BUSH'S FAILURE IN NORTH KOREA
NICHOLAS EBERSTADT

the weekly Standard

JANUARY 26, 2009 $4.95

MEET THE NEW BOSS . . .

Fred Barnes • Matthew Continetti
Andrew Ferguson • Irwin M. Stelzer

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

MARCH 8 - 10, 2009 · NEW YORK CITY

Is the global warming crisis over? Was it ever really a crisis?

Tens of thousands of scientists now say the media and environmental advocacy groups have it all wrong, that global warming is not a crisis. They point to a cooling trend in global temperatures since 2000, past warming and cooling cycles that were not man-made, and new evidence that carbon dioxide is not a very powerful greenhouse gas.

On March 8-10, 2009, the 2009 International Conference on Climate Change will provide a platform for scientists and policy analysts from around the world who question the theory that global warming is a crisis.

For more information about this exciting conference or to register online, please visit www.heartland.org or www.globalwarmingheartland.org, or call 312/377-4000. Audio and video recordings of presentations made at the 2008 International Conference on Climate Change are also available online at both Web sites.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

José María Aznar
Former Prime Minister of Spain

Vaclav Klaus,
President Czech Republic;
President, European Union (tentative)

Richard S. Lindzen, Ph.D.
One of the world's most respected atmospheric physicists

Harrison "Jack" Schmitt, Ph.D.
Former U.S. Senator
Apollo 17 Moonwalker

Willie Soon, Ph.D.
A physicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics

73 CONFERENCE SPEAKERS, INCLUDING:

J. Scott Armstrong, Ph.D.
University of Pennsylvania

Syun Akasofu, Ph.D.
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Frank Clemente, Ph.D.
Penn State University

David Douglass, Ph.D.
University of Rochester

Christopher Essex, Ph.D.
University of Western Ontario (Canada)

Michelle Foss, Ph.D.
University of Texas, Center for Energy Economics

William Gray, Ph.D.
Colorado State University

Fred Goldberg, Ph.D.
Royal School of Technology (Sweden)

Kesten Green, Ph.D.
Monash University (Australia)

Craig Idso, Ph.D.
Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change

David Legates, Ph.D.
University of Delaware

Jay Lehr, Ph.D.
Science Director
The Heartland Institute

Ross McKitrick, Ph.D.
University of Guelph (Canada)

Patrick Michaels, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow
Cato Institute

Lord Christopher Monckton
Former advisor,
Prime Minister Thatcher

Jim O'Brien, Ph.D.
Florida State University

Tim Patterson, Ph.D.
Carleton University (Canada)

Benny Peiser, Ph.D.
Liverpool John Moores University (United Kingdom)

Arthur B. Robinson, Ph.D.
Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine

S. Fred Singer, Ph.D.
Science and Environmental Policy Project

Lawrence Solomon
Canadian environmentalist and author of *The Deniers*

COSPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS (PARTIAL LIST)

Accuracy in Media
Alternate Solutions Institute
American Policy Center
Americans For Prosperity
Atlas Economic Research Foundation
Australian Libertarian Society
Business & Media Institute
Carbon Sense Coalition
Cascade Policy Institute
Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change
Climate Strategies Watch
Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow
Competitive Enterprise Institute
Cornwall Alliance
Freedom Foundation of Minnesota
Frontiers of Freedom
International Climate and Environmental Change Assessment Project
Initiative for Public Policy Analysis (Nigeria)
Institute for Private Enterprise
Institute of Public Affairs (Australia)
Instituto Liberdade
International Climate Science Coalition (New Zealand)
Istituto Bruno Leoni
John Locke Foundation
Liberty Institute (India)
Mannkal Economic Education Foundation
Minimal Government Thinkers (Phillipines)
Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine
Science and Environmental Policy Project
Science and Public Policy Institute

GLOBAL WARMING
WAS IT EVER REALLY A CRISIS?

More than 34,000 scientists have signed a petition saying global warming probably is natural and not a crisis. See the complete list at www.oism.org/ppetition/.

For more information about global warming, visit www.globalwarmingheartland.org.

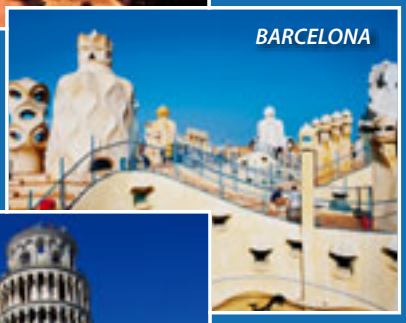
The Heartland INSTITUTE
WWW.HEARTLAND.ORG

Reserve Your Cabin Today!

OBAMA STIMULUS EFFECT: NEW, LOWER PRICES!

THE WEEKLY STANDARD cruises the Mediterranean August 7-17, 2009 aboard Holland America's luxury liner, *Noordam*.

Join us for a week and more of the best conversation about politics at home and abroad with Bill Kristol and Fred Barnes—plus stops in Rome, Florence/Pisa, Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, La Goulette (Tunisia), Palermo, and Naples.



Call *1-800-266-4043* or visit *www.twscruise.com*

THE CRUISE AUTHORITY®

Holland America Line

the weekly Standard

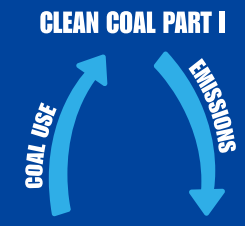
CLEAN COAL.
COOL.

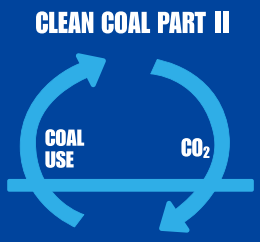
Clean coal means energy security, jobs and economic stimulus along with a cleaner environment.

What is clean coal? Part One of clean coal has taken place in recent years, as billions of dollars in new technologies scrub away emissions.

Part Two builds on this with new, efficient coal-fueled power plants with reduced carbon footprints. Eventually, carbon capture and storage will allow plants to recycle the CO2 back underground in deep storage or even oilfields, increasing U.S. oil production.

Americans overwhelmingly support the use of coal. A landslide 72% of opinion leaders recently said yes to the use of coal to generate electricity and 69% say coal is a fuel of the future.





America has more coal than any nation, and coal fuels half of our electricity. The world is turning to coal in increasing amounts. The more we use it, the less we need to rely on foreign energy.

So let's use coal to deliver energy security, more jobs and a stronger economy. And let's solve the technology and regulatory hurdles to let America recycle its carbon.

Clean coal. It's a stimulus package that we can all agree on.

Peabody Energy is the world's largest private sector coal company and a global leader in clean coal solutions. Find out more at CoalCanDoThat.com.

Peabody
CoalCanDoThat.com

CLEAN COAL: AMERICA'S ENERGY FUTURE

COAL

COAL CAN DO THAT

Contents

January 26, 2009 • Volume 14, Number 18

Articles

Cover: Gary Locke

Features

Books & Arts

the weekly Standard

The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of News America Incorporated, is published weekly (except the first week in January, third week in April, second week in July, and fourth week in August) at 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington D.C. 20036. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-850-682-7644 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $3.95. Back issues, $3.95 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington, D.C. 20036.

BPA INTERNATIONAL

Dept. of Half-Empty Glasses

Well, that was quick. It took Paul Kennedy 15 years to back off from the thesis of his 1987 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, that the United States was in decline and ran the risk of "imperial overstretch." By 2002, the Yale historian was writing a long article for the *Financial Times* in which he recounted standing on the deck of a U.S. aircraft carrier and marveling at this country's "disproportionate military and economic heft." "Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power" between the United States and other nations, he wrote then. "Nothing."

Now, just seven years later, Kennedy has changed his mind again. Recently he wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* that the "world's number one power will take heavier hits than most other big nations" in the coming year, and that the "global tectonic power shifts, towards Asia and away from the West, seem hard to reverse." So America is back on the path of decline and there isn't much we can do about it.

Kennedy's latest not only recycles the arguments in his 20-year-old book. It's also not particularly provocative. Indeed, it's just the latest drop in a torrent of books, articles, and op-ed columns proclaiming that America's best days are behind it. The central challenge facing President Obama, the declinists argue, is to manage America's decline in a way that will "help to make those historical transformations less bumpy, less violent, and much less unpleasant" (Kennedy). We weep for the trees that have been felled in order to print this stuff.

Yes, even an old and conventional argument can be correct. And there's no question that America faces great economic and national security challenges. We have yet to fully reckon, for example, with the enormous burden of global responsibility that has been entrusted to us. Nonetheless: The Scrapbook tends to think that Kennedy had it right in 2002. The central fact in world politics remains the overwhelming military, economic, and cultural power of the United States of America. That power may be diminished slightly during the global downturn. But America has been in recession before, and has recovered. It's called the business cycle for a reason.

And it's not as though our potential challengers and adversaries aren't also reeling. Just ask the Chinese factory worker who has been laid off because of a lack of demand for his products. Or talk to Hugo Chávez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose economies have plummeted along with the price of oil. In fact, America's autocratic rivals are likely to fare worse during the recession, because their heavily politicized economies, undemocratic governments, and relatively weak civil societies suppress the innovation and dynamism that spur recovery. Somehow the declinists miss this.

Kennedy acknowledges that America "possesses tremendous advantages compared to other great powers in its demographics, its land-to-people ratio, its raw materials, its research universities and laboratories, its flexible work force, etc." He's right! We'd add that the U.S. economy still dwarfs the others; the United States accounts for slightly more than a fifth of global economic output—down only three percentage points from its share in 1960.

Meanwhile, U.S. defense spending, at 4.2 percent of GDP, is still at least six times greater than the amount our closest rival, China, spends. America protects global stability and promotes global public goods—such as stable sea lanes—through a network of diplomatic and military alliances that spans the globe. The result is a more peaceful world where terror networks like al Qaeda are slowly being destroyed.

Declinism is a recurring fad among American intellectuals and, like all fads, it's a passing phenomenon. One day—probably right around the time Barack Obama begins his reelection campaign—Paul Kennedy will probably change his mind once more and marvel at American might and all the good that liberal democracy has done for the world. We're waiting. ♦

Senator Trail Blazer

The late columnist Carl T. Rowan once divided the world into "dream makers" and "dream breakers," and The Scrapbook states unequivocally that it is not a dream breaker. So naturally, we are delighted by the appointment of Roland Burris to the Senate seat recently vacated by Barack Obama.

We concede, of course, that the appointment comes with something of a

taint, since Burris was the choice of Governor Rod Blagojevich of Illinois, who has been accused of seeking to sell the seat to the highest bidder. But there is no evidence that the elevation of Burris was a fee-for-service transaction, or that the former one-term attorney general of Illinois (1991-95) is personally corrupt.

No, The Scrapbook's pleasure may be explained two ways. First, the whole Blagojevich episode has not only come to symbolize the Illinois/Chicago political environment that nurtured Barack Obama, but has revealed cer-

THE ELEPHANT IN THE LIVING ROOM.

tain chinks in the president's armor as well. For whatever reason, he chose not to involve himself in the business of filling his vacant Senate seat, and as a consequence, emerged from this episode looking weak—compared to Blagojevich!—unprepared, even politically naïve.

When the governor first announced the Burris appointment, both Obama and the Senate Democrats announced that the appointment would not stand, and Burris was initially turned away when he sought to take the oath on the Senate floor. But then Representative Bobby Rush (D-Illinois), our favorite ex-Black Panther, made noises about lynch mobs and George Wallace, at which point the Democrats' reservations about Blagojevich's choice melted away.

That's the first explanation. The second is depicted in the photograph on the opposite page. This impressive neoclassical structure is Senator Burris's pre-mortem mausoleum in Chicago's Oak Lawn Cemetery. It may be difficult to read the inscribed text, but the future occupant has listed all manner of accomplishments as a "Trail Blazer," some of them impressive in their way—first black attorney general of Illinois, first African-American bank examiner for the U.S. Treasury—and some preposterous. For example, it is noted for posterity that Burris was the first non-CPA to serve on the board of directors of the Illinois Society of Certified Public Accountants, and that he was the first black exchange student at the University of Hamburg from his alma mater, Southern Illinois University.

Now, after innumerable failed attempts at statewide and federal office, Burris the Trail Blazer will keep the stonecutters busy for the next two years at least. He is, after all, the third African American (after Obama and Carol Moseley-Braun) to serve as senator from Illinois, and the first non-CPA SIU graduate to be appointed to the Senate by the first Illinois governor to be impeached in the 21st century. ♦

Czech, Please

To mark the Czech Republic's turn at the rotating European Union presidency, artist David Cerny told officials in Prague he and other artists from the EU would create a sculpture of Europe, in which individual countries would be represented by national symbols of pride. Or something like that. In reality, Cerny and a few of his friends made "Entropa," which is currently on display in Brussels. And it may result in the dissolution of Europe.

While Italy is rendered lovingly as a nation of soccer fanatics, Belgium as a box of chocolates, and Sweden as an IKEA box, Bulgaria is, well, a Turkish toilet (see photo below). One Bulgarian diplomat was flush with anger, describing it (to euobserver.com) as "preposterous, a disgrace," and "a humiliation for the Bulgarian nation and an offence to national dignity." But as Cerny explained to *Spiegel Online*, "No other [European] country has those kinds of toilets." Germany is represented by a mass of cars on highway strips—that look suspiciously like a misshapen swastika. (Cerny denies this vehemently.) All of Holland, meanwhile, is submerged in water, save several minarets of mosques. France is dominated by a giant sign yelling "Strike!" And Luxembourg is so tiny it simply dangles a pricetag.

The Scrapbook hopes these countries will develop a sense of humor. After all, it could be worse. Imagine being depicted as a Dracula-themed amusement park. That would be Romania. ♦

Casual

Mr. Obama Head

The best store in Washington recently changed its name from the P&D Souvenir Factory to the classier-sounding Obama Biden Collectible Merchandises. The ex-P&D is on Tenth Street N.W., next door to the Peterson House, where Abraham Lincoln—remembered today as one of Barack Obama's big influences—was taken after his assassination. Tourists file through the bedroom where he was lain, his skull leaking brain matter, and somberly they contemplate his agonizing martyrdom before going next door to buy a bobblehead Lincoln wearing a Hawaiian shirt and sitting in a miniature Thunderbird. I visit P&D every few months, and on my most recent visit I loaded up on Obama merchandise, spending a lot of money that I hope I can write off on my taxes. I walked out with a mixed bag, however.

I don't want to sound like one of those Republican sore losers, but my Barack Obama Candy Bar was kind of tasteless—a big disappointment. The wrapper was smooth and elegant, with a gold sheath beneath the picture of the new president grinning and fist-bumping his wife. But the chocolate had that dry, flaky feel that means somebody somewhere got skimpy with the whole milk. I've eaten crayolas that were tastier. Fortunately I bought an eight-ounce can of Nuts for Obama, along with a bottle of Obama Spring Water to wash them down.

I could have used a crayola for my Obama Family Coloring Book, in which Sasha and Malia are shown doing chores around the White House, spending weekends at Camp David, and making friends at school while their father stands around with excellent posture, grinning and pointing. The likenesses are better in the book of Obama Paper Dolls, though in truth the paper doll Mrs. Obama looks more like BernNadette Stanis, from *Good Times*. Not necessarily an improvement.

The pleasantest artistic rendering of Obama is on the Yes We Can jigsaw puzzle, made by Hasbro. Unlike G.I. Joe and Mr. Potato Head and the other flowers of Hasbro genius, the puzzle isn't recommended for kids under 12, according to a disclaimer on the box. I can see why. The Obama puzzle has a thousand pieces, literally. Obama's in the foreground, grinning, always grinning, but behind him wide stretches of indeterminate blue slowly blend into a bird's-eye view of a vast crowd. Each head in the crowd is incredibly teeny. And they all look bald. It's impossible to distinguish one from another when you're trying to match the pieces. You could have an army of spinster aunts in your house and still not finish the puzzle in a week.

JOSEPH ENTERPRISES

Determined Chia Obama

Hasbro did not manufacture the Obama Action Figure, which is too bad, because Hasbro would have brought some G.I. Joe-level quality to the job. The action figure on sale now is both too flimsy and too cartoonish. His hands are like ping-pong paddles. So I left the action figure on the shelf, and I did the same with the Obama bobblehead. Some news stories have made a big deal of the Obama bobbleheads. But bobbleheads are not a big deal. There was a time, not so long ago, when becoming a bobblehead really meant something in this country. A bobblehead was a signal not merely of celebrity but of achievement. Only the most accomplished public figures got to be bobbleheads: the fleetest athletes, the most toothsome movie stars, entertainers who had reached the zenith of popularity. Now we've defined bobbleheads down. Soap opera stars can be bobbleheads today, so can a utility infielder, also the mascots of unranked college sports teams. I know where you can get a Tom Daschle bobblehead.

Obama calendars come with monthly themes, grand in the Obama style: Once you're done renewing America's Promise, Reclaiming the American Dream, Promising America's Renewal, Reclaiming the Renewal of America's Promised Dream, Promising America a Reclaimed Renewal, and Reclaiming the Promise of Renewal, you're still only halfway through the year. Sprinkled week to week are the new president's most uplifting commands. "Let us unite in common purpose," for example, "to chart a new course for America." It makes so much more sense when you can hear him say it.

At the store on Tenth Street there are many more merchandises, each merchandise imprinted with Obama's handsome mug: shot glasses, key chains, and, of course, mugs. On one item, the store was no help. I asked the friendly, non-English speaking woman behind the counter whether she stocked any Chia Obamas. Even with hand gestures, I couldn't get her to understand the Chia concept. "Vegetation," I said, patting my head. "Growing out of here."

She looked at me like I was crazy. And maybe I am, because I went straight home to order a Chia Obama online. Joseph Enterprises offers two options: a "Happy Chia Obama" or a "Determined Chia Obama." I'm going with Happy Chia Obama, at least for now.

Andrew Ferguson

Correspondence

Net-Zero Gas Tax

As serious observers expect from him, Charles Krauthammer has produced a thoughtful analysis of the "Net-Zero Gas Tax" (January 5 / January 12). His discussion of negative "externalities," possibly higher price elasticity of demand for gasoline, the terrible inefficiency of current and likely future energy regulation, and the need to offset the energy tax to maintain revenue neutrality, is impressively rigorous.

Critics may always assert that the devil is in the details. Even though he offers provisions for those not paying payroll taxes because they are receiving unemployment compensation or Social Security, what about those who are retired but living entirely off of their savings and investments? Take the 60-year-old, blue-collar or middle-class couple who do not own a second home in the Hamptons but who were looking forward to spending some of their early years of retirement camping and traveling in their RV. The Net-Zero Gas Tax is adding yet another tax to the class of Americans who use this form of recreation but who will not receive the offsetting payroll tax reduction. The negative effects on the RV industry, private campgrounds, etc., may be devastating. Incidentally, their industry trade associations also have studies showing that the carbon footprint from typical RV vacations is less than for similar destination trips that include fly, rent-drive, and hotel.

Troubles with the details of implementing this proposal can be addressed, but are they likely to be by the incoming liberal Congress and administration? In the political climate of the next few years, the real danger of this proposal is that it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for conservatives to cede to liberals that social engineering through tax policy is morally fine. This would accelerate the process by, among other things, putting the final nail in the coffin of any relationship between funding sources and expenditures. The gas tax would no longer have even a minimal relationship to road and bridge expenditures but would be commingled with Social Security. Would the annual benefit statements from the Social Security Administration reflect the gas tax revenues? However this is handled, it would almost certainly further erode the linkage between individual FICA taxes and benefits, thus causing them to have an even greater resemblance to welfare benefits. The slippery slope that this Net-Zero Gas Tax proposal puts us on may lead to the complete elimination of FICA funding of Social Security and the substitution of general revenue funding. Discussion of this larger issue should not be rushed.

Larry Fiala
Madison, Wis.

The case for a significantly higher gasoline price is very strong, as you note, and, as you also note, it is hard to get support for raising the price by a tax rather than by higher crude oil price. You are on the right track to propose earmarking the tax for the more politically acceptable purpose of reducing payroll taxes.

But, I suggest splitting off part of the increase, perhaps 10 cents per gallon, for repairing and improving highways and bridges. That would be an economic stimulus, but would be funded out of the gas tax rather than deficit spending.

The biggest share should go to public funding in support of energy efficiency and sustainability—research and development, grants and subsidies, public investments in energy efficiency such as CAFE, alternate fuels and energy sources such as ethanol or hydrogen, public transportation, carbon emission reduction and sequestration, etc. These all have support as good things to do to help achieve energy independence and sustainability. Funding them out of a tax on motor fuels would double the effectiveness of the program—money wisely spent will reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and sending the bill to motor fuel consumers will give them the incentive to cooperate with the programs and also to take their own steps to reduce fuel consumption.

Walt Butcher
Pullman, Wash.

Christianity in Asia

Max Boot and Richard Bennet's "Treading Softly in the Philippines" (January 5 / January 12) was, as usual, excellent. But one quibble. They describe the Philippines as "the only Christian country in Asia."

Of those in South Korea who claim a religious identity, most say Christian, and, if we include them in Asia, Papua New Guinea and East Timor are both massively Christian, as are several of the small countries of the western Pacific. And, of course, Russia is the largest country by area in Asia.

Paul Marshall
Hudson Institute
Washington, D.C.

Sufism is Key

The key fact in addressing Abd el-Kader is that he is a Sufi. This is mentioned only in passing in Roger Kaplan's review ("Algeria's Patriot," January 5 / January 12). If Sufism, its tolerance, and slight mysticism were the Islamic norm, there would be no "Clash of Civilizations." I am surprised that this was overlooked.

Claude Varner
Memphis, Tenn.

•••

The Weekly Standard
welcomes letters to the editor.
Letters will be edited for length
and clarity and must include the writer's name,
address, and phone number.
All letters should be addressed:
Correspondence Editor
The Weekly Standard
1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505
Washington, DC 20036.

You may also fax letters: (202) 293-4901
or email: editor@weeklystandard.com.

Be Politically Incorrect!

Sport your opinionated style with our new *Weekly Standard* merchandise! Great as gifts or keep them for yourself!

BASEBALL CAP

Show which team you're on with a *Weekly Standard* baseball cap

POLO SHIRT

Wear your politics on your sleeve with an embroidered Weekly Standard logo polo. (Available in white and navy)

HEAVY-DUTY GOLF UMBRELLA

Weather the election season under our nylon golf umbrella

THE BILL & FRED COFFEE MUG

Start your morning off "right" with this 19 oz. coffee mug

Order today at ***weeklystandardstore.com!***
or call us toll-free at **1-866-869-6389!**

the weekly Standard

Misreading History

Some Republicans—including a lot on Capitol Hill—are in danger of making a mistake. They're about to draw the wrong lessons from the Bush legacy. And misreading history will only prolong the GOP's time in political detention.

Somehow Republicans and conservatives have gotten the idea that, if only Bush hadn't approved all those big spending bills, things would have worked out splendidly. The argument goes something like this: Bush betrayed conservatives with No Child Left Behind, reauthorizing farm subsidies, expanding Medicare, and turning a blind eye to pork-barrel spending. Big spending policies hurt GOP credibility with the public. Since voters couldn't spot the difference between Republicans and Democrats, they opted for the real party of government. Hence the constant refrain you hear in conservative circles about the GOP needing to "return to its roots" and oppose the welfare state on principle. That will boost conservative turnout, reestablish confidence in the Republican party, and get us back to the glory days.

Sorry, folks. The lesson of the last eight years is not that Americans want a smaller government. It's that Americans recoil at what appears to be an incompetently run government out of touch with the major challenges of the day. Your average voter doesn't mind government action if he deems it necessary to pursue a public good like national defense or supporting retirees. He votes for the party that has the most compelling program for the future, not the one simply trying to stand athwart it.

Conservatives have been successful not when they've rigidly opposed government, but when they've proposed a different type of government that produces conservative results. Barry Goldwater rode his extremism in the defense of liberty right into a political ditch, whereas Ronald Reagan campaigned and won on pro-growth tax cuts, a defense build-up, and national pride. It's true that Reagan always regretted his inability to stop government expansion. But the voters had few such regrets.

In 1994, Republicans campaigned on a Contract With America that didn't simply hurl abuse at big government. It promised reform. The American voters gave the GOP both houses of Congress. But Republicans forgot the Contract's lessons and turned a principled stand against spending into a government shutdown that appeared willful and obstinate. And what do you know? Congressional Republicans lost seats in each of the next three cycles.

Then George W. Bush promised a different kind of Republicanism that would introduce conservative policy ideas into established (or new) government programs. We're not about to defend everything Bush did, or argue that all of these reforms will prove beneficial in the long run. Instead we will note that, substantively and politically, Bush's first term was a success. He not only got his 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, No Child Left Behind, and Medicare prescription drug coverage. He won reelection and saw expanded GOP congressional majorities in 2002 and 2004.

The second term? Not so good. Bush's approval rating sank below 50 percent in the spring of 2005. This was months before Hurricane Katrina and the onset of sectarian war in Iraq. Bush's numbers fell as he was traveling the country trying to convince Americans to partially privatize Social Security. That might have been the right thing to do. It certainly was the libertarian thing to do. But it was also incredibly unpopular. When he talked about Social Security, Bush scared the bejeezus out of voters, and his ratings never recovered.

Now Republicans are powerless and in a state of denial. They think a war on earmarks and a cut in the capital gains tax will solve everything. Not gonna happen.

Of course, none of this means that Republicans shouldn't oppose Obama's liberal agenda. What it means, instead, is that they need to put positive, conservative reforms front and center.

Such an agenda probably won't come from the GOP congressional leadership. No, as in 1977-80, intellectual creativity and political entrepreneurship is likely to come from the backbenches. It's already beginning to happen. Last month, Tennessee senator Bob Corker emerged from nowhere to lead the GOP in framing an alternative to the auto bailout. But he needs some company. Luckily, there are plenty of areas where an ambitious conservative reformer can make his—or her!—name. For example, Martin Feldstein, Tom Donnelly, and others at the American Enterprise Institute have developed a sensible proposal to shift some of Obama's stimulus money to defense spending. It could sure use a political champion.

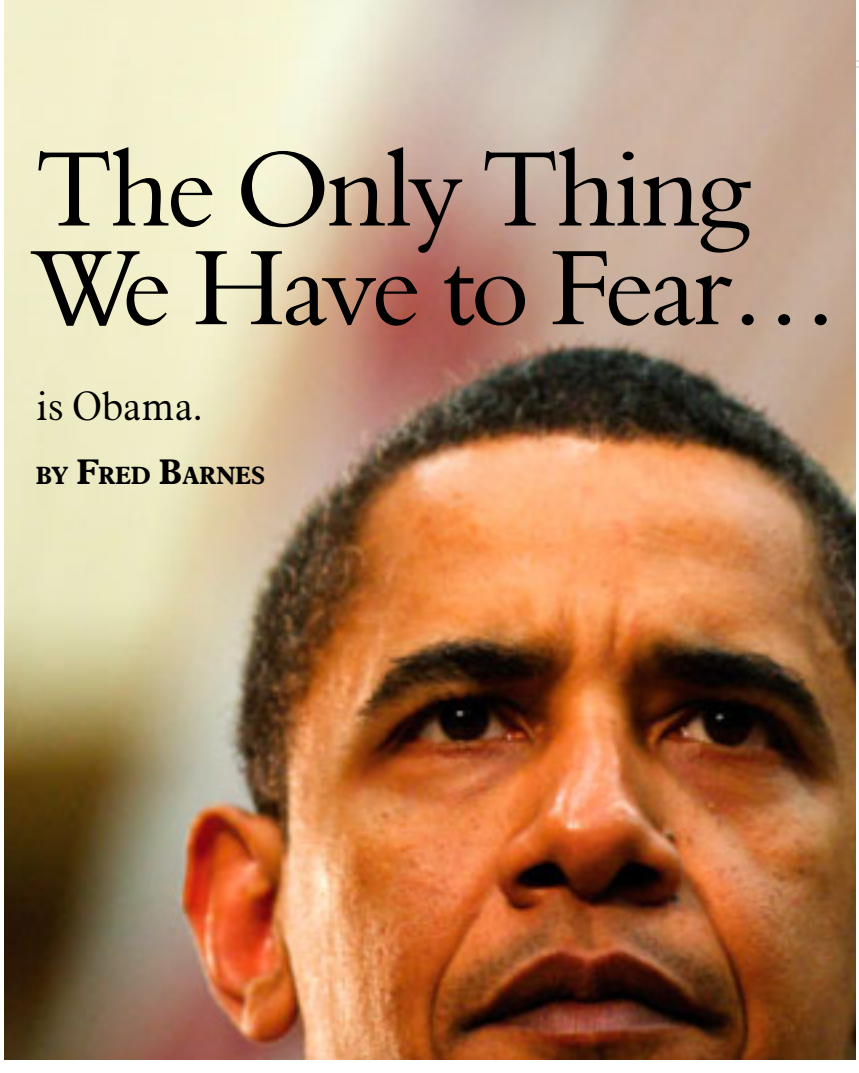
A less intrusive government that encourages personal responsibility among its adult citizens is an important goal. The difficulty is getting there. A reflexive opposition to government is not the way.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

The Only Thing We Have to Fear…

is Obama.

BY FRED BARNES



Barack Obama is the apostle of hope. But he also arouses the flipside of hope—fear. And while the fear he stirs may turn out to be unfounded, it's not irrational. People don't know who Obama really is or where his ideological center of gravity rests, to the extent it rests anywhere. He was a liberal in the Senate and the campaign, a centrist in the transition, and who knows what he'll be as president. He's elusive.

I count four separate fears. Whether he's a crypto-Marxist is not one of them. Neither is the absurd fear that he's secretly a Muslim, even a closet jihadist. Nor is the groundless claim Obama was actually born outside the United States and isn't really an American citizen. Forget all those. They're nonstarters.

He doesn't know what he's talking about. This is a legitimate fear. Obama throws around numbers like confetti. In the campaign, he said he would create 1 million jobs. After the election, he put out a plan he said would produce up to 3 million jobs. Then in a radio address on January 10, he said the number could reach 4.1 million and said 500,000 would be jobs in the alternative energy field, 200,000 in health care. Does he really believe he can achieve this? The fear is that he might.

"Social Security, we can solve," he told the *Washington Post* last week. Really? President Bush, freshly reelected, promoted Social Security reform in 2005 and got nowhere. Certainly Obama was no help. Obama "said his administration will begin confronting the issues of entitlement reform and long-term budget deficits soon after it jump-starts job growth and the stock market," the *Post* reported. When will this happen? Not next year or next summer but next month when he convenes a "fiscal responsibility summit."

Obama is smart, Ivy League-educated, and able to discuss issues knowledgeably and intelligently. He's put together a strong staff. The same was often said of Bill Clinton. Brains and advanced degrees, though they thrill Washington's journalistic elite, aren't enough. Clinton didn't have a magic wand and neither does Obama. True, reality often creeps in. Obama initially aimed to shut down Guantánamo instantly. Later his aides said it might take a year. Last week, Obama told the *Post* he'd consider it a failure if the prison hadn't been closed by the end of his first term.

He's a pushover. Who's tougher, Senate majority leader Harry Reid and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi or Obama? The fear is that Reid and Pelosi are. Indeed they act like they are. Reid told ex-senator Joe Biden, Obama's vice president, he's not welcome at meetings of the Senate Democratic caucus. Neither Reid nor Pelosi is cautious about ramming the liberal agenda through Congress. Pelosi wants to raise taxes now, in the teeth of the recession.

As a senator, Obama never bucked his party, its leaders, or a single liberal interest group. In the 2007 debate over immigration reform, Obama voted for every amendment pushed by liberal lobbyists, though if they'd passed, the amendments would have jeopardized the emergence of a bipartisan majority. The legislation died for other reasons.

Obama's allegiance to organized labor has been unflagging. He cosponsored "card check" legislation allowing labor to set up unions without winning elections by secret ballot. He's still for it, despite its unpopularity and diminished prospects of passage. When he met last week with Mexican president Felipe Calderón, Obama said he wants to "upgrade" the North American Free Trade Agreement. Renegotiating NAFTA is a top priority of labor leaders, but Mexico, Canada, and most economists fear it would reduce trade and stir alarm about a wave of protectionism.

He's another Jimmy Carter on foreign and national security policy. Carter had

CORBIS

Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard.

misplaced confidence in his ability to bend anyone, including dictators, to his view through persuasion. He was a talker, not a doer. A year after he met with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, Carter was shocked when Brezhnev ordered an invasion of Afghanistan. His talks with North Korea led to a treaty on nuclear weapons that the North Koreans soon violated. Carter was surprised again.

Obama's willingness to meet with dictators or other anti-American leaders has raised the Carter fear. He sometimes talks about diplomacy as if it's a panacea, a surefire way to solve the world's problems. On the other hand, Obama is committed to sending more American troops to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban and al Qaeda. And he's backed away from a rapid withdrawal from Iraq now that a status of forces agreement has been reached. Perhaps the fear of Carter redux is exaggerated.

Obama has nerves of jello. This fear may be unfair, since there's no evidence one way or other as to how he might react in a crisis. David Shribman of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* wrote that Obama "possesses an enviable inner calm." Maybe, maybe not. What Obama does have is an enviable outer calm. Inside, he may be wracked with doubts and anxiety as he takes over the presidency. We don't know. The problem is he's never had to make a truly tough decision.

Presidents with strong nerves are decisive. They don't balk at unpopular decisions. They are willing to make people angry. President Bush had strong nerves. President Clinton, who passed up a chance to eliminate Osama bin Laden, did not. Obama is a people pleaser, a trait not normally associated with nerves of steel.

We'll soon discover if any of these fears has merit. Obama made a series of clever moves during the transition, reaching out to conservatives and picking evangelical pastor Rick Warren to give the invocation at the inauguration. But these were cost-free, ephemeral, and didn't reveal much. What Obama does as president will tell us all we need to know. ♦

It's Your Job Now

Bush hands over the reins.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

As George Walker Bush watches Barack Hussein Obama be sworn in as the 44th president of the United States, he may be among the few happy Republicans in Washington. Those who have been meeting with the 43rd see a man comfortable in his own skin, confident history will vindicate his decision to wage war on terror and proud of having foiled numerous plots to attack America. Listening to him talk about his planned return to his beloved Texas, one can't help being reminded of President Number 3, Thomas Jefferson, who reportedly remarked as his term ended, "Never did a prisoner, released from his chains, feel such a relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power."

It is those shackles that Obama will happily don. Bush says when the new president steps into the Oval Office there will be a moment in which he realizes the full weight of his new responsibilities. Perhaps that will come when he glances at his in-tray. He has promised to do a lot of things on "day one"—start a new peace process in the Middle East, accelerate the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and ship thousands more to Afghanistan, open a dialogue with Iran, close Guantánamo, replace "don't ask, don't tell" with a policy allowing gays to serve openly in the military, end the interrogation techniques that Bush and Dick Cheney credit with having prevented attacks on America, and repeal a host of Bush's executive orders.

And that list doesn't include Obama's top priority—getting his stimulus package through an increasingly fractious Congress. The incoming president wants to spend $825 billion over the next two years to meet what he calls "a crisis not seen since the Great Depression." Pause a moment for perspective: The unemployment rate is now 7.2 percent; it was 25 percent during the Great Depression. True, the jobless total is rising, but even the gloomiest Gusses don't expect it to top 10 percent or so before the recovery takes hold. That's more in line with experience during the 1982-83 recession than with the Great Depression.

Not everyone is overjoyed with Obama's plan. David Obey, the Wisconsin Democrat who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, thinks the package is too small. Deficit hawks in both parties, fearful of a burst of inflation, think it is too large, given the already-strained federal budget. Some Republicans say that features such as the $600 million to help television viewers convert to digital have nothing to do with a stimulus. Environmentalists are disappointed that few of their pet infrastructure and transportation projects are to be funded. And more than a few Democrats don't like the tax cuts: They would rather increase spending.

Now the horse-trading with Congress begins. Obama's principal trader, Larry Summers, is not noted for his emollient style, his sympathy with lawmakers who might succumb to what the *Wall Street Journal* calls "the lobbying frenzy now under way," or his patience with congressmen who want to make sure that money gets spent in their districts. And on the other side of the table are congressmen unhappy with the seepage of power from the legislature to the executive during the Bush years, and eager

Irwin M. Stelzer is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard*, director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute, and a columnist for the* Sunday Times *(London).*

to reassert their relevance. "I don't work for Barack Obama," announced Senate majority leader Harry Reid.

But in the end Obama will get most of what he wants. The Democrats dare not turn down their new president, and the minority Republicans don't have the votes to deny Obama a victory if it comes to a showdown vote—besides, they are pleasantly surprised at the amount and type of tax cuts included in the stimulus package, and his courteous attention to their views.

In any event, politicians pay attention to the polls. And Obama's approval rating is over 80 percent, while Congress's languishes in the low 20s. As for Reid, a majority of voters in Nevada now regret having sent him to the Senate. In Washington, the politician holding the 80 beats the ones holding the 20 every time. And when it comes to the issue at hand, the stimulus package, 60 percent of those Americans with an opinion think it's a good idea.

No surprise, given mounting concern about the economy, and fears that unless the government does something, we are in for worse. Every day brings more bad news. The latest survey of business conditions released by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis last week reported that "economic activity continued to weaken" across the country, "retail sales were generally weak" as was the labor market, and "manufacturing activity continued to fall." One way to understand the severity of the problem is to consider this: It's one thing when tired old companies such as Delta Airlines and General Motors announce layoffs, quite another when Google fires 100 recruiters because it expects to need fewer new workers this year, and Microsoft prepares for substantial layoffs. The economy's growth engines are sputtering.

Obama is doing his best to combine a show of confidence with warnings that it will take time to get the economy moving again. And to leave himself room for error. He has taken to citing Franklin D. Roosevelt as his mentor, a name more familiar to voters than the real father of his stimulus package, John Maynard Keynes, the great British economist who contended that hiring the unemployed to dig holes makes sense. Obama points out that FDR continually experimented, and if one plan didn't work, he would scrap it and try another. After cartelizing the economy in a bid to end the depression by raising prices, FDR reversed field and called for a vigorous antitrust attack on cartels. He spent money on roads, bridges, dams, and other infrastructure projects, some that yielded benefits to society, others that did not.

Obama plans to do both—change course if necessary in pursuit of "whatever works" and spend money. Indeed, by some measures he will make FDR look positively parsimonious. Diana Furchtgott-Roth, an economist colleague of mine at the Hudson Institute, has compared the magnitude of U.S. spending under Obama's planned stimulus with spending in Roosevelt's day. In 1934 government spending reached 11 percent of GDP in the fight against the Great Depression, while Obama plans to increase spending to 23 percent of today's GDP in his effort to put the economy on a growth path. True: Obama's stimulus plan is not as large as Roosevelt's relative to the size of the economy. But it starts from a much higher base of government spending on programs that did not exist when FDR was deploying his jauntiness as a national antidepressant.

In addition to stimulus funds, the new president will have available the second $350 billion tranche of the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP). As a courtesy, Bush asked Congress to authorize that expenditure so the money will be available to Obama on "day one." Congress complied, but only after Obama promised to use between $50 billion and $100 billion for a foreclosure-prevention effort, and to place greater restrictions on recipients' use of the funds. Originally intended to fund the purchase of toxic assets from troubled banks, the first half of the TARP money ended up in the hands of the auto companies ($19 billion), AIG ($40 billion), Citigroup ($25 billion), and sundry banks in exchange for preferred shares. Congress feels that it voted for one thing and got another; Obama promises that won't happen again—no more free ride for those bankers whose greed so offends liberal congressmen and whose sheer incompetence so offends almost everyone else.

Obama knows one thing. He is inheriting George Bush's recession. But by year end, or certainly by the end of 2010, he will own it. If the measures he adopts don't show signs of working—unemployment no longer rising, credit flowing again in reasonable amounts, foreclosures down—it will be Obama's recession.

That will put the small rump of anti-Keynesians on the spot, for they will be called upon to recommend their own remedies. No, a call for lower interest rates won't do, since the Fed's short-term rates are already zero. No, a call to increase the money supply won't sound plausible: It would be drowned out by the roar of the presses that are already turning out billions in new money. And no, a call for less regulation won't pass the laugh test, since the existing regime is already discredited.

Fortunately, it might not come to that. Credit markets are already responding to the measures taken by the Fed and the Treasury. The commercial paper market (a key source of funding for borrowers such as companies and banks) is showing signs of life, with the portion of these IOUs that the Fed has been required to buy dropping precipitously. The market for mortgage-backed securities issued by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the government-sponsored mortgage financiers, is improving. Risk premiums in the interbank lending market have dropped, as have those in the bond market. Investors have shown a willingness to take on more risk by buying the junk bonds offered by Cablevision Systems and El Paso Corp. (a natural gas producer and pipeline operator) last week.

More surprisingly, some banks—not many, but some—have begun to raise private capital to reduce their obligations to the federal bailout pro-

gram. The *Financial Times* summarizes all of this: "There is now compelling evidence that the authorities are not simply substituting for private activity in the markets in which they are intervening, but pulling in private capital as well."

Problems in the credit markets are far from over, witness the need of Bank of America for additional billions of bail-out cash. But Obama might just get lucky and end the year with a recovery underway. Goldman Sachs's economists are atypically cheerier than most. They "expect the unfolding massive stimulus to end the technical recession in the second half of 2009." But they also expect the unemployment rate to keep ticking up "through late 2010." Economists know that the unemployment rate is a lagging indicator, rising only after a recovery is well underway. Less well-trained voters, who now rate unemployment America's top problem, don't deal in such technicalities, which would mean that they are less likely to hail Obama and the Democrats as saviors come the midterm elections if unemployment is still headed up. That might put Obama in mind of Jefferson's first inaugural address in which the Virginian noted, "I have learned to expect that it will rarely fall to the lot of imperfect man to retire from this station with the reputation and favor which bring him into it." A lesson the departing president learned all too well.

Obama's willingness to consult them, the inclusion of tax cuts in the stimulus package, the final shedding of the political liability that George Bush has become, and, if truth be told, the probability that Obama might come to "own" the current recession explain why all is not gloom in Republican circles as the inauguration of the new Democratic president approaches. In fact, most wish him well, and share with Obama's supporters the pride the country feels in seeing at least a portion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream realized through a man President Bush described in his farewell address as one "whose history reflects the enduring promise of our land." ♦

Charter of Democracy

Will the dissidents in Beijing ever get the support their Soviet counterparts did? BY ELLEN BORK

Teng Biao, a Chinese lawyer, is a prominent member of the "rights defense" movement, which is attempting to use China's existing laws and institutions to protect human rights. After Teng and other lawyers offered to represent Tibetans arrested during widespread demonstrations in March 2008, the authorities refused to renew his license to practice law. Hu Jia, Teng's friend, with whom he wrote an open letter criticizing Beijing's rights abuses in connection with the Olympic Games, has been jailed. Teng himself has had a number of encounters with the security police, including being abducted and held incommunicado for two days.

In the middle of Teng's business card, in English on one side, and Chinese on the other, appear the words "Living in truth," the central idea of Václav Havel's 1978 essay "The Power of the Powerless."

In the essay, Havel—then a dissident Czech playwright who had been repeatedly jailed by the Communist regime in Prague—used a metaphorical greengrocer to illustrate the corrosiveness of life in a totalitarian system. The greengrocer hangs the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" in his shop window. The sign, Havel wrote, has little to do with the words and their meaning. Its message, directed to the Communist rulers and his fellow citizens, is: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me." The slogan helps the greengrocer to hide his own degradation and oppression "behind the façade of something high. And that something is ideology . . . [which] offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them."

The greengrocer's predicament contains its own "repressed alternative." Suppose, Havel wrote, the greengrocer stops hanging the sign in his window. Suppose he goes further.

> He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength in himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie.

His rebellion, writes Havel, contains "the singular, explosive, incalcu-

Ellen Bork works on human rights at Freedom House.

lable political power of living within the truth."

In early December, Teng and 302 other Chinese intellectuals and activists, lawyers, and even some serving officials published Charter 08, a statement inviting Chinese people, "inside the government or not, and regardless of their social status," to work for the "rapid establishment of a free, democratic and constitutional country."

An English translation of Charter 08 by scholar Perry Link was published in the January 15 issue of the *New York Review of Books*. In his preface, Link, who knows personally many of the Charter 08 signers, observed that the document "was conceived and written in conscious admiration" of Charter 77, the initiative of Havel and other Czechoslovak dissidents that led eventually to the end of Communist rule in Eastern Europe.

Like the Czechoslovak Chartists, Charter 08's signers call themselves a civic movement, not an opposition organization. Both call for freedom of expression and the rule of law rather than the supremacy of the Communist party. Finally, just like the Czechoslovak Chartists, who were arrested in January 1977 as they attempted to put their document in the mail, two prominent Chinese Chartists, Liu Xiaobo and Zhang Zuhua, were detained on the eve of the charter's publication on the Internet. Liu, a writer imprisoned twice before, remains in custody. According to the group Chinese Human Rights Defenders, 100 other signers have been interrogated or harassed. Nevertheless, since the release of Charter 08, the number of people putting their names to it has grown into the thousands, with many Chinese living overseas among them.

The Chinese Chartists' invocation of their Czechoslovak comrades raises many questions worth considering. For now, the most important one is whether the free world will mobilize to support the Chinese Chartists, as it once did dissidents in the Soviet bloc.

In thinking about the Cold War era as a model for supporting dissidents in China, it is important to remember that the West's record was not always clear. For example, although the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 is now viewed as a major contribution to the fall of communism in the Soviet bloc, it was not intended to be. The Helsinki accords were a "document of détente," as Jeri Laber, the founder of Helsinki Watch, put it. The Warsaw Pact countries and the West agreed to confirm the Soviet Union's postwar boundaries. Human rights provisions, relegated to a "third basket," were not taken seriously by the Warsaw Pact countries. Not surprisingly, many dissidents were pessimistic about Helsinki. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, by then in exile in the West, anticipated the "funeral of Eastern Europe." Comparisons were made to the conference at Yalta.

Yet other dissidents, learning from the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and other Western broadcasts about the human rights commitments their governments had insincerely undertaken, sensed that something had changed. "Everyone here has his own reaction to this," one wrote from Prague: "We, the people from the ghetto, feel a cautious hope; the secret police feel an increased nervousness." At least, there was opportunity. In Moscow, Yuri Orlov, Natan Sharansky, and others reasoned, as Sharansky later wrote, that "if the human rights commitments contained in the Helsinki agreements became important to the free world, then the Soviets could not easily ignore them." Soon Helsinki monitoring groups formed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Charter 77 was launched in January 1977, timed in anticipation of the Belgrade conference scheduled for the fall, at which the signing governments would review implementation of the accords.

The governments of the free world were not the first, or the staunchest, sources of support. President Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had initially opposed the inclusion of human rights provisions in the Helsinki Final Act—fortunately several European countries insisted—and later they opposed the establishment of a U.S. commission to monitor implementation. In the United States, it was private groups, especially Helsinki Watch, that provided support and pressured governments. Members of Congress already active on behalf of "*refuseniks*" (Soviet Jews denied visas to leave the USSR) visited Helsinki activists, giving them a measure of protection. When congresswoman Millicent Fenwick remarked on the risk *refuseniks* were taking by meeting with official American visitors, one of the activists replied, "Don't you understand? That's our only hope. We've seen you. Now they know you've seen us."

In Poland, too, official U.S. support for dissidents lagged behind private efforts. After workers at the Gdánsk shipyard founded the independent labor union Solidarity in August 1980, Jimmy Carter's secretary of state, Edmund Muskie, tried to dissuade Lane Kirkland, the head of the AFL-CIO, from providing financial aid to the union. But Kirkland remained "unimpressed by these arguments," wrote his biographer Arch Puddington. "He told Muskie ... the labor movement, as an independent institution with ties to free unions around the world, had the obligation to assist its fellow unionists."

Kirkland believed that pressure from abroad would help the dissidents and deter the Soviet Union and the Polish government from cracking down. As he explained at a press conference in Chicago shortly after the Solidarity strike began, "Every spokesman for freedom in Iron Curtain countries with whom we have had contact ... has strongly asserted the proposition that their survival and inspiration depend very heavily on support and attention and publicity from the Free World."

Things got worse before they got better. Many Helsinki activists inside the Soviet bloc were arrested. Martial law was declared in Poland in 1981. Thanks to the sacrifices of the dissidents and the efforts of their supporters abroad, however, expectations changed, not only of what it was possible to achieve behind the Iron Curtain, but also of what American policy should be.

America's relationship with the People's Republic of China has followed a different path. From the beginning, Washington has viewed its relationship with Beijing as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. A Cold War accommodation led Washington to subordinate democracy and human rights to other interests. "What is important is not a nation's internal political philosophy," Richard Nixon told Mao in 1972. "What is important is its policy toward the rest of the world and toward us." Dissidents and their causes were largely ignored. Even Ronald Reagan referred to the PRC as "this so-called communist country," a "shrewd formulation" according to writer James Mann, that "deflected attention from the unchanged nature of China's political system and enabled Reagan to keep on denouncing political repression in the Soviet Union while saying virtually nothing about similar conduct in China."

None of this was lost on Chinese dissidents, who felt neglected while the free world took up the cause of their Soviet counterparts. Their frustration mounted as they watched the Soviet Union dissolve and U.S. policy toward China remain unchanged. In 1990, Fang Lizhi, the dissident physicist sometimes called the "Chinese Sakharov," went into exile. A mentor to student democracy protesters, Fang had taken refuge in the American embassy on the night of the Tiananmen massacre one year before. Upon his arrival in the West, Fang criticized the West for its "double standard" toward human rights in China. Fang, now a professor at the University of Arizona, is one of the overseas signers of Charter 08, along with the writers Ha Jin and Zheng Yi.

Twenty years later—long after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Velvet Revolution that made Václav Havel president of Czechoslovakia—the effects of this double standard are still being felt. U.S. "engagement" policy depends on rationalizing Chinese repression. American officials engage in bogus human rights dialogues and delude themselves that China's Communist leaders will see political reform as "in their interest." The end of Mao-era mass repression is taken for progress, yet the methods have simply changed, becoming more sophisticated and often subtler, with cooptation and incentives giving way when necessary to coercion and brutality.

Before the Gdánsk strike of 1980, Polish activists were near despair. "[W]e felt we were at the end of the road," Zbygniew Bujak later told Havel's translator, Paul Wilson.

> We had been speaking on the shop floor, talking to people, participating in public meetings, trying to speak the truth about the factory, the country, and politics. There came a moment when people thought we were crazy. Why were we doing this? Why were we taking such risks? . . . Then came the essay by Havel. Reading it gave us the theoretical underpinnings for our activity. It maintained our spirits; we did not give up. . . . When I look at the victories of Solidarity and Charter 77, I see in them an astonishing fulfillment of the prophecies and knowledge contained in Havel's essay.

Havel wrote that the power of the truth depends not only on "those who already live within it," but also "on the soldiers of the enemy, as it were—that is to say, on everyone who is living within the lie and who may be struck at any moment (in theory, at least) by the force of truth." The fear of such power caused the Soviets to expel Solzhenitsyn, Havel wrote, "in a desperate attempt to plug up the dreadful wellspring of truth, a truth which might . . . one day produce political debacles unpredictable in their consequences."

The same fear has led PRC authorities to exile dissidents like Fang Lizhi, Wei Jingsheng, and Wang Dan and imprison tens of thousands of others. Now they have begun to move against Liu, Xiaobo, and other signers of Charter 08. Much as Soviet and Eastern European dissidents undermined détente as the basis for U.S.-Soviet relations, so do Chinese dissidents threaten the logic of American policies toward Beijing. It remains to be seen if their efforts will also become "important to the free world." ♦

Strange Days on Capitol Hill

Republicans for Obama, Democrats unsure.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

House minority leader John Boehner started his press conference on January 15 sounding like a teenage girl who had just found out that her boyfriend like totally hooked up with her best friend.

"Oh. My. God."

Before he continued, Boehner glanced at the talking points prepared for his statement on the $825 billion stimulus package proposed by Democrats in the House of Representatives. "My notes here say that I'm disappointed." He was looking for something stronger. "I just can't tell you how shocked I am at what we're seeing. It's clear that they're moving on this path along the flawed notion that we can borrow and spend our way to prosperity."

Boehner asked how NASA was going to spend $400 million fighting global warming, if ACORN would qualify for community development grants, and whether federal money should be used for waterslides. He wondered why taxpayers were providing handouts to universities with billion-dollar endowments.

"I want to know how digital TV coupons are going to stimulate our economy," he said, pointing out a Democratic proposal to help citizens who still watch television using an antenna convert to digital next month. "I just read last week that 94 percent of the people who needed a converter for their digital—to receive their digital signal—had already gotten it. And so if there's only 6 percent of American TVs that still need these, how could we possibly spend $650 million on this?" It's a good argument. How indeed?

Boehner saved his greatest outrage for last, though. With their proposal, House Democrats are apparently failing to support Barack Obama's efforts to change Washington.

It's an interesting strategic play. Obama has certainly given many indications over the course of this transition that he would like to govern as a centrist. And congressional Democrats, a very liberal bunch, have expressed their concerns, often publicly. So Boehner, leader of a very conservative group of House Republicans, declares that Obama is promising change he can believe in.

"The president-elect really does want to change the way Washington works," Boehner explained to the small gathering of reporters.

While congressional Democrats are calling for the "same-old, same-old," he said, the new president offers hope for a new tone in Washington. "We're going to work with him to try to prove that Washington can work differently, because in this time of economic anxiety the American people expect us to work together."

Does Boehner actually believe what he's saying?

He seems to. He provided similar assurances to me two days earlier in his office at the Capitol. "The president has made it pretty clear that he wants to work with us," Boehner said. "I've talked to him several times. I've talked to his staff a number of times. And I truly do believe he's sincere about this."

It is the kind of hopeful bipartisan talk you would expect from Susan Collins, a moderate Republican senator from a state Obama won by 23 points, or Chuck Hagel, the retired Republican senator whose pseudo-centrism has made him a favorite on the Sunday talk shows. But John Boehner? If he leads in this direction, will his caucus follow?

And what about Senate Republicans? In an interview in his Capitol Hill office on Friday, I asked minority leader Mitch McConnell if he shares Boehner's optimism. The Kentucky Republican said that he, too, had found his early interactions with Obama "impressive" and gave the Obama team "good marks for openness, candor. But in the end," he says, "they will get Republican votes if they adopt Republican policies."

He added:

> I think the key to getting Republican support for initiatives is not just candor and openness and accessibility—they've so far done a great job on that—but how far in the end they're willing to go from a policy point of view.

McConnell acknowledges that Obama will be able to push most of his agenda through Congress without the support of Republicans. But if he does so, he risks looking like he's been "co-opted" by the leftwing of his party—not a good result for someone who campaigned on bridging partisan divides.

> Charm and candor and accessibility will only take you so far. We appreciate it. We really do. But in the end, charm alone is not going to get a substantial number of Republican votes and allow a bill to be called bipartisan unless it genuinely comes our way in a serious, substantive way.

Take the stimulus package. "Republicans tend to like the fact that they're saying up to 40 percent of it may be tax relief," notes McConnell. "But the question is what kind of tax relief. If it's called tax relief and it's really just a spending program then it's really just a bait-and-switch."

Boehner, though, is already following through on Obama's request

---

Stephen F. Hayes, a senior writer at The Weekly Standard*, is the author of* Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President *(HarperCollins).*

for input. He asked Eric Cantor, the House minority whip, to solicit ideas for the stimulus that he could present to the incoming president. At hearings Thursday—the kind of pretend hearings you can hold when you're in the minority—Republican legislators heard from Mitt Romney and former eBay CEO Meg Whitman, among others, who not surprisingly presented policies that the House Republicans could pass along to the Obama administration. And Friday, Boehner, Cantor, and Republican Conference chairman Mike Pence did just that, sending a letter to Obama to report on the proceedings:

> The findings of the hearing further illustrate the need for an economic recovery plan that provides real tax relief, that lessens the burden on our middle-class families, and helps small businesses create jobs without burying future generations under mountains of debt or squandering taxpayers' hard-earned money.

The letter ended with a bottom-line statement of basic principles.

> An economic recovery plan should help the private sector grow and create jobs, rather than expanding government at the expense of working families and small businesses.

To do that, Obama would have to move toward the Republicans in a serious, substantive way.

It is quite a moment. While Republicans are embracing Obama, Democrats are expressing skepticism. Harry Reid says he doesn't "work for Obama." David Obey called Obama a "crown prince." Barbara Boxer insisted they weren't "potted plants." Barney Frank wants him to challenge Republicans—actually, Frank called it fighting the "savage beast." Bill Nelson called Obama's comments on the economy "mumbo jumbo."

The top House Republican is sounding positively senatorial. The Senate minority leader is offering the blunt, matter-of-fact assessment we expect to have from the leader of the House. It should be an interesting hundred days. ♦

Remembering Helen Suzman

South Africa's old-school liberal, 1917-2009.

BY MARIAN L. TUPY

Growing up in Johannesburg in the mid-1990s, I had the great privilege of knowing Helen Suzman, the legendary white anti-apartheid activist and South African parliamentarian who died on New Year's Day. This outspoken and fearless promoter of racial equality and political liberty was an inspiration to me as to many others. I saw her for the last time in November 2007. She was just about to celebrate her 90th birthday, but if she was increasingly frail, there was nothing retiring about her views. She called Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe a "murderer" and thought Thabo Mbeki, then South Africa's president, "despicable" for not doing more about AIDS and Zimbabwe.

Only Nelson Mandela, who'd come calling a week before my visit, had gone on walking on water. Together they had fought and defeated apartheid, but Helen's views, like Mandela's, had grown more suffered than listened to in the new South Africa. There was, as she put it, "no appetite" for her brand of classical liberalism under the iron fist of Mbeki's African National Congress. Though she felt that the end was near, she was determined to go on speaking out and to protect her legacy from "being airbrushed from South African history."

Helen Gavronsky was born into a family of Lithuanian Jews in Germiston, a suburb of Johannesburg, in 1917. She studied business and economics at the University of the Witwatersrand. During World War II, she worked as a statistician at the War Supplies Board and then returned to the University of the Witwatersrand to lecture on economic history. In 1953, she was elected to parliament on the United party ticket. Judging the UP too subservient to the apartheid regime, she switched to the Progressive party in 1959 and remained in parliament until 1989.

The ultimate goals of the Progs, as they were called, were an end to all race-based discrimination and universal suffrage. Yet as independence movements led much of Africa to tyranny and economic ruin, the white electorate in South Africa cooled on political reform. Between 1961 and 1974, Helen was the only unambiguously anti-apartheid politician in parliament. Yet she persisted in hounding the political establishment. When the National party government accused her of deliberately asking embarrassing questions, Suzman retorted, "It's not my questions that are embarrassing South Africa, but your answers."

Throughout her parliamentary career, Helen was subjected to relentless attacks from the government benches. There were shouts of "Go back to Moscow" and "Go back to Israel" as she rose to speak. Prime Minister P.W. Botha called her a "vicious little cat." "I am provocative, and I admit this," Helen later said. "It isn't as if I'm only on the receiving end, a poor, frail little creature. I can be thoroughly nasty when I get going, and I don't pull my punches."

To understand this tenacious and stubborn woman, one has to under-

Marian L. Tupy is a policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity.

stand her philosophy. "I stand for simple justice, equal opportunity, and human rights. . . . [These are] the indispensable elements in a democratic society—and well worth fighting for," she said. A liberal of the old school, Helen wanted people to be treated on merit and not because of their race or gender. For years, she toured South African jails, visiting inmates—including Mandela on Robben Island—and advocating for more humane treatment of prisoners. She was one of the early campaigners for more transparency and accountability in anti-terror legislation.

As a trained economist, Helen saw the free market as the best way to reduce poverty. But she thought a free economy was about more than just material well-being; it would undermine the injustice of apartheid. With its restrictive labor laws and considerable degree of state planning, apartheid was meant to protect the white minority from cheaper black labor and the supposed predations of "Jewish capital." South Africa's leaders loved to rail against capitalism as the enemy of white civilization. Hendrik Verwoerd, prime minister between 1958 and 1966, wrote, "There are people who [argue that] . . . simply everything . . . must be made subordinate to their so-called economic laws. . . . It is fortunate that under a Nationalist government these worshippers of economic laws have never had their way but a nobler and higher goal has been striven after—the maintenance of white civilization."

The National party politicians correctly surmised that the much-maligned profit-motive would lead private companies to compete for the best workers regardless of race. Like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the founders of apartheid saw capitalism as a revolutionary force that was inimical to the status quo. Thus, the early apartheid legislation received support from white trade unions and from the South African Communist party, which proclaimed, "Workers of the world, unite to keep South Africa white!" (The SACP later changed its position on civil rights, though its opposition to capitalism remained.) Helen, however, saw the freedom to earn a living free of government intervention as an important step toward defeating apartheid long before race equality became a rallying cry of the left.

Helen Suzman at 90, in November 2007

AFP PHOTO / ALEXANDER JOE

It was perhaps only natural that Helen, who had seen the government used for evil, would be skeptical about its ability to promote virtue. As Mandela's vision of an inclusive "rainbow nation" gave way to the Afrocentrism of Thabo Mbeki, racial divisiveness reentered South African politics. Opponents of the ANC were regularly dismissed simply because of the color of their skin. "Debate is almost nonexistent and no one is apparently accountable to anybody apart from their political party bosses," Helen said in 2004. "It is bad news for democracy in this country. Even though we didn't have a free press under apartheid, the government of that day seemed to be very much more accountable in parliament."

Helen derived great satisfaction from seeing all the apartheid legislation scrapped, and blacks and whites vote as equal citizens in the 1994 elections. But the apparent inability, or unwillingness, of the ANC to tackle AIDS, crime, corruption, and persistent poverty made her as scathing in her attacks on black nationalists under Mbeki as she had been on the white nationalists during apartheid.

Helen is often called an "icon," but she despised the word and the attention. Behind her self-deprecating response to international adulation lurked a worry. In its drive to consolidate power, the ANC has created a liberation myth that overemphasizes its role in bringing about majority rule. Such a myth is useful; it enables the ANC to monopolize the appearance of virtue and, with it, power. Helen's career reminds us that life under apartheid was more complex. She embodied the determination of a minority of white South Africans to oppose injustice wherever they saw it. No matter how stony the African soil is for classical liberal ideas, they will, courtesy of Helen Suzman, forever remain a viable alternative to race-based politics. ♦

The Great Man Theory of History

Russian style.

BY CATHY YOUNG

William Faulkner once said that the past isn't dead, it isn't even past—and that's certainly proving true in post-Soviet Russia. Vladimir Lenin still lies in his grand mausoleum on Red Square. And meanwhile, Tsar Nicholas II and his family, murdered by Lenin's revolutionary government, were lavishly commemorated last summer in churches and the state media on the 90th anniversary of their deaths.

So when a television production called "Name of Russia," a knockoff of a 2002 BBC series, invited viewers to select the greatest Russian in several rounds of telephone and Internet voting, it's no wonder the project quickly became a minefield.

Controversy first erupted last July with the news that Joseph Stalin, arguably the biggest mass murderer of the 20th century, was leading in the semifinal vote. Most of the media reacted with dismay. Series producer Alexander Lyubimov issued an appeal to the public to say no to Stalin by voting instead for Nicholas II, who briefly took the lead. Yet mere days later, Stalin was back in first place.

Eventually finalists were chosen, and a series of debates on these 12 was televised. The winners were announced on December 29. Top honors went to Alexander Nevsky, the 13th-century warrior prince, saint of the Russian Orthodox Church, and hero of Sergei Eisenstein's eponymous 1938 film. The two runners-up were Petr Stolypin, the reformist prime minister assassinated in 1911—and Stalin.

The common view in Russia is that the vote was rigged to produce a socially acceptable result. The Communists are convinced that Stalin really won, and pessimistic liberals assume so too. But even the official results are hardly encouraging, at least for anyone who wants to see Russia move toward freedom, limited government, and individual rights.

Take the semi-mythic Alexander Nevsky, whose military exploits against Teutonic crusaders were probably greatly exaggerated by Russian chroniclers—and who collaborated with another invading force, the Mongol-Tatar Horde. Alexander received his principality from one of the Mongol khans and brutally suppressed rebellions in Russian cities that refused to pay tribute to the Horde. His defenders explain that Alexander made his deals with the khans out of necessity and saved Russia from devastation; other historians argue that he used the Mongols to gain leverage against rival Russian princes.

The vote for Alexander Nevsky, moreover, can be read as militantly anti-Western. The Russian Orthodox Church canonized Alexander as a defender of the faith because he reportedly turned down an offer of alliance with the Catholic Church against the Mongols—a decision that helped usher in 200 years of rule by the Horde, viewed as disastrous to the tradition of liberty in Russia by both Russian liberals and pro-Western conservatives. Perhaps the best-case scenario is that the people who chose Alexander as the "greatest Russian" were simply voting for a charismatic movie hero symbolizing Russian might and patriotism.

Runner-up Stolypin is a more complex case: A genuine reformer, he tried to modernize Russia with far-reaching political and economic measures that promoted local self-government and family farming. Indeed, many historians believe that if Stolypin's reforms had not collapsed under pressure from both left and right, the 1917 revolution might have been averted. Yet his name is also associated with authoritarianism and repression. He repeatedly tried to bully the recently instituted Russian parliament, and he responded to a wave of revolutionary violence by setting up tribunals whose sentences were carried out in 24 hours without appeal; 1,000 to 3,000 people were executed over a six-month period, and the hangman's noose became known as "the Stolypin necktie."

Interestingly, some media reports claimed that Prime Minister Putin had privately endorsed Stolypin in the contest. Indeed, Stolypin's advocate in the TV debates was film director Nikita Mikhalkov, a friend and strong supporter of Putin. And Stolypin's biography on the "Name of Russia" website seems to emphasize parallels to Putin, from a background in the "security services" to harsh action against "terrorists" to the claim that his reforms were known as "the Stolypin Plan" (the ruling United Russia party touted its "Putin Plan" in the parliamentary elections of 2007).

As for Stalin, the death toll under his rule—counting the terror-famine of 1932-33, the firing squads, and the millions worked and starved to death in the camps of the gulag—has been estimated at 20 to 40 million. One posting on a Russian online forum noted that for Russians to choose Stalin as the greatest man would be akin to Israelis' giving that honor to Hitler.

No less depressing is the fact that the historical figures associated with Russia's frail tradition of liberty fared quite badly in the "greatest Russian" vote. In the semifinals, the physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov received about 275,000 votes, dwarfed by Stalin's more than a million. In the final round, the most "liberal" of the candidates—Tsar Alexander II, who abolished serfdom

Cathy Young, a contributing editor to Reason*, is the author of* Growing Up in Moscow: Memories of a Soviet Girlhood *(1989).*

and made the first attempt at broad liberal reforms in Russia—came last.

While the "greatest Russian" vote was in no way scientific, serious polls have found that about half of Russians view Stalin's role in history as mostly positive (though fewer than one in ten say the terror was justified). He is widely credited with defeating Nazi Germany in World War II, one of Russia's few genuine achievements in the 20th century—even though Russia's horrific losses in the war can be blamed largely on Stalin's failure to prepare for the German invasion and his prewar purges, which decimated the officer corps. Many Russians also see Stalin as the man who turned the Russian state into a leviathan feared around the world—even if it was equally feared by Russians themselves.

In today's Russia, plainly, the Stalin legacy is ambiguous. Stalinism and its crimes stand officially condemned; in July, Dmitry Medvedev became the first Russian president to lay a wreath at a memorial to Stalin's victims. Yet at the same time, there is a strong trend in official propaganda, from the media to history textbooks, to treat Stalinism as a mix of bad and good: terror on one side, industrialization and the victory in World War II on the other.

The growth of Stalin's popularity has been partly a response to the economic and social chaos of the 1990s. But in the Putin era, state propaganda is feeding the trend—emphasizing Russia's greatness and imperial power and cultivating the image of "Fortress Russia" surrounded by enemies, while downplaying the idea, embraced under Yeltsin, that the totalitarian Soviet past should be rejected as evil. The semi-exoneration of Stalin was evident, for instance, in June when the national NTV channel aired the program *Who Was 'Asleep at the Wheel' at the Start of the War?*, challenging the notion of Stalin's responsibility and presenting him as a wise leader whose decisions were undercut by feckless underlings.

In early December, Russia hosted its first-ever scholarly conference on Stalinism, which drew both Russian scholars and Western historians such as Hélène Carrère d'Encausse. Such an event, supported by official institutions, could be seen as a positive step. Yet the conference also generated some disturbing news. According to a report by Nikita Sokolov on Grani.ru, the panelists included two high-ranking Russian academics who acted as near-apologists of Stalin. One observed that many Roman emperors also did evil things but nonetheless built a great empire; the other noted that Stalin's nationalities policy resulted in the survival of virtually every small ethnic group in the Soviet Union, in contrast to the near-extinction of Native Americans in the United States. The Russian minister of education defended a textbook that whitewashes Stalin on the ground that it meets demand from both instructors and students.

For that matter, even if the organizers of the "greatest Russian" project were eager to distance themselves from their bronze-medal winner, there were signs that officialdom was not entirely displeased with Stalin's success in the vote. The series' segment on Stalin was introduced by Mikhalkov, who noted that the very fact of a public debate on Stalin was "a victory for society"—presumably an improvement on unambiguous condemnation—and then spoke of Stalin's "magic" and the reverence he inspired.

The day after the results of the vote were announced, the pro-government paper *Izvestia* ran a "pro and con" feature on Stalin's third-place finish. For the "pro" side, the newspaper's deputy editor in chief, Elena Yampolskaya, argued that, awful though the late tyrant may have been, the vote was not an endorsement of "blood, paranoia, and barbarism," but a rejection of liberalism, political correctness, and consumerism and an embrace of "victory, power, indifference to monetary gain, statecraft, and imperial ambition (a phrase that is, at last, no longer considered pejorative)."

The Stalin who today enjoys semi-official approval, then, is not so much a Communist leader as a great Russian nationalist, a patriot who rebuilt the strong state torn down by internationalist Communists. Many of Stalin's supporters also praise him for restoring the nearly exterminated Russian church in the war years; on the fringes of Stalin worship, a small, bizarre cult regards the Communist dictator as a closet Christian and even advocates his canonization.

Today, when economic crisis looms over Russia, there is a widespread sense that the Putin era has truly ended, its "stability" having collapsed with the price of oil. If this is true, Russia may soon find itself once again at a crossroads, facing a choice between integration into the free world and authoritarian isolation. Perhaps it could start by exorcising some of its undead heroes.♦

A Russian Orthodox icon recently installed at St. Olga's Church outside St. Petersburg, depicting Joseph Stalin with the Blessed Matrona of Moscow, a 20th-century saint

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Obama & the BCS

A playoff is not the change we need.

BY JEFFREY H. ANDERSON

Under the bright lights, Florida scored 10 fourth-quarter points to beat Oklahoma 24-14 and claim the BCS National Championship. When asked for his thoughts following the Gators' tremendous win, President-elect Obama replied, "We need a playoff."

That's not necessarily the best way to endear oneself to Florida voters. But, more to the point, I would argue that it doesn't express a particularly keen understanding of college football, the BCS, or the pros and cons of a playoff versus the current bowl system.

The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) was formed in 1998 to ensure that college football would finally feature an annual championship game. (The participants are decided by a coaches' poll, the Harris poll, and the average of six computer rankings.) Prior to the BCS's creation, there were four times in the 1990s alone when two major undefeated teams weren't matched up in a bowl game.

Contrast this with the BCS era. There has been some controversy over title-game selections, although very little in the past five years. But when a given matchup clearly should have taken place, it has taken place—as in the 2006 Rose Bowl, when Vince Young and Texas beat USC on a fourth-down touchdown run with 19 seconds left, and the 2003 Fiesta Bowl, when Ohio State beat Miami in double-overtime.

What no one could have imagined when the BCS was conceived was how much interest it would generate in regular season games. As teams across America vie for only two spots in the National Championship Game, fans are glued to results and broadcasts of games in other regions in a way that they never were before—and wouldn't be with a playoff. If winning the Southeastern Conference title were to mean winning an automatic playoff berth, why tune in to USC-Oregon State?

Let us consider the most common playoff proposals. The most viable is a "plus-one," which would place the top four teams in two different bowls, with the winners playing each other. This season, Utah—the team that emerged as the consensus national runner-up (and was #2 in my rankings prior to the bowls and #1 afterward)—would have been left out of such an arrangement, in favor of Florida, Oklahoma, Texas, and USC. So a "plus one" wouldn't have resolved much of anything.

Some have argued that Florida, Utah, Texas, and USC should now all be invited to play in a four-team, post-bowl playoff. But why then did Oklahoma have to play Florida (and vice versa) instead of getting an easier road into that four-team field? Furthermore, you can't just decide ad hoc what to do each year after the bowls have already been played. And who wants to see a post-bowl playoff in the years when a Vince Young scores a dramatic touchdown in Pasadena or when the Buckeyes prevail in double-overtime?

Another common proposal is an eight-team playoff, which would do still greater damage to the bowls and the regular season. And this season it would have excluded then-undefeated Boise State (winners on the road versus an Oregon team that would win the Holiday Bowl). It would also have excluded Texas Tech, authors of the most dramatic and biggest win of the fall—over then-number one Texas on a 28-yard touchdown pass with one second left on the clock.

In fact, that memorable game is a perfect example of the adverse effect that a playoff would have on college football's regular season. A playoff would have stripped that game of its drama, as Texas would have been playing for a higher playoff seeding, instead of for a coveted spot in the title game.

Despite such common-sense objections, some fans speak of a playoff as if it were ordained by the heavens. What, however, is so magical about wiping the slate clean after the regular season and declaring that only the games from that point forward will count?

The truth is, a playoff would be less—not more—likely to produce a matchup of the two best teams on the field, would compromise the uniquely rich slice of Americana that is the college football bowl games, and would diminish the most dramatic regular season in all of sports.

The BCS preserves all of this, while ensuring that half of the bowl teams go out as winners. Furthermore, it gave unsung Utah the chance to play, and beat, an excellent Alabama team in the Sugar Bowl.

President-elect Obama seemingly doesn't realize how unlikely that opportunity would have been in the pre-BCS days. In the 30 seasons prior to the BCS's inception, what we now call "non-BCS-conference teams" didn't play in a single major bowl game—not one. Since the 2005 bowl season, they have played in four—and won three.

In truth, the president-elect probably didn't see too much college football this fall, being somewhat busy with other things. The guess here is that he likely spent about as much time sharing his thoughts about how to reform college football as he spent watching games.

If so, he missed a great show. College football is alive and well, and more popular than ever—largely because of the Bowl Championship Series and the title game it provides, the bowl games it preserves, and, most of all, the meaningful regular season it produces.

The change we need is to stop bashing the BCS and start recognizing what a great thing it is for college football. ♦

Jeffrey H. Anderson (with Chris Hester) created one of the six computer rankings used in determining which college football teams will play in the National Championship Game.

What Went Wrong?

The Bush administration's failed North Korea policy

By Nicholas Eberstadt

Of all the disappointments for which the George W. Bush administration will be remembered, perhaps none is as bitter as the failure of its North Korea policy. Despite its intermittent tough talk about Kim Jong Il and his regime, the Bush team's record with Pyongyang these past eight years is a nearly unbroken string of defeats and retreats.

At the end of the Bush era North Korea's nuclear arsenal is bigger and more deadly than ever before. On the Bush watch, North Korea not only publicly declared itself to be a nuclear power, but set off a device to prove it. No less dismaying, there are fewer genuine constraints against further North Korean nuclear proliferation in place today than at Bush's first inauguration. The Bush administration, moreover, has failed abjectly in its intent of loosening Kim Jong Il's monster grip on his slave-state. Despite the speechifying about "the Axis of Evil" and "Freedom on the March," the real existing North Korean system remains as savagely repressive and defiantly unreformed as ever.

A portrait of Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il

So what went wrong? In and around Washington these days, the Bush administration's North Korea policy has spawned considerable off-the-record discussion about "lessons to be learned," much of it from circles close to the incoming Obama administration.

In the Obama camp's recounting, three purported Bush administration mistakes are always highlighted: (1) Dubya's ideological and narrowly moralistic view of North Korea, in contrast to what is seen as the Clinton administration's more pragmatic and nuanced "engagement"; (2) the Bush crew's supposed aversion to negotiation with distasteful adversaries; and (3) an alleged Team Bush failure to understand the potential for major breakthroughs on contentious questions through "high level dialogue," that is to say, face-to-face meetings of top leadership (possibly even, as the president-elect himself at times has said, without "preconditions").

This Obama camp critique offers strong clues as to what we may expect in the way of North Korea policy from the incoming administration. But as a diagnosis of what actually went awry in Washington's dealings with Pyongyang during the Bush years, such an analysis is sorely lacking. It is both superficial and inaccurate. Unless the new administration's North Korea team starts with a clear-eyed recognition of the fundamental reasons that Bush's North Korea policy failed, it risks repeating Bush's same mistakes—and perhaps committing even graver errors on its own watch.

Let us examine each of the particulars of the Obama camp's critique in turn.

Despite assiduous efforts to rewrite history (not least by some of Obama's own prospective appointees), the Clinton years were not exactly a Golden Age of U.S.-North Korea relations. The architects of the Clinton "engagement" with Pyongyang indulged in willful self-deception (and also some collateral deception of the American public) on the North Korean nuclear question.

Late in the second Clinton term, at the very moment

NEWSCOM

Nicholas Eberstadt, who holds the Henry Wendt chair in political economy at the American Enterprise Institute, is author of The North Korean Economy Between Crisis and Catastrophe *and is a member of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.*

when elated senior officials in Washington were celebrating their impending diplomatic "breakthrough" with North Korea on nukes and other troublesome issues, the country was in fact secretly racing to build an illicit uranium-based weapons program in contravention of its diverse nonproliferation commitments and pledges to Washington and to the international community.

The details of these violations are now largely public—and much of the information derives from sources who could hardly be considered agents of American intelligence (including the so-called "father of the Islamic Bomb," Dr. A.Q. Khan of Pakistan). Clinton's "engagement hawks" chose to ignore the mounting evidence that North Korea was cheating. They preferred instead to believe a tale of their own making, namely that "high level meetings" with Kim Jong Il (such as the audiences which Secretary of State Albright was awarded in Pyongyang in October 2000) were about to open up new vistas in relations between the two countries.

That illusion of progress could only be maintained as long as American officials averted their eyes from unpleasant facts. Sure enough: The current and ongoing "North Korean nuclear crisis"—the one that erupted in 2002—was set in motion when Bush administration officials finally confronted their North Korean counterparts with proof that they had been caught cheating.

Kim Jong Il relaxing with supporters

GETTY IMAGES

The acts of self-deception that marred "engagement" with North Korea during Clinton's first term, incidentally, may have been less spectacular, but they were no less consequential. Chief among these was the Clinton team's 1994 "Agreed Framework," a document signed by emissaries from both Washington and Pyongyang. That "Framework" was officially hailed at the time as a major diplomatic achievement, and vaunted ever after by Clinton envoys as a roadmap for North Korean "denuclearization." The fine print of that "Framework," unfortunately, indicated instead that America would, eventually, be providing North Korea with *nuclear power plants*. Indeed, the text stipulated there would be a couple of "light water reactors" for Pyongyang in the deal.

In effect, the Clinton administration's plan for resolving the original "North Korean nuclear crisis" of 1992-94 was to promise Pyongyang a supply of even more fissile material. While some proponents of the "Framework" implied that the envisioned reactors would be "safe" because they would produce non-weapons-grade plutonium, the plain truth is that there is no such thing as "safe" plutonium. (Nagasaki, after all, was incinerated by an atomic bomb from similarly "safe" plutonium.) The "Agreed Framework" finally fell apart in 2002, repudiated by Pyongyang at the outset of the current North Korean nuclear crisis, but its fateful precedent—U.S. acquiescence in, and support for, a "peaceful" nuclear development program for North Korea under the Kim Jong Il regime—haunts us to this day.

So much for Clinton-era "engagement." What about the potential of diplomatic breakthroughs via "high level meetings" with Kim Jong Il?

Contrary to perceptions apparently prevailing in some wings of the Obama camp, "high level meetings" with the Dear Leader have in fact *already* taken place—repeatedly. Over the past decade, Kim Jong Il has parlayed directly with an American secretary of state, a Japanese prime minister, and two successive presidents of South Korea. Two of these summits took place in the Clinton years, two in the Bush era. But none of them yielded any appreciable diplomatic results—for the outsiders.

Kim Jong Il lied to Madeleine Albright about North Korea's nukes and missiles in 2000; he lied to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi about North Korea's Japanese abductees in 2002. He humiliated South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun at their 2006 Pyongyang summit—the negligible results of that top-level get-together are one reason why most American readers have never even heard of the meeting.

Admittedly, the sensational Pyongyang summit held between Roh's predecessor Kim Dae Jung and the Dear Leader in June 2000 (for which the South Korean won the Nobel Peace Prize) did look like a true "high-level breakthrough" at first—but the spectacle was later discredited as a cash-for-photo-ops transaction. It turned out that Kim Jong Il only invited the South Korean president to the North after a secret promise was made to reward the Dear Leader

with hundreds of millions of dollars in South Korean taxpayer funds for the visit, a fraud for which the Nobel Laureate ultimately had to apologize on national television, and for which several of his aides were subsequently sentenced to prison by South Korean courts. (Some high-level meetings with Kim Jong Il, to be sure, *have* produced significant agreements. At a Moscow summit with Vladimir Putin in 2001, Kim and Putin both backed the proposition that "the pullout of U.S. forces from South Korea is a pressing issue which brooks no delay"—a breakthrough of sorts, perhaps, but not exactly a turnaround in Pyongyang's position on that issue.)

Kim Jong Il's track record in "high level meetings" with foreign leaders is absolutely unambiguous: Like his father

A toast! Kim Jong Il and Madeleine Albright in October 2000

before him, the Dear Leader always uses these occasions to press for advantage and to pursue preexisting objectives set for the North Korean state. There is nothing surprising about this: The only surprise is why anyone might expect him to behave differently. The notion that Kim Jong Il might forget to do all this (much less reverse nearly three decades of his own relentless military and nuclear policy) if only he were, at last, within intoxicating personal proximity of a real American president is worse than fanciful. It is profoundly condescending.

Finally, let us consider the charge that the Bush administration's North Korea policy failed for want of diplomatic activity. It *is* true that United States and North Korean envoys had relatively little contact for the first year and a half or so of Bush's tenure: a diplomatic hiatus due in part to the incoming Bush administration's prolonged "policy review" on North Korea, and thereafter to Pyongyang's explicit refusal to meet with Bush officials for many months on end. Since then, however, the sheer volume of U.S. negotiating and conferencing with North Korea has been immense—very possibly outweighing, by purely quantitative measures, the Clinton era's corresponding diplomatic initiatives with North Korea.

For the past five and a half years, the United States and North Korea (along with China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea) have been entwined in a multilateral "Six Party" process on North Korean denuclearization. These exhaustive deliberations and their side-meetings have resulted in untold thousands of hours of official face-to-face contact, and in at least two agreements signed by all six governments (including one that the State Department formally refers to as a "North Korea-Denuclearization Action Plan").

The Bush administration, in short, can hardly be faulted for a lack of conferencing with North Korea. During the last two years of the Bush tenure, indeed, the administration's envoys have been almost endlessly engaged in such busywork. The problem, instead, is that these protracted "denuclearization talks" did not produce anything in North Korea remotely resembling denuclearization.

Just the opposite. With each new round of this diplomatic process, North Korea's status as a nuclear weapon state became a little more undeniable, while international constraints on Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions looked correspondingly less credible. With the final round of Bush-era Six Party Talks, which collapsed in Beijing just last month over the issue of a "verification protocol"—that is, whether Pyongyang would submit to outside validation of its claims about its own nuclear activities—North Korea had in effect managed to rewrite or redefine nearly all the international nonproliferation strictures it had faced at the start of the Bush presidency.

Such an achievement arguably qualifies as a diplomatic triumph—but only a triumph for Kim Jong Il and his minions.

If the Team Obama critique is unpersuasive, how then did the Bush administration's North Korea policy come undone?

The trouble was not a lack of summitry, a shortage of negotiations, or a want of Clinton-style "engagement." Nor was the problem the president's purportedly narrow and ideological view of the Kim Jong Il regime. In retrospect, George W. Bush's unapologetically harsh pronouncements about the North Korean state's nature, its intentions, and its trustworthiness look decidedly *more* realistic than the corresponding assessments of the "North Korea hands" from the previous Clinton administration.

No, the problem was not the Bush attitudes toward

NEWSCOM

the Kim Jong Il regime, unfavorable as they were. It was rather that the president and his administration never actually developed a *policy* toward North Korea—an approach through which those attitudes toward this dangerous regime would be operationalized, and objectives coherently pursued. From beginning to end, Washington's failures on the North Korea front these past eight years can largely be ascribed to the unfortunate fact that the Bush administration couldn't settle on a strategy for dealing with Pyongyang.

For an administration so often criticized for an overbearing (and undeserved) confidence in its own strategies, the charge that the Bush administration lacked a strategy altogether in dealing with one of its most serious adversaries may sound curious. Incoming Bush officials were scathing—both in private and public—about what they held to be the Clinton administration's hapless mismanagement of North Korea policy. And such disdainful criticisms of their predecessors' policies strongly suggested, at the very least, that they had an alternative policy of their own.

In the event, the Bush team's low regard for Clinton administration performance was not ultimately based in fundamental disagreements about contending North Korea strategies. The Bush team's initial, and not-so-secret, mantra on North Korea was "Anything But Clinton." "ABC" was something that all members of the Bush North Korea team could agree upon. But it could not provide any guidance on what actually to do—or how to make their big North Korea problem into a smaller one.

In retrospect, the hints that the Bush administration lacked a North Korea strategy were always there, even from the beginning. The strangely protracted and seemingly inconclusive "North Korea policy review" at the start of Bush's tenure was one of these. In June 2002—nearly a year and a half into his first term—George W. Bush's deputy secretary of state, Richard Armitage, declared that "Once we have made up our minds" about North Korea policy "we will of course go to our South Korean and Japanese friends"—revealing that the search for a North Korea strategy was still a work in progress. More than two years later, in October 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell practically spelled it all out on CNN: In a memorable response to an interviewer's question, he reassured his audience that "We [the Bush administration] don't have any red lines" in dealing with North Korea. If you don't have a policy—or a strategy—you won't have "red lines," either.

Thus paradoxically, despite his hard-line reputation and his openly hostile posture toward Kim Jong Il, President Bush and his advisers actually lacked a game plan for reducing the threats that Pyongyang posed to America and her allies. Consequently, notwithstanding its unabashedly negative view of the Dear Leader and his government, the administration's approach to North Korea was unmoored from the very start. Disconnected from any guiding vision, America's "policy" on North Korea stumbled from one blunder to the next.

When an international actor walks onto the world stage without a policy or a strategy, he is both more likely to acquit himself poorly in the face of surprise, and more likely to be surprised in the first place. In contrast to their North Korean counterparts, who are reputed to "game out" responses to their international opponents' every possible move, the Bush team found itself constantly being caught unawares by North Korean gambits and not knowing how to react.

The administration, for example, gained a significant tactical advantage over Pyongyang in late 2002 when it unexpectedly demonstrated that it had caught North Korea cheating on its nuclear pledges with a covert uranium program—but then was thrown for a complete loss when North Korea upped the ante by removing the international safeguards on its plutonium program, announcing its withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and restarting its Yongbyon plutonium reactor. The eventual U.S. countermove—a call in 2003 for the multilateral denuclearization negotiations ultimately known as the Six Party Talks—was an improvisation bereft of clear objectives or thought-through means for achieving them, as was to become clear.

The stunning and pervasive failure of Bush-era diplomacy to reduce the North Korean threat or advance American interests entailed more than just the failure of the Six Party Talks—it also involved a host of missed opportunities or plain missteps in America's bilateral relations. China and South Korea—Kim Jong Il's two main financial backers at the start of the Bush administration—may not have shared the administration's sentiments or priorities regarding North Korea, but those facts in and of themselves did not mean that drawing those two governments toward policies more to America's liking was a diplomatic mission impossible. (This, after all, is the ordinary terrain on which competent diplomats the world over are forced to operate.) Given China's exposure to risks emanating from North Korea—including risks to its domestic political, economic, and social situations—Americans certainly had a brief for arguing that broad cooperation with Washington on the North Korean question, while obviously unappetizing to Beijing, would be less unpleasant than some of the potential alternatives.

As for South Korea's "sunshine era" governments—which at times seemed more suspicious of the U.S. forces protecting them than of the North Korean forces committed to destroying them—these presided over closely divided electorates in open societies, meaning that there was always scope for Washington to cultivate coalitions with domestic

South Korea constituencies to build pressure for an issue-by-issue approach toward North Korea more to America's liking. The United States never attempted anything like this, preferring instead to sulk until the South Korean electorate finally brought "regime change" to their country. (As fate would have it, the Bush North Korea team no longer really wanted a non-sunshine president by the time it finally got one in 2007.) Neglecting the potential of bilateral diplomacy, of course, is all that much more likely when one does not have a strategy to connect the dots.

Despite the tremendous distraction and diversion of resources imposed by the course of military events in Iraq, the United States possessed (and possesses still) a vast array of international instruments for countering North Korea's nuclear provocations: instruments, one should perhaps emphasize, well short of war. Put another way: To a leadership informed by a strategic vision, conference diplomacy with Pyongyang would be just one of many options in the portfolio for reducing the threat posed by North Korea.

In the absence of a coherent policy, though, the imperative of "success" in talks with North Korea suddenly took on a life of its own for the Bush team. (After all, there was no alternative strategy, no "plan B," for what to do if the talks came to an unsuccessful end.) Consequently, instead of crafting our conference diplomacy with Pyongyang in accordance with our overall strategy for North Korean threat reduction, our efforts at North Korean threat reduction came to be tailored to the perceived needs of our conference diplomacy.

Thus our Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)—a promising international effort to interdict the illicit commerce of North Korea and other peddlers of weapons of mass destruction—was allowed to fade into obscurity when its very success was deemed to pose risks to the "continued progress" of the talks with North Korea. (Have you heard about PSI over the past two years? Neither has anyone else.)

Then there was the "Banco Delta Asia" affair. Pyongyang depends on counterfeiting, drug-running, and other such sources of income to prop up its shaky state finances. Thanks to careful and persistent interagency detective work, American officials began to track these down in the Bush years. When this work prompted Macau's Banco Delta Asia to freeze over $20 million in suspect North Korean assets, North Korean officials howled—and warned they would not return to the nuclear bargaining table until they got their bag-money back. The strategically inclined would have realized we had found a pressure point—and would have squeezed all the harder, to extract concessions. But our State Department envoys fought tooth and nail against our Treasury officials to free their negotiating partners from this economic chokehold—and with the president's backing (and the skirting of a few laws) saw to it that the loot was fully returned to Pyongyang's discomfited gangsters.

In a universe where policymakers were alert to the connection between real world events, officials might have realized that the North Korean regime's practiced abuse of its subjects at home was the flipside of its methodical menace of foreign populations through weapons of mass destruction and that human rights must be an active front in the overall fight for North Korean threat reduction. In the atomized worldview of the Bush administration's North Korea team, however, human rights in North Korea was routinely treated as an irrelevant annoyance or worse—even though the president himself had spoken passionately about the cause.

Thus Christopher Hill, the point man on negotiations with North Korea in the second George W. Bush administration, would demur in December 2008 that "each country, including our own, needs to improve its human rights record." And when the president's own envoy on human rights in North Korea suggested last January that human rights be included as a consideration in our Pyongyang deal-brokering, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would sharply declare, "He doesn't know what's going on in the Six Party Talks."

Adrift without a strategic compass, Bush's North Korea team ended up clinging like shipwreck victims to the desperate prospects of their negotiating sessions with North Korean officials, sacrificing substance so that the process might continue. In the name of keeping the talks going, they would embrace vague joint agreements with loopholes big enough for a covert uranium enrichment program to slip through; politely refrain from demanding accounts of Pyongyang's nuclear proliferation with governments like Syria; and exhibit bizarre forbearance in the face of North Korea's provocations. U.S. diplomats had worked strenuously to pass U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718 in 2006—a condemnation of North Korea's nuclear test, replete with economic sanctions—but Bush's North Korea team was perfectly willing to undercut this international effort to penalize the North Korean regime if "progress in the talks" so demanded. Last October, in the hope of luring North Korea back to the Six Party table yet again, North Korea was removed from the roster of countries subject to U.S. "Terrorism List" sanctions.

Ironically, as the Six Party Talks lurched on, the United States seemed to become a more dangerous and unpredictable actor, at least for America's own allies and partners. Cooperating with Washington on tracking down North Korean illicit finances, for example, meant being left unexpectedly out on a limb when Washington suddenly reversed

course and started undoing its own economic pressure campaign. Even worse, indicating willingness to cooperate closely with Washington in the Six Party Talks would come to expose allies to the risk and indignity of being slapped down on issues critical to their own national interest (as happened last year, when Washington stiff-armed Tokyo on the question of Japanese abductees in North Korea).

The longer the Six Party Talks progressed, the further the American negotiating team seemed to be separated from its initial goals and objectives. Gone today is any talk of a "complete, verifiable and irreversible disarmament" for North Korea. Gone, too, is any serious talk of a "complete and correct" North Korean accounting of that state's past nuclear activities. Gone is any substantive discussion of a credible and comprehensive international nuclear verification regime on North Korean territory. And gone, of course, is any diplomatic dialogue about North Korea's secret uranium program—the project that triggered the current round of the North Korean nuclear crisis in the first place. Just about all the Bush administration can point to for its troubles at these talks is a decommissioned cooling tower at the Yongbyon plutonium facility and a ton or so of diversionary North Korean paperwork on the plutonium project. By the most exquisite of ironies, American scientists detected traces of highly enriched uranium on some of that documentation—presumably fallout from an enrichment program that the same paperwork was meant to prove does not exist.

If the Bush North Korea team had had a strategy or policy worthy of the name, these adventures in conferencing would have been terminated years ago—as soon as it became clear they were advancing North Korean rather than American interests. But for lack of any better idea, apparently, the deleterious Six Party diplomacy was allowed to masquerade as the U.S. North Korea policy—and to continue until the final buzzer sounded on the Bush administration.

In 2001, the incoming Bush administration accused its predecessors of "kicking the can down the road," of fecklessly deferring difficult international problems. With North Korea, the Bush administration leaves town in the indelicate position of having committed the very offenses it pilloried the Clintonistas for—and big time.

America's strategic position with respect to North Korea is worse today than when Bush first took office. The Obama team inherits a much more serious North Korean nuclear threat than the one Bush faced in early 2001. Moreover, all of the perverse diplomatic incentives for Pyongyang that Bush aides criticized in the Clinton North Korea policy—bribes for showing up at meetings, no-penalty responses to provocations and violations, and the like—ended up becoming "business as usual" in the Bush era. It will be that much more difficult now for the Obama administration to confront, and unteach, such routine bad behavior by North Korea. To make matters worse, the North Koreans are well aware that they have just faced down the most implacably hostile American president to confront them since Harry S. Truman—and have not only bested him diplomatically, but have practically made him eat his own Bush Doctrine in front of the world. Thanks to the experiences of the past eight years, North Korean leadership will be much more confident and quite possibly bolder in its opening moves against the new and perforce untested Obama administration.

AFP

Christopher Hill: 'Each country . . . needs to improve its human rights record.'

Yet when all is said and done, the outlook for American policy toward a hostile, nuclear North Korea is by no means unremittingly bleak. Viewed plainly, Pyongyang has been dealt a miserable international hand, which it has played exceedingly well. America, conversely, has been dealt a potentially winning hand in this contest. It is just that we have played the hand extraordinarily poorly.

Playing our hand better is both the challenge and the promise for America's North Korea policy in the years ahead. The Obama administration can capitalize upon the tremendous opportunities inherent in this situation, promoting American interests and international humanitarian objectives at one and the same time. Seizing these opportunities, however, will require the Obama team to discard the myths of the Clinton era, and to recognize the failures of the Bush era for what they really were. ♦

We Should Build a Bigger Navy

China is.

By Seth Cropsey

About a decade ago the foreign policy establishment was busy dismissing China's efforts to build a powerful, modern military. Writing in the *Washington Post* in 1997, Michael Swaine, a China specialist then at the RAND corporation, declared that the "enduring deficiencies in China's military logistics system call into question its ability to operate [naval and aviation] weapons over a sustained period, particularly outside China's borders." Well, right now, Chinese naval vessels are deploying in the Gulf of Aden to assist in the international anti-piracy mission. It's 4,000 miles from China to the Gulf of Aden.

Swaine further predicted that China "will remain at least a full generation behind the world's leading military powers." In January 2007, Beijing used a ground-based medium range ballistic missile to destroy one of its own aging weather satellites—an impressive technological accomplishment that only two other nations, the United States and the Soviet Union, have ever achieved.

In 1999, the Brookings scholars Bates Gill and Michael O'Hanlon concluded in an article—"Power Plays . . . While There's Less to the Chinese Threat than Meets the Eye," also in the *Washington Post*—that China's "ballistic missiles will be hard-pressed to defeat Taiwan's military or sink nearby U.S. ships." Yet the Defense Department's 2008 assessment of China's military noted that "PLA planners are focused on targeting surface ships at long ranges from China's shores. . . . One area of investment involves combining conventionally-armed ASBMs [anti-ship ballistic missiles] based on . . . C4ISR [DoD-speak for command, control, communication, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] for geo-location and tracking of targets, and onboard guidance systems for terminal homing to strike surface ships or their onshore support infrastructure." China's effort to threaten U.S. ships at sea is taken seriously today, as is shown by the debate over whether the Navy's next generation of carrier-based aircraft has sufficient range to accomplish their missions without forcing U.S. carriers to sail within areas of the Pacific to which China seeks to deny access.

A 1998 Foreign Policy Research Institute article written by Avery Goldstein asserted that Beijing was so far behind other advanced industrial states that "successful modernization will leave China with forces by the second or third decade of the next century most of which would have been state of the art in the 1990s." This observation retains some validity, but there is nothing primitive about China's effort to deny the U.S. Navy access to large strategic swaths of the Western Pacific. Indeed, the last few weeks have produced the prospect of another particularly important advance in the Chinese military's steady transformation into a modern, serious, powerful force.

On the last day of 2008, the *Asahi Shimbun* reported that China is planning to begin construction of two medium-sized aircraft carriers—a contemporary navy's most flexible instrument of power projection—in its Shanghai yards this year. They are scheduled for launch in 2015. The article also repeated widely circulated information that the shipyards in the Yellow Sea port of Dalian are putting the finishing touches on a refurbishment of the 55,000 ton Soviet-built Kuznetsov-class carrier, the *Varyag*, a vessel that a Chinese company with connections to the People's Liberation Army purchased in 1998 and then towed to China from the Black Sea in 2002.

The Soviet carrier was a good platform to learn—in established Chinese tradition—the architecture, design, and gross characteristics of the aircraft carrier. As a training platform, the *Varyag* will provide indispensable experience for future carrier pilots and support personnel in the demanding business of naval carrier aviation. China should have three operational aircraft carriers to add to its submarine and surface fleets around the midpoint of the next decade.

All this tracks with the Pentagon's 2008 evaluation of Chinese military power, which noted: "China has an active aircraft carrier research and design program," and "if the

Seth Cropsey is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. He served as deputy undersecretary of the Navy in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, as well as in the U.S. Navy.

leadership were to so choose, the PRC shipbuilding industry could start construction of an indigenous platform by the end of this decade." In November, the director of the foreign affairs office of China's defense ministry, Major General Qian Lihua, told the *Financial Times* that "the question is not whether you have an aircraft carrier, but what you do with your aircraft carrier." The following month China's defense ministry spokesman, Huang Xueping, offered similar public comments, observing that the protection of national interests required China to undertake carrier aviation.

Aircraft carriers are not only important as a symbol of a great or growing military power. They are useful and tremendously adaptable instruments of force. We are still only witnessing the beginning of China's naval build-up, but the carriers will have a profound impact on her ability to project military force as disputes with its neighbors, including Japan, over potentially energy-rich sea beds and islands in the South and East China Seas fester. The carriers will also give China greater control over the passage of oil from the Middle East and increase Beijing's military influence in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. They will support possible future Chinese claims to Asian hegemony. They will force Japan to consider construction of similar instruments of naval force. The successful operation of the midsize carriers China envisions would lay the operational, logistic, command and control, and tactical foundation for building vessels with the—much greater—striking power and range of the U.S. Navy's Nimitz-class carriers.

Towing the former Russian carrier Varyag *through the Bosphorus in 2001*

NEWSCOM

That's not all, though. The initial focus of China's carriers is likely to be to the south and west, but the vast Pacific lies immediately beyond the chain of islands and land formations that extend south from Japan through the Philippines. The wide but penetrable moat between these islands and the Chinese mainland offers bastions for her growing force of nuclear-propelled, intercontinental ballistic missile-carrying submarines, as the islands themselves shield China from the open ocean. But the eventual passage of her carriers eastward, beyond the moat, reestablishes the potential for naval competition in the Pacific that disappeared with the defeat of the Imperial Japanese navy in 1945.

This challenge did not appear suddenly like a dragon from the mists of China's famous stone forests. The Chinese have been working towards a naval aviation capability for many years. A summer 2008 Congressional Research Service report noted an Indian naval analyst's observation that the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been planning for large naval combatants like carriers and amphibious vessels for a quarter of a century.

A safe and effective naval aviation capability requires mastery of a host of design, operational, logistic, training, and command skills. China has been addressing these deliberately and methodically. Courses for future carrier and amphibious ship commanding officers began at the Guangzhou Naval Academy in 1985. Two years later, the same academy, in sensible imitation of the U.S. Navy's tradition of selecting qualified pilots to command aircraft carriers, initiated a program for young PLAN pilots to prepare them to command ships. These officers are reaching the correct seniority, level of experience, and age to become the PLAN's first carrier commanders. Negotiations with European companies for construction of large amphibious ships took place in the late 1990s. A little over two years ago, the Russian press reported that China was negotiating to purchase as many as 48 SU-33 fighter aircraft, which are built to be launched and recovered by aircraft carriers and can be refueled in flight. In September 2008, an article in *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported that 50 students had begun a course of study at the Dalian Naval Academy intended to prepare them to become the PLAN's first fixed-wing aircraft carrier pilots.

The Chinese carriers will build on one of the PLAN's most significant accomplishments: the creation of a fleet of attack and ballistic missile submarines. This began, as the carrier program did with the *Varyag*, with the purchase of Russian subs in the 1990s, specifically the Kilo-class conventional-powered attack submarine of which China now possesses 12 (the Chinese have also acquired powerful surface combatants from Russia). The PLAN's submarine force continues to experience significant growth, in both size and capability, as several new classes of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines armed with

rockets of increasing range are being added to its force.

If we assume the year 2020 as a reasonable target for China's gaining genuine competency at naval aviation—particularly the joint operation of carriers with the rest of a fleet—it will have taken just 35 years for China to transform its navy from a large collection of aging World War II landing ships, patrol boats, shore-based aircraft, and submarines with very limited range into a modern naval force with an offensive ballistic missile capability. It will be able to project power and will offer the U.S. Navy a serious challenge in the Pacific. The span is about the same amount of time that it took Japan to turn its coastal defense navy into the battle fleet that destroyed a Russian rival at the Battle of Tsushima Strait in May 1905.

There are numerous similarities between China's and Japan's rise as naval powers. Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward isolated and impoverished China—leaving it with a technologically backward military—as two centuries of Tokugawa rule had isolated and impoverished Japan. Both countries looked abroad for help. China depended initially on Russian naval technology. Japan looked to Holland, France, and especially England to acquire large modern ships as a precursor to developing their own naval industrial base. Both countries depend heavily on the seaborne delivery of critical natural resources. China and Japan—at different times, of course, and at significantly different degrees of national assertiveness—looked to naval forces as the symbol and instrument of broader regional and international ambitions. Japan built a world-class navy in three and a half decades with large strategic consequences for America and the world. China is well on its way toward a similar accomplishment, with the potential for similar consequences.

The U.S. Navy's response to the PLAN's deliberate and steady progress has been diffident. Dismissive of increasing Chinese naval capabilities at first, U.S. naval commentators have lately adopted a more harmonious position as the gulf between the PLAN's reach and grasp has narrowed. Admiral Dennis Blair, former commander of the U.S. Pacific Command and now in line to become the new administration's director of national intelligence, wrote in 2007 that "China is on a positive trajectory" and argued that "the U.S. should offer to involve China in bilateral and multilateral military operations for the common good." Thomas Barnett, a researcher and a professor at the Naval War College until 2004, urged in a 2005 article ("The Chinese Are Our Friends") in *Esquire* that the president stop the "rising tide of Pentagon propaganda on the Chinese 'threat' and tell Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld . . . that our trigger pullers on the ground today deserve everything they need to conduct counterinsurgency operations."

Whether or not it shares these views of Chinese benignity, the Navy has drifted in recent years. At about 280 combatants, fleet size today is less than half its level during the Reagan administration. The Navy says it needs an additional 33 ships to carry out its various global missions, but the needed increase eludes its leadership. The costs of shipbuilding have increased without effective restraint, and one new class of large surface combatants—the Zumwalt class of destroyers—was cancelled. Another—the Littoral Combat ship—saw overruns double the cost of the first ship and the number to be purchased fall by nearly a fifth. (The price remains stratospheric for a vessel whose most immediate mission would be to chase speedboat-borne pirates.) The programs to replace aircraft carriers as they reach the end of their useful service lives are in irons as a result of a clash between previous DoD decisions that restrict the size of the next carrier and the expansive requirements of the critical systems planned for the next generation of carriers.

Even without the likelihood that China's next large step in developing its navy is the addition of aircraft carriers, the United States needed to increase its combatant fleet. Continued missteps that result in a diminishing U.S. Navy at the same time that China's naval force grows are an invitation to change the balance of power in Asia, the Pacific, and the world.

The Obama administration should use part of its proposed economic stimulus package to begin a naval restoration program that will increase the combatant fleet by at least 15 percent before 2016, and the program should not be relegated to future budget years, which are as changeable as the weather. A Naval Recovery Act should include an immediate advance in the schedule for constructing a new carrier, thus eliminating the undesirable possibility that the Navy will be short one for several years. Similar efforts should aim at drawing Japan closer, developing our connections with the Indian navy, reestablishing a naval base in the Philippines, and building a relationship with Vietnam that could eventually support a U.S. naval presence. Offsetting China's efforts to deny the United States access to our Western Pacific friends and allies requires thoughtful statecraft as well as effective naval forces.

Allowing the current U.S. naval slippage to continue will result in a combat fleet of a size we haven't seen since 1911. Combined with the parallel growth in the Chinese navy and the certainty that Beijing's leadership will use it to fill the vacuums created by a diminishing U.S. naval presence, this would be more damaging and strategically far-reaching than any of the Bush administration's mistakes. The PLAN's likely entry into carrier aviation is interesting for what it says about China's long-term strategy and objectives. How we respond is far more important. ♦

Annals of Eden

Does the serpent have the last word?

By Ryan T. Anderson

'Adam und Eva' (1526) by Lucas Cranach

DIRECTMEDIA PUBLISHING / THE YORK PROJECT

As St. Paul told the Romans: "Sin came into the world through one man; many died through one man's trespass; the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation; because of one man's trespass, death reigned; one trespass led to condemnation; by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners."

Well, actually, that's not quite all Paul said. It's what you get if you take the Letter to the Romans and remove all mention of Christ, leaving just the fallen world that Adam made for us. Alan Jacobs gives this stripped-down passage from Paul in his new book, *Original Sin*—and rightly so, for Jacobs, who teaches English at Wheaton College, has set out to explore how the concept of original sin is key to understanding ourselves.

The Book of Genesis is clear enough about what happened that fateful day in the Garden, but the Jewish tradition developed no doctrine of original sin. For that, we needed Paul, with his description of man's alienation from God and his discussion of the fallen nature it produced: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

Original Sin
A Cultural History
by Alan Jacobs
HarperOne, 304 pp., $24.95

Jacobs walks through the historical controversies surrounding these passages' interpretation, especially the battles with Pelagius in which St. Augustine emphasized the existential reality of the soul's bondage to sin. To Pelagius, that seemed an excuse; even in this life we can follow Christ's command to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Fortunately, Pelagius's spiritual elitism (he wanted everyone to be a monk) was rejected by the Church. It proved to be Augustine's recognition of our fettering that left room for our liberation by grace.

But we shouldn't get lost in theological thickets. Jacobs's subtitle, "A Cultural History," is apt. The book's concern is not so much to trace the development of the doctrine as to show how it permeates our culture and our identity. Of original sin, Pascal remarked that "nothing jolts us more rudely . . . and yet but for this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we remain incomprehensible to ourselves." Jacobs agrees that the key to "explaining ourselves to ourselves" is "reconsidering that curious concept called *peccatum originalis*, the belief that we arrive in this world predisposed to wrongdoing."

Original Sin explores the concept with key examples from history, works of literature, cinema, music, politi-

Ryan T. Anderson is the editor of Public Discourse: Ethics, Law and the Public Good*, a publication of the Witherspoon Institute.*

cal theory, social criticism, and even psychology and evolutionary biology. Jacobs includes the predictable cast: Augustine, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Edwards, Lewis, Tolkien. But he also invites some surprising guests: Plato, the Confucian Xun Zu, Rousseau, Muddy Waters, Richard Dawkins, and such movies as *Animal House*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, and *Hellboy*. Jacobs's use of examples is, by necessity, somewhat erratic, and it makes the book's thesis and overarching narrative a little hard to discern.

Still, some examples stand out. Jacobs considers the relation of original sin to educational theory. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed that just as disease makes medicine necessary, "so the disorders of our rational nature have introduced the necessity of education and tutors." Education aims at "discerning these sins and rooting them out as aggressively as possible." But then there is Rousseau, who believed that naturally good human beings are corrupted by society. He claimed that his discourse on education offers "simply a treatise on the natural goodness of man, intended to show how vice and error are foreign to his constitution, invade it from outside, and imperceptibly alter it."

Of course, Rousseau leaves us no answer for the question of where the evil in society comes from. And Christian views about the origin of this evil provide, surprisingly enough, an even stronger grounding for human equality. All humans—the rich and the poor, the high and the low—inherit the stain of Adam, Jacobs argues, and stand in equal need of redemption.

To buttress this claim, Jacobs recounts how Odilo, a 10th-century abbot of Cluny, introduced the Feast of All Souls (when the church prays for all the departed) just after the Feast of All Saints (when the church honors the saints in heaven). Such a move, Jacobs says, promotes democracy here on earth, "based on . . . the judgment that each of us stands under because of our inheritance from Adam." The spirit of Odilo's feast "offends every aristocracy, real or imagined, traditional or inverted—every attempt to separate 'us' from 'them.'"

Centuries later, the doctrine's relation to equality would play out in the efforts of abolitionists. The Harvard botanist Louis Agassiz developed theories of polygeny—that each race descended from different parents—to support the claim that blacks are "in everything unlike the other races." Against this, the Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell grounded our equality in our common ancestry: "No Christian man . . . can give any countenance to speculations which trace the Negro to any other parent but Adam."

The concept of original sin played a major role, as well, in the development of 20th-century American thought. As the historian George Nash has observed, underlying conservatism's political philosophy is "a Christianity grounded in what was, for many neoconservatives, the deepest lesson of World War II: the lesson of evil, of original sin." I guess one could call it the original mugging by reality.

The utopian social theorists who seek to break the chains that man creates, convinced that we all are good at heart, end up denying the evil we all know exists.

Though *Original Sin* is long and about a rather unpleasant topic, Jacobs's flowing prose keeps the book moving at a nice pace. But it advances no clear thesis—the tension between our potential for moral greatness and the lived experience of our inclination toward evil is as close as Jacobs gets—and it leaves a good deal out. Readers will want, for example, some reflections on the 20th-century totalitarian regimes and their utopian denial of original sin, on the role of Calvinist thought during the American Founding, and on the idea of the *felix culpa* (the belief that Adam's sin was a happy fault for meriting so great a redeemer in Jesus Christ).

G.K. Chesterton famously quipped that original sin is "the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved." In that vein, Jacobs presents a lively discussion of recent scientific investigations into human nature, such as the 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment, in which students serving as prison guards all too easily shed their repugnance to inflicting pain. He also turns to evolutionary psychology. Noting that three separate secular reviewers had described arguments by Steven Pinker as modern-day doctrines of original sin, Jacobs quotes Pinker as affirming, in essence, a fallen nature: "Violence is not a primitive, irrational urge. . . . Instead, it is a near-inevitable outcome of the dynamic of self-interested, rational social organisms."

Read in this light, evolutionary psychology can show that we come into the world predisposed to wrongdoing. It can even explain *why* we're (biologically) so disposed. The one thing it cannot explain is what exactly is *wrong* about our wrongdoing.

Meanwhile, the utopian social theorists who seek to break the chains that man creates, convinced that we all are good at heart, end up denying the evil we all know exists. Saddest of all are those who recognize original sin but see no hope for redemption. Jacobs gives the example of Rebecca West, whose travels through Yugoslavia during the run-up to World War II brought her to "one of the worst positions a person can occupy"—accepting the truth of "an Augustinian anthropology without its accompanying theology."

Which is why the opening redacted lines from St. Paul can never stand complete. Watching a guard at the Gulag repeatedly abuse prisoners, Solzhenitsyn came to believe that he would have acted the same if only given the chance, that "the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart." That realization drove Solzhenitsyn into the Orthodox Church, where he could hear the complete words of St. Paul: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." ♦

Bleak House

The view of mankind from Glasgow's lower depths.

BY BARTON SWAIM

Schoolchildren nowadays are told to keep journals and write whatever comes to mind—this in the interest of helping them to express themselves. But of course, as anybody knows who's ever actually raised a child, teaching children to express themselves is like teaching puppies to pee. That's all they do.

James Kelman's new novel turns that mundane reality into art. *Kieron Smith, boy* is the uninterrupted flow of a young boy's thoughts about the things that seem important to him: the joys of climbing drainpipes, the evils of older brothers, the best way to win a fight, the ethical and physical perils of stealing cigarettes from one's father.

Kieron Smith, boy
by James Kelman
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,
432 pp., $26

James Kelman

The book is written entirely in the flat, repetitive, and sometimes self-contradictory sentences of a boy from the ages of about 7 to 11. This, together with the young narrator's ability to write in broad Scottish dialect when he chooses—the setting is 1960s Glasgow—makes the novel a challenge to read. But it is a remarkable work of fiction, and worth the effort. Kelman is well known for his ability to reproduce the language of working-class Scots without making his prose unreadable to a non-Scottish audience. Here he also captures the internal world of boyhood, with its petty grievances, inarticulate longings, and dark speculations.

This was Glasgow when it still reflected the rivalries of Northern Ireland, and the meaning of religious identities—the difference between "papes" and "proddies"—preoccupies Kieron.

> They [the Catholic boys] could not pass our school either. We had stones to pelt them so ha ha and we shouted at them. Catholic cats eat the rats. They shouted at us. Proddy dogs eat the frogs.

> They went down the main road then round by our street but sometimes if it was ones ye knew, if they stayed in your street and maybe if ye played with them and ye just passed and saw them looking, so ye made it a secret wee look just if it was a secret wee hullo or if ye kidded on ye did not see them, they did that too. When ye came out to play at nighttime it was okay and ye were just pals.

The book's most powerful scenes are those in which the boy is listening without fully understanding what he's listening to. But listening he is: "Everything ye say, he is taking notes," remarks his grandfather after realizing the boy has heard a conversation not intended for his little ears. "That is weans for ye." Indeed Kieron, like his creator, is an excellent listener; he relays the aural texture of his world in ways both childlike and lifelike.

> I liked noises and listening just to what it was if it was outside, motor cars or what, if it was music from through the wall or big boys shouting in the street or maybe just heels walking, oh that is a woman, cullick cullick, cohhhhh, cullick cullick.

James Kelman, like virtually all Scottish writers over the last century, is a man of the left. Indeed, he calls himself an "anti-parliamentarian" and has refused to vote for most of his life, so committed is he to the revolution. But he is more artist than political crank, whatever his extracurricular commentaries lead one to believe. Although, like the other Scottish writers with whom he is associated—Alasdair Gray, Liz Lochhead—he espouses a politics that equates Scottish nationalism with militant egalitarianism (both, not coincidentally, are anti-English), Kelman doesn't use his fiction to trumpet his politics. Maybe it's there, but you have to look hard for it.

Kelman's chief crotchet has to do with language. He refuses to write in what he likes to call, with an equal measure of sanctimony and naïveté, "the 'received' language of the ruling class." His protagonists neither know nor care about the norms of written English. Kelman, though not himself a university graduate, has evidently read or absorbed enough Foucault to believe that grammatical and syntactical rules are manifestations of political oppression. Written standards of English are a form of—to use the academic jargon—cultural imperialism.

(Of course, Kelman is quite happy to use standard punctuation, word order, and spelling; otherwise his books wouldn't sell. There's a line in his novel *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* [2004] in which the protagonist, an anarchist, explains that he's "opposed to authority on principle. Mind you, I'll negotiate on particulars." Just so.)

Language is a recurring theme in *Kieron Smith*, but there's no trace of the Foucauldian balderdash Kelman likes to put forward in interviews and essays. Kieron's mother is always harping on the boy about speaking proper English. "She did not like me saying aye, and if I said maw, maw was awful and just horrible, she hated it." But his father uses the commoner diction and resents his eldest son, Matt, for "talking nice." In none of this, however, is there a hint of Kelman's ludicrous theory about the hegemony of standard English; indeed Catherine, Kieron's

Barton Swaim is the author of a forthcoming book on 19th-century Scottish literary critics.

COLIN MCPHERSON / CORBIS

proper-speaking mother, is among the few characters in this bleak novel capable of loving.

One of several things that makes *Kieron Smith* both a gentler and a more intellectually engaging work than Kelman's previous novels is its handling of profanity. Kelman's novels aren't for the delicate, replete as they are with four-letter words and other evidence of urban Scotland's underbelly. Kelman's is a genuine talent, but his ultra-realist sensibility drives him to fetishize the offensive as somehow truer or more authentic—his Booker-winning novel *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994), the internal monologue of a hoodlum blinded in a drunken brawl, is to my mind unreadable.

The wee protagonist of *Kieron Smith*, by contrast, makes a conscious decision not to use "swear words." He even renders the middle letters of indecorous words with asterisks; bloody becomes b****y, shite becomes s***e. Kieron's pals find his decision annoying and pester him about it mercilessly. He has regrets—"I wished I had not started not swearing"—but when told to say a series of swear words, he refuses.

Why does he stop swearing? Kieron himself doesn't seem to know. "No because of nothing," he explains. It seems plain, though, that at some level the boy senses the coercive nature of the hard profanity used by his peers—a social habit in which the f-word, used incessantly, becomes a way to express opposition or hostility to those one perceives to be privileged or "posh," stultifying the minds of young people who want to seem tough and disaffected. (I know a postman in Edinburgh, an evangelical Christian, whose "ministry," as he once explained to me, consists in an attempt to persuade his coworkers to clean up their language.)

Near the end of the novel Kieron forgoes the use of asterisks, and begins using "swear words" the same as his pals. Has he finally found his voice and become at ease with his own identity? Or has he conformed to a cultural imperialism of another kind? Kelman—to his credit as a novelist—doesn't tell us the answer. ♦

BCA

Consider the Source

Jihad has Islamic, and non-Islamic, roots.

BY RAYMOND IBRAHIM

REUTERS / FAISAL MAHMOOD

Outside the Red Mosque, Islamabad

For some time now there has been a raging debate regarding what fuels Islamic terrorism—whether grievances against the West have caused frustrated Muslims to articulate their rage through an Islamist paradigm, or whether (all grievances aside) Islam itself leads to aggression toward non-Muslims, or "infidels."

Laurent Murawiec's *The Mind of Jihad* offers a different perspective. Discounting both the grievance and Islam-as-innately-violent models, Murawiec explores certain untapped areas of research in order to show correlations between radical Islam and any number of uniquely Western concepts and patterns, both philosophical and historical.

The Mind of Jihad
by Laurent Murawiec
Cambridge, 350 pp., $80

While this approach is admirable, it also proves to be overly ambitious, and thus problematic, specifically in its insistence that radical Islam is merely the latest manifestation of phenomena rooted in the Western experience. Murawiec is no apologist; neither, however, is he interested in examining Islam's own peculiar *Weltanschauung*—as outlined by the Koran and *hadith*, articulated by the *ulema* (theologian-scholars), and codified in sharia law—in order to better understand the jihad.

Instead, according to Murawiec, radical Islam is an ideological heir to Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Nazism, Marxism, and nihilism; jihadists are duplicates of otherwise arcane characters from Christian history, such as

Raymond Ibrahim is the associate director of the Middle East Forum and the author of The Al Qaeda Reader.

the Millenarians. Indeed, any number of European concepts and personages permeate *The Mind of Jihad*, often presented as prominent factors contributing to the rise of radical Islam—betraying, perhaps, the author's vast erudition concerning Western, not Islamic, paradigms.

Again, while these are interesting observations and worthy of exploration, Murawiec goes too far: The words "Gnosticism" and "Millenarianism" appear prefixed to Islamic terminology and figures repeatedly; this does not help and can distract—especially the lay reader who is trying to understand jihad within a strictly Islamic milieu.

Consider Murawiec's millenarian thesis. He argues that jihadists are Islamic versions of heretical Christians who, driven by "superman"/Gnostic impulses, wrought havoc in Europe at the turn of the first millennium, often murdering and pillaging indiscriminately. Yet the dissimilarities would appear greater. The Millenarians were a product of an already lawless age. Modern-day jihadists are not; they live in the modern era which, while managing to appease violent "millenarian" tendencies in Christians, has evidently not managed to sate Muslim impulses.

If all things are equal, why aren't modern Christians behaving like their predecessors, whereas modern Muslims are? The response cannot be that the modern Muslim world is in a state of dislocation and disarray: Today's Islamic world is much more prosperous and structured than the Dark Ages in Europe, which directly influenced the savagery of the Millenarians.

Moreover, whereas the Millenarians were anathematized as heretics, often persecuted by the Church, modern jihadists have yet to be condemned by any serious Islamic authority. Indeed, they are often validated by them.

After describing the jihadists' "bloodlust" and disregard for innocents as representative of a chaotic and heretical millenarian spirit, Murawiec reveals that Sheikh Al Azhar, the equivalent of the pope in Sunni Islam, "demanded that the Palestinian people, of all factions, intensify the martyrdom operations [i.e., suicide attacks] against the Zionist enemy. . . . [H]e emphasized that every martyrdom operation against any Israelis, including children, women, and teenagers, is a legitimate act according to [Islamic] religious law, and an Islamic commandment." This alone is enough to dismantle the millenarian thesis since, unlike millenarian violence, which had no scriptural/church support, modern day jihadist violence (including "suicidal bloodlust") is backed by Islamic law and is a *commandment*.

For that matter, why does Murawiec insist on examining jihad(ists) through Christian paradigms and precedents, when Islam itself affords plenty of both—and centuries before the Millenarian movement? Moderate Muslims often portray al Qaeda as duplicates of the Kharijites. Breaking away from mainstream Islam in the 7th century and slaying not infidels, but fellow Muslims accused of apostasy, the jihadist Kharijites present a much more useful paradigm to understanding radical Islam than anything Christian.

This, then, is the ultimate problem with *The Mind of Jihad*: It tries to explain jihad by largely ignoring or minimizing Muslim precedents and doctrines in favor of Western precedents and philosophies. This is further evident in the latter half of the study, where the case is made that radical Islam is heavily influenced by Nazism, communism, and the "Western" concept of revolution.

While it would be folly to deny that such concepts influenced 19th- and 20th-century Islam, overemphasizing them also implies that Islam is a passive receptacle to the West, that it only reacts, never creates. At any rate, only those Western ideologies comporting with Islam ever found acceptance, indicating that the former were subsumed to the purposes of the latter, not vice versa. Murawiec agrees: "What borrowing took place almost exclusively concerned the authoritarian, dictatorial, and totalitarian ideologies"—aspects innate to Islam.

But even the concepts of revolution and revolutionaries are not imports to the Islamic world, semantic quibbling aside. Consider the life of the Islamist leader Maududi, who was out to "re-create Islam," "politicize religion," and whom Murawiec paints as Lenin:

> A déclassé semi-intellectual with a powerful, charismatic personality sets himself up as a figure of messianic qualities whose cosmic mission is to establish perfection on earth on behalf of and according to the prescriptions of God. He is the quasi-peer of the great prophetic figures, and is possessed of extraordinary abilities. He is also possessed of a complete knowledge of how to move the world from its present, desolate nadir to the zenith of perfection: He is a man with a plan . . . which encompasses all aspects of life. . . . He is in charge of the immense bloodshed God requires for the Plan to be implemented.

While this is meant to portray Maududi as an Islamic aberration, it perfectly describes the prophet of Islam: Muhammad. Yet if Muhammad was a "revolutionary" who brought a "plan . . . which encompasses all aspects of life" (sharia law) and which requires "immense bloodshed" (jihad), is the behavior of Maududi or any other radical—all of whom are commanded to emulate the *sunna* (example) of their prophet, including by revolting against infidelity—unprecedented within the Islamic paradigm? Modern radicals are not so much out to "re-create" Islam as to reassert it. As for "politicizing religion," Muhammad is responsible for that.

Muhammad was a "revolutionary" who violently overthrew the "oppressive" Meccans. His successors, the caliphs, reshaped the world through the Islamic conquests. Even the Shia and Kharijites, who revolted against the last righteous caliph, were "revolutionaries." Today's radicals see themselves as following in their prophet's footsteps, trying to create the society he created through blood and conquest, as he did.

At one point, Murawiec stresses that, according to sharia, Muslims are forbidden from revolting against their rulers, even if the rulers are tyrannical. While true, there is one caveat: Rulers must fully implement sharia law;

if they fail, even in part, they become infidel; and the same sharia that commands Muslims to obey tyrants also commands them to revolt against secular rule. This is precisely the justification jihadists use to attack "apostate" governments in the Islamic world.

The bottom line is that "Gnostic bloodlust" finds a precedent in Muhammad, who had 800 men decapitated after they had capitulated to him; who had no compunction about besieging infidel cities with fire and catapults, even if women and children were sheltered there; and who had poets, including women, assassinated for offending him. "Suicidal nihilism" finds precedent in the Koran and the deeds of the earliest jihadists, who actively sought martyrdom, as well as the words of Muhammad, who said he wished to be "martyred and resurrected" in perpetuity. Islam's "Manichean" worldview, which splits the world between good and evil, is a product of Islamic law and jurisprudence. We need look no further than to Islam itself to understand jihad.

That said, it cannot be denied that parallels exist between Muslims and non-Muslims: Such is human nature, which reacts similarly to similar stimuli, irrespective of race or creed. But this raises the question: If Christian Millenarians, without scriptural/churchly support, behaved atrociously, how much more can be expected of jihadists who, while sharing the same violent tendencies inherent to all men, are further goaded by *direct commandments* from God and his prophet to kill or subjugate infidels to Islam?

Short of examining how jihadists understand jihad, short of examining its juridical and doctrinal origins, short of studying the *sunna* and biography of Muhammad, short of appreciating jihad as a distinctive element in Islam; in other words short of doing what Muslims past and present do—that is, go to *Islam*'s sources—we can never hope to understand "the mind of jihad."

For those readers, however, who are firmly aware of the above, Murawiec's book, especially its detailed historical accounts, can serve to augment their knowledge. ♦

BCA

His Novel Idea

The point of good fiction is not theory but storytelling.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

How-to books about writing or reading fiction are usually disappointing, and for good reason: You can no more learn how to write a convincing tale by reading Tolstoy than you can learn to race a bicycle by reading books about the Tour de France. Nor will you shape yourself into an ace critic by reading Edmund Wilson or F.R. Leavis, though their essays may help.

How Fiction Works
by James Wood
Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 288 pp., $24

That said, useful books about reading do come along approximately every blue moon—for instance, the late Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* and E.M. Forster's older but ever amusing *Aspects of the Novel.* James Wood's *How Fiction Works* may be measured, then, against a handful of precursors and in certain ways it stands up. It is literate, subtle, engaging, and free of lit crit fads (the odious use of "privilege" as a transitive verb, as in "NOW privileges women" occurs only once).

Wood's title, unfortunately, suggests some sort of motorist's manual, with diagrams of gizmos under the hood, literary equivalents of carburetors and valves; but his approach is humanistic. He and I may disagree about whether "waves" ruffle the body of water into which Icarus falls in the Brueghel painting that inspired Auden's poem "Musée des Beaux-Arts" and, as well, what the Russian writers mean by *ostranenie* or "defamiliarization." But those are details.

Wood's favorite gizmo in fictional technique is "free indirect discourse," a narrative form that he associates primarily with Flaubert. It features the character-observer's idiomatic voice without naming that observer. If a storyteller writes, without telling you whose thought it is but leaving no doubt, "By God, he was going to shut her rattling mouth if it was the last thing he ever did," free indirect discourse has been committed. You hear someone's identifiable voice. And to what purpose?

Wood writes as if he believes that this mode of storytelling may have been the most important breakthrough in narrative technique since the ancient Egyptians began decorating royal tombs with pictorial chronicles. He elaborates accordingly at some length.

For me, however, the main byproduct of Wood's book was a flood of memories of teaching courses and seminars in the 1990s at Washington and Lee University. I assert no claim that my experience was unique, or even exceptional, but it was distinctive; and in the process of being an amateur professor there for 10 years, I probably learned more about *how fiction works* than my students.

I certainly recall the day when I tried to explain free indirect discourse. It is easier to define it than to say why a narrator would choose to thrust himself into the consciousness of his character, rather than simply quote or cite him by name—why, instead of writing, "Fred looked from his hotel window and saw a freight train dragging itself across the distant landscape," he might write: "In the distance a freight train crawled tediously past." That adverb "tediously" tells you how Fred felt about the train and you knew to begin with that it was he who was looking, a bit impatiently, out of the

Edwin M. Yoder Jr. is the author, most recently, of Lions at Lamb House.

window. Wood is right in saying that it has to do with the increasing exploration of human consciousness, featuring interiority of characterization.

Like all virtuous readers, Wood is a fan of Chekhov, as am I. It is to some degree an acquired taste. When I began teaching 19th-century French and Russian writers in a course called "European fiction in translation," my longstanding favorites were Tolstoy and Turgenev, with Balzac and Flaubert close behind. But the more I read Chekhov the more I admired his power of telling tales by implication.

Wood speaks glowingly of "The Lady With the Little Dog," one of Chekhov's masterpieces. The story begins with a casual seduction in a Crimean resort. A practiced seducer hits on his target by petting her little dog in a seaside cafe, but the story develops complications when this roué discovers that the woman has turned his world upside down and that meeting her was the great event of his life.

Chekhov neither moralizes nor editorializes, and his stories often begin and end at arbitrary points of time, as if life were a long loaf that one slices here and there at random, as if blindfolded. But his characters are firmly and humanely judged, and the theme is always clear. As my relish for Chekhov grew, so did that of the students who, to my astonishment, even began to rank Chekhov above Tolstoy in their end-of-term surveys.

But if you infer from this that students can be pushed or lured into sharing a teacher's preferences, think again. There was one great European writer, if only one, for whom my enthusiasm proved incommunicable, Thomas Mann. Mann's great novels, especially *The Magic Mountain* (1924), were landmarks for readers who came of age, as I did, in the 1950s. But when I tried to teach that epic novel 40 years later, it was beyond the reach of even diligent students, perhaps because grasping the dialectic between the humanist Settembrini and the reactionary cynic Herr Naphtha requires a sophistication in the history of Western ideas that no longer exists.

Mann posed other difficulties. His brilliant novella, "Death in Venice," which for me ranks with Tolstoy's best at the top of that form, so utterly spooks young American males, with their macho obsessions, that they seal off all human sympathy with the protagonist, Gustav Aschenbach. Aschenbach is an honored and distinguished writer, on vacation in wicked old Venice, who becomes infatuated with a beautiful boy. That homoerotic infatuation costs him his dignity and self-restraint; and to prolong his voyeuristic contemplation of the boy he declines to warn the boy's mother, also vacationing with her children

Thomas Mann

at the same fashionable hotel, of an approaching cholera epidemic. The female students were at ease with poor old Aschenbach, but the boys tended to view the fallen literary man, despite his classical depth, as a predatory pedophile and no more.

One day I tried a trick. I wrote an alternative ending, in which Aschenbach's stern old father appears to him in a vision and shames him into warning the mother to gather her endangered children (including the beautiful youth) and flee the impending epidemic. A young man who'd been much disturbed by the story thought my ending was terrific, brilliant. Who had written it? he asked. I said: Never mind who wrote it, what I want you to see is that it turns a tragedy of sensibility into a maudlin soap opera. It was no sale; the boys in the back row merely pulled their baseball caps lower over their blushing faces. That was the last time I taught "Death in Venice." Mann wasn't a total washout, however. We did better with *Buddenbrooks*, the author's semi-autobiographical novel of a high bourgeois family's decline.

It was pleasant to find that college students could read difficult writers with appreciation and enjoyment, including James, Faulkner, Proust, and Joyce—notwithstanding the widespread superstition that all four are prohibitively difficult. And there were rewarding comic moments. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, which I taught in a six-week spring term (I've never worked harder), there is an amusing reference to the Nelson monument in Dublin (later blown up by the IRA). Joyce describes the great English admiral as a "one-handled adulterer." One student asked if it was an allusion to masturbation. The instructor was able to explain, fortunately, that Lord Nelson had lost an arm in a naval battle and had had a famous affair with Lady Hamilton: thus Joyce's clever tag, *one-handled adulterer*.

Wood's guides to fiction may, with luck, help turn back the tide of bad teaching that often begins with the saturation of English departments in esoteric literary theory, with its obscurantist dogmas. As Wood says more than once, the point of reading good fiction—along with the fun of watching the moves of accomplished narrators, as one does the sliders and knucklers of a great pitcher—is that it acquaints us with worlds, people of all sorts and conditions, that we may otherwise be too provincial or green to know. It cultivates our sensibilities; and in the shallow and vulgar world of American pop culture, young sensibilities need cultivating.

Wood will not supplant Booth or Forster. But *How Fiction Work*s is exceptional. And for anyone who's tried to hammer a few tips on reading into hard but willing heads, it's a feast of remembrance. ♦

The Abstract Art

How philosophers boil philosophy to its essence, and why. **BY MARK BLITZ**

Much as the mere WEEKLY STANDARD might aspire to be eternal, ontology is not among its readers' obvious interests. After all, no one ever emerged from the McCain camp to sniff that Sarah Palin thinks that a Heidegger is an exotic melon, competing species of barracuda, or the capital of Argentina. (Good thing, too, for imagine preparing her for a debate with the intellectuals' intellectual, Joseph Biden.)

The flood of stories about the Republican's future mercifully lacks the cry that we need a fresh metaphysics to bring to the American people. No pundit has suggested that Yes We Kant should have been McCain's campaign slogan. Perhaps We Can, Circumstances Permitting, seems more prudently Republican—or at least it would have been back when the GOP knew how to inspire political confidence by defending financial sobriety.

Ontology seems more to be the Democrats' thing, in any event. Bill Clinton's nonchalant it-depends-on-the-meaning-of-is was doubtless a high crime, with or without blue-dress evidence, and Barack Obama's we-are-the-ones-we-have-been-waiting-for is the kind of Hegelian head-scratcher only a William Ayers could unravel. (Or is it, perhaps, merely an IRS employee's lament for his missing refund check?)

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.

Idea and Ontology
An Essay in Early Modern Metaphysics of Ideas
by Marc A. Hight
Penn State, 278 pp., $55

Marc Hight's *Idea and Ontology* is free from such political concerns. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the analysis of ideas among early modern thinkers is not only epistemological, but also ontological. In fact, we can hardly understand the role of ideas in how we know unless we have a view of what they are. This early modern view is a version of the medieval distinction between substance and accident or mode. A substance is independent and enduring, while its modes attach to but are not independent of it. For ideas as the early moderns saw them, a central question is whether they are merely modes of the mind.

Hight traces his theme, with impressive acuity and learning, from Descartes through Hume, and includes in his analysis Malebranche, Arnauld, Locke, Leibniz, and Berkeley. Much of his study is devoted to Bishop Berkeley, whom Hight takes seriously and helps us take seriously. Berkeley's view that "the essence of sensible things is to be perceived," or that "ideas just are the 'things' in the world" seems less preposterous in Hight's telling than in the caricature of Berkeley held by those who have heard a little about him but know still less.

Hight is able to show how Berkeley accounts for the continued existence of objects when we are no longer perceiving them, relying on Berkeley's view of God. Ontologically, he argues that Berkeley makes ideas quasi-substances, writing "as if" ideas are like modes because they are ontologically dependent on minds, and like substances because they are "robust objects that in perception appear volitionally independent of minds."

Hight's purview in *Idea and Ontology* is largely confined to other analytic philosophers who have written on his theme, and his goal is to expand their vision. This makes his book technical in places, although never so technical that an intelligent reader acquainted with early modern thought cannot benefit from it. More, there is a certain delight in following clever and resourceful arguments, distinctions, and qualifications, not just among the primary thinkers but among the secondary scholars as well.

Bishop Berkeley

GETTY IMAGES

One should never underestimate the inventiveness occasioned by the need to defend one's views.

Hight's perspective is nonetheless somewhat more narrow than it should be. I missed, in particular, two directions that he could have taken, if only briefly.

One is giving some attention to Martin Heidegger, whose thought springs to mind when the topic is ontology, and who has much to say about early modernity, especially Descartes and Leibniz. Heidegger explores the modern standpoint of subjectivity and its correlative objectivity, an exploration that is necessary if we are to understand why ideas and perceptions would appear to be what substantially is in the first place. Heidegger also traces the connection between subjectivity and projecting truth as certainty, a view that grounds our contemporary science and technology.

Considering this might have led Hight to discuss more fully why modern philosophy is so centered on epistemology, despite its continuing ontological concerns. More directly, looking at Heidegger might have led him to examine more fully the independence and duration that he believes characterize substance.

The other direction would have been for Hight to connect his analysis of ideas with other issues important to thinkers such as Locke, whose discussion of ideas is tied to his attempt to reduce clerical influence and advance enlightenment and individual natural rights. The link between the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and the *Two Treatises of Government* can be fruitfully explored.

Such exploration might have controlled Hight's occasional tendency to reduce his thinkers' concerns to the technical and scholarly ones of contemporary professors. There is a bit too much academic talk of ontological commitments, as if thinkers and their thoughts will soon be lobbying for marriage licenses. The authors he discusses had reasons for their deepest views, however, not mere commitments to them. These gaps not withstanding, Marc Hight has written a commendably intelligent and useful book. ♦

BCA

Oxoniennes

Women have crashed the gates of England's oldest university. **BY ELISE PASSAMANI**

One of the first women to study at Oxford University in the late 19th century wrote that she would hide her notebooks in her jacket to avoid the embarrassment of being identified as "that eccentric creature, a girl student."

For anyone walking through Oxford today, this alumna's discomfort could not seem more foreign: Women students are everywhere, from pubs to playing fields, labs, and lecture halls, sporting garments emblazoned with colorful college crests.

Her Oxford
by Judy G. Batson
Vanderbilt, 384 pp., $45

As of 2006, the university boasted 5,735 women out of a total of 12,106 undergraduates, and 3,262 women out of 7,380 postgraduates. The last of the Oxford men's colleges to go co-ed (Oriel) did so in 1985, and the one remaining women's college (St. Hilda's) welcomed its first men this past October. This year marks the 50th anniversary of women achieving full status in the university.

Women's struggle to become full students at Oxford spanned approximately 80 years, starting in 1879 when the first 21 women students arrived. The university's transformation from a symbol of male privilege to a place where women have equal status is charted in fascinating detail in *Her Oxford.* Judy G. Batson weaves together an enormous scope of information from the archives of the five former women's colleges and, more important, the memoirs of many of Oxford's first women students. The result is a highly enjoyable portrait of an institution steeped in tradition and of the intrepid women who, with serious scholarship and determination, broke down Oxford's barriers one by one. The author includes an array of black and white photographs depicting college life from the 1880s to 1960, and the book is topped off with 120 mini-biographies of noteworthy alumnae, ranging from Dorothy Sayers to Margaret Thatcher.

Surprisingly, Batson cites an issue of demography as the impetus for improvements in women's secondary and higher education in 19th-century Britain. In the 1851 census, "women outnumbered men in Great Britain by over 500,000, and more than 800,000 . . . were classified as spinsters"—due, in part, to the higher mortality of boys but also to the higher rate of men emigrating to the far reaches of the Empire. As a result, middle-class Victorian women couldn't count on getting married, and many needed to work to support themselves. One of the only respectable avenues open to such women was to become governesses. But few had any formal education, let alone credentials to show potential employers.

"Who could have predicted," Batson asks, "that an attempt to improve the intellectual abilities of governesses would lead to a transformed educational climate for women in general?"

Once women started attaining some formal education, a positive cycle was put into motion. Many of the earliest women university students went on to become teachers and headmistresses in schools for girls, which in turn produced better prepared candidates for higher education. Notes Batson: "By 1890, good-quality girls' schools had sprung up all over the country; women could earn degrees from a number of universities and colleges and could study, though not earn a

Elise Passamani is a graduate student at St. John's College, Oxford.

degree, from the two most ancient institutions, Oxford and Cambridge."

The first residential women's colleges were Lady Margaret Hall (LMH) and Somerville, both founded in 1879 on properties in North Oxford purchased from St. John's College. Concurrently, a separate group, the Society of Home-Students, was founded for women already living in Oxford who did not want to move into a residential college. This would eventually become St. Anne's College. Then, in 1886, the principal of LMH founded St. Hugh's to help women of more modest means come to Oxford, and 10 years later, the fifth and last of Oxford's women's colleges, St. Hilda's, was formed in a partnership with the Cheltenham Ladies' College, a secondary school.

Between 1879 and 1910 the women's colleges were administered in large part by a group called the Association for Promoting the Education of Women in Oxford (AEW), which arranged lectures for the women students to attend as well as tutorials. Women students could only attend lectures if the lecturer consented; at times they would be required to enter a lecture hall through a side door and had to sit apart from the men. Frequently, sympathetic Oxford dons would come and lecture to women in "rented rooms over a baker's shop in Little Clarendon Street" in North Oxford.

John Ruskin, for one, seems to have refused to let women attend his lectures, referring to them as "the bonnets." But the supporters of women at Oxford became adept at swiftly putting opponents in their place. When, in 1958, a writer in the *Times* suggested that women's colleges focus on teaching domestic courses, a woman promptly responded: "[W]henever higher education for women becomes the subject of public discussion some dodo of a man raises his antique English head and spits vulgar abuse on women in general."

While Batson exposes prejudice where it existed, her tone is straightforward and devoid of bitterness. *Her Oxford* is not a reproach to the paternalism of the past but a panegyric to the women who brought about so much positive change.

In particular, she pays great attention to the outstanding leadership provided by women who, during the early years, skillfully managed the colleges with limited resources. The first principal of LMH was Elizabeth Wordsworth (great-niece of the poet), whose curious mind and social ease set the tone during the 30 years she was in charge. Annie Rogers, who took the Oxford Local Examination in 1873 at age 17 under the name "A.M.A.H. Rogers," did so well she was awarded a scholarship to study at Worcester College—until it was realized she was a girl and the offer was rescinded. (She would later become secretary of the AEW and a classics tutor at St. Hugh's.) Her predecessor at the AEW, Bertha Johnson, became principal of the Home-Students in 1893, where her leadership

Oxford undergraduate, 1953

was described as "a benevolent autocracy, of a vivid and somewhat unconventional type," and where her "touch of motherliness" earned her the affection of many students. Emily Penrose, who attended Somerville during 1889-92, returned as principal in 1907 and stayed for nearly 20 years. While some women students at other colleges didn't sit for examinations, Miss Penrose insisted that all her students do so; she believed that excellence was the best argument for allowing women to earn degrees.

The question of awarding degrees was first raised in 1894. Many Oxford men had come to accept the presence of women in their midst—after all, women "had behaved with exceptional decorum; they had not been carted off to hospitals or mental institutions with brain fever; and the majority had shown that work of a university standard was not beyond their grasp"—but the 1896 resolution to grant women degrees was defeated, and women were to remain "honored and indulged guests," as one Oxford professor put it, until the question came up again in 1920.

In the meantime, women students became very important during World War I. Indeed, so many undergraduates left to fight—between 1914 and 1915 the total number of students decreased by two-thirds—that it may be argued that women helped keep Oxford from shutting down. Many left their studies to become nurses.

Just before the war broke out, a St. John's fellow named John Stocks called for a committee to reconsider granting degrees to women. After the war, Oxford's governing bodies convened in May 1920 and voted for a statute that would grant degrees to women. (Cambridge did not do the same until 1948.) What's more, they agreed to grant degrees retroactively to former students who had fulfilled all their requirements, and those who hadn't sat for examinations could come back and do so. Thanks to their principal's insistence on academic achievement, many Somerville students from the Penrose era were immediately qualified.

Her Oxford is a serious book, but it is full of amusing anecdotes, such as this description of Annie Rogers's gardening habits:

> gardeners at St. John's College were urged to keep a sharp eye on Miss Rogers if she walked around their premises carrying a large, furled umbrella, handy as both a digging tool and a carryall for smuggling out acquisitions . . . under her "enlightened despotism," St. Hugh's gardens became some of the most beautiful in Oxford.

Her Oxford is also an indispensable resource for those interested in Oxford, and in changing attitudes towards women's role in higher education. The women of my generation can easily take their education for granted, but of the 785 million illiterate adults in the world today, two-thirds are women, and in many places, girls are simply denied schooling. ♦

GETTY IMAGES

Pitt the Younger

A tear-jerker conjures memories of 'The Jerk.'

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button is stately, impressive, and, in its final half-hour, very moving. Only later, as the chill winter air rouses one from a contented stupor into a somewhat more bitter condition, does it become oddly apparent that this strange story of a person born old who grows younger as his life progresses until he dies as a baby is actually a humorless remake of the Steve Martin movie *The Jerk*.

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button
Directed by David Fincher

The Jerk, you may recall, begins with the words, "I was born a poor black child." And thus it is with Benjamin Button, who emerges from the womb of his white mother as a wizened baby, is abandoned by his horrified white father, and is then taken in by a 17-year-old black nurse whom he calls "Mama."

Like Navin Johnson, the character played by Steve Martin in *The Jerk*, Benjamin Button leaves the care of his black mother as a teenager and strikes out for the territories. Navin ends up working at a gas station run by Jackie Mason. Benjamin ends up on a tugboat that makes its way to the Russian port of Murmansk.

In *The Jerk*, Navin becomes wealthy when an odd invention of his becomes a hit. Benjamin Button becomes wealthy when his father comes back into his life and informs him that he is the heir to a successful business called Button's Buttons. (The humor is not much more sophisticated than the offerings of *The Jerk*, even though *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* cost $150 million.)

Navin finds and loses his love, and then finds her again. The same happens with Benjamin, though there is no analogue between the silly happy ending of *The Jerk* and the silly but five-hankie final minutes of *Benjamin Button*, which would cause even the most expressionless Buckingham Palace guard to break down into heaving sobs. I actually heard people gasping for air. I may have been one of them. I'm not saying the movie earns those sobs honestly, but earn them it does.

The Jerk has no purpose other than making the viewer laugh, which it does only intermittently, since it really isn't all that funny. *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is a much better movie than its predecessor, and it thinks it is making a study of a great many things: Death and war and time and love. It has as much to say about them, however, as *The Jerk* does.

But it is wonderfully and lovingly made, as opposed to *The Jerk*, which is sloppy and ugly and incompetent. And where *The Jerk* had an astonishingly annoying Steve Martin in it, *Benjamin Button* revolves around Brad Pitt, who is handled brilliantly by his peekaboo-playing director, David Fincher. We don't get to see Pitt in all his camera-ready glory until the movie is half over. After wearing tons and tons of makeup, Pitt is at last shown taking a ride on a motorcycle through the Louisiana countryside, his hair trailing behind him as the wind whips around him. This is surely the longest and slowest "reveal" in movie history. Pitt is, at last, Pitt, and with his emergence, the movie begins anew with a burst of youthful energy.

Nonetheless, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is a failure for two reasons: It's preachy, and it's stupid. Throughout its 160-minute running time, we are treated to a great many homilies. The scenarist, Eric Roth, also adapted Winston Groom's *Forrest Gump* for the screen, a movie in which one character, Forrest's mother, was known for her statements of pithy depth ("life is like a box of chocolates"). In *Benjamin Button*, every character offers pearls of wisdom, and does so with the regularity of an airport people-mover coming in and out of Terminal B. There are no conversations in this movie, just one character depositing dubious pearls of wisdom into the ear canal of another; and since they're neither wise nor especially pearl-like, they grow extraordinarily tiresome.

Worse yet is the astonishingly lame plot device Roth contrives to create romantic melodrama at the movie's climax. Characters who have made their peace with the fact that Benjamin is getting younger as he ages suddenly decide that it's just too painful for him to hang around, and an entirely unnecessary and incredible separation is effected to set up the sob-inducing ending.

The preposterous separation takes the movie out of the realm of fable and moves it into the realm of the afternoon soap opera. If you create a world in which a man can live his life backward, and have his "curious" affliction accepted without question by the other characters in that world, you cannot stretch the conceit past the breaking point by having the characters suddenly awaken to the fact that what is happening is unacceptably weird. Either *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is taking place in a world slightly altered from our own, or it isn't. You can't have it both ways.

Let me amend that. You can have it both ways. But you're not going to get an Oscar for it. The makers of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* went to bed every night and awoke every morning with thoughts of that statuette in their hands. But when the credits roll on the Academy Awards at the end of next month, the words "Benjamin Button" will not pass the lips of the Best Picture presenter.

They should take heart, though. *The Jerk* didn't win, either. ♦

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

"The pilot who crash-landed an Airbus A320 on the Hudson River in New York has been promised a gold-plated 'key to the city' today in recognition of a 'miraculous' piece of airmanship."

—News Item

Parody

deniers are now the same as [illegible] deniers. It's WARM out there. Trust us.

JANUARY 22, 2009 *ONE DOLLAR CHEAP*

WEEHAWKEN MAYOR AWARDS 'GOLD TIRE IRON' TO PILOT

'Thanks For Not Landing on Us, Either!'

By MICHAEL WILSON AND AL BAKER

In yet another sign of appreciation for the US Airways pilot who safely crash-landed his commercial jet into the Hudson River last Thursday, Weehawken mayor Richard Turner announced the New Jersey township is awarding its coveted "Gold Tire Iron" to Captain Chesley B. Sullenberger III. "New York isn't the only place that's safe," said the mayor. "Weehawken is, too. And the same with Hoboken and Union City. If it were any closer, we'd have a mess from Port Imperial Boulevard to Sinatra Drive!"

The Airbus A320 with 155 passengers and crew members splashed into the Hudson River near 48th Street in Manhattan—but also across from the shores of Weehawken. Town councilman Robert Zucconi called the incident "a mixed blessing." "On the one hand, the crash on water could have been tragic. On the other hand, we've got a lot of cargo sitting at the docks waiting to be unloaded, including a shipment of Vespa scooters. God forbid something happened to that shipment, somebody would have to pay for all that."

istockphoto.com

Weehawken's coveted 'Gold Tire Iron'

Mayor Turner said his township was nevertheless ready to help, if only Mayor Bloomberg asked. "Mike [Bloomberg] has my number. He could have asked. We got a lot of guys who are good at getting people out of the water. You'd be surprised how many times we've fished somebody out. Normally they'd been missing for a month or two, but still." The mayor also noted he would not only have rescued the passengers, "but I'd also rescue their overhead luggage. I mean, let's face it, in these tough times, you could probably use what's in your suitcase. Besides, do you know how much matching luggage costs these days?"

According to Robert Sosa, Third Ward councilman, the tire iron, made of genuine Santo gold, is a symbol of the town's working class ethos. "Normally we award this distinction to an individual who achieves something truly extraordinary, courageous, and noble, in the spirit of Weehawken." Previous awardees include singer Jerry Vale, Broadway actress and singer Chita Rivera, and former Vice President Aaron

Continued on Page A35

Geese Recount Jet Engine Horror

'Suddenly, Blood and Feathers Everywhere!'