THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING OBAMA PRESIDENCY
MEGHAN CLYNE • WILLIAM KRISTOL
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BPA INTERNATIONAL

An Impactful Appointee

The new administration has kept The Scrapbook busy these past few weeks: So much Hope and Change in the air, so many new names and faces to learn! But every now and then a familiar figure swings into view, and The Scrapbook is appropriately gratified. So you can imagine our reaction when we learned that Dr. Johnetta B. Cole has just been named to head the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art on the Mall.

What, you've never heard of the National Museum of African Art? Maybe that's because, as the *Washington Post* explains, it draws more children than adults because of (in the *Post*'s delicate formulation) "its strong education programs." Surely it couldn't be because of its small, undistinguished collection. After all, according to the *Post*, the National Museum of African Art "has a collection of 9,000 objects, including 500 items obtained from the Walt Disney Co. in 2005." The Disney acquisition, the *Post* helpfully points out, "was seen as a validation of the museum's status."

To which The Scrapbook adds: If a truckload of art from Walt Disney won't silence skeptics about the National Museum of African Art, surely the recruitment of Dr. Johnetta B. Cole should do the trick.

To begin with, unlike many museum directors, Dr. Cole actually likes those things they hang on the wall: "There are too many people who make the fallacious statement that this art stuff is not fundamental, not essential to our lives," she says. "I think it is." And it isn't just this art stuff that motivates Dr. Cole. The former president of Spelman College in Atlanta and Bennett College in Greensboro, N.C., has spent the past several years as chairman of the Johnetta B. Cole Global Diversity and Inclusion Institute at Bennett College, where "we realize the boldness of our efforts to advance and support access and opportunity for everyone to fully utilize their differences to make a difference."

Dr. Cole is one of the Johnetta B. Cole Global Diversity and Inclusion Institute's featured motivational speakers ("Bring an impactful message to your next event") and, of course, a member of the board of directors of Home Depot, Merck & Co., and NationsBank South, as well as a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, where she has "consistently addressed issues of racial and gender discrimination."

Curiously absent from all this inspiring data about Dr. Cole is the equally interesting fact that she was, for many years, a member of the national committee of the Venceremos Brigade, an organization that sends young admirers on sugar cane-harvesting expeditions to Fidel Casto's Cuba, and is closely connected to Cuban intelligence. Or her presence on the executive board of the U.S. Peace Council, a virulently anti-American creature of the Cold War with KGB links. Indeed, in the early 1990s, Dr. Cole's radical connections sent such an impactful message to the Clinton administration that it hastily dropped plans to appoint her secretary of education.

But now, all is forgiven. Wayne Clough, secretary of the Smithsonian, is "delighted" with his choice of Dr. Cole and looks forward "to working with her in her new role and in finding opportunities to use her talents to help with pan-institutional activities." And not just about that art stuff, either: We expect that Dr. Cole's diverse Cuban/Soviet experience will send an impactful message to the occasional adult who visits her museum, and that Dr. Cole herself will "fully utilize [her] differences to make a difference"—with taxpayers' money, of course. ♦

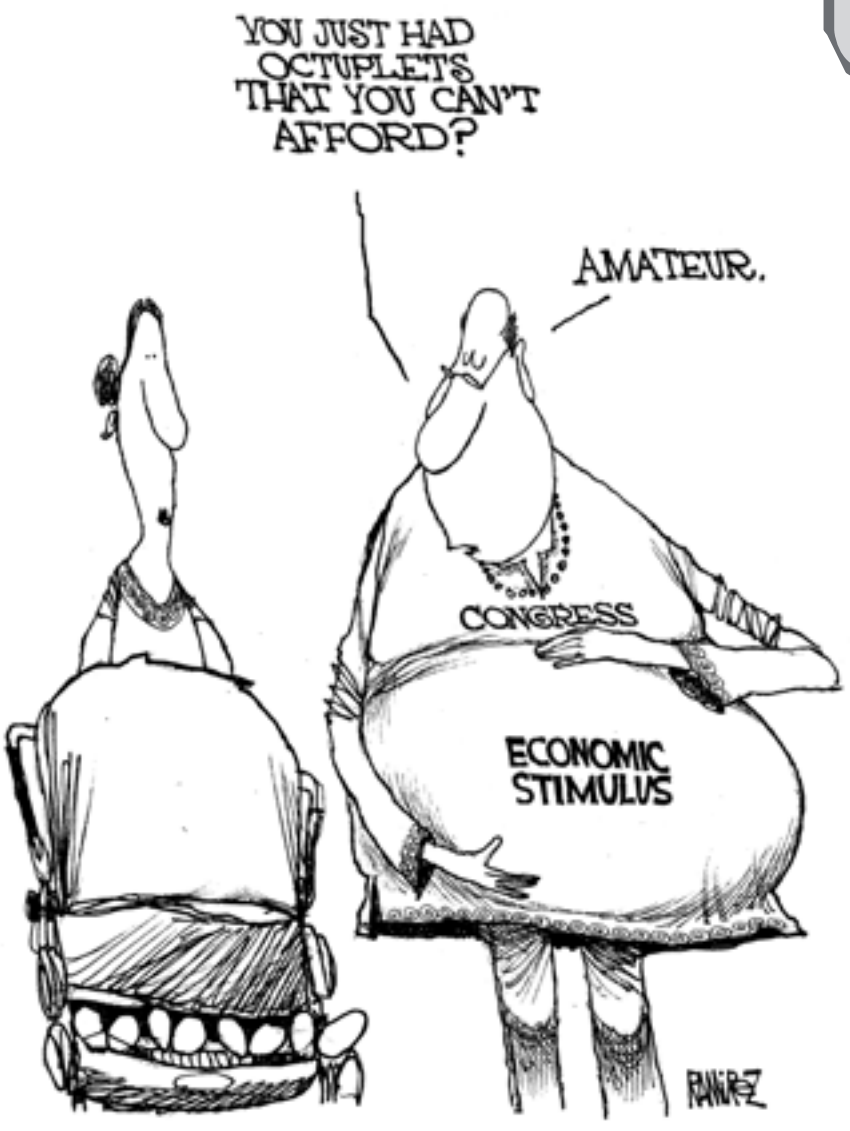
Giving Odierno His Due

The *Washington Post* has the generous practice of serializing books by featured reporters—Bob Woodward being the most tedious example—on its front page. The latest beneficiary is Thomas E. Ricks, author of *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (2006), whose new book (*The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq*) attempts to explain the success of the surge and subsequent

political/military progress in today's Iraq.

The Scrapbook congratulates Ricks on the publication of his new book, and wishes him well. But in the *Post* serialization he informs readers that "this account of the military's internal struggle over the direction of the Iraq war is based on dozens of interviews with [Gen. Ray] Odierno, Petraeus and other U.S. officials" and that "Odierno's role has not been previously reported."

Up to a point. It is true that *The Gamble*—in time-honored *Washington Post* fashion—tends to concentrate on the behind-the-scenes maneuvering in Washington more than the battlefronts in Iraq, but readers of The Weekly Standard learned all about General Odierno and how the surge was working (see for instance our July 9, 2007, cover and our March 10, 2008, article



"The Patton of Counterinsurgency") long before Thomas E. Ricks put pen to paper, thanks to the detailed accounts of Frederick and Kimberly Kagan reporting from Iraq. ♦

Daniel Seligman, 1924-2009

The Scrapbook was sorry to read of the death of Daniel Seligman, whose "Keeping Up" column was for years not just the best thing in *Fortune* magazine, but the best column of its kind in American journalism and an unacknowledged influence on our own efforts. Though the tone was unfailingly light and witty, the man swung a mean bat, often against his journalistic cohort. And he pioneered the use of the Nexis database as a tool of media criticism. Here is a typical sample from the April 29, 1996, edition of *Fortune*:

> We were 6 years old the first time we watched a schoolyard bully in action. It was a cement yard adjoining P.S. 166 in Manhattan, and we remember the holy terror quite clearly. We will warily not mention his name, however, as there is at least some possibility he is still alive after the years he has presumably spent brawling in bars and getting into tire-iron fights with motorists who cut off his car. Sociology being excluded from the first-grade curriculum, we had not yet assimilated "self-esteem" into our vocabulary. But thinking back on the lout years later, we were pretty sure he had more of it than we did.
>
> We are surer than ever after reading an utterly fascinating report on self-esteem in the latest issue of *Psychological Review*. . . . [subtitled] "The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem."
>
> Friends, there really is a dark side —even if it is hard to discern in the endless public palaver on the subject. A Nexis search on March 26 yielded up 3,847 articles invoking "self-esteem" that had been added to the database just since year-end. A serious sampling of the articles turned up none questioning esteem's quintessential wonderfulness and centrality in human affairs. A *Village Voice* entry worries that low self-esteem leads innocent suspects to confess. An AP feature earnestly attributes a wave of suicides among French police officers to their low self-esteem. The *New York Times* approvingly reports that Little League coaches are now being trained to raise kids' self-esteem as well as bunting skills. Articles in the *Arizona Republic* and a lot of other places tell us that kids join violent gangs because they lack self-esteem.
>
> The *Psychological Review* paper is long (29 pages), fact-freighted, and totally inconsistent with the above blather. . . . Specifically, the profs tell us that high levels of self-esteem are often associated with violent, aggressive behavior. . . . "Gang members apparently think, talk, and act like people with high self-esteem, and there is little to support the view that they are humble or self-deprecating or even that they are privately full of insecurities and self-doubts." . . . In and out of schoolyards, their mindset can leave them thinking they are entitled to steal from and beat up others, also that they can get away with it. ♦

Casual

Another Season, No Whoopee

Returning from Palo Alto a few weeks ago, as our plane was about to land at O'Hare, I gazed down at the gray, snow-covered landing field, and braced myself for more of the grim gulagian Chicago winter. The weather in northern California had been in the mid-60s, the skies unfailingly blue and sunny, and, to use the words with which Bishop Hebert ended his poem on Ceylon, "only man was vile." What, I asked myself, am I doing here?

The answer is not that I don't know any better but that I can't think of any place better. I do not yearn for what are called sunnier climes. Arizona is not a real possibility for me. My friend Robert Nisbet, the sociologist and a Californian most of his life, in his 60s accepted a job at the University of Arizona, built a grand new house there, and after a few years was driven bonkers by the relentless sameness of sunny day after sunny day, and promptly packed up and moved to Manhattan.

I have had short holidays on both coasts of Florida, the Gentile west (Sanibel Island) and the Jewish east (Boca Raton), and in true Judeo-Christian spirit—who are these Judeos, anyway?—found each equally boring. In Florida I saw too many well-dressed older men with funny walks carrying the remainder of their breakfasts in Styrofoam boxes out of restaurants. I don't like to be around so many old people. If I want to look at old people, I have my bathroom mirror. No, Florida, clearly, is not the answer.

But what, as Gertrude Stein is supposed to have said on her deathbed, is the question? The question is, Why should I, a man of many winters, spend yet another one in Muscovite-like Chicago, walking the streets as I do encased in down, wool, leather, fleece, and rubber, trudging along, the roses quite gone from my already sunken cheeks?

The answer is, I like it here. I even secretly believe that undergoing a good spell of rotten weather builds character, if only by teaching how little nature cares about us pathetic humans. "Want to help the environment?" young people on neighborhood street corners with petitions in hand not infrequently ask me. "Why?" I answer. "What did the environment ever do for me?"

DARREN GYGI

I grew up in this wretched climate. So did my mother; and my father, a Montrealer, grew up in an even worse climate. The weather was not a subject much up for discussion in our household. Complaining about it was inadmissible. The weather was what it was, an unalterable given—case closed. "Cold enough for you?" my mother, normally a kindly and always a gracious woman, would sometimes ask, not much sympathy in her voice. The assumption behind the question was, stick around, it's likely to get colder still.

False memory perhaps heightens the coldness of the winters of my youth. I seem to remember winter winds that felt like a slap in the face; not an ordinary slap, either, but the kind that follows a deep insult to one's integrity. I spent a lot of time during those years waiting, in full shiver, on street corners for buses. Under the delusion that I cut a handsomer figure without a lot of extra clothes, I went about in a leather jacket—no hat, no gloves—through most of my high-school winters. I'm lucky I still have both ears and all my toes. Vanity thy name is adolescence.

Vanity has now been replaced by caution. Harsh wintry days suddenly daunt me. I have to work up a bit of courage to go out into them. I leave my apartment as if I'm about to ride through the Eskimo equivalent of Apache territory. The thought of the lengthiness of winter depresses, if ever so slightly, even though Chicago winters are shorter than those in Buffalo, which can, I'm told, run to five-month stretches. (In one of his novels, the fine Indian novelist R.K. Narayan remarks, of a town in southern India, that "eight months of the year the weather is impossible, and during the other four it is worse.") Still, I would rather be here in Chicago, wading through gray slush, than in Scottsdale, Arizona, in a Fila running suit jogging among cacti.

As the president of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins, when recruiting scholars and scientists for the school, used to tell them, with the hauteur that came so easily to him: "Really you must come to Chicago. The population hereabouts isn't all that interesting. The social life is practically nil. The city's cultural institutions are few. The weather of course is miserable. You'll get so much work done."

The old boy was on to something. Heaven for climate, a character in a James Barrie play says, hell for conversation. But for getting work done through gray winters Chicago can't be beat.

Joseph Epstein

the weekly Standard

Obama Levitates

One of many highlights of the stimulus bill the Democrats just rammed through Congress is $8 billion for high-speed rail. What makes this appropriation special is that there was no money for high-speed rail in the original House legislation. The Senate bill had $2 billion. The legislation coming out of conference "compromised" on $8 billion.

How did this happen? Well, some of that $8 billion, as the *Washington Post* reported Friday, seems intended for "a controversial proposal for a magnetic-levitation rail line between Disneyland, in California, and Las Vegas, a project favored by Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.). The 311-mph train could make the trip from Sin City to Tomorrowland in less than two hours, according to backers." Reid of course played a major role in putting together the final bill.

That's the kind of policymaking the new Obama administration has embraced in its signature legislative proposal: a congressional process as unseemly as ever; an emergency bill that barely addresses the emergency; a "stimulus" bill short on stimulus (is that magnetic-levitation rail line "shovel-ready"?).

What accounts for this debacle? You could start with a lack of presidential leadership. Who would have thought the missing player in the first month of the administration would be Barack Obama? He let his signature economic legislation, the stimulus, be shaped by congressional Democrats. He let internal disputes over the difficult question of how to save the banking system result in a disastrous non-announcement of a non-plan by Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner last week. Before that, he let Geithner become Treasury secretary after cheating on his income taxes, and waived his own ethics rules to appoint a lobbyist as deputy secretary of defense—undercutting his promises to clean up Washington. He allowed Rahm Emanuel to politicize the Census Bureau, losing as a result his commerce secretary-designee, Judd Gregg, an ornament of his professed hope for bipartisanship.

In foreign policy, Obama has exerted no more control. He allowed both Super-Special Pooh-bah Richard Holbrooke and National Security Adviser Jim Jones to give interviews to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, respectively, touting their own importance and presenting the president as a distant player in the formulation of foreign policy. Meanwhile, turf wars in the State Department and the National Security Council are even more bitterly fought than usual. The tale of Holbrooke shouting at Undersecretary of State Bill Burns that he'll keep Burns waiting as long as he wants, since he (allegedly) outranks Burns, makes the Rumsfeld-Powell drama look tame.

And where is Obama amid all this turmoil? Well, he's not amid it—and he's apparently not curbing or directing it. He seems to be magnetically levitating at least a few inches above the ground, doing campaign events in swing states and in his home state of Illinois, revving up the crowds to . . . do what? To encourage congressional Democrats to support their own package? He allowed the aforementioned Jim Jones—who has a lot on his plate—to spend many hours at an international gabfest in Munich at which Vice President Joe Biden, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, and Holbrooke were already over-representing the United States. Reveling in the fond attentions of the Europeans and occasionally dozing off from jet lag, Jones allowed the delegation to send dangerously ambiguous signals about the U.S. commitment in Afghanistan.

Politically, Republicans are relieved by Obama's weak start. A well-crafted stimulus could have split Hill Republicans. It could also have exposed intellectual disarray on the right over the financial crisis. But Obama allowed the GOP to dodge that bullet and begin the term with a reinvigorating series of intellectually successful assaults on the stimulus bill. A strong message on Afghanistan from the administration would have won the support of Republican hawks—and might have caused other Republicans foolishly to move in a semi-isolationist direction, provoking another internal GOP dispute. Withdrawing Geithner's nomination would have elevated the new president above the last eight years of Republican-dominated Washington business as usual.

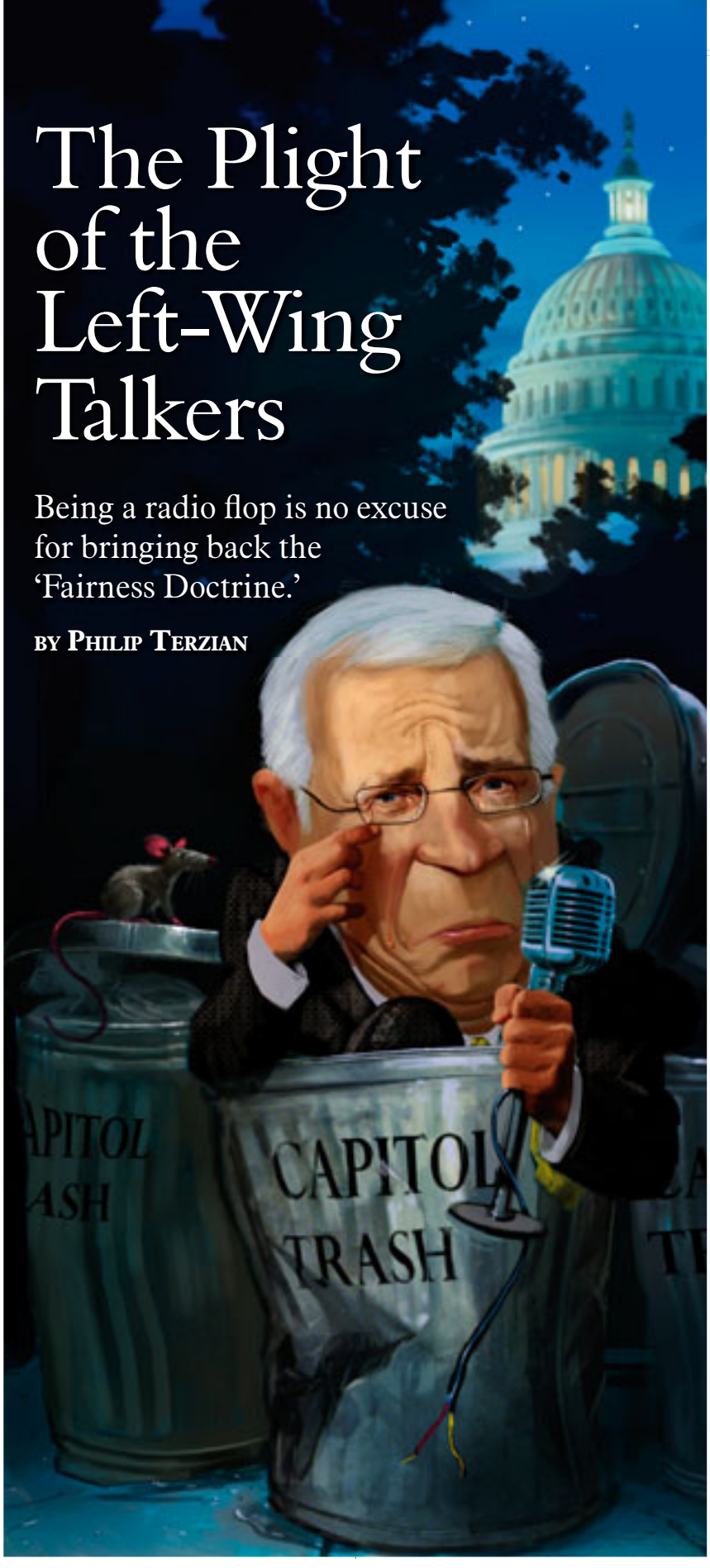
So Republicans have some reason to cheer. But not much. The country needs a president capable of exercising leadership at home and abroad. Barack Obama has had a charmed career. He's been the magnetic-levitation train of recent American politics, skimming over the surface at great speed without having to slog through the mud that slows down and climb over the boulders that trip up normal politicians. But now he's president. The charm is wearing off. It's time for him to stoop to govern.

—William Kristol

The Plight of the Left-Wing Talkers

Being a radio flop is no excuse for bringing back the 'Fairness Doctrine.'

BY PHILIP TERZIAN



THOMAS FLUHARTY

Bill Press's professional life, such as it is, has been very complicated in recent years.

A longtime Democratic functionary in California and midlevel official in the Jerry Brown administration, he became a TV editorial commentator in Los Angeles when Ronald Reagan was president. That is the same sort of sinecure, now largely extinct in broadcasting, that catapulted the late Jesse Helms to the U.S. Senate from North Carolina; but Bill Press has been less fortunate. He ran in the Democratic primary for California insurance commissioner (and lost), chaired the California Democratic party (during the Pete Wilson era), and then settled on his current incarnation as an author of political potboilers (*Spin This!*, *How the Republicans Stole Christmas*, *Bush Must Go*) and designated liberal on cable shoutfests (*Crossfire*, *The Spin Room*, *Buchanan and Press*).

Until the other day, he was host of the morning drive-time "Bill Press Show" on OBAMA 1260 AM radio in Washington, D.C. That is, until the owner of OBAMA 1260 decided to end all political programming on his network and replace it with financial advice. Now, once again, Bill Press is looking for work. And he seems to have found it: He is writing a book about talk radio, and has embarked on a crusade to restore the Fairness Doctrine in broadcasting.

The reason, as he explained the other day in the *Washington Post*, is that talk radio is largely dominated by conservatives, while liberals are not only outnumbered, but scarcely heard on the air. This is not because left-wing radio hosts and their programs—Al Franken, for example, or Jim Hightower—have failed to find national audiences, but because (in Press's words) "the only reason there's not more competition on American airwaves is that the handful of companies that own most radio stations do everything they can to block it. In many markets . . . they

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join in providing no outlet for progressive talk."

It is not often that a mere two sentences perfectly capture both the progressive rationale for reviving the late, unlamented Fairness Doctrine and the reason liberals flop on talk radio; but Bill Press, to his credit, has written them.

First, two propositions: Many progressives don't believe in market forces; and most progressives—like most politicians—have decidedly mixed feelings about the First Amendment. From Bill Press's perspective, the fact that left-wing talk radio has been largely unsuccessful is the fault not of left-wing talk radio but of Corporate America—or, as he describes them, "the handful of companies that own most radio stations." Because Bill Press cannot imagine that listeners find him consistently resistible (as they seem to do) it must be the fault of the right-wing capitalists who own the radio stations and conspire to keep liberals like Bill Press off the air.

This is not only delusional, so far as the evidence is concerned, but represents a near-total misunderstanding of the corporate/capitalist mind. The truth, of course, is that if Barbara Boxer or Barney Frank or any other progressive, famous or obscure, had a radio talk show that garnered high ratings and earned millions in advertising revenue, "the handful of companies that own most radio stations" would be climbing over each other to sign them up. The idea that station owners would refrain from making money for ideological reasons is not only laughable, but insulting to the basic instincts of most people in business. Somebody who calls his radio station OBAMA 1260 is not going to collude with other owners to keep the airwaves liberal-free.

Which brings us to the Fairness Doctrine. Since the Democrats regained control of Congress in 2007 there has been increasing discussion of reviving the Fairness Doctrine—actually an FCC regulation, not an act of Congress—which was repealed in 1987. The ostensible reason for the Fairness Doctrine, instituted in 1934, was to ensure "balance" in the coverage of public issues; its practical effect was to banish nearly all discussion of public issues on radio and television for the next half-century. That is the reason why the doctrine was revoked 22 years ago, and why conservative talk radio has flourished ever since.

Now, the fact that conservatives have succeeded, and liberals failed, in this realm has driven Democrats to a notably anti-democratic position on the question. Here, for example, are declarations from two of the most egregiously partisan Democrats in the Senate, Dick Durbin of Illinois and Tom Harkin of Iowa. "I have this old-fashioned attitude," says Durbin, "that when Americans hear both sides of the story, they're in a better position to make a decision." And Harkin, in his cruder, more direct fashion, recently told none other than Bill Press: "We gotta get the Fairness Doctrine back in law again."

Of course, the reason Senators Durbin and Harkin and Debbie Stabenow of Michigan and Dianne Feinstein of California yearn to revive the Fairness Doctrine is that it would precipitate the end of conservative talk radio. And they have the power to do this. The FCC is theoretically empowered to demand "balance" (and punish transgressors) because the airwaves are public property, and Congress reserves the right to regulate what it claims.

That is why neither Dick Durbin nor Tom Harkin—nor even Bill Press—has expressed the slightest concern about "balance" or "both sides of the story" in, say, the nation's daily newspapers or news magazines or in Hollywood or the book publishing trade. In the one place where conservatives have gained a foothold, and might even be said to dominate, congressional Democrats are determined to shut them down—and not by way of market forces, or competition, but through enabling legislation. So much for the First Amendment. ♦

Don't Dumb Down Afghanistan

Lower expectations would lead to lesser results.

BY GARY SCHMITT & DANIEL TWINING

Reading tea leaves is a dangerous business when it comes to a new administration. There is always a fair amount of floundering around that comes from having too few senior people in place, unsettled policymaking processes, and indecision over which campaign promises to keep and which to toss overboard.

Take, for example, the Obama administration's policy toward Afghanistan. While running for president, Barack Obama promised that help was on its way in the form of thousands of additional troops; now President Obama appears to have put his own promised surge on hold.

The ostensible reason is that the new administration wants to have a thorough review of Afghan policy before making that decision. On its face, reasonable enough—although America's civilian and military agencies spent much of last year undertaking such reviews in order to recommend policy options to the new administration.

Nonetheless, comments from senior administration officials in recent days suggest that "the review" might already have its conclusion in hand: U.S. goals for Afghanistan will be trimmed and the size of our commitment limited. The new buzz words being tossed around by administration strategists and military advisers are *realism*, *attainable*, *end game*, and even "How do we get out?"

The crux of the matter is that while candidate Obama could claim the Bush administration had taken its eye off the 9/11 ball when it went to war with Iraq, once Obama's own eye turned to Afghanistan, he discovered a difficult conflict that will require a generational commitment and sustained investment in building civilian and military institutions. Faced with that fact, it appears President Obama might blink, not wanting to own a war that could possibly eat up his administration's time and energy and which liberals in his own party are losing the stomach to prosecute.

> The real choice is between a democratic Afghanistan whose governance extends throughout the whole country or no legitimate government at all, with every man, family, tribe, and ethnic group looking out for its own.

This is ironic. Opponents of invading Iraq portrayed Afghanistan as "the good war," and the necessary one. And there is no question that Saddam Hussein's armies were more formidable military opponents than its cave-dwelling Taliban counterparts. Now, however, as in Alice's Wonderland, everything is upside down: Iraq has become the winnable war, and Afghanistan the quagmire.

But is lowering the bar in Afghanistan a workable strategy? Does deemphasizing the building of a capable, democratic Afghan state, moving away from a full-scale counterinsurgency effort, and focusing instead on keeping the Taliban and al Qaeda at bay lead, in Vice President Biden's words, to "a stable Afghanistan that is not a haven for terrorists"? More likely it results in an Afghanistan that is unstable, balkanized, and home to more, not fewer, terrorists. The real, on-the-ground choice is between a democratic Afghanistan whose governance extends throughout the whole country or no legitimate government at all, with every man, family, tribe, and ethnic group looking out for its own.

In a balkanized Afghanistan, cooperation between U.S. and Afghan security forces will be uncertain and make the job of rooting out radical Taliban and al Qaeda elements more difficult. In such an Afghanistan, the Taliban, with access to millions upon millions in drug money and willing to be as ruthless as necessary, will have the upper hand when it comes to securing the "cooperation" of the Afghan population.

Perhaps a stratagem of lowered expectations might work if the United States were willing to act as Britain did when it was the colonial power. But how likely is that? Would either the American public or its military support trying to establish a balance of power within Afghanistan by playing off one warlord or tribe against another? It seems doubtful. And, lest we forget, in the end it didn't work for the British either.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is right to say that "if we set ourselves the objective of creating some sort of Central Asian Valhalla [in Afghanistan], we will lose." But that is a straw man: No one expects Afghanistan to become, as the phrase was often used by critics in Iraq, some sort of "Jeffersonian democracy." Nevertheless, failing to establish a functioning and accountable Afghan state, as difficult as that may be, is a recipe for losing the war.

A minimalist military surge, as some within the administration are advocating, cannot succeed in securing our strategic goal of an Afghanistan able to deny safe haven to terrorists. A pseudo-surge of this sort, followed by trimming our commitment, will send

Gary Schmitt is director of the program on advanced strategic studies at the American Enterprise Institute and Daniel Twining is senior fellow for Asia at the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

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exactly the wrong signals to (1) the Taliban, who know they only have to wait us out, (2) our allies, many of whom are already looking for ways to edge away from the mission, (3) Afghanistan's neighbors, including Iran and Pakistan, who will intensify their support for the Taliban or other tribal factions so as to secure their interests, and (4) the Afghan people, who will find it increasingly risky to cooperate with the Afghan government and international forces if it appears that the Taliban will outlast both.

At the recent Munich Security Conference, General David Petraeus, former commanding general in Iraq and now Central Command's lead officer, laid out a sensible strategy. In his words, the Afghan people are the decisive "terrain" in this struggle—implying that a focus on finding and fighting Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents is viewing the problem from the wrong end of the telescope. Our strategy, instead, must focus on protecting the population and connecting them with the Afghan state. Giving short shrift to that mission—by failing to put sufficient boots on the ground, provide the level of assistance needed, implement a comprehensive civil-military campaign plan, tackle pervasive corruption, or invest in building Afghan governing capacity—will only make it more likely that we will face a resurgent Taliban and al Qaeda presence in Afghanistan.

As difficult as all this might be, the particular irony in the administration's possibly emerging verdict that building a democratic state in Afghanistan is too hard is that Afghans themselves disagree. Recent polling by the Asia Foundation shows that, despite insecurity and misgovernance, 78 percent of Afghans still believe democracy is the best form of government, and 65 percent believe free and fair elections can deliver a better future. But only 38 percent of Afghans believe their country is moving in the right direction—because of the pervasive insecurity and corruption that characterize life there today. Afghans have not given up on democracy; it would be a sad and self-defeating commentary if we did. ♦

Remember Rev. Wright?

A colleague of his has just been added to the roster of the Obama administration. BY MEGHAN CLYNE

Back in May, when the furor over Jeremiah Wright threatened to derail the Obama campaign, the candidate mournfully explained his decision to leave the controversial Trinity United Church of Christ. "We don't want to have to answer for everything that's stated in a church," Obama said. "On the other hand, we don't want to have a church subjected to the scrutiny that a presidential campaign legitimately undergoes." After Obama parted from Wright, the preacher and Trinity United became the campaign issue that dared not speak its name.

Now the campaign is over and so, it appears, is the scrutiny—for the new president has just made a personnel decision that reopens the entire issue. Earlier this month, he appointed the Reverend Dr. Otis Moss Jr. to serve on the new President's Advisory Council established as part of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. The official White House press release notes that Moss is the pastor emeritus of Cleveland's Olivet Institutional Baptist Church. Not noted, however, are Moss's many ties to Trinity and its troublesome former pastor.

To begin with, Moss's son, Reverend Otis Moss III, succeeded Wright at Trinity. The younger preacher is known for his own fiery sermons and for likening the backlash against Wright to a "public lynching." The new member of the Obama administration, though, has plenty of ties to Wright on his own. Otis Moss Jr. and Wright shared a mentor in Samuel DeWitt Proctor, who helped give rise to black liberation theology. In fact, it was the radical Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference that sponsored Wright's now-infamous National Press Club appearance in late April 2008—which led to Obama's break with Trinity and Wright. Less noted was the fact that the symposium's guest preacher that day was Reverend Otis Moss Jr. Moss has publicly defended Wright and compared his preaching to that of Amos, Micah, Malachi, and John the Baptist.

Moss's closeness to Wright is expressed most clearly in the 40-minute tribute sermon he preached from Trinity's pulpit on the occasion of Wright's 36th anniversary at the church in February 2008. Of Wright, Reverend Moss said: "All of us who know him and love him have been blessed by his genius, his creativity, his scholarship, his discipleship, his sensitivity as an artist, his boldness as a prophet, and, I agree, his rhythmic poetry." This homage came long after Wright's hit parade of sound-bites: "God Damn America" . . . "America's chickens are coming home to roost" . . . "Bill did us like he did Monica Lewinsky." Poetry indeed.

Even more interesting, perhaps, is Moss's own rhetoric. He is a political preacher and has said, "If you are preaching a gospel that has nothing about politics, nothing about economics, nothing about sociology, you are preaching an empty gospel with a cap and shoes but no body to it." His sermons at Olivet are hard to come by. But from public lectures, one concludes that, while his style is more subdued than Wright's (or his own son's) and his themes more benign, there are still plenty of comments that call into question his suitability for government service. Take, for instance, this obser-

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vation made at Yale in October 2004:

> You have heard that it was said, "God bless America." But I say unto you, Pray for all of the Osama bin Ladens and the Saddam Husseins. . . . I say unto you, Be kind, be as kind to Castro as you are to the Saudi family and the leaders of China and Russia. This, however, is difficult in a society . . . when we are afflicted or infected with hubris. It's almost an incurable disease—incurable not because of despair, but because of arrogance.

A spokesman for Moss explains that he meant his audience to "understand that you must 'pray for your enemies' and those that would do you harm. No more, no less." So in the spirit of Christ's admonition to turn the other cheek, Moss wants us to pray for those who have killed thousands of American citizens within the last decade. Yet he's still holding a 400-year-old grudge against the settlers of Jamestown. In a panel discussion on "the State of the Black Union" with Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, on the occasion of Jamestown's quadricentennial, Moss noted:

> When we think of Jamestown, we must see the triple holocaust that came out of Jamestown . . . that African holocaust, that Native American holocaust, that African-American holocaust. And until we deal with that and place it in the collective memories of our own history, and the wider history of the world, we are in a state of denial—often celebrating when we need to be correcting the propaganda of history.

Moss was loudly opposed to American action in Iraq, a theme woven throughout his lectures and writings. In a book coauthored with Jeremiah Wright, Moss explained:

> I know where the weapons of mass destruction are, and they are not the ones we went looking for in Iraq. I know where they are, and you know where they are! According to statistics, AIDS is a weapon of mass destruction. Miseducation and no education are weapons of mass destruction. Forty-four million people without health care is a weapon of mass destruction.

Even the experiences of day-to-day life in America draw Reverend Moss's ire. Air travel? "Now when I go to the airport I have to take off my shoes—not because the ground is holy ground, but because of a man somewhere in a cave that we can't find." A long drive? "You can travel from New York to California and listen carefully to radio or media and never get outside of the beam of hate." Not even classic films are safe: In a tag-team sermon with his son, Moss assumed the persona of a 21st-century Moses, then proceeded to declare the Jewish prophet a man of "Afrocentric heritage"—despite "Eurocentric Hollywood movie distortions of [his] Africanness." (Take that, Cecil B. DeMille.) Moss also seems to enjoy sowing racial discord. At the "State of the Black Union" conference in Jamestown, he accused President Bush of "pimping New Orleans."

Otis Moss Jr.

Moss wants us to pray for those who have killed thousands of American citizens within the last decade. Yet he's still holding a 400-year-old grudge against the settlers of Jamestown.

Given the enormous backlash he endured over his connections to Wright, Trinity, and black liberation theology, one wonders why Obama tapped Moss to serve on the President's Advisory Council. At least three other members—Fred Davie of Public/Private Ventures; Dr. William J. Shaw of the National Baptist Convention; and Bishop Vashti M. McKenzie, the first woman bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—bring what might be called a black perspective to the council's work. With Wright, Obama could at least argue that his affiliation with the pastor was a personal matter of private faith. Yet by appointing Moss, Obama has given him the imprimatur of the White House and a position from which to help shape public policy. While Moss and other members of the faith-based President's Advisory Council aren't paid, they are entitled to public funds for travel costs, per-diem expenses, and support staff. They can hold hearings and form task forces. And of course, they can guide the work of Obama's faith-based office as it directs public funding to religious and community groups.

Perhaps the quiet installation of Moss is part of a grander design for the faith-based office: to make it a mechanism for nationwide "community organizing." In 1995, Obama told the *Chicago Reader*:

> In every church on Sunday in the African-American community we have this moral fervor; we have energy to burn. But as soon as church lets out, the energy dissipates. We must find ways to channel all this energy into community building. The biggest failure of the civil-rights movement was in failing to translate this energy, this moral fervor, into creating lasting institutions and organizational structures.

By tapping the likes of Moss to

TIM SLOAN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

help steer his faith-based policies, Obama could be using the White House to "translate the energy" of black churches into "creating lasting institutions" of left-wing political agitation. A look at the other members of the advisory council certainly supports this interpretation. Vashti McKenzie is another proponent of black liberation theology, and another friend and defender of Jeremiah Wright who has preached at Trinity United. Jim Wallis also publicly supported Wright and has even been an inspiration to the reverend. In his National Press Club speech, Wright quoted Wallis as saying "America's sin of racism has never even been confessed, much less repented for." In an earlier life, Wallis once said he hoped "more Christians will come to view the world through Marxist eyes." In recent years he has settled for working through congressional Democrats, helping them make their policies more palatable to people of faith. Wallis has been joined in that task by Rabbi David Saperstein—another prominent liberal and member of the new faith-based advisory council.The council looks like nothing so much as an attempt to build a powerful political grassroots network to advance the liberal causes dear to Obama's heart.

The ironic humor in the whole thing is that back when it was President Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Moss warned other pastors:

> Sometimes the king will call you up even out of your dungeon and ask: "Is there any word from the Lord?" . . . If we are tied to the stuff of the king, it is difficult to tell the president—or the king [laughter]—it's difficult. . . . It's difficult if you are tied to a "faith-based grant" [more laughter] and your whole sustaining budget is contingent upon the next appropriation. When the question comes up, "Is there any word from the Lord?" you might have to say, "Wait, let me check with the board. Let me check with the budget committee."

Now that he is in a position to shape where those faith-based grants go, one suspects Moss will be singing a different tune. ♦

An Election, but Who Won?

You'll have to wait awhile to find out who will govern Israel. BY ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Jerusalem

No doubt President Obama had planned to call the winner of Israel's Tuesday elections to offer congratulations and suggest a visit to Washington. But Israel's bizarre and dysfunctional electoral system has produced no winner, only a mess likely to produce a weak government and perhaps new elections in two years or less.

As in the United States in 2000, there was no clear winner on election night. The Knesset has 120 members, so 61 are needed to govern. Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party increased its strength in parliament from 12 seats to 27, but this was one fewer than Tzipi Livni's Kadima party—and a disappointment because polls had led everyone to expect he would surpass her easily. Yet despite this good result for Livni, there was no victory for the left or center-left, for the Labor party fell to a historic low of 13 seats, and Meretz, further to the left, won only 3.

But our presidential system ultimately produced a single winner with full presidential powers in 2000. Winner really does take all in the United States. In Israel's parliamentary system, power will be divided in a fractious Knesset and in a coalition cabinet where whoever is prime minister will not have a majority for his or her own party—just a collection of ministers linked more by a desire for power than by ideological or political consensus. Livni claims the moral right to be prime minister because she edged out Netanyahu by one seat (or so it seemed from exit polls); he claims that right because the total vote for right-of-center parties exceeded that for the left. President Shimon Peres will wait for the official results on February 17, spend the following week consulting with all party leaders, and then ask either Netanyahu or Livni to take four to six weeks to try to put a coalition together. When Livni tried to do this last summer (after scandals forced Prime Minister Olmert to say he would resign), she failed. She could be asked to try now, and fail again; the math suggests that Netanyahu would have an easier time assembling 61 votes in the Knesset.

The outcome turns less on Peres, who is supposed to follow the recommendations and advice he gets from party leaders, than on Avigdor Lieberman, whose right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Our Home) party jumped to 15 seats. A Russian (Moldovan) immigrant, Lieberman reached beyond his initial ethnic base and took right-wing votes from Netanyahu (and a few from Livni). It will be hard for Netanyahu or Livni to reach 61 seats without the 15 Lieberman won, making him a possible kingmaker. Lieberman runs his party as a fiefdom, so the decision will be his alone—unless Kadima and Likud (and perhaps Labor) form a coalition that excludes him. It does not seem likely that Lieberman would choose an alliance with Livni, when his natural partner is the right-of-center Likud, so the most likely outcomes are a "grand coalition" of Bibi and Tzipi (who together are only 4 votes short of a majority), or a more right-wing coalition including Lieberman. In discussions that have already begun, Israel's leading pols are engaged in back-room deals for

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who gets which cabinet ministry; the ghosts of Tammany Hall are smiling.

Israelis will now debate, yet again, changing their electoral system and adopting single-member constituencies, but meanwhile they need a new government. They won't have one for six weeks and maybe more, slowing down any thoughts in the Obama administration of rapid movement on Middle East matters. And when that new government is formed out of competing parties and leaders whose opinions of each other are often unprintable, our new Middle East envoy Sen. George Mitchell will find that figuring out Israel's new policies toward Iran, Hamas in Gaza, or negotiations with the Palestinian Authority takes even longer. It is hard to see any point to his planned late-February visit to Israel. Israel's new prime minister will probably visit the United States in April after Passover and dealing seriously with these key issues will begin only then.

Israel's election results are difficult to interpret as a strong endorsement of any person or ideology, and in that sense are a faithful reflection of the doubts and divisions here. Yet Israelis tend to face reality squarely and with determination, deriding pretty diplomatic evasions. And on security issues (which are always paramount) even a weak government, like that of Prime Minister Olmert today, can act—as it proved in Gaza.

Few Israelis believe there is any chance of comprehensive peace negotiations with the Palestinians now, with Gaza in the hands of Hamas and the "leadership" of Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas looking even weaker than in past years. Abbas spent most of the recent Gaza war and the weeks since traveling, avoiding the sad realities that face him in Ramallah. Palestinian Authority prime minister Salam Fayyad continues his work to sustain the West Bank economy and train a decent and effective police force, and is trying now to gain control of any Gaza reconstruction funds—both to keep them out of the hands of Hamas and to strengthen the PA's support in Gaza. But in all this he is hampered by a simple lack of funding, and he missed a payroll in February. Arab states continue to send the Palestinians gifts of extravagant rhetoric and countless Arab League resolutions—but not much cash.

Meanwhile Iran's influence in this region grows (a fact that, by the way, worries most Arab states as much as it worries Israel). Not only Iran's nuclear and missile programs but its role as chief ideological and financial backer of Hamas, Hezbollah, and other terrorist groups continues to expand. For Israelis, the main worry is whether their new government will be smart enough and tough enough to meet that challenge—and whether ours will. ♦

Rehab for Jihadists

The Gitmo problem is also a Yemen problem.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES & THOMAS JOSCELYN

During the final months of the Bush administration, top U.S. counterterrorism officials engaged in an intense debate about the fate of the Yemenis detained at Guantánamo Bay. There are a lot of them there—nearly 100 out of the total population of 248—and most can be directly tied to al Qaeda's global terror network. Barack Obama's Gitmo problem is, in many respects, a Yemen problem. And it just got worse.

In an interview with a Saudi newspaper last week, Yemen's foreign minister Abu Bakr al Qirbi was asked about the jihadist rehabilitation program his government is setting up to facilitate the return of Yemeni detainees. Saudi Arabia has made a comprehensive attempt to deprogram jihadists and to secure their promise to end their terrorist ways. U.S. counterterrorism officials like to point to the Saudi program as a model of what should be done with captured jihadists, though 11 former Guantánamo detainees who passed through the Saudi program just showed up on the kingdom's list of "most wanted" terrorists.

Yemen's new program, judging from al Qirbi's description, has a different purpose altogether.

> The center Yemen prepares aims at receiving returners from Guantánamo Bay and rehabilitating them to be reintegrated into their society. We have to understand that these young men underwent several types of sufferings as a result of investigations, torture, and non-humanitarian treatments. Of course, they have affected their psychological and physical conditions.
>
> It is necessary to provide them help and physical and material support. They have to be rehabilitated in order to return to their normal life, and we have to provide them work opportunities and train them if this is needed.

The problem, according to al Qirbi, isn't that the detainees are committed jihadists who might well commit further acts of violence. It's that the United States treated them so harshly that they might have trouble adjusting to life back in Yemen.

Juan Zarate, who was the top counterterrorism official in the Bush White House, is not surprised by the comments. "The Yemeni government has to contend with their political reality in which the Gitmo detainees are seen as either victims or heroes," he says. "In addition, there is not yet a real rehabilitation program in Yemen—as we understand it with the

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Saudis and other governments. These dynamics, along with the existing security risks in Yemen, should give us pause as we think about repatriating Yemeni detainees."

Other Yemeni officials, including President Abdullah Ali Saleh, have said that the new program will include an effort to get these jihadists to "shun extremism and fanaticism." Yet, rehabilitating the Yemenis detained at Guantánamo will be no easy task. Yemen is home to a vast terrorist recruiting network comprising Islamic sheikhs and veteran mujahedeen. They regularly call upon eager new recruits to take up arms against Islam's supposed enemies around the world. As we reported recently (see "Anywhere but Yemen," February 9, 2009), most of the Yemenis currently held at Guantánamo were recruited by this network. They have been indoctrinated into the Taliban's and al Qaeda's cause and see America and the West as infidels worthy of slaughter.

The U.S. government's unclassified files are replete with references to the Yemeni detainees' extremist worldview. Consider three examples.

Abdul Rahman Umir al Qyati answered the call for jihad in Afghanistan. He trained at al Qaeda's infamous al Farouq camp and then became a guard at the Kandahar airport in 2001. At that time, the airport was a stronghold for Osama bin Laden, and only the most trustworthy recruits were given guard duties there. Al Qyati "holds the United States in disdain" and admits "that if another call for jihad were issued he would comply even if it meant killing Americans and destroying U.S. interests."

Majid Abdu Ahmed also answered a Yemeni cleric's call for jihad in Afghanistan. During his time in U.S. detention, Ahmed referred to his interviewing agents as "infidels" and explained "that all Americans are infidels, and they will go to hell." Ahmed told his interviewers that the September 11 attacks "were very small in scale and he wishes for greater destruction and torture to fall upon Americans."

Adil Said al Haj Obeid al Busayss is an admitted Taliban member who attended a training camp in late 2000 and then fought on the front lines in Afghanistan. Busayss sees the entire world as a battlefield for jihadist forces to conquer. When a non-Islamic country falls, its inhabitants will have three choices: pay a tax for their infidel beliefs, leave the country, or convert to radical Islam. Anyone who refuses to submit will be killed.

In their views, these three detainees are typical of the Yemeni population at Guantánamo. The jihadist ideology that drove them to fight thousands of miles from home and participate in all facets of the global terrorist network's operations is uncompromising.

Transferring al Qyati, Ahmed, and Busayss to their homeland poses serious risks. Al Qaeda is an increasingly powerful force inside Yemen. And as al Qaeda's attack on the American embassy in Sana'a just five months ago reminds us, Westerners are the organization's preferred targets there. Al Qaeda is always looking for willing hit men to carry out its operations. The Obama administration should be mindful that Busayss allegedly "stated he would support a fatwa advocating attacks against infidels within his country."

In addition to two high-value Yemeni detainees who worked directly for bin Laden, at least 27 others are alleged to have ties to him. This includes 14 detainees who were his bodyguards, another who traveled with bin Laden on recruiting missions, and another who was part of bin Laden's entourage during the escape from Tora Bora. At least 15 more Yemenis, including three who also have direct ties to bin Laden, were captured in the 2002 raids in Pakistan that netted top al Qaeda operatives Abu Zubaydah and Ramzi Binalshibh, the Yemeni point man for the September 11 operation.

A majority of the Yemeni detainees in Guantánamo were trained for fighting and directly supported the terror network's operations. Yemen is not a country that can be reasonably expected to house and rehabilitate these detainees. And yet this appears to be the policy of the Obama administration.

The U.S. ambassador to Yemen, Stephen Seche, said recently that he hoped a "majority" of the nearly 100 Yemeni detainees held at Guantánamo Bay would be returned to their native land so that they might "integrate themselves back into their own society with their families and make a future for themselves here." A State Department spokesman told The Weekly Standard that Seche's comments reflect the views of the Obama administration.

On February 12, the new director of national intelligence, Dennis Blair, presented the U.S. intelligence community's annual threat assessment to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Throughout the Arab world, al Qaeda is under pressure. Al Qaeda in Iraq has been greatly weakened by the Awakening movement and the dogged efforts of Coalition forces. And, beginning in 2003, Saudi Arabia's "aggressive counterterrorism efforts" have made the kingdom "a harsh operating environment."

But, there is trouble brewing. Saudi Arabia faces "threats from al Qaeda elements in the region, particularly from Yemen," Blair read aloud from the assessment:

> Yemen is reemerging as a jihadist battleground and potential regional base of operations for al Qaeda to plan internal and external attacks, train terrorists, and facilitate the movement of operatives. Al Qaeda leaders could use al Qaeda in Yemen and the growing presence of foreign jihadists there to supplement its external operations agenda, promote turmoil in Saudi Arabia, and weaken the Saleh regime.

To this end, Blair continued reading, al Qaeda in Yemen has "conducted 20 attacks against U.S., Western, and Yemeni targets" as of September 2008.

It is clear that the U.S. intelligence community sees the growing threat coming out of Yemen. Does the Obama administration? ♦

Take a Chance on an Auction

Swoopo and the rise of Entertainment Shopping.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

On a recent Friday morning, there was an auction for a Nintendo Wii on the website Swoopo.com. At 9:45, the auction was set to end in 20 seconds, and the Wii was about to sell for $34.05—a bargain for an item that retails for $250. But Swoopo uses a very curious auction process, one that may not be an "auction" at all.

Users purchase "bids" from Swoopo for 75 cents each. These bids are only sold in packages, not singly, and must be bought ahead of time. A user might purchase, say, 100 bids from Swoopo for $75. Prospective buyers then spend these bids on items such as the Wii. Unlike eBay and other online auction houses, Swoopo is the sole seller of goods on their site—users do not sell to each other. And unlike eBay, users do not bid a specific price for goods.

Swoopo posts an item for sale with a countdown clock showing the end time for the auction. The starting price for each item is $0.15. Each time a user spends one of his bids on the item, the purchase price increases by 15 cents and, most critically, somewhere between 10 and 20 seconds are added to the auction clock. (Swoopo won't say how it determines the amount of time added.) On Swoopo auctions often go on for quite a long time after they seem just about to end.

People kept "bidding" on that Wii—which you'll recall was about to sell for $34.05 with 20 seconds left. Fifty minutes later, the price had risen to $100.20 and there were 4 minutes on the clock. After another half hour, the price was $123.15, with only 15 seconds left. And 45 minutes after that, the auction finally ended, with the Wii selling for $159.60 to someone with the screen name "tomaker."

It would seem that tomaker got a bargain, saving $90 off the retail price of the Wii. But Swoopo made a killing on the deal. The final price means that 1,064 bids were placed in the auction—at 75 cents each, that's $798 direct to Swoopo. Add the final purchase price and Swoopo managed to sell a $250 item for almost $1,000.

Based in Munich, Swoopo was founded by two German entrepreneurs in 2005. In 2007, it opened a British version, called TeleBid. This was followed by a portal in Spain, and, in September 2008, the entire family was consolidated under the "Swoopo" brand name when an American site was launched, complete with an office in Cupertino, California. The sites are all now operated under the umbrella of Entertainment Shopping, Inc.

Swoopo is just the most prominent example of a new type of Internet business which describes itself as "entertainment shopping." Websites such as Penny Cave, Yellman, and Winners24 may vary the details, but the basic formula is the same: People purchase very cheap "bids" for the chance to then buy goods at incredible discounts. And there are discounts on Swoopo. For instance, Swoopo claims that buyers have recently gotten a Playstation 3 for $100.95 (retail price: $399), an LG 22-inch LCD HDTV for $134.70 (retail price: $550), and an Apple iPod Touch for $76.20 (retail price: $230). Yet in each of these cases, Swoopo has made a great deal of money. If you assume that Swoopo paid full retail price for the goods, they turned profits of $204 on the Playstation, $258 on the TV, and $200 on the iPod.

What's more, it's not clear that Swoopo even bears the costs of purchasing and warehousing all the items beforehand. Buried in the site's terms of service agreement is the disclosure that prizes may be shipped "directly from our suppliers." And then there's this disclaimer: "Should Swoopo not be able to deliver the item ordered, Swoopo shall be entitled to substitute the item with a comparable replacement product with the same or better features, or provide a refund of the auction end price to the user based upon the user's preference." Which means essentially that Swoopo might not even possess, or have an agreement to possess, prizes at the time they are putting them up for auction.

Still, not all auctions end profitably for Swoopo. Occasionally a real steal will pop up—one user recently bought a $60 computer mouse for $3.75, meaning that Swoopo lost $37.50 on the transaction. In another super bargain, a user named "canton" won an Apple MacBook Air, an $1,800 computer, for $66.96—meaning that Swoopo got taken for $1,400. It would seem that Swoopo's biggest weakness is time periods when not enough users are on the site simultaneously to keep pushing the auction prices up. Which is why international expansion is so important to the company: The German, Austrian, Spanish, British, and American versions of the site all run the exact same auctions, meaning that people from different countries—and, more important, time zones—are bidding against each other, round the clock. It seems to be working. CEO Gunnar Piening says that the company has 1.7 million registered users and had revenues of $29 million in 2008. The company's number of transactions has tripled, hitting 11,000 for December 2008. Swoopo claims on their website that they have now passed the start-up phase of their business and are generating "solid

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profits." In the long run, as we all know, the house always wins.

Which raises the question of whether Swoopo's auctions are actually legal. The company makes money by dangling the possibility of a sharply discounted product in front of users, enticing lots of people to pay a little money for the chance to win it. It resembles nothing so much as a private lottery.

Nonprofit lotteries—church bingo, PTA raffles—are generally allowed in the United States, but private lotteries are generally not. Legally, a lottery has three elements: (1) consideration, which is to say, a monetary buy-in; (2) a reliance on chance instead of skill; and (3) a prize.

I. Nelson Rose, a professor at Whittier Law School and coeditor of *Gaming Law Review*, is generally recognized as America's top gaming lawyer. He's undecided as to what Swoopo really is. "I think it's a close call," Rose says. The model definitely involves consideration and a prize, Rose notes, but whether or not it is dependent on chance, from a legal standpoint, isn't clear. "If you make this into a regular land-based auction where people sit in a room, but conduct the auction the Swoopo way, is it a true auction as opposed to a lottery?" he asks.

Rose thinks the more pressing issue is monitoring. Neither Swoopo nor any of the other entertainment shopping sites have verification systems that prove that genuine bidders are participating: "tomaker," the individual who Swoopo said won the Wii, could be anyone, or no one. Because Swoopo does not allow participants to interact with one another, there's no way to tell who is what. Piening says, "All bidders on swoopo are real users, who have registered and paid for their bids. There are no exceptions. There have never been any exceptions." Nonetheless, entertainment shopping without regulation is like playing a non-certified slot-machine. As Rose notes, "[Y]ou could set up something like this and not have anybody ever win."

Even if Swoopo is running afoul of gaming laws, it's unlikely authorities will pursue them. Law enforcement typically doesn't investigate Internet gaming unless the operation is linked to organized crime or the source of consumer complaints. If entertainment shopping takes off, however, individual states may decide to issue legislative clarification as to whether or not they consider it gambling. For his part, Piening insists that "Swoopo is neither gambling nor a lottery" because "chance does not play a role at all for determining the winner of the auction." It may be telling, though, that the company recently retained Tony Cabot, a prominent Las Vegas attorney and specialist in gaming law.

Either way, the odds seem to be in Swoopo's favor. "The characteristic that makes it so inviting," Rose explains, "is that it has what all successful gambling has: the near miss." The biggest indicator of success is, of course, imitation. Laughs Rose, "I am now getting calls from people who want to copy it." ♦

What Japan Did Wrong

And what we can learn from it.

BY DUNCAN CURRIE

Amid our current economic and financial turmoil, Japan's experience during the 1990s looms large in the minds of American policymakers. The 1990s were a "lost decade" for Japan, a period of deflation and widespread economic misery. In just a few short years, Japan went from being the world's model of economic success to its cautionary tale.

During the late 1980s, the Nikkei stock index climbed relentlessly upward, driven by a real estate boom. As Jeff Kingston noted in his 2004 book, *Japan's Quiet Transformation*, the Nikkei "tripled in the 45 months prior to the December 1989 stock market peak," at which point Japanese stocks represented some 44 percent of global equities. The bubble reached its apex at the end of 1989, a year in which the Bank of Japan raised interest rates several times. What followed was cataclysm.

"In 1990," Kingston observed, "property values in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya fell between 40 percent and 60 percent from their bubble era peaks, while in 1991 alone the stock market average lost 36 percent of its value." As the economy began shrinking, loan defaults proliferated and Japanese banks saw their capital positions decline rapidly.

The government dithered. "Probably the very biggest mistake the Japanese made was to refuse to acknowledge there was a problem," says economist Edward Lincoln, director of the Center for Japan-U.S. Business and Economic Studies at NYU's Stern School of Business. "They did not take really serious government action until 1998."

Initially, the Japanese finance ministry thought—or hoped—that fallout from the crash would be minimal. After all, very few Japanese households owned stock; the bulk of household assets were in savings accounts. So Japanese officials reckoned that only greedy speculators (who were blamed for causing the crisis) would be seriously hurt. "Nobody in the Japanese government understood how far those [asset] prices were going to go down," says Lincoln. When policymakers realized just how extensive the loan defaults were becoming, they colluded with the banking sector to downplay

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the problem and conceal its magnitude.

Then the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis hit and further exacerbated Japan's troubles. A series of large Japanese banks went bust, and denial was no longer an option. The Japanese parliament passed legislation to recapitalize the banking system and handle bank closures, but it didn't provide enough money and didn't allocate that money effectively, disbursing the funds without much regard for the health of individual banks. In 1998, two more large banks, the Long-Term Credit Bank and Nippon Credit Bank, collapsed. Once again, the government attempted to recapitalize the banks. This helped mitigate the crisis, but again the Japanese government failed to establish a sufficient level of bank capitalization. Numerous financial institutions continued camouflaging their portfolios of bad loans.

It was not until the premiership of Junichiro Koizumi (2001–06) that banks were finally forced to address their dodgy assets. As economists Takeo Hoshi and Anil Kashyap note in a recent paper, "the banks only really returned to being adequately capitalized in 2006 and 2007, when macroeconomic conditions improved and after supervision policy had changed."

It wasn't just the elected government that failed to recognize the severity of the crisis. The Bank of Japan, traditionally a conservative central bank, moved far too slowly in slashing interest rates after the crisis began. It took the central bankers several years to bring interest rates to zero. Then, in 2000, they prematurely started lifting them before deflation had ended.

As for fiscal policy, the Japanese government temporarily reduced income taxes in 1994. More tax cuts—some temporary, some permanent—were enacted over the next two years. But the government allowed all the temporary tax cuts to expire in 1997 and simultaneously increased the consumption tax. "My impression is that the tax cuts did work," says Lincoln. Indeed, the economy had briefly returned to decent growth levels in the mid-1990s. But after the 1997 tax hikes, it "got pushed back into recession," and then was battered by the Asian financial crisis.

Realizing its mistake, Tokyo implemented more temporary income tax cuts. In 1999, local governments began issuing consumption vouchers, which could only be spent on certain things and in certain places. The shopping coupons were mostly a flop. "There was an impact," says Takeo Hoshi, of the University of California, San Diego, "but the impact was small."

Japan also attempted to stimulate the economy with infrastructure spending. Throughout the postwar era, Japan had always devoted an exceptionally large share of public spending to its infrastructure. In the early 1990s, this spending mushroomed and led to an explosion of what Lincoln calls "absolutely stupid projects."

Throughout the postwar era, Japan had always devoted an exceptionally large share of public spending to its infrastructure. In the early 1990s, this spending mushroomed and led to an explosion of 'absolutely stupid projects.'

The construction binge would have worked better, says Hoshi, if the money had been targeted more prudently. He reckons that most of it was wasted, and that the tax cuts were a better stimulus than the public works schemes.

Others, however, take a more benign view of Japan's infrastructure spending. Economist David Weinstein, a Japan expert at Columbia, believes that Japanese government spending was more important than tax cuts in boosting aggregate demand during the mid-1990s. Japan was an "extreme case," he says, in which massive infrastructure spending made sense. Weinstein also thinks the 1997 tax increases were a major obstacle to Japan's recovery. "They were much too hasty in raising taxes."

Compared with Tokyo in the 1990s, Washington has been fast in its reaction to the financial crisis. The adoption of a zero-interest-rate policy took years in Japan; in America, it took months. Whereas Japanese officials spent years denying or sugarcoating their bank woes, U.S. officials have been much more forthright in tackling the bank credit crunch. Those American lawmakers who wish to see most or all of the Bush tax cuts expire at the end of 2010 should remember that, as Hoshi observes, Tokyo's 1997 tax hikes "put the Japanese economy back into recession."

Japan was not sufficiently aggressive in pressuring banks to sort out their bad loans, or in recapitalizing those banks. Weinstein points out that the U.S. banking system today is much more sophisticated than the Japanese system was in the 1990s, yet the response from Washington has been disappointingly similar.

In their recent paper, Hoshi and Kashyap stress that "the fundamental problem" plaguing U.S. banks is a capital shortage. This was also the basic problem plaguing Japanese banks after the bubble burst. Hoshi and Kashyap show how Japan's use of asset management companies (AMCs) to buy up bad debts had only minimal success, partly because of their limited asset purchases, and that, moreover, the AMCs did not help recapitalize the troubled banks. The Japanese bank saga demonstrates that recapitalization and removing toxic assets are two different challenges, Hoshi and Kashyap write, and that "care should be taken not to waste money propping up financial institutions that will ultimately fail."

So have U.S. policymakers learned the correct lessons from Japan's bank meltdown? Hoshi does not sound terribly confident: "I'm afraid we may be making the same mistake the Japanese government made." ♦

Murder in Moscow

Press criticism, KGB-style.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Vice President Joseph Biden has told the Europeans that the new administration wishes to "reset" relations with Vladmir Putin's Russia. But the January 19 slaying of two dissidents, 34-year-old human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalism student Anastasia Baburova, 25, on a Moscow street is one of several recent reminders that Americans cannot be comfortable in Putin's embrace.

Markelov, head of the Institute for the Supremacy of Law, may well have been murdered as a result of the release from custody, one week before, of Russian army colonel Yuri Budanov, who had been sent to prison for crimes he committed while serving in Chechnya. Markelov had been crucial to Budanov's 2003 conviction in the kidnapping, torture, multiple sexual assault, and murder of an 18-year-old Chechen girl, Elza Kheda Kungaeva. Budanov, although he admitted his guilt and was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, had benefited from an early release.

On the day he perished, Markelov delivered a statement to the press. Representing the family of the Chechen female victim, he accused the Russian authorities of improperly arranging for Budanov to be let go. He then walked to a metro station near the Kremlin with Baburova. The killer, wearing a ski mask, approached from behind and shot Markelov in the back of the head. Baburova pursued the shooter, who turned and fired into her forehead. She died several hours later.

Anticipating her graduation from journalism school, Baburova was working for the daily *Novaya Gazeta*, which has employed a distinguished roster of liquidated investigative journalists. *Novaya Gazeta* is co-owned by Alexander Lebedev, an ex-KGB official and billionaire turned political reformer, who purchased the ailing London *Evening Standard* on January 21, only two days after Baburova's death.

As the largest individual shareholder in *Novaya Gazeta*—he owns 39 percent—Lebedev is responsible for a publication that has experienced the high-profile killing of several of the country's leading reporters. Anna Politkovskaya, murdered in the elevator of her apartment building in 2006, was his top staffer; she too had exposed atrocities in Chechnya, and Markelov was her lawyer. Igor Domnikov was killed in a brutal beating in 2000. His colleague Yury Shchekochikhin was poisoned in 2003.

Indeed, the poison cabinet seems to have become a favored anti-dissident weapon of the Russian state, as it was under Stalin. Politkovskaya herself was poisoned (though not fatally) in 2004 when she tried to travel to Beslan during the hostage crisis there. And less than two months after her eventual murder, Alexander Litvinenko, another former KGB agent critical of the Putin regime, was killed in a highly unusual poisoning in London.

In the aftermath of the Markelov-Baburov assassinations, the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists reported that Lebedev, perhaps spurred by his KGB experiences, had announced the intention of *Novaya Gazeta* journalists to petition to arm themselves if necessary. *Novaya Gazeta* editor Dmitry Muratov denounced the Russian government for its inability to protect the press and asserted, "We have three options. The first one—to leave and turn off the lights. . . . The second—to stop writing about the special services, corruption, drugs, fascists; to stop investigating the crimes of the powerful. . . . The third option is to somehow defend ourselves."

Russian political life has increasingly assumed a pogrom atmosphere. Markelov had extended his investigation of human rights violations from Chechnya to the central Russian republic of Bashkortostan, which has a Turkic Muslim majority, but has not been the scene of Chechen-style rebellion against Russian rule. At the end of 2004, local police beat up to 1,000 people in Bashkortostan over a period of four days. Markelov had warned against "the spread of the Chechnya syndrome throughout other regions of Russia" and exposed the existence of a secret "order number 870" issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2003, which authorized the police to declare states of emergency without informing the public and to follow them up with repressive actions.

One of his closest friends, an academic named Vladislav Bugera, described Markelov as a perhaps naïve product of the old Soviet way of life. Writing in the online periodical *Johnson's Russia List*, Bugera called the dead lawyer a "socialist and an internationalist" whose many causes included an independent labor union, but whose socialism was "moderate . . . and reformist. . . . He was a reliable person. You could always be sure of him. . . . He is my hero."

Needless to say, a return to socialist ideals would stand no chance of protecting human rights from state abuse. Russia has been through its dark eras of internal strife and compulsory social experiment; Putinism, now aggravated by the global economic crisis, represents an attempt to revive aspects of both. The staggering challenge before Russian supporters of democracy is to find a way to construct a new and unburdened system of individual rights, secured by due process. Russian democrats and those abroad who would help them can ill afford to look away from the blood of Russian lawyers and journalists shed in the street. ♦

Stephen Schwartz is a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Law and Disorder

The case for a police surge

By William J. Stuntz

We live in strange times. The federal budget deficit is higher than at any time since World War II as a percentage of GDP, yet the president and Congress are not in budget-cutting mode. Rather, they are seeking to make that deficit even larger by spending sums that, before now, seemed beyond the realm of possibility. The more obscene the amounts, the better. John Maynard Keynes's famous suggestion—pay some workers to dig ditches and others to fill them up—hasn't made it into any stimulus package, yet. But the night is still young, and politicians are still exercising their imaginations.

Sadly, in the face of record-breaking federal spending, one uncommonly good spending idea has gotten short shrift: Use federal budget dollars to pay for more cops on high-crime city streets. A modest version of that idea—$8.8 billion in federal money over six years—was enacted as part of the 1994 crime bill, and it contributed to the second-biggest crime drop of the last century.

Given that track record and the sheer magnitude of the stimulus spending, one might think that now is the time for an immodest version of the idea: say, $5 billion a year for four or five years. One would be wrong. The House stimulus package included one-shot spending of between $3 billion and $4 billion for urban policing, depending on how one counts. The Senate's more moderate proposal pared that sum down to $1 billion and change—less than "real money" by the Dirksen standard. At that level of funding, the stimulus package would pay for a mere 10,000-15,000 officers for one year only. That number is too small—America has 650,000 local police officers to patrol America's streets; 10,000 more is a drop in the bucket—and too short-term. If the recession lasts more than a year, the new officers will be out of jobs before they have time to do their productive work.

House and Senate alike are making a serious error. For $5 billion per year—five years' funding would be about 3 percent of the stimulus package—lawmakers could put another 50,000 cops on city streets. Doing so would likely both reduce crime and reduce the nation's swollen prison population—a rare combination—and would also help the economy in poor city neighborhoods by making investments in those neighborhoods safer. This is one policy that conservatives and liberals alike could support. If the Obama administration is looking for opportunities for bipartisanship, it should look hard at urban policing.

I

The case for more police spending begins in another part of the world, with another battle against mayhem. Not long ago, the Iraq war seemed a lost cause. Two decisions proved it wasn't. First, General David Petraeus changed tactics: Buy off or coopt all enemy fighters who are susceptible to such overtures, and bring violence to bear only on the irreconcilables. Give priority to protecting the population. Second, President Bush embraced the new approach and backed it up by sending another 30,000 soldiers to the front. Once an unattainable goal, victory in Iraq is now in sight.

Taken together, those two decisions were revolutionary. For 35 years, America's military had been looking for ways to avoid another Vietnam: a long war with heavy casualties that steadily lost public support. So, after Vietnam, military technology emphasized efficient violence: weapons systems that could take out targets more precisely and from longer distances with fewer soldiers. Military doctrine moved in a similar direction, emphasizing speed and

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surprise—"shock and awe"—in order to overpower enemies quickly. Both technology and doctrine aimed to get more bang for the buck, more and better-targeted violence with fewer soldiers.

The Iraq surge followed the opposite strategy: The goal was to get less bang for the buck, to use more soldiers to produce less violence. It worked. Post-Saddam Iraq is not, it turns out, ungovernable. All it needed was what any ruler needs in order to rule crime-ridden territory: armed men in uniform standing guard on violent street corners, in numbers enough to reassure local residents that they can walk the streets in peace.

That sounds like—and is—a job for a well-trained, well-funded force. The war in Iraq bears more than a passing resemblance to the battle against violent street gangs in the roughest parts of American cities. The tactics Petraeus used to win that war are eerily similar to the tactics the best police chiefs use to rein in gang violence. But better tactics alone cannot do the job. In Boston as in Baghdad, those tactics work only if the police forces that use them have enough personnel: lots of police boots on the most violent ground.

Today, that condition is not satisfied. Most American cities are underpoliced, many of them seriously so. Instead of following the Bush/Petraeus strategy, the United States has sought to control crime by using small police forces to punish as many criminals as possible. As all those who have even a passing familiarity with contemporary crime statistics know, that approach—call it "efficient punishment"—does not work. Like the Army in pre-surge Iraq, the nation's criminal justice system is in a state of crisis. America needs another surge, this one on home territory.

The poorest black neighborhoods are frighteningly crime-ridden. The social cost of that crime is colossal, measured in families never formed and investments unmade, lives ended murderously and other lives slowly crushed by long prison terms. Plainly, the public policy status quo is not working.

II

Readers may be excused for wondering how crime could be a large problem in 21st-century America. Crime fell substantially in the 1990s. In this decade, crime rates have been mostly level; the gains from the 1990s remain intact. Where is the crisis?

The short answer is: in urban neighborhoods that readers of this magazine rarely visit. The most important crime trend of the last half of the 20th century wasn't a rise or fall in overall crime levels. Rather, the key trend was a change in the distribution of serious crime, as Table 1 illustrates:

In 1950, violent crime was mostly a southern phenomenon; of the six non-southern cities listed above, three had murder rates lower than the nation's, and the other three had rates only modestly higher than the figure for the nation as a whole. Today, violent crime is an urban problem—everywhere, not just south of the Mason-Dixon line. Atlanta and Philadelphia are comparably homicidal, as are Houston and Chicago. All but one of the non-southern cities listed above—New York is the exception—saw their murder rates double since 1950; all but two saw murders triple, while the nation's rate rose slightly. And remember: These figures are calculated after the 1990s crime drop.

Those high contemporary murder rates understate the rise in urban violence. Thanks to advances in emergency medicine, a sizable fraction of 1950 murder victims would survive today. For accurate comparison, one must cut the 1950 figures by at least one-fourth. Do that, and a clear picture emerges: Outside the South, American cities are at least several times more violent than they were in the mid-20th century. The same is not true of the small cities and towns where many Americans live: In New York state, 3.2 million people inhabit jurisdictions that saw zero murders and manslaughters in 2007. In most of the United States, violent crime is something that happens elsewhere. In the poorer parts of American cities, crime stories are much closer to home. The 1990s narrowed that gap modestly, but the gap remains large.

Even within crime-ridden cities, violent offenses are geographically concentrated. The safest city neighborhoods are about as safe as those small towns in New York where no murders happen. In the most dangerous city neighborhoods, violent crime reaches levels common in Mexico, Russia, and South Africa—three of the highest-crime countries on the planet. Most of our dangerous communities have two things in common: They are poor, and a large share of their population is African American, as one more pair of statistics suggests. In the United States

in 2005, the homicide rate among whites stood at 3.5 per 100,000. Among blacks, the figure was 26.5. Urban homicide rates are strongly correlated with the size of cities' black populations.

This is the core of 21st-century America's race problem. The poorest black neighborhoods are frighteningly crime-ridden. The social cost of that crime, and of the criminal punishment that seeks to hold it in check, is colossal, measured in families never formed and investments unmade, lives ended murderously and other lives slowly crushed by long prison terms. Plainly, the public policy status quo is not working. To stay the course—to resist change in a setting that so needs changing and in which so many lives are at stake—is morally indefensible. That proposition holds true for those of us on the political right as well as for those on the left. Conservatives are not anarchists; we believe governments should be small, not absent. Even the smallest governments seek to maintain a decent level of order and safety in public places. Today, in much of urban black America, that goal is not being met.

III

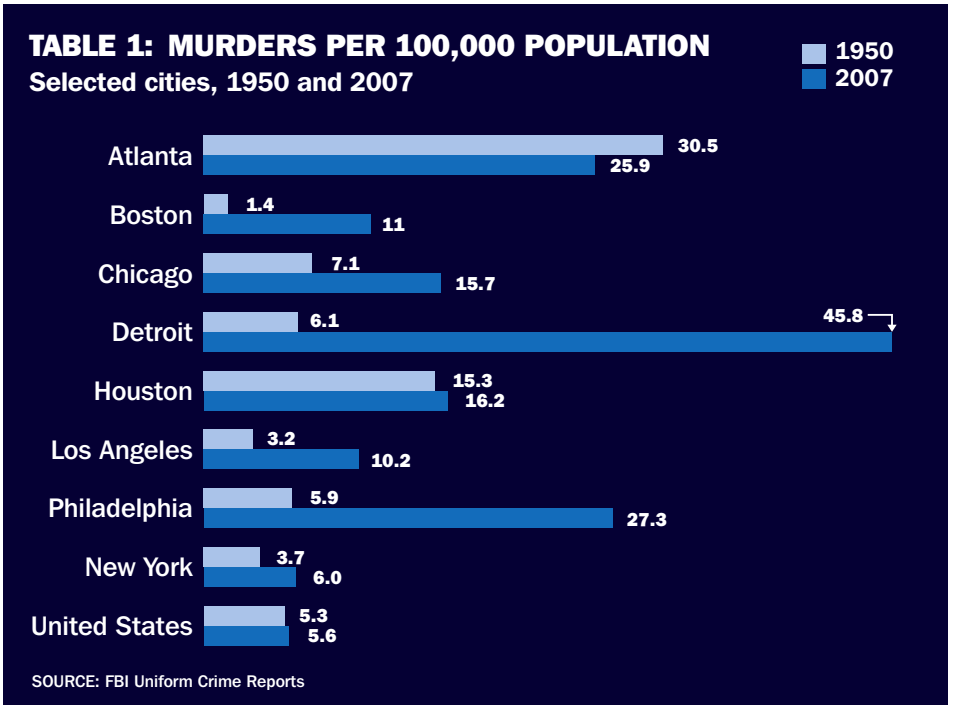
Over the past 35 years, the United States has run the equivalent of a controlled experiment in alternative means of reducing violent crime. A massive, disproportionately black prison population has had surprisingly little effect on urban violence. As we shall see, modest increases in the size of urban police forces appear to have achieved much better results. More-than-modest increases might do better still.

Some history is in order. Between 1950 and 1975, in the midst of the largest crime wave in American history, prison populations fell sharply throughout the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast. By the early 1970s, imprisonment rates in those parts of the country were comparable to the lowest imprisonment rates in the 21st-century Western world. In 2001, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden imprisoned 58, 58, and 69 inmates per 100,000 population, respectively. (The European average was 87 per 100,000.) In 1972, the imprisonment rates in Massachusetts, Illinois, and New York stood at 32, 50, and 64, respectively. Between the mid-1970s and 2000, those same prison populations skyrocketed. New York's imprisonment rate sextupled; Illinois's multiplied more than seven times, while Massachusetts's rose eight-fold. Measured per unit crime, the increase in punishment was greater still. Nationwide, the number of prisoner-years per homicide rose more than 800 percent between the mid-1970s and the beginning of the 21st century. In the span of three decades, Americans first embraced punishment levels lower than Sweden's, then built a justice system more punitive than Russia's.

In criminal justice as in business and finance, price stability is one of the keys to successful governance. Criminals are what economists call risk-preferring; they enjoy taking chances. When the consequences of a given crime vary widely across time and place, criminal punishment takes on the character of a lottery. Criminals like lotteries. Fluctuating "prices" thus rob criminal punishment of its deterrent power.

The same is true when the prices offenders pay for their offenses are opaque, such that members of the public and would-be offenders alike cannot tell which consequences flow from which crimes. Over the last generation, America's justice system has increasingly embraced the use of certain criminal prohibitions as means of punishing other, harder-to-prove crimes. Federal prosecutors could not convict Martha Stewart of insider trading, but no matter: Obstruction of justice could substitute for the more serious crime that prompted Stewart's prosecution. Con-

TABLE 1: MURDERS PER 100,000 POPULATION
Selected cities, 1950 and 2007



SOURCE: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

victing members of urban gangs of violent felonies is often difficult: The government needs witnesses to convict, and gang members are skilled at silencing those who might testify against them. Often, prosecutors respond by charging gang members—all of them, not just the ones with the most homicides or assaults to their names—with drug crimes or with possessing unregistered weapons. In such a system, even defendants cannot easily tell what price they pay for the violent crimes that prompt their prosecutions.

There is one more reason why skyrocketing prison populations in the 20th century's last quarter did not produce plummeting crime rates: The number of inmates rose too far and too fast, especially the number of black inmates. Table 2 tells the story

The black imprisonment rate in 2000 was roughly one-third higher than the rate at which citizens of the Soviet Union were confined to the gulag's camps in Stalin's last years (when the camps' population peaked). If America's jail population is included, the black incarceration rate is nearly double the Soviet rate of confinement circa 1950.

Such massive incarceration rates cannot effectively deter crime. At percentages like these, a term in the state penitentiary becomes either an ordinary life experience or a badge of honor, not a scarlet letter that stigmatizes those who must wear it. Over the course of the past generation, incarceration has become part of the cultural furniture of black America. When criminal punishment is at once routine, opaque, and variable—three adjectives that fit American punishment practices to a T—it cannot serve the purposes for which it is designed.

Given those characteristics, it should be unsurprising that the tripling of America's imprisonment rate in the 1970s and 1980s produced no drop in urban crime. On the contrary, in high-crime cities, the level of criminal violence rose during those two decades. True, crime fell in the 1990s—but as it did so, the rate of increase in the prison population slowed. The notion that increased criminal punishment accounts for the bulk of the crime drop is implausible: If so, why didn't crime fall more, and sooner? The murder rate in the United States is about the same as in 1966; the imprisonment rate is almost five times the rate in 1966. Apparently, it takes five times as much punishment to achieve the deterrent effect prison terms had more than 40 years ago.

As it was in Iraqi streets before the surge, so it is in violent American neighborhoods: Killing more insurgents and locking up more criminals seem only to produce more insurgents and criminals. A different approach is needed.

IV

That different approach has already succeeded. Between 1989 and 1999, the number of urban police officers per unit of population rose 17 percent. Arrests fell by a little more than 20 percent; arrests of black suspects fell by one-third. Crime fell too, and it fell most in the jurisdictions that hired the most cops. In 41 pairs of neighboring states, one jurisdiction increased its policing rate more and its punishment rate less than its neighbor during the 1990s. In the higher-policing, lower-punishment states, violent crime fell by an average of 24 percent. In the lower-policing, higher-punishment group, the average crime drop was only 9 percent. Higher-policing, lower-punishment states outperformed their more punitive, less well-policed neighbors in all parts of the country. The city that saw the nation's largest crime drop—New York—increased the size of its police force the most. The state that includes that city increased its prison population the least.

The results—more cops, less crime, fewer prisoners—sound too good to be true. What explains them? The answer is the same in American cities as in Iraqi ones. When men in uniform make the streets inhospitable to the violent, civilians can pacify and reclaim their own neighborhoods.

The results—more cops, less crime, fewer prisoners—sound too good to be true. What explains them? The answer is the same in American cities as in Iraqi ones. General Petraeus saw the process: Increase soldiers' street presence, make civilians feel safe, and local traffic increases; before long, the streets are inhospitable to terrorists and militia members. Over time, the real work of pacification is done by civilians reclaiming their own streets.

Best of all, putting more boots on violent ground tends to reduce the incidence of inappropriate violence and abuse by those whose job is to maintain order. In Abu Ghraib, there were 15 prisoners per guard on average; at some points the ratio reached 75 to 1. By comparison, prisons in the United States ordinarily have a ratio of 6 prisoners per guard. Violence and coercion are substitutes for

numbers; when the number of guards is high enough, the need for physical force and the temptation for cruelty both drop sharply.

The same principle applies in police work. The *Washington Post Magazine* recently ran a story about the mayor of Berwyn Heights, a small town in Prince George's County, Maryland. The county police executed a drug raid on the mayor's house; the raid turned up no evidence but left Mayor Calvo and his wife traumatized; among other things, the police shot and killed the couple's two dogs. Even the best police forces sometimes act on bad tips. But those mistakes are fewer when officers are numerous enough to know the communities in which they work. And the errors that remain are less costly when the police force is sufficiently well staffed that an ordinary house search does not resemble a military action. Nationwide, the number of local police officers per 100,000 population stands at 245; in New York City at its peak size in 1999, the NYPD employed 561 officers per 100,000. In Prince George's County, the number is 195. Given a larger police force, Calvo's dogs might still live. So might his trust in the decency of his community's law enforcement personnel.

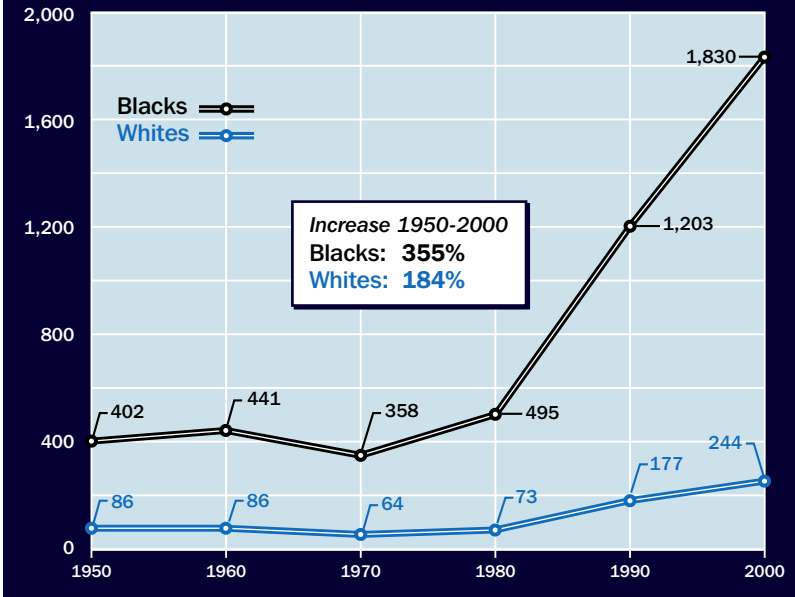
V

One more question must be answered: If American cities need more policing, why shouldn't the cities pay for it themselves? The same question might be asked about urban public schools, and the same answer given: Big-city public schools disproportionately serve the poor. Local tax bills are mostly paid by wealthier city dwellers. If cities tax them too heavily, those taxpayers may move to friendlier jurisdictions. Which is why federal and especially state governments pay most of the tab for urban schools. By contrast, cities pay more than 90 percent of their own police budgets—though urban police spending, like spending on urban public schools, disproportionately benefits the poor.

Actually, the authors of state and federal budgets have gotten these two subjects backward. There is little evidence that marginal budget dollars make for better schools, but a great deal of evidence that marginal dollars mean better policing. Throwing money at problems is rarely good public policy. Urban policing may be the exception to that rule.

That is the liberal case for more federal funding for local police. There is also a conservative case. Conservatives are skeptics of governments that seek to fine-tune individual incentives. For the past generation, state legislators and members of Congress have acted as though, if only the right criminal prohibitions and sentencing rules are enacted, behavior will change in just the ways lawmakers wish. Like other regulated actors, criminals stubbornly resist such direction. Conservatives believe in the power of culture. Policing surges free residents to take control of their neighborhoods and build the street cultures the locals want. Those local cultures do more to control crime than any government-tailored incentives. Last but not least, conservatives believe in the traditions that capture the wisdom of the past. Before the last half-century and outside the South—at the times and places where criminal justice worked best—the normal ratio of police officers to prisoners was two to one. Today, in most of the country, the ratio is one to two.

TABLE 2: BLACK AND WHITE IMPRISONMENT RATES
Prisoners per 100,000 population, 1950-2000



SOURCE: Margaret Werner Cahalan, *Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States, 1850-1984* (1987); Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics.*

Again, we live in strange times. Over the next couple of years, money will be spent in fantastic sums, and much of it will leave nothing good in its wake. All the more reason to invest in a service that makes life better for those whose lives most need help. That is the liberal thing to do—and also the conservative thing to do. More important, it is the right thing to do. ♦

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OBAMA STIMULUS EFFECT: NEW, LOWER PRICES!

Geithner Lays an Egg

And that's only one of the problems with the Obama economic strategy

By Lawrence B. Lindsey

Elections have consequences. That is what democracy is about after all. Barack Obama is correct when he states that his victory last November gives him the right, or more specifically the power, to have things his way when it comes to handling the nation's economic challenges.

The country, moreover, could use some decisive economic action. The financial system is a mess, unemployment is rising and will keep increasing. The government will likely run a deficit of 10 percent or more of GDP both this year and next—roughly twice the share of the Reagan deficits and roughly three times the size of President Bush's deficits. To fight the credit contraction, our central bank is expanding its balance sheet at a pace that might lead a visitor from another planet to confuse the United States with Argentina.

This makes it all the more frustrating that less than a month into his presidency, Obama has made a complete hash of economic policy, utterly squandering his mandate in a series of missteps that suggest he has not made the transition from campaigning to governing. This, even as Obama never stops reminding us in his constant televised appearances that the economy is slipping fast and time is of the essence.

The problems began with the inexplicable decision by the administration not to submit its own economic stimulus package, but instead delegate the job to Nancy Pelosi and the barons on the House Appropriations Committee. Appropriations is the reptilian brain of the political process. It is where all the back scratching, logrolling, and pork barreling gets done. Macroeconomic coherence is just not part of the skill set of House Appropriations members. So even rebuilding the nation's infrastructure got short shrift. Instead, the package was loaded with largesse for fellow politicians and civil service employees back home. The standard was not the proclaimed "shovel-ready" but "social-worker ready."

This package was marginally improved by the House Ways and Means Committee. Ways and Means gave money directly to workers as opposed to local politicians. It also ramped up the various medical spending conduits, which will push more money to health care providers—though not necessarily provide more health care. But there was no improvement in the tax system, which might, say, encourage job creation and retention by lowering the tax burden on employment or investing.

So the package the House produced was not "stimulus" in any normal understanding of the word. Of the $820 billion package that emerged from the House, only 20 percent would be spent in fiscal 2009 and only another 40 percent in 2010. That left 40 percent of the package to be spent in 2011 or later, when even the more pessimistic forecasters (of whom I am one) expect the economy to be in full recovery. This plan delivers the stimulus at precisely the wrong time.

The package was so bad that it made criticism of the new president socially acceptable, a rare development for the first initiative of a president elected with a large mandate. Alice Rivlin, doyenne of Democratic party policy economists, criticized the lack of macroeconomic benefit in the plan. Her sentiments were echoed by just about every leading economist in both parties who was not employed by the administration.

The new administration fell into this hole by belatedly discovering the fiscal realities of the country. Government spending takes time to get going, and, once flowing, is difficult to stop. During the transition, Team Obama surveyed the agencies for "shelf ready" spending needs and found them woefully inadequate as a credible stimulus package. The incoming Obama policymakers had been focused on spending, not tax cuts, because they wanted to draw a line between themselves and their predecessors. But, faced with the facts, they made a virtue out of necessity by having the

Lawrence B. Lindsey, a former governor of the Federal Reserve, was special assistant to President Bush for economic policy and director of the National Economic Council at the White House. His most recent book is What a President Should Know . . . but Most Learn Too Late *(Rowman and Littlefield).*

president call for taxes to be 40 percent of the package. This annoyed the more left-leaning Democrats of Congress, who were then appeased by being given the power to craft the spending.

The legislation was written by Democratic committee chairmen with no Republican input. The president covered this up by going to the Hill and meeting with the Republican caucus. But, since Obama had no direct role in writing the package, the signal to congressional Republicans was twofold: Bipartisanship was just a façade the president needed to maintain his approval ratings, and Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid were the ones with the power, not Barack Obama.

The shreds of comity on which Washington depends were saved by Senator Susan Collins of Maine, who drafted a compromise that eliminated some of the most wasteful spending and sped up other parts. The bill that emerged from conference is close to the Collins compromise and is better than the House one at moving spending into the present. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that a quarter of the spending in the conference agreement would leave Washington this year and a total of 75 percent by the end of 2010, a substantial improvement. But it is still not "stimulus," and that fact is going to become apparent later this year. Money leaving Washington for state capitals is different from money actually entering the economy and creating jobs.

The administration released a report by its top economists saying that passage of the stimulus bill would mean that national unemployment would peak in the third quarter of 2009 at about 8 percent and start going down thereafter. Let's just say that we should all hope they are right. The economy will get a pop from the start of stimulus just as the economy got a pop in 2008 from the one-time checks that were sent out. Growth in the second quarter of 2009 is likely to be positive as the first round of stimulus hits the economy. As the rate of new stimulus slows in subsequent quarters, growth will turn negative again. The odds are high that unemployment will still be rising on the first anniversary of the Obama presidency next January with the prospect (but not a certainty) of double-digit unemployment at the time of the midterm elections.

As the stimulus bogged down, a new word crept into the administration's economic policy vocabulary—"comprehensive." The problems would not be easy to solve, and stimulus alone was insufficient. Bank recapitalization and housing mortgage issues would also have to

MICHAEL RAMIERZ

be dealt with. The task for announcing these was delegated to Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner. But the scripting of the message and indeed the whole "rollout" of the issue was tightly controlled in the West Wing.

Like so much of what happens in Washington, the reasons for this odd locus of decisionmaking authority are less nefarious than meets the eye and more a matter of simple necessity. The first problem is a lack of personnel at Treasury. Geithner is the only confirmed appointee in the department. No deputy secretary, no undersecretaries of either domestic or international finance, no assistant secretaries, no deputy assistant secretaries. The West Wing is the only place where the personnel reside who can make decisions.

The second problem is political. There are no easy answers when facing a trillion-dollar hole in the banking system. Either the banks will fail, or money is going to have to be given to the banks to fill the hole, or the proverbial can will be kicked down the road with enough money being slowly injected into the system to keep it going. The first option is a nonstarter. This brings the essential choice down to writing a big check now to the banks or writing a lot of little checks over time, and bankers are not the most politically sympathetic recipients of federal largesse at the moment.

So there is a political incentive to create a focus on issues that are tangential to the trillion-dollar problem. Make sure that bankers sell their corporate jets! No more bonuses!

The sale of 50 corporate jets in today's market might fetch you $1 billion if you're lucky. End all the bonuses on Wall Street and you get real money—another $18 billion. Put the two together and a $1 trillion problem shrinks to a mere $981 billion one. The administration's hope was that such measures plus the group flogging of the CEOs of the big banks on the Hill last Wednesday would focus the media, Congress, and the public away from the fundamental enormity of the task at hand.

But Geithner still had to say something, and none of the various options available was attractive. Buy the assets from the banks? Set the price high enough to bail out the banks and you have a trillion-dollar overpayment. Set the price at current market prices and you have to come up with the same trillion as a bank capital injection. Do what Bill Seidman and the George H.W. Bush administration did during the S&L crisis by nationalizing the banks and then reselling the pieces into the market? Might work, but while Seidman disposed of the thrift industry by selling them to the basically healthy commercial banks, there aren't any basically healthy banks left on the planet to buy an institution like Citibank or Bank of America. Combined, those two institutions have 14 percent of the deposits in the American banking system, and there are plenty of other banks that need help as well.

The Geithner announcement was repeatedly put off while each of the options was publicly discussed. In the end the political decisionmakers decided there was no politically acceptable decision. But expectations had been building, stoked higher with each postponement of the speech. When Geithner finally spoke and by omission essentially admitted that the Obama administration hadn't come up with a solution, the stock market plummeted.

A discredited stimulus package followed by a largely vacuous bank-rescue speech proved to be too much. In just over three weeks, Obama and company squandered the greatest stock of political capital any president since Lyndon Johnson had inherited from an election.

But it wasn't only the stock prices of America's publicly traded companies that collapsed. So did the stock of the Obama administration. A discredited stimulus package followed by an overly hyped but largely vacuous bank-rescue speech proved to be too much. The mainstream media, which had given Obama a free ride since the election, turned on their choice. In the space of just over three weeks, Obama and company squandered the greatest stock of political capital any president since Lyndon Johnson had inherited from an election.

It is certainly not too late for Obama to create a sensible government policy and assist in an American economic recovery. But he has to stop campaigning and start governing. This means fewer speeches (his strong point, and something he evidently enjoys) and more noodling through wonky decision trees and detailed analyses in concert with expert advisers on both the inside and the outside. All presidents in my experience—and I have served four different administrations—have to learn the difference between campaigning and governing. Obama, whose vita contains lots of campaigning for high offices but remarkably little tenure in such offices, has a bigger challenge than most in making this transition. But he is a smart and well-intentioned fellow. Most important, he has a strong survival instinct. Perhaps he'll sense that unless he makes a rapid transition, he will be a one-term president as the economic catastrophe he warns against so often comes to pass. ♦

Douglas MacArthur and Harry Truman at Wake Island, October 1950

Irresistible Force

Meets immovable object

BY ALONZO L. HAMBY

On April 11, 1951, in the midst of the stalemated Korean war, Captain Harry S. Truman, 129th Field Artillery, 1917-19, aka, president of the United States, summarily fired General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, commander in chief, Far East (CINCFE). The widespread public reaction was shock and outrage. Few Americans thought that Truman, whose fragile popularity was already in decline, had the credentials to sack a five-star general widely believed to have been the greatest military leader of World War II.

MacArthur, who had not set foot in the United States since 1935 when he left to develop and command the Philippine army, returned in a way that Julius Caesar would have envied. Making his way from San Francisco to Washington to the cheers of millions of Americans, he arrived in the nation's capital on April 19 to deliver a nationally broadcast speech to Congress. His gifts for oratory and self-dramatization undiminished by his 71 years, he charged the administration with denying him the opportunity for victory in the Korean War and concluded by telling his listeners, "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away."

Truman & MacArthur
Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown
by Michael D. Pearlman
Indiana, 352 pp., $29.95

Missouri Republican congressman Dewey Short voiced a widespread sentiment when he declared, "We heard God speak here today."

A Caesar, brought to the seat of power on such a tide, would have dispatched his enemies, assumed power, and waged war as he wished. If in a generous mood, he might have assigned Captain Harry to a tiny Pacific atoll. As it was, MacArthur simply faded away, remaining an icon to a cadre of hard-core supporters, but soon forgotten by a larger public drawn to the more enduring appeal of another five-star general, MacArthur's onetime aide Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The Truman-MacArthur controversy is most often remembered as a real-life morality tale that vindicates the vital importance of civilian control of the military. President Truman, so the

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narrative goes, was a doughty small-d democrat who brought to heel a vainglorious warrior bent on starting a nuclear war and trashing the Constitution. Michael Pearlman, a recently retired professor of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, gives us a considerably more nuanced story. Depicting a MacArthur who was feckless and at times detached from reality, he also lays bare the stumbling hesitancy of both civilian and military leadership in Truman's Washington and leaves us wondering how this badly managed little war ever happened.

The Korean peninsula, divided between Soviet and American occupiers in 1945 at the 38th parallel, existed on the fringes of the Cold War in June 1950. China had, by then, fallen to Mao Zedong's Communist insurgency with little regret from the Truman administration. American civilian and military officials were contemptuous of Chiang Kai-shek's ineffective Kuomintang regime, convinced in any case that the United States could not defend every anti-Communist government, and hopeful that Mao would be an independent Communist in the mode of Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito. (American statesmen perennially assume their adversaries are rational actors: "Fifty years later," Pearlman comments, "Washington was still searching for reasonable leaders in Serbia, Iraq, and Iran, as well as the Taliban government of Afghanistan.")

Impoverished and strife-ridden, the new nation of South Korea had staggered along on the brink of anarchy under its autocratic president Syngman Rhee. American military forces were withdrawn in 1949. In January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivered a major address at the National Press Club, outlining a Pacific defense perimeter that pointedly excluded both South Korea and Chiang's last redoubt, Taiwan.

Acheson's pronouncement reflected an administration consensus that America could dominate the Pacific but not the Asian mainland. The major object of American foreign policy had to be the strategically and economically valuable regions of Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. The task required aid to Greece and Turkey in 1947. The Marshall Plan, approved by Congress in 1948, provided Western Europe the means for economic recovery. The North Atlantic Treaty and the establishment of NATO followed in 1949.

At the beginning of the effort, the president had proclaimed the Truman Doctrine: "It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." This bold statement resonated much more loudly than Truman's qualifier that such help would be mainly through economic aid. Having left the impression of a universal commitment to block Communist expansion, Truman made reliance on economic assistance all the more necessary by drastically cutting the defense budget.

By 1950, the European strategy was a manifest success, but a significant section of the Republican party—much of it isolationist before World War II—had emerged as "Asia Firsters," criticizing the administration for the loss of China and arguing for support to Chiang. On June 25, the North Korean invasion of the South brought Asia to the center of American attention.

Having written off South Korea and sharply reduced American military capabilities, why did the Truman administration decide to fight there? If South Korea had fallen to internal subversion, the United States would have done nothing. But could it ignore a cross-border invasion of a client state without undermining the credibility of a NATO structure that existed mainly on paper? Munich, less than a dozen years in the past, was a living memory. Truman's instincts, moreover, were for intervention, whatever the difficulties.

"Dean, we've got to stop the sons of bitches no matter what," he told Acheson. The Europeans, responding with fulsome praise, seemed to agree. A United Nations resolution legitimized the effort.

Driven into a perimeter around the southeastern port of Pusan, American troops and the remnants of the South Korean Army held the line. On September 15, 1950, a flawless amphibious landing at Inchon turned the tide. About two weeks later, with explicit permission from Washington, MacArthur sent his troops across the 38th parallel in an ill-coordinated dash for the Yalu River. China, he assured Truman in a mid-October meeting at Wake Island, would not intervene. A month later, at least a quarter million Chinese troops moved into North Korea without detection, struck hard at American units, and sent them on a long retreat. European allies who had lauded the decision to intervene were soon obsessed with the fear that American power and attention would be sucked into the quicksand of Asia.

What the Europeans feared, MacArthur saw as an opportunity. Asia had been the focus of his career for a decade and a half. Convinced that Europe was the past and China the future, he saw the Korean conflict from the beginning as a vehicle for liberation of the mainland. Swallowing his own doubts about Chiang and not bothering to seek authorization from Washington, he had flown to Taiwan for talks with the Kuomintang leader. He thereby established the appearance of an alliance and fed Mao's paranoia.

MacArthur astoundingly would tell Washington in February 1951 that 100,000 Kuomintang troops, landed with American support, could achieve "the domination of South China behind the protective line along the Yangtze River." Neither the White House nor the Pentagon bought into this optimistic scenario, but the politics of the war compelled a commitment to the defense of Taiwan, previously written off as militarily insignificant.

In early 1951 Americans and South Koreans, under the command of General Matthew B. Ridgway, managed to stop the overextended Chinese offensive, then push the enemy back to the vicinity of the 38th parallel. Like most historians, Pearlman commends Ridgway's reinvigoration of a beaten army, and he especially lauds Marine General Oliver P. Smith, whose brilliantly executed retreat from the Chosin reservoir preserved his own force while doing great damage to the Chinese.

The Truman administration was ready for negotiations to end the war; it signaled MacArthur to establish a strong defense line and concentrate on inflicting maximum casualties. Eager to assuage European fears, it had already drafted General Eisenhower from retirement to command NATO. Now committed to a military buildup, it bolstered Ike's reassuring presence by sending fresh divisions to Europe rather than Korea.

MacArthur, contrary to a widely held belief, seems never to have requested authority to use atomic bombs against the Chinese. Nonetheless, his protests were loud and clearly intended to benefit Asia-First Republicans. Truman, drawing on his study of the Civil War, had been inclined to leave military matters to the generals and give them support. Superficially plausible, his approach in practice failed to make a distinction between battlefield tactics and grand strategy. The president tolerated MacArthur's misadventures and insubordination until the general more or less openly aligned himself with the Republicans.

By then, MacArthur's dismissal was possible only because Truman could count on the support of General George Marshall (now secretary of defense), General Omar Bradley (chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and General J. Lawton ("Lightning Joe") Collins (Army chief of staff). Eisenhower, who had no love for MacArthur, remained silent, but his presence at the head of NATO did much to convince the American public of Europe's importance. They and other military eminences had already played key roles in the Truman presidency. Just three days before MacArthur's recall, the *New York Times* columnist James Reston had written that "prominent soldiers are supplying much of the balance, statesmanship and confidence so sorely needed by the Administration."

Resolutely passing up every opportunity to dramatize a dramatic story, Pearlman eschews grand narrative. He uses military acronyms (especially the ghastly CCINFE) too freely, displays a sometimes confusing lack of respect for chronology, and seems to end every second sentence with a dangling clause. What distinguishes his work is its extensive research and an evenhanded skepticism that delineates the failures and weaknesses of both Truman and MacArthur.

He dissects Truman's temperament plausibly. It may be impossible to explain to a contemporary audience just how an elderly general who affected a corncob pipe and a ridiculous combover of a bald pate could overawe the American public, the Pentagon, and, for a time, the president. Still, the author has researched his subject extensively, frequently displays a fine sense of irony, and has produced probably the best study of this subject to date.

MacArthur, he reminds us, was only the most spectacular example of a series of military officers after World War II who too openly argued with civilian leadership and were shunted aside. Ridgway himself would be forced into retirement in 1955 for arguing with President Eisenhower's budget cuts. Wesley Clark's zeal for combat in Kosovo 40 years later ended similarly. Admiral William Fallon's open skepticism about the surge in Iraq terminated his career. In these and other cases, the cashiered officers went quietly and with little public notice. All, in one way or another, protested against a policy that did not appear to be backed by adequate resources. Expansive ends and limited means still constitute a central dilemma of American grand strategy.

Today, a prosperous South Korea seldom remembers the Korean war, pursues a romantic vision of reunification with the North, and as recent mass demonstrations show, seems gripped by the menace of U.S. beef. China has made a transition from Mao's primitive Communist socialism to a flourishing fascistic state capitalism. It has begun a long-term program of amassing naval power that could lead to the occupation of Taiwan in the not-so-distant future.

As in 1951, the United States remains the world's major defender of liberal values, possessing enormous firepower and technical capabilities. It also has an undersized military, allies even more reluctant to share in heavy lifting, and a far more uncertain sense of national purpose. ♦

BCA

Flex Time

When survival's at stake, are sound minds enough?

BY ABBY WISSE SCHACHTER

What would you expect of a book entitled *The Jewish Body*? Before the copy arrived at my door, I tried to predict its contents. What is a Jewish body? Are Jews even interested in bodies? Maybe this is a really short book.

Short it is. The text for this latest offering from the Jewish Encounters series runs no more than 250 pages. And yet, Emory anthropologist Melvin Konner manages to fill those pages with a stunning array of material.

The Jewish Body
by Melvin Konner
Schocken, 304 pp., $25

Abby Wisse Schachter is an editor at the New York Post.

How can you go wrong with a book that discusses circumcision of the penis by including multiple attractive drawings? Then, as part of a serious discussion of the history of this religious rite, Konner explains why a Jewish penis is "perfected" by "the fruitful cut." Good news for those of us married to circumcised men.

Konner has a fun section on "tough Jews"—all about boxers and gangsters. Did you know, for example, that Jewish boxers in America became superb defensive fighters "to avoid getting their faces bruised which would alert their Orthodox parents to what they were doing"? And speaking of Jewish faces, Konner provides a

short history of rhinoplasty and reveals that we have a Jew to thank for the creation of what he dubs a "Jewish bodily fiction"—the nose job.

It turns out, the impact Jacques (*nee* Jakob) Joseph had on Jewish life, when he developed the surgery in the late 19th century, is terrifically serious. As Konner explains, for centuries the Jew had been defined by the Christian European world for his differences. He was defined by those physical attributes that made him other, ugly, weak, despised. The nose was one of the most obvious of those negative attributes.

"Medical and 'scientific' references to the Jewish nose go back at least to 1850," Konner writes, "when Robert Knox . . . described it as 'a large, massive, club-shaped, hooked nose, three or four times larger than suits the face. . . . Thus it is that the Jewish face can never [be], and never is, perfectly beautiful."

At first, Konner tells us, rhinoplasty wasn't considered an acceptable surgery because, unlike, say, correcting club feet, altering a nose was cosmetic. But over time the argument put forth was that a nose job made such a difference psychologically that it could be considered healing: "Disabled people were being helped," Konner explains. Jewish bodies were being made to look less Jewish, allowing the Jew in the body to blend more fully into the surrounding society. For some Jews, the nose job was freedom.

Konner also has a spirited section on Jewish sex where he argues that, while there is no prohibition about this most basic bodily function, the religious authorities made themselves perfectly clear about the rules.

"Get it, yes, but for God's sake, get it under control," Konner says. "You don't do it outside of marriage, with a child or a relation, by yourself, with a same sex partner, or during menstruation, but that's just for starters." He also includes a long section on Jewish literature about Jewish bodies from Franz Kafka to Isaac Bashevis Singer, Philip Roth and Cynthia Ozick.

Late in the book he discusses "Jewish genes," and from that vantage point makes a passionate—if short and somewhat out of place—plea for Jewish reproduction. He points out that the Jewish birthrate is lower than replacement levels. In response he recommends that the official Jewish community in America provide funds to help families pay for having more children.

> A serious money prize for the third, and more for the fourth, fifth, and sixth babies? Free Viagra? Jews should consider whatever it takes to put more Jewish bodies on the planet.

These subjects are certainly interesting, but the book isn't really about any of them. The title actually refers to the two extremes of the 20th century for Jewish bodies: the worst that was ever done *to*

Hank Greenberg, 1939

Jewish bodies, the Holocaust, and the best metamorphosis Jews have ever performed, turning themselves *into* robust bodies and giving birth to the state of Israel. Konner is interested in the nadir of the Jewish body vs. its apex.

The author repeats the same point throughout the book: Jews did weak for 18 centuries; they did weak better than anyone else. Jews built up their minds and built up the importance, even the necessity, of the mind over the body for generations and generations. They learned Talmud, they learned medicine, they learned law. They read, they wrote, they argued. The Jewish mind is vast, nimble, and replete with knowledge—knowledge that has had an impact on the world far beyond the planet's Jewish population.

And yet, in the blink of an eye, these physically weak but mentally strong Jewish bodies were destroyed by what Konner calls the Nazis' "public health project." The great experiment of Jewish "mind" culminated in Jewish bodies being burned, gassed, tortured, shot, smashed against walls, thrown into pits, rotted, and sickened to death.

On the heels of that catastrophe, though, and even before the Shoah had begun, Konner says the tide turned and Jews began to realize that mind alone was not working. Early advocates for the Jewish body included Max Nordau, who argued for Jewish club gymnastics, A.D. Gordon for "brawny grappling with the soil," and, of course, Theodore Herzl, who developed the whole idea of a Jewish state as a means of normalizing the Jewish condition.

Jews had to go back to Zion to "perform redemptive physical labor," Konner writes, "build up their strength, and raise their hands in their own defense." The reason? As Konner quotes Emma Lazarus, another early "body" Jew, so that "where the respect due to us cannot be won by entreaty, it may be commanded, and where it cannot be commanded, it may be enforced." These early Zionists, as Konner puts it, "called the Jewish people back to the life of the body and saved them."

Konner's argument in favor of Jews' using their bodies as well as their minds made me want to cheer: "The world has been, is, and will be a very dangerous place for Jews. They tried weakness—oh how they tried; indeed, they were better versed in it than anyone else on earth. Strength is better." His love and passion for Israel—for its reality as well as its conception—are especially worth savoring. He writes about how he opposed the war in Vietnam but loves Israeli military victories. You can practically see the joy on his face as he describes an Israeli young woman walking with him through Jerusalem listing the different characteristics of the automatic weapons they see slung over the shoulders of the Jewish men and women (Israeli Army soldiers) they pass on the street.

Konner adores the kick-their-asses

NEWSCOM

Jewish body, and he says so. And then he goes and destroys his carefully crafted argument by insisting there must be a Palestinian state. Konner seems to be saying to the reader: Yes, Jews will be killed if they don't defend themselves; this is what happened over and over and over again. Yes, Israel is the only solution for Jews because, as he writes, "survival on this planet depends not on mind alone, but on mind and body, argument and physical force, learning and fighting." But don't think that just because I'm saying all this lovely stuff about Jewish strength that I'm not a good liberal. Yes, there must be a Jewish state, but the Palestinians are deserving, too. They are also victims and they must have their justice, too.

How else to explain including any mention of the Palestinians when justifying Israel's existence. What, after all, does one thing have to do with the other? It is the Arab argument *against* Israel's existence that has shackled the Jewish body politic to the fate of the Palestinians. Konner is mistaken to connect the two, and worse, he weakens his case for the Jewish state by suggesting that Israel's legitimacy is tied to whether or not another Arab state is established in order to satisfy the claims of Israel's enemies. Konner is most comfortable with Jewish strength so long as it is a response to Jewish victimhood.

The Jewish Body would have been that much more successful had Konner chosen, instead, to emphasize an understanding of the Jewish body that he mentions but doesn't dwell on: Jewish peoplehood. "DNA technology traces history in the genes and confirms much, but not all, of what the Jews have thought about themselves," he writes. "Jewish peoplehood is a reality, and it traces to an origin in roughly the place and time, if not the exact manner, that Jews have always believed in."

That is, we were formed into a group millennia ago, in roughly the area where Jewish sovereignty was reestablished in 1948. Jews need Israel not because of the Nazis, and not because of generations of anti-Semitism or persecution. Jews need Israel, and we need our strong Jewish bodies, because we are a people: the Jewish people, the people of Israel. ♦

KEYSTONE / CORBIS

BCA

Ideas in Concrete

The law of unintended consequences applies to architecture. **BY JAMES GARDNER**

Le Corbusier, ca. 1945

No one man has exerted greater influence on the way the world looks today than Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, known to history as Le Corbusier. From the rotting remains of the Cabrini Green projects in Chicago to the slums of São Paolo and the state buildings in Chandigarh, it is hard to avoid the improbable influence of this rebellious scion of humble Swiss Calvinist stock.

Though there has never been a lack of books about Le Corbusier, even while he lived, this new biography claims to be the first to cover in detail his entire life, which began in La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1887 and ended in 1965 with his drowning (possibly self-willed) in the waters of the French Riviera.

Le Corbusier
A Life
by Nicholas Fox Weber
Knopf, 848 pp., $45

Weber, who has previously tackled the lives of Matisse and Balthus, among others, has not written a scholarly biography of his latest subject. Because Le Corbusier's urban and architectural ideas have been so widely discussed already, the author's treatment of these issues feels perfunctory. Rather, the strength and novelty of this book, nearly 850 pages

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long, is that it thoroughly mines the architect's correspondence with his mother, to whom Weber had unique access. And because she died at nearly 100 years old, those letters cover most of Le Corbusier's career. The abundant citations have been ably translated by Richard Howard.

Without being hostile to his subject, Weber depicts Le Corbusier as something of a hustler whose entire career was an ongoing overcompensation for his sundry insecurities, his fear of impotence and his desire, even when he was 60 and world famous, to impress his mother. The result of such an approach is to turn Le Corbusier into a charming rogue, all too human in his foibles and his naked ambition. But this impression is largely a consequence of the author's relying so heavily on Le Corbusier's correspondence with his mother. And while Weber draws on other sources, readers would have benefited from seeing Le Corbusier a little more from the outside, as a public man.

Biographers often need to be reminded that the public man and the private man are two halves of the same human whole, that the former is not (as writers like Weber are inclined to believe) merely the mask of the latter. That said, Weber deserves credit for allowing his readers, when they lay down his lengthy book, to feel as though they now know Le Corbusier.

Le Corbusier's success challenges the notion that one's childhood has anything to do with one's subsequent career. Le Corbusier's impish bohemianism, his ardent sensualism and acrobatic self-promotion ran completely contrary to his Swiss Calvinist upbringing, which seemed to have been designed to suffocate any creative urge before it could ever arise. Both his mother and his father, a watchmaker, seemed satisfied with their modest lot in life, and they viewed with gravest misgivings the artistic aspirations of Édouard and his older brother Albert, a composer.

The one thing that Le Corbusier grasped from a young age was the need to get as far away from La Chaux-de-Fonds, and as quickly, as possible. The first order of business, on graduating from high school, was to reinvent himself. A tall, striking figure with cropped hair and jughead ears, he soon started calling himself Le Corbusier, a variant of the name of one of his ancestors, Lecorbésier. He also began to wear those goofy round glasses that became his signature and that, four generations later—for no particular reason—continue to influence the eyewear of "progressive" architects around the world.

Corbusier's 'Radiant City,' Reze

By his early twenties, he was traveling extensively around Europe in his determination to become a great painter, as well as a great architect. He worked briefly with Peter Behrens in Berlin, and then with Auguste Perret in Paris, the city he would call home for most of his life.

This distance from his birthplace had the beneficial result of compelling him to provide a running commentary on his career in the form of his correspondence, first with both parents and then (at his father's relatively early death) with his mother alone. Though he does appear to have had a deep affection for his parents, his openness in writing to them about his sexual insecurities is so startling, even today, that one can almost believe he was trying to provoke them. As soon as he had any money he began, in Weber's recounting, to frequent brothels with rare zeal. And as his fame grew, he would have many amorous affairs—with Josephine Baker, among others—though his philandering does not appear to have disturbed his long and happy marriage to his frequently inebriated wife, Yvonne.

Inevitably, the aspiration of a book like this is to shed light on Le Corbusier's architecture through revelations about his character. But to that end, the character that is revealed here is rife with paradox. At the most superficial level, the pale, denuded façades and the structural austerity of Le Corbusier's most classical works, like his Villa Savoye (1929), might seem to have something to do with the austerity of his Calvinist background. And yet his latest works, such progenitors of Brutalism as the chapel at Ronchamp (1954) and the Monastery at Sainte Marie de La Tourette (1960) attest to a willful and wayward individualism that is diametrically opposed to the impersonal machine aesthetic of his earlier works.

One of Weber's most useful revelations is that, even as Le Corbusier was designing his austere Villa Savoye, he was no more given to personal or emotional austerities than Picasso had been when, two decades earlier, he pioneered his arid brand of Analytic Cubism. For Le Corbusier, no

ROGER VIOLLET / GETTY IMAGES

less than for Picasso, the rejection of sentiment and the corresponding embrace of a machine aesthetic, far from being a rejection of emotion, were the passionate forms in which (at least in the 1920s) he expressed his contentious personality. That same spirit would express itself, in terms closer to Le Corbusier's true character, in the Brutalist works from the end of his life.

The one element of his career that seems plausibly "Calvinist" is his indefatigable industry. One hesitates to call this a work ethic, since he labored less out of any moral conviction than out of a deeply felt need to be always busy. Surely few people in the 1930s and 1940s traveled as often in ships, planes, and even dirigibles as Le Corbusier, who visited Brazil, India, the United States, Algeria, Japan, and any other place that held out the promise of a client, often a government ministry, that would let him build.

For a man as passionate about most things as Le Corbusier appears to have been, it is odd that he seems to have been essentially apolitical. To some of his more traditionally minded opponents, Le Corbusier was a dangerous figure because he had visited the Soviet Union and, being Le Corbusier, strove mightily to ingratiate himself with any commissar who would let him realize his grand projects. But to those on the left, Le Corbusier was equally suspect, not only because he built villas for wealthy clients but because he had few scruples about working (or, some might say, collaborating) with the Vichy government during World War II.

Even if Le Corbusier's most seminal ideas were articulated a generation before that conflict ended, it was in the aftermath of the war that his influence reached its zenith. This influence was threefold: It consisted in developing the modernist villa as an architectural typology, in fostering the aesthetic of both the International Style and Brutalism, and in creating the theoretical foundations for the dominant form of Modernist urbanism in the West and in the developing world well into the 1970s.

The emergence of the modern villa is of marginal importance, while Brutalism has dwindled into a period taste, and the International Style had many authors beside Le Corbusier. It is rather in his urbanism that Le Corbusier was most transformational. Curiously, perhaps tragically, the roots of his ideas can be seen as profoundly anti-urban. Influenced, in large measure, by Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement at the end of the 19th century, Le Corbusier rationalized that the ideal city would integrate the space and greenery of the country in the form of his signature tower-in-a-park complexes. Corollary to this was his stated aim, in the infamous Plan Voisin, to bulldoze much of Paris out of existence to make way for such towers. Mercifully, that never happened in the French capital; but how many other urban areas, including Manhattan under Robert Moses, fared far worse.

The defining aspect of Le Corbusier's urbanism, like much of his own architecture and the architecture he inspired, is that it all looked plausible enough on paper, especially before it was ever put into practice. Perhaps it was only by having these ideas made flesh that we could come to understand just how dreary and soul-crushing a concrete structure can be, just how menacing to the social fabric a community, divorced from the life of the street and the larger shape of the city.

But now that such structures have been realized, there can no longer be any doubt. ♦

BCA

Anti-Hero Worship

A German novelist turns the literary world upside-down. **BY SUSANNE KLINGENSTEIN**

"We have to be grateful for each writer to whom power is denied," said Daniel Kehlmann, one of Germany's rising literary stars. The setting for Kehlmann's remark was a poetics lecture at the University of Göttingen in 2006—the very place, ironically, where seven professors (among them the fairytale collectors Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm) were sacked from their jobs in 1837 because they objected vigorously to the abolition of the constitution and their political disempowerment as citizens.

Me and Kaminski
A Novel
by Daniel Kehlmann
Translated by
Carol Brown Janeway
Pantheon, 208 pp., $21.95

Kehlmann's point, though, was that Germans are misguided in their awed reverence for Great Writers, and in their assumption that the world would be a better place if such creators of high culture had a say in politics:

> My god, Hölderlin and Kleist embraced patriotism and the German Nation, Kipling the English Empire; Claudel and Yeats were half-fascists; Pound and Benn whole ones; Céline and Jünger I don't even want to talk about, and Aragon, Eluard, Brecht, Heinrich Mann and Feuchtwanger and many dozens of Europe's premier intellectuals wrote letter or reverential submission to and hymns about Josef Stalin. Writers have two main traits: they dislike pragmatics and they are often opportunists.

Susanne Klingenstein is a lecturer in the Harvard/MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology.

This is why the Germans now revere the 34-year-old Kehlmann: He releases them from culture worship by telling them that the emperors are naked.

Kehlmann's point about the political shortsightedness and moral fallibility of great writers was secondary to his claim that creative writers are not professionals and usually don't know very much, and that it is utterly useless "to drag every hopeful creator of two short stories and three poems . . . before a microphone and demand explanations about writing as such (*an sich*) and how he, in particular, deals with it."

Kehlmann knows what he is talking about. As his entertaining, stingingly witty, and philosophically sophisticated 2005 novel *Measuring the World*, about the 18th-century mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss and the explorer Alexander von Humboldt, was developing into a best-seller, Kehlmann was being mercilessly beleaguered by the cultural recyclers who build careers out of hyping or rehashing original products and getting their creators to show off their secrets and to reveal whether it is really "all true."

The siege culminated in Kehlmann's appointment to deliver the poetics lectures at Göttingen. The former pupil of Jesuits in Vienna, and later student of philosophy, opened his lectures slyly by saying, "I know nothing" (*Ich habe keine Ahnung*), and then argued that a careful reader can move from ignorance to insight by following the trails of motives and their variations that texture literary works like musical compositions.

This is certainly true of Kehlmann's own novels. *Measuring the World*, about a cranky, womanizing, brilliantly theoretical Gauss and an obsessive-compulsive, sexless, yet reality-addicted Humboldt, was a minutely structured composition demonstrating the convergence of parallel universes in the joyless perfection of Weimar's great classical period. What that period lacked, Kehlmann argued somewhat paradoxically, was the playfulness of art and the acknowledgment of the great cost, the blood, sweat, and tears, of cultural production. In great art, these opposites must coalesce.

Kehlmann's 2003 novel *Me and Kaminski*, which has just been published here in Carol Brown Janeway's smooth translation, is also a tightly composed and highly controlled work. Narrated seemingly without any great effort, *Me and Kaminski* purports to be a light, airy send-up of the ambitious young critic type who, tottering on the brink of despair on account of his own insignificance, decides to remedy his situation and achieve instant fame by outing the darkest secrets of an established cultural icon.

Daniel Kehlmann

The moral villain in Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost* was one Richard Kliman who, under the guise of wishing to restore the now long dead writer E.I. Lonoff to the literary stature he deserves, craves to establish his own fame. The vehicle to accomplish both is to reveal Lonoff's incestuous relationship with his half-sister (as the biographer Steven Kellman revealed Henry Roth's incestuous relationship with his sister, causing Henry Roth's writer's block). Kliman stalks the narrator Zuckerman who, consumed by envy, is forced to recognize in the virile predator a version of his former irritating self.

In the hands of the 75-year-old Philip Roth, the theme of young critic and old artist turns into a moving essay not about the Jamesian theme of life versus art but about the impotent jealousy that the old harbor toward the selfish young, a burning envy that a feigned altruism barely conceals and red-hot rage cannot relieve.

Kehlmann, lacking Roth's perspective on old age, uses callous youth to his advantage and turns the parasitic critic into his narrator. Thus, when at the very beginning his critic Sebastian Zöllner awakens in a railway car from "unquiet dreams," the reader finds himself confined to the consciousness of a "monstrous vermin." These are Kafka's words from the opening of "The Metamorphosis," to which Kehlmann's opening paragraph alludes.

One of the great pleasures here is to discover along the way the multitude of hidden literary allusions to Borges and Nabokov and Kafka. Zöllner's name, the French *douanier* (as in Henri le douanier Rousseau), or the less poetic American "customs officer," alludes to lines by Bertolt Brecht that one ought to thank a *Zöllner* for forcefully demanding and extracting wisdom from the wise. Zöllner, the man who collects tolls from border crossers—that is to say, of dead and forgotten artists who wish to reenter life and fame—is a 31-year-old art critic for an undistinguished German newspaper. He is on his way to the reclusive mountain abode of a once famous but now forgotten painter, Manuel Kaminski, whose biography he wants to write.

Laced with juicy autobiographical nuggets that Zöllner wants to extract in a series of interviews from the (purportedly) blind and sick painter about his life in Paris and his studies with Matisse, Zöllner plans to release

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his biography and cash in right after Kaminski's death—that is, as he passes from one realm into another—and when attention to Kaminski is revived in the press.

When Zöllner arrives, he realizes that access to Kaminski is controlled by his daughter. He bribes the housekeeper to let him into the house while the daughter is away. He searches the house, finds a last series of abandoned paintings depicting grimacing faces in the cellar and some letters in the office, and finally, at the novel's halfway point, he faces the old man. Now the narrative takes off and, in a series of unexpected shifts, the painter takes the would-be critic for the ride of his life.

As Zuckerman in Kliman, the old painter recognizes in the young predator a version of his youthful self and knows the young man's game. He'd once played it himself. His purported blindness masks insight, whereas the critic's pretended insight masks total blindness to the games played in the arts. All is deceit and elusive reality. *Mundus vult decipi*. Painter and critic deserve each other, and their lives turn out to be parallels that meet on the brink of infinity. Kaminski's central work is a vast series of paintings depicting mirrors facing each other at odd angles, opening vistas into endless self-reflected emptiness.

At the end of *Me and Kaminski*, having raced from the southern to the northern border of Germany in pursuit of the past, painter and critic take leave of each other at the zero point of their lives. Destitute and deprived of all illusions, they part at the shore of the endless, blank North Sea. It is a scenic cliché, an enactment of one of Kaminski's paintings, pointing forward to his death and back to Goya's marvelous painting of a lone dog's head suspended on the border between light and dark. The allusion undermines the cliché: Only the cynic can play and survive the game of art.

Daniel Kehlmann's witty, learned, and hugely entertaining novel raises the hope that German literature is done navel-gazing, and once more ready to play in the big leagues. ♦

Right Faces

The alternative universe of Patrick Henry College.

BY WILLIAM MEYERS

JONA FRANK / CHRONICLE BOOKS / 2008

Between 1990 and 2004, the 105 members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities grew by 71 percent. In comparison, all public four-year campuses grew by about 13 percent. The Christian schools offer an alternative to the academic and social vulgarities of secular campuses and, in a buyers' market for Ph.D.s, have enormously improved the caliber of the education they provide. Given the fear and derision with which the sort of people associated with these schools are usually characterized in the media, Jona Frank's book of photographs is, well, a revelation.

Right
Portraits from the Evangelical Ivy League
by Jona Frank
Chronicle, 128 pp., $35

Jona Frank is a West Coast photographer whose previous book, *High School*, explored the trauma and glory of adolescence. The subjects of *Right* are students at Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia, the "Harvard for homeschoolers," whose mission is to prepare "Christian men and women who will lead the nation." The students Frank depicts, several with perfect SAT scores, have ambitions for careers in politics, media, and the arts, which

William Meyers's photo exhibition, The Water's Edge, *will be at the Alice Austen House Museum on Staten Island during March 1-May 1.*

Patrick Henry fosters with its rigorous liberal arts core curriculum. In Frank's color portraits, these young adults are neatly turned out, personable, and determinedly serious.

Frank works in the tradition of the great German portrait photographer August Sander: Most of her subjects are shown against representative backgrounds and acknowledge the photographer by facing the camera. There are some characteristics they have in common: They stand well, not slouching, twisting, or hunched over. With one possible minor exception, they are not fat. Their complexions are subject to the same eruptions as nonbelievers' their age. There are no facial piercings besides earrings on some of the women. No tattoos. Little makeup. The men habitually wear suits. None are grotesque. But as with many revelations, they can be hard to interpret.

"Elisa, 22," a government major, was shot with one of the school's red brick, colonnaded buildings out of focus in the background. Her light tan trench coat contrasts with the bright green lawn behind her. She stands in the belted trench coat with her arms crossed on her chest in a confident yet casual manner and looks straight ahead. Her features are regular—attractive, even—with her face framed by her dark shoulder-length hair. But her tightly drawn smile, with the merest suggestion of dimples, is enigmatic. It is far more sophisticated than the "say, cheese" smile Americans habitually wear before the camera, but there is something challenging about it, a suggestion reinforced by her knowing eyes.

One wonders what it is Elisa knows, what she is thinking, if she is framing an agenda.

Elisa differs from "Juli, 18," an education major, who wears a perpetual expression of bewildered innocence. Julie Schuttger has a fair complexion and reddish hair parted in the middle and gathered behind. She is one of three students Frank photographed with their families; the homes all appear well ordered and comfortable, if somewhat vanilla. The three families have a total of 24 children, none of whom seems to have the luxury of time to be bored.

'Juli, 18' & 'Roommates'

"Shant, 20," a public policy major, presents himself to the camera with a look of troubled concern. He stands on Patrick Henry's broad green campus with his hands in his pants pockets, wearing a blue jacket, blue shirt, and a pale yellow tie. He has thick, dark hair, expressive eyebrows and, like several other male students, chin whiskers.

Shant explains in an interview why he protested the firing of a professor by Chancellor Michael Farris. Farris, a lawyer famed for his defense of homeschooling parents, founded Patrick Henry; he thought the professor's teaching might undermine the students' Christian beliefs, but the firing prompted several other professors to resign in sympathy. Shant is articulate as he explains his relationship with Farris and other faculty, the petition he circulated, his discussions with other students, and his unresolved feelings about the college.

There are pictures in *Right* of couples on their way to the Liberty Ball, of campus marriage rituals, and of interns working on Capitol Hill, in the White House, for political campaigns, at *Slate*, and Fox News. Students come to Patrick Henry College because they want to affect the culture, and they are prepared there to do so. Almost all are political and social as well as religious conservatives, and their impact will be felt first on the right.

Consider, then, "Will, 21," a history major, and the subject of one of Frank's most compelling portraits.

Will is handsome, blue-eyed, neatly groomed, smartly dressed, and, I find, a bafflement. Frank's camera was at about chest level, so Will looms up slightly. His attention is fixed on the camera, but his expression reveals nothing; he is withholding himself. This is a bit disconcerting because you feel he has something to say. But for the present Will is just obliging the photographer—and waiting for his time to come around. ♦

JONA FRANK / CHRONICLE BOOKS / 2008

Unashamedly Funny

Sometimes a comedy is designed to make us laugh.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

A few weeks ago, an unheralded movie called *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* shocked Hollywood by earning nearly $33.8 million in its opening weekend. *Paul Blart* then continued to shock Hollywood by holding strong in its second and third weekends rather than dropping off precipitously, which is usually what happens when a bad movie opens big and the people who went to see it tell their friends to avoid it like the plague.

Paul Blart: Mall Cop
Directed by Steve Carr

As of this writing, *Paul Blart* has earned $100 million against a production cost of $26 million, and will probably top out around $120 million. While American comedies often do poorly overseas, the broad nature of *Paul Blart* means it might make a lot of money abroad. If so, it will end up a phenomenally profitable piece of work.

This wasn't supposed to happen. *Variety*, which still considers itself the show-business bible even though by now it is more like the show-business *Dianetics*, called *Paul Blart* "an almost shockingly amateurish one-note-joke." It was little advertised. Its own distributor hoped it might earn maybe half of what it made in its first few days. As a result, the term "blarted" is now being bandied about to describe the effect of a terrible movie that crowds out more deserving fare, as in "you've been blarted."

Very funny. Only here's the thing: So is *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*. Well, maybe not *very* funny, but pretty funny, with a really winning performance by Kevin James in the title role. James, who starred in an intermittently engaging sitcom called *The King of Queens* for nine years, made a surprising jump to the screen as Will Smith's sidekick in the romantic comedy *Hitch*. He is the only performer ever to upstage Smith in one of Smith's own movies.

James began as a stand-up comedian, so range is not his strong suit. Having played a shleppy fat guy lovesick for a celebrity in *Hitch*, and a shleppy fat guy fireman widower who lives for his kids in *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry*, here he plays a shleppy divorced fat guy lovesick for a beautiful girl who lives for his kid and wants to be a New Jersey state trooper.

Paul Blart is James's first full-fledged loser character—a truly pathetic 40-year-old living with his obese mother and obese daughter who logs onto a dating website to find that he has no messages and no matches. (His Mexican wife married him for a green card, got pregnant to make it look good, then took off.) He fails the state trooper test again and again because he is so hypoglycemic he faints in the middle of the obstacle course he is running quite brilliantly.

Blart is a study in humorlessness. He takes his job as a security guard at a mall in West Orange, N.J., with a seriousness bordering on fanaticism. While the other guards are falling asleep and drinking on the job, he is revving himself up for Black Friday, the monster shopping day that comes the day after Thanksgiving.

James revels in Paul's loserdom. The movie is an endless procession of fat jokes. Now, I am usually rather sensitive about fat jokes, for reasons having to do with my own avoirdupois issues. But I have to admit, these are pretty good ones. But the most inspired visual gags here come not from James's bulk, but from his mode of transportation.

His costar is a Segway, the two-wheeled pogo stick-like conveyance that caused a frenzy a few years ago when no one knew what it was but everybody knew it had eaten up $100 million in development costs. The Segway has, indeed, caught on only in places like Disney World, where staffers have to travel some distance in areas where cars are not allowed. Blart goes up and down and around and sideways on the Segway, and at one particularly clever moment, rises from the gigantic play pit full of rubber balls riding the thing as though it were a dolphin breaching the surface of the ocean's waters.

Blart is pathetic, but he's a perfectly decent guy and knows the mall so well he is able to challenge a bunch of bad guys who take it over. His triumph is on a very small scale, like the movie itself; but as it pretends to nothing more, it is a rare production that actually exceeds the scope of its ambitions.

COLUMBIA PICTURES

The key to understanding the success of *Paul Blart*, though, is its modesty in a different sense. There's nary a curse word, nor is there (despite its title) a flatulence joke, or an exposed or near-exposed breast. He is an innocent, and so is the movie that surrounds him, and it seems clear that audiences have been hungering for a comedy that doesn't force them to cover their own eyes in discomfort, their children's eyes in embarrassment, or their grandmother's in shame. ♦

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

"Our nation is ready to hold talks based on mutual respect and in a fair atmosphere."
—Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, February 10, 2009

Parody

deniers.

ARCH 10, 2009 *ONE DOLLAR CHEAP*

OBAMA AND AHMADINEJAD MEET IN 'FAIR ATMOSPHERE'

Two Leaders Enjoy Magic Kingdom, Avoid Haunted Mansion

By DAVID E. SANGER

ORLANDO — When Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad expressed a desire for direct talks with President Barack Obama in a "fair atmosphere," U.S. diplomats did not initially take his wish literally. But after numerous negotiation sessions between American and Iranian officials, it became evident that Mr. Ahmadinejad in fact wanted to meet at a fair. "And what better fair than Disney World?" said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Ahmadinejad was optimistic about concluding agreements on issues such as terrorism and nuclear energy but delayed matters until he was done touring the Magic Kingdom. Said the Iranian president: "First we see the Magic Carpets of Aladdin, then the Dumbo Ride, then Pirates of the Caribbean, and then we can discuss the impending extinction of the Zionist entity." State Department spokesperson Robert Wood reminded reporters that choosing Disney World was a significant step: "If President Obama was not serious about a dialogue with Iran, we could have simply met at Six Flags Great America or Kings Dominion. And meeting at Busch Gardens would have certainly sent the wrong signals."

And while both American and Iranian officials seemed to enjoy Big Thunder Mountain Railroad and the Jungle Cruise, the Iranian delegation did have some complaints. Parliament speaker Ali Larijani called the Swiss Family Treehouse and the Carousel of Progress "an utter waste of time." After the latter show ended, said Mr. Larijani, "We were running hazardously to 'It's a Small World.'" Mr. Ahmadinejad himself described the Country Bear Jamboree as "disturbing" and was disappointed to learn Space Mountain was not a nuclear facility. And despite Mr. Obama's assurances that the Haunted Mansion is not real, the Iranian president found the very notion of a "house of spirits" to be "unnatural" and refused to enter.

Before tomorrow's sit-down at Cinderella's Royal Table, the two presidents will stroll down Main Street USA and visit the Hall of Presidents, where Mr. Ahmadinejad says he plans on hurling insults at the animatronic statues for at least thirty

Continued on Page A8

Mike Matus for Worldwide Image

Presidents Obama and Ahmadinejad meet in the Magic Kingdom. "We would never allow our rodents to grow this large in my country," said the Iranian leader.

Daschle Returns to Quiet Life of Lobbying

New clients include Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, Madoff

the weekly Standard
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