the weekly Standard

MARCH 2, 2009

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THE AGE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY
MATTHEW CONTINETTI

THE PATH OF REALISM OR THE PATH TO FAILURE

ELLIOTT ABRAMS on laying a foundation for peace in Palestine

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the weekly Standard

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

A 'Nation of Cowards'?

Our nation's first African-American attorney general, Eric Holder, has been getting some flak for his remarks the other day in a speech to employees of the Justice Department: "Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot," he told them, "in things racial we have always been, and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards."

As readers can imagine, many Americans didn't appreciate their country being characterized as "a nation of cowards," especially on the subject of race by a black attorney general appointed by America's first black president, and reacted to Holder's remarks with anger.

The Scrapbook was a bit angry too: Barack Obama's race was largely incidental in his presidential campaign, and has been a source of national pride, not consternation, since his election; the same could be said, to some lesser degree, about Eric Holder's appointment to the Department of Justice. The Scrapbook also remembers when Phil Gramm was widely excoriated last year—and forced to quit the McCain campaign—for calling us a "nation of whiners" about the economy.

Is Holder the beneficiary of a double standard? Of course he is.

Here, however, The Scrapbook will advance a somewhat contrarian view: We think that Holder's point is a fair one, but was poorly expressed. What he probably meant to convey was that Americans, of both races, are reluctant to publicly discuss racial issues in candid terms, which is plausible to some extent. But this is a case of the American people's good manners, or their choosing to avoid unnecessary conflict, not cowardice. Nor does it apply to every American: For example, President Obama's longtime spiritual counselor, the Reverend Jeremiah ("God Damn America!") Wright, can hardly be accused of refraining from discussing race in candid terms.

What really offends The Scrapbook is less the "nation of cowards" line than the speech itself. Banal, bumptious, meandering, a wearisome parade of hackneyed phrases and meaningless, sometimes incoherent, observations, it leads us to a shocking conclusion: Holder must have written it himself! Full of mixed metaphors and too many internal contradictions to count, it features such observations as this gem, which will keep students of rhetoric scratching their heads for years to come:

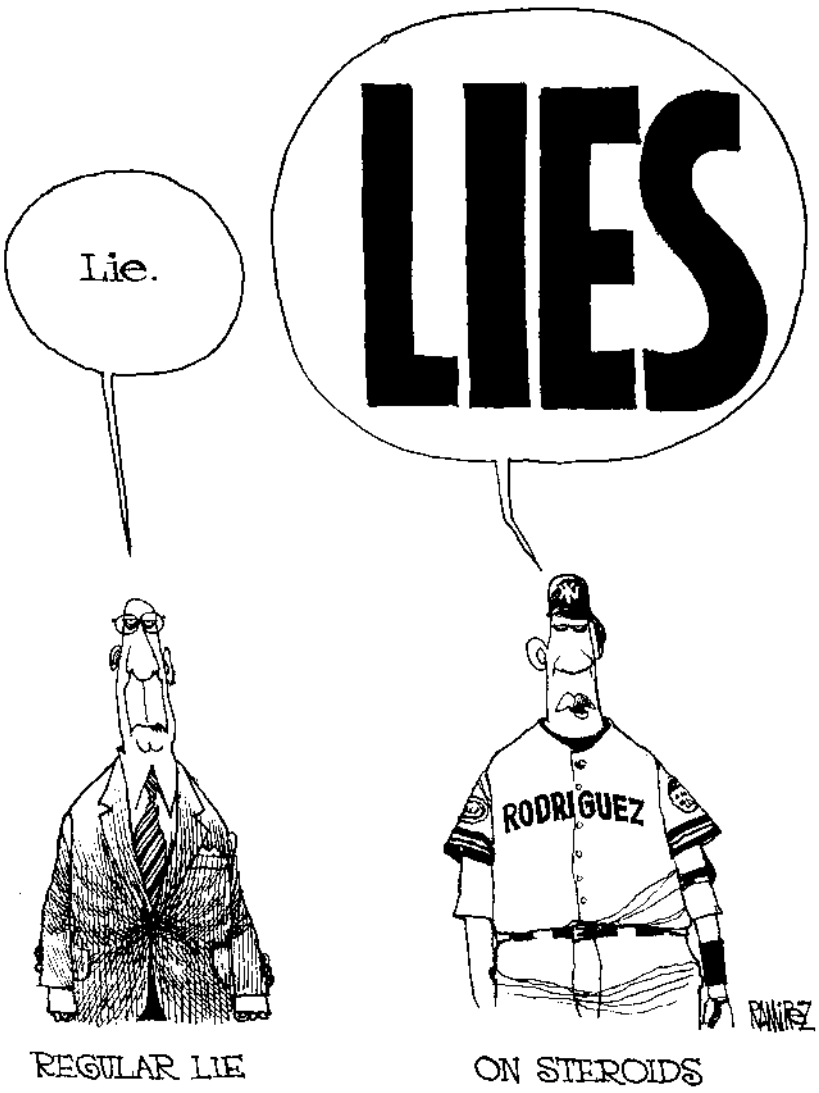
> Today the link between the black experience and this country is still evident. While the problems that continue to afflict the black community may be more severe, they are an indi-

Need a Pied-à-Terre in D.C.?

In the continuing saga of Iceland's bankruptcy, a new development caught The Scrapbook's eye this week: An MLS listing for the house, shown below, at 2443 Kalorama Road in Washington. The 10-bedroom, 7-bathroom Tudor mansion on Kalorama has been the residence of Iceland's ambassador to the United States since 1965. In late January, it was put up for sale, with an asking price of $5.65 million. Amenities include a recently remodeled main kitchen, three fireplaces, walk-in cold storage, staff quarters, a heated four-car garage, and a swimming pool.

Olafur Sigurdsson, the deputy chief of mission for the embassy, explains that the move is part of the government's radical attempt to save money. When Iceland's banking system collapsed, the government was left holding $61 billion of bank debt, and the country's Foreign Service was forced to cut its 2009 budget by 20 percent. Iceland plans to buy a smaller residence for the ambassador once the house sells, and other embassy staff will not be affected by the sale. Sigurdsson insists that this isn't a fire sale, saying that the home "will not be sold unless a reasonable price is offered."

We suspect "reasonable" may turn out to be somewhat less than list price. ♦



cation of where the rest of the nation may be if corrective measures are not taken. Our inner cities are still too conversant with crime but the level of fear generated by that crime, now found in once quiet, and now electronically padlocked suburbs, is alarming and further demonstrates that our past, present, and future are linked.

Translation: The problems of the black community are more severe now than in the past because suburbanites are racists and live behind electronically padlocked walls which cause people in the inner city to prey on each other.

Well, at least we know what the nation's top law enforcement officer believes is the cause of black-on-black crime in our nation: gated communities! And if Eric Holder continues to complain about Americans' "cowardice" on the subject of race, The Scrapbook has a piece of advice for him: The only reason he is attorney general—and delivering offensive orations during Black History Month—is that Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee were too polite to make an issue of his corrupt—and, dare we say, cowardly—advice to Bill Clinton to pardon the international fugitive Marc Rich, and didn't want to obstruct the nomination of our first African-American attorney general.

Once again, Eric Holder is the beneficiary of a double standard. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'And yet, somehow, this nerd-in-chief has ascended to a level of global cool uninhabited by any of his political forebears. The opening spread of a recent *Entertainment Weekly* cover story, titled 'President Rock Star,' neatly summarized the situation: 'He's bigger than Brangelina, bigger than Beyoncé . . . "("The Cool Presidency: An Inquiry into Obama's Hipness," Michelle Cottle, *New Republic*, March 4). ♦

'Obamaweek' Update

Last year The Scrapbook jokingly suggested that *Newsweek* was running so many hagiographic covers of Barack Obama, the magazine might as well rebrand itself *Obamaweek*. Now it looks as if the magazine's marketing department may be thinking along the same lines as The Scrapbook.

The latest issue (ironically with a rare, non-Obama cover—a collector's item!) contains a full page ad offering a 21-by-17 inch, "framed, matted and ready to hang" reprint of *Newsweek*'s two commemorative inauguration covers. It's dubbed a "one-of-a-kind collectible" which sounds like promotional moonshine, since we're guessing they will print as many hundreds of its kind as the market will bear. Yours for a mere $124.95.

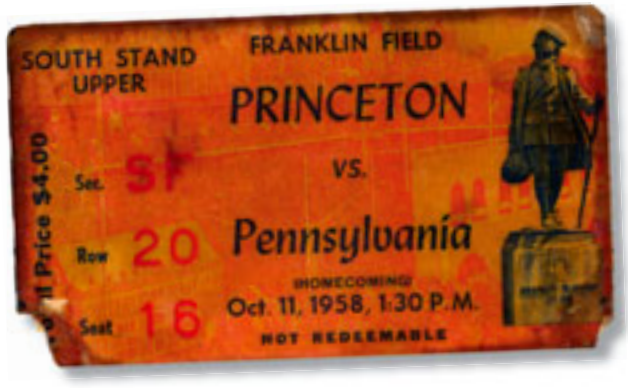
What's that? You say that sounds kind of expensive? Ah—but it's adorned with "a quote from *Newsweek* Editor Jon Meacham" and his signature! Cheap at the price. ♦

Casual

The Real Glory Game

Two books were published last year about the 1958 National Football League championship game between the New York Giants and the Baltimore Colts. This was the contest that, according to the subtitle of *The Glory Game*, "changed football forever" and has since been called, by popular consensus, the Greatest Game Ever Played. It took place on December 28, 1958, and Baltimore defeated New York, 23-17.

With all due respect to the authors and the late Johnny Unitas, the famous Baltimore quarterback, they're off by two months. The Greatest Game Ever Played took place in 1958, all right, but on October 11, not December 28, and in Philadelphia, not New York. And Princeton defeated the University of Pennsylvania, 20-14.



I know this because I was there, at Franklin Field on the Penn campus, in Section SF, Row 20, Seat 16, and I know all that because, as I write, I am looking at the ticket, now in slight disrepair but encased in laminate, on my desk. This was the first football game of any consequence I witnessed in my life—very nearly the first public spectacle I ever saw—but it is also a kind of personal milestone that, for whatever reason, still resonates 50 years later.

The reason, I suspect, is that the very fact of attending the game at all was exotic—by my standards, at any rate. I have no idea why my father, a Penn graduate but no sports fan, chose to go to this particular game, or why he decided to take me along; indeed, the whole episode was so uncharacteristic—my father was, to put it politely, deeply reserved and not especially fond of excursions with children—that it has always seemed to me far more consequential than it actually was.

Unfortunately, the mystery will never be solved, since nearly all the principals are long since dead: my father; his younger brother, another Penn graduate who was resident in Philadelphia and obtained the tickets; and a favorite cousin of mine, who accompanied us and sat beside me, and provides a footnote. Since very nearly everyone in my family had attended the University of Pennsylvania, my contrarian instincts impelled me to root for Princeton. This scandalized my cousin, who taunted me throughout the game with Princeton's initials (PU), but the gods are not mocked: Ten years later he graduated from Princeton, not Penn.

In 1958 the journey by automobile from the Maryland suburbs of Washington to West Philadelphia was not by interstate highway, and I recall being awakened in darkness to get on old Maryland Route 29 (and, later, the Pulaski Highway) for the slow, fitful progress through downtown Baltimore, across the Susquehanna River, into Wilmington and up the picturesque industrial stretch of the Delaware River—lit by the flames of the Sun Oil refineries—south of Philadelphia.

Franklin Field is a venerable stadium, seemed venerable at the time, and struck my eight-year-old eyes as being filled to capacity. But I recall my father surveying the crowd and asking his brother, half in jest, "Where is everybody?" He had attended Penn football games as long ago as the 1920s, when not only every available seat was filled but a moveable section of bleachers was installed on the 33rd Street side of the stadium.

I remember two things, in particular. First, the speed of the game was impressive—especially by today's televised standards—and the field was a churning sea of action, with orange stripes (Princeton), black jerseys (Pennsylvania), and referees in knickers. This was also an experimental season in college football scoring, when a post-touchdown kick yielded two extra points, not one.

I recall being impressed—even moved, if ever so slightly—by one ritual toward the end of the game. When it was obvious that Penn was destined to lose, spectators on our side of the stadium began singing "Hail, Pennsylvania" and waving mournful handkerchiefs in the air. It was a cold day, gray and slightly windy, and the effect was suitably elegiac.

Above all, however, I remember the Princeton quarterback, Fred Tiley, who was also captain of the team. I am in no position to judge how distinguished he was in the long history of Ivy League football, but on that day he seemed to be everywhere on the field, effortlessly taking the hikes, maneuvering skillfully to the left and right, throwing the occasional exquisite completed pass.

Not long ago, on a whim, I decided that he might like to know that somebody, somewhere remembered his sterling performance on that day. Fred Tiley is now an orthopedic surgeon in Oregon, and I'm pleased to report that my tentative email yielded a friendly telephone call and long reminiscence about the details of the game. It may not have been the Greatest Game Ever Played, I told him, but it certainly was the Greatest Game I Ever Saw.

Philip Terzian

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Summers Knows Best

Unions spur unemployment, and "there is no question" about it. "High union wages that exceed the competitive market rate are likely to cause job losses in the unionized sector of the economy." That is the unvarnished conclusion of one of the country's most admired economists. From 1970 to 1985, a state with average unionization had a rate of unemployment 1.2 percentage points higher than a state with no unions. This represented "about 60 percent of the increase in normal unemployment" in that period.

Okay, a finding from several decades ago may be a bit dated. But the phenomenon of how unionization affects unemployment isn't. Nor is the economist—Lawrence Summers, formerly president of Harvard and now President Obama's chief economic adviser. In this week's *Fortune*, Nina Easton calls him "the mastermind" of Obama's economic policy. His influence has limits, however, for Obama is aggressively promoting unionization at the worst possible time, smack in the teeth of a deepening recession with soaring unemployment.

Media attention has focused on the hot button issue of "card check." It would jettison labor's biggest impediment to signing up workers, the secret ballot. Naturally, it's labor's top priority in 2009. And though Obama and the vast majority of Democrats in Congress favor card check, its fate is unclear.

But Obama has already taken significant steps to aid unions. Steps that underscore his support for a surge in unionization. "I do not view the labor movement as part of the problem," he told union leaders at a White House event last month. "To me, it's part of the solution." Summers must have winced when he heard that.

Obama has issued four executive orders to benefit unions, nominated a union pawn as labor secretary, and picked a union lawyer to head the National Labor Relations Board. Aside from ramming card check through Congress, there's not much more he could have done in his first month in office to please labor leaders.

One executive order says private contractors on federal construction projects should hire union workers. This puts non-union contractors, especially small minority companies who compete by making lower bids than contractors with unionized workers, at a distinct disadvantage. Another order bars federal contractors from being reimbursed for expenses incurred in trying to persuade employees not to form a union. A third would force contractors to retain workers when taking over a project from another contractor.

These orders will have an immediate impact. Most (if not all) of the infrastructure projects funded in Obama's $787 billion stimulus plan will have union workers. Given the higher labor costs, this means fewer of the estimated 1 million construction workers currently unemployed will find work.

To make matters worse, the "prevailing wage" required on federal projects by the Davis-Bacon law will apply to all projects. This is supposed to be the average wage for construction workers in a region, but it usually turns out to be the higher union wage. So fewer workers will be employed even on non-union projects.

There's a double whammy here. Despite rising unemployment, a sharp limit is being imposed on hiring. And taxpayers will be required to pay considerably more for construction projects than necessary. This should be unacceptable in good times. In a recession, it's worse. This is flagrantly counterproductive.

Take one example. A non-union employer with the low bid wins the contract on a partially completed construction project. If the prior contractor had union workers, the new boss would have to retain them, their union wages, and possibly even their union.

As a devotee of the New Deal, Obama ought to have learned the lesson of increased unionization. After the Wagner Act of 1935 empowered labor organizers, unionization flourished and wages rose for those who had jobs. At the same time, unemployment went up.

If card check passes, this trend—more unions, fewer jobs—will shift into high gear. But the measure suffered a slight setback last week. Blue dog Democrats got House speaker Nancy Pelosi to postpone a vote until the Senate acts. The queasy moderates fear voting for an unpopular bill that could fail in the Senate. Labor leaders had hoped House approval would give card check a big boost in the Senate, where a handful of Democrats have voiced misgivings.

At the White House, organized labor's clout is still palpable. The president is indebted to union leaders for their lavish support for his campaign with money (hundreds of millions) and personnel (tens of thousands). And labor trumps Larry Summers. Too bad. On unions and unemployment, Summers knows best.

—Fred Barnes

A Good Thing Obama Could Do

For a change.

BY LAWRENCE B. LINDSEY

JASON SEILER

Barack Obama met his President's Day deadline for getting a stimulus bill to his desk. As soon as it was passed, the administration started backpedaling on how stimulating it will actually be. Instead of January's projection of 4 million jobs and unemployment peaking in the third quarter of 2009, White House officials are now on the talk shows saying that it will take years for its positive effects to show up. That is kind of late for admitting that their critics' observations about the bill were right. Maybe they'll do better next time, and if they keep on schedule we'll soon find out, as congressional action on setting a new energy policy should occur next month. Let us hope that March's action is more energizing than February's was stimulating.

What the administration and congressional Democrats didn't seem to get is that good policy is not about "shock and awe" with big numbers. Sharp pencils are needed to make sure the numbers actually work. And good policy starts with a clearly stated rationale for why government involvement is necessary.

When it comes to energy policy, the rationale is twofold. First is the adoption of a basic operating standard for the country as a whole. Second is the presence of an externality—dependence on foreign oil—where the true costs and benefits to the nation of using oil are not reflected in the price set by the market.

Consider the case of operating standards. The chemical makeup of the gasoline on which we run our cars is selected by government working in concert with the oil industry and the automakers. It really makes sense for it to be that way. Imagine if cars made by GM could run only on gasoline made and sold by Exxon while cars made by Ford ran on Chevron gasoline and Toyota ran only on Shell. Or imagine if Texas demanded one kind of car with one kind of gasoline while New

Lawrence B. Lindsey is a former governor of the Federal Reserve. His most recent book is What a President Should Know . . . but Most Learn Too Late.

York demanded another. Actually, some in Congress tried to create just such a Balkanized gasoline market by allowing each state to set its own rules, but the Bush administration blocked it. Standard setting makes sense.

There can be more than one standard, but there is a limit. The piece of the market that is subject to a given standard must be large enough to make using that standard economically viable. And, as the gasoline example demonstrates, economic viability means that you have to have a big enough part of the market to cover all areas of the product involved—enough cars to justify a car maker, enough gasoline stations to justify a brand of gasoline, and so forth. Congress is now confronting exactly this problem with regard to the transformation of a portion of the nation's trucking fleet from diesel to natural gas.

Such a conversion makes real economic sense. Take a sharp pencil to the economics of running a big 18-wheeler. A diesel powered truck costs about $105,000. A natural gas powered truck costs $175,000. A diesel powered truck gets about 6 miles per gallon and drives 100,000 miles per year, burning 17,000 gallons of diesel. A truck driving the same distance on natural gas would burn 2,100 cubic feet of natural gas. Diesel now costs about $2.50 per gallon and was much higher earlier this year, but even at the lower fuel price that means $42,500 in fuel costs. Gas at about $5 per cubic foot makes the annual fuel costs of the natural gas vehicle $10,500.

The fuel savings from using a natural gas truck is thus roughly $32,000 per year, which would pay for the added cost of the truck in just over two years. Call it roughly a 40 percent annual rate of return on money invested. So why, even in these credit starved times, doesn't the trucking industry begin the switch from diesel to natural gas?

This is where standards come in. A long-haul truck has to have a place to refill its tank, and there are about 9,600 truckstops nationally where most of them refuel. For the conversion of the trucks to work, these truckstops would need to add natural gas refueling to their existing diesel capacity. This isn't cheap, about $1 million each just to add natural gas, perhaps twice that to build a whole new station. So, the investment in refueling infrastructure would be roughly $10 billion.

It obviously makes no sense for an individual truck owner to make the switch. Even a single large trucking company with a fleet of, say, 20,000 trucks, would find the additional refueling investment way out of reach. And of course, owners of truck stops will only make the investment once a critical mass of trucks makes the conversion to natural gas. You might call it a chicken and egg problem, but it comes down to getting over the economic hurdle of setting a standard.

One way of doing this involves a part of what is widely known as the Pickens Plan, after famous Texas oilman T. Boone Pickens. Pickens proposes giving buyers of natural gas powered trucks a $70,000 tax credit for the next three years. That makes the decision to buy a natural gas powered vehicle almost a no-brainer. Pickens estimates that in three years we would have a critical mass of 350,000 natural gas powered trucks. With that prospect, there is a clear incentive for the nation's truckstops to provide the refueling capacity the fleet will need. Of course, once you get the refueling capacity in place, it becomes quite easy for future truck purchasers to take advantage of the cost saving—and 40 percent return on investment—that buying a new truck powered by natural gas provides even without the credit.

This brings us to the second reason for government involvement. The total three year cost of this tax credit —$70,000 for 350,000 trucks would be about $25 billion. That money is a direct transfer from the taxpayers of the nation to those pioneering truck fleet owners who are the first to adopt natural gas powered vehicles. Those same truck owners will also be capturing the saving from lower fuel costs. The reason that it is in the national interest to provide this tax break is that it will also provide a major saving to the nation's oil import bill and take us a significant way toward national energy independence. This is where the word "externality" comes into play; in particular, the benefits to the country of being closer to energy independence.

Again, consider some math. If just 350,000 trucks make the switch from diesel to natural gas over the next three years, America will end up importing 150 million fewer barrels of oil each year. How much is national energy security worth? Some commentators have suggested a $1 per gallon gas tax. Stated differently, people are saying that there is an "externality" in the form of benefits from national energy security that is worth $1 for every gallon of gasoline we use.

If you apply that measure to the Pickens Plan, the numbers become truly staggering. One dollar a gallon is worth $40 for each barrel of oil not imported. That amounts to $6 billion per year each and every year into the future on the plan's $25 billion investment—an annual rate of return of 24 percent. That's if you stop at just 350,000 trucks. When additional natural gas powered trucks are added to the fleet after the credit expires and after we already have the critical mass of trucks needed to justify refueling stations, all the energy saving gains come at no additional cost to the government. If one quarter of the nation's 4.5 million truck fleet converted—as might be expected after about 10 years or so—the total saving to the country would be three times as large. Even a much lower "externality" cost to energy security produces a significant rate of return. At 25 cents per gallon the real return is at least 6 percent, twice the current government borrowing cost.

So if the administration and Congress really want to produce good policy, rather than merely grabbing headlines by throwing taxpayer money around, they might do some similar arithmetic on their ideas. Converting the truck fleet to natural gas shows the approach taken by a smart businessman, not a politician. Moreover, the Pickens Plan contains a clear jus-

tification for government involvement—standard setting that the private market cannot do by itself. If it could, the fuel savings on natural gas trucks would already have driven the private market to use natural gas in large fleets.

The stimulus bill had provisions for the insulation of public buildings and similar energy retrofits. If this actually make sense from an energy saving point of view, one has to ask why government didn't do it in the first place. There is no standard-setting issue with regard to insulation. The heating and cooling of America's buildings, moreover, is not done with imported oil. Less than 5 percent of all the oil we import goes to such purposes. So the energy provisions of the stimulus bill were more about throwing other people's money around and grabbing headlines in the process than about energy security. Let's hope Congress and the administration take their time, pull out a sharp pencil and a calculator, and do a better job next time. ♦

Another Spectre Is Haunting Europe

The street may replace the voting booth as the way to force change. BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

As the worldwide slump deepens so must worries that the economic crisis will spill out onto the streets. In December, France's president Nicolas Sarkozy warned that *les évènements* of May 1968 could repeat themselves, and not only in the land of the torched auto. That same month IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn used the possibility of social unrest—in rich countries as well as poor—to drum up support for aggressive fiscal expansion. Now it's reported that the leaders of the EU's member states will spend part of their March summit discussing signs of growing disorder across their increasingly embattled union. After weeks in which Greece came close to anarchy, and riots broke out in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania (and, just outside the EU, in newly destitute Iceland), they are right to be concerned.

After roughly three decades of growth, European living standards are imploding, and once-rising expectations are dropping down with them. It's the sense of something lost that hurts the most. People can deal with living without that which they never had (which is why so many dirt poor countries languish without any meaningful regime change), but when prosperity vanishes, rage will go hand-in-hand with disappointment, frustration, and despair. Extra-legal protest, whether it's antiglobalization riots, spasms of racial or ethnic violence, or the repeated recourse to highway blockade, is already a part of the European political landscape, east and west. Under the circumstances it's hard to see how an economic slowdown on the current scale can continue without expanding this miserable tradition. The only question is where. Riga today. London tomorrow? Hamburg? Lille? Madrid? Dublin? A glance at the business pages suggests there are plenty of places to choose from.

It's a sad commentary on the situation Europe's leaders are now contemplating that some of the best clues as to what might happen there can be found in China and Russia. This reflects how the increasing reach of the EU within its member states has left the individual nations less free to respond to the demands of their peoples at a time of distress and imposed upon them a soft authoritarianism that increases the chance of disorder.

Start with China where, despite the extraordinary economic expansion of recent years, the promise of prosperity has spread far further than its achievement. According to some reports, there were nearly 80,000 "major" incidents of unrest in 2007, an inevitable response to the dislocations of helter-skelter growth in a People's Republic where hundreds of millions of the People have been left behind, deprived of what scant security they once enjoyed, and given no legal way of making themselves heard. And that was in the good times.

Since 2007, growth has slowed dramatically to an annualized rate of perhaps 6-7 percent. That's some way below the near double-digit pace usually thought necessary to sustain China's vast army of migrant workers (some 20 million of whom are said to have lost their jobs in the downturn). More ominous still are the large numbers of new university graduates: articulate, ambitious, and now unemployed. There is a good reason that the Chinese regime has put in place a $600 billion stimulus package. It's the same as the one that has led some of the country's elite to worry openly about the prospects for social peace.

There are at least some (faint and fiercely disputed) signs that all those billions might be having an effect, but no such comfort is available in Russia. The ruble is sharply down, and the economic growth that legitimized Putin's rule has dwindled to nothing. This winter has seen protests in Moscow, Vladivostok, and other cities, events largely unthinkable a year ago. Like the Chinese, the Russians are throwing money at the problem. And, like the Chinese, they are tightening up internal security. The rigidities of authoritarian rule may ultimately provoke a violent reaction, but so long as these regimes retain a monopoly of

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force and a willingness to use it, disorder can generally be stamped out: until, of course, the revolutionary moment. But that moment still seems far away.

In a broad collection of countries to Russia's west, the situation looks more immediately dangerous. These states are all nominally democratic, but the extent to which democracy, and the shared trust that must go with it, have really taken root is not only unclear, but also about to be put to a brutal test. Emerging from beneath the rubble of the Soviet imperium has been a long and wearying process, marked by setbacks and punctuated by crises, but somehow nearly always sustained by the dream of better times to come and, more practically, massive transfusions of Western money, both public and private. That was then. GDPs across the region are in free fall (if you prefer another cliché, the governor of Latvia's central bank has offered up "clinically dead" as a description of his country's economy), a situation that may finally sink the hulks of the Western European banks already perilously exposed to this part of the world and not, therefore, in a position to come up with any fresh cash.

Economic collapse and fragile democracies are a fissile combination, and that's before considering the opportunity they present for geopolitical mischief-making. The Ukrainian state is politically weak, ethnically divided, facing tricky elections, and, many analysts reckon, on the edge of insolvency. Under these promising circumstances Moscow would be most unlikely to object to a destabilizing riot or two in a neighbor whose independence it still resents. And the same holds true for the Baltics. After all, the Kremlin was widely thought to be behind disturbances (unrelated to the economy) in the Estonian capital, Tallinn, in 2007.

But while Kiev, Riga, and Sofia may seem reassuringly remote, believing that the more established democracies in the western half of the continent will necessarily escape disorder is, as Sarkozy, Strauss-Kahn, and those fretting European premiers undoubtedly understand, to ignore the lessons of the past. Optimists like to see Iceland as a special case, and, yes, Greece too. They might also argue that the January protests in France were nothing more than business as usual. But all these supposedly discrete disturbances were beginning to look like a pattern even before a wave of wildcat strikes in the U.K. (protesting the importation of cheap foreign workers from other EU countries). Expectations are being dashed in the west of Europe just as much as they are in the east, and there will be consequences. To be sure, the nations of the EU's heartland are far better off (and, critically, have more generous social security nets) than those that so recently escaped Soviet rule, but a dashed expectation is a dashed expectation wherever it falls to earth.

National politicians, neutered by a confederation where most important decisions are taken within an opaque and remote political structure that is subject to but the barest pretense of democratic control, now function as little more than messenger boys for the real bosses in Brussels.

In some ways the darkening of a once bright future may be more difficult to deal with for populations like those living in Western Europe where truly hard times (and the psychological mechanisms to cope with them) are scarcely more than a folk memory. Making matters worse, social cohesiveness within these countries has been badly battered, most notably by mass immigration and, more happily, the greater opportunities for individual autonomy that affluence has hitherto brought in its wake. The idea that, at some level, "we're all in this together"—a vital safety valve for a society under stress—may no longer be available for use.

Adding further poison to the mix is the catastrophic effect of EU membership on the relationship between Europeans and their political class. The idea that the governing should listen to the governed underpins any successful democracy. It does not underpin the EU—as those naughty no-voting Irish are just the latest to discover. National politicians, neutered by a confederation where most important decisions are taken within an opaque and remote political structure that is subject to but the barest pretense of democratic control, now function as little more than messenger boys or enforcers for the real bosses in Brussels.

This raises rather awkward questions as to what Europe's ballot boxes are actually for, questions that may turn very ugly indeed when the bread has gone stale, the circuses have shut down, and recovery remains elusive. Fortified perhaps both by images of disturbances elsewhere and the knowledge of the spinelessness that is a not-so-guilty not-so-secret of so many European governments, the peoples of the EU might well conclude that the street is a better way to force through change than the voting booth. Throw in the organizing capabilities of the Internet, relatively high levels of unemployment amongst the articulate and well-educated, and the rallying impact of a populist cause, and it's easy to see what will come if the slump lingers on.

No clear thread yet runs through the discontent now rippling across the EU, which remains mostly of the throw-the-bums-out variety. Yet in the midst of a debacle typically blamed (we could debate how fairly) on capitalist excess, a Trotskyite postman is the second most popular political figure in France and a party with its roots in the Communist dictatorship is polling at around 15 percent in Germany. If economies continue to spiral down, anxiety, uncertainty, and anger are bound to assume more concrete ideological forms, forms that are unlikely to be pretty.

Sometimes history repeats itself as tragedy, not farce. ♦

J. Edgar Moyers

The biggest hypocrite in America.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

The most surprising thing about the recent revelations concerning Bill Moyers is that anyone should be surprised. For those of us who care—and those of us who care, care deeply—detailed accounts of Moyers's career as a political bottom-feeder have been publicly available since the mid-1970s.

Yet even Moyers watchers will find the new information juicy, if perfectly in keeping with the Moyers we have come to know. The *Washington Post* reported last week that in 1964, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI investigated Jack Valenti, a close aide to President Lyndon Johnson, chasing rumors that Valenti was gay. He wasn't, but homosexuality was a sore subject in the Johnson White House in 1964. The same month that the FBI launched its investigation into Valenti, the president's most trusted adviser, a fellow Texan named Walter Jenkins, was arrested in a Washington YMCA on what was then quaintly called a "morals charge." The presidential election was a few weeks away. The timing could have been better.

With Johnson's reluctant approval, the FBI followed an anonymous tip that Valenti was (another quaint phrase) "a sex pervert." Hoover's men came up with nothing, aside from a remark from a closeted gay photographer that Valenti was a "very charming and intelligent individual." He was certainly right about that. After he left government Valenti became a lobbyist for Hollywood and a Washington fixture, impossible to miss at a black tie dinner or in the gossip column of the *Post* or zipping down H Street in his silver Mercedes. He was the size of a leprechaun and accented his mysteriously deep permatan with a gleaming semi-pompadour. His fathomless store of gossip, his gift for profanity, and, perhaps most of all, his clothes—high collars, billowing ties, Burberry two-buttoned, double-vented suits with lapels as sharp as an X-Acto knife—marked him as a creature otherwise unseen in the natural world. Valenti was the Washington lounge lizard.

Bill Moyers and LBJ, 1966

Another trait of his, one he shared with many veterans of the Johnson White House, was a deep antagonism to Bill Moyers, who had also served Johnson as an aide/confidant/sycophant. (Johnson required his staff to multitask.) The FBI memos that the *Post* uncovered give a hint why Moyers's former colleagues disliked him so. "Even Bill Moyers," the *Post* reporter writes, "is described in the records as seeking information on the sexual preferences of White House staff members." *Even* Bill Moyers! Forty years of bogus reputation-building prop up that *even*. Valenti knew better. When he was in government, seeking information about sexual preferences was the kind of thing Moyers did.

In 1976, a Senate committee, forever after known as the Church Committee, released reams of documents recounting the unseemly behavior of American intelligence agencies during the 1950s and 1960s. Several of the documents involved Moyers, who by the mid-1970s had already climbed into his PBS pulpit and assumed the role of national scold, thrashing, for example, the Nixon administration for its abuse of governmental power—just as he would later vilify the Reagan administration, during the Iran-contra scandal.

The Church documents detailed the government's notorious campaign against Martin Luther King Jr.—a series of wiretaps and other surveillance, covering King from his home to his hotel rooms, which began under President Kennedy and accelerated under Johnson. Hoover routinely forwarded the results, including accounts of King's sexual activities, to the Johnson White House, and on at least one occasion Moyers forwarded a Hoover report on King throughout the executive branch.

In retrospect, when he has discussed it, Moyers has said the White House's

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interest in King was in monitoring his association with alleged Communists who might endanger the civil rights movement. But King had another association even more worrisome to the White House: antiestablishment Democrats. King traveled to the 1964 Democratic Convention in hopes of encouraging a slate of dissident delegates and was greeted by the usual FBI wiretaps. The agent in charge, Cartha DeLoach, kept in contact with Moyers and Walter Jenkins throughout the convention. Afterwards, Moyers sent a thank-you note to DeLoach, who replied:

> Thank you for your very thoughtful and generous note concerning our operation in Atlantic City. . . . I'm certainly glad that we were able to come through with vital tidbits from time to time which were of assistance to you and Walter. You know you have only to call on us when a similar situation arises.

A few weeks later, when Jenkins was arrested, Moyers took DeLoach up on his offer. Johnson worried that Jenkins might have been set up by Republican operatives. He ordered Moyers to gather information on the sexual histories of staffers for the Republican nominee, Barry Goldwater. Moyers called DeLoach, who came up empty. Thanks to the new Valenti documents, we now know Moyers's curiosity extended beyond King and Republicans to his fellow Democrats as well.

Moyers has disavowed this portion of his past as the "indiscretions" of a callow young man in thrall to a mesmeric president and patron. At the same time, however, he's happy to take credit for his role in developing the programs of the Great Society, when, presumably, he was just as callow as when he was on the phone to Cartha DeLoach. And of course the indiscretions would be less galling if he hadn't gone on to a career as a public moralist, with a specialty of condemning the indiscretions of his political opponents. Barry Goldwater, for one, had no patience with the hypocrisy. "Every time I see him," Goldwater once said, "I get sick to my stomach and want to throw up." ♦

No Speech, Please

We're British.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Britain's politicians care so much about constitutional protections for human rights that they have two sets of them—the centuries-old traditions laid out by parliament and precedent and the newfangled European Convention on Human Rights, written into British law in 1998. Neither of these stopped Britain from becoming the first European Union country to bar an elected European legislator from its territory for his political opinions on February 12.

The Dutch MP Geert Wilders heads the Freedom party, which holds 9 of the 150 seats in the Second Chamber in The Hague. He has been preoccupied with militant Islam at least since November 2004, when the filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a Muslim fanatic in Amsterdam, and Wilders's own name turned up on a jihadist hit list. In March 2008, Wilders released *Fitna*, a 15-minute film, on the Internet. It details contemporary Islamist outrages and locates their inspiration not in any perversion of Islam but in specific suras of the Koran itself, which Wilders likens to *Mein Kampf* and urges authorities to ban.

When two members of the House of Lords invited Wilders to give a screening of his film, the rabble-rousing Labour peer Lord Ahmed threatened to put 10,000 people in the streets. The home secretary, Jacqui Smith, warned Wilders that he would not be admitted to the U.K., since "your statements about Muslims and their beliefs, as expressed in your film *Fitna* and elsewhere, would threaten community harmony and therefore public security in the U.K." Wilders came anyway, on a British Midlands flight packed with 50 journalists and cameramen. When he was turned away as promised, he called British prime minister Gordon Brown "the biggest coward in Europe."

This episode, taken together with the ongoing attempt by Wilders's opponents in the Netherlands to have him prosecuted for discrimination and incitement to hatred, reflects the European confusion about what free speech is and how it is best protected. Author Kenan Malik, a veteran of London antiracist movements, was most disturbed that "Wilders was penalized not for what he did but for what someone else may have done to him. That is neither logical nor just." There was confusion on both sides of the Channel. Dutch foreign minister Maxime Verhagen protested to the British government before and after Wilders's arrival, but he had said of *Fitna* when it first came out: "Freedom of expression doesn't mean the right to offend." Many would say that freedom of expression is a *synonym* for the right to offend.

Two things are being mixed up: freedom of speech and freedom of movement. Under the old, pre-EU dispensation, Britain would have been entitled to turn Wilders around at Heathrow. Just because a country protects free speech for its own citizens does not give it any obligation to admit any foreigner for any reason. During the Cold War, the United States permitted its citizens to spout Communist propaganda to their hearts' content, but it also passed the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act in 1952 to bar foreigners considered ideologically undesirable. By the end of the Cold War,

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there were 368,000 people—Gabriel García Márquez and Pablo Neruda among them—to whom the government said: *No pasarán.* More recently, the State Department withdrew its visa to the Swiss Islam scholar Tariq Ramadan without feeling the need to explain its actions in detail.

The problem is that Britain has—by act of Parliament—subordinated its own laws to the European Convention on Human Rights. Brussels, not Westminster, sets the rules. In the human rights context Wilders is a fellow European. And the British action sets a new precedent for relations among EU citizens. That is why promoters of the European Union were so upset by Wilders's exclusion, even on the left. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, for instance, called it "indefensible."

There was a lot of huffing and puffing about the necessity of banning Wilders. Foreign secretary David Miliband and left-wing MP Keith Vaz were particularly insistent, although both admitted to not having seen the film, which is ubiquitous on the Internet. An *Observer* editorial called it a mistake to bar Wilders, but felt the need to add that he and his movie were "poisonous," "brutal," "shoddy," "deluded," "grotesque," and "odious." The most common criticism was that creating a cause célèbre played into the hands of Wilders, helping a publicity hound to spread his obnoxious ideas. But most politics today—from announcing mission accomplished in Iraq on the decks of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* to peddling a stimulus package in front of jobless people in Elkhart, Indiana—involves publicity. When you cut through the hemming and hawing and question-dodging, the only grounds for banning Wilders would be that he is a racist. Is he?

Wilders is not a crank (or not *just* a crank), and 84 percent of Dutch people object to the way the British handled him. Wilders is a politician of the center-right who drifted away from the market-liberal VVD (over the party's EU policy) shortly before the murder of van Gogh. Like his former fellow party member Ayaan Hirsi Ali (who described Wilders as "*definitely* not a racist"), he went into hiding in the days after the van Gogh murder. His party took 6 percent of the vote in the last election, but a recent poll showed that if elections were held today it would win 25 seats in the Second Chamber, just two behind the country's largest party.

He talks a mile a minute, and, when I interviewed him in 2005, he repudiated attempts to link him to the hard-right Belgian party then called the Vlaams Blok: "I would never do that," he said. "I remember the Vlaams Blok from years ago, and many of the same people are in place." Nor was he an ignoramus about Islam—he had read a lot of books by serious scholars. But he was insistent that there was a lot to worry about. "I'm not saying this out of xenophobia," he said. "There are a million Muslims in the country, and they are heading all the wrong lists."

In August 2007, Wilders wrote in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, "I've had enough of Islam in the Netherlands—not one more Muslim immigrant. I've had enough of Allah and Mohammed in the Netherlands—not one more mosque." He announced that he was working on a film about the Koran, and rumors began to fly that a Koran would be torn onscreen. Or perhaps burned. The Malaysian ambassador to the Netherlands warned that violence would ensue that would make the Danish cartoon riots look "like a picnic." The Dutch cabinet drew up emergency plans and practiced evacuations for its embassies. Queen Beatrix devoted her Christmas speech to tolerance.

So when the film came out it was a bit of an anticlimax. It was a confused and choppy collage—a bit like the Beatles' "Revolution 9." Wilders didn't use any incendiary language, only the footage of actual Islamist atrocities, interspersed with the text of a half-dozen suras. A lot of it was, to be sure, horrifying: clips of planes hitting the World Trade Center, bodies falling from the building, audio of the 911 calls ("I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die! I'm burning up!"), a 3-year-old girl saying she had learned in the Koran that Jews were "apes and pigs," the beheading of a hostage in Iraq, the beheading of (one assumes) an adulteress, signs at marches reading *God Bless Hitler* and *Freedom Go To Hell*, and then the ripped page. But here Wilders struck a conciliatory note: "The sound you heard was a page being removed from the phonebook. For it is not up to me but to Muslims themselves to tear out the hateful verses from the Koran."

One suspects that Britain is excluding Wilders—and that the Netherlands is prosecuting him—not because his views are divorced from reality but because they make a certain contact with it. He is, after all, not the first to describe the Koran as a war manual: Schopenhauer, Renan, and Churchill said such things, and Afshin Ellian, the Iranian-Dutch legal philosopher, has noted in recent weeks that Erasmus—that great icon of the pan-European open society—was considerably tougher on Islam than is Wilders.

Of course, none of this makes *Fitna* a *good* film or a *fair* film. In calling for the Koran to be banned, Wilders runs into two big problems. The first might be called the grandfathering problem. It has recently occurred to censorious radicals that there is no particular reason that the monuments of our culture should be exempt from the ideological censorship we bestow on newer works. Thus, in recent years, evangelical Christians in Britain have been interrogated on suspicion of homophobia on the basis of the scriptures they were distributing. There is a similar obtuseness in Wilders's denial that the Koran is a monument of a magnificently impressive culture, even if it is not our culture.

The second problem is the sauce-for-the-goose problem. Wilders has on many occasions urged that the Netherlands ban Muslim radicals. He even argued against admitting Khalid Yasin, a hardline Muslim preacher from Sheffield, England. As Ian Buruma notes: "For a man who calls for a ban on the Koran to act as the champion of free speech is a bit rich."

That's quite right as an intellectual

matter. But what is important about Wilders is the legal matter. He is not concerned about free speech. He is concerned about Islam. What makes this a free-speech issue is the actions of the Dutch and British government. Wilders's arguments should be met with other arguments. They should not be met with threats of jail.

Do European speech laws now favor Islam? Has Britain, the cradle of free speech, ceased to care about it? People ask such questions as if they are rhetorical and can be answered only with a sigh or a sad nod. In fact, they are real questions with real answers.

Yes, there is increasingly a special regime for speech concerning Islam, or at least concerning religion. After the murder of van Gogh in 2004, the Dutch justice minister, Piet-Hein Donner, urged that blasphemy laws that had fallen into desuetude be revived to protect Muslims. He failed, but so did efforts to eliminate those laws, and Donner's successor, Ernst Hirsch Ballin, has sought to strengthen them in recent weeks. Dutch elite opinion now leans towards the idea that one should try not to give the Muslim populations any cause for anger. In Britain, Muslims sought in 2006 a "law against incitement to religious hatred." Before it passed, the House of Lords altered it to ensure that it would not chill critical discussion of any religion. Apparently they failed.

Yes, the British government has grown less interested in freedom. After the July 2005 transport bombings, and even more after the foiled airplane plot of the following summer, the government said so explicitly. "Traditional civil liberty arguments," said Tony Blair, "are not so much wrong as just made for another age." Since then, 270 people have been refused admission to Britain on grounds of sowing hate. Only four of these have been Europeans. This kind of disparate impact must leave Jacqui Smith feeling she has little to apologize for in banning Wilders.

The new European conception of freedom of speech, based on anti-racism, protects a lot less speech than did the old British and Dutch conceptions of freedom of speech, based on sovereignty. Maybe membership in the family of man relieves one of a certain amount of worry about the liberties of one's fellow citizens. ♦

Don't Copy the Tories

They're hardly a model for Republicans.

BY SAHIL MAHTANI

In this winter of conservative discontent, Britain's Tories present a tempting alternative. What would happen if Republicans, following their example, rejected market economics and championed social welfare? Could they win again? It's a thought-experiment that's come alive in Britain in recent years. Thatcherism has been happily shed, and David Cameron's Tories, no longer "the nasty party," are in the throes of a great courtship of the public. Victory in the next election is likely. Naturally, the revival has captured attention stateside, where some conservatives are spreading similar ideas.

Much ballyhooed is the communitarian turn in Tory thinking. Cameron's army of gentle toffs invoke words like "family," "neighborhood," and "community." Whereas under Thatcher they had always defended the individual against the state, now Tories give greater priority to these constituent social units. In practice, this means moving beyond traditional obsessions with Europe, tax cuts, and private health care and focusing instead on policies like paternity leave, environmentalism, and road safety. The broad idea is to align Tories belatedly with the mixed economy, or the "third way," while tainting Labour as well-meaning but bungling statist bureaucrats.

It's a shift that caused a near civil war within the Tory party. Old Thatcher stalwarts never really accepted the transformation, and the rift has been complicated and sometimes bitter. Cameron himself has had a difficult public relationship with Thatcher, and has made bold statements like, "There [actually] is such a thing as society," and, in a recent discussion of tax cuts before an audience of businessmen, "There's more to life than money." Partly as a result of these moves, he was not invited to Thatcher's 80th birthday party in 2005, though as Cameron has gained in success, relations have improved. Today's Conservative party maintains the fiction of a formal ideological unity. Yet it's difficult not to acknowledge the reality: Thatcherism has been dead for some time now, and the conservatives have killed it.

Could something similar happen to the Republican party? From today's vantage point, the answer is—happily—no. If nothing else, the vast infrastructure of free-market think-tanks combined with the firepower of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page will prevent classical liberalism from being written out of the Republican coalition. Moreover, where Britons have long agreed on the state's commitment to social welfare, the contours of this commitment are still up for major debate in the United States. To imagine a Republican candidate declaring, as Cameron did in 2006, that "trickle-down economics is not

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working" is implausible, not least because, in the United States, that's a kind of rhetoric strongly associated with Democrats.

But perhaps the more important reason a transformation along Tory lines is unlikely here is that the new British communitarianism is largely a response to Muslim immigration, a burning cultural issue with little parallel in the United States. (Hispanic immigration fires some passions, but not enough to command the mainstream.) This political era in Britain began with the 2005 London underground bombings and has quickly made immigration the unstated premise of British politics, underlying the rhetoric of both sides.

It's evident when David Cameron argues for limiting the number of immigrants and urges a revival of "community cohesion," and it's there when Labour prime minister Gordon Brown calls for a "shared national purpose" while suggesting that migrants "should be able to speak the English language." Less conspicuously, Civitas—the think tank of a prominent Cameron adviser, which published "On Friendship," the major formulation of Tory communitarianism—often publishes on topics like honor killings, political correctness, and British identity. Not only is immigration the elephant in the room of British politics, but its presence is felt across the political spectrum.

Anecdotes, however, don't convey the sheer scale of the transformation, which is best seen on the level of policy. When Britain completely revamped its immigration laws last year, it moved to a system that welcomes high-income, skilled workers while restricting entry of low-income, unskilled workers. This wasn't an accident. The poorest immigrants in Britain are often Muslims, and the immigration minister who unveiled the new policy acknowledged that mass immigration had left the country "deeply unsettled," insisting, somewhat defensively, that it wasn't "racist for Labour to debate" it. Meanwhile, the new immigration minister has proposed a cap on the number of immigrants, a daringly conservative idea for a Labour government. "Community cohesion is crucial," he announced. "After the economy, this is probably the biggest concern facing the population."

Other reforms reflect this theme. The emphasis is on "earning citizenship" rather than simply obtaining it. English proficiency is compulsory. Immigrants who integrate (by doing community service, for example) are given shorter naturalization times. The average age for a marriage visa has been raised to 21 from 18 in order to "crack down on forced marriage," as a press release puts it.

The changes continue: Starting in December, some foreigners living in Britain had to begin carrying ID cards, with full coverage expected by 2015. Foreigners convicted of minor offenses not only receive the requisite punishment, but also see their welfare benefits suspended. Not to mention that a "Britain Day"—a development of some comedic potential—was on the cards until a few months ago. With Britons clearly anxious about integration and citizenship, it's easy to see how Tory communitarianism, with its call for a revival of civic life and trust, could become so popular.

There are other reasons why recent Tory successes are untranslatable to the United States—the bumbling specter of Gordon Brown, for one—but ultimately, they point to the broad conclusion that successful ideologies must emerge from local passions. Tory thinking cannot be grafted onto Republican strategy in the United States because it is a response to concerns Americans do not have. ♦

Faith-Based Confusion

Will 'charitable choice' survive the Obama Justice Department?

BY JOSEPH LOCONTE

On February 5 President Obama announced the creation of a White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, a revamped version of the Bush administration's contested program to expand the reach of religious charities fighting poverty and other social problems. Like George Bush, Barack Obama described the contribution of faith-based organizations as "critical" to meeting human needs. He praised groups that demonstrate a "living, breathing, active faith." And he promised to "empower" them with more federal funding. Unlike the Bush initiative, however, Obama's plan threatens either to discriminate against religious providers or to fatally compromise their religious identity.

The Bush effort was built on the 1996 "charitable choice" legislation, which made it unlawful for federal agencies offering antipoverty grants to exclude faith-based organizations from receiving funding because of their religious character. That law guarantees participating groups control over "the definition, development, practice, and expression" of their religious beliefs. It also allows them to consider religious commitment in employment decisions—the same right enjoyed by churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship.

The Obama White House—joined by the Democratic party leadership and a coalition of left-wing activists—

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rejects both the spirit and letter of the law. Candidate Obama, in the "guiding principles" for "partnering with communities of faith" that his campaign published last summer, declared that religious organizations receiving federal funds "cannot discriminate" in hiring for religious reasons. Under this view, faith-based groups could be compelled to employ individuals who reject their religious tenets. The Coalition Against Religious Discrimination, which includes organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign, is especially anxious about gays and lesbians denied jobs by religious employers who uphold traditional views of marriage.

Whether President Obama will prod Congress to repeal or amend the hiring protection of the charitable choice law is unclear. Joshua DuBois, who worked on the Obama campaign and now heads the faith office, said the Justice Department will review the issue on "a case by case basis." This didn't satisfy the *New York Times*, which last week ran an editorial scolding the administration for not immediately overturning the hiring protection by executive order. Plainly, the institutional autonomy of religious organizations—at least those interfacing with government—is now at risk.

The White House and its allies are quick to cite Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, sex, national origin, or religion. They are slower to admit, though, that Title VII carved out a clear exemption for houses of worship. Critics of charitable choice insist that their grievance is not with the mission or beliefs of religious entities, but rather with "government-funded discrimination" in employment.

Yet why should a charity's acceptance of taxpayer support to alleviate poverty negate its right to freedom of association? Defenders of the law argue that if Planned Parenthood—which receives about $336 million in government grants and contracts—were denied the right to exclude pro-life Catholics from employment, its lawyers would be mobilizing like locusts. "Faith-based organizations can hardly be expected to sustain their religious vision without the ability to employ individuals who share the tenets of the faith," explains Carl Esbeck, a University of Missouri law professor who helped draft charitable choice.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers initially agreed. Passed as part of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, charitable choice was approved for four additional programs during the Clinton administration, always including a group's right to hire co-religionists. President Bush extended the statutory protections by executive order to all federal antipoverty spending—involving billions of dollars distributed through at least eight federal agencies to thousands of faith-based providers.

African-American pastors and community leaders are the most enthusiastic about the new partnerships with government. They are also among the most religiously devout groups in the country. Hence the paradox: America's first black president seems prepared to nullify the self-government and spiritual identity of black institutions.

The Supreme Court has yet to hear a case on the issue. But recent High Court rulings, such as *Mitchell* v. *Helms* (2000), have affirmed the right of religious organizations to accept government grants without becoming secular agents of the state. And in 2007, the Justice Department ruled that World Vision, an evangelical group, was free to hire only those who shared its Christian beliefs to administer a $1.5 million grant to help at-risk children. That decision seems consistent with the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which forbids the federal government from placing "substantial burdens" on religious organizations. (It's also worth noting that, as required by charitable choice, these religious groups serve people of all faiths or of no faith.)

Largely forgotten in this debate is how the charitable choice law has fostered new alliances between government and faith communities to help the poor and marginalized. For instance, a significant number of the churches and religious charities tackling problems such as poverty, crime, drug abuse, and family breakdown are African American. Surveys show that African-American pastors and community leaders are the most enthusiastic about the new partnerships with government. They are also among the most religiously devout groups in the country. Hence the paradox of Barack Obama: America's first black president seems prepared to nullify the self-government and spiritual identity of black institutions.

There were hints of Obama's ambivalence toward religion even during his recent appearance at the National Prayer Breakfast. He lamented that faith has been used as "an excuse for prejudice and intolerance." He recalled that "wars have been waged" and "innocents have been slaughtered" over religion. By contrast, when George Bush first spoke at the National Prayer Breakfast in 2001, he did not warn the mostly Christian audience, gathered for coffee and danish, about religion's heart of darkness. "Millions of Americans serve their neighbor because they love their God," he said. "They do for others what no government program can really ever do: They provide love for another human being; they provide hope even when hope comes hard."

If President Obama agrees—if what he really admires about these good Samaritans is their "living, breathing, active faith"—then he'll allow them to live, breathe, and move without government dictating every step along the way. By pressing ahead with an agenda to restrict their freedom, he will only alienate countless neighborhood caregivers who cannot isolate their charitable work from their religious ideals. ♦

The Path of Realism or the Path to Failure

Laying a foundation for peace in Palestine

By Elliott Abrams

Repetition of failed experiments is not a sign of mental health or a path to scientific progress, nor is it a formula for Israeli-Palestinian peace. Yet that is the road we may again take, unless the lessons of the Bush years are learned.

As an official of the Bush administration I made three dozen visits to the Middle East in the last eight years, and in February, as Israelis voted, I made my first visit as a private citizen in nearly a decade. After lengthy discussions with Israelis and Palestinians, it seems to me obvious that it is time to face certain facts, facts that President Bush actually saw clearly during his first term: We are not on the verge of Israeli-Palestinian peace; a Palestinian state cannot come into being in the near future; and the focus should be on building the institutions that will allow for real Palestinian progress in the medium or longer term.

In a historic speech on June 24, 2002, President Bush said, "My vision is two states, living side by side, in peace and security." How were we to get there? He was specific:

> There is simply no way to achieve that peace until all parties fight terror. Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership, so that a Palestinian state can be born. I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror. I call upon them to build a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty.
>
> If the Palestinian people actively pursue these goals, America and the world will actively support their efforts. If the Palestinian people meet these goals, they will be able to reach agreement with Israel and Egypt and Jordan on security and other arrangements for independence. And when the Palestinian people have new leaders, new institutions and new security arrangements with their neighbors, the United States of America will support the creation of a Palestinian state, whose borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty will be provisional until resolved as part of a final settlement in the Middle East. . . . A Palestinian state will never be created by terror. It will be built through reform. And reform must be more than cosmetic change or a veiled attempt to preserve the status quo. True reform will require entirely new political and economic institutions based on democracy, market economics and action against terrorism.

This was the announcement that the United States was breaking totally with Yasser Arafat—the single most frequent foreign visitor to the Clinton White House—and would henceforth consider him a terrorist rather than a negotiating partner. Six months later the "Roadmap," a plan for progress toward these goals, was drafted. Even its formal name, "A Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," suggested its conformity to President Bush's speech. Its preamble stated in part, "A two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only be achieved through an end to violence and terrorism, when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror and willing and able to build a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty."

The Roadmap did not call for leaping directly from the status quo—the Palestinian Authority, or PA, established after Oslo—to statehood. Instead it called for an interim phase "focused on the option of creating an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty, based on the new constitution, as a way station to a permanent status settlement." The text here reiterated the need for Palestinian leaders "acting decisively against terror, willing and able to build a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty."

After Arafat's death in November 2004, his lieutenant Mahmoud Abbas became president of the PA, and efforts to achieve some of these required reforms began. But there began as well a distancing by the United States and the international "Quartet" that had sponsored the Roadmap (the United States, United Nations, European Union, and Russia) from the tough and clear standards that had been set out. It is as if those standards were meant

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to record disgust with Arafat, but with his passing the familiar insistence on rapid progress—and more Israeli concessions—returned.

More and more speeches, including American speeches, called for rapid agreement on a Palestinian state, for a final status agreement, for elimination altogether of that interim phase. Worse yet, at the Annapolis Conference, announced in July 2007 and convened that November, the president announced that the goal was a final status agreement by the end of 2008. This left only 13 months, which was itself astonishing for a problem as old and complex as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It seemed to ignore the June 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza, and, as the end of 2008 coincided with the end of the president's own term, it seemed to substitute the American political calendar for a realistic assessment of facts on the ground, just as the Clinton administration had done.

And it failed. Those of us within the Bush administration who had protested the Annapolis plan and the announcement of the 2008 goal were sadly proved right. Historians may puzzle over the causes of the failure, and perhaps more so over what led the president to turn away from the tough-minded realism toward this conflict that he showed during his first term. But the lesson for 2009, for the new administration, must be that there are actually only two alternatives: realism and failure.

Prime Minister Salam Fayyad visiting a West Bank village last year.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Judging by the standards set forth in President Bush's still remarkable 2002 speech, the PA has made some genuine progress. Under U.S. tutelage, training of Palestinian security forces has begun largely under the radar, at a training center in Jordan. But it is working: Sixteen hundred police from the West Bank have gone through the course, and there are plans to double that number. The newly trained forces are not exactly crack troops, but they are a far cry from the divided and ineffective gangs created by Yasser Arafat. Their success was visible during the recent Gaza war, when they acted in parallel, and sometimes in concert, with Israeli forces to prevent Hamas violence and terrorism in the West Bank. Order was maintained.

Much of the credit goes to PA prime minister Salam Fayyad, a U.S.-trained economist whose integrity, candor, and effective administration of the PA have made him a favorite of the United States and all other donors. Fayyad, a former finance minister (who brought order from chaos in the PA's finances and continues to fight PA corruption), has presided over continuing economic growth in the West Bank and maintains a working if unfriendly relationship with Israeli officials. Fayyad is well aware of the history of his sometime partner, sometime foe in Jerusalem, the government of Israel, and indeed of the history of the entire Zionist enterprise: Institutions were built over long decades to prepare for Israel's independence despite the uncertainty of when it would arrive. The Zionists struggled to be ready, hoping thereby also to bring the day closer. That is Fayyad's task for the Palestinian people, as he appears to see it.

He gets remarkably little help, from either Arab states or the West. The willingness of oil-rich Arab leaders to supply Palestinians with endless amounts of rhetoric and precious little cash is not new, though the high oil prices of recent years made it all the more obscene. But Fayyad has also had less help from the West than one might expect. The shift away from realistic efforts to build Palestinian institutions and toward international conferences like Annapolis put President Abbas in the limelight, not the pragmatic work of Fayyad and his ministers. So Abbas traveled from capital to capital, as he continues to do, safely removed from the difficult work of building the basis for an independent Palestine. If the West Bank had a factory with a thousand jobs for every such trip, for every photo op with a smiling foreign leader, and for every international conference, the Palestinians there would be thriving.

What are the chances that such meetings will produce a final status agreement in 2009? None. Despite the pressures for progress after Annapolis, little progress was made in 2008, and if anything conditions are worse now. In 2008, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were frequent at two levels: Prime Minister Ehud Olmert met with President Abbas, and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met with Palestinian chief negotiators Ahmed Qurei ("Abu Ala")

and Saeb Erekat. I am unaware of the achievement of any actual agreement on any important issue on either track.

On the toughest issues, such as Jerusalem and refugees, there was, unsurprisingly, no meeting of the minds. It is unlikely negotiators will do better this year. It has been true for decades that the most Israel can offer the Palestinians is quite evidently less than any Palestinian politician is prepared to accept. Those who say "the outlines of an agreement are well known" and thereby suggest that an agreement is close are precisely wrong: Is it not evident that to the extent that such outlines are "well known," they are unacceptable to both sides or they would have led to a deal long ago? In addition, any possible deal would take years to implement: Israel would need that time to remove settlers from lands that would become part of Palestine, while the Palestinians would need to win the fight against terrorism. So any deal would be a so-called shelf agreement, where Palestinian leaders would be compromising on Jerusalem, borders, and refugee claims in exchange not for a state, but for an Israeli promise of a state at some indeterminate future date. No Palestinian leader jumped at that in 2007 or 2008, and none will in 2009.

There is much to build on, with security force improvements well under way, the economy in decent shape, and a reliable and trustworthy leader in Prime Minister Fayyad.

Meanwhile, whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the PA as an institution, Fatah as a party is moribund. Its reputation for incompetence and corruption remains what it was when Arafat was alive, for there has been no party reform despite endless promises. At one point in 2008, when Ahmed Qurei—one of Arafat's closest cronies, famed for permitting corruption, renowned for opposing the rise of any newer and younger leaders in Fatah—was formally charged with organizing and implementing party reform, tragedy gave way to farce. But if democracy is impossible without democratic parties, the collapse of Fatah is no joke; it suggests that a future independent Palestine would either be run by Hamas and other extremists and terrorists or become a one-party "republic" on the model of Tunisia or Egypt.

There is more. Prime Minister Olmert, who was intent on trying for an agreement by the end of President Bush's term, will be gone, and his successor will not be as enthusiastic to make the concessions Olmert reportedly offered the Palestinians. President Obama has not committed himself to achieve an agreement in 2009 in the way that President Bush did in 2007 and 2008. The Palestinian political leadership under President Abbas and his Fatah party is weak, even increasingly illegitimate as the presidential election date prescribed in the Palestinian law was ignored and Abbas's term in office extended. And, of course, it is impossible to see how a comprehensive final status agreement between Israel and the PA can be reached when the PA itself has now lost control of 40 percent of the Palestinian population, the 1.4 million Palestinians living in Gaza.

First, there is the question of who can actually negotiate with Israel on behalf of the Palestinian people. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is still recognized by the Arab League and the United Nations as the "sole legitimate voice of the Palestinian people" though it never won a free election to attain that status. Israel's past negotiations, in the Oslo Accords of 1993 and ever since, have all been with the PLO—not formally with the PA, which was created at Oslo to exercise certain governmental functions in the Palestinian territories. When Israel negotiates with Abbas, it is in his capacity as chairman of the PLO, not in his role as president of the PA. But now the PA governs only one part of Palestinian territory. Hamas governs the other part—and Hamas is not a member of the PLO. In the 2006 elections 44 percent of Palestinians voted for Hamas, moreover, and it maintains a majority in the Palestinian parliament (a possible problem should that body ever meet). So, for which Palestinians do Abbas, the PA, and the PLO actually speak? While Israel rightly refuses to negotiate with a terrorist group like Hamas, or with the PA or PLO should it include Hamas in its ranks, it remains true that the PA and PLO no longer have a strong claim to represent all Palestinians and may now lack the ability to enforce any deal with Israel they sign.

Second, the lesson of Gaza to Israelis is identical to the lesson of south Lebanon, and a cautionary tale regarding withdrawal from the West Bank: "Land for peace" concessions have failed and become "land for terrorism." Until there is far better security in the West Bank, few Israelis would risk withdrawing the Israel Defense Forces and Shin Bet from operating there.

And third, the terrorist groups Israel is dealing with, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, used to be local; now those groups have the full backing of Iran, both directly and through Syria and Hezbollah. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now part of a broader struggle in the region over Iranian extremism and power. Israeli withdrawals now risk opening the door not only to Palestinian terrorists but to Iranian proxies. How could Israelis, or Palestinians for that matter, take such a risk—especially when

the new American administration has not defined its policy toward Iran, except for some vague and (to Arabs and Israelis alike) worrying phrases about outreached hands and sitting across negotiating tables, and the U.S. military option is invisible?

Taken together, these factors suggest that a final status agreement is not now a real-world goal. What is? A return to the realistic assessments and policies that marked Bush's first term. In practice, this suggests an intense concentration on building Palestinian institutions in the West Bank.

There is much to build on, with security force improvements well under way, the economy in decent shape, and a reliable and trustworthy leader in Prime Minister Fayyad. Neither the United States nor Israel has done nearly as much as it can to promote progress on the ground, allowing Palestinians in the West Bank freer movement and helping create more jobs and a better standard of living. After the Gaza war, Israel appears prepared to do more, and should be asked to do so; Israel has a strategic interest in the success of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and of moderate forces in Palestinian society more generally. Arab states should be pressured intensely to provide the funds needed to meet the PA payroll and undertake sensible investment projects, for example in housing and agriculture. The United States and the Quartet should take some time away from endless meetings and speeches and resolutions calling for immediate negotiations over final status issues, and turn instead to making real life in the West Bank better and more secure. If there is ever to be a Palestinian state, it will be the product of such activities, not of formulaic pronouncements about the need for Palestinian statehood now.

It is also time to rethink the recent commitment to leaping all at once to full independence for the Palestinians, and even to break the taboo and rethink that ultimate goal itself. Immediate and total independence was not the plan when the Roadmap was written in 2002 and released in 2003. Then, it was understood that "an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty" was a necessary way-station. Given Hamas control over Gaza, which makes a united independent Palestine impossible for now anyway, a West Bank-only state with provisional borders and only some of the attributes of sovereignty makes far more sense as a medium-term goal. It might also allow postponing compromises on Jerusalem and refugee claims that no Palestinian politician could now make, for those issues could be left aside for another day, while the delays are blamed on Hamas and its rebellion in Gaza.

How that episode will end is entirely unclear, given Israel's reluctance to reoccupy and rule Gaza, and Egypt's reluctance to enforce strict controls on the smuggling of weapons. One Israeli official told me that Egypt had agreed to stop the smuggling through the tunnels. But will they really do it? I asked him. Oh, he replied, "now you are asking if we can get an agreement to implement the agreement. That's different." While Iran is able to sustain the Hamas terrorist regime in Gaza, negotiations over a full final status agreement are little more than staking territorial claims to a mirage.

But one is free to wonder as well whether Palestinian "statehood" is the best and most sensible goal for Palestinians. When I served under Secretary of State George Shultz in the Reagan administration, we were expressly opposed to that outcome and favored some links to Egypt and Jordan. On security and economic grounds, such links are no less reasonable now; indeed, given Hamas control of Gaza and the Iranian threat to moderate Arab states as well as to Israel, they may be even more compelling. As we've seen, President Bush in 2002 stated that the Palestinians should "reach agreement with Israel and Egypt and Jordan on security and other arrangements for independence."

Now, even the mention of Egyptian and Jordanian involvement will evoke loud protests, not least in Amman and Ramallah, and perhaps U.S. policymakers should think but not speak about such an outcome. There are many and varied possible relationships between a Palestinian entity in the West Bank and the Hashemite monarchy, and if none can be embraced today, none should be discarded either. One Arab statesman told me when I asked him about a Jordanian role that there "must absolutely be an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank—if only for 15 minutes," and then they could decide on some form of federation or at least a Jordanian security role for the area. If the greatest Israeli, Jordanian, and Egyptian fears are of terrorism, disorder, and Iranian inroads in a Palestinian West Bank state, a Jordanian role is a practical means of addressing those fears.

Israel's next government, which Israel's president has asked Benjamin Netanyahu to form, must soon take up these matters with the Palestinians, Arab neighbors, the EU, and above all with the United States. The new Obama administration has not yet worked out a policy toward Iran or toward the Israel-Palestinian conflict, but that may be a hopeful sign. Thinking is better than assuming or reacting or misjudging. As the new team reviews the playing field, it would be well advised to look not only at what its predecessors did in the second Bush term, but also at what they did in the first term—when a gritty realism prevailed over visions, dreams, and endless conferences. For, again, it seems to me there are at present only two paths forward—the path of realism and the path to failure. ♦

The Age of Irresponsibility

Bill Clinton and Paris Hilton are the problem. Why couldn't David Petraeus and Sully Sullenberger be the answer?

By Matthew Continetti

Decades from now, historians are going to fill e-tome after e-tome debating when the crisis in American authority began. A good place to start would be the Clinton era. The president of the United States had a tawdry affair, lied about it, and refused to accept any responsibility for his actions. The Republicans correctly pointed out that the president had acted beneath his office. The problem was that many of them were acting beneath their offices, too. In Washington, where the spirit of public service is supposed to reign, both Democrats and Republicans were using positions of power for private indulgence. Many things sprang from the Clinton impeachment. Confidence in authority was not one of them.

We correct for the mistakes of past presidents. George W. Bush (barely) won the White House in part because he promised to restore integrity to the office. And the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, did briefly increase the public's trust in government and its elites. In the tense months following the attacks, the public rallied behind strong leaders like Bush, Rudy Giuliani, and Donald Rumsfeld. These men, who had many private failings, nonetheless were seen to be acting in the interests of the nation as a whole. We seemed to be on the verge of a new era of patriotism and civic renewal.

But it was not to be. The lack of accountability among the elites quickly caught back up. There was George Tenet, whose time as CIA director included two massive intelligence failures. Bush gave Tenet the nation's highest civilian honor in return. There was the FBI, which still hasn't definitively figured out who attacked America with anthrax in late 2001. There was Rumsfeld, who committed too few troops to the fight in Iraq and failed to change strategy when it became clear, early on, that America was losing the war. He stayed in his job until 2006. The generals whom Bush and Rumsfeld tasked with running the war? None of them suffered any consequences for his failures. One of the main opponents of the successful surge strategy in Iraq, George Casey, was promoted to Army chief of staff.

"There are no shortcuts. . . . When you try to take shortcuts, you may end up tarnishing your entire career," said Obama in reaction to news of Alex Rodriguez's steroid use. Bunk. In the age of irresponsibility, when you take a shortcut, you end up with $275 million from the New York Yankees.

Nor was the crisis in authority limited to politics. There were dramatic instances of public corruption such as the Jack Abramoff scandal, but there were also remarkable examples of private corruption such as the Enron and Arthur Andersen accounting scandals. In the months after September 11, business titan after business titan came under indictment: Enron executives, Martha Stewart, Tyco CEO Dennis Kozlowski—the list goes on. Chief executives were massively compensated even when they drove their companies into a ditch. No surprise when populism started making a comeback. The private sector and the public sector were failing the common man. Neither acted with any sense of propriety.

The same was true of our cultural elites. The celebrity

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of the age was Paris Hilton, an exemplar of the inequality and promiscuity that characterize the present moment. Hilton was born into extraordinary wealth but did not achieve true fame until 2003, when her homemade porno movie made it to the Internet. Twenty or even fifteen years ago, Paris Hilton's behavior would have been a scandal. Not today. Why? Because the wealthy, famous, and well-connected can do as they please and suffer no consequences—as long as they possess no shame.

There are moments when it seems as though every figure who waltzes across the public stage is a cheat, a fraud, a liar, or a failure. Child abuse scandals have tarnished the image of Catholic bishops and priests. Steroid scandals have racked Major League Baseball, the Tour de France, and the Olympic games. And then there are the celebrities who write books, make music, and perform in film and television. Where to start?

THE BORROWERS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY LOCKE

On any given day, any public figure might be arrested, assaulted, admit to infidelity, go bankrupt, or break down emotionally in front of television cameras. Sometimes all of these things happen at once.

The next day the celebrity will be released from incarceration. He will go into a rehabilitation program or "spend time with the family" and emerge, weeks later, with a tell-all book and publicity tour that make him even richer than he was before. The idea of "rehab" is so ubiquitous that in 2007 it was the title of a hit song. No negative value is attached to poisoning one's body to the point where it requires detoxification. Quite the contrary. "Rehab" is, in some sense, something to aspire to. To go to rehab implies deep financial resources and a life rich with experience (at least in the areas of alcohol and drug abuse). There are no consequences.

It wasn't until last fall that we saw how widely the rot had spread. Everyone was implicated in the financial meltdown. Everyone who took on a mortgage they couldn't afford, who lent to people who couldn't pay back the loan, who securitized the unpayable debts and resold them in ways even astrophysicists can't understand, and who instituted government policies that spurred a culture of easy money and consumption beyond one's means. All were responsible.

Meanwhile, as the men who brought the financial system to the brink of collapse were cashing in and remodeling their offices, the executives and union officials who bankrupted the American automobile industry were traveling to Washington hat in hand, begging the public sector to give them aid. Bush had no credibility with the American public. Treasury secretary Hank Paulson inspired no one's confidence.

America's political, economic, and cultural elites seem incapable of behaving responsibly and being accountable for their actions. That incapacity is why you wake up in the morning and dread reading the day's headlines. It is why, for years, there seemingly has been nothing but bad news. It is this larger crisis that has driven the public's opinion that the country is headed down the "wrong track" and fostered the widespread sense that American power has entered a period of decline. This is the age of irresponsibility.

Barack Obama was elected, in part, to restore the public's confidence in the elites. But he will have a hard time doing so. Obama mistakenly assumes that the problem is political. If the problem were political, a change in the partisan composition of government

would be all that was necessary to restore confidence and integrity to the system. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. The Bush administration's failures did not occur in a vacuum. The problem is systemic.

There has been a change in government, but the crisis persists. Political corruption has not disappeared. It has simply changed its partisan affiliation. The chairman of the House committee that writes the tax code is under investigation for cheating on his taxes. A leading House appropriator, John Murtha, is under investigation for

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accepting illegal campaign contributions. The chairman of the Senate banking and housing committee is under fire for a sweet mortgage deal that he received. President Obama's commerce secretary-designate, New Mexico governor Bill Richardson, withdrew his nomination because of an investigation into his handling of state contracts. Obama's Treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, whose department includes the IRS, has admitted to not paying payroll taxes while he was an employee of the International Monetary Fund. Obama's Health and Human Services secretary-designate, Tom Daschle, withdrew his nomination because he had not paid taxes on his limousine and driver. Another Obama appointee also withdrew because of tax problems. No wonder the federal government is in the red.

The financial system remains shaky. The CEO class remains out-of-touch and politically tone-deaf. In December, federal prosecutors accused investor Bernie Madoff of orchestrating the largest Ponzi scheme in the history of the world. There are manifold opportunities for rent-seeking and graft in the Democrats' huge stimulus bill. And the culture has not been reformed. Over the summer the American swimmer Michael Phelps dazzled spectators with his record-breaking athleticism. Since winning eight gold medals at the Beijing Olympics, how has he behaved? Like a parody of a frat boy with way, way too much time on his hands. He gambles, drinks, and dates a stripper. Photographs of him smoking marijuana have surfaced in the press. This is not simply a case of a young person "having fun" and "enjoying life." Phelps is a role model. Role models have responsibilities. They are supposed to set an example. There are children's books written about Michael Phelps the athlete. Michael Phelps the young man is a character from a Jacqueline Susann novel.

Recently the world's highest-paid baseball player, Alex Rodriguez, admitted that he had used performance-enhancing drugs during the early part of this decade. A reporter asked President Obama for his reaction to the news. "You know what?" Obama said. "There are no shortcuts. . . . When you try to take shortcuts, you may end up tarnishing your entire career."

Bunk. In the age of irresponsibility, when you take a shortcut, you end up with $275 million from the New York Yankees.

So far, there have been two chief reactions to the crisis in American authority. The first is populist. The second is elitist and embodied in the policies of the Obama administration.

Populism, the sentiment that American elites are not acting responsibly, has been building for some time. We've seen it in the reaction to the long catalogue of government and market failures over the last decade. We've seen it in the palpable and growing anxiety about globalization that was manifest during the debates over the Dubai Ports deal, immigration reform, free trade, and the Troubled Assets Relief Program. We've seen it in the left-wing populism of authors like Thomas Frank and in the right-wing popu-

lism of Dick Morris, whose latest bestseller is titled—take a deep breath—*Fleeced: How Barack Obama, Media Mockery of Terrorist Threats, Liberals Who Want to Kill Talk Radio, the Do-Nothing Congress, Companies that Help Iran, and Washington Lobbyists for Foreign Governments are Scamming Us . . . and What to Do About It*.

This is nothing new. Populism has been around for a while. It has its pluses and its minuses. Populism is a temper, not a program, a vague suspicion of elites that reinforces democratic notions of equality and majority rule. The temper motivates Americans to periodically chastise their elites. But the populist commitment also has a dark side. It too often spawns political utopias and pie-in-the-sky plots to better the condition of the people. And populist outbreaks can spin out of control, moving from a reasonable suspicion to a paranoid search for "enemies of the people."

These days the enemies of the people are all over the place. For the left-wing populists, they are the titans of Wall Street, the bank executives, the CEOs who really botched things up but have suffered few consequences, and the business class's political allies in the Republican party. For the right-wing populists, they encompass all elites, from the CEOs whom John McCain criticized during the presidential campaign and the "liberal media" to central bankers and corrupt politicians.

Suspicion. Paranoia. Contempt. Resentment. This sort of thinking doesn't make for reasonable politics. And here, ultimately, is the problem with populism. It is good at diagnosis but bad at prescription. Are a large number of the folks in charge not performing their duties? Yes. Is American society suffering from a deficit of personal responsibility? Absolutely. But the populist too often goes overboard. His rhetoric becomes too fiery. His anger feeds on itself. Asked what steps he'd take to address the problems he has identified, he says little more than "Throw the bums out!" But that doesn't get us anywhere. There are always new bums to take the old bums' places.

Populism excels at tearing down old constellations of power and bringing new ones into being. In 1980, a populist moment brought Reagan the White House and Republicans control of the Senate. In 1994, it gave the GOP both houses of Congress for the first time in 50 years. In 2006, a similar populism handed power back to the Democrats. And, in 2008, widespread public anxieties sent Obama to the Oval Office.

Reagan was a success. He instituted public policies that spurred the economy, forced the collapse of the Soviet Empire, and reinstilled national pride among Americans. Since then the populists haven't been so lucky. The 1994 Republican Revolution ran aground shortly after it left the shore. The 2006 Democratic Restoration was inept. It failed in its principal goal—to force an American withdrawal from Iraq—and rapidly replaced Republican corruption with the Democratic version.

THE CONGRESSMAN

It's too early to judge Obama a success or a failure. But he does appear to understand the cause of the populist tremor. If his inaugural address is any indication, Obama has figured out that a lack of personal accountability is the problem. But he hasn't figured out what to do about it.

"What is required of us now," Obama said, "is a new era of responsibility—a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly." Obama identified the pervasive lack of accountability among American political, economic, and cultural elites. He reminded his audience of the concept of duty. And while he might have expanded the sphere of personal obligation a little too far—what does it mean, exactly, to have duties to "the world"?—the message was spot-on. "It is time to put away childish things," Obama said earlier in the speech, quoting Paul.

To leave childhood behind is to embrace adulthood and the values associated with it. Independence. Self-sufficiency. Modesty. Responsibility. Decorum. Fidelity. Civility. These are the values that have, like the buttresses of a cathedral, supported American society for centuries. A cursory glance around the country today—and especially at the people who run it—reveals that our nation is sorely lacking in these staples of middle-class life. We are living through a drought of middle-class respectability. And that has led us to political and economic crisis.

Obama and the Democrats believe that the erosion of bourgeois values can be slowed or even reversed through public expenditure. This is what the Democrats are talking about when they bring up the "vanishing middle class" and propose government intervention. But their efforts are doomed to fail. Public expenditure can't buy virtue. It may even crowd it out.

To preserve the American middle class, Obama and the Democrats want to transfer the burden of responsibility from the individual to the government. They want to raise taxes and finance expanded federal government intervention in education, health care, pensions, and the workforce. Their logic is that, if you no longer have to worry about sending your child to a good school—or going bankrupt because of a hospital visit, or delaying retirement because your 401(k) is now a 201(f), or working several jobs because you can't get a good wage—you are more likely to have a happy, healthy family. Your middle-class existence will be more placid. The bourgeois values of hard work, accountability, pride in country, and discipline will carry on to the next generation. The populist impulse will subside.

The stimulus bill captures the ethos of this new liberalism perfectly. The dramatic expansion of government's share of the economy is geared toward specifically liberal ends. Ends like Head Start, subsidies for college education, Medicaid, alternative energy, and a loosening of welfare requirements. The bill is a partisan Democrat's dream. It's also a huge miscalculation. Increased dependence on the state is not a solution to our lack of personal accountability. It will only encourage more of it.

Obama is no fool. He understands the need to bolster responsibility. He has given several speeches challenging fathers to play a more active role in raising their children. He seems open to good ideas from the private sector, from the nonprofits, from charities and churches. But his heart is with the public sector. He has witnessed elites fail, yet he seeks to put more power in the hands of political elites. Nor is he alone. The lack of alternatives to Obama's liberalism is dispiriting but unsurprising. All the political energy nowadays is on the left. The unanimity of liberal opinion seems to be that, for America to retain its place among nations, we need to look more like Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

But the values of such social democracies are the opposite of the American virtues. The opposite of what Obama claims to want to promote. The American ethos is one of self-reliance. This is not the same as autonomous hedonism and greed. A self-reliant individual is responsible for himself and his family. He is accountable for his actions. He has to be. The welfare state, by contrast, promotes dependence. As government expands its sphere of involvement in everyday life, the number of supplicants for government assistance increases. Rather than encouraging the individual to take responsibility for his actions, the new liberals have embarked on policies that will encourage the individual to turn to government instead. The individual might be delivered from the risks of the marketplace. But what about the risks of the public sector?

Government has, time and again, proven itself inadequate to the immense challenges of the day. At times it seems impervious to reform. The Democrats' assumption is that this is because the GOP was in power during much of the last quarter century. It is a partisan fantasy. What's more, the return of big government only invites further populist reaction. Since Obama has so clearly identified the solutions to the crisis with the state, guess who the people will rebuke if the crisis remains unresolved? Not Wall Street. The way we are headed, in a few years, there might not even be a Wall Street for the people to rebuke.

The failures of the elites aren't related to public expenditure. They are related to a spiritual torpor afflicting the affluent. In a rich society, as we pursue our individual ends, obligations—both private and public—fall to the wayside. The status game consumes all. Corners are cut. The higher we scale the ladder, the more material possessions become an end in themselves. We chase one pleasure after another. Our mantra is "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." The reigning ethic is every man for himself.

Irving Kristol, in his 1976 essay "Adam Smith and the Spirit of Capitalism," anticipated the spirit of our own time:

> [H]appiness comes to mean little more than the sovereignty of self-centered hedonism. The emphasis is on the pleasures of consumption rather than on the virtues of work. The ability to defer gratification, which is a prerequisite for a gradual bettering of one's condition, is scorned; "fly now, pay later" becomes, not merely an advertising slogan, but also a popular philosophy of life.

How does more federal money for school construction fix *that*?

There is no reason Obama can't begin to restore dignity to politics and American life. He just isn't trying very hard. But even if he did try, there is only so much one man can do.

Hence it becomes necessary to identify an alternative vision of society where elites uphold and promote the bourgeois values. Only in this way might we all salve the spiritual crisis behind our age of irresponsibility. Such a task extends far beyond the reach of politics.

Where to begin? Start with some exemplars of decency, professionalism, and ability. US Airways pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger III riveted the nation with his dramatic crash-landing into the Hudson River. Sullenberger's experience and stoicism meant that not a single life was lost during the dramatic and dangerous touch-down. It is no surprise that he has been lionized in the days since. When everything else seems to be crashing all around us, Sullenberger is a rock of common sense and soft-spoken modesty. Imagine—just imagine—if the men and women who represent us in Congress shared his character?

Then there is General David Petraeus. At the recent Super Bowl, Petraeus received huge applause when he walked on field for the pregame coin toss. The crowd's response was no mystery. They were saluting the man who helped rescue the American war effort in Iraq, the man who did so without mincing words to the American people or their elected representatives. Petraeus has a Ph.D., runs marathons, wins wars, and spends every waking moment trying to become a better soldier and man. It ought to give us hope that our culture—the culture of A-Rod, Madoff, Hilton, and Murtha—is still capable of celebrating someone like Petraeus. Why not boldly and consistently champion the commitment to patriotism and duty expressed in the character of the American soldier—a living refutation to irresponsible living?

The sad fact is that it is difficult to come up with more than a few examples of elite responsibility. Failure breeds apathy. So the age of irresponsibility has spawned a cheap cynicism that says, since everything is broken, why not sit back and laugh at the degradation?

THE CEO

But the cynics are wrong. Things can get a whole lot worse. A failure of accountability not only erodes the foundations of our culture. It also puts our country on unstable fiscal ground. A storm of moral and financial insolvency has been brewing for some time. The populist reaction is only the beginning. We're hearing the thunder. Get ready for the deluge. ♦

Lies, Damned Lies, and . . .

Statistics can tell a bogus story BY KEN RINGLE

As the current economic apocalypse reminds us, the most valuable lifetime text on money—or almost anything else, particularly in Washington or Wall Street—was not authored by John Maynard Keynes or Friedrich von Hayek or Adam Smith or Niccolo Machiavelli. It's *The Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen.

This merry fairy tale, in which two Bernie Madoff-type tailors convince a vain king that they've woven him a suit so elegant it's invisible to the stupid or incompetent, ends with the king parading, naked as Clintonian ambition, before a cheering populace unwilling to admit it isn't smart enough to recognize quality threads. Cheering, that is, until a small child points out that the emperor has no clothes.

That child obviously went on to become a properly skeptical reporter. He clearly escaped indoctrination in pre-K from the likes of Foucault, Derrida, and other current icons of academe who cross-stitch the notion of truth with the same needle and thread that clothed the emperor. Alas, today he's an endangered species.

Now comes one Joel Best, author of *Damned Lies and Statistics*, with another earnest little book to help us scissor through the lumpy statistical featherbed that pads every fabric of our public and private life. Want full employment? Want honest stockbrokers? Want health care? Who ya gonna call? Stat busters!

Best, a professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Delaware, is actually a bit of a political Pollyanna, useful as his slender volume is. He assures us that some statistical errors are accidental or inadvertent, which those who toil amid the spinning wheels of the nation's capital know to be largely hoo-ha.

Super Bowl Sunday, 1996

AMY SANCETTA / AP PHOTO

Stat-Spotting
A Field Guide to Identifying Dubious Data
by Joel Best
California, 144 pp., $19.95

Everybody's cooking the numbers. Causists do it to plead their passion. Candidates do it to justify their politics. Federal agencies do it to swell their budgets. Scientists do it to glean research money. Even journalists, who should know better but pretend they don't, do it to grab headlines and boost careers. Show me a Washington worker bee wedded to statistical integrity and I'll show you someone underappreciated, underpaid, and starving for truth. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Nevertheless, Best's prescribed body armor for making one's way through these statistical shootouts is made of the very components Aesop or Socrates advised: skepticism, multiple perspectives, comparison, and common sense. For example, when confronted with fantasyland feminists shrieking that 4 million American women every year are battered to death by husbands or boyfriends, it helps to know that the number of deaths in 2004 of *both* sexes in the United States from *all* causes was only about 2.4 million. Just over half of those died from either cancer or heart disease. In comparison, such highly publicized causes of death as traffic accidents (43,000), suicide (32,000), homicide (17,000), and HIV/AIDS (16,000) each accounted for only about 1 or 2 percent of all deaths—a far smaller proportion than many headlines and fundraisers would have us believe.

Likewise, it helps to know that the U.S. population is something over 300 million, and that about 4 million babies

Ken Ringle, longtime reporter and cultural critic for the Washington Post, *writes from retirement.*

are born in the nation each year, fairly evenly divided by sex. Thus, if 4 million women were being battered to death each year (never mind by whom), the nation's population would be undergoing a fairly precipitous decline.

Such benchmark statistics are available in the annual *Statistical Abstract of the United States*—one of the few government publications turned out by an agency (the Census Bureau) that has no political axe to grind. It's available online.

Best points out that the 4-million-battered-women figure is recirculated regularly on various websites, despite its obvious falsity: "We have no way of knowing what led the creator or the [first] website to make this error," he says charitably. But my own experience suggests we do.

In January 1993, while idly surfing through wire stories as a reporter for the *Washington Post*, I encountered a number of stories claiming that more men beat their wives and girlfriends on Super Bowl Sunday than on any other day of the year. The claim had a certain aura of plausibility. You know: beer, testosterone, gridiron violence. Among the many reporting this "fact" were the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, the *Boston Globe*, and NBC. I had no reason to doubt the reported claim that women's shelters reported a 40 percent increase in domestic violence each Super Bowl Sunday.

But then I stumbled on a secondary story that gave me pause. A women's group in California had held a news conference ramping up the Super Bowl claim. One of those women was Sheila Kuehl. The story identified her as managing lawyer of the California Women's Law Center, but she was better known nationally for having played Zelda, Dwayne Hickman's nagging wannabe-girlfriend, on the 1960s sitcom *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*. While this needn't necessarily void her mastery of jurisprudence, it did spur me to examine her claim. And that involved an Old Dominion University study purporting to say that women's shelters in Northern Virginia reported 40 percent more cases of domestic violence whenever the Washington Redskins played.

Now, that didn't compute. In its annual orgiastic coverage of the Redskins, the *Post* had published numerous stories over the years examining the effect of Redskins fever on the Washington metropolitan area. One enduring finding was that the city and its suburbs are never as safe, and never as quiet, as on days the Redskins play. Police calls, hospital admissions—all were down. Both the crooks and the cops were watching the games. Could the paper have missed something?

Intrigued, I called the authors of the Old Dominion study cited by Kuehl. They said she had totally misrepresented their findings: There was no meaningful statistical relationship between domestic violence and football. Certain there must be a grain of truth somewhere in the Super Bowl violence story, I phoned other authorities, surveyed hospitals and women's shelters, and was astounded to discover that the whole thing was myth. Apparently it had all been ginned up by a yappy lefty "media watchdog group" called—and wouldn't the tailors of the emperor's new clothes love this?—Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).

The *Post*'s front-page story debunking the Super Bowl violence myth prompted embarassment and retractions in the journalistic ranks, and howls of outrage from Kuehl, FAIR, and others who predictably attacked me as some sort of front man for wife beaters. I always urged anyone doubting my story to find verifiable statistics showing a domestic violence surge on Super Bowl Sunday either before that 1993 story or in the 16 years since. No one ever has.

Yet the Super Bowl violence myth *still* circulates. It turns up every January, on the Web and elsewhere. I still get calls and emails about it. As Joel Best writes: "A bad statistic is harder to kill than a vampire."

One of his rules for spotting questionable statistics involves the general tendency of suspect statisticians to confuse frequency and severity. In reality, he points out, the worse things are, the far less common they are. For example, we hear all the time that so many millions in America "go to bed hungry at night." This summons up Depression-era images of skeletal children and wasted adults on the verge of starvation.

Yet that kind of hunger—the sort of epidemic found in Haiti or Zimbabwe or parts of India or Bangladesh—is virtually unknown in the United States. Granted, we have the occasional story of some penniless octogenarian subsisting on canned dog food; and granted, we have no shortage of poverty. But hunger is not the same as starvation, especially in a country where one of the most serious and widespread problems among the poor is obesity.

It may seem, Best declares, that we're bombarded by such statistics, "but the ones we encounter in news reports are only a fraction of all the numbers out there. They have been selected . . . tailored to shock and awe, to capture and hold our attention." Sometimes they're presented with hyperbole—"the worst disaster in U.S. history"—and sometimes with changing definitions—is everything that *was* a wetland *still* a wetland?—and sometimes with slippery measurements—like equating mean income with average income—and sometimes with peculiar percentages or comparisons.

One example of the latter which Best does *not* cite—and how could he have omitted it?—was the famous claim some years back that a single woman over 35 had more chance of being struck by lightning than ever getting married. Surely you remember the hoorah it caused; *Newsweek* even put it on a magazine cover. The statistic was hyped, and subsequently debunked; but it still haunts the psyches of the fearful because, like the Super Bowl violence myth, it appears to validate a certain kind of dread.

How else can you spot dubious data? Do they equate correlation with causality? (Masturbation causes acne!) Do they report emotion as fact? (Blacks believe whites are prejudiced!) Do they leave variables uncontrolled, take facts out of context, or grind an obvious axe? If they do, they may have been sown (as well as sewn) by the tailors of the emperor's new clothes. Or as Stephen Colbert assures us in the preface: "The statistics you don't compile never lie." ♦

Wired for Art

Can genetics explain the human appetite for beauty?

BY MAUREEN MULLARKEY

Until now, no one needed a gene map to find where beauty was located. It stayed where we left it: in the eye of the beholder. Enter a gatherum of beholders, and we had a reassuring consensus that distinguished cultivated tastes—yours and mine, certainly—from the rest. It was not much of a system. Still, it had the merit of dignifying value judgments as acts of intuition rooted in individual sensibility. And it left intact the ineffable dimension of beauty.

It is time to stiffen the spine of contemporary art talk with injections of "Darwinian truth." Denis Dutton, professor of the philosophy of art at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, proposes a *biology* of art. Taste in the arts is shaped by natural selection, he argues. It has been suggested before, this linking of culture and genetics. Last time it ended in tragedy; this is farce.

The Art Instinct
Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution
by Denis Dutton
Bloomsbury, 288 pp., $25

Dutton takes his cue from Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct* (1994), a chatty survey of a cognitive scientist's approach to linguistics. He attempts a parallel excursion through aesthetic appreciation: "Darwinian aesthetics can restore the vital place of beauty, skill, and pleasure as high artistic values." This book manages the semblance of a thesis while skirting the substance of one. The logical niceties of grounding aesthetics—the work of philosophers and psychologists—in the molecular depths of evolutionary biology are left in a tangle. It is assumed that somewhere in our DNA there is at least one nucleotide permutation that does more than determine the "human art instinct." It also ratifies aesthetic preferences that align with Denis Dutton's.

Maybe such a mechanism exists; but Dutton, a nonscientist and off-the-rack Darwinist, knows enough not to hunt for it. Better to hedge with appeals to natural and sexual selection. He bets his ambitions on one horse: The art instinct is a byproduct of biological adaptation, like male nipples and female orgasm (a subject that absorbs a baffling amount of Dutton's attention). An artful dodger, he seizes opportunities to forgo Darwinian imperatives where it suits. The individual artist's sacred intention is, of necessity, exempt from the tyranny of blind causality. (Tracey Emin's unmade bed might be a random variable, but not Dürer's etchings or a Bach cantata.)

Scrupulous inattention to contradictions in his position spares Dutton from having to clarify standards for artistic merit under a Darwinian dispensation. A messy business, taste; it invites obvious questions. How does biology account for the apparent *devolution* of taste that the author laments? Is bad taste an acquired characteristic or a hereditary predisposition? If artistic taste is a Darwinian fitness indicator, are the curators of the Whitney Biennial a genetic underclass? Can a yen for kitsch be identified, like the Epstein-Barr virus, and eliminated *in utero*? Are you wearing that ugly suit because your genes made you do it?

By the time we reach reflection on Jane Austen, Dutton's "Darwinian Genesis for the arts" looks like one more opiate of the professoriate:

> [O]ur intense interest in artistic skill, as well as the pleasure that it gives us, will not be denied: it is an extension of innate, spontaneous Pleistocene values, feelings, and attitudes. . . . Our admiration of skill and virtuosity itself is an adaptation derived from sexual selection off the back of natural selection.

Pleistocene values? He knows what they were? He's read their stuff? The paragraph says more about faculty room culture than it does about literature. With the Western philosophical canon shriveled to a bookend for *The Origin*

BEN STANSALL / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Maureen Mullarkey writes about art for the New Criterion *and other publications.*

of Species, Dutton has little basis for engaging what it is about Jane Austen's fiction that ultimately matters: its moral dimension. Grace of mind—a signal to the old Scholastics of the beauty of moral harmony—is not explicable in physical terms. And moral purpose is not admissible.

Charles Darwin himself, in *The Origin of Species*, was less dogmatic than his acolyte:

> How it comes that certain colors, sounds, and forms should give pleasure to man and the lower animals—that is, how the sense of beauty in its simplest form was first acquired—we do not know any more than how certain odors and favors were first rendered agreeable.

In 1985, Max Delbrück, a Nobel Laureate and one of the world's most eminent biologists, published his lectures on evolutionary epistemology. His *Mind from Matter?* opens this way:

> So far as I can tell, our science simply has no handle whatever on the most conspicuous and immediate reality of our lives: that we are aware.

Dutton knows better. He recognizes the correspondence between our consciousness of beauty and the engines of mating criteria, incest avoidance, and whatever is flashing a thigh in popularizations of evolutionary biology. References galore stand bail for supportable inferences. To refer to something (e.g., "the ways in which costliness and waste impinge on beauty") is as good as arriving at a justified conclusion. It takes chutzpah to ride the coattails of a discipline of which one has only a superficial grasp.

Denis Dutton moonlights as the editorial entrepreneur behind *Arts & Letters Daily*. Bookmarked on browsers across the anglophone world as www.aldaily.com, it is a lively grab bag of articles vacuumed from a miscellany of sources. In a mouse click, readers can swing from anti-intellectualism in presidential speeches to the ancient connection between bathhouses and sex. How about something on Yiddish, cat cloning, botox, or behavioral economics?

The site is required skimming for the same reason Joseph Epstein confessed fondness for the *Times Literary Supplement*: It is indispensable for intellectual dilettantes. A little dilettantism makes conversation, but it drags on the interdisciplinary splash Dutton wants to make. *The Art Instinct* follows the format of ALDaily: It is a magpie succession of opinions, snippets of anthropology, bouquets to Steven Pinker, and leaps from Pleistocene rain forests to calendar art and Kant. Names drop; the desiderata pile up. Dutton chats about art forgery, sniffs at "bourgeois high seriousness," curtsies to irony, jabs at "theists," and draws analogies between clitoral stimulation and . . . well, it is hard to say.

The Art Instinct seems partly calculated to establish the author's bona fides as a correct-thinking multicultural feminist and enlightened opponent of "masculinist agendas" and creationism. He is pleased to let on that religious convictions and patriotic feelings are byproducts of Pleistocene adaptations. (Count how many times the word Pleistocene appears.) Neanderthal man is the measure of all things.

Yet to say that man has an instinct for artmaking is to state the obvious. The human animal is a cauldron of instincts. Like other species, *homo ludens* loves to play. *Homo faber* craves to build and make things; so do beavers and bower birds. But our shared creatureliness tells us nothing useful about Western man's historic ache to identify the beautiful and the good. Aristotle ("The beautiful is that which . . . being good, is pleasurable because it is good") would have had no difficulty grasping St. Augustine's prayer: "O Beauty, late have I loved Thee."

One instinct specific to man is the quest for transcendent meaning, an enduring subtext of the study of beauty. Dutton's armchair panty raid on evolutionary biology forfeits philosophy's crucial witness to questions that lie beyond the legitimate horizon of science. ♦

P&A

Motivation High

Schools that work need a system that sustains them.

BY JOAN FRAWLEY DESMOND

During a campaign stop in Milwaukee, site of the largest publicly financed voucher program in America, then-Senator Barack Obama was asked to comment on the city's school reform program. He expressed skepticism about vouchers, but seemed to leave the door open: "You do what works for the kids," he told editors at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. As news of this apparent willingness to buck the teachers' unions made headlines, the campaign issued a quick clarification: Barack Obama "has always been a critic of vouchers."

If President Obama still wants to know "what works for kids," particularly students on the social margins, he should pick up *The Street Stops Here*. This compelling portrait of the daily "miracles" performed in Roman Catholic institutions like Harlem's Rice High School isn't designed to make the case for vouchers. (Patrick J. McCloskey favors privately funded tuition subsidies that don't carry the risks associated with government intrusion, and thus pro-

The Street Stops Here
A Year at a Catholic High School in Harlem
by Patrick J. McCloskey
California, 456 pp., $27.50

Joan Frawley Desmond, who writes on religious and social issues for a variety of publications, lives in Maryland.

tect the unique character of church schools.) No, the author is concerned with a less contentious agenda: He wants to renew our appreciation for the methods, achievements, and requirements of inner-city Catholic schools that might face extinction if they don't stabilize their finances.

A Canadian journalist who conducted research for the book while attending the Columbia School of Journalism, McCloskey asks readers to discard preconceived notions about the "Catholic model"—a top-down, teacher-directed, virtue-based approach that contradicts the received wisdom of progressive education. He even suggests that urban public schools might incorporate some of the practices of Catholic schools. His moving account of the daily grind at one such institution should easily convince readers that Catholic schools for the poor deserve and need support.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York operates 55 secondary schools. No one would mistake Rice High School for boys, founded by the Congregation of Christian Brothers in 1938, as the crown jewel of the system. Short on funds, staff, and occasionally even students, the school provides a case study of the crisis besetting inner-city Catholic education.

Critics assert that such schools are "elitist institutions," and that higher test scores and graduation rates are achieved by "skimming" the best students from the public system. Such claims, however, do not describe the status quo at Rice. When the author arrives for the start of the school year, he encounters an institution organized around an unstated but radically pragmatic mission: Rice seeks to move students from the underclass into the working class.

The student body includes boys from stable dual-income and single-parent families. But Rice also enrolls homeless teenagers, former gang members, and students with parents dying of AIDS or battling addiction. Private and corporate donors help out the most needy, covering all or most of the annual $5,550 tuition. For some students, a Rice diploma is the only option: "They all dead or in jail," says one boy of friends who began their high school careers in the public system.

Most freshmen begin Rice with academic deficits and nonexistent work habits; but contrary to their experience in middle school, they learn that disruptive behavior and unfinished assignments provoke immediate consequences. Few are ready, but 99 percent of Rice seniors get into college. McCloskey believes this is accomplished through a hopeful, ordered, and unifying religious ethos that makes the school community "an attractive alternative to street culture."

Another key difference with public schools is that the church places enormous authority (and accountability) in the hands of principals. The late Orlando Gober, the archdiocese's first African-American principal, led Rice like a latter-day Charlemagne. On a given day, he played the roles of visionary, disciplinarian, teacher, fundraiser, and father figure. Through extraordinary personal commitment, he kept this small, countercultural oasis functioning.

Initially, Gober appears an unlikely hero. The students idealize celebrity athletes and gangsta rappers; the principal was an overweight diabetic who initiated a campaign to eliminate the "n-word" from student speech. But teenaged boys raised by single mothers yearn for paternal approbation, and many visited Gober's office to sort out their troubles. As students dropped their guard, the principal confronted the "father wounds" inflicted by absent men who rarely surfaced in their sons' lives. Yet Gober disdained self-pity as a "trap." When a homeless student complained about doing homework, Gober reminded him that a college scholarship, the ultimate solution to his predicament, requires even *more* concerted effort.

"You are male by birth, but men by choice" is one favorite aphorism that Gober repeated at assemblies. His impromptu sermons and classroom discussions were inspired by Christian teaching, which affirms the intrinsic dignity of each person and guides the inculcation of virtue. The faculty's determined efforts to help students find their place in the world recall 19th century New York, when local churches began to open schools for impoverished Irish immigrants, seeking to curb an epidemic of homelessness, alcoholism, and illegitimacy. The parochial system evolved into a powerful tool of social engineering, and aided subsequent waves of Catholic immigrants.

For much of the 20th century, the steady supply of educated priests, nuns, and brothers established a financially competitive alternative to the public system. The religious teaching orders lived in common and made minimal financial demands, keeping tuitions low. The status quo remained intact until the 1970s, when religious orders lost members in droves and church schools were forced to raise tuitions to cover salaries for lay faculty. Meanwhile, demographic changes in urban neighborhoods reduced the pool of Catholic students.

Rice High School proves that Catholic schools can still change lives. But the church has yet to adopt an economic model that will keep tuitions affordable. About a hundred Catholic schools close annually, the survivors depend on a patchwork system of contributions from parents, wealthy Catholics, foundations, and local corporations. (Twenty percent of Rice students receive full tuition from Student Sponsor Partners, the nation's first privately funded voucher initiative, which turns away thousands of applicants.) And although Rice is still open for business, McCloskey describes its status as fragile—a "lingering presence" in Harlem.

The Street Stops Here calls on Roman Catholic leaders, education reform groups, and large philanthropic institutions such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to coordinate a systemwide rescue/reinvention that would protect the legacy of Rice High School, and similar institutions, for generations to come. As Obama said, "You do what works for the kids." ♦

West Meets East

The extraordinary history of Rome's exotic remnant.

BY RICHARD TADA

Empress Theodora and attendants, Ravenna

Two workmen knocked on Judith Herrin's door in 2002. They were repairing buildings at King's College, London, and were intrigued by the sign that read "Professor of Byzantine History." Upon encountering Professor Herrin, they asked, "What is Byzantine history?" Herrin was momentarily flummoxed by the question, but eventually managed (as she puts it) to "sum up a lifetime of study in a 10-minute visit." That visit resulted in *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, an introduction to the topic for nonspecialists.

The Byzantine Empire represents history's greatest survival story. As the surviving eastern half of the Roman Empire, Byzantium enjoyed an extraordinary combination of cultural inheritances—Greek, Roman, and Christian. It thus had deep roots, and was able to withstand shocks that would have killed a lesser state. During the meteoric rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Arabs took Syria and Egypt from Byzantium and swept away the Persian Empire in the east. But the newly truncated Byzantine Empire—confined to Anatolia, part of the Balkans, and Sicily—managed to rally, beating back Arab attempts to seize the great capital city of Constantinople.

Byzantium
The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire
by Judith Herrin
Princeton, 440 pp., $29.95

Were it not for Byzantine resistance, Islam might well have overrun much of Europe. This fact alone makes Byzantine history enormously significant—as Herrin states, "the modern western world, which developed from Europe, could not have existed had it not been shielded and inspired by what happened further to the east in Byzantium."

Yet Byzantium's relationship with medieval Western Europe was uneasy. A long period of isolation led the eastern and western branches of Christianity to drift apart. The resulting differences in custom and (to some extent) in doctrine led to mutual suspicions and escalating hostilities, culminating in the disastrous Fourth Crusade of 1204, when westerners sacked and occupied Constantinople. Although the Byzantines were able to retake Constantinople in 1261, the empire had been badly undermined. It entered a long decline, finally succumbing (though not without a fight) to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Byzantium has a thematic structure. Each chapter focuses on a particular broad topic, such as the imperial court, icons, and the survival of Roman law. Herrin is clearly a master of her subject, as shown by her excellent description of Byzantine literary culture. The Byzantines spoke Greek. While the vernacular speech was on its way to becoming modern Greek, Byzantine scholars maintained the ability to read classical Greek texts. Thus the Byzantines deserve the credit for preserving the remnant of ancient Greek literature that survives today, since it was their scholars who copied and commented on the texts.

For their part, the Byzantines, following in the tradition of the great historians of classical antiquity, wrote many distinguished works of history. Herrin devotes a chapter to Anna Komnene (or "Comnena" in the more familiar transliteration), the daughter of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos, who reigned between 1081 and 1118. In the late 11th century, Byzantium was nearing collapse, torn by internal conflict while under heavy attack from external foes. Anna's work, the *Alexiad*, recounts the thrilling back-from-the-brink story of the imperial revival orchestrated by her father.

Herrin (correctly, in my view) defends Anna from a recent preposterous claim that she never wrote the *Alexiad*, but merely cobbled together notes left by her husband after he died. Herrin notes that Anna had the opportunity to gather information on the battles and other dramatic events she describes: She

Richard Tada is a writer in Seattle.

accompanied her father on forays outside of Constantinople and evidently listened in on conversations he held with his military commanders.

Herrin emphasizes the point that, contrary to stereotype, the Byzantine empire was not a static, hidebound entity. Paradoxically, a state like Byzantium, with a deeply rooted cultural tradition, can be more flexible and innovative than one without. An example involves the Slavonic liturgy, the means by which the Byzantines propagated Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans and (in a development with enormous consequences for the future) in Russia. During the early medieval period, Slavs overran most of the Balkans. In the ninth century, two brothers in Thessalonica, Constantine and Methodios, learned the Slavonic tongue. Constantine—who later took the monastic name Cyril—devised a Slavonic alphabet (though the alphabet we now know as "Cyrillic" is a later development).

Cyril and Methodios oversaw the translation of the Bible and the Orthodox liturgy into Slavonic. While their mission to Moravia (in the modern Czech Republic and Slovakia) ultimately failed, their disciples became influential in newly converted Bulgaria. From the 10th century onward, the translations of Cyril and Methodios became instrumental in the Christianization of Russia. Herrin sees the Byzantines' promotion of Slavonic (instead of insisting on Greek) as an "example of Byzantine innovation and creativity," contrasting it with the western Church's emphasis on Latin.

A few points in *Byzantium* trigger the impulse of a specialist to quibble. For example, Herrin discusses the 11th-century devaluation of Byzantine gold coinage, presenting it as the result of budgetary pressures. However, she doesn't mention another possibility raised by modern scholars: Perhaps the devaluation was a response to economic growth, which increased the demand for circulating coinage—a demand met by minting a larger number of debased coins. Such nitpicking aside, the information here is both solid and detailed—so much so that even a specialist will frequently encounter previously unknown facts.

Byzantium does have a couple of shortcomings. Some chapters seem to meander, almost in a stream-of-consciousness fashion, from one topic to another. While this enables Herrin to display an impressive range of knowledge, it can make political and military developments, where a grasp of the chronology is critical, hard to understand. Thus in Herrin's account of the initial Islamic conquests, the *second* Arab assault on Constantinople (in 717 A.D.) is discussed before the first (674-678).

A more serious problem arises in the last chapter, where Herrin addresses Pope Benedict's 2006 lecture at Regensburg, in which the pontiff quoted the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (reigned 1391-1425) regarding the aggressive nature of Islam. At this point, current *bien-pensant* attitudes make their intrusive appearance. Herrin accuses Benedict of displaying an "ignorance of Byzantium," and then launches into a defense of Islam that seems out of place. She probably would have done better to avoid the Benedict incident altogether.

Possibly as a result of similar attitudes, Herrin's account of the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453 falls flat. When describing the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204 she quite rightly denounces "the desecration of ancient Christian places" and "the murder, rape and mistreatment of fellow believers." By contrast, her description of the Ottoman sack of 1453 is exceedingly restrained, emphasizing offences against property. Yet the sack of 1453 was every bit as brutal as that of 1204, and plundering was the least of it.

Fortunately, the distorting mirror of contemporary allegiances is largely confined to the final portion of the book. But in general, *Byzantium* offers a solid introduction to Byzantine history and culture, and the sheer depth of information it contains could repay multiple readings. ♦

PCA

Brief Encounter

Once upon a time, Archibald MacLeish cast a shadow. **BY JOHN SIMON**

Lately I have been rereading some of the poems of Archibald MacLeish. I can't say that I like them any more than I ever did, but it brings back memories of the time when I was a section man at Harvard in a poetry course he taught.

Between 1949 and 1962 he was Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, a grand title if ever there was one, though perhaps a tautology as well. What, one wonders, is the difference between rhetoric and oratory? At most, the one between how to write an effective statement and how to deliver it effectively. But while the former remains in the purview of an English department, the latter would seem to belong in a theater department.

As a professor of English, MacLeish put together efficient classroom presentations and delivered them in a smooth and pleasing manner; not for nothing had he been a lawyer and a diplomat. What impressed me even more than the content was that he always began precisely at the designated minute, and always ended with his last word synchronous with the bell announcing the end of the hour. Did he use a stopwatch when composing a lecture? And even so, how did his punctilious punctuality defy the irruptions of the unforeseen?

It happened either in the academic year 1950-51 or, possibly, in the next

John Simon writes about theater for Bloomberg News.

one. MacLeish was teaching two courses. One a seminar in writing, mostly for graduate students, with which I wasn't involved. That year his star students were William Alfred, working on his play *Hogan's Goat*, and Ilona Karmel, with concentration camp horrors behind her, writing the autobiographical novel *Stefania.* The play, first produced locally, eventually made it to a short New York run, providing Faye Dunaway with her first lead. Alfred then faded away. Karmel's novel was a moderate success, after which she, too, disappeared.

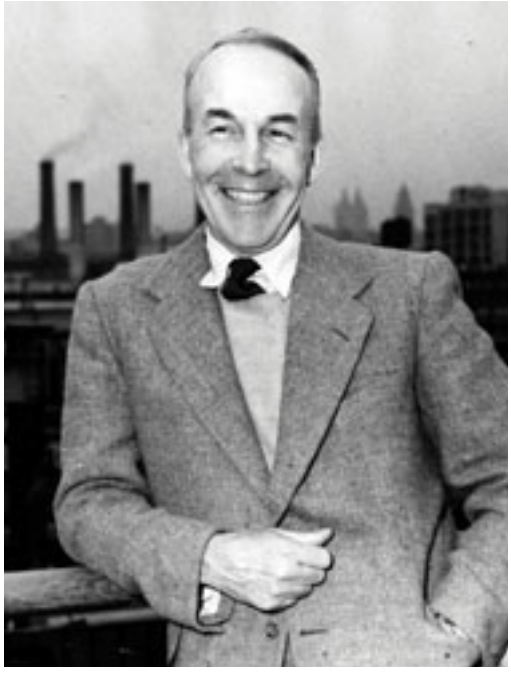
The one-semester undergraduate course, in which I was one of three section men, was called "Yeats, Rilke, Rimbaud." The professor lectured twice a week to the entire class. Each section man, a graduate student in charge of one-third of the undergrads, filled in details, answered questions, and discussed the written assignments he had graded. Interesting papers were also shown to the professor.

At a preliminary meeting with the section men, MacLeish provided an outline of the course. David Aivaz, one of my fellow section men and himself a promising poet, asked whether someone like Hart Crane wouldn't be similar enough to Rimbaud and easier for the students—Rimbaud and Rilke having to be read in translation. With considerable hauteur, MacLeish replied that Crane was in no way a worthy substitute for Rimbaud, with which, tacitly, I completely agreed.

As it happens, into my section fell three subsequent celebrities. Rona Jaffe, future pop novelist and author, above all, of the bestselling *The Best of Everything*, was a standard B student, neither problem nor pleasure. Adrienne Rich, already winner of the Yale Younger Poet Prize, approached me the second week in a huff: Why was the course so elementary, and couldn't I get MacLeish to make it more advanced? I couldn't, and saw no need for it; Rich promptly dropped the course.

Harold Brodkey—future author of the appealing story collection *First Love and Other Sorrows* and, among several lesser works, the grandiose but unfinished 836-page posthumously published autobiographical novel *The Runaway Soul*—was a problem. MacLeish's assignments were perfectly reasonable: explications of a certain number of key poems. This Brodkey couldn't, or wouldn't, do. He wrote, instead, self-indulgently surreal prose poems that had nothing to do with the assignments.

I finally sat down with him on the steps of Widener Library and tried for an hour to guide or coax him into doing right. He wouldn't budge. In one of his typically irrelevant papers he made fun of MacLeish's "menopausal maunderings"—or was it "lucubrations"? In any case, something similarly offensive.



Archibald MacLeish, 1947

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

I graded Brodkey as incomplete, and thus a failure. MacLeish simply transferred him to Peter Seng's section, where he got a respectable grade. A mediocre student named Felicia (last name forgotten), who belonged to a prominent family, got MacLeish to up her grade from a C to a B. Altogether, he always tried to be popular with the students, whether or not they deserved special concessions.

Occasionally, MacLeish would summon me to his office in Widener, trying paternally—or paternalistically—to turn me into an easier grader. In the sense of how education evolved, he was right; as to where such leniency landed us, he was not.

Students being students, they looked for and found spurious shortcuts. In the case of Yeats, they latched on to the line "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart," and bandied it about as an answer to every question about the poems. This was brought to MacLeish's attention and mildly upset him.

What upset him much more was the students' discovery of what remains to this day his best-known poem, "Ars Poetica," and its portentous ending: "A poem should not mean / But be." Visibly embarrassed, MacLeish went into a superior performance of rhetoric and oratory trying to explain that those words, whatever they managed to *be*, did not *mean* what they seemed to say. But dissatisfied with his own sophistry, he resolved to repudiate the poem and prevent its future reprinting. Needless to say, he dropped the idea.

When the course got to Rilke, MacLeish announced that, in a forthcoming lecture, we would alternate: He would read a poem in translation with me then reading it in the German original. I don't know how the reigning beauty among Radcliffe students, Christine Bosshard, of German-Swiss origin, got wind of this and came to me asking to audit that session. I, of course, agreed—and, after one look at her, so did MacLeish.

Christine enjoyed my performance, but alas, not enough to show any further interest in me. MacLeish, however, summoned me to his office, which I entered wondering what I had done wrong this time. He, however, received me cordially, and merely wanted to know who was that beautiful girl I had brought to his class. I told him what little I knew.

Christine graduated, but I somehow

managed to track her down in New York's West Village. She granted me a short walk around a few blocks of the Village. She revealed very little about herself, and made no mention of MacLeish. That was the last I saw of her.

As the course progressed to Rimbaud, I hoped that Archie (that was how I thought of him, but certainly not how I addressed him) would also ask me for some recitation in French. This didn't happen, either because he did not know my fluency in French, or because, in his five expatriate years in Paris, he had learned enough French to be able to recite Rimbaud in French to himself, and let the students fend for themselves.

At term's end, Archie threw an afternoon farewell party for his students in both courses. He and his wife Barbara inhabited a rather grand house in the suburbs, and we foregathered in a large, glassed-in terrace room. In a corner sat Barbara, lovely but prematurely white-haired, looking wifely and silently knitting. When Archie would turn to her for comment, she would just smile and knit on. He was nicely put together, as always, conservatively suited as befits a former assistant secretary of state and Librarian of Congress. Not for him the academic uniform of rumpled corduroy jacket and khaki pants.

For some reason, Harold Brodkey wasn't there; perhaps he had had enough of menopausal maunderings. When MacLeish voiced his regret at the absence of an outstanding student, I had had enough and quoted the outstanding student's slur. The result? It was held against me, not him.

The last time I saw Archie was years later at some cultural program of New York's 92nd Street Y. He was seated a few rows ahead of me on the aisle, with the good wife next to him. I went up to them and greeted respectfully. After the briefest bafflement, Archie beamed at me, greeted me warmly and, turning to Barbara, asked, "You remember John Simon, dear, don't you?" Barbara said little, if anything, and smiled her knitter's smile. No memorable words passed, and perhaps there wasn't even time before the program began.

Sad, but not exactly unearned, is how unread and unremembered MacLeish has become today, not quite 27 years after his demise, both as poet and cultural propagandist. This despite his two Pulitzer Prizes for poetry and one for drama (the pretentious but hollow verse play *J.B.*, which also won a Tony). He also won a National Book Award, the Bollingen Prize in poetry, an Academy Award for Documentary Feature (*The Eleanor Roosevelt Story*), and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

His poetry hardly even needed Edmund Wilson's brilliant satire, "The Omelet of A. MacLeish." Check out almost any poem of his and it reads like a parody of T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound. Even the frequent absence of punctuation MacLeish could have derived from e.e. cummings or Guillaume Apollinaire. On dusty shelves, the poems may still be, but they certainly do not mean much.

Perhaps the best thing Archibald MacLeish ever wrote was a radio play, *The Fall of the City*. In it the citizenry are terrified by a menacing figure in armor outside the city walls until, though conquered by it, they discover that the armor is empty. How prophetic of Archie's fate. ♦

A Civil Reunion

Lee meets Grant at the New-York Historical Society.

BY CHRISTOPHER WILLCOX

Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, two of American history's most enigmatic and controversial figures, are receiving a thorough, and thoroughly stunning, reappraisal at the New-York Historical Society in a blockbuster exhibition that will delight the public and inflame the partisans—particularly those who most revere the gentleman in grey. Originally conceived as separate shows, this monumental project is a joint effort of the New York society and its counterpart in Richmond (the Virginia Historical Society), where the show opened late last year. Its particular genius lies in its careful examination of the similarities and differences in the two men, as well as the regionalist interpretations that have colored their stories for generations.

Grant and Lee in War and Peace
Through March 29 at the New-York Historical Society

If General Lee emerges slightly diminished by comparison, it is not from any fault of character or failure of nerve. Indeed, the exhibit keeps pretty close to the mythic, and deeply popular, narrative of the reluctant rebel who supported the Union until the very end, then fought valiantly and against overwhelming odds, accepting defeat honorably and returning to Virginia to cultivate his garden. It is, rather, General Grant's immense, if flawed, stature as a military genius and hugely consequential political leader that casts a shadow over the whole history of the Civil War and the Gilded Age.

Talk about an odd couple. Lee was tall, patrician, impeccably dressed, and kept a volume of Marcus Aurelius alongside his Bible for easy reference. He was the very epitome of Episcopalian gentlefolk. Grant was, by all accounts, short, stout, a sartorial disaster area, and far more likely to have a whiskey bottle nearby than a Bible.

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

He even refused last rites on his deathbed, apparently feeling that he hadn't earned the right to them.

Lee was an effective, even creative, farmer prior to the war and later an outstanding educator as president of what is now Washington and Lee University. Grant failed at everything he undertook outside of public service and was often at the brink of ruin. In the end he saved his family from penury by penning a remarkable memoir with an assist from his close friend, Samuel Clemens. He barely got it out the door before expiring from throat cancer.

Lee married up (to Mary Custis, a step-granddaughter of George Washington) but unhappily. Grant's marriage to Julia Dent was a love match and, if less storied than the marriage of John and Abigail Adams, it would be hard to imagine a happier one. Even their funerals were a study in contrast: Lee's was a modest affair in quiet Lexington, Virginia; Grant's was witnessed by more than a million people in New York City, and his tomb in Upper Manhattan is the stuff of pharaohs.

Both men were effective strategic thinkers and eager to take the offensive on the battlefield. As the exhibit notes, the Civil War's early skirmishes were fought where Lee wanted them to be fought. What set Grant apart and above, however, was his nuts-and-bolts brilliance as a quartermaster: His troops were better supplied and better fed than anyone else's, Union or Confederate. That and his sheer audacity made him the go-to general for Abraham Lincoln, who famously declared that he wanted more drunkards running his battles if they could fight like Grant. By the time he laid siege to and took the supposedly invulnerable Vicksburg on the Mississippi River, the war was pretty much over for the increasingly isolated and undersupplied Confederacy. But not before the death toll reached 618,000. If Grant had one drawback as a warrior, it was his tolerance for casualties. His fellow Union generals judged him harshly on this point, and there is no evidence that Grant inspired the kind of adulation from his associates that Lee famously enjoyed. He was all about results, and the results were undeniable.

Although the Civil War provides some of the most vivid images and artifacts on display, there is a good deal of imaginative and intriguing material on both men's prewar experiences in Mexico and in battles with Indians. And although historians and anyone deeply familiar with the period will discover few surprises, the general public is probably unaware that Lee, a West Point graduate, was offered the command of Union forces by his fellow Virginian Winfield Scott before he decided to join the Confederacy. The what-ifs had he accepted that offer—including, possibly, the avoidance of war—are tantalizing indeed.

ALONZO CHAPPEL / AP PHOTO

Lee and Grant at Appomattox, as seen by Alonzo Chappel

Apart from some interesting portraiture and a wonderful George Catlin oil, "Comanche Warriors," the standout visuals in the show are the political cartoons, especially by Thomas Nast, and the stunning photography. An 1870 portrait of Lee by Michael Miley is grave, majestic, and heartbreaking—a masterpiece. It might also hold the key to Lee's enduring appeal, which is, above all, about character, image, and charisma.

As president, Grant sent federal troops into the South to protect the freedmen's civil rights and suppressed the Ku Klux Klan. He strengthened the federal government and encouraged development of the western frontier. He would be the first president to extend significant legal protections to Native American tribes; African Americans had more freedom to vote under Grant than they were to enjoy until passage of the 1968 voting rights act. He cemented the special relationship between the United States and Great Britain that would serve the world well—and even save it in the next century. He ended the financial panic of 1873 by vetoing a popular but inflationary currency bill. And although his second term was plagued by scandals involving friends and family, there is no evidence that he was guilty of anything but a trusting and loyal nature.

Lee spent his final years, among other things, transforming a provincial school with 50 students and four teachers into a first-rate college with 410 students and a faculty of 22. He had disassociated himself from the Peculiar Institution, and keepers of the flame have been assiduous in circulating quotations like his pronouncement, in an 1856 letter to his wife, that slavery "is a moral and political evil in any country." Still, Lee retained slaves as long as he legally could, had runaways (including a woman) whipped, and fought for a cause that would have preserved slavery, whatever his personal qualms or intentions.

The history of the American Republic is continuously written and rewritten, and "Grant and Lee in War and Peace" is hardly the last word on the critical period they helped shape. But it is a fascinating contribution to the continuing conversation, and manages to be entertaining and informative, for which we can be thankful. ♦

The Jazz Singer

Blossom Dearie, 1926-2009.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

When the jazz singer Blossom Dearie died recently at age 82, the *New York Times* described her as a "cult chanteuse," explaining that the six Verve label albums she recorded in the late 1950s, "are today regarded as cult classics."

This was meant to be a compliment, I suppose, implying that Miss Dearie's followers are a fervent band—a musical elite of sorts—zealously devoted to her quirky, seductive singing style. As words go, however, "cult" has a decidedly pejorative edge, and the *Times* seemed to be suggesting that Blossom Dearie's fans—and by extension, camp followers of traditional jazz—are a rarified bunch, slightly out of step with the popular musical mainstream, perhaps hovering somewhere above it.

If so, I was pleased to count myself among them. Blossom Dearie—her real name, by the way; she was born Marguerite Blossom Dearie, the daughter of a Scottish immigrant—was not to everyone's taste, but I found her high-pitched, understated style quite appealing, especially combined (as it usually was) with a subtle, unerring sense of swing. Not least, she was one of those singers who accompanied herself on the piano—a feat of musical dexterity that I, as a jazz pianist wannabe, find impossible to comprehend. See if you can track down a video of Mel Torme playing and singing "When Sunny Gets Blue," and you'll see what I mean.

As for Blossom Dearie, her death is an occasion for mourning, but not undue sadness. Like the luckier jazz musicians, she had a solid core following and remained in demand until age and infirmity shut down her nightclub/cabaret career a couple of years ago. Unlike many jazz musicians, if she was afflicted with vices, they seem not to have affected her capacity to perform or ability to earn a living. She was, according to the *Times* obituary, "an independent spirit who zealously guarded her privacy"—one of those journalistic phrases designed to raise eyebrows—but the only thing the outside world knew about her was her music.

Which is fine with me. One of the many things I *don't* like about the late Billie Holliday—I speak here as a heretic—is the extent to which her admirers remind us that she lived the lyrics of her songs, or that the pain you perceive in, say, "Fine and Mellow" is searingly autobiographical. To which I say: That's nice, but would it be asking too much to hit the right note and stay in time? Blossom Dearie's voice—curiously girlish, throaty, almost hushed in tone—is clear as a bell and her rhythmic sense is impeccable.

When I learned that she had died I consulted YouTube and found a clip of her performing on "The Tonight Show," introduced by Jack Paar. I would guess that the year is 1961. The camera finds her seated at the piano, her characteristic page-boy blonde hairdo in place, a drummer to the left and bass player in the background. We never actually see the keyboard, but Blossom Dearie's arms move up and down and back and forth as she sings a slow, methodical version of "Surrey With the Fringe on Top."

It is a bravura performance. Her subtle phrasing infuses a measure of wit and charm into Oscar Hammerstein's otherwise saccharine lyrics, and her sense of swing and jazz timing—playing around with the beat, pushing the tone slightly up, down, or sideways—is diabolical. Her voice seems never to rise more than a few notches above a whisper, but the minor changes in key and little vocal arpeggios are perfectly done. A fair-to-middling Broadway tune is transformed into a small gem of a jazz composition.

It's a pleasant thing to watch, very infectious, and something of an artifact as well. Blossom Dearie is one of the great song stylists of jazz—in a line of succession that includes, say, Ella Fitzgerald and Anita O'Day—but you have to wonder where it all leads. There are younger singers who perform in the tradition of the American Songbook—Stacey Kent is a favorite of mine—but as the *Times* would put it, nowadays they are closer to cult favorites than widely popular. Jazz has never enjoyed a mass audience—it came closest during the swing era of the 1930s—and is today one of those rarified tastes, like opera, that thrives in a modest niche in the musical universe.

That clip of Blossom Dearie on *The Tonight Show* is a case in point. Does anyone imagine that Conan O'Brien, soon to succeed Jay Leno in the pilot's seat, will invite anyone remotely resembling Blossom Dearie to perform on his *Tonight Show*? The world that we glimpse in that brief excerpt—*The Tonight Show* broadcast live (in black and white!) from New York, its audience applauding a delicate jazz performance, the collective awareness of an older Broadway tune—is fully as exotic, in the early 1960s, as a surrey with the fringe on top. ♦

NEWSCOM

Philip Terzian is the literary editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Revenge Is Sweet

And there's money to be made killing Albanian Muslims. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

Once again, Hollywood is in shock over the unexpected success of a movie to which no one gave a second thought. Last week it was *Paul Blart: Mall Cop.* This week, it's *Taken*, a kidnap-and-rescue thriller set in Paris but made in English, the work of a team of French filmmakers whose movies make fortunes at home and around the world and have basically laid an egg in the United States. (*The Fifth Element*? *Angel-A*? *B-13*? *Léon*? Do these titles mean nothing to you? Well, then, join the club.)

Taken
Directed by Pierre Morel

This time, Pierre Morel (director) and Luc Besson (writer-producer) have taken the Hollywood rulebook and put it through the shredder. In the movie's third weekend, *Taken*'s box-office take declined by a mere 8 percent. That happens only to successful children's movies, never to R-rated films for adults. The audience is holding steady because people are returning to *Taken* a second or third time, and because they are telling all their friends to see it.

So what is it that is causing all the rumpus? *Taken* is a quick, brutal, beautifully photographed B-movie with absolutely nothing on its mind, perfectly fine if you like that sort of thing, but in no way memorable except for the presence of Liam Neeson. He plays the protagonist, an American ex-spy with an Irish accent (the movie never bothers explaining this) whose teenage daughter is kidnapped by white slavers at Orly Airport.

Neeson has overwhelming power. He's a mountain of a man, and he moves with leonine authority. I've seen him act in the theater four times now, and he has without question the most physically commanding stage presence of any performer in my lifetime. *Taken* just keeps the camera on him, and in part, the financial triumph belongs to Neeson, who may actually become an international box office sensation at the age of 56 because of it.

But Neeson's turn as the star of *Taken* can't explain the movie's staying power. Only one thing can: the killing. When his daughter is first kidnapped, the movie contrives to get him on the phone with her captor. Neeson explains that the kidnappers have made a mistake. He is trained to deal with these situations. If the kidnappers let his daughter go, he will drop the matter right there. But if they don't, he will come after them and he will kill them.

And oh, how he does. He kills them with guns. He kills them with knives. He kills them with his bare hands. He throws them through windows. He kills them three at a time, four at a time. And he does all this while he is completely sleep-deprived. He even shoots somebody's wife in the arm who is a completely innocent bystander just to get the man's attention and cooperation. He only has 96 hours to save his daughter, and save her he is going to.

But even all this killing, with no agonizing and no worrying and no moments of pained self-reflection, doesn't quite get at what is so viscerally effective about *Taken*. What matters is the nature of the people Neeson is killing. They're very bad people. They are seizing girls traveling alone, they're drugging them, and they're selling them off to fantastically rich men as sex slaves, never to be seen again. They deserve to die, and seeing Neeson mete out the justice is a satisfying kind of reptilian-brain wish fulfillment.

Still, we haven't quite gotten at the true nature of the bad guys Neeson dispatches. And here's the thing: They're not just white slavers, not just bad guys, not just slave-keepers. They're *Muslims*.

Now, the movie doesn't make a really big deal out of this. The slavers, you see, are Albanians. They come from a single small town, and by the time Neeson is through with them, the town's annual tax revenues have sunk to maybe two leks a year. But the fact is that Albanians *are* mostly Muslim, around 70 percent. And the men—or rather, the men cast in *Taken*—look like they would be more at home in a café in Beirut than in a town on the Eastern shore of the Adriatic.

Once Liam is done with them, he has to take on their customers. And here he comes crosswise of some unambiguous Arabs. They're on a yacht, they have machine guns, and they work for a big fat old fellow in a white burnoose who looks a little like King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. In the big standoff with Liam, the sheikh actually takes out a scimitar and holds it across Liam's daughter's throat.

In conclusion, then: *Taken* is a nothing movie, albeit one with an exciting star, by a filmmaking duo notably unsuccessful in the United States. But it's about an American who goes to rescue his innocent daughter, slaughters dozens of evil Muslims in the process, and doesn't give it a second's thought.

Taken is a 9/11 revenge fantasy, even if audiences don't quite know it, and its success reveals that even now, more than eight years after the attacks, a somewhat well-wrought version of such a fantasy has the power to seize the American imagination. ♦

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

Britons on trial over "airliner bomb plot"

Tue Feb 17, 2009 12:06pm EST

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By Michael Holden

LONDON (Reuters) - A group of Islamists plotted to cause deatl "almost unprecedented scale" t up transatlantic airliners using explosives hidden in soft drink London court heard Tuesday.

The eight men were almost rea

The Accused

METROPOLITAN POLICE / PA WIRE URN:6886737

1. Cedric James Alexander al-Rashid, 24, stockbroker, native of Taqwa-on-the-Wold, Derbyshire, graduate of Sharia College, Cambridge.
2. Ian "Squiffy" Muhammed, 21, student, native of Lower Medina, Sussex, at Queen Elizabeth II Madrassa, Manchester.
3. Neville Abdul al-Fayed, 25, army officer, native of Ahadith-on-Sea, Cornwall, second lieutenant in the Argyll and Suban'Allah Highlanders.
4. Colin James Herbert "Jumbo" al-Tahajud, 31, clergyman, native of Halal-on-Edge, Staffordshire, sub-Dean of Winchester Mosque/ Cathedral.
5. Rupert Maurice Henry Chador-bin-Umrah, 36, university professor, native of Middle Ashura, Kent, Regius Professor of Divinity, Saddam College, London
6. Ivor Francis "Tuffy" Alaihu-Salaam, 39, huntsman, native of Little Ramadan, Worcestershire, Master of the Fatwa Beagles, Surrey.
7. Oliver Benedict St. John Arafat, 21, student, native of Great Qiyamah, Lincolnshire, at Shahadah College, Oxford.
8. Giles Hamish "Kip" Ibrahim, 25, physician-in-training, native of Upper Surah, Somerset, at the Royal Eid Ul-Adha College of Medicine, London.

Brown: People Love My Scottish Humour

LISTAIR WILFRED-BRIMLEY

nd (Reuters) – At the

the global financial crisis began in late 20

British Prime Minis