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Autumn Reading

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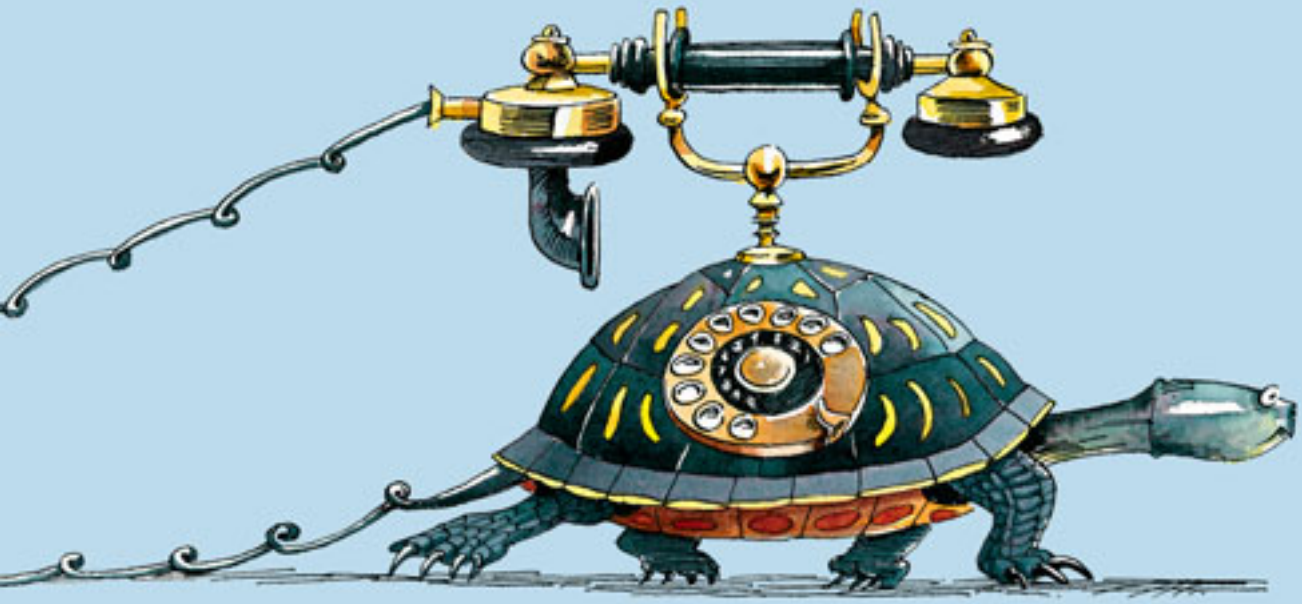

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Sycophancy in Our Time

Once upon a time Lyndon Johnson's chief of staff, Jack Valenti, gave a speech in which he expressed the view that "I sleep better each night knowing that Lyndon Johnson is my president," followed by several sentences of praise for his boss's wisdom, compassion, vision, and strength of character. The reaction, in the nation's capital of 1965, was widespread laughter: Even Herblock, the *Washington Post* cartoonist who reliably protected Democrats in office, felt obliged to depict Valenti as a whipped servant on the White House plantation.

Now, THE SCRAPBOOK brings you up to 2009, and introduces you to Rocco Landesman, the Broadway producer who is chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. Last week Landesman delivered an address in which he took (in THE SCRAPBOOK's considered opinion) Obama-worship to surreal new heights.

> This is the first president that actually writes his own books since Teddy Roosevelt and arguably the first to write them really well since Lincoln. If you accept the premise, and I do, that the United States is the most powerful country in the world, then Barack Obama is the most powerful writer since Julius Caesar. That has to be good for American artists.

Where to begin? Well, first of all, Lincoln was a brilliant craftsman of the English language; but unlike the amazing Obama, he never published any books. And of course, there have been other presidents between Caesar and Obama whose language skills, as it were, have been impressive—Thomas Jefferson, for example—or to adapt Landesman's snarky phrase, wrote their own books: Ulysses S. Grant, whose *Memoirs* are considered a classic of literature, or Woodrow Wilson, whose *Congressional Government* remains a classic work on the subject. Calvin Coolidge's autobiography has its admirers for its compelling, austere prose, and Dwight D. Eisenhower's *Crusade in Europe* was so well written that his editor at Doubleday, Ken McCormick, once said that he scarcely changed a syllable.

As a matter of fact, what makes Landesman's assertion so preposterous is that no one believes Obama's *Audacity of Hope* is anything other than a political potboiler—probably drafted in large part by his Senate staff—and there has been, ahem, credible discussion in the media about who may have ghosted his memoir, *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. Everybody knows the story of General Grant racing to finish his memoirs as he was dying of throat cancer, but no one is entirely confident about who, precisely, produced the works of the most powerful writer since Julius Caesar.

Which, of course, is what really makes Landesman's words so embarrassing. What does it mean to call a president "the most powerful writer" in two millennia? Some of the most admired works in any language—*The Consolation of Philosophy*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"—were written by people who conspicuously lacked political power. Adolf Hitler wrote his very own book (*Mein Kampf*) and was, for a handful of years, even more powerful than Caesar; but no one would have argued in 1942 that "this has got to be good for [German] artists."

Then again, THE SCRAPBOOK is not especially surprised by this outbreak of philistinism. Landesman's predecessor at the Arts Endowment, Dana Gioia, was one of the most admired poets in America; Landesman owns theaters and produces Broadway shows. George W. Bush may not have been a "powerful writer," but unlike Barack Obama's, his administration's intellectuals were the real thing. ♦

More Icons from the Smithsonian

Fate never closes one door without opening another—or so it seems at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall. Since its opening in 2004, the museum's handsome, expensive, enormous, and mostly empty building at the foot of Capitol Hill has become a showcase for innovations in reflexively left-wing and unintentionally hilarious museology.

The NMAI's current lead exhibit, for example, is a chin-puller called "Ramp it Up: Skateboard Culture in Native America," which "celebrates the vibrancy, creativity, and controversy of American Indian skate culture." It closes November 1, but those who mourn its loss can take heart: The skateboards are being replaced by the "iconic works" of Brian Jungen, a Canadian-Indian artist. The Smithsonian come-on says he explores "themes of globalization, pop culture, museums, and the commodification of Indian imagery." Jungen is a multimedia man. Among his "exquisite objects" are totem poles made from golf bags, ceremonial masks made from Nike sneakers, and a basketball court made from—you guessed it—224 sewing tables. (Must be tricky during a fast break!) A tip o' the feathered headdress to the Smithsonian curators, who never fail to top themselves. ♦

Golf bag totem poles

Cross Enrages

Two weeks ago we published a piece in these pages on *Buono* v. *Salazar*, the Supreme Court case in which a former National Park Service employee is demanding that the park service take down a memorial cross that has stood in the Mojave National Preserve since 1934. The Court's decision in *Buono* will likely determine other decisions about the use of religious symbols on public land. One of those cases, *American Atheists, Inc.* v. *Duncan*, is now pending before the Tenth Circuit.

In the mid-1970s, the Utah Highway Patrol Association, a nonprofit group that serves as a booster for the friends and families of Utah's state troopers, began the Fallen Trooper Program for officers killed in the line of duty. Families of deceased troopers could request a memorial; the association would pay for the creation of a white cross marker, adorned with the Utah Highway Patrol logo and a plaque with a short biography of the officer. The memorial would be placed near where the officer had died, most often on the side of a highway. No government funds are used to build or maintain the tributes.

The association says it would have been happy to use any symbol; it just happens that the cross is the only symbol that has been requested by families. In 2005, a group called American Atheists sued the Utah Highway Patrol and the state's Department of Transportation, alleging a violation of the Establishment Clause and claiming that individual plaintiffs (on whose behalf they were suing) were "offended and intimidated" by the crosses, because (1) they are located primarily on the side of (government owned) roads; and (2) the memorials include the official Highway Patrol logo.

The Atheists demand that the memorials be taken down. The district court in Utah found against the Atheists, who appealed to the Tenth Circuit. The appeals court is waiting to see which way the Supremes rule in *Buono* before rendering its decision.

Cases such as *Atheists* v. *Duncan* are likely to proliferate if the Court finds against the cross memorial in *Buono*. Among other things, the plaintiffs contend that the cross is "exclusively a Christian symbol." Which could open a Pandora's Box. Consider, for instance, the American Cemetery at Normandy, where 9,387 World War II servicemen are buried. The graves of Jewish soldiers are marked with a Star of David. All others are marked by a white cross—including 307 "unknown" graves. The same situation applies at the American Cemetery at Flanders Field, where 21 unknown servicemen from World War I are marked by crosses, and at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery, where 490 unknown soldiers are memorialized with crosses.

Arguably, the cross in such settings, aside from being a Christian symbol, has become a memorial symbol in the American tradition. To remove the cross from the nation's symbolic currency wouldn't just be to strip religion from part of the public sphere, but to chisel away at Americanism itself. But then, for groups like the American Atheists, that's probably the point. ♦

Confucius Say . . .

There's no question this month has been a busy one for members of Congress. The fight over health care has been all-consum-

ing. House majority leader Steny Hoyer is adding even more days in the November congressional calendar just to deal with the legislation. Staffers have been spending 12-hour days on the Hill and working weekends. And yet there was still time for Representative Al Green of Texas to introduce House Resolution 784, "Honoring the 2,560th anniversary of the birth of Confucius and recognizing his invaluable contributions to philosophy and social and political thought." The House then allotted 40 minutes to debate said resolution but quickly decided not to use the time (the resolution did pass).

This brings to mind two thoughts from the man himself: "Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue" and "he who will not economize will have to agonize." ♦

Life Imitates Parody

After President Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize, we had a little fun by portraying him in an online parody as winning golf's coveted green jacket of the Masters (see above). Of course we knew it was unlikely the president would win the prestigious golf tourney. At least not this year. But maybe next? According to Mark Knoller of CBS (and as pointed out by *Politico*), Obama has tied "President Bush in the number of rounds of golf played in office: 24." He points out that it took Bush almost three years to reach this total.

We don't begrudge a president's hitting the links. Golf has been a presidential pastime since the Taft administration (if William Howard Taft could swing a 5-iron, who can't?). But remember all the fun the media had with George W. Bush and his fondness for the sport (and for his exercise regimen in general)? Michael Moore had a field day portraying the former president as caring more about his personal handicap than the war on terror. But just as the press now reports on what a great example President Obama sets for our youth when it comes to the amount of time he spends in the gym or playing basketball, we expect to read similar headlines concerning the president and this intellectual game of golf, a sport that requires a keen sense of perspective, an incredible amount of patience, razor-sharp focus, not only strength but also subtlety, and perhaps if any president were to master this game, it would be . . . ♦

Capitalism Takes Its Revenge

Speaking of Michael Moore . . . Remember when the mainstream media were fawning over the hefty filmmaker's latest screed, *Capitalism: A Love Story*? The Scrapbook has been following the film's progress in the press this month. Except there hasn't been much to follow. The movie flopped. Through the end of October, it had grossed only $13 million. Among indie films, its take-per-screen had it lodged last week between *Good Hair* and *Whip It* (nope, we hadn't heard of them, either). Michael Moore: not too big to fail. No wonder he's got it in for capitalism. ♦

Correction

Our literary editor Philip Terzian reports ("with considerable mortification") that the essay about Wikipedia that appeared in the October 26 issue ("Wacky Wiki") was written by Joe Queenan, author of *Closing Time*, and not by Joseph Phelan, editor of Artcyclopedia.com, as we mistakenly indicated. Our apologies to our two distinguished contributing Josephs, and a promise never to confuse them (or our readers) again. ♦

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The Age of Innocence

Until The Weekly Standard offered me a parking space and I began driving to work, I was a lifelong consumer of public transportation. Trains, in particular, are a favorite of mine, including subway trains and underground shuttles. I am less enthusiastic about buses. This may be because of the ponderous nature of bus travel—subject to traffic and frequent, prolonged stops—but I suspect there's a psychological element as well.

I began commuting from suburban Maryland into Washington for school and piano lessons at age seven, and used to think that I spent three-quarters of my time standing at cold, windswept, desolate bus stops waiting for buses that seemed never to arrive in timely fashion. Especially in the city, I was also subject to the attentions of men we would now call homeless, who took advantage of my status as a sitting duck to plead for money or, in certain cases, demand it in the cause of social justice. On the raccoon theory of supply and demand—feed them once and you'll never be rid of them—I would decline.

To be sure, a panhandler in ragged clothes asking for a quarter is something even a young boy in the Eisenhower years could comprehend. Not so the other gentlemen—somewhat better dressed, considerably more voluble, outright friendly—I would encounter on my very long, very tedious, homeward journey.

In the morning my bus was packed with middle-aged, newspaper-reading commuters, male and female; as the evening shadows lengthened, however, my return trips were taken on near-empty buses. Following my lifelong tendency to sit in the back of any room I enter, I would climb on board, find a seat somewhere near the rear of the bus, pull out a book (*Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *The Boys' Life Treasury*, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *1066 and All That*), and read contentedly.

Once every few weeks, however, I would find my reverie interrupted by odd, slightly furtive, unwelcome men—considerably older than me, sometimes gray-haired—who, surveying the vast landscape of an empty D.C. Transit bus, would sit beside me and, after an awkward moment, strike up a conversation.

Needless to say, my parents were not the sort of people who, having committed their seven-year-old to solo travel on a city bus system, would have warned him about things that were, in the late 1950s/early 1960s, essentially unmentionable. And it took a while for me to unravel the mystery of why these vaguely disconcerting fellows should have settled next to me when there were so many empty seats at their disposal.

CHRIS GASH

But I held my own. A combination of innate shyness and not-so-well-repressed fury combined to keep my responses monosyllabic. I had no desire to make a new friend out of some random busrider three or four times my age who wore multiple rings, smelled of cologne, and had ruined my comfortable seating arrangement.

Moreover, my alluring wife assures me that my facial expression in repose looks (in her memorable words) as if I "want to punch someone out." So I tended to speak as little as possible, glare sideways, and pretend not to hear the gentle inquiries about where I went to school, what I was reading, where I lived, what my name was, and how often I took the L-4 bus. In due course they would obligingly shut up, and sometimes even stand up and change seats.

At the time, I was puzzled by the attention. I was not then, and have never been, a pretty thing and, like any seasoned bus rider, usually regarded my fellow passengers with a baleful eye. But I suppose the sight of a lone 13-year-old in a tweed jacket and tie, reading a book (*The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, *This Side of Paradise*, *Lord Jim*, *Harpo Speaks*) might have suggested a certain vulnerability, or sensitivity of temperament, or hunger for love, or whatever. How mistaken they were.

As the years went by a certain innate cruelty of spirit took hold, and I would fix such intruders with a bemused expression, or offer nonsense answers, or tell them that I had "gonorrhea—or diarrhea, I'm not sure which." I have always remembered one slightly pudgy, pasty, slightly balding specimen wearing a brown leather jacket, who spoke in a thick Southern accent. Taking note of the volume in my hands, and seeing that I was an embryonic literary type, he blurted out, "Have you ever read *City of Night* by John Rechy?"

So taken aback was I by this reference to the 1963 bestseller which, in the words of its dust jacket, documents "the garish neon-lit world of hustlers, drag queens, and men on the make who inhabited the homosexual underground of the early sixties," I could only laugh in response.

Somewhat nervously.

Philip Terzian

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The Pelosi Plan

In 1993, a newly elected Democratic president and a Democratic Congress pushed through a tax increase on a party-line vote. The next year Democrats lost control of Congress, with House Speaker Tom Foley defeated in his reelection bid and the Senate seat of retiring majority leader George Mitchell going Republican.

In 1995, the newly elected Republican Congress tried to reduce the rate of growth of Medicare. The proposal was pilloried by the Clinton White House as drastic and unconscionable. The bill did not become law, the Gingrich revolution came to a screeching halt, and Bill Clinton was reelected in 1996, defeating Bob Dole, who, Clinton tirelessly pointed out, had attempted to bring about those Medicare cuts in collusion with Newt Gingrich.

Politicians aren't altogether stupid. No president or congressional majority has tried to raise taxes since 1993. No president or congressional majority has tried to slash Medicare since 1995.

Until now. With Barack Obama as her front man, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi—the real power in the Democratic party—has gone Clinton and Gingrich one better. Clinton tried to hike taxes. Gingrich sought to cut Medicare. Pelosi wants to do both at once. This is quite a feat: She's combined the most unpopular Democratic and Republican proposals of the last generation in one piece of legislation.

Eric Cantor, the House Republican whip, holding a printed copy of Pelosi's bill

And her timing is impeccable. Pelosi has decided to raise taxes and discourage employment just as joblessness approaches 10 percent. She's decided to cut Medicare reimbursements just as seniors' retirement accounts have shrunk. She's decided to advance a huge spending bill just as the deficit is at historic highs. She's decided to insist on federal funding of abortion just as the issue seems to have reached some sustainable middle ground. And she's decided to put forward a 2,000-page piece of legislation with a mind-boggling array of scary instances of bureaucratic coercion and farcical examples of nanny-state liberalism—all nuggets of political gold for Republicans—at a time when the public is sick of statist overreaching and big-government meddling.

This is the Pelosi Plan to wreck our health care system and—the bright side!—the Democratic majority along with it. This week we'll see whether enough of her fellow House Democrats intervene to prevent her from devastating their party. There will be no Republican votes for the Pelosi Plan of tax hikes and Medicare cuts. Will there be enough Democratic resistors so the bill is either withdrawn or defeated?

It's hard to say at this point. The arm-twisting and palm-greasing haven't yet produced enough Democrats to put the Pelosi Plan over the top. The substantive case against various versions of the legislation made for months by an army of nonpartisan experts and wonks has had an effect. The state of the American economy and the federal budget gives sane Democrats pause as they consider enacting a sprawling new entitlement. And as Americans read the legislation over the next week, they'll find so much that is ill-considered, cumbersome, deceptive, and house-of-cards-like that it all just may collapse of its own weight.

Or it may collapse because of swine flu.

After all, we're seeing a big government health care program in operation right now—the Obama administration's effort to deal with the swine flu problem. No, come to think of it, it's now the swine flu emergency. Last week, President Obama so legally designated it. How's that test case in government-run emergency care going?

Turn on your local news to find out. You'll see false reassurances, broken promises, rationing which doesn't provide the promised rations, queues lengthening while supplies run out, and lots of bureaucrats explaining just why things aren't working quite as their centrally planned plans had planned.

The swine flu emergency is a foretaste of life under the Pelosi Plan. Surely this spectacle, happening in real time before us, will give even more Democrats pause. Do they really want to be known as the Swine Flu Democrats?

I suspect that late this week, at least 40 House Democrats will heed the wishes of the American people and refuse to rubberstamp the Pelosi Plan. And once it has been relegated to the dustbin of history, sensible members of Congress from both sides of the aisle will get together to pass reasonable, incremental health care reforms.

—William Kristol

NEWSCOM

Hark! the Heralded Dylan Sings

Bob Dylan fans are the battered wives of the music industry. BY ANDREW FERGUSON

He is one of the great artists of the century.
—Andrew Motion,
England's poet laureate, 2000

The great artist of the past fifty years, I believe.
—Joe Klein, *Time*, 2009

Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle like a bowl of soup,
Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle like a rolling hoop,
Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle like a ton of lead,
Wiggle, you can raise the dead
—Bob Dylan, 'Wiggle Wiggle,' 1990

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

If you needed more evidence, the release this month of Bob Dylan's Christmas album, *Christmas in the Heart*, should close the case. Dylan fans are like Baby Huey dolls, those inflatable figures with the big red nose and the rounded bottom, weighted so that when you punch them—punch hard, punch with all your might—they bounce right back, grinning the same frozen, unchangeable grin.

We can only make a guess how Bob Dylan truly feels about his fans. But it can be a good, strong guess. He's been punching those Baby Hueys for a long time, hard.

It's not too unusual for a performer to lack respect for his most worshipful admirers; he hears himself as they do not, knowing how far short of his hopes his performance invariably falls, despite their wild applause. Sometimes an artist will even hold his audience in contempt, though he's careful, for business reasons, to keep the contempt at least thinly concealed; Abstract Expressionist painters come to mind. But not since Don Rickles at the height of his powers—the second greatest artist of the past 50 years, some believe—has a performer taken delight in actively abusing the people who pay money to enjoy his act. And when Rickles did it, the people were supposed to laugh, and did. When Dylan does it, the fans pull their chins and think hard. Then they pop right back, Baby Huey-like, and start explaining.

This has been going on a long time. The first instance followed an album called *Self Portrait*, released in 1970. In a single two-record set, Dylan embraced every musical convention that the revolution he helped lead a few years before was meant to destroy. *Self Portrait*'s sound borrowed equally from the hillbilly corpus of Frankie Laine and the champagne music of Jackie Gleason. Dylan used his Voice of a Generation to sing "Let It Be Me" backed by celestial choirs and swelling strings, and he led a slick, bored-stiff studio band through Tijuana Brass instrumentals. From the hamper of his own work he produced songs of surpassing idiocy—"All the Tired Horses," for example, which featured a choir repeating its only lyric: "All the tired horses in the sun / How'm I gonna get any riding done, hmmm?"

At first, in the pop music world, there was dismay. Then the chin-pulling began. What was Dylan up to? With the honorable exception of the unillusioned Greil Marcus, who opened his review with a reasonable question ("What is this s—?"), critics tried to puzzle it out. Deep thinking reviewers from *Crawdaddy* and

GARY LOCKE

Rolling Stone began toying with what has since become famous, to me at least, as the Dylan roots theory. It has proved remarkably durable and elastic. Whenever Dylan did something artistically egregious, in poor taste, inept, schlocky, or otherwise incompatible with his reputation for genius, the reviewers would explain that he was a kind of musicologist, plumbing the roots of Americana, absorbing within himself the variegated traditions of our native music and transmuting them into art uniquely his own. Hence "All the Tired Horses." Stupid? The work of a tapped-out songwriter who doesn't know when to quit? Think again. Dylan was simply wandering in realms of the spirit the rest of us hadn't yet reached. As his audience has been saying ever since, he's always one step ahead of his audience. The fact of his genius became unfalsifiable. Nothing he did could contradict it.

So Dylan turned and hit 'em again. He became a born-again Christian. He performed in Kabuki make-up. He performed drunk. He wore funny hats. He veered from headbanger rock to Opryland cheese. He made boring, pretentious movies about himself. *He played with the Grateful Dead*. Nothing seemed to work; his admirers just dug in deeper, gaining confidence as their ranks grew even to include England's poet laureate. At last, in what for any other performer would have been a self-administered death blow, he adopted the stage style he's famous for today: the adenoidal voice mumbling unintelligible lyrics, the chainsaw arrangements mangling the most beloved Dylan standard till the body can't be identified. He tours continuously, doing this night after night.

A Dylan concert is unlike any other event in the history of American show business. It is notable most for the uneasy sense among the audience that no one has the slightest idea what song they're listening to. To an outsider, it looks like a cruel hoax, an inside joke that the joker alone is in on. Yet I've seen fans weep in gratitude as he garbles his most famous lines. The ovations are deafening. Forget Baby Huey: Dylan fans are the battered wives of the music industry.

Not all Boomers have been seduced, of course. Some have dipped in and out of the Dylan catalogue and emerged with fond feelings for a handful of touching love songs, a few really good rave-ups, several funny musical jokes, and once in a while a clever reworking of a standard blues number. His melodies are always simple and often childlike, and sometimes non-existent, on purpose. The lyrics vary wildly in quality. As a lyricist he was poleaxed by the Symbolists early on and never quite recovered. Neither have his admirers, especially the overschooled among them, who were ever after given license to describe his lyrics as "surrealistic" rather than "nonsensical." Late 20th-century American culture held few spectacles more painful than hearing a professor of Elizabethan literature go all exegetical over a "masterpiece" such as "Visions of Johanna," with lines like these: "When the jelly-faced women all sneeze / Hear the one with the mustache say, 'Jeeze / I can't find my knees.'"

Robbie Robertson, who with The Band backed Dylan off and on for many years, takes the most judicious and accurate position toward his friend's stuff. He'd always been puzzled by the overwrought encomiums, he once said. "I heard some great lines, sure. But a *poet*?" And there are some great lines. But for every great line there's another one with a wiggling ton of lead or a scheme that rhymes jeeze with sneeze. In a devastating essay in *Spy* magazine, back in 1991, Joe Queenan sifted the wreckage and nominated these as Dylan's worst lyrics: "You may call me Terry, you may call me Timmy / You may call me Bobby, you may call me Zimmy."

I don't know. We could argue all day.

Misanthropy can be turned into art, especially when the misanthropy is as intense as Dylan's. Americans have made a tradition of it. From Poe to Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce to H.L. Mencken, Sherwood Anderson to Dorothy Parker, the list is long. But Dylan's talent doesn't run as deep as theirs. His contempt hasn't been sublimated and forged into something more comely. *Christmas in the Heart*, the most misanthropic Dylan album ever, spreads it all on the outer layer. The record is a collection of Christmas standards, familiar kitsch classics like "Winter Wonderland" and "Silver Bells" and forgotten kitsch classics like Sammy Cahn's "Christmas Blues," along with the obligatory quasi-hymns, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and "O Come All Ye Faithful," sung, *Deus misereatur*, in Latin.

The production and packaging are professional. The band is competent in a midnight-at-the-Nashville Hyatt sort of way—maybe a little heavy on the tremolo but still. And the songs themselves are fine, of course. The arrangements, though, are jarringly slick, with sleigh bells and gossamer strings and cooing girl singers—as if Dylan had chosen to lift the backing tracks from an Andy Williams Christmas special circa 1968. Oozing just beneath his asthmatic croak, the arrangements give an effect of overwhelming creepiness. His voice gets worse with every track. You wonder whether someone left the karaoke machine on in the emphysema ward at the old folks' home. He doesn't sing notes so much as make exhausted gestures in their general direction, until at a break he falls silent and is rescued by the backup singers, who reestablish the melody in the proper key. But then he starts singing again.

Many of the notices about *Christmas in the Heart* have been pussyfooting. We should be clear: The record is not irony, or camp. This is not a case of "It's so bad it's good." Dylan is not Florence Foster Jenkins or Tom Waits. This is a case of "It's so bad I can't believe it." Under no one else's name would a commercial concern like Sony release a product so embarrassing. Yet *embarrassing* doesn't quite cover it. For a man as self-aware as Bob Dylan, it's—what? The conclusion is unavoidable: He's doing this on purpose. He knows

what his record sounds like. It's not a misstep. It's not a gag. It's an affront, a taunt. He's giving us a choice. He's saying, Okay, this is what it's come to: You've got two options. You can cover your ears and go running from the room in horror, or you can call me an enigmatic genius who's daring to plumb heretofore unexplored archetypes of the American imagination. But you can't do both.

Was there any doubt which option his longtime admirers would choose? They're greeting *Christmas in the Heart* with the usual welcome embrace. (*Thank you, sir, may I have another?*) Baby boomers no longer having a monopoly over pop music's critical apparatus, there have been unkind reviews, too—jokes along the lines of "Get this man a Mentholyptus!" But there's been much more of this: "A true Christmas miracle," said the *Washington Post*; "a genuine charmer," said the *Detroit Free Press*. The *Palm Beach Post* said the new record proved that "Bob Dylan remains as inscrutable as ever." "The case for Dylan goes beyond his music," the *Independent* said, deftly sidestepping the question of quality altogether. "In his own peculiar, perverse way, he has survived extraordinary pressures to offer a sort of unfolding lesson on how to live a full and fulfilled artistic life."

And the roots theory has been put to excellent use, ho ho ho. "Dylan," said the *L.A. Times*, "seems to be offering up an astute exploration of the roots of holiday music—Christmas records in particular—in the same way he has returned in various albums over the years to mine pop music's foundation in blues, folk, country and gospel." *USA Today* said, "His habit of exploring pop's roots resumes." "Throughout his long career," said the London *Observer*, "Dylan's only constancy has been to his music, to the old, half-forgotten forms and the itinerant player's incessant searching."

Over that long career and all that searching, the Dylan roots theory, trotted out here yet again, has protected Dylan from transgressions even more distasteful than releasing terrible albums. Multiple instances of plagiarism, for example, have been hinted at, then proved, then waved away with lit-crit clichés. When someone is rude enough to point out that Dylan has lifted a few lines from someone else's work or copied a melody that isn't his, the theft is called homage, a borrowing, an element of "cultural collage." It's Inscrutable Bob returning to those roots of his, working within the honorable folk tradition that let one old-tyme warbler pinch freely from another and no hard feelings.

As a pop music reviewer put it in the *New York Times* a few years ago, by way of exculpation, Dylan "dips into a shared cultural heritage" to write songs that "are like magpies' nests, full of shiny fragments from parts unknown." The problem is, we do know where some of those shiny fragments come from; most recently they've included lines and images taken from a modern Japanese novel and the mawkish poems of a 19th-century Southern versifier with the unlikely name of Henry Timrod. More to the point, in the folk tradition, performers didn't copyright their works. Property rights would have complicated beyond recognition that gentle spirit of communal give-and-take.

Dylan not only copyrights his stuff, he publishes it under the auspices of the particularly ruthless copyright enforcer BMI, and then without apology he cashes the royalty checks from songs that depend on lyrics that aren't his and melodies he didn't write. He must reckon that a shared cultural heritage is all well and good, but a man's got to make a living. To cite the most lucrative instance, Dylan copied the tune of "Blowin' in the Wind" from an old spiritual called "No More Auction Block." So far so normal, as far as the folk tradition goes: Just one troubadour tipping his dusty slouch hat to a forgotten forerunner. But Bob filed ownership rights over the melody, and it has been a favorite of elevator-music programmers for nearly half a century. He has a big house in Malibu to show for it, with ocean views. No telling what the real tunewriter got for thinking it up.

Yet all is forgiven if not forgotten. Is there any length of slack the Dylan die-hards won't cut him? With the big sales and favorable reviews of *Christmas in the Heart*, we know the answer: *Absolutely not*. Whenever I hear extravagant praise for Dylan—I wish I had a Free Baconator coupon for every time he's been called the greatest American songwriter—I can't help but think, yow, what would these guys do with a truly great American songwriter? Someone who uses more than five chords and writes tunes that range beyond six steps on the chromatic scale? I like to think that if they ever listened to Ned Rorem or Virgil Thomson, or Cole Porter or Hoagy Carmichael, they would be overwhelmed and delighted by hearing the real thing at last.

But of course they wouldn't be. They have heard "Night and Day." Dylan worship is impervious to evidence. It begins and ends in experience and memory, personal and generational. A few years ago I heard a man in his early eighties who should know better pronounce Duke Ellington the greatest composer of the 20th century. In further conversation it turned out that Ellington's stuff was the soundtrack of his youth, the music that played as he fell in love, learned to dance, left home, went to war, became a man. And he wasn't about to let any of this jibber-jabber about Prokofiev or Stravinsky shake him from his judgment.

Boomers are particularly vulnerable to the same conceit, with an overlay of pompous allusions half-remembered from our American Studies class. We spy, in every cultural event we've witnessed and in every figure we've admired, the greatest, the biggest, the most . . . whatever. It looks like sophistication but it's really insouciance. Even as Dylan continues to sneer at them, his boomer admirers will refuse to believe it. They forget that the Poet warned us himself, so many years ago, with such prescience: "Something is happening here, but you don't know what it is, do you Mr. Poet Laureate?" ♦

Obama's Fight to Win or Lose

Mitch McConnell takes a shrewd tack in the battle over Obamacare. BY FRED BARNES

The easy life is about to end for President Obama. For the first time, he can't defer or delegate or depend on the media to bail him out. He has to stand and fight for the policy that defines his presidency—liberal health care reform. And the fight won't be pleasant.

Obama is exactly where he *didn't* expect to be. His popularity has declined at a record rate. His supposed power of persuasion has turned out to be nonexistent. More Americans oppose his health care initiative than support it. And Republicans are prepared to combat him and Democrats on every major provision of it.

The large Democratic majorities in the Senate and House may look overwhelming, but they're not. At least a half-dozen Democratic senators are queasy about Obama-style reform. If two of them bolt, Republicans should be assured of the 41 votes that would block a motion to end debate on the legislation. If only a single renegade Democrat emerges, that will suffice so long as all 40 Republican senators, including Maine's Olympia Snowe, hang together.

There's less for Obama to worry about in the House. Speaker Nancy Pelosi can afford to lose about 40 Democrats and still pass Obamacare. Yet there is significant uneasiness in her ranks. When Democrats met last week, 47 said they're opposed to the bill, and four or five sneaked out of the room to avoid declaring themselves. Pelosi softened it ever-so-slightly, and Republicans figure she'll have the votes for passage.

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The Senate is the battleground. Republicans are mounting a nonstop, full-court press against Obamacare. Minority leader Mitch McConnell has made an issue of the normally routine "motion to proceed" with discussion of the bill on the Senate floor.

ASSOCIATED PRESS / SETH PERLMAN

It's at this point that Democrats with misgivings about Obamacare have what McConnell calls their "maximum leverage." Democrats who want non-trivial changes in the bill—Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas opposes the public option, Evan Bayh of Indiana the tax on medical devices—would have great difficulty getting them approved once the bill reaches the Senate floor. It will take 60 votes to remove anything from the bill Senate majority leader Harry Reid introduces at the start of deliberations.

Chances are, the motion to proceed will pass, though 41 votes are enough to defeat it. If it were to lose because of Democratic defections, the bill would have to be altered to accommodate the dissenters, upsetting the balance of taxes, Medicare cuts, and benefits. Liberals would be furious. Reid would be fit to be tied. Obamacare would be thrown off track.

Discombobulating Reid is part of the Republican strategy. Reid is mistake-prone, as he demonstrated recently in trying unsuccessfully to repeal cuts in doctors' fees under Medicare. He is anxious over his dicey reelection prospects next year in Nevada. He's erratic under pressure.

Given the Senate's rules, it's easy for Republicans to prolong the debate into next year. There are two likely benefits. The longer the debate, the more snarled up the Senate becomes in procedural matters and the more likely Reid is to blunder. Even more important is the time it will give Republicans to educate and arouse the public about Obamacare.

They already have a receptive audience. As pollsters Frank Luntz and Lowell Baker noted last week:

> The untold story of the past six months is the collapse in support among independents and moderates. Republicans always hated the Obama approach, while Democrats were always in his corner. But to see Americans in the political center turn from cautiously supportive to increasingly opposed is the most significant political consequence of the debate.

Republicans need help from outside Washington to succeed, particularly in states whose senators are less than committed to Obamacare. Grassroots opposition can be pivotal. In 2007, it was largely responsible for derailing an immigration reform bill that might otherwise have been enacted.

Over the past summer, noisy protests at town hall meetings and tea parties had an enormous impact. But the intensity of that opposition has subsided just as counterpressure by liberal interest groups has risen. Republican leaders believe that fervor must be jacked up once more, reminding key Democratic senators

of the risk of voting for Obamacare.

There's one tricky part for Republicans in the health care fight. They don't want the bill to be improved—that is, made a bit less sweeping and draconian. The bill can't be improved sufficiently to satisfy Republicans, but it might become more palatable to worried Democrats. Republicans can probably count on liberal Democrats to prevent this by rejecting moderate amendments (which would face the 60-vote hurdle).

The shrewdness of McConnell's emphasis on the vote to proceed will become clear when the final cloture vote—which would end debate on the bill—is taken. Democratic senators with qualms about Obamacare are likely to have voted for the motion to proceed, explaining they'll seek changes in the bill. In all likelihood, those changes won't be approved. Obamacare will have emerged from weeks of debate roughly the same. Will moderate Democrats then vote for cloture on the motion to end debate?

This is the key vote. Reid will likely need to hold all the Democrats. Here Obama's role is crucial. It may be up to him alone to keep Democrats from defecting. One or two votes could decide the outcome. If Obama fails, his health care initiative may die.

We know what the president will say in one-on-one meetings or phone calls. My presidency and our party's future are at stake. So is yours. If I lose, you lose too. If we don't pass health care reform now, we never will. We have to pass a bill. I promise I'll support the changes you want later—after the bill passes. Your constituents who oppose us now will come around. I'll help your reelection. And so on. If that doesn't work, Obama's aides can take the Chicago approach: Vote against us, and we'll make sure you regret it.

In a pinch, a president can usually get the one or two votes he needs on an important issue. The office of the presidency gives him the prestige and influence to do this. But influence can slip away. We'll find out soon if Obama's has. ♦

When Pro-Israel Is Not Very Pro-Israel

Meet the J Street gang.

BY MICHAEL GOLDFARB

What would you call a group that opposes sanctions on Iran, questions Israel's right to defend itself from terrorist groups firing rockets from Gaza, seeks to pressure Israel into making major concessions without regard to the views of the elected government in Jerusalem, and supports a U.N.-commissioned report accusing Israel of committing war crimes in the course of self-defense? That group is J Street, the new advocacy organization that calls itself "pro-Israel, pro-peace."

J Street held its inaugural conference last week. But a lot of the fanfare came the week before the event, when 13 members of Congress withdrew their support. The names of 160 senators and representatives appeared on the list of conference sponsors, but suddenly names started to disappear. First to go was Representative Mike Castle, the Delaware Republican who is planning to run for Joe Biden's Senate seat in 2010. Just hours later, *Politico* reported that New York's senators, Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, had pulled their names off the list as well.

The floodgates were open. By the time the conference started, every Republican on J Street's list save Louisiana representative Charles Boustany had bailed. Joining them were an even larger number of Democrats, including Arkansas senator Blanche Lincoln and North Carolina senator Kay Hagan. Ultimately only a quarter of the congressmen—and just two of the senators—listed as conference sponsors showed up at the event.

Meanwhile J Street organizers were becoming uncomfortable with some of their own invited guests after a video turned up of Josh Healey, one of the speakers, reading a poem called "Queer Intifada." He compared Guantánamo to Auschwitz and Anne Frank to Matthew Shepard. In another poem, he asked if "we're the ones writing numbers on the wrists of babies born in the ghetto called Gaza?" Other videos were soon discovered, including one that showed another panelist calling Israel a "whore" in a reading at a Chicago establishment called "Café Intifada."

J Street cancelled the poetry session citing the "use and abuse of Holocaust imagery" by the scheduled speakers. Then the Israeli ambassador, Michael Oren, turned down an invitation to address the conference. The embassy explained the decision by saying that it feared certain of J Street's positions might "impair Israel's interests." While the Israeli government declined to send a representative, noted Zionist King Abdullah of Jordan did deliver a taped greeting.

When J Street was launched 18 months ago, the group basked in favorable press coverage heralding the arrival, at long last, of a progressive alternative to AIPAC, the dominant pro-Israel lobbying group that enjoys broad bipartisan support in Congress. The only serious hiccup came after a statement the group put out at the height of the Israeli incursion into Gaza in December.

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J Street said then that, "while there is nothing 'right' in raining rockets on Israeli families or dispatching suicide bombers, there is nothing 'right' in punishing a million and a half already-suffering Gazans for the actions of the extremists among them." One of the country's most prominent Jewish doves, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, blasted J Street as "morally deficient" for its equivocation.

In the months leading up to the conference, J Street took a number of controversial positions that raised red flags among pro-Israel groups and their supporters. Earlier this month, J Street opposed sanctions on Iran, even as the House of Representatives voted 414 to 6 for such action, and with polls showing overwhelming support for new sanctions among Jews in particular and Americans in general. J Street also refused to condemn the report accusing Israel of war crimes in Gaza produced by South African judge Richard Goldstone under the authority of the U.N. Human Rights Commission.

J Street claims that it speaks for the moderate mainstream of American Jews who, it insists, are poorly represented by the current constellation of pro-Israel organizations. But if J Street's pro-Israel credentials were being called into question by its critics in the run up to the conference, it was the J Street rank and file who were eschewing the pro-Israel label once the conference got underway.

On the first day, J Street provided space for an "independent" blogger panel that featured several participants who denied they were "pro-Israel." One was a Palestinian woman who declared herself a "one-stater"—an opponent of the two-state solution that would allow Israel to maintain both its Jewish and democratic character. Another panelist looked around and said, "There are many Zionists in this room, there are also some non-Zionists and anti-Zionists." A third panelist mocked Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel in the course of an attack on Christians United for Israel, the pro-Israel group whose annual conference Wiesel chose to address on the same night that J Street kicked off its meeting.

That night, the *Jerusalem Post* reported, a board member of J Street U, the group's university affiliate, announced that her chapter would be formally dropping the pro-Israel half of the "pro-Israel, pro-peace" slogan. "We don't want to isolate people because they don't feel quite so comfortable with 'pro-Israel,' so we say 'pro-peace,'" she told the paper. The next day a J Street official, downplaying the story, insisted that J Street would affiliate only with organizations that were explicitly pro-Israel. Later, in subsequent statements, J Street staffers backtracked and declined to draw a line in the sand over the group's pro-Israel character. Asked if J Street was a Zionist organization, executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami responded, "It is silly to insist that any organization that supports Israel say it is Zionist."

Jeremy Ben-Ami, executive director of J Street

A member of J Street U, the group's university affiliate, announced her chapter would be dropping the pro-Israel half of the 'pro-Israel, pro-peace' slogan: 'We don't want to isolate people because they don't feel quite so comfortable with "pro-Israel."'

As Ben-Ami tried to spin the growing sense among reporters that they were not in fact attending a "pro-Israel" conference, a panel titled "What Does It Mean To Be Pro-Israel?" was taking place. It featured Jonathan Chait of the *New Republic* and Matthew Yglesias, a blogger at the Center for American Progress. As Yglesias later wrote, Chait argued that "there was an ambiguity running through the J Street constituency as to whether the group was or should be pro-Israel at all."

Yglesias, who was once listed as an adviser to J Street and who has been a tireless booster for the group, said the comment struck him as "kind of nuts." The audience quickly resolved the question. "When we moved to the Q&A time," Yglesias wrote later that day, "it became clear that a number of people in the audience really were quite uncomfortable self-defining as 'pro-Israel' in any sense and that others are uncomfortable with the basic Zionist concept of a Jewish national state."

Another panel titled "Messaging Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace" featured Democratic pollster and J Street board member Jim Gerstein and Matt Dorf, who advises J Street on message strategy.

Dorf explained that "message is a dirty word in the progressive community," comprised as it is of honest liberals who fear "we're tricking people—saying different things to different audiences." But, Dorf assured his audience, "When we talk to different people, we need to say different things."

An audience member, though, asked how he could "message" his mother and father, his grandmother and grandfather, and his cousins. The audience laughed.

It turns out everyone in the room had the sense that in the eyes of their own friends and family, their views on Israel were radical. It seems that both J Street supporters and its leadership face the same problem—convincing the world that they are pro-Israel even though the positions they take and the policies they promote put them squarely at odds with Israeli public opinion. ♦

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The Flying Imams Win

And the rest of us lose.

BY SCOTT W. JOHNSON

The case of the flying imams who were removed in November 2006 from a USAirways flight in Minneapolis for questioning by law enforcement authorities concluded in the Minnesota federal district court before Judge Ann Montgomery. The parties arrived at a settlement of the case on October 20 in a court-supervised conference. The amounts paid by the defendants remain confidential.

The case drew national attention—including that of Congress, which passed a law protecting private citizens who report suspicious activity and law enforcement authorities who act in good faith on the information. The imams had named USAirways passengers who raised concerns about their behavior as John Doe defendants in their original complaint, but later dropped the passengers.

Represented by an attorney from the New York chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the imams went forward with federal civil rights and state law claims against USAirways and the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) police officers and FBI special agents involved in their removal from the flight and their questioning. This past July, Judge Montgomery denied the motions of the law enforcement defendants for dismissal on the ground of qualified immunity.

When these defendants appealed the ruling to the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, she scheduled the conference that resulted in the termination of the lawsuit. As a result of the recent settlement, Montgomery's 47-page decision of last July stands as the last word on the law applicable to the case. Without going into all the legal issues it discusses, some aspects of it deserve serious scrutiny. Montgomery emphasized the distinction between the suspicion necessary for lawful investigatory stops (a relatively low standard) and the probable cause necessary for arrests (a higher standard), and her comments addressing the issue raise lingering concerns.

> One of the striking elements of the case is the number of law enforcement officers who participated in the detention or questioning of the imams. According to the judge, they were all being unreasonable.

The six imams were detained as they were returning home from a convention of the North American Imams Federation in a suburb of Minneapolis. Three of the six had prayed before the passengers at the airport as they awaited the departure of the flight. A passenger had passed a note to the pilot pointing out suspicious activity:

> 6 suspicious Arabic men on plane, spaced out in their seats. All were together saying "... Allah ... Allah" cursing U.S. involvement w/ Saddam before flight—1 in front exit row, another in first row 1st class, another in 8D, another in 22D, two in 25 E&F.

Onboard USAirways personnel called MAC dispatch to advise that the six passengers would be removed and ask for officers to come to the gate. The first MAC officer on the scene was advised by a USAirways manager of the passenger's note. He was also advised that some of the six passengers had checked no luggage, some had asked for seatbelt extensions, some had one-way tickets, and all six were of Middle Eastern descent. A USAirways flight attendant told one of the MAC officers that, in her opinion, the two seatbelt extensions requested by the imams were unnecessary given their sizes.

A MAC officer and a federal air marshal boarded the plane and interviewed the passenger who had written the note. In her decision the judge stated that after leaving the plane, the officers conferred and decided that the request for seatbelt extensions, the praying and utterances prior to boarding the plane, and the seating configuration amounted to suspicious behavior. They alerted the FBI and were requested to detain the imams for questioning.

The imams were removed from the plane and searched. They were taken into custody and transported in handcuffs to the airport's police command center. There they were interrogated by the FBI and Secret Service for several hours, then released five to six hours after leaving the aircraft.

The principal issue addressed by Montgomery's decision is whether the law enforcement defendants were entitled to qualified immunity for their actions. This immunity protects government officials from monetary claims under circumstances where a reasonable officer would not know his conduct was illegal. Montgomery held that the flying imams were the subject of an unlawful arrest and that no reasonable law enforcement officer could have believed otherwise.

Quoting case law, Montgomery stated that the relevant question in determining qualified immunity is whether it would be clear to a reasonable officer that his conduct was unlawful in the situation he con-

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fronted. She held that no reasonably competent law enforcement officer could have believed that his conduct was legal in the imams' case.

One of the striking elements of the facts in the case is the number of law enforcement officers who participated in the detention or questioning of the imams: Montgomery mentioned six MAC officers, one federal air marshal, three FBI special agents, at least one Secret Service officer, and four other law enforcement officers. At the time of the arrest, Montgomery observed, law enforcement officers outnumbered the imams fifteen to six.

So far as one can determine from the judge's opinion, not a single one of these officers questioned the legality of the imams' detention and interrogation. Given the variety of officers and agencies involved, one might almost posit the imams' detention as a case study in whether a reasonable law enforcement officer would think the conduct in question was legal. All of these apparently thought it was.

Omar Shahin back at the Minneapolis airport in November 2006

Montgomery was highly critical of the law enforcement officers' failure to ascertain facts that would have exonerated the imams when they were removed from the aircraft. She cited the fact that USAirways had assigned the seats taken by the imams and that they had not in fact purchased one-way tickets. She called the imams' reported cursing of the United States constitutionally protected speech. And regarding the requested seatbelt extensions (one of which, she notes, was requested by a blind imam), she said:

> The MAC Defendants have produced no evidence of a documented instance in which seatbelt extensions were used as a weapon or that law enforcement ever expressed concern about their use as a weapon. It is difficult to understand what danger a seatbelt extension poses that is not also posed by a sturdy belt with a large buckle. Even assuming the extensions could be employed as a weapon, the MAC Defendants have failed to offer a reasoned explanation of how Saleddin, who is completely blind, could pose such a threat.

These observations are odd. Prior to 9/11, there was no documented instance of box cutters having been used by hijackers. Prior to Richard Reid's attempted bombing of American Airline Flight 63 in December 2001, there was no documented instance of shoes having been used as bombs. When taken together with other circumstances, the imams' request for unneeded (according to the flight attendant) seatbelt extensions certainly raised reasonable suspicion if not probable cause.

As for some of the other circumstances, Montgomery stated: "Praying in public, commenting on current events, and even criticizing government policy is protected speech under the First Amendment." This is true. She failed to note, however, that lawful speech such as cursing the United States might reasonably bear on the interpretation of other behavior brought to the attention of law enforcement.

Neither does the decision state what the interrogation of the imams turned up about their backgrounds. It wouldn't have taken much digging to discover that one of them, Omar Shahin, was a former representative of and fundraiser for the Muslim charity KindHearts, shuttered by the Treasury Department as a Hamas front in February 2006. (Shahin claims he "had no clue what they were doing.")

In the concluding paragraph of this key part of her decision, Montgomery stated:

> Unquestionably the events of 9/11 changed the calculus in the balance American society chooses to make, especially in airport settings, between liberty and security. Ultimately, the proper balance will be achieved, in large part, because we have the most capable and diligent law enforcement and intelligence communities in the world. But when a law enforcement officer exercises the power of the Sovereign over its citizens, she or he has a responsibility to operate within the bounds of the Constitution and cannot raise the specter of 9/11 as an absolute exception to that responsibility.

Reading the opinion elicits a question: Can we reasonably rely on law enforcement authorities to be so capable and diligent that they will arrive at appropriate determinations within a matter of a few minutes—when fifteen out of fifteen law enforcement professionals handled the case of the flying imams as they did?

The decision raises perhaps an even more basic question: What was law enforcement to do? Judge Montgomery believes the authorities were required to release the imams after a brief investigatory stop to go on their way and catch their flight or board another. The next time around, it will be the imams who fly and the other passengers who stay behind. ♦

ASSOCIATED PRESS / JANET HOSTETTER

McChrystal Lite

How to lose a war by splitting the difference.

BY TOM DONNELLY AND TIM SULLIVAN

In its continuing search for an alternative to General Stanley McChrystal's comprehensive counterinsurgency approach to the war in Afghanistan, and with President Obama having eliminated the minimalist counterterrorism plan of Vice President Joe Biden, the White House has lately been floating a split-the-difference trial balloon: "McChrystal Lite" or, to give the veep his due, "McChrystal for the cities, Biden for the countryside."

Last week the *New York Times* was allowed a sneak-peak of what this half-pregnant approach might look like. It reported that White House advisers are aiming to defend "about 10 top population centers." A number of press accounts indicate that the number of additional troops would be capped at around 20,000—half the 40,000 recommended by McChrystal—no more than four brigade-sized units and the needed support. The *Times* also indicated that McChrystal had briefed the White House on how he would employ any reinforcements: "The first two additional brigades would be sent to the south, including one to Kandahar, while a third would be sent to eastern Afghanistan and a fourth would be used flexibly across the nation."

To the Washington punditocracy, half a loaf sounds about right; even if they don't think it's the right strategy, they think it's what Obama will do as a matter of domestic politics. But does it make any military sense?

A troop ceiling of 20,000 reinforcements would present McChrystal with painful choices. To begin with, it would sacrifice urgency, taking longer to achieve any decisive effects—and McChrystal's assessment concluded in August that the coming year was critical. The president's middle-way approach would also force McChrystal to revisit the balance between committing U.S. troops to combat and to training Afghan Army and other security forces; and he might have to reconsider the trade-offs between formal school-house training, embedded training teams, and unit-to-unit partnerships, the approach that proved to be most effective in Iraq. But even if he were to maximize the combat punch of half a surge, he would face challenges in deploying the new forces. Consider these possible courses of action:

McChrystal's planned deployment of additional forces as described in the *Times* represents a sensible effort on the part of the general to prioritize the most violently contested areas of the country and address them as effectively as possible. Nevertheless, the "two south, one east, one in reserve" disposition would force McChrystal to accept a great deal of risk by spreading the force thin and failing to achieve adequate counterinsurgent-to-population ratios, as a recent study by Frederick and Kimberly Kagan, based on their many trips to the region, makes plain (see www.aei.org/article/101059).

Let's begin with the "two south" slice of this plan. Southern Afghanistan remains the heartland of the insurgency, and it is widely understood that Kandahar City and the surrounding districts of Kandahar Province are the Taliban's center of gravity. The Kagans calculate the U.S., Canadian, and Afghan troops already deployed around the city to be a force of 4,800, which is responsible for maintaining security among a population of 1,015,000. The counterinsurgent-to-population ratio, then, is one to more than 200, or less than a quarter what counterinsurgency doctrine dictates. Unlike Iraqis, Afghans—including the Taliban—traditionally prefer to avoid fighting in their cities. Even so, security in the city is essential, and at the moment only Afghan National Security Forces conduct patrols there, making the ratio inside the city even less favorable. Even if both of the brigades McChrystal intends to send to the south were deployed to the Kandahar City area, they would not improve the counterinsurgent-to-population ratio there enough to have a decisive impact. The Kagans' detailed study estimates that it would take roughly four and a half brigades to reach the desired ratio. It's also worth noting that the Canadians will be withdrawing their forces by mid-2011; if the area is not secure by then, their departure will create a larger gap.

Placing both of the new brigades destined for the south in Kandahar, moreover, would shortchange Helmand Province, nextdoor, where the Marines, British, and Danes have made substantial progress in recent months. Military operations there are complicated by the fact that Helmand is the center of the poppy production that feeds the opium industry which helps to finance the Taliban and corrupt the Afghan government. By putting one brigade in Helmand and one in Kandahar, McChrystal could likely consolidate and expand gains in Helmand, where the current troop-to-population ratio in the contested river valley is a reasonable 1:83 (though even with an additional brigade it would fall short of the 1:50 ideal). This would also have the benefit of consolidating the political partnership with Great Britain and Denmark—the two NATO allies most committed to staying the course in Afghanistan. Conversely, it would further shortchange Kandahar, which is a greater strategic priority.

The third brigade-sized unit, meanwhile, would be deployed among the volatile eastern provinces of Paktia, Paktika, and Khost—better known as

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Greater Paktia—where the combined strength of U.S. and Afghan forces is 8,200 and the force ratio is 1:79. The region is critical in many ways. The western parts sit astride the key Kabul-to-Kandahar highway, and the bowl-like area around Khost is just across the border from North Waziristan, the sanctuary of the Haqqani network, a Taliban-affiliated militia that operates in Afghanistan. The additional brigade in this region would make a big difference, not only consolidating recent gains but no doubt improving prospects for counterterrorism strikes against the Haqqanis, the younger of whom, Sirajuddin, is both a charismatic leader and highly radicalized.

The mission of the "reserve" brigade is less clear, although it is true that forces in Afghanistan have been stretched so thin that senior commanders have essentially been without a significant tactical or operational reserve with which to shape or react to events. But a reserve brigade is one thing in the context of a "Full McChrystal" surge of eight brigades and quite another in the context of a half-surge. First of all, under McChrystal Lite, chances are it wouldn't be in reserve for long. It would be far more likely to be committed, or tied down, as the result of having to react to an insufficient level of force across the theater; that is to say, it would more likely be used to prevent failure than to reinforce success. And there would likely be a temptation to parcel it out piecemeal around the country, lessening its impact and making it harder to support and sustain.

But this sequence of deployments—the one leaked to the *Times*—is surely a derivation from the sequence planned for the full complement of forces that McChrystal requested. Once he faces the reality of a cap on the troops available, McChrystal may rearrange the deck chairs. In particular, he may decide to mass all of the forthcoming brigades in the area that's most strategically vital and presents the greatest security challenge: Kandahar. Then there will be questions as to how best to balance the forces within the province between those focused on securing Kandahar City and those disrupting rural insurgent sanctuaries and lines of communication in the surrounding province.

But there's a very strong argument for a Kandahar-centric surge. Not only is Kandahar the Taliban's strategic center of gravity, but the key area of operations—those parts of the province that are contested—is the largest and most populous "battle space" in southern Afghanistan. Beyond the city-focused forces described above, there are now about 7,200 U.S. and Afghan forces deployed in the province. Three additional brigades in the Kandahar City area would very nearly provide the number of troops necessary to conduct a proper counterinsurgency mission; another brigade elsewhere in the northern portion of the province would help provide those focused on the city with increased room to breathe and strategic space in which to operate.

The downside of this approach, of course, is its opportunity costs: Decisive action in Kandahar precludes decisive action elsewhere. Helmand and the volatile provinces in the east would be left to fend for themselves until the operations in Kandahar were complete. There would likely be few demonstrable regional synergies in the short term, either—the Kandahar "ink spot" would not be linked to any other save that created by the new rurally focused brigade in Kandahar, which could presumably provide support to the population center of Tarin Kowt, north of Kandahar in Oruzgan province. But since the Dutch battalion in Oruzgan is scheduled to leave next year, larger or longer-term local success would be uncertain. Nevertheless, an all-in approach to Kandahar would have good prospects for achieving at least a localized example—and arguably the most decisive example—of sustainable security.

This would be, to force an Iraq analogy, akin to having succeeded only in Anbar in 2007, without the follow-on successes in the Baghdad belt, in the capital, in Basra, and in chasing al Qaeda and the insurgents northward. So even if an incomplete surge could chalk up some successes, other risks would continue to rise. Violence has long been festering in northern Afghanistan, with the Taliban resurgent there and election tensions accelerating the trend; Kunduz and Mazar-e-sharif are on the White House "Top 10" list of cities to be secured, but it's hard to see how, with a semi-surge, anything more could be done there. Likewise, in the west, Herat is critical but has been all but neglected heretofore.

Officers in Afghanistan ruefully observe that you can't have an ink-spot strategy without enough ink. A half-surge would increase the amount of ink, but Afghanistan is a large and dry piece of paper; McChrystal Lite would make it hard to connect the dots. It would also be hard to synchronize the effort with the nascent counterinsurgency campaign in Pakistan. It's good news that the Pakistani Army is pushing into South Waziristan, but unless there is pressure across the border in Khost and greater Paktia, the likelihood of Pakistan advancing against the Haqqanis is negligible.

The biggest problem, though, is that a half-surge cannot produce a meaningful result in a timely manner; we should remember that the McChrystal plan proceeds from his assessment that the next year—several months of which have already been lost—is critical to regaining the initiative from the Taliban.

Time matters not only in Afghanistan, but also in Pakistan and, most of all, in Washington and across America where, absent some sign that the war can be won, political and public support is increasingly shaky. If McChrystal Lite is problematic from a battlefield perspective, it's worse from a strategic and political standpoint.

A clever commander like McChrystal and the capable troops he leads will no doubt figure out how to make the most of what they've got. But a half-surge would seem to cut their prospects of winning by more than half. ♦

The Two-Front War

Pakistan is finally doing its part. Now we need to do ours.

By Frederick W. Kagan

A network of militant Islamist groups stretches from India to the Iranian border, from the Hindu Kush to the Indian Ocean. These groups include Pashtuns and Punjabis, Arabs and Uzbeks and more. They have no common leader, vision, hierarchy, or goal. But they do agree on a few key points: Any government not based on their interpretation of Islam is illegitimate and apostate; anyone who participates in or obeys such a government is not a Muslim and is therefore liable to be killed; Muslims must be "liberated" from oppressive regimes such as Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan; and the United States and its allies are the principal sources of support for these unjust and apostate regimes and must be defeated or destroyed. Al Qaeda is the most infamous of these groups because it alone succeeded in attacking the American Satan on its own soil, but all of the Taliban groups and various other Pakistani organizations, including Lashkar-e-Taiba, support each other morally, financially, ideologically, tactically, and strategically. They see an attack on any one of them as an attack on all.

The West benefits from no such clarity. We are constantly bemused by the constellation of names and initials by which these groups designate themselves. Is the Afghan Taliban related to the Pakistani Taliban? Is al Qaeda related to either? What is anyone to make of a group that calls itself "Tehreek-e Nafaz-e Shariat-e Mohammadi" (TNSM—Movement for the Enforcement of Sharia)? This confusion has bedeviled our discussions about strategy for the war in Afghanistan. It has distorted our relationship with Pakistan as well. In particular, resentment over the fact that elements of the Pakistani security services continue to shelter and support some of the Taliban groups fighting the United States in Afghanistan is blinding us to the importance of the current Pakistani offensive against internal enemies in Waziristan. That operation—*Rah-e Nijat* or "Path to Deliverance"—is striking a blow against one of the most important militant Islamist sanctuaries in the world. The reactions of the other members of the Islamist network to this operation show clearly the relationships among them and the real stakes of the American effort in Afghanistan.

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Pakistan and Islamism

Pakistani governments and the Pakistani military have been supporting Islamism in one form or another since the days of President Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in the 1970s. The Pakistani state defines itself as the haven for India's Muslims, a notion that lends itself to sympathy with Islamism. The main drivers of Pakistani support for Islamism, however, have been pragmatic (as Shuja Nawaz has shown in *Crossed Swords* and Pakistani ambassador to the United States Husain Haqqani in *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*). Bhutto supported Islamism for domestic political reasons. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, his successors supported the Islamist groups that took the lead in fighting the Red Army. U.S. assistance to the *mujahedeen* was funneled through Pakistan, inadvertently strengthening the ties between Pakistan and the Islamists. Two *mujahedeen* who received much Pakistani assistance were Jalaluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—both now prominent leaders of insurgent forces operating against the United States and its allies in Afghanistan (although Jalaluddin has largely handed over control of his group to his son, Sirajuddin).

The Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in humiliation in 1989, and the United States lost interest. Pakistan did not. As a new government of sorts coalesced in Kabul around Tajik and Uzbek leaders of the *mujahedeen* in the early 1990s, Islamabad became concerned that it might face a hostile Afghan state, compounding its traditional tensions with India by threatening to open a new front in the event of renewed conflict. At first the Pakistani security services supported Hekmatyar, but he proved ineffective. When a small band of Pashtuns under the leadership of Mullah Mohammad Omar emerged to fight against the depredations of the "warlord government" of Kabul in 1994, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) seized the opportunity. The ISI provided organization, training, equipment, and advisers to the fledgling movement, which rapidly overran the fractious warlord state, rising to power as the Taliban regime in 1996.

The withdrawal of American interest from Afghani-

stan coincided with a series of somewhat-related crises that turned Pakistan sharply away from the United States and much more toward the Islamist camp. Long-simmering discontent in Indian-controlled Kashmir erupted into open violence in 1989. Pakistan's support for the Kashmiri militants led to U.S. condemnation of Islamabad's support for terrorism. The Kashmir crisis, among many other things, led to the deposition of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (Zulfiqar's daughter) in August 1990, further fracturing the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. In October 1990, finally, President George H.W. Bush refused to make the annual certification that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear weapon required by the Pressler Amendment of 1985. As a result, all U.S. aid to Pakistan—including military exchange programs—was cut off.

One important figure among the *mujahedeen* was a Palestinian Islamist named Abdullah Azzam. His fiery sermons to raise money and support in Saudi Arabia found an eager follower in Osama bin Laden, who migrated to the Afghan fight in the mid 1980s and continued to work with Azzam in Peshawar. In 1987, Azzam founded an organization in Pakistan called Markaz Dawat-ul Irshad (Center for Religious Learning and Propagation, also known as Jamaat ut-Dawa), together with Hafiz Mohammad Saeed. Azzam was assassinated in 1989, but his protégés did him proud—bin Laden by founding al Qaeda, Saeed by founding the Lashkar-e-Taiba, "Army of the Pure," to serve as the militant wing of the Markaz Dawat-ul Irshad.

The purpose of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was to inspire jihadism among the world's Muslims. Saeed once said, "We believe in [Samuel P.] Huntington's clash of civilizations, and our jihad will continue until Islam becomes the dominant religion." Saeed established the movement's base at Muridke, a town near Lahore in the heart of Punjab, where he aimed to develop a model city to serve as an exemplar of the sort of Islamist government for which he was fighting. The outbreak of conflict in Kashmir led Saeed to focus his nascent organization on that conflict—thereby earning the support of the ISI in addition to the continued support of the Saudi backers who had helped him establish the group in the first place.

Pakistan drifted generally away from the United States and toward the Islamists in the 1990s. Army chief of staff Mirza Aslam Beg called the 1991 Gulf war "a Western-Zionist game plan to neutralize the Muslim World," as Shuja Nawaz writes, adding that Beg also initiated negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran to ensure Pakistan's "strategic depth" in the event of a war with India. Pakistan recognized the Taliban government in Kabul in 1996 (virtually the only government to do so other than Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). The revelation of a missile deal between North Korea and Pakistan led to further U.S. sanctions in 1998. Pakistan then tested six nuclear weapons in May 1998 following the testing of an Indian weapon, straining relations with Washington even more. Tensions rose still further when Pakistani forces entered Indian-controlled Kashmir in 1999. General Pervez Musharraf finally seized power in a military coup in 1999 and suspended the constitution.

The 9/11 attacks thus found Pakistan locked in a close embrace with the Taliban in Afghanistan and with Islamist groups such as the LeT within Pakistan itself. That was the context in which Secretary of State Colin Powell delivered an ultimatum to Musharraf: Pakistan must be either with the United States or against it in the coming war on terror.

Musharraf did not demur. He supported the U.S. military operation against the Afghan Taliban government he had helped bring to power, announced his opposition to al Qaeda, and outlawed the LeT. But the change was too sudden for members of the security services who had long-established relationships with the groups against which Musharraf had suddenly turned. With or without Musharraf's orders, the ISI helped resettle Mullah Omar and the Haqqanis in Pakistan and continued to support them. Failings in the American military strategy in 2001—notably the refusal by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to deploy ground forces to cut off the retreat of al Qaeda fighters from northern Afghanistan—allowed both Taliban and al Qaeda leaders and troops to escape.

The United States responded by pressing the Pakistani government ever harder to take effective action against al Qaeda and its allies in Pakistan, especially within the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where many had taken refuge. Musharraf responded with a series of grudging and incompetent military operations culminating in a 2004 offensive into Waziristan that ended in humiliating failure. That failure led to a series of weak "peace deals" with anti-American leaders in Waziristan, particularly Maulvi Nazir Ahmad and Hafiz Gul Bahadur.

In the meantime, Musharraf's actions against some Islamist groups turned others against Islamabad. LeT,

Mullah Omar's Taliban, Hekmatyar's group, and the Haqqani Network remained loyal to Pakistan in return for support and shelter. The TNSM, however, found new life in supporting the Afghan Taliban against the U.S. attack by sending thousands of fighters from its base in the Bajaur Agency of the FATA into Afghanistan. When that effort failed, the TNSM turned its attention back to the Pakistani government, which it considered illegitimate because of its failure to implement Islamic law.

Pakistani operations in Waziristan generated a backlash among the Pashtun tribes there that coalesced in December 2007 with the formation of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan ("Pakistani Taliban Movement") under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud. Maulvi Nazir, commander of the Wazir Taliban group in South Waziristan, described the phenomenon:

> Our companions used to go to different areas like Ghazni and Zabul, but the Pakistani government started hindering our path. In the beginning we had intended Jihad against America and had not meant to fight here, but when the Pakistani government became an obstacle for us and started hindering our passages, destroying our bases, martyring our brothers and ambushing and arresting them from their route . . . we were left no choice other than directing our weapons towards the Pakistani Government. [all translations by SITE Intel Group].

The TTP was meant to be an umbrella organization, and it soon claimed suzerainty over the TNSM, the Mehsud fighting groups in Waziristan, and branches in Punjab. Its objective is the overthrow of the apostate Pakistani government. Baitullah Mehsud described its aims in January 2008:

> The Pakistani forces came here by order from Bush, and the soldiers of the army are destroying our homes. Therefore, the goal of our alliance is the defense of the Muslim person. By the way, the ultimate result of this alliance, which we basically formed for defense, will be the implementation of Muhammadian Sharia law all throughout Pakistan.

The philosophical underpinnings of both groups are identical with those of al Qaeda, and also with those of the LeT, as well as with those of all of the major Afghan Taliban groups. The TTP and the TNSM recognize Mullah Omar as the "Commander of the Faithful." Maulvi Nazir noted, "The Emir of the believers is Emir of the Jihad too. The Mujahideen all over the world accept him as their Emir." Baitullah Mehsud declared, "We did pledge allegiance to the Emir of the Believers before, and Allah willing, our allegiance to him will last forever. He is our legitimate emir [as per Islamic *sharia*], and our allegiance to him stems from our love and respect for him."

By mid-2008 the Islamist groups appeared to have the Pakistani government on the ropes. The TTP effectively controlled Waziristan through a series of "cease-fire" agreements that amounted to surrenders by Islamabad to the Islamists. The TNSM/TTP controlled Bajaur Agency and much of neighboring Mohmand Agency. It had spread beyond the FATA into the Northwest Frontier Province as well, establishing a base in Dir District and even in Swat—a much more cosmopolitan area close to metropolitan Pakistan and generally not amenable to extremist Islamism. Musharraf had done nothing effective to check the expansion of these groups or the consolidation of their control in their areas of influence. He had not curtailed the support of the ISI for Afghan Taliban groups. And he had proved unwilling or unable to dismantle the network of al Qaeda senior leaders using Pakistan as its base. It seemed likely that Pakistan's long support for Islamist groups could well lead to its demise, an appearance strengthened by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007 purportedly at the orders of TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud.

PAKISTAN'S COUNTERATTACK

Musharraf resigned from the presidency on August 18, 2008. Asif Ali Zardari, the widower of Benazir Bhutto, won the post on September 6. On that day, the Pakistani military launched Operation Sherdil against a major TNSM/TTP base in Bajaur Agency. Chastened by the experiences of previous years in which ill-prepared assaults in difficult terrain had resulted in hundreds of dead, wounded, and captured Pakistani soldiers, the army proceeded with deliberate and overwhelming force up the four major river valleys in Bajaur. It relied heavily on airpower, leveling Islamist-held villages in the agency and generating tens of thousands of refugees. Loe Sam, a key village in the midst of the agency, was completely destroyed as Pakistani military operations continued for months. American forces in Afghanistan quietly assisted by deploying a battalion along the Afghan border with Bajaur on the east side of the Kunar River. Despite the violence of the operation, however, the Pakistanis could not capture or kill TTP leader Maulana Faqir Muhammad. Neither could they stop the spread of TNSM/TTP influence in Dir and Swat.

The determination shown by the Pakistani government in the Bajaur fighting was undermined when Islamabad signed a cease-fire in Swat with Sufi Mohammad, the founder of the TNSM. In return for a halt in fighting, the government committed to enforce *sharia* law and only *sharia* law in Swat. This experiment in meeting the demands of the Islamists was revealing about their true aims. The Pakistani Constitution already contained provisions requiring the state to abide by and enforce *sharia* law and Muslim tradition. From the government's perspective, recommitting to that principle was not a significant concession. But Sufi

Mohammad and Maulana Fazlullah interpreted it to mean that they could choose the religious judges who would interpret *sharia* as they desired. It is hard to say how this quasi-religious conflict would have proceeded had the TTP fighters in Swat kept their side of the bargain. Instead, puffed up with their success, they sent a raiding party into neighboring Buner in April, clearly violating the peace accord.

Zardari and army chief of staff Ashfaq Kayani responded decisively, launching Operation *Rah-e-Rast* ("Path of Righteousness") in mid-April to liberate Swat from the control of the TNSM and TTP. The operation was largely successful, although it generated more than a million refugees. The refugee flow was not entirely negative for the government, however. Swat refugees took to the airwaves to describe the outrages of Islamist efforts to impose their extremist religion on a moderate population. For the first time, Pakistani public opinion began to turn against the Islamists. Zardari, sensing a political opportunity among other things, drove the fight further. The Pakistani military cleared Swat, and then worked to clear neighboring Dir District. More important, the military stayed in these areas after the initial clearing operations. Today, two Pakistani divisions drawn from the Indian border—the 19th Infantry Division and the 37th Mechanized Infantry Division—remain in Swat as part of what we would call the "hold" phase.

The Islamists responded to the Swat operation with terrorist attacks across Pakistan, including a car-bomb in Lahore that a group called Tehrik-e-Taliban Punjab ("Punjab Taliban Movement") claimed. The Pakistani government then prepared an operation against the last remaining major Islamist sanctuary—South Waziristan. The preparations included moving significant regular military forces into both North and South Waziristan in order to isolate the Mehsud tribal area. They also included a protracted and difficult effort to persuade the surrounding Islamist leaders—particularly Maulvi Nazir to the south and Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan—to tolerate the army's operations and refrain from fighting alongside Baitullah Mehsud's TTP. Islamabad was able to conclude these agreements by playing up inter-tribal tensions; also, the radical Uzbek Islamists supported by Mehsud had a talent for antagonizing the locals. It is likely that Pakistani military operations in Swat and Bajaur and the large amount of military force they were bringing into the area persuaded Gul Bahadur and Nazir that they were in earnest and could seriously disrupt these leaders' power bases if they chose. An ostensible quid pro quo in this agreement was that Pakistan would put a stop to U.S. drone strikes in the areas controlled by Bahadur.

In the meantime, the pressure on the Mehsud tribal area allowed the Pakistani military to obtain actionable intelligence about Baitullah Mehsud. A U.S. Predator drone killed him on August 5. Many analysts feared that the death of Mehsud would mean the end of the Pakistani operation, but slow preparations for an offensive in the Mehsud tribal area continued as the TTP struggled to select a new leader. It finally did so on August 22 with the announcement that Hakimullah Mehsud had succeeded Baitullah.

The storm finally broke on October 17, when some 28,000 Pakistani troops drawn from the 7th and 9th Infantry divisions, supported by around 10,000 members of the paramilitary Frontier Corps, advanced along three axes toward the heart of the Mehsud resistance base. The ground operation was preceded by a week of targeted air attacks and was supported by airstrikes and helicopter gunships. It was not, however, as destructive as the Bajaur operation. Pakistani forces have labored to seize key terrain around important objectives first (to avoid ambushes), and to clear contested villages carefully rather than obliterating them. As of this writing, the operation has continued unabated for two weeks, and Pakistani military forces are advancing on the three most important TTP bases in the area methodically but unrelentingly.

ISLAMIST REACTION

Baitullah Mehsud was eulogized by no less a figure than Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's deputy. Zawahiri praised him as a figure who sought to unify all Islamists into a fight against their common enemies:

> Then he, may Allah have mercy on him, participated in unifying the ranks of the mujahideen in Pakistan, for he founded Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, which took over its emirate. He participated in founding the Shura of the mujahideen that included all the mujahideen in Pakistan in addition to their foreign brothers. Then this united force, with grace from Allah and His assistance, hears and obeys the Islamic Emirate and its emir, the Emir of the Believers, Mullah Omar, may Allah preserve him.

Baitullah "demonstrated, may Allah have mercy on him, that the rulers of Pakistan and the leaders of its armies are merely a traitorous, bribe-seeking group that sold its religion, honor and the blood of the Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan to the new Crusader-dom in exchange for a few dollars and benefits." He also "demonstrated that he does not acknowledge the British Durand line that separates Afghanistan from Pakistan, and that he will do jihad to expel the Crusaders from Afghanistan and will do jihad as well against their agents that cooperate with them in Pakistan and Afghanistan."

Other Islamist groups offered more practical assistance. TTP and allied movements have launched a wave of terrorist attacks across Pakistan in response to the Waziristan operation. Reports from Bajaur indicate that the TTP leadership there has been discussing pulling some of their fighters out

of Kunar and Nuristan provinces in Afghanistan and sending them to support their comrades in Waziristan. A Pakistani paper reported on October 25: "Taliban sources said Maulana Faqir Muhammad had convened a meeting of local and foreign militants to devise a strategy for sending fighters to South Waziristan to fight alongside their fellow Mehsud Taliban militants against the Pakistan Army." It added that "They said some Arab commanders also attended the meeting and did not agree with Faqir Muhammad's proposal to go to Waziristan at a time when they were engaged in, what they termed, a 'crucial and decisive' battle against the U.S.-led forces across the border in Kunar and Nuristan provinces of Afghanistan." Arab commanders in this context very likely refer to al Qaeda leaders or their representatives.

It is possible that the protests of these Arab commanders went unheeded. On October 29, *Asia Times* reported that "in a telephone conversation on Wednesday, a militant linked to [Qari Ziaur] Rahman [a Taliban commander in Nuristan] said that now that they had control of Nuristan, the militants are 'marching towards Mohmand and Bajaur to help their fellow Taliban fighting against Pakistani troops,' referring to two tribal agencies across the border." The report continued, "As the militant who spoke to *Asia Times Online* said, there is now the opportunity to open a new front, with Rahman's forces on the Afghan side and those of Moulvi Faqir Mohammad on the Bajaur and Mohmand side."

The new TTP leaders, for their part, have restated their commitment to the ideological struggle:

> And the conclusion is for us to work according to the Islamic Shariah, make others follow this path as well, which is the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, show concern about educating and uprighting Muslims according to the Shariah law. As for the way to get rid of positive courts and their police that were established by the English regime, that is through implementation of Shariah, because there are Shariah judges and scholars. This is not impossible. The Emir of the Believers Mullah Muhammad Omar provides a vivid example for the entire world. Our brothers in Swat also established the same system that did not please those malicious ones. They started to incite people against them and distort their image in the media and launched a war against them after that. Was it not for this, Swat today would have become another example where Shariah is practiced. They made numerous sacrifices for that, as did all tribal children and Pakistanis. So we cannot abandon this matter.

And so the battle continues.

The Pakistani military has now deployed four regular army divisions and tens of thousands of Frontier Corps forces in a series of operations that have lasted for more than a year to defeat the Islamist groups that had taken control over large areas of Pakistan and threatened the survival of the Pakistani state. Still the United States is disappointed. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton just last week twitted Islamabad for failing to eliminate al Qaeda. American analysts and officials regularly complain that Pakistan is not "doing its part" by halting its support for Mullah Omar, Haqqani, and Hekmatyar. At the same time, people seeking to downplay the importance of defeating the Afghan Taliban increasingly argue that Mullah Omar's group has separated from al Qaeda and from Pakistani Taliban groups and even that it would not support them or permit them to establish sanctuaries in Afghanistan should it return to power. Above all, conventional wisdom now goes, we must understand that the Taliban of all stripes are local movements concerned with local power struggles and not a threat to the United States.

It is true that these groups do not have the capability or the intention at present to strike the American homeland directly. It does not follow, however, that they are not a threat to the United States except in this narrowest and most short-sighted sense. Their overall aims and ideologies are indistinguishable from al Qaeda's. They all—including al Qaeda—recognize Mullah Omar as "commander of the faithful" and an exemplar of right behavior both as an insurgent and as the leader of an Islamic state. They coordinate their activities at all levels and come to each other's assistance when attacked. They see the provision of sanctuary to their threatened comrades as a religious (as well as tribal) obligation.

The network of Islamist groups in South Asia, in other words, really is a network. We must not imagine that we can decide that the success of key elements of that network—especially Mullah Omar's group—would not strengthen the elements that are most dangerous to America and to stability in a nuclear-armed region.

We must recognize, finally, that Pakistan actually is making a major contribution to this struggle by taking on the elements of the Islamist network that—while closely aligned with al Qaeda—pose the greatest threat to its own stability. Defeating the Afghan Taliban is our job, working together with our Afghan partners. However desirable and helpful it would be for Pakistan to evict or capture the bases of Mullah Omar or Haqqani, the momentum of 30 years of support will be hard to reverse. Nor is it even necessarily wise for the United States to demand that the fragile Pakistani government, already engaged in an extremely difficult and controversial struggle against its own internal enemies, open two additional fronts.

The war against Islamists in South Asia is now a two-front war. Pakistan has shown surprising determination and competence in its struggle against one part of the Islamist network. The United States must show similar determination and competence in our struggle against the other. ♦

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Arabian Fables (II)

More fanciful Arab myths to sway world opinion.

Earlier this year, we published our message, "Arabian Fables (I)," in which we made clear how the Arab propaganda machine creates myths and lies with which to misinform the world. We discussed the myths of the "Palestinians"and of the "West Bank" and the mythical concept of "occupied territories". In today's message, we shall address three more of these myths.

What are some of these myths?

Jerusalem ("Arab East Jerusalem"). The Arabs have assiduously propagated the myths that Jerusalem is an Arab capital, that (after Mecca and Medina) Jerusalem is their third holy city, and that it is intolerable to them that infidels (Jews) are in possession of it.

The reality of course is that Jerusalem was never an Arab capital and that it was, until the Jews revitalized it, a dusty provincial city that hardly played any economic, social, or political role. Jerusalem is mentioned hundreds of times in the Jewish Bible and has been the center of the Jewish faith and the focus of Jewish longing ever since the Romans destroyed the Temple in the early years of the first millennium. Not once is Jerusalem mentioned in the Koran.

As to "East Jerusalem": There is East Saint Louis, there is East Hampton, and there used to be East Berlin, but, until the Arab propaganda machine created the concept, there was never in history an "East Jerusalem", let alone an "Arab East Jerusalem".

The eastern part of Jerusalem is now predominantly inhabited by Arabs, though their proportion is decreasing. But what is the reason for this? It is because the Jordanians destroyed all traces of Jewish presence from the eastern part of the city and drove all the Jews out during the 19 years (between 1948 and 1967) in which they were in occupation of the eastern part of the city. The world, informed by Arab propaganda, considers those Jews who wish to return to the eastern part of the city to be troublemakers or worse.

The concept of Jerusalem being a holy Arab city and the capital of whatever political entity the "Palestinians" may eventually form is a myth and so of course is the concept of "Arab East Jerusalem".

"Settlements." When Jordan came into possession of Judea/Samaria and the eastern part of Jerusalem, following the invasion of the newly-formed Jewish state, and stayed in occupation for 19 years, it systematically obliterated all Jewish villages in the area under their occupation, drove out the Jewish inhabitants, and left the area "judenrein" (free of Jews)—the first time that concept had been applied since the Nazis created it during their short and bloody reign in Germany. When the Israelis recovered these territories, they rebuilt these villages, created new ones, and built new towns and suburbs to existing cities, especially Jerusalem.

The Arabs decided to call these towns and villages "settlements", with their connotation of illegitimacy and impermanence. The world, including the United States, is much agitated over these population centers and, goaded by the Arabs, declares them to be impediments to peace. What nonsense! Nobody considers the tens of thousands of Arabs who continue to stream to these territories as impediments to peace.

The term "settlements", too, is a propaganda myth created by the Arabs.

> "The Arab propaganda machine has created myths that have been accepted by much of the world. No peace in the Middle East is possible until those Arab myths have been exposed for what they are!"

"Refugees." In 1948, when six Arab armies invaded the Jewish state in order to destroy it on the very day of its birth, broadcasts by the advancing Arab armies appealed to the resident Arabs to leave their homes so as not to be in the way of the invaders. As soon as the "quick victory" was won, they could return to their homes and would also enjoy the loot from the Jews, who would have been driven into the sea. It didn't turn out quite that way. Those Arabs who, despite the urgings of the Jews to stay and to remain calm, foolishly left, became refugees. Those who decided not to yield to those blandishments are now, and have been for over 60 years, citizens of Israel, with all the same rights and privileges as their Jewish fellows.

But what happened to those refugees—by best estimates about 600,000 of them? Did their "Arab brethren" allow them to settle in their countries, to work, and to become productive citizens and useful members of their societies? No! They kept and still keep them, their children, their grandchildren, and in some cases even their great-grandchildren, in miserable "refugee camps", so that they can be used as political and military pawns in order to keep the burning hatred against Israel alive and in order to supply the manpower for the unremitting fight against Israel.

During those more than sixty years, Israel has taken in more than three million Jewish immigrants from all parts of the world and has integrated them productively into its society. According to the "Palestinians", the Arab "refugees" have now marvelously increased to five million (!). It is the intent and fervent desire of the Arabs that all of them should return to Israel so as to destroy the country without the necessity of war.

The "refugees" are a red herring and another myth created by the Arab propaganda machine.

The Arab propaganda machine, aided by the most high-powered public relations firms in the United States and all over, has created myths that, by dint of constant repetition, have been accepted as truth by much of the world. No sensible discussion, no peace in the Middle East, is possible until those Arab myths have been exposed for what they are.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
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FLAME is a tax-exempt, non-profit educational 501 (c)(3) organization. Its purpose is the research and publication of the facts regarding developments in the Middle East and exposing false propaganda that might harm the interests of the United States and its allies in that area of the world. Your tax-deductible contributions are welcome. They enable us to pursue these goals and to publish these messages in national newspapers and magazines. We have virtually no overhead. Almost all of our revenue pays for our educational work, for these clarifying messages, and for related direct mail.

65C

Too Small To Fail

The brutal realities of Latvia's response to the economic meltdown.

By Andrew Stuttaford

Riga, Latvia

It's a measure of the tension of the times in which we live that Anders Borg, the finance minister of famously polite Sweden, has been going around threatening Latvia. Yes, *Latvia*. "The patience of the international community is," he growled on October 2, "very limited, and Latvia has little room to maneuver."

If it's rare for a Swede to lose his cool, it's astonishing that a small Baltic state (Latvia's population is just over 2.2 million) was the cause. But Latvia is in an economic mess that is extraordinarily deep (GDP will fall by nearly 19 percent this year), and the consequences have already spread far beyond its borders. Evidence that it was pushing back at those who have been trying to help is what triggered Borg's explosion—well, that, and the risk posed to three of Sweden's largest banks by their roughly 40 billion euros of Baltic exposure.

The story of the Latvian crisis is, if nothing else, proof of the old maxim that no good deed goes unpunished. While the underlying sources of the country's difficulties can be put down to the devastation of half a century of incarceration in the Soviet domain, the immediate cause can be found in one of the happier events in Latvian history: its 2004 admission, alongside the other Baltic states (Lithuania and Estonia), into the European Union.

The integration of large swaths of Eastern Europe into the wider European economy and, ultimately, the EU is something that even Euroskeptics concede has been a triumph: a fusion of enlightened self-interest, generosity, and strategic vision that has done much to smooth the path away from Soviet rule and Communist ways. Initial flows of capital lured to the region by the collapse of Communism were, as the 1990s progressed, supplemented by waves of investment attracted by the reassuring spectacle of former Soviet satellites rediscovering the pains and pleasures of the free market. The transformation was further accelerated by the prospect of eventual EU membership as a final guarantee that they would not slip back.

This was the way it worked in Hungary, Poland, and other former Warsaw Pact nations, and this was the way it eventually worked for the three Baltic states, the first former Soviet republics to apply for, and be accepted into, EU membership. Thus funds began flowing into Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia almost as soon as they regained their independence—at a time when the prospect of losing it again to Brussels was still but a distant dream. Much of this money came from the neighboring Nordic countries attracted by an exciting local investment opportunity, historical connections (the Latvian capital, Riga, was once the largest city in greater Sweden), and a keen interest in avoiding the development of three turbulent post-Soviet slums in their backyard.

So far, so benign. But the onrush of Nordic cash overwhelmed the small and rickety enterprises typical of economies emerging from Communist rule. A huge part of the Baltic banking sector ended up in Nordic hands—roughly 70 percent of borrowing in Latvia is now sourced from banks controlled by foreign (primarily Nordic) institutions. What began as a change for the good (the Nordic-run institutions were better managed and capitalized than their local predecessors) degenerated into an unhealthy codependency as the banks financed an unsustainable boom on ultimately disastrous terms. By the time it was all over, they were essentially funding the current accounts of all three Baltic nations.

The bubbles began to inflate as EU membership loomed early this decade and ballooned after the three countries crossed the finish line. Too much money (and too much credit) was pouring into economies too small to absorb it productively, which triggered inflation, speculation, and a consumer binge. Overall government borrowing remained modest in each of the Baltic states, but debt racked up in the private sector—in Latvia it reached 130 percent of GDP in 2008. Imports were sucked into the region, and exporting industries were priced out. (Latvia's textile sector was 12 percent of the country's exports in the early 2000s; it is today only 5 percent.)

As the Baltic economies roared (Latvia's GDP grew by 12 percent in 2006, and 10 percent in 2007), current account deficits soared (Latvia's peaked at some 25 percent in 2007). Fueling the inflationary fire still further, a number of EU countries (notably the U.K. and Ireland) waived the transitional period that has traditionally followed the accession of

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less-developed countries into the EU and opened up their labor markets to workers from the Baltic, attracting far more immigrants from the region than originally expected. That was good news for employers in London and Dublin, but it siphoned off talent back home, increasing already fierce upward pressure on wage rates and, incidentally, adding to the demographic anxieties of three small peoples that had—only just—succeeded in preserving their ethnic, cultural, and political identity after half a century of Moscow's best efforts to Russianize their countries. Not the least of the ironies facing the Baltic states is the way that their long overdue reintegration into the global economy could, by offering their best and brightest citizens better opportunities abroad, destroy the integrity and the essence of the nations they leave behind.

Protesting against cuts in the education budget in Riga, September 2009

When economies overheat, real estate prices tend to boil over, and so it was all over the Baltic. In Latvia, house prices jumped by (on some estimates) 300 percent between 2004 and 2007. Never a healthy phenomenon, the real estate bubble had an extra malignant aspect in the Baltics as most of the mortgage lending (a chunk of it distinctly subprime) that financed it was denominated in euros—not yet the Baltic countries' currency. Back in 2004 when Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia signed up for the EU they took a seat in the waiting room for the monetary union. They were in a strong position to satisfy the Maastricht preconditions for adoption of the euro (subdued inflation, low levels of government debt, and well-managed public spending), and all three local currencies—the Latvian lats, the Estonian kroon, and the Lithuanian litas—had been pegged to the euro by 2005. Forecasts that they would be replaced by Brussels' money in 2008 did not seem out of line. Borrowing in euros looked like the smart thing to do. Euro interest rates were well below those charged for borrowing in lati, krooni, and litai and, with the adoption of the EU's single currency purportedly just around the corner, there was not supposed to be much in the way of foreign exchange risk. International (mainly Nordic) banks keen to minimize their exposure to the small illiquid Baltic currencies were only too happy to oblige: Some 80 percent of all private borrowing in the Baltic countries is in euros.

But the cash that cascaded into the Baltic countries pushed up their inflation rates to levels far in excess of the Maastricht criteria. In Latvia inflation peaked at nearly 18 percent in May 2008—up from 6.2 percent in 2004 and the 2 percent range between 2000-03. Drawn in by the prospect of near-term Baltic adoption of the euro, the flood of new money has perversely done a great deal to delay that switch (the latest predictions cluster at around 2011 for Estonia, 2012-13 for Lithuania, and, fingers crossed, 2014 for Latvia, although the IMF recently suggested that the latter date will slip still further). Foreign exchange risk was back.

And so were tough times. The inevitable bust arrived, gathering pace at roughly the same time as international financial markets were freezing up in 2008, an unhappy coincidence that made bad things worse as the (already slowing) foreign capital inflows that had done so much to sustain the boom came to an abrupt halt. To get an idea of the scale of the disaster that has struck, Latvian retail sales are running at 70 percent of 2008, the nation's real estate prices are down some two-thirds from their levels of two years before, and industrial production slumped 18 percent between June 2008 and June 2009.

The textbook response to this type of boom-and-bust would be a drastic devaluation of the currency to slash the cost of exports, discourage imports, and bring burgeoning current account deficits under some degree of control. If textbooks aren't sufficiently persuasive, markets can usually be expected to help out, and, sure enough, the lats came under strong pressure in June. But the sparse market in Baltic currencies gives them considerable protection against speculative attack. It's almost impossible to short thinly traded lati, krooni, or litai to the extent it would take to break their pegs to the euro. The fact that Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia all operate currency board systems (in Latvia's case de facto rather than de jure) under which their monetary base is essentially backed up by gold and foreign exchange reserves means it would take an almost complete collapse in domestic confidence to trigger a run on the currency.

Of the three Baltic currencies, the lats has come under

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the most pressure (the economic and political fundamentals are weaker in Latvia than in Estonia or Lithuania, and the Latvian central bank had to spend around 1 billion euros to defend the currency in June). Yet the Latvian authorities continue to believe that now is not the time for devaluation. Latvian central bankers told me in August that depreciating the currency is simply not the answer to the country's predicament, and they make a good case. Devaluations work best in economies where a good portion of demand can be satisfied domestically, where the export sector has a high value-added component (i.e., not textiles and the like), and when the global economy is in good shape. None of these descriptions applies to the Baltic states or the world in 2009.

If most countries are trying to reflate their way out of the current economic crisis, Latvia is doing the opposite—slashing public sector pay as much as 40 percent, raising taxes, and sharply reducing welfare payments and pensions.

The alternative approach being pursued by Latvia is an "internal devaluation" (Lithuania and Estonia have taken a similar tack) designed to rebuild its international competitiveness by purging the inflationary excesses of recent years and, while it's at it, restore badly needed fiscal and budgetary balance—in other words to generate some of the positive effects of a devaluation without abandoning the currency peg. If most countries are trying to reflate their way out of the current economic crisis, Latvia is doing the opposite. Public sector pay is slated to be reduced by as much as 40 percent (though actual cuts appear to have been less so far) as part of a budgetary squeeze that has included the closing of hospitals and schools (admittedly Latvia was oversupplied with both) and sharp reductions in both welfare payments and pensions—payments that weren't generous in the first place. Adding to the misery: Taxes are being increased. As economic cures go, this is about as tough as it is possible to get, and it has already yielded some tentatively positive results. Latvian inflation has been brought to its knees (in September it was running at 0.1 percent), the trade deficit has shrunk dramatically, and the current account is back in surplus (14 percent of GDP in the second quarter).

Advocates of a conventional devaluation retort that any signs of improvement are merely symptoms of an economy where all demand has been crushed and will stay crushed for quite some time. This is not, they argue, the sort of recovery that will persuade the nation's best and brightest to stay at home once the broader European economy has improved enough to resume hiring. Nor will it attract the new capital that Latvia so badly needs, capital that will only be further deterred as the "hopeless" defense of the peg perpetuates uncertainty over the currency's future while underpinning a real effective exchange rate that continues to rise.

Such arguments are too pessimistic—though only just—and they also fail to address the implications of all those foreign currency loans. Repaying them is already difficult within the context of a devastated real estate market and collapsing economy. Increasing the outstanding balances by 30 percent (the percentage generally thought to be by how much the lats would have to be devalued) would generate Sisyphean agony and drive domestic demand even deeper into the hole. Complicating matters still further is the fact that the affected borrowers are drawn disproportionately from the ranks of the young (many older Latvians remain ensconced in the properties they received gratis in the post-Soviet privatizations), the enterprising, and the upwardly mobile, who are the main hope of any lasting revival. (Undoubtedly a good number of them are also to be found in Latvia's governing class. Unsurprisingly they are not that keen to devalue. Would you vote yourself into bankruptcy?)

Crucially it was the harsh medicine of the internal devaluation that secured the international financial support without which Latvia's economy might have already collapsed. The country's key lenders have so far shown themselves willing to assist in propping up the Latvian currency. It's not hard to guess why, despite some rumored disagreements within the lending consortium, this strategy prevailed. The Swedish banks most heavily involved in the Baltic have all made substantial provisions against lending losses in the region (and raised major amounts of capital to replace what has been lost), but neither they nor the Swedish state that has effectively underwritten them would welcome the massive additional hit to balance sheets that would follow a devaluation of the lats—particularly as it would likely trigger devaluations (and further losses) in Lithuania and Estonia. There's also a clear risk (although less than there was a few months ago) of a domino effect—Baltic devaluations pressuring other vulnerable Eastern European currencies with the potential for extremely unpleasant implications for Western banks exposed in the former Soviet empire. To give just one example of what could be at stake, earlier this year outstanding loans by Austrian banks to Eastern Europe were reported to amount to roughly 75 percent of Austria's GDP.

It's this fear of wider contagion that largely explains the willingness of the multinational group that includes the

EU, the IMF, the World Bank, and, of course, the Nordic countries to lend Latvia 7.5 billion euros (and that's before counting the indirect help Latvia has received, including critically, Sweden's support for its banks). In the wake of last year's global financial meltdown, those few billions may seem like chump change, but they represent a huge sum for Latvia (whose GDP stood at around 22 billion euros in 2008). For once, the country is benefiting from the size of its economy: It's simply too small to fail. In absolute terms a bailout of Latvia (or for that matter, any of the Baltic countries) does not involve that much money. If such a rescue can stave off catastrophe elsewhere it will be a bargain. Who needs a Baltic Lehman?

But will this support buy enough time for the internal devaluation to work? Talking to Latvian civil servants, it is impossible to miss their unease about what may happen when the bleak Baltic winter descends on a population struggling through economic disaster. Nobody has forgotten the rioting in Riga (and in Lithuania) in January, the low point of a fraught few months that also saw the collapse of Latvia's sitting government. While there was a reasonable level of confidence amongst those to whom I spoke that the social net will hold, a winter of discontent may be difficult to avoid as benefits ratchet down (unemployment benefits fall sharply after five months on the dole and are then eliminated altogether after nine months—although the unemployed remain eligible for other forms of assistance), savings evaporate, and jobs remain scarce. Unemployment now stands at 18 percent, a devastating number in a climate of deteriorating welfare support. There are indications that the economy's fall is slowing (GDP is currently forecast to decline by a mere 4 percent next year), but what few green shoots there are have sprouted too late to make much difference this winter.

Adding to the worries is the fear that the country's economic woes will be used by the ever more revanchist Kremlin to foment discontent among the roughly 30 percent of the population that is of ethnic Russian descent. Maddening symbols of lost empire, and small enough to bully, Latvia and Estonia have long been placed amongst Russia's worst enemies by Vladimir Putin. He may be unable to resist the temptation to make their problems worse.

The Latvian government's strategy appears to be to hang on grimly and hope that the global economy recovers quickly and strongly enough to pull a sensibly deflated Latvia out of the mire and into hailing distance of the allegedly (that's a debate for another time) safe haven of eurozone membership. So far this tough approach enjoys at least a degree of grudging popular support. Some two-thirds of Latvians are thought to support the defense of a currency that is a symbol of both hard-won independence and the ability of ordinary Latvians to build a better future for themselves. They have seen their savings wiped out twice in the last 20 years, first by the Soviet implosion (and the chaos that accompanied it) and then again, after painful rebuilding, by a massive banking crisis in the mid-1990s. Devaluation would look all too much like round three. Latvian officials also put a great deal of faith in the country's flexible labor markets and the resilience of a people with recent memories of times far, far harder than now. Latvians will know, I was repeatedly told, how to cope.

Maybe, but all attempts to measure public opinion are guesswork—bedeviled by societal division (ethnic Latvians and ethnic Russians often see matters in very different ways) and the fact that Latvia's political parties are often little more than collections of a few friends or co-conspirators, sustained by self-interest, shared ethnic identity, and passing eddies of voter enthusiasm. They are bad at reflecting public opinion and worse at shaping it. If overall living conditions deteriorate badly this winter, there may be no one able to speak honestly to the nation or for its concerns. That's not a recipe for social peace.

There will be parliamentary elections next year and the uncertainty about the degree of support the internal devaluation will continue to enjoy helps explain September's unexpected failure of the governing coalition to pass all elements of the austere 2010 budget that was a condition for the continued support of Latvia's international lenders. This was the failure that so angered Anders Borg in early October. His mood will not have been improved by the market tremors that followed both his comments and subsequent press reports in Sweden that he had told Swedish banks to prepare themselves for the worst.

It's difficult to imagine that he would have been cheered up by the almost simultaneous revelation that the Latvian government was contemplating measures limiting the liability of homeowners to their lenders, a move that would have serious implications for a number of Sweden's banks. This proposal may have been an unsubtle attempt to pressure the Swedes into agreeing to go a little easier on the 2010 budget, but, with the furor it stirred up, it backfired. Its most controversial element—the idea that it would have retrospective effect—has been withdrawn, and the budget hiccup has been resolved with a Latvian climb-down. But these spats were a reminder that the realities that define this uncomfortable situation continue to hold true: Latvia is still both highly vulnerable and too small to fail, the codependent relationship between Sweden's banks and their Latvian borrowers continues to be both intact and unhappy, and the durability and extent of popular support for Latvia's harsh economic medicine remains an unknowable, unnerving mystery.

It's going to be a long winter. ♦

'Dr. Johnson in the Ante-Room of Lord Chesterfield' by E.M. Ward

The Good Doctor

Samuel Johnson, writer and sage

BY EDWARD SHORT

James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) may be the greatest biography ever written, but it is also uneven, unbalanced, and anything but definitive. In the last 60 years many Johnsonians have rounded out Boswell's account. James Clifford re-created his pugnacious youth; Walter Jackson Bate explored his moral vision; Donald Greene took up his politics; Jonathan Clark meticulously delineated his essential Toryism; Robert DeMaria reassessed his literary achievement; Henry Hitchings revisited his lexicographical innovations; and Ian McIntyre just completed a study of his relationship with Hester Thrale.

Now, to mark Johnson's 300th birthday, Peter Martin, Jeffrey Meyers, and David Nokes have written new biographies of the poet, lexicographer, essayist, critic, biographer, and editor who dominated the late 18th century, and has fascinated readers ever since.

Samuel Johnson
A Biography
by Peter Martin
Harvard, 640 pp., $35

Samuel Johnson
The Struggle
by Jeffrey Meyers
Basic Books, 552 pp., $35

Samuel Johnson
A Life
by David Nokes
Henry Holt, 448 pp., $32

Johnson's life can be seen best as a study in indomitability. Born in the cathedral town of Lichfield in 1709, half-blind and scarred with scrofula, he later recalled that he "was born almost dead and could not cry for some time." His father was a bookseller and his mother a peevish, implacable woman. At Lichfield Grammar School, he had Latin beaten into him by a schoolmaster who would cry out as he thrashed his charges: "I do this to save you from the gallows."

Johnson escaped the gallows but not debtor's prison. Poverty dogged him all his days until George III awarded him a pension in his fifties. He could only afford to spend a year at Oxford, and when he returned dejectedly to Lichfield, he suffered the first of his two crack-ups, which nearly relieved him of his sanity. After failing to make a living as a schoolmaster, he moved to London

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and put himself to school in the arts of Grub Street, where he gradually established himself as "that great Cham of literature," as Tobias Smollet called him.

The works on which Johnson's literary reputation is based include the pioneering *Life of Savage* (1744); the long poem, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), which T.S. Eliot thought superior to Gray's *Elegy* and "the perfect theme for his abilities"; his great *Dictionary* (1755), on which Noah Webster and James Murray based their dictionaries; *Rasselas: The Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), an Oriental tale featuring some of Johnson's wittiest prose, which he dashed off in two weeks to bury his mother; *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775), a caustic account of his trip to the Hebrides with Boswell; a fascinating edition of the works of Shakespeare (1765); and his magnificent *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81), which Oxford recently released in a superb four-volume set edited by Roger Lonsdale. Johnson also wrote some of the greatest essays in the language, including a series of moral essays for a periodical called *The Rambler* (1750-52) and a series of more lighthearted essays for two other periodicals, *The Adventurer* (1754) and *The Idler* (1758-1760).

That most of these works remain available in popular editions refutes the claim that Johnson is no longer read. The common reader, "uncorrupted by literary prejudices," with whom Johnson "rejoiced to concur," continues to enjoy the power and richness of his work.

In 1735, Johnson married Elizabeth Porter, a widow 20 years his senior, who fell in love with the genius of her unlikely suitor, if not his grotesque person, telling her daughter: "This is the most sensible man that I ever saw in my life." Her death inspired Johnson's greatest sermon, which he wrote to bear the seemingly unbearable trial of bereavement. "The only end of writing," he once wrote, "is to enable the reader better to enjoy life, or better to endure it." In his sermon for Tetty, he practiced what he preached.

Since one of Johnson's deepest convictions was that "a decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization," he made his successive London homes a haven for strays and misfits and often walked the streets at night to put pennies in the palms of sleeping homeless children. Still, when it came to poverty and the problems that perpetuate poverty, Johnson was no liberal; he believed in alms, not government handouts. And he also believed in something our own liberals abominate: personal responsibility. "Resolve not to be poor," Johnson urged the extravagant Boswell, "spend less. Poverty is a great enemy to human happiness; it certainly destroys liberty, and it makes some virtues impracticable."

On Monday, May 16, 1762, Boswell met Johnson in Tom Davies's bookshop, and it is from that momentous day that he began to draft his own largely eyewitness account of Johnson's life in London, which he lived in company with some of the greatest figures of the age, including Edmund Burke, Joshua Reynolds, Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick, and Edward Gibbon, all of whom were also members of Johnson's famous Club, where Boswell heard and recorded many of the brilliant conversations that give his biography so much of its exuberant life.

What makes Johnson great are not his views about this or that political issue . . . but his genius, good-heartedness, courage, wit, and of course his profoundly enjoyable, profoundly instructive writings.

To show the extent to which Boswell honored Georgian proprieties, Meyers quotes several diary entries that Boswell suppressed from his *Life*. These include Johnson's conviction that "unless a woman has amorous heart she is a dull companion" and his revelation that his wife had told him "I might lie with as many women as I pleased provided I loved her alone"—an offer Johnson apparently never took her up on but which nonetheless shows that the two may not have enjoyed conjugal relations. Still, if Boswell bowdlerized the more salacious aspects of Johnson's life, he had no qualms about pumping his hero's inner circle. He particularly hounded Elizabeth Desmoulins, one of Johnson's indigent lodgers, who admitted that "she actually got into bed with Johnson while Tetty was sleeping in the next room," though Johnson "commanded his passion."

Most biographers would have been content with this but Boswell probed further, until Desmoulins confessed: "I have many times considered how I should behave, supposing [Johnson] should proceed to extremities. . . . [Though he was] so terribly disgusting . . . such was my high respect for him, such the awe I felt of him, that I could not have had resolution to have resisted him." Here Meyers cannot resist adding, with ludicrous prurience: "Tetty and Desmoulins, his two Elizabeths, were the closest he ever came to realizing his fantasies about having a Turkish seraglio."

Meyers is good on Johnson's condemnation of the slave trade at a time when many of the 20,000 blacks living in London were poorly paid servants. Francis Barber, Johnson's Jamaican servant, whom Meyers believes might have been the son of Johnson's good friend Richard Bathhurst, was a notable exception: Johnson made him his principal heir, after rescuing him from the navy and paying his fees for five years of schooling at Hertfordshire—to the tune of £300.

"A black man and naval veteran in his late twenties," Meyers observes, "must have been wildly out of place among rural English schoolboys."

Meyers departs from the general consensus on Johnson by arguing that he was anti-Catholic. Specifically, he cites Johnson's translation of the 17th-century Portuguese Jesuit Father Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia* (1735), in one passage of which Johnson excoriated the Jesuit missionaries on the grounds that they "preach the Gospel with swords in

their hands, and propagate by desolation and slaughter the true worship of the God of Peace." Meyers infers from this and from Johnson's lifelong contempt for the Catholic French that his subject regarded the Roman Church as "cruel, insolent, and oppressive."

Those who consult Boswell and Johnson will know that this was not Johnson's settled view. In the *Life*, Johnson is quoted as saying that "a good man of a timorous disposition in great doubt of his acceptance with God, and pretty credulous, might be glad to be of a church where there are so many helps to get to Heaven. I would be a Papist if I could. I have fear enough; but an obstinate rationality prevents me."

He was equally indulgent towards what might be thought the sins of the Roman Church. In the Harwich stagecoach one afternoon in 1763, Johnson and Boswell encountered a woman inveighing against the Spanish Inquisition. Johnson, to what Boswell describes as the "utter astonishment of all the other passengers," defended it, maintaining that "false doctrine should be checked on its first appearance; that the civil power should unite with the church in punishing those who dare to attack the established religion, and that such only were punished by the Inquisition."

Indeed, Johnson habitually spoke so well of Catholicism that the father of his good friend Bennet Langton believed he was actually Catholic. Of course, some might attribute this to Johnson's habit of advocating unpopular positions to exhibit his debating skills; but he was also a fiercely independent thinker, not to mention partial to the Stuarts; so it would have been surprising if he had *not* had a good word for the old faith.

Meyers may be quick to expose Boswell's suppression of evidence—indeed, he is convinced that "biographers, like lawyers, should be required to take a course in evidence"—but as his handling of Johnson's religious views shows, he is ready to suppress evidence himself when it suits his purposes. Still, Meyers has written an engaging book. Thoroughly in command of his sources, he writes with brisk efficiency and has genuinely new things to say about the life and work. He includes a lively epilogue on the influence Johnson had on such writers as Jane Austen, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Virginia Woolf, and Samuel Beckett. And he appreciates how it was often Johnson's vulnerability that prompted his truculence: "The loud explosions were guns of distress," as Boswell neatly put it.

Still, Meyers plays fast and loose with the historical record by claiming that Johnson was "progressive." Simply because he abhorred the "race of wretches … whose favorite amusement is to nail dogs to tables and open them alive," or felt that there should be a "more rational and equitable adaptation of penalties to offences" in English courts of law, does not make him "progressive." In the continuing debate over Johnson's politics, Meyers sides with Greene, who disputed Clark's claim that Johnson's Toryism consistently proceeded from his lifelong commitment to "order, rank, and subordination." Yet even Greene recognized that Johnson tended to a kind of "skeptical conservatism" and distrusted fashionable shibboleths. The very word "progressive" would have struck Johnson as delusive.

Martin follows Meyers in trying to make Johnson more sympathetic by making him more contemporary. Yet, in his preface, he admits that he has his work cut out for him:

> Paradoxically, in spite of Johnson's iconic status and occasional programmes about him on television and on the radio, I have been surprised from spot interviews in the high streets of several English towns that only about a quarter of people I spoke to could identify him. Some wondered whether he was a boxer, or a contemporary of Shakespeare's, or a Canadian sprinter convicted of drug-taking, or a leading Conservative MP.

By saddling Johnson with something as meaningless as "iconic status," Martin signals the tone that he means to take with his reader. If Johnson treated his reader with straightforward respect, Martin treats his as though he were as ill-informed as the High Street English. For example, he claims, "When one reads Johnson, one is struck by how modern he is. Far from being rigidly conservative, backward-looking, and authoritarian, he was one of the most advanced liberals of his time." Yet the word *liberal* as a term of political affiliation only entered the language in 1801, 17 years after Johnson's death. This anachronistic misrepresentation may flatter the Englishman in the street, but it will be of no use to those interested in the historical Johnson. Simply because Johnson was not an inveterate Tory does not make him a liberal, advanced or otherwise.

Martin, in his earlier biography of Boswell, looked beyond his subject's wenching and carousing to focus on the scrupulous biographer and the improbable family man. His present biography is good on Johnson's friendship with Mrs. Thrale and other women—a topic that cries out for more scholarly treatment—but rather less good on many other matters. In his preface, Martin chides Boswell for neglecting his hero's literary achievement, but the incorrigible Boswell certainly understood the force of Johnson's moral essays and made at least one observation that nicely sums up all of Johnson's writing.

Wrote Boswell:

> His superiority over other learned men consisted chiefly in what may be called the art of thinking, the art of using his mind; a certain continual power of seizing the useful substance of all that he knew, and exhibiting it in a clear and forcible manner; so that knowledge, which we often see to be no better than lumber in men of dull understanding, was, in him, true, evident, and actual wisdom.

When Martin takes up the work, he is either banal or fatuous. About *London: A Poem*, which rehearses so many of Johnson's major themes, Martin can find nothing more to say than that it possesses "energy," "animus," and what he calls "currency in the present political situation." Of the *Life of Savage* he offers this baffling gloss: "Johnson was enraged by society's obtuse, clumsy, ill-conceived philanthropy that organized Savage's 'miseries of dependence' and coerced him to go west"—that is to say, to Wales, whenever the spendthrift poet ran out of money. Martin's is a characteristically muddled sentence—how does

one organize misery?—but if what he is trying to say is that Johnson blamed society for Savage's follies, he needs to reread the book.

Martin makes a similar hash of the great moral essays of *The Rambler*. "Complicated human behaviour cannot be reduced to easy choices," he writes. "Nobody can attain perfection, so to judge others is a dangerous and misguided business." In other words, *don't be judgmental.* For Martin, this is the essence of what England's greatest moralist has to say to his readers. He sees the import of Johnson's literary criticism in similarly simple-minded terms: "Literature was not for him a rarefied aspect of human expression but part of ordinary and endlessly complicated life itself; it was another of life's pleasures."

Granted, not all biographers are obliged to be critics; but even on strict biographical grounds, Martin is slapdash. Of all the events in Johnson's fascinating life, none is more moving than the amends he made for his filial ingratitude. When Johnson was a proud, frustrated, bitter young man, and without the necessary fees to remain at Oxford, he had no alternative but to rejoin his father in his failed bookshop. But rather than help salvage the business, Johnson disdained it and spent most of his time brooding.

Fifty years later, as Johnson told Boswell, "I desired to atone for this fault; I went to Uttoxeter in very bad weather, and stood for a considerable time bareheaded in the rain, on the spot where my father's stall used to stand. In contrition I stood, and I hope the penance was expiatory." All Martin can bring himself to say about this is: "The scene has been pictorially represented and cited so many times that it has been certified as one of the great images of Johnson's troubled soul." This is characteristic of his perfunctory treatment of many pivotal events of his subject's life.

Readers who expect a modicum of good English from authors will look askance at Martin's odd use of the word "certified." But then he misuses words on nearly every page. He writes of a "fresh boost to his disaffection and alienation," of the Christian doctrines of original sin and damnation constituting what he calls "Protestant fundamentalism," of Michael Johnson's bankrupt bookshop as "a bookish bower of bliss." Worse, in a feeble attempt to be funny, he calls the conversations that Boswell so brilliantly re-creates in the *Life* "bull-sessions."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "bull" as "trivial, insincere, or untruthful talk . . . nonsense." If this is how Martin regards the conversation of Samuel Johnson and his friends, why should he bother sharing it with anyone?

'Dr. Johnson's Penance' by Adrian Strokes

COLLECTION OF PHILIP TERZIAN

There is nothing wrong with trying to make Johnson sympathetic to contemporary readers; but he should not be treated as though his greatness were somehow reliant on whether he shares (or can be made to appear to share) the prejudices of current readers. There is a contemptible vanity in this approach to literature, of which neither Martin nor Meyers is entirely free. The literary critic A.D. Nuttall saw the same narcissism in those who wish "to be handed not Milton, but a Miltonized version of their own features."

What makes Johnson great are not his views about this or that political issue—"Why, Sir, most schemes of political improvement," he told Boswell, "are very laughable things"—but his genius, good-heartedness, courage, wit, and of course, his profoundly enjoyable, profoundly instructive writings. In one of his greatest books, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, Johnson defined the historical sense that gives all learning—including biography—its universal appeal. After visiting Iona, the birthplace of Christianity in Scotland and northern England, Johnson wrote:

> Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me and from my friends be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied . . . whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona.

Johnson recommended these ruins not because they flattered the 18th-century English but because they testified to a wisdom, bravery, and virtue noble in their own right. Biographers should endeavor to recommend Johnson with the same imaginative humility and avoid trying to turn him into a mirror of their own or their readers' self-satisfied faces.

David Nokes, who has written good books on Jane Austen and Jonathan Swift, writes the best of the three biographies here precisely because he tells the story of the life through Johnson's own letters—which, taken together, constitute an unsparingly honest, moving record—and never yanks his subject from his proper historical setting. He draws persuasive inferences from Johnson's diaries and presents his critical and biographical judgments with balanced incisiveness.

In the portrait he paints, which is of a brilliant, lonely, God-fearing, turbulent, lovable man, he exemplifies one of Johnson's own firmest convictions: "That there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful." ♦

B&A

A Fine Mess

Even E.L. Doctorow can't spoil the saga of the Collyer brothers. **BY TERRY TEACHOUT**

If you take a bus to Manhattan and keep an eye peeled as you roll through Harlem, you might spot a tiny park on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 128th Street. It's just big enough to hold a couple of benches and a few trees, and a plaque on the fence that protects the bright green grass from passersby identifies it as the Collyer Brothers Park.

Homer & Langley
A Novel
by E.L. Doctorow
Random House, 224 pp., $26

I doubt that very many of the present-day locals know who the Collyer brothers were, but there was a time when the names of Homer and Langley Collyer were known to everyone in New York City and a considerable number of people elsewhere in America. In 1947 their rotting corpses were found in the brownstone house that once stood at 2078 Fifth Avenue, where they had lived since 1909, surrounded by a hundred tons of junk, including a canoe, an X-ray machine, 14 pianos, the rusty chassis of a Model T, some 25,000 books, hundreds of bundles of old newspapers, and an assortment of glass jars containing pickled human organs.

How did such a bizarre state of affairs come to pass? No one knew, and no one knows. Homer and Langley Collyer were the children of a gynecologist who had moved uptown to Harlem in the days when it still harbored plenty of well-off whites. In 1919 Dr. Collier deserted his family, also for reasons unknown, and his sons took over the brownstone on Fifth Avenue and lived there for the rest of their lives. After illness confined Homer to a wheelchair and robbed him of his sight, Langley gave up his other activities and devoted himself to caring for his older brother.

The eccentricities of the Collyers, who never bothered to pay their bills and so were forced to do without gas, electricity, running water, or a telephone, were sufficiently familiar to their neighbors to have gotten them into the newspapers on more than one occasion. Still, they usually took care to keep out of sight, and it was only when an anonymous caller told the police that strange smells were coming from their house that the reclusive brothers made the tabloids at last.

Homer's body was found after a two-hour search, but it took another two weeks for the police to uncover Langley, who was buried under a mountain of newspapers. Further investigation revealed that the house was full of homemade booby traps designed to ensnare burglars, one of which had killed Langley. Unable to escape or call for help, Homer starved to death a few days later. The crumbling house was soon torn down, and the lot on which it had stood since 1879 remained vacant until 1965, when it was turned into a park.

No letters or diaries were unearthed in the Collyer house, and little was known about the brothers beyond the bare facts of their life and death. The only first-hand description of their living arrangements comes from a 1938 newspaper interview with Langley.

"We've no telephone, and we've stopped opening our mail," he told a reporter for the *New York World-Telegram*. "You can't imagine how free we feel." Two biographers subsequently managed to fill in some of the factual blanks, but to this day no one has succeeded in coming up with a satisfactory explanation of why the Collyers cut themselves off from the world.

Everyone loves a mystery, and the impenetrable mystery of the Collyer brothers effortlessly worked its magic on the American public. Their names became a byword for reclusiveness—Art Carney made mention of them in a 1956 episode of *The Honeymooners*—and though they have long since faded from the common stock of pop culture reference, novelists, playwrights, and screenwriters continue to be fascinated by the peculiar residents of the newspaper-crammed brownstone on Fifth Avenue.

Now E.L. Doctorow has written a shortish novel about the Collyer brothers and their times. As usual with Doctorow, *Homer & Langley* is a casserole of outright fiction and fictionalized fact, heavily sauced with deadpan irony, sprinkled with politics and written in the *faux-naïf* style of *Ragtime*, the book whose commercial success enabled its high-minded author to embrace the cushy lifestyle of a limousine liberal.

It is, of course, no secret that Doctorow is a man of the left, and that his books are vehicles for his ardent political convictions. In *The Book of Daniel*, his novel about Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, he describes those enduringly popular heroes of the red-diaper set as "the revolutionary heirs of Jefferson and Lincoln and Andrew Jackson and Tom Paine." As for *Ragtime*, the novel that made Doctorow rich and famous, suffice it to say that no one who reads this fable of the early days of American radicalism will be left in any doubt of its author's contempt for all things bourgeois.

Homer & Langley covers much of the same historical turf, the difference being that Doctorow's Collyer brothers do not die in 1947 but hang on until the '70s, long enough to see Richard Nixon laid low by Watergate. Once again history is turned into a passing show, and once again the details are systematically diverted to didactic ends.

Is it World War II yet? Then you can bet that the faithful servants of Homer and Langley will be convicted of the crime of being Japanese-Americans and hauled off to a concentration camp. In the world of E.L. Doctorow, all

Terry Teachout, drama critic of the Wall Street Journal *and chief culture critic of* Commentary, *is the author of the forthcoming* Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong.

policemen are "crooks with badges," all Negroes are noble, everything happens for a reason, and the reason is ever and always that America is no damn good.

But even though *Homer & Langley* is very nearly as heavy-handed as *Ragtime*, the main problem with the book is that it fails to bring the Collyers to fictional life, mainly because Doctorow is unable to supply a dramatically convincing account of how and why they became hermits and compulsive hoarders. Their retreat into the twilight world of madness is simply something that happens bit by bit.

Needless to say, this may be what actually happened to them—real life is rarely as neat as art—but it is not the stuff of which compelling novels are made, especially when they're written in the etiolated, blandly coy prose to which Doctorow has accustomed us ("My parents are together for eternity at the Woodlawn Cemetery up past what was the village of Fordham, though it is all the Bronx now, and of course unless there's an earthquake").

How might one put the unlikely story of the Collyer brothers to more effective fictional use? It happens that, in 1954, Marcia Davenport, a once-successful, now-forgotten novelist, wrote a bestselling novel about the Collyers called *My Brother's Keeper* in which she supplied them with a *cherchez-la-femme* backstory involving an Italian soprano and an illegitimate child. I'd be the last to claim that *My Brother's Keeper* is a serious piece of work, but it proves unexpectedly hard to put down, not least because of the skill with which Davenport weaves together her made-up plot with the real-life story that inspired it. Unlike Doctorow's Collyers, Davenport's Collyers make sense.

As for the real Collyers, they remain as unknowable now as they were in their lifetimes, and it is unlikely that anyone will ever get to the bottom of their *folie à deux*. Not that such strange creatures can ever be dissected, least of all by the blunt instrument that is modern psychiatry. To call them victims of obsessive-compulsive disorder is like calling Hannibal Lecter the victim of an eating disorder. They cannot be explained, merely described, and the other great failing of *Homer & Langley* is that it doesn't describe them memorably.

My Brother's Keeper, by contrast, may not be a very good novel, but I can vouch for its memorability: I picked it up the other day for the first time since I'd read it as a boy, and I was startled by how many of the twists and turns of Davenport's women's-magazine plot were firmly lodged in my mind four decades later.

BETTMANN / CORBIS

The brownstone on Fifth Avenue, 1947

And what of the descendants of the Collyers' neighbors? They aren't much inclined, it seems, to talk about the strange white men who lived in the house on the corner of Fifth Avenue, much less to burnish their legend. The Harlem Fifth Avenue Block Association sought seven years ago to change the name of Collyer Brothers Park to Reading Tree Garden. "They did nothing positive in the area, they're not a positive image," said Celia Moultrie, the group's president. But nothing came of her initiative, and the plaque on the fence that surrounds the park remains unchanged.

E.L. Doctorow takes a less jaundiced view of the Collyer brothers. "It's all very well to make them characters and weirdos and quote odd things they may have said, but I thought it was a momentous thing they did," he explained to the *New York Times* earlier this year. "It's as if that house was another country."

Nor need you read very far in *Homer & Langley* to sense that he actually *admires* the Collyers. Why? Because they refused to play by the rules of the gilded age that spawned them. Indeed, the only period of American life in the 20th century that Doctorow's Collyers find at all satisfactory is—surprise, surprise—the '60s. One fine October day they cautiously emerge from their Harlem redoubt, stroll downtown to an anti-war rally in Central Park, bring a group of friendly hippies home with them, and discover to their amazement and delight that the time is no longer out of joint:

> Living as they did, these kids were more radical critics of society than the antiwar or civil rights people getting so much attention in the newspapers. They had no intention of trying to make things better. They had simply rejected the entire culture. . . . I considered the possibility, after drinking too much of their bad wine, that my brother and I were, willy-nilly and ipso facto, prophets of a new age.

Somehow, though, I doubt that the members of the Harlem Fifth Avenue Block Association will soon be persuaded that there was anything momentous about the grisly fate of the last occupants of the house at 2078 Fifth Avenue. As Ray Charles remarked of the poverty in which he grew up, "It's easy for people who eat warm food and sleep in warm beds to talk about it, but it's detestable when you live it." Few of those who have done so and lived to tell the tale are inclined to romanticize the marginal existences they worked so hard to escape.

Unlike E.L. Doctorow, they know weirdness when they see it. ♦

B&A

Case by Case

The new Oxford edition of decisions that made history.

BY TERRY EASTLAND

Chief Justice Melville Fuller and the Court, 1892

In 1992 Oxford University Press brought out *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*. Organized alphabetically, the more than thousand-page book had entries on the Court's history and current operation, the justices themselves, legal doctrines and vocabulary, and the Court's leading decisions, such as *Marbury* v. *Madison*—which confirmed the power of constitutional review, and without which the book would have been much smaller, if indeed a book at all—and, more recognizably, *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, which declared unconstitutional segregated public schools.

Seven years later the editor of the *Companion*, Kermit Hall, put together another alphabetically structured but much shorter Oxford book: *The Oxford Guide to United States Supreme Court Decisions*. The *Guide* treated the most important decisions, like *Marbury* and *Brown*—some 440 in all. Not surprisingly, since Hall edited both books, many of the case entries he used for the *Guide* were originally composed for the *Companion*. He edited some of those entries while also adding new ones on big decisions handed down after the *Companion* was published.

The Oxford Guide to United States Supreme Court Decisions
Edited by Kermit L. Hall and James W. Ely Jr.
Oxford, 528 pp., $35

In 2005, Hall updated the *Companion* in a second edition. And now, the *Guide* has been published in a second edition. It includes case entries first composed for the 2005 *Companion* as well as entries on decisions rendered since 2005. Among the cases treated here that are not in the first edition are *Bush* v. *Gore* (2000), the Michigan Affirmative Action cases (2003), the Texas and Kentucky "Ten Commandments" cases (2005), and the Enemy Combatant Cases (2004, 2006, and 2008).

Oxford identifies Hall, who died in 2006, and the legal historian James W. Ely, as coeditors. It's a fitting designation for Hall, since the *Companion* and the *Guide* were his books to begin with. Moreover, Hall himself contributed more entries to the *Guide* than anyone else, with 49 in the second edition. The cases Hall wrote on range in subject matter from voting rights to racial set-asides to federalism to free speech to public school prayer to abortion.

Each entry begins with the name of the case, its official citation in the *United States Reports*, and other basic information. The decision is described and analyzed, and notable concurrences or dissents noted. So are subsequent responses to rulings in later cases or in legislation passed by Congress.

While there are more liberal scholars than not among the more than 100 contributors—drawn as most are from legal and political science faculties, hardly Republican redoubts—conservative scholars are not absent. They include Nelson Lund, who contributed the entry on *District of Columbia* v. *Heller*, the 2008 case in which the Court adopted the individual-rights interpretation of the Second Amendment; and Gail Heriot, who composed the entry on *Parents Involved in Community Schools* v. *Seattle School District No. 1* (and a companion case from Louisville), the 2007 cases in which the Court struck down race-based policies designed to achieve racial balance in public schools.

Unfortunately for this new edition, however, it is marred in ways especially noticeable in a reference work. Proofreaders evidently missed on page 205 "Frank-furter" (the justice) and on page 218 "Fulli-love" (the name of a party in a 1980 race set-aside case) and on page 109 "theburden." Inexplicably, some contributors aren't listed in the directory of contributors, among them (to cite one example) Howard Gillman, who wrote the entry on *Bush* v. *Gore*—and in case you wondered, is professor of law and political science at the University of Southern California.

And on occasion the *Guide* stumbles. For example, on *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey*, the 1992 case in which the Court

CORBIS

Terry Eastland, publisher of THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *is the author of several books on law and government, including* Benchmarks: Great Constitutional Controversies in the Supreme Court.

explicitly declined to overrule *Roe* v. *Wade*, the entry states that Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy "were more concerned with the institutional danger that [*Casey*] presented to the Court than with settling the abortion issue by outlawing it."

Of course, the Court could not have outlawed "the abortion issue." But it could have overruled *Roe* v. *Wade* and returned the issue to the states—which was the critical question before the Court.

Still, having read many of the entries, and assessing the volume in terms of its case-specific objectives, I'd say this *Guide* deserves high marks. Some entries stand out for their obvious excellence—in particular the ones on school desegregation cases by Dennis J. Hutchison of the University of Chicago Law School—and some of the best entries are on older cases raising issues that the Court later revisited.

For example, on *Barron* v. *Baltimore*, the 1833 case in which the Court held that the Bill of Rights restrains only the federal government and not the states, the entry efficiently notes the reemergence of the issue with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment and closes with a reference to the Court's application of provisions of the Bill of Rights to the states that, overturning *Barron*, began more than 90 years later in *Gitlow* v. *New York* (1925).

Likewise, there is *Carter* v. *Carter Coal Co*., the 1936 case in which the Court held unconstitutional a New Deal statute designed to regulate the production of coal. Congress based its authority for the law on the Article I power to regulate interstate commerce, but the Court said that clause had limits which Congress had overstepped. The entry on the case observes that, within a year, the Court had changed its mind, and the clause then "became the basis for a massive restructuring of the federal-state relationship." Moving to the end of the 20th century, the entry notes how the Court forged a new direction as it found excessive some congressional invocations of the commerce clause, starting with *United States* v. *Lopez* in 1995.

As a reference book, the *Guide* will be used not for hours at a time but on this occasion and then that, to look up a case and then, maybe, another one or two. So a user of the *Guide* may not grasp, in reading a particular entry, what all of the entries taken together demonstrate: how the judicial power has come to be exercised over the past two centuries. Within this story there is another story, not one the *Guide* undertakes to tell but which is there for the historically minded reader: how the exercise of judicial power has expanded well beyond what the framers of the Constitution anticipated.

The *Guide* in this edition, and any others to come, will continue to find an audience among lawyers. But it is also a book for the educated layman wanting to know the basics of particular cases. Inevitably, for the lawyer as for the layman, the question arises as to whether all of what the *Guide* contains is located somewhere online. What I found is that, while you can look up any of the cases in the *Guide* online, and read the opinions in their entirety, there does not seem to be a site that replicates what the *Guide* does in selecting and concisely analyzing such a large number of significant cases.

The *Guide* thus makes its own case for what is still known as a book, that thing with covers and paper. That is manifestly to its credit. ♦

B&A

Cool Gone Cold

Old hipsters now need hip replacement.

BY ANN MARLOWE

Reading Ted Gioia's dust-jacket credits ("Best-selling author of *The History of Jazz and Delta Blues*"), readers may think this book is about jazz or pop culture. It is—and Gioia has written an intellectually precise, lively, and imaginative account of "the cool" and its role in American life. But even Gioia may not realize that he has offered up a tangential illumination of the whole phenomenon of modernity:

> Starting in the fifties and gaining momentum over the next two decades, average people wanted to lead their lives as though they were works of art, songs or movies or novels. At the same time, people now judged songs or movies or novels as lifestyle accessories, not as aesthetic products. In some strange way, this became the epitome of the cool—to externalize your life as though it were one more entertainment product.

The Birth (and Death) of Cool
by Ted Gioia
Speck, 256 pp., $25

Ann Marlowe is working on a book about perspectival culture and the origins of counterinsurgency theory.

This rehearses the argument of the whole book, including the "death of the cool," which he attributes to the eventual sickening commercialization of the concept. From now on, he argues, we are in for earnestness, authenticity, and an absence of irony.

Where did "the cool" come from? Gioia's answer is no surprise: from African Americans. Cool was first defined in print in 1947, in a book titled piquantly *Jive and Slang of Students in Negro Colleges*. It meant "neatly dressed," and a "cool papa" was a "nonchalant fellow."

Unsurprisingly, Gioia, the author of five books on the subject, leans heavily on jazz in explaining cool. Almost 40 pages are devoted to discussing the roles of Bix Beiderbecke, Lester Young, and Miles Davis in the construction of cool, and much of this is gloriously written criticism. A few representatively brilliant asides: Gioia looks at Method acting as a sort of stage jazz, and riffs on the fact that Bugs Bunny, Fred Flintstone, and the Pink Panther had jazz themes

despite the fact that jazz record sales were minuscule.

The strength of this study is that Gioia's theorizing rests on specific examples drawn from his magisterial knowledge of jazz. That is also its weakness. Gioia may underestimate the degree to which film fed the aestheticization of everyday life, and starting long before the 1950s. Gioia would also have deepened his analysis by looking at 19th-century intellectual history. The ability to "externalize" one's view of one's life arose in the late 19th century. There is Nietzsche, who wrote about looking at art from the perspective of life in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the aesthetes, decadents, and dandies of the *fin de siècle*.

Gioia might also have written more about when bohemia arose, and why, and why it seems increasingly fragile, though not so fragile as "the cool." He pays so much attention to jazz that he slights the role of bohemia, including the WASP bohemia of early 20th-century Greenwich Village, in forming "the cool."

Then there is the role of Jews, also soft-pedaled here. Gioia includes "blacks, gays, jazz musicians, street toughs, bohemians, and countercultural figures of all types" as role models for cool—but not Jews. This, too, would be investigated best by going back to the 19th century, where Jews first appeared as "cool" figures in novels (*Daniel Deronda*, Proust), politics (Benjamin Disraeli), and society. The aura of the demonic and outcast that clung to them would also be part of the aesthetic of cool.

But these are quibbles; Ted Gioia has not written a definitive work of intellectual history but an extended essay on a phenomenon that draws on his own field of expertise. And he has hit upon the one essential point: He writes that the cool "eventually boiled down to how one was perceived by others. Coolness, even more than beauty, is inevitably in the eye of the beholder."

This is a remarkable insight into all of modernity, not just "the cool," and I would go further and say that this emphasis on the eye of the beholder was a necessary precondition for cool. Cool was unthinkable until there was a fashion for what Nietzsche called perspectival thinking in the *Will to Power*.

Loosely, this means regarding reality as lying mainly in the eye of the beholder rather than being fixed, immutable, and objectively given. Once this makes sense, then it also makes sense to dress, live, and act "as if" you were whatever you want to be. In 1400 it made no sense to dress as a peasant if you were a noble, or vice versa, because reality most definitely did not lie in the eye of the beholder. It was part of a permanent social order established by God.

Miles Davis, 1959

CBS PHOTO ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

But sometime in the late 19th century it began to make sense to dress "as if" one were what one wanted to be—and this continues to make sense. Cool is part of a larger phenomenon of what might be called perspectival culture. Once reality lay in the eye of the beholder, conceptual art and Abstract Expressionism and happenings and performance art made sense. Some of these works' main purpose, in fact, was to draw our attention to the fact that they were art only if we agreed that they were—for instance, musical pieces like one of John Cage's, *4' 33"*, which consisted solely of silence.

I have argued elsewhere that modern counterinsurgency theory only became possible once people in the military, too, saw that the reality of the battle space depended on perceptions (in this case, that of the population). If the population doesn't think you're doing counterinsurgency, you're not.

Perspectival culture extends into far less lofty domains like sports, décor, and fashion. Gioia notes, but doesn't comment on the fact, that the skateboard was invented in 1958. Why not in 1760, like the roller skate? (Granted, skates were not widely used until more than a hundred years later, when improved to make turning easier, and when there were more paved roads.) I would argue that it took a certain view of the urban landscape, as a place to play, to make anyone want to do the things people do with skateboards.

"By 1979," Gioia explains, "the whole culture had gone cool." And so, of course, cool began to lose its allure. We are in for a "decooling" of society, the result of an oversaturation of cool. "Cool is increasingly just cultural noise," writes Gioia, and marketers will try to make the slick into the authentic to grab us. The "core post-cool values of simplicity, authenticity, naturalness, and earnestness" are upon us. But Gioia should distinguish this change, which is merely stylistic, from the larger change signified by the culture of cool he analyzes.

The idea that reality is whatever it is perceived to be, rather than something with independent existence, is likely to be with us as long as our culture survives. This is a good thing, too. The radical subjectivism which gave birth to contemporary art and to counterinsurgency theory has also given us cultural relativism and a loss of confidence in Western values. But the skepticism inherent in perspectival culture will not be the destruction, but the saving, of Western civilization. Poseurs and, especially, their commercialization may be annoying, but they don't blow up airplanes or commit suicide bombings. It takes a belief in the objective reality of one's beliefs to produce fanaticism. ♦

B&A

Atrocity Road

In the Philippines, a Japanese assault on civilization.

BY VICTORINO MATUS

Although my father was only four years old when the Japanese Army invaded his island in the Philippines in 1942, he remembers well their occupying presence over the ensuing three years.

For instance, there were village roundups in which an informant wearing a bag over his head would point out to his Japanese masters members of the resistance. The accused were then taken away, never to be seen again. When his school was converted into a local headquarters, my father sneaked onto the grounds, peered through a classroom window, and saw a Japanese interrogator wacking a guerrilla insurgent on the back with a two-by-four until he vomited blood.

Of course, that wasn't the worst of it. In the spring of 1942, on the main island of Luzon, facing unbeatable odds and with no relief in sight, General Edward P. King surrendered a force of 76,000 Americans and Filipinos to the Japanese Imperial Army—the largest surrender by an American general in history. The prisoners were then instructed to march toward a rail station where they would be transported to a prisoner-of-war camp. Little did the captives realize their journey would become a nightmarish 66-mile hike known as the Bataan Death March.

The subject—one of the worst atrocities suffered by American forces during the Second World War—is well-covered ground. Nevertheless, in what amounts to 10 years' worth of research and reporting, Michael and Elizabeth Norman, a husband-and-wife academic team, have written a compelling and exhaustive account of the incident.

Tears in the Darkness
The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath
by Michael Norman
and Elizabeth M. Norman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 464 pp., $30

Although the authors designate one survivor, Ben Steele of Montana, as their focal point, the book is sprawling: Not only is the death march captured in horrific detail, but, as the subtitle suggests, its aftermath is captured as well: the mass suffering at Camp O'Donnell, where soldiers were sometimes buried alive; the torture within the walls of Bilibid Prison; the passage of thousands of POWs (Ben Steele included) from the Philippines to mainland Japan, to be used as slave labor; and the trial and execution of General Masaharu Homma, who initially presided over the invasion of the Philippines and who, the authors believe, was wrongly convicted.

The Normans are unsparing in their criticism of General Douglas MacArthur, commander of United States Army Forces in the Far East. His delayed reaction to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, also noted by other historians, proved costly. The bulk of the Army Air Force was caught on the ground just as the first wave of Japanese Zeros approached Clark Field: "Many were parked in neat rows in the open on their ready lines, noses to the runway. From above they looked like toys on a large lawn, silver toys perfectly outlined against the greensward of Luzon's wide central plain." The Japanese pilots took full advantage of the opportunity, leaving only wreckage behind.

It wasn't long before MacArthur moved his operations to Corregidor, an island fortress in Manila Bay, just south of the Bataan Peninsula. (Filipinos pronounce this as "Bataahn.") In bracing for the Japanese invasion, a hasty retreat was sounded, and the consequences were tragic:

> Tons of provisions stockpiled in northern Luzon to support MacArthur's plan to fight at the beaches and along the central plain had simply been abandoned. At just one warehouse alone, the army quartermaster had left fifty million bushels of rice, enough grain to keep a garrison going for years.

Rations were cut drastically, and before long, troops were scavenging the jungles for their next meal:

> Soon almost every carabao [water buffalo] on Bataan, some twenty-eight hundred animals, had been eaten, and the quartermaster began to slaughter the cavalry's mounts, packhorses, and mules. When these too were gone, the men turned to hunting wild pigs, jungle lizards, giant snakes.

One soldier "spotted the skeletal paw of a monkey reaching up from the depths of the pot. 'I think I'll pass,' he decided."

By the time MacArthur fled to Australia in March 1942 (he visited Bataan just once), malnutrition had set in among his troops. The average weight loss was estimated to range between 20 and 30 pounds, which partly explains why, despite a numerical advantage, the U.S. and Philippine armed forces were ultimately no match for the resupplied and reinforced Japanese Army. (Another reason was that the Philippine Army, with the exception of the elite Scouts, was poorly trained and ill-equipped.)

Though General Jonathan Wainwright had been left in charge by MacArthur, it was General King who surrendered the bulk of the force on the mainland on April 9. King saw no point in continuing the fight. Defeat was inevitable. Rather than sacrifice thousands more of his men, King sought to spare them, simply hoping for humane treatment at the hands of the enemy.

King, in fact, asked a Japanese colonel if his men would be treated well. The colonel responded, "We are not barbarians." But they were. To get an idea of what the POWs experienced:

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> A Japanese private searching a young Air Corps captain found a few yen in the man's pocket. The guard hissed his disapproval and summoned an officer. The officer looked at the money, then forced the American to his knees. Some of the men standing nearby swore they saw a glint of sun on the officer's sword as he brought it down on the young captain's neck.
>
> Army medic Sidney Stewart, standing in the ranks at Mariveles waiting to be searched, watched a guard coming down the line punch a soldier in the face. The soldier was young, a fledgling, and afraid, and he cried out in pain—a form of protest, as the Japanese saw it, that always invited more punishment. The guard raised the butt end of his rifle and bashed the soldier in the head. The boy sagged to his knees, groaning, and the guard raised his rifle for another blow. This time, he split the boy's skull. The American twitched and shuddered in the dirt for a few moments, then he was quiet and did not move again.
>
> Richard Gordon stood horrified as a column of tanks crushed an American sergeant who had fallen asleep on the shoulder, and Brown Davidson came upon remains that had been run over so often, all that was left intact was a hand lying nearby. To Ray Hunt of St. Louis the remains on the road looked like "wet sacks." Major John Coleman of Wellington, Texas, thought them swatches of cloth, khaki cloth, until he stepped on one and slipped. "Good God," said Marine Private Irwin Scott of Dallas, "we're marching on our own men."

The Normans also relate an incident that took place along the Pantingan River in Luzon: a massacre of Filipinos (and some Americans) that is now mostly forgotten. According to Pedro Felix, one of a handful of survivors, hundreds of Philippine Army officers, bound by telephone wire, were bayoneted to death or beheaded, despite having surrendered. (Felix managed to escape after being stabbed multiple times and falling into a pile of bodies in a ravine.) The authors also provide accounts from the Japanese perspective—soldiers explaining the need to avenge the deaths of their comrades, others who viewed the order to kill with suspicion, and those racked by guilt after committing the crime.

Such impressions are invaluable as the reader is left wondering: Just what goes through one's mind when killing the helpless? The Normans thoroughly explore the motivation and reasoning behind such atrocities. Take, for example, the brutal nature of Japanese basic training: "Men were beaten till their teeth fell out or their eyes swelled shut or they lost their hearing, 'beaten like a dog!' one recruit wrote home, 'beaten like a bag of flour.'"

Perhaps the authors put it best when they explain that

> when the first-year privates finally finished their pitiless apprenticeship, they were promoted to senior privates, stewards to a new cohort of conscripts. Now the bullied became bullies themselves. One group of primitives had created from itself another group of primitives, and all the groups from all the camps across all the home islands formed one great primal horde, 2,287,000 men who had been savaged to produce an army of savage intent.

American prisoners carrying their dead, 1942

But there is also illogic. On the one hand, "Here were the very men who had made [one Japanese soldier's] life so hot, so hard, so damn miserable. *Hai*, yes, he knew the rules, he'd read the *Senjinkun*, the military code—'do not punish them if they yield'—but he thought, 'How can we stick to the rules?' Comrades had been killed, good Matsuyama boys butchered. 'How can I forgive them so easily?' he asked himself." On the other hand, the soldier reflects, "In the middle of a battle they had laid down their arms and raised their hands, a shameless act for any soldier. Should such men be received with respect? What did they think they were going to get? 'a welcome, a bath, a rest?'"

Some of the Japanese justified the Pantingan massacre by explaining, "They're not yet imprisoned so we can't call them prisoners. It would be hard for us to kill the prisoners in a camp, but these men are still the enemy and we're still in the middle of a war. We have to kill them."

If, by some miracle, prisoners were not outright executed by their captors, disease and illness could just as easily claim them:

> The lack of nutrients aggravated and accelerated their malaria, dengue fever, blackwater fever, diphtheria, and pneumonia, and left them suffering from a host of painful, and lethal, conditions: wet beriberi (with its gross edema), scurvy (which made their noses bleed and their teeth fall out), pellagra (a feeling of pins in their skin accompanied by severe diarrhea), nyctalopia (night blindness), amblyopia (day blindness or loss of vision), tinnitus (ringing in the ears), burning feet, conjunctivitis (severe itching and burning in the eyes), and gross peripheral neuropathy (their limbs went completely numb).

Worst of all was dysentery: "So many men had come into camp with it (a third? half?) the slit trenches they dug—and they dug them regularly—filled within days."

In *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, John Dower wrote that "whereas 4 percent of Americans and British servicemen taken prisoner by the Germans and Italians were calculated to have died in captivity, the incidence of death among American and British Commonwealth prisoners of the Japanese was estimated to have been 27 percent." And yet, there are survivors like Ben Steele, who suffered from beriberi and malaria, and was even administered last rites (he remembers watching other prisoners divide up his possessions). Thanks to Michael and Elizabeth Norman, these survivors can tell their tales—and not just the evil that men do but also the sacrifice and good works of others. The authors note that through-

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out the Bataan Death March local villagers would line the road and make every attempt to give the prisoners food and water at the risk of suffering punishment by the Japanese.

In Hampton Sides's *Ghost Soldiers*, an earlier account of the Death March, we learn of a pregnant woman who offered food to an American and paid a terrible price. This detail stood out in my mind because of the stories my father tells about the liberation of his island in March 1945. He was seven at the time and vividly remembers not only the dogfights between Zeros and P-38 Lightnings but also the GIs who gave out treats like chewing gum. Whenever he encountered an American, my father would ask, "Chiclets, Joe?" And sometimes the soldiers would simply press a Hershey bar into a child's hand without his even asking.

They were always good like that. ♦

B&A

Big Talker

The reputation of Isaiah Berlin rests on words and letters, not books. **BY JAMES GRANT**

On June 11, 1957, two days before the announcement of his knighthood (awarded, so a friend teased, for services to "brilliant conversation"), Isaiah Berlin lunched with the queen. Ignoring frowns from other guests, he insisted on the merits of various books banned for obscenity in Britain, including Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and one by Edmund Wilson. In a letter to Wilson he remembered finding the queen to be quite jolly:

> She asked me if I read much—& said that her father once informed his luncheon guests that he had been reading a *most* interesting book—the Bible—& had any of them read it, & if so, what did they think of it. You cannot tell me that I shd have had a gayer time at the White House or the Elysee. The Queen inquired after my views of the works of Louise de Vilmorin—I asked hers regarding Cocteau. I think perhaps you had better *not* disillusion the benevolent U.S. press with their view of this grave, dull, limited, horsey young early Victorian prig.

Enlightening
Letters 1946-1960
by Isaiah Berlin
Edited by Henry Hardy and Jennifer Holmes
Random House, 704 pp., $50

The Book of Isaiah
Personal Impressions of Isaiah Berlin
Edited by Henry Hardy
Boydell, 368 pp., $47.95

In this second volume of letters, we find Berlin mixing with just about everyone in high society. His work in Washington during the war, preparing dispatches on American opinion for the Foreign Office, had secured his reputation and given him enviable contacts. Despite this, the late 1940s and early '50s were in many ways a time of acute self-doubt, which (he must have thought) called for long and lugubrious letters. After the war, he returned to Oxford, where he left analytical philosophy for the history of ideas. It was where he wanted to be, but he constantly worried that his intellectual output was insignificant.

The letters are far from dull, however, and frequently the miserable and the jovial sit together on the same page. On the whole the letters are endearingly vivacious, filled with a passion for life and a love of gossip. But there is also a strong undercurrent of guilt, shame, and inadequacy.

Berlin particularly valued his friendship with the "agreeably malicious" Maurice Bowra, whose "immoral front"—standing against the solemnity of Oxford dons—he found liberating. Thanking Bowra, he writes, "Having arrived in England with Russian sentiments & habits, & had a firm, narrow, tidy English uniform clapped on all this, I should, I think, have grown into a ludicrous caricature of English attributes but for this great act of rescue." He may not have been a ludicrous caricature of English attributes, but he came close with his rapid, upper-class English diction, paradoxically modeled on Bowra.

In his preface to *The Book of Isaiah*, compiled to mark the centenary of Berlin's birth, Henry Hardy issues a warning: "This book contains strong laudatory content throughout." The warning is necessary, for the contributions—written mostly by those who knew Berlin in person—unapologetically champion Berlin, with all the hyperbole that goes with such writing.

And it must be said, the impression from these letters is not entirely agreeable. Jennifer Holmes (who joins Hardy to edit the letters) writes that "while his sympathy for the human condition in the abstract is readily apparent, sympathy for individuals—even his closest friends—is in fairly short supply, and empathy almost non-existent." His irrepressible disdain for people is relentless. Einstein is regarded as "a genius, but surely a foolish one, with the inhumanity of a child." The "dreadful" Rebecca West is "obviously sick and mad." E.H. Carr, a "philistine," is "worthless." Kingsley Amis is "revolting." And so on.

"Can you ever read through your letters? I can't. But I am always ashamed of them, a little." You can see why, and now they have been published, his reputation will surely be damaged. These pages depict a cowardly snob, one who was regularly treacherous even to his closest friends.

But while the letters show Berlin's harshness, they also demonstrate his more obsequious side. "I say what I imagine to be true; I never by any chance think of what reactions this will cause," he writes; and yet, when the reactions did occur, he would then try to assuage bruised feelings. In truth, he was nearly always thinking about possible reactions. Feeling "a curiously powerful devotion"

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to Winston Churchill, who had asked for his help with his first volume of memoirs, Berlin wrote a flattering review of the second volume to avoid writing anything that would upset him. Personal considerations about his private life, he confided, outweighed the public interest. Churchill's reaction to the review ("It's too good to be true") highlights the problem of excessive praise.

It was odd that Berlin, a liberal social democrat, felt so devoted to Churchill. It was not just that he felt more socially comfortable among conservatives, as Michael Ignatieff suggests in his masterful biography. In the realm of ideas as well as in his friendships, Berlin oscillated between opposing sides. For example, discussing the "reactionary liberal" Frederick Hayek, he said he had "an inveterate sympathy for traitors in both camps, crypto-reactionary progressives and crypto-progressive reactionaries."

There was one reactionary, however, who proved too much for Berlin, and that was T. S. Eliot. Their disagreement over the latter's anti-Semitism is the only time both sides of the correspondence are printed in full. Eliot had complained about being associated with Arthur Koestler in Berlin's article, entitled "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation," in which he criticized Koestler for posing a stark choice for the Diaspora: either full assimilation or emigration to Israel.

Attempting to disassociate himself from this view, Eliot maintained that, for him, the Jewish problem was not a racial problem at all but a religious problem. In reply, Berlin quoted Eliot's 1934 lecture at the University of Virginia: "Reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable."

The term "free-thinking" could scarcely describe a religious community, Berlin pointed out, and so must have described the Jews as a race. Eliot responded by saying that, instead of race, the word culture would be more appropriate, and anyway, he went on, his emphasis had been on free-thinking—after all, many Jews had abandoned their faith but not their culture. His conclusion was that either the Jews preserve their own culture in their own community or assimilate fully by accepting Christianity. This is barely distinguishable from Koestler, but again for fear of causing offense, Berlin removed the association from future editions of his article.

Berlin was one of those cultural Jews, subscribing to the rituals but not the content of Judaism—and doing so despite the contradiction. He had many other inner conflicts, too—his Jewish, Russian, and British identities, for instance—and had to reconcile his lifelong Zionism with his anti-nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Writing to passionately pro-Arab correspondents, he would try his hardest to find agreement: The creation of a Jewish state had been "at the expense of the Arabs. Of course they mind. Of course they are right to mind." And it would have been an anathema to Berlin for the justification to come from religious or tribal grounds. It had to come instead from the more utilitarian idea of safety. In January 1958, having been asked by Israel's prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, who he thought a "peasant leader," about the status of children from mixed marriages, Berlin made it clear that religious affiliation should make no difference to civil and political rights.

Sir Isaiah Berlin, 1985

Though Berlin was often an astute political observer, he sometimes felt less interested in politics than in the great questions of philosophy and intellectual history—or the elections of the warden of All Souls, which are excessively covered in these pages. Public engagement with the horrors of the 20th century seemed a burden, and when he did engage publicly, he would soon feel regret, as he did with most of his writings. When he wrote to proclaim his stout anti-Marxism, for example, after being thought a fellow traveler by the *New York Times*, he later admitted to Alice James that he "felt ashamed of publicly avowing my solidarity with the safe majority."

In 1949, to Michael Straight, the editor-proprietor of *The New Republic*, Berlin wrote that he had nothing worth saying about Western Europe, although he was more interested—but even more cautious, for fear of endangering his acquaintances—on the subject of the Soviet Union. He was in a predicament: "where I could talk freely I have nothing to say, where I have something to say I cannot talk freely." Years later, the "detestable" Straight, as Berlin was then calling him, published, without permission, a false account of his famous meeting with the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, putting her in real danger.

The critical night in late 1945 with Akhmatova, an alluring remnant of prerevolutionary Russian culture, stayed with Berlin for the rest of his life. The relationship is captured well by Anatoly Naiman in *The Book of Isaiah*. Along with other Russian artists—Turgenev, Tolstoy, Pasternak, all of whom feature regularly in the letters—she taught him the effects of totalitarian societies on culture.

Berlin was a great critic of totalitarianism, although he wrote relatively little on the 20th-century horrors. With its roots in the 18th-century belief that there was one right way for human beings to live, communism and fascism went against his understanding of human nature, derived from his own conflicting personality and convictions. In a lengthy and thoughtful letter to George Kennan in 1951, Berlin explained that conflicting and irreconcilable values are part of the human condition, and if this is denied, people "lose their status as free human beings; indeed as human beings at all." Nature, then, is irrational, and as he knew from Akhmatova, culture, not uniformity, was the best civilizing force. He could have said, as Sigmund Freud did, that culture

GEMMA LEVINE / GETTY IMAGES

exists to protect us against nature.

Berlin may have lacked Freud's knack for aphorisms, but he remains an important thinker, even if his own (all too human) nature contained faults and contradictions.

There were many who believed Berlin's fame was undeserved, earned by his personality and not his ability. He readily remarked that his ability was persistently overestimated. "Long may this continue," he would say. ♦

B&A

Polk's Empire

The president who did what he said he would do—and in one term. **BY EDWARD ACHORN**

Historians still fiercely debate whether James K. Polk is our most underappreciated president, but I'll say this: He sure seems to be our most politically incorrect one. Polk's brilliant success in vastly expanding the size and power of the United States during his fleeting four years in office (1845-49), conquering Mexico along the way, has earned him the eternal enmity of much of academia. And his drab and crabby nature has kept him from holding a place in the hearts of his countrymen commensurate with his achievements.

A Country of Vast Designs
James K. Polk, the Mexican War and the Conquest of the American Continent
by Robert W. Merry
Simon & Schuster, 592 pp., $30

In many ways, Polk's Mexican War has come to be treated as a defining American sin, the work of a leader who exploited the theme of national honor to justify a power grab, battering a weaker country into submission. The sainted Henry David Thoreau, I was taught from an early age, bravely went to jail for declining to pay his poll tax in protest of America's schemes against Mexico (though he had also failed to pay it well before then). America got its comeuppance, we are told, when its territorial expansion fanned the flames over slavery, bringing on the blood-soaked calamity of the Civil War.

Ulysses S. Grant, who fought in both conflicts, called the Mexican War "the most unjust war ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." Gore Vidal noted that the Polk era "is where we turned brutally imperial. Never looked back." The ponderous Al Gore, a distant relative of the conspiracy-minded novelist, has declared that Polk's war has been "condemned by history."

But it may be a little more complicated than that, Robert W. Merry suggests in this expansive new book. Polk did not act in a vacuum. He represented an extraordinarily dynamic young country, whose innovative people, raised in freedom, were willing to take bold risks to get ahead in life. No matter how much Polk's political enemies in the Whig party thundered against expansion, it seems clear that most Americans shared and cheered the president's sense of manifest destiny, and planned to make better use of the continent than did their predecessors.

Corrupt, enervated Mexico, feebly administering its sparsely populated territory, simply lacked the enterprise, resolution, and rule of law to keep its far-flung borders intact. Whatever academics might think of the matter, such weakness inevitably creates a power vacuum, and it seems clear that European powers (notably Great Britain) would have been tempted to fill the void if Americans had not.

"History moves forward with a crushing force," Merry argues, "and does not stop for niceties of moral suasion or concepts of political virtue."

Instead of dodging the most compelling national issue of his time, Polk worked hard to increase the size of the United States by more than a third, adding to it what is now Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and part of Colorado. Through his agency, America became a Pacific power, and ultimately the strongest nation on earth.

It is ironic, to say the least, to read of illegal American immigrants flooding into Mexican California, and the latter being too weak or indifferent to do much to stem the Anglo-Saxon tide. Mexico surely did not help its cause when it assumed a posture of mindless, or at least foolish, belligerence against its more powerful and resourceful neighbor, "clearly tempting fate by any reckoning," as Merry writes.

Mexico abused American citizens and refused to make up for it, haughtily rejected diplomatic gestures, and fired the first shots, bringing on war after America placed an army in position to defend the territory of newly annexed Texas, which for ten years had claimed the Rio Grande as its western border. That Polk was only too willing to see such a war commence does not make him solely responsible.

I don't mean to suggest that Robert W. Merry makes some sort of god out of his hero. One of the charms of this book is that the author readily explores Polk's failings, as a politician and man. Hailing from North Carolina and Tennessee, a protégé of the boisterous Andrew Jackson, Polk was "small of stature and drab of temperament," Merry writes, and "lacked the skills and traits of the natural leader."

Afraid of confronting adversaries head-on, preferring to disparage them in the pages of his diary, he misled some powerful officials into believing they could dominate him—among them his appallingly self-serving secretary of state,

Edward Achorn, deputy editorial pages editor of the Providence Journal*, is the author of the forthcoming* Fifty-nine in '84: Old Hoss Radbourn, Barehanded Baseball, and the Greatest Season a Pitcher Ever Had *(Smithsonian/HarperCollins).*

James Buchanan, later one of America's worst presidents. Gideon Welles, then a civilian naval officer, said of Polk: "He possessed a trait of sly cunning which he thought shrewdness, but which was really disingenuousness and duplicity."

Polk comes across as a very cold fish—dour, humorless, sanctimonious, publicly oblivious to the horrors of slavery, obsessed with detail, and altogether incapable of relating to the common man. In one telling incident, a juggling act visited the White House, astonishing and delighting 50 assembled guests. Polk later grumbled that the display contributed little to the audience's "edification or profit," adding that he considered his own time in attendance "unprofitably spent."

After losing two straight bids for governor of Tennessee, Polk seemed highly unlikely to capture the 1844 Democratic presidential nomination. Yet even after he pulled it off, Merry notes, "at no time did he allow his correspondence to betray any hint of excitement or even surprise."

We can only speculate over how much his personality was stunted by a horrifying incident in his teen years, when he underwent an operation for agonizing urinary stones, with only brandy for a sedative. The doctor cut through the prostate into the bladder, and "knowing what we know now about the nerves that line the prostate and control much of the sexual function, it would seem likely the operation left the young man impotent or sterile, perhaps both."

If so, the impotent man proved a very potent president. Polk set out to accomplish four aims: settling the Oregon question, thus scuttling the risk of a war with England; acquiring California, one way or another, from Mexico; creating an independent treasury system; and lowering tariffs. Through an act of extraordinary will, he achieved all four—and died, a spent man, four months after leaving office.

Some of Merry's diversions into the more arcane corners of the politics of Polk's time can be tedious, leaving me wishing for a straighter path; and I could have used more maps, especially when the subject was the Oregon territorial disputes and America's battles in Mexico. But *A Country of Vast Designs* is a welcome exploration of a president who, whatever we might think of his personality, used his time in office to vastly expand the power and influence of the freest and greatest country in history.

That may make James K. Polk a pariah in certain circles, but it also makes him unquestionably great. ♦

B&A

Annuals of Crime

The choice of 'Best' can be a mystery, too.

BY JON L. BREEN

Houghton Mifflin's determination to isolate the best American writing each year has gone beyond the venerable flagship *Best American Short Stories*, published annually under various imprints and editorships since 1915, to volumes commemorating essays, science and nature, spiritual, sports, and travel writing, comics, even the eclectic catch-all nonrequired reading. From its beginning in 1997, *Best American Mystery Stories* has had an editor of impeccable qualifications: Otto Penzler, proprietor of New York's Mysterious Bookshop and longtime publisher, commentator, anthologist, and all-around expert on the genre.

Best American Mystery Stories 2009
Edited by Jeffery Deaver
Houghton Mifflin, 400 pp., $14

For each year's collection, editorial consultant Michele Slung attempts to identify every published short story by an American or Canadian author that qualifies as a mystery under Penzler's very broad definition. Slung culls the obvious losers and passes along what remains to Penzler, who narrows the field to the 50 he deems most worthy. These are submitted, in turn, to an eminent guest editor who selects 20 for the final volume.

The first year's guest editor, Robert B. Parker, was followed by Sue Grafton, Ed McBain, Donald E. Westlake, Lawrence Block, James Ellroy, Michael Connelly, Nelson DeMille, Joyce Carol Oates, Scott Turow, Carl Hiaasen, George Pelecanos, and for this year's volume Jeffery Deaver.

Penzler defines a mystery as "any work in which a crime, or the threat of a crime, is central to the theme or the plot." Therein lies a problem. Apart from admitting quite a bit of fiction without any mystery element whatsoever, while excluding the admittedly rare mystery story that does not involve a crime, the definition would take in many, perhaps even most, classic works of literature. Even if you change the umbrella designation to crime story, what keeps this volume from being less a specialized anthology than a road company version of *Best American Short Stories*?

To the typical reader, the quality and entertainment value of a story are what matter, not whether it fits the artificial parameters of a particular genre. But when an anthology's title represents a popular category, it's fair to consider how well it fulfills its implicit mission. Devotees of the mystery genre expect the same qualities of good prose, involving characters, stimulating ideas, keen observation, and vivid background they would seek in any work of fiction; but they also look for such elements as detection, intricate plot construction, and surprise.

As the years go by, these qualities have become scarcer and scarcer in this annual celebration, whose contents sometimes seem to have been chosen

Jon L. Breen is the author, most recently, of Probable Claus.

more for literary pretension and snob appeal than for originality and effectiveness as mystery or crime stories. Literary journals contribute more entries than do periodicals specifically devoted to mystery fiction.

The sheer storytelling excellence found in the previous volume from 2008, guest-edited by Pelecanos, disarmed such criticism to a degree. But this year's gathering is much weaker generally, and even more lacking in real mystery. Jeffery Deaver, in bestselling novels and beautifully crafted short stories, specializes in stunt construction, reader misdirection, and jack-in-the-box surprises. Ironically, not a single story in this book reflects those qualities.

Yes, there are some fine stories here. Alafair Burke's "Winning," about a policewoman who is a rape victim and her husband's inability to handle it, is very strong and powerful, as is her father James Lee Burke's "Big Midnight Special," told by a guitar-plucking inmate at a Southern prison camp in 1963 and beautifully written, like all the author's work. David Corbett's "Pretty Little Paradise," concerning a pregnant Las Vegas cocktail waitress turned drug dealer, is a first-rate example of fiction noir. Chuck Hogan's "Two Thousand Volts" effectively describes an execution night through the eyes of a cop, a truck stop diner counterman, a last-meal food gopher, and the condemned prisoner himself.

Clark Howard's "Manila Burning," about the illegal trade in fossil stone, is a downbeat travelogue of Philippine poverty with a somewhat upbeat ending. Joyce Carol Oates, who has done several novels and stories inspired by true crime cases, fictionalizes Andrea Yates's murder of her children in "Dear Husband." Alice Munro's home invasion drama "Free Radicals" is an effective pure suspense story. Others represented by work that is, at the least, interesting include N.J. Ayres, Michael Connelly, Rob Kantner, Robert McClure, Garry Craig Powell, and Vu Tran.

That leaves us with the odder choices for a best-of collection. Tom Bissell's "My Interview with the Avenger" comes from an original anthology with a dubious premise: Literary writers were commissioned to write about superheroes. Bissell carries out the assignment reasonably well, but was it really worth doing? Ron Carlson's "Beanball," an okay story about a baseball scout working in Central America, follows a conventional thriller structure with a bit too much Hemingway in the telling. M.M.M. Hayes's "Meantime, Quentin Ghee," in which a rural Westerner plans to kill (and torture?) an injured biker lest he despoil the environment, struck me as very slight.

Nic Pizzolatto's "Wanted Man" is written well enough, but its general dreariness is unredeemed by character interest. Randy Rohn's "The Man Who Fell in Love With the Stump of a Tree," set in rural Indiana, hasn't much apparent point. Jonathan Tel's wrong-man story, "Bola de la Fortuna," starts as a standard mystery but goes in a different direction, which would be perfectly fine if the result were something as good as the genre conventions being cast aside.

Perhaps the most problematic of all is Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "G-Men," an alternate-history tale in which J. Edgar Hoover and Clyde Tolson are both murdered in 1964. Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy appear as characters. Rusch is a good writer, and this is certainly an intriguing idea; but as presented here, with its perfunctory and underdeveloped solution to the whodunit, it's a work in progress, a promising candidate for expansion to novel length but a doubtful choice for a best-of-the-year volume.

Are any of these bad stories? Well, maybe one or two. But the real point is this: It's impossible to imagine there weren't better ones that would render the title of this anthology more accurate. ♦

B&A

Great Reformer

Is freedom of conscience indebted to John Calvin?

BY BARTON SWAIM

There are a few great historical figures whose names can provoke denunciations even from people who have little more than vague impressions of who they were. John Calvin is foremost among these. The variety of pejorative mischaracterizations attaching themselves to the name Calvin is incredible. He is regularly described as a bloodthirsty persecutor of heretics, a crank obsessed with predestination, a pugnacious killjoy, a religious extremist, and a totalitarian dictator.

Calvin
by F. Bruce Gordon
Yale, 416 pp., $35

Calvin's association with the persecution of heresy is especially puzzling. It's certainly true that he believed in the suppression of theological heresy by force—as, indeed, did the overwhelming majority of Protestants and Catholics in the 16th century. Thousands were executed elsewhere in Europe during his lifetime. Calvin himself reluctantly approved the execution of one anti-Trinitarian heretic, a man whose demise Calvin could not have prevented even if he had wanted to. And as Calvin scholars have never tired in pointing out, he pleaded with the council, unsuccessfully, to carry out the execution in a more humane way than by burning. Yet Calvin has somehow acquired the reputation of Tomás de Torquemada.

That he is so frequently called Geneva's "dictator" is slightly more reasonable, but only slightly. Calvin had a great deal of moral authority over both church and the civil government, especially after

Barton Swaim is the author, most recently, of Scottish Men of Letters and the New Public Sphere: 1802-1834.

the 1555 council elections drove most of his opponents from power. But even at the height of his influence, Calvin had far less power over one city-state than Archbishop Laud had over England or Cardinal Richelieu had over France. Indeed, unlike these, Calvin spent virtually his entire career fighting for the church's *independence* from the civil authority. One of his aims, in fact, was never achieved: the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper—a curious failure on the part of this "dictator."

Nor was Calvin fixated on predestination, the doctrine that God elects some but not others to salvation. He certainly taught the doctrine, inasmuch as the New Testament does so straightforwardly, as had Augustine and Luther. But predestination occupies only a small segment of Calvin's writings, and he labeled those who brood and speculate on the subject "insane."

The popular equation between Calvin and predestination tends to perpetuate the idea that Calvinism gave birth to capitalism. Max Weber's famous *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) argued that Calvinism fostered an acute sense of "inner loneliness" and so created a culture in which outward productivity signified election. Weber's thesis had to do with later generations of Calvinists, not Calvin himself, and anyhow it has been demolished many times over.

There is a reasonable and persuasive argument to be made that Calvin's doctrine of the calling—the idea that all forms of honest work, not just ecclesiastical or spiritual forms, bring honor to God—hastened the evolution of the division of labor in western societies. But Calvin's relationship to "capitalism," to the extent such a thing exists outside the realm of academic theory, is vastly more complicated than is commonly assumed.

Nor was Calvin anything close to the humorless ascetic he is frequently described as having been. He wrote powerfully about the beauties of the human body, approved the use of alcohol "not only for necessity, but to make us merry," and spoke frankly about sexual matters. Not untypical is a remark in one of his biblical commentaries: "The intercourse of husband and wife is a pure thing, good and holy."

"For Calvin," writes William Bouwsma in his magisterial *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (1988), "every aspect of human sexuality was valuable and deeply moving."

Calvin could be described in many ways, some of them unflattering. He was hypersensitive to criticism, dismissive toward those with whom he disagreed, frequently irritable, and he held grudges long past their expiration date. But a crank he was not.

Indeed, John Calvin was one of the greatest Christian humanists of the Renaissance. His learning was awesome; he drew on ancient texts, sacred and pagan, fluently and extensively. He regularly cited Plato and Aristotle, but also Cicero, Quintilian, Homer, Virgil, Plutarch, Seneca, Horace, Juvenal, and Ovid. The famous opening line of his greatest work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*—"Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves"—was taken more or less directly from Cicero's definition of philosophy. He knew the ancient church fathers as well as any man of his age. He especially loved Augustine and Chrysostom, but also Ambrose, Gregory, Hillary of Poitiers, and Cyprian.

As a scholar, Calvin was unequaled. His interpretations of ancient texts stand up to modern critical standards astonishingly well. Biblical critics still consult his commentaries as a matter of course—a distinction belonging to no other biblical interpreter prior to the 20th century. Calvin's prose is widely admired among Renaissance scholars for its "lucid brevity," as Calvin liked to describe his own ideal. The French historian Bernard Cottret has argued powerfully that Calvin's *Institutes* stands as a masterpiece of 16th-century literature, comparable in many ways to the *Essays* of Montaigne.

John Calvin turns 500 this year. He is the father of the Reformed tradition of Protestantism; his writings shaped the societies in which that tradition flourished—the Swiss Confederation, the Netherlands, to some extent his native France, and especially England, Scotland, and America. He deserves to be better understood.

Jean Calvin was born in Noyon, 60 miles north of Paris, in 1509. Little is known of his early years. His father was a notary, or prosecutor, in the local bishop's court, and Calvin was bound for the church. The senior Calvin seems to have fallen out with the bishop and so redirected his son toward a career in law, which he began studying at Orleáns in 1528. The following year he attended Bourges University, where he made the acquaintance of French reformists under the patronage of Marguerite of Navarre, the king's evangelical sister.

In 1532, aged 23, Calvin published an academic thesis, a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*. It made no effect, but it does give some indication of the young man's learning and, more significantly, his intellectual self-confidence.

At some point in the early 1530s, while studying and lecturing at the Collège Royal in Paris, Calvin experienced a gradual conversion to Protestantism. On All Saints' Day 1533 his colleague Nicholas Cop preached a sermon, innocently

titled "Christian Philosophy," in which he propounded a flagrantly Lutheran interpretation of the Old Testament Law. Calvin either wrote the sermon or, at the very least, collaborated with Cop on it (there is an extant copy in Calvin's hand). Within days Cop and Calvin were forced to flee the city. Calvin eventually settled with friends in Basel under an assumed identity.

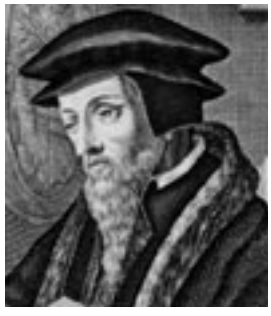
Calvin was not naturally a man of action; all he wanted was a place to study and write. Yet he soon found himself almost forcibly recruited into the leadership of the reform movement. In 1535 he had gone back into France to bring the rest of his family to Basel. On their return, they were diverted by the eruption of war and had to pass through Geneva. Calvin only meant to lodge for a night, but Guillaume Farel, the fiery reformer then charged with establishing a reformed church in the city, found Calvin and implored him to stay and help.

> Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set on devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter a threat that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. I was so struck with fear by this threat that I desisted from the journey I had undertaken.

The following year he published the first edition (there would be four in all) of his *Institutes*, a kind of summation of Christian doctrine as Calvin saw it. That same year, 1536, when officials in Berne staged a debate between Catholic and Reformed theologians, Calvin brandished his almost superhuman powers of memory to great effect by quoting the fathers at length. At 27, Calvin was the rising star in a reform movement that desperately needed one.

Only three years into the job, however, he was ordered to leave Geneva. Calvin and Farel had insisted on the church's right to excommunicate. This was a measure rarely used, but one they felt the civil magistrate had no right to exercise. For almost three years Calvin lived in Strasbourg, where he lectured at the Strasbourg Academie, published a highly regarded commentary on the Book of Romans, and married Idelette de Bure.

Calvin had not wanted to marry except for the sake of convenience, expressing himself in comically detached tones to friends urging him to marry: "I am none of those insane lovers who embrace even vices once they have been overcome by a fine figure," he protested. "The only beauty that attracts me is this: if she is modest, accommodating, not haughty, frugal, patient, and there is hope that she will be concerned about my health."



John Calvin, ca. 1560

As it turned out, Idelette's health was poorer than Calvin's, and he spent much of the next nine years caring for her. Her death was a dreadful blow. "Truly," he reflected, "mine is no common grief. I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, who, if any severe hardship had occurred, would have been my willing partner, not only in exile and poverty but even in death. . . . From her I never felt even the slightest hindrance."

With Calvin in Strasbourg, the Genevese church was left without a figure of sufficient moral and intellectual authority—a fact which, difficult as it is to imagine today, had severe political consequences. Geneva had joined the Reformed cause only a decade before, and questions of social and cultural norms, bound up as those were with religious practice, were still in flux. Adding to the confusion was the fact that French Protestant refugees were continually streaming into the city—reluctant immigrants whose religious views and cultural practices did not always cohere with those of native Swiss.

In 1540 the city invited Calvin to return. He did not want to go back; "I would prefer a hundred other deaths to that cross," he complained, "on which I should have to die a thousand times a day." Authorities in Berne, fearful that Geneva was slipping back into disorder, lobbied hard to get Calvin released from Strasbourg, and eventually he agreed. A mounted escort was sent from Geneva to fetch him.

Over the next 24 years Calvin would publish commentaries on almost every book of the Bible, dozens of polemical tracts, and three further editions, both in Latin and French, of his increasingly influential *Institutes*. His learning and verbal fluency were legendary: He had little time to prepare his daily lectures and sermons, so overwhelmed was he with ecclesiastical affairs, and delivered them with only copies of the Hebrew and Greek texts in front of him. He relied heavily on his memory and a dazzling ability to construct arguments on his feet. Eventually an amanuensis was hired to take down his words verbatim; many of his biblical commentaries originated as more or less impromptu lectures.

In Geneva Calvin pursued two goals with relentless energy. The first was to achieve the church's independence from the civil authority, and in that he was largely successful. A long series of conflicts between ministers and magistrates reached its climax in 1553 over the issue of whether the consistory had the right to ban members from communion on its own authority. The council refused to cede that authority, and when the consistory banned a rascal called Philibert Berthelier from communion (he had been arrested for assault, and was known as an adulterer), the council promptly reinstated him.

On a Sunday in September of that year, Calvin made it clear from the pulpit that he was prepared physically to block Berthelier from the table. He was so certain that he would be forced to leave Geneva again that he went on to preach a farewell sermon. The offender, however, never showed up. Three years later the council altered its former interpretation of the law and granted the church sole authority over its own ritual—a crucial moment in the West's long journey toward freedom of religion.

Calvin's other major aim met with far less success. From almost the moment

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

he arrived in Geneva for the second time, as Bruce Gordon shows here, Calvin sought to bring some appearance of theological unity to Protestantism. There were, of course, several significant points of difference between Reformed and Lutheran Protestants, but the most important was the nature and meaning of the Lord's Supper. Although Gordon makes no attempt to explain the reasons why this subject was so contentious—an odd omission given the distance modern readers will feel from such debates—his biography does a splendid job of presenting Calvin the international statesman.

In simplest terms, Calvin wanted to ease the plight of French evangelicals. With the Edict of Fontainbleau (1540) Protestantism had been defined as seditious, and the French state had been given the task of rooting it out. Many hundreds, possibly as many as 3,000 Protestants, were executed. The only means available to Calvin of palliating this dreadful state of affairs lay in bringing together Reformed and Lutheran states under a single Protestant confession. The French court's rationale for persecuting evangelicals would become untenable, Calvin believed, if Protestant conviction were perceived in Paris to be the dogma of central Europe.

The task he set himself was nearly impossible. The aged Luther and his more vitriolic followers could not refrain from attacking the Swiss over points of doctrine; and for their part the Swiss (chiefly Heinrich Bullinger, minister in Zurich) hotly rejected Calvin's proposal of forming an alliance between the Swiss Confederation and Francis I, the French king, against the bellicose Catholic Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.

This, too, would have given the Swiss Reformed some influence with Francis and, later, Henry II. But Calvin could not command the support of Bullinger who believed, not without reason, that the followers of Christ could not ally themselves with instruments of the Devil.

Bruce Gordon is an authority on the Swiss reformation, and his portrayal of Calvin in the broader context of European politics is, so far as I am aware, unsurpassed. He has total command of the scholarship on Calvin in French, German, and English, and his treatment is both winsomely sympathetic and justly critical.

The excellent book is especially helpful on the notorious trial and execution of Michael Servetus. The common view is that Calvin wanted nothing more than to see the Spanish heretic burned. As Gordon shows, however, the councils of Basel, Zurich, and Berne were all urging Geneva to execute Servetus, so eager were they to prove their detestation of anti-Trinitarian heresy to the rest of Europe. Calvin, in fact, while feeling Servetus deserved the capital sentence, hoped also that the punishment would be mitigated.

"Calvin," concludes Gordon, "did not want Servetus to die." Unfortunately for the accused, the Genevese council would at that time do almost anything if Calvin opposed it: "Were I to allege that it is clear at mid-day," he grumbled, "they would immediately begin to doubt it." The council wanted Servetus burned, and on October 27, 1553, that is what happened—leaving Calvin to defend the decision, which unfortunately he tried to do.

For all its strengths, however, one finishes Gordon's account wondering whether Calvin really matters very much. He was a fascinating man who led a moderately adventurous life. But did his work change the contours of European society in any significant way? Gordon just isn't interested in that kind of question. That is his right, of course, and in general a reviewer ought to refrain from criticizing a book for failing to be something its author didn't intend it to be. But surely a biography timed to appear on the 500th anniversary of a man as profoundly influential and widely misunderstood as John Calvin ought to make some attempt to explain the man's significance beyond the confines of the century in which he lived.

Gordon's reticence on this score is especially puzzling inasmuch as this volume places great emphasis on the political dimension of Calvin's life and work. Despite the mistaken notion of Calvin as the "dictator of Geneva," and so on, the French reformer made a crucial contribution to the development of political freedom in Western Europe—chiefly, though not exclusively,

by his doctrines of political resistance.

Throughout his life, Calvin labored to bring relief to the suffering saints in France. He established a hospital for French refugees; he penned polemical works in defense of the French evangelicals; and he orchestrated a plan to send Reformed ministers clandestinely into France in order to make converts and bring some legitimacy to the Protestant cause there.

What he could *not* do was condone open rebellion. Calvin was foremost an interpreter of the Bible, and the Bible—most explicitly in the 13th chapter of Romans—teaches obedience to civil authority. The Christian's duty, he believed, was to submit patiently, even if that meant exile or martyrdom.

Over the course of the 1550s, the situation in France deteriorated, and Calvin was forced to rethink his views. The decisive moment came in 1560 with the ill-fated Conspiracy of Amboise. The plan had been to abduct the young king, Francis II, and assassinate his regents. Having thwarted the conspiracy, the regency's court responded with vengeance on a monumental scale: More than a thousand men were executed, many of their mutilated corpses displayed around the town of Amboise.

Calvin had known about the plot, and had opposed it. But the scale of the slaughter seems to have compelled him to formulate a fuller, and ultimately more humane, expression of the Bible's teaching on political resistance. When the fourth and final edition of his *Institutes* appeared in 1559, Calvin articulated what became known as the theory of interposition: the doctrine that "lesser magistrates"—officials possessing some middle level of authority, such as elected representatives in parliamentary democracies—have the right, indeed the duty, to resist when rulers take up violence against their godly subjects.

> If there are now any magistrates of the people, appointed to restrain the willfulness of kings (as in ancient times the ephors were set against the Spartan kings, or the tribunes of the people against the Roman consuls, or the demarchs against the senate of the Athenians; and perhaps, as things now are, such power as the three estates exercise in every realm when they hold their chief assemblies), I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious treachery, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God's ordinance.

Even before this, however, Calvin had gestured in the direction of the private-law theory of resistance: the proposition that civil authorities who wantonly abuse their power cease to hold that power legitimately and can therefore be lawfully deposed. As early as 1552 he had observed that "if a king, or ruler, or magistrate, do become so lofty that he diminishes the honor and authority of God, he goes beyond the limits of his office. . . . For he who goes beyond the bounds of his office . . . must be despoiled of his honor," a view he repeats briefly in the 1559 *Institutes*.

By the time he published his lectures on the Book of Daniel in 1561—a work dedicated to the persecuted Protestants in France—Calvin had embraced the idea that lawless tyrants forfeit their right to obedience. "For earthly princes," writes Calvin, "lay aside their power when they rise up against God, and are unworthy to be reckoned among the number of mankind. We ought, rather, utterly to defy them than to obey them."

Both of these arguments—the doctrine of interposition and the private-law theory of resistance—exercised a powerful influence over Calvinist political movements over the next three centuries. Calvin did not invent these concepts; versions of them had appeared in Luther's *Warning to His Dear German People* (1531) and, before that, in the writings of the conciliar movement of the 14th century. But it was Calvin who, by the authority his works exercised over the tradition that came to bear his name, infused these ideas into the marrow of European politics.

Calvin's views on political resistance were adapted, expanded, radicalized, and in some cases, secularized by his theological heirs—often in ways he could not have foreseen and, given the limits of his own circumstances, would not have countenanced. In one form or another, the arguments he asserted on political resistance animated the Dutch Calvinists' rebellion against Spanish rule in the 1560s and again in the 1580s, Huguenot resistance to Catherine de Medici in the 1570s, John Knox's intransigence in the face of English ecclesiastical hegemony in the 1550s and '60s, the Puritan struggle against the Stuart monarchy in the 1630s and '40s, and the Scottish Covenanters' refusal to accept Episcopacy from the 1630s all the way to 1688.

And of course, Calvin's arguments played a major role in the American colonists' revolt against (in the words of the Declaration) "a Tyrant . . . unfit to be the ruler of a free people"—a contest George III himself termed "the Presbyterian Rebellion."

Happiness and ease were not the dominant tones in Calvin's experience. "Men are undoubtedly more in danger from prosperity than from adversity," he had written, with the conviction of experience, "for when matters go smoothly, they flatter themselves, and are intoxicated by their success."

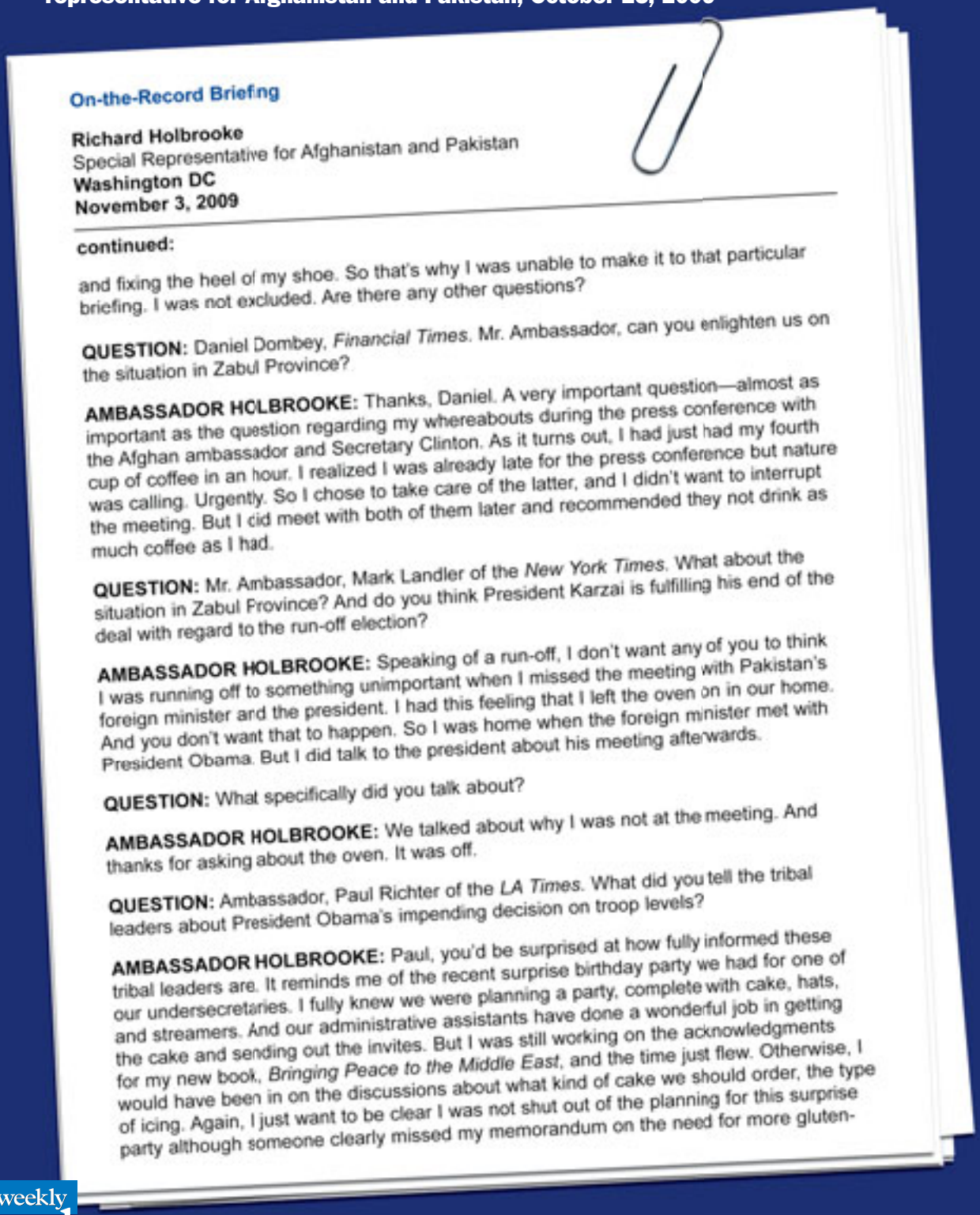
Apart from the three tranquil years he had spent in Strasbourg, his was a life of duty in adversity. All his children had died in infancy, and he was a widower at the age of 40. He had never wanted to lead the reform movement, or indeed any movement. He had been defeated in his quest for Protestant unity, and victory in Geneva had come only at the price of physical dilapidation. By the time he died at age 54, he had been tormented by ill health for years—gallstones, kidney stones, stomach cramps, arthritis, intestinal parasites, migraine headaches, and tuberculosis.

For those who lack sympathy with or interest in his theology, Calvin has, admittedly, little appeal. He did not have the epic personality of Luther or the learned munificence of Erasmus. What he did have was a ferociously powerful mind and unbending devotion to the task of interpreting that vast, fathomless book, the Bible.

Such a life deserves more than derision. ♦

"And I want to make a footnote here, because I noticed that somebody said that there was a meeting we were excluded from yesterday. I want to be very clear on that. The president had a television conference with [ambassadors Eikenberry and Ricciardone] yesterday.... Secretary Clinton and I knew about it in advance. We thought it was a great idea.... And we talked about it with him afterwards. I'm online and on the phone to [the ambassadors] several times a day.... In regard to—so that's why I didn't go back...."

—State Department briefing with Richard Holbrooke, special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, October 23, 2009



On-the-Record Briefing

Richard Holbrooke
Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan
Washington DC
November 3, 2009

continued:

and fixing the heel of my shoe. So that's why I was unable to make it to that particular briefing. I was not excluded. Are there any other questions?

QUESTION: Daniel Dombey, *Financial Times*. Mr. Ambassador, can you enlighten us on the situation in Zabul Province?

AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE: Thanks, Daniel. A very important question—almost as important as the question regarding my whereabouts during the press conference with the Afghan ambassador and Secretary Clinton. As it turns out, I had just had my fourth cup of coffee in an hour. I realized I was already late for the press conference but nature was calling. Urgently. So I chose to take care of the latter, and I didn't want to interrupt the meeting. But I did meet with both of them later and recommended they not drink as much coffee as I had.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, Mark Landler of the *New York Times*. What about the situation in Zabul Province? And do you think President Karzai is fulfilling his end of the deal with regard to the run-off election?

AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE: Speaking of a run-off, I don't want any of you to think I was running off to something unimportant when I missed the meeting with Pakistan's foreign minister and the president. I had this feeling that I left the oven on in our home. And you don't want that to happen. So I was home when the foreign minister met with President Obama. But I did talk to the president about his meeting afterwards.

QUESTION: What specifically did you talk about?

AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE: We talked about why I was not at the meeting. And thanks for asking about the oven. It was off.

QUESTION: Ambassador, Paul Richter of the *LA Times*. What did you tell the tribal leaders about President Obama's impending decision on troop levels?

AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE: Paul, you'd be surprised at how fully informed these tribal leaders are. It reminds me of the recent surprise birthday party we had for one of our undersecretaries. I fully knew we were planning a party, complete with cake, hats, and streamers. And our administrative assistants have done a wonderful job in getting the cake and sending out the invites. But I was still working on the acknowledgments for my new book, *Bringing Peace to the Middle East*, and the time just flew. Otherwise, I would have been in on the discussions about what kind of cake we should order, the type of icing. Again, I just want to be clear I was not shut out of the planning for this surprise party although someone clearly missed my memorandum on the need for more gluten-