
BELGIUM WAFFLES
CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL
the weekly Standard
DECEMBER 21, 2009
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SENATORIAL MALPRACTICE
The quack health care nostrums of Dr. Reid
• Matthew Continetti
• Jim Prevor
• Jeffrey H. Anderson & Andy Wickersham
• James C. Capretta & Yuval Levin
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FEELING BETTER?

Wasn't health care reform supposed to improve the status quo and our confidence in the health care system? Is that happening?

America needs health reform, but reforms that increase the role of government and increase its power over private decisions do not improve the quality and affordability of medical care. Reforms that add to an already massive budget deficit, place new tax burdens on millions of taxpayers, and force changes to existing health plans individuals are already satisfied with are not improvements. A public option that threatens the ability of private insurers to compete is not progress.

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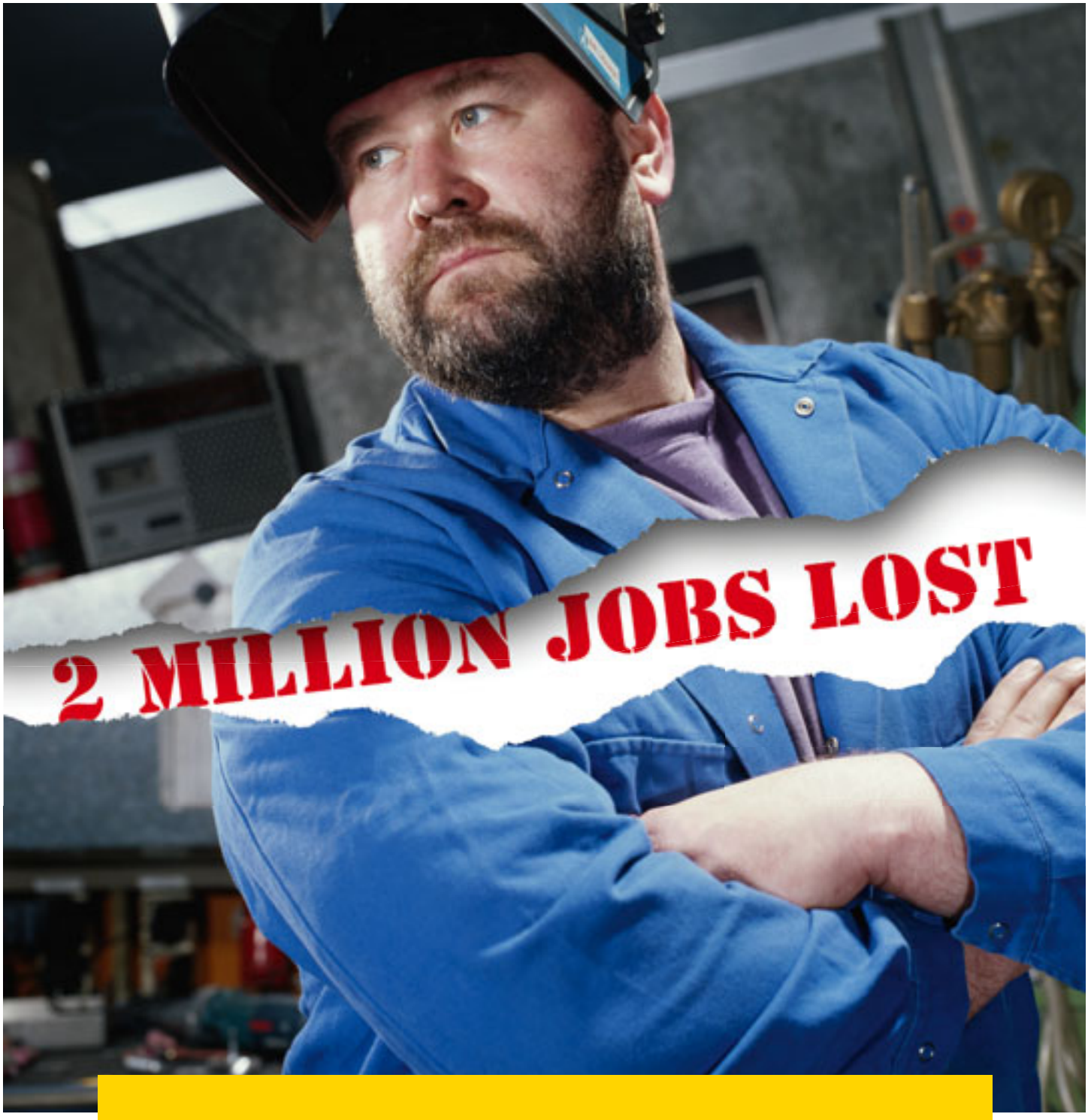

Another **unfortunate truth** about Congress's climate bill

As the U.S. Senate considers the Kerry-Boxer climate legislation, Americans aren't getting the whole truth. A recent study* found the House-passed climate bill could cost two million American jobs – and the new Kerry-Boxer bill could have even greater economic impacts.

America is in the middle of a harsh recession. Think about the impact of two million jobs lost. Yet another unfortunate truth about Congress's climate bill.

Learn more at **EnergyCitizens.org**

*Source: *Impact on the Economy of the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (H.R. 2454)*, CRA International, August 2009

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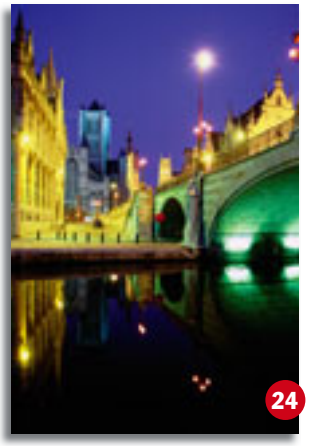
Contents

December 21, 2009 • Volume 15, Number 14



Articles

Features

Books & Arts

COVER BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

Massa Reid's Demagoguery

The Scrapbook has been patiently awaiting it, and it finally arrived last week: Senator Harry Reid's December 7 declaration that Republicans who have spoken out against the nationalization of American medicine—otherwise known as "health care reform"—are akin to those Americans of yesteryear who spoke up in favor of slavery.

"All Republicans can come up with is this: Slow down, stop everything, let's start over," said the Senate majority leader. "If you think you've heard these same excuses before, you're right. When this country belatedly recognized the wrongs of slavery, there were those who dug in their heels and said slow down, it's too early, let's wait, things aren't bad enough."

In one sense, this was a comforting piece of demagoguery. Reid would not make so outlandish or insulting a claim if he weren't feeling desperate about the prospects for Obamacare, especially in light of those astonishing opinion polls that reflect ever-diminishing public support for Barack Obama—now at the lowest level (46 percent) for any modern president at this juncture—and his scheme for health care reform. In another sense, we may also be thankful that Reid didn't make the obvious partisan leap—all too common during the Bush presidency—of comparing Obama's opponents to Hitler. Of course, if health care reform continues to lose steam in contentious congressional meetings, we might start hearing the Hitler/Nazi talking point.

Which leads The Scrapbook down the familiar path of correcting rhetorical travesties. Not only is the Obamacare/slavery analogy deeply tendentious and offensive to Republicans, it is flat-out wrong, historically. Is it possible that the Democratic leader in the Senate is unaware that the Republican party was founded in 1854 as an antislavery party—Abraham Lincoln, anyone?—and that the political faction that really, truly, actually did oppose the abolition of slavery during the Civil War was Harry Reid's own Democratic party?

For that matter, push the story a century ahead and consider passage of the 1964 Civil Rights bill. It is true that the measure was proposed by a Democratic president (John F. Kennedy)—although largely as an expansion of an earlier Civil Rights bill (1957) that had been enacted under a Republican president (Dwight D. Eisenhower), who also created the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. But the truth is that the 1964 Civil Rights bill enjoyed overwhelming Republican support in the Senate—only six GOP senators opposed it, all on libertarian/constitutional grounds—while no less than 21 Democrats opposed it (including Albert Gore Sr. of Tennessee, whose son Al Jr. is in the habit of misrepresenting his father's historic "no" vote).

And guess which Democratic senator presided over a historic 54-day filibuster to kill the Civil Rights bill during that contentious spring and summer of 1964? The answer: Robert Byrd of West Virginia, who still holds office today, and was in recent years the Democratic leader in the Senate—the very same job currently held by Harry Reid.

Who, when the subject comes to slavery, civil rights, and Republicans, ought to—but doesn't—have the decency to hold his tongue. ♦

Don't Know Much About History . . .

Being patriotic, The Scrapbook is glad but not surprised to learn that nine out of ten Americans want schools to teach the founding principles of the country and the story of the American Revolution. Being worldly-wise, however, The Scrapbook is sad but not surprised to learn that the schools do so shabby a job of it that when it came to a simple test of knowledge about the founding, nearly 83 percent of those same Americans failed.

The news comes to us from a survey commissioned by the American Revolution Center, a nonpartisan nonprofit whose website is a font of information valuable for teachers, students, and the general public. Headed by the art historian Bruce Cole, former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the center is working to create the first Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia.

What would it take for the center's findings to register with school systems? Colleges aren't listening either. Go to the fascinating website whatwillstheylearn.com, run by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and see which top colleges and universities require a course in American history or government for graduation. Quick preview: 18 do, 119 don't.

With our formal institutions of learning so uninterested in passing on the founding heritage, it's left to private efforts to satisfy Americans' appetite for our history. The success, to take just one example, of the splendid 2008 HBO miniseries about the life of John Adams is encouraging.

WASHINGTON EXAMINER / NATE BEELER

And there is some consolation in knowing that, even when detailed knowledge is lacking, the big ideas seem to be getting through.

The American Revolution Center's study found as much. When asked the most important values upon which America was founded, most of the 1,001 adults surveyed answered: freedom and liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and freedom from tyranny. ♦

Scenes from the Great Recession

Why is demonizing the banking industry such a popular pastime in Washington these days? Maybe to distract people's attention from another industry that has enjoyed exceptional good fortune and rapid salary growth over the past year: the federal government.

Dennis Cauchon of *USA Today* reports, "Federal workers are enjoying an extraordinary boom time—in pay and hiring—during a recession that has cost 7.3 million jobs in the private sector." The "average federal worker's pay" is now "$71,206, compared with $40,331 in the private sector." But the eye-popping figures are at the high end:

> The highest-paid federal employees are doing best of all on salary increases. Defense Department civilian employees earning $150,000 or more increased from 1,868 in December 2007 to 10,100 in June 2009, the most recent figure available.
>
> When the recession started, the Transportation Department had only one person earning a salary of $170,000 or more. Eighteen months later, 1,690 employees had salaries above $170,000.

This is a bipartisan scandal, by the way. As Cauchon notes, "Then-president Bush recommended—and Congress approved—across-the-board raises of 3% in January 2008 and 3.9% in January 2009. President Obama has recommended 2% pay raises in January 2010, the smallest since 1975. Most federal workers also get longevity pay hikes—called steps—that average 1.5% per year." ♦

That's Not Funny . . .

New York Times enviro-blogger Andy Revkin, generally friendly to the global warming crowd, published a humorous item last week on Copenhagen hookers offering free services to the thousands of politicians and bureaucrats in town for the U.N.'s global warming confab (we think this is what people who share the same line of work call "professional courtesy"). Climatologist Michael Schlesinger of the University of Illinois was outraged at this undisciplined outbreak of levity and emailed Revkin (while cc-ing his entire distribution list):

> Shame on you for this gutter reportage. . . . The vibe that I am getting from here, there and everywhere is that your reportage is very worrisome to most climate scientists. Of course, your blog is your blog. But, I sense that you are about to experience the 'Big Cutoff' from those of us who believe we can no longer trust you, me included.

It's good to be reminded that global warming is all about the science—that scientists have reached a consensus based on rational inquiry, that environmental reporters convey these facts without fear or favor. And that there is no ideological enforcement whatsoever, no siree. ♦

'Avatar': Are Neocons to Blame?

Variety's Todd McCarthy has just reviewed James Cameron's highly anticipated new movie *Avatar*, which,

as far as special effects go, sounds like nothing we have ever seen. (At $500 million, it better be.) The plot, however, is a different story: In the year 2154, the U.S. military sends an expedition to the planet Pandora in search of a mineral essential to Earth's survival. But in order to save our planet, we must essentially destroy the one inhabited by the Na'vi. McCarthy describes "an overarching anti-imperialist, back-to-nature theme that will play very well around the world" and how "unavoidable Vietnam vibes emanate from the scenes of futuristic choppers descending upon the verdant jungles and mountainsides of Pandora."

"Thematically," writes McCarthy, "the film also plays too simplistically into stereotypical evil-white-empire/virtuous-native clichés, especially since the invaders are presumably on an environmental rescue mission on behalf of the entire world, not just the U.S. Script is rooted very much in a contemporary eco-green mindset, which makes its positions and the sympathies it encourages entirely predictable and unchallenging."

Rumor has it that an alternative ending to the script includes a stunning revelation that, in fact, the Earth did not need this precious mineral to be saved after all and that it was the product of a green conspiracy made public only after a hacker successfully accessed the scientists' emails and posted them for all to see. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'The community-organizing group ACORN said Monday that an internal investigation had concluded there was no criminal conduct by employees who offered advice on how to hide assets and falsify lending documents. ACORN's chief executive described the report, by former Massachusetts attorney general Scott Harshbarger, as 'part vindication, part constructive criticism' . . . " (Associated Press, December 8). ♦

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How Green Was My Valley

California tops the list of states in budgetary crisis, but the grim headlines forecasting the Golden State's collapse only make me think back to the vibrant scenes of my childhood in the San Joaquin Valley.

The valley isn't a glamorous part of California. Few visitors do more than breeze through Bakersfield on their way to Los Angeles or refuel in Fresno en route to Yosemite. By comparison with the bays and beaches of the Pacific coast, the middle of the state just doesn't offer much to see. At least not in the touristy or cultural sense.

But the valley is the state's agricultural epicenter, and as the daughter of a valley grower, I spent a good part of my childhood in the 1980s learning to appreciate the agriculture industry. My dad managed stone fruit production for a large produce company based in Bakersfield, and he made every Saturday take-your-child-to-work day.

My brother and I would climb into Dad's work truck and leave our suburban home to head for the orchards—or "ranches"—every Saturday morning. This gave our mom, who taught us at home Monday through Friday, a much-needed break. And it gave us a day alone with Dad. He laid down simple rules for these trips—use the restroom at the company office (no stopping once we're out on the ranch), stay away from the boxed beehives, and watch out for rattlesnakes.

Dad's office was adjacent to a packing shed and around the corner from a "cold storage." The packing shed housed rows of conveyor belts designed to move the fruit to stations where it was packed for storage or shipment, but early on Saturdays the packing lines were usually still. The cold storage was a mystery, forbidden because of its low temperatures and forklifts. Dad would disappear into the refrigerated building alone, leaving to my imagination the experience of wandering a larger-than-life refrigerator.

My favorite part of the day was driving around the orchards. I loved seeing the seemingly endless rows of trees—the settled order of it all. I had no concept of "woods" then because all the trees in my world came in neat rows and grew no more than 10 feet high, pruned for easier, safer picking. On a clear day in the San Joaquin, you could see not only the foothills rising beyond the rows but the Sierra Nevada to the east and the Tehachapi Mountains surrounding the southern tip of the valley. If time allowed, we would end the day with a long drive up and down the roads of the ranches in the foothills. To my brother and me, it was like having our own personal kiddie coaster. Our favorite ranch to drive we called "the Moon" for its crater-like dips. For a few minutes all that existed were those blissful hills.

ROB ULLMAN

Saturdays had to come to an end, of course, and we would return to conventional life. Peaches and plums were never the same at the grocery store. They always seemed smaller and less glorious. Whenever we were at a grocery store with Dad, he always "needed" to inspect the produce section. For what seemed like an hour, he would check ripeness and size and look for any damage, such as scarring. Then he would point to the prices above the produce displays and tell us that growers saw only a small percentage of that price, what was left after the costs of farming, packing, storing, and shipping were factored in. I wouldn't fully understand these lessons until I went to work in the business myself.

Three summers I worked in offices at a local packing shed and cold storage. After long days on the job, Dad and I would talk about Rose Diamonds and Snow Kings and air shipments to Taiwan. And later, a time would come when I could be found in the produce section of my own local grocery store inspecting, just as I'd been taught.

When I go home to visit these days, there are fewer trees in the valley. Independent growers downsize or slowly pull out, as the costs of farming rise. Empty patches of land litter the landscape, and orderly, once prosperous orchards are gradually replaced with signs that say "For sale or lease."

Yet my dad, always willing to teach me more about "the business we have chosen," doesn't look on this scene with melancholy. "This has just been a bad year," he says. "But once you finish a season, that's the past." To persevere in farming, you must have what Dad calls the "optimism of the farmer." As he says, "You have to believe that next year will be better."

Kari Barbic

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A Nobel War Speech?

'I liked what he said. I talked too in my book about the fallen nature of man and why war is necessary at times.'

Thus spoke Sarah Palin. The recipient of her praise? Barack Obama, for last week's Nobel Peace Prize address.

There was a fair amount for Bush Doctrine-supporters, American-exceptionalist patriots, and neocon warmongers to like in Obama's Oslo speech. He sounded hardheaded and pro-American, certainly by contrast with his previous rhetorical forays abroad—his utopian world-without-nuclear-weapons remarks in Prague in April or his apologetic speech to the Muslim world in Cairo two months later.

In Oslo, Obama began "by acknowledging a hard truth: We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes." The implication of that? "There will be times when nations—acting individually or in concert—will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified."

Note that "acting individually." Despite much talk elsewhere in the speech about the international community acting together, Obama held open the possibility that nations will have to act alone and will be morally justified in doing so.

Similarly, despite his professed admiration for Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Obama explicitly said, "as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone." Indeed, Obama went on implicitly to rebuke Gandhi: "A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies."

What's more, "negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. . . . So yes, the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace."

The instruments of war may even have a preemptive role to play. For, Obama explained, an American president "cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people." Indeed, Obama repeated the "standing idle" image later in the speech: "Those who seek peace cannot stand idly by as nations arm themselves for nuclear war." Threats matter, and we can't wait to be attacked.

It's true that for Obama—as for any American president—the first alternative to standing idle against threats, or against governments that "brutalize" their own people, is international pressure and sanctions (accompanied by engagement). Indeed, Obama said, "the closer we stand together, the less likely we will be faced with the choice between armed intervention and complicity in oppression." But "less likely" is not never. We might in fact be faced with the choice of unilateral, preemptive armed intervention.

Where might that occur? Obama mentioned the Iranian regime twice in his Nobel speech—once in the context of nuclear proliferation, once in the context of human rights. (And he didn't call it the Islamic Republic of Iran, as he did in Prague and Cairo.) Reading Obama's speech could lead one to wonder whether this president, who had been committed to engagement with Iran, has decided that engagement has failed and is moving toward pressure and sanctions—and that he has in the back of his mind the possibility that the United States, "acting individually," might have to use force to stop the Iranian nuclear program.

But perhaps that's wishful thinking.

On the other hand, we can presume that President Obama, when preparing his remarks, went back and read the addresses of those of his predecessors who were similarly honored. Perhaps he was moved by these words of an earlier progressive, Theodore Roosevelt, accepting his Nobel Peace Prize almost a century ago:

> We must ever bear in mind that the great end in view is righteousness, justice as between man and man, nation and nation, the chance to lead our lives on a somewhat higher level, with a broader spirit of brotherly goodwill one for another. Peace is generally good in itself, but it is never the highest good unless it comes as the handmaid of righteousness; and it becomes a very evil thing if it serves merely as a mask for cowardice and sloth, or as an instrument to further the ends of despotism or anarchy. We despise and abhor the bully, the brawler, the oppressor, whether in private or public life, but we despise no less the coward and the voluptuary. No man is worth calling a man who will not fight rather than submit to infamy or see those that are dear to him suffer wrong. No nation deserves to exist if it permits itself to lose the stern and

virile virtues; and this without regard to whether the loss is due to the growth of a heartless and all-absorbing commercialism, to prolonged indulgence in luxury and soft, effortless ease, or to the deification of a warped and twisted sentimentality.

Is it too much to hope that President Obama has learned some TR-like lessons in his first year in office? Wouldn't it be something if he now set about reminding today's progressives that "peace" can be a mask for cowardice, and that national well-being requires "the stern and virile virtues" rather than "a warped and twisted sentimentality"?

—William Kristol

The Power of One

It's the Yuletide season, and Democrats are in a giving mood. Nancy Pelosi says the House's tax-raising, Medicare-cutting, trillion-dollar-spending health bill is her "Christmas present to the American people." In the Senate, Harry Reid is desperate to pass his version of health care reform before Santa begins his annual world tour. And President Obama will sign anything—and we mean *anything*—he can tout during next year's State of the Union.

According to all the polls, however, the public sees the Democratic party as one of those well-intentioned but deeply flawed relatives who bestows on you green socks and a fruitcake, when what you really wanted for Christmas was *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. The bad news is that in politics all sales are final, and the money for the "present" comes out of your own pocket. The good news is there's a gentleman in the Senate who can save the country from an Obamacare Christmas disaster. And not because he happens to celebrate Hanukkah.

Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, the independent Democrat, is the key man blocking a bad bill. Why? Simple arithmetic. If no Republican defects, then Harry Reid will need the support of all 60 senators who caucus with the Democrats to end debate and proceed to a final vote on health care. Last week the two most likely GOP defectors, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins of Maine, both signaled they won't support Reid's bill. The loss of just one Democrat, therefore, will scuttle the "deal" Reid is cobbling together.

In the past, Lieberman has displayed the courage and independence necessary to tell his party it's on the wrong track. In 1998, he pointed out that President Clinton's affair with an intern was a moral transgression that deserved rebuke. From 2006 to 2008, when Democratic politicians and commentators ran away from an Iraq war that was going badly, Lieberman stuck with his principles and backed the surge of troops and counterinsurgency strategy that has put Iraq on the (bumpy) road to normalcy. Lieberman's reward was a left-wing primary challenge in 2006 that succeeded in depriving him of the Democratic nomination. Running as an independent, he nevertheless won the general election. In doing so, he became even more free to do what's right regardless of political calculation.

Unlike his steadfast support for American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, Lieberman's current skepticism toward the Democratic health bills is shared by the public. The poll numbers are stunningly bad. Recent surveys conducted by Gallup, Quinnipiac, the *New York Times*/CBS, and CNN all show support for the pending legislation continuing to sink. Despite the Democrats' and the president's best efforts, the public seems convinced that Obamacare will increase taxes, deficits, and premiums and make health care worse.

Last week, in their frantic quest for a legislative victory, Senate Democrats decided to abandon the public option in favor of a scheme that would allow individuals between 55 and 64 years old to buy in to Medicare. Leave aside the propriety of trying to ram through the Senate a consequential piece of legislation, a major part of which hasn't gone through committee mark-up or been thoroughly debated. The Medicare buy-in is the AIG of health care reform. It would pump even more money into an already failing enterprise, costing citizens even more for an ultimate bailout, in higher taxes, in the rationing of care, or both. It would create an adverse-selection problem where the only folks buying in are high-risk and thus more expensive to insure. And it would replace the public option—which liberals always viewed as a step toward single-payer health care—with, well, single-payer health care. No wonder Paul Krugman and Howard Dean are happy. No wonder Lieberman has "increasing concerns."

Joe Lieberman

THOMAS FLUHARTY

Nor is he alone. A small group of red state Democratic senators are also wary of Reid's bill, we hear. But they are hedging. No one wants to be the first to say he or she will oppose the president's top domestic priority. Who is the bold, courageous voice speaking for the country? If Lieberman blows the whistle, surely other Democrats, who know how bad this legislation really is, will follow. Someone has to go first. That's Joe. And then bipartisan majorities can pass sensible health care reforms next year. That's what we call Joementum.

—Matthew Continetti

{It's hard to celebrate when you're hungry.}

During the holidays, families gather to celebrate traditions and create lasting memories. But for families facing hunger, the holidays can be one of the hardest times of the year. Right here in America, hunger affects over 12 million kids and their families. This year, you can Share your Season with a hungry child and help end childhood hunger in America. See how at **strength.org**

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From Awful to Worse

Harry Reid's medical malpractice.

BY JAMES C. CAPRETTA & YUVAL LEVIN

THOMAS FLUHARTY

The Obama administration and congressional Democrats long ago gave up any pretense of working to rationally reform American health care. The exercise now underway in the Senate is a mad dash to get to 60 votes, and nothing more. That's why some Democratic senators who had no idea exactly what is in the "breakthrough deal" announced by majority leader Harry Reid last week immediately hailed it as a milestone. They're for anything that creates a sense of "momentum" and "inevitability."

But the substance does matter. If Congress passes something in the end, ordinary Americans know they will have to live with it. And from those voters' points of view the latest effort to strike a compromise among Senate Democrats would, based on press reports of what it involves, take the horrendous bill offered by Reid earlier this month and make it even worse.

In most ways, the new proposal is as terrible as Reid's original bill. It would spend hundreds of billions on a new entitlement even as our debt is mounting, inflict massive tax increases on a troubled economy, impose costly mandates on employers at a time of high unemployment, squeeze money out of Medicare without fixing the program, insert the government in countless new ways between doctors and patients, and cause millions of middle-class families to lose the employer-based insurance they have today and pay even higher premiums.

But in one crucial respect, the new proposal is far worse than the last one. For most of this year, the liberal Holy Grail has been the so-called "public option"—a new government-run insurance program offered to working age people and their families, much as Medicare is available to senior citizens. But, despite a full-court press by liberal activists, the idea has foundered on its complete lack of sense.

The only plausible reason to put more people in government-run insurance would be cost control, but no one believes the federal government now knows how to control costs sensibly. Liberals say a new insurance bureaucracy should be given the power to use Medicare's price-setting and regulatory structure to cut costs. But that structure has never successfully controlled Medicare spending because price-setting doesn't address volume—and so creates an incentive for more and more spending. Indeed, the Obama administration admits that Medicare's current arbitrary bureaucratic payment systems are a prime source of the inefficiency and inequity throughout the entire health sector, driving up costs for everyone. That's why the president and his team are proposing to set up an independent Medicare commission to straighten out the mess. They know they don't know how to do it and can only hope someone else does. So if

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Medicare is a big part of the problem, how is its model the solution?

Since no one has been able to answer that question, prospects for the public option have dimmed in the Senate. Liberals in Congress have been looking to save face and find another route to their ultimate goal of moving the country toward a single-payer health system. They may have found one in the compromise touted by Reid.

Apparently, in exchange for dropping the "public option," moderate Senate Democrats have tentatively agreed to open up Medicare to people age 55 to 64 (retirees can currently sign up for it at age 65). In other words, rather than build on the failed cost-control model of Medicare, they now want to actually further burden Medicare itself. Why take a roundabout path to failure when a direct one is available?

The irrationality of this solution is staggering. But, of course, it's a solution to Reid's political problem, not to the nation's health care financing crisis. Moderate Senate Democrats don't want to vote for anything called a "public option," but some of Reid's more liberal colleagues won't give up the dream of marching toward a single payer health care system. So he has offered up an even more direct path to such a system, but given it a different name and frame than the "public option."

Liberals are ecstatic at the prospect. New York representative Anthony Weiner, a single-payer advocate, called the idea the "mother of all public options." His excitement is understandable. According to the Census Bureau, only 4.3 million people age 55 to 64 were uninsured in 2008. But the total population in this age range was 34.3 million—so the Medicare buy-in is not a means to help the uninsured but a means to socialize the health insurance of a vast swath of the public.

Initially, a voluntary Medicare program might attract only a small number of enrollees, especially because those who opt in would be required to pay the full premium. But over time, employers would likely find it convenient to put their early retirees into Medicare to shed some of their costs, providing only wraparound coverage as they do for retirees over 65. Once the opt-in is established, moreover, pressure would build for Congress to ensure "premiums" are affordable. Directly or indirectly, the government would find ways to subsidize enrollment. If established, a Medicare option for the 55- to 64-year-old population would quickly become the default option for the entire age group, and a case for further lowering the age of eligibility would emerge.

And when that happens, those who have fought all year against a new government-run insurance plan will have lost the battle, and those seeking means of actually cutting the growth of health care costs will pretty much have lost the war. The Reid bill already assumes a 15 million-person jump in enrollment in Medicaid, bringing the total enrollment to 60 million Americans. If 20 to 30 million new people end up on Medicare, on top of Medicare's current 45 million enrollees, then more than one-in-three Americans would be covered by government-funded health insurance. A single-payer health care system would be all but inevitable.

Every criticism lodged against Obamacare this year applies to this new "compromise," and at least one more in addition: The only thing it compromises is the chance of reforming American health care for the better. ♦

The Real Lessons of 1994

Voters punished Democrats for Hillarycare. They'll do the same for Obamacare.

BY JEFFREY H. ANDERSON & ANDY WICKERSHAM

Democratic senators and congressmen have been trying to convince each other, particularly their more conservative colleagues, that they'll all be better off in the 2010 elections—and will avoid a repeat of their 1994 debacle—if they pass Obamacare. Bill Clinton, half of the central duo in the failed attempt to pass Hillarycare in 1994, recently addressed Senate Democrats and sang the party-line tune. Speaking to reporters afterward, Clinton said, "I think it is good politics to pass this and to pass it as soon as they can. . . . The worst thing to do is nothing."

But the evidence cuts the other way. Democrats did indeed get slaughtered in 1994—with Republicans taking over the House for the first time since the Truman administration—but it wasn't because they failed to pass Hillarycare. It was because they tried.

It's true, there were no formal votes on a bill, so there was no chance for Democratic members to distance themselves officially from the plan. Nevertheless, voters knew that it was the more conservative Democrats (with the GOP, then as now the minority party, urging them on) who killed the bill—over their more liberal colleagues' objections.

So who paid the price in 1994? Was it the typical Democrats, for trying to pass Hillarycare or their more con-

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servative colleagues for stopping it?

The question is timely, for Americans' notion of what their health care would be like under Obamacare is strikingly similar to what they thought it would be like under Hillarycare. A recent ABC News/*Washington Post* poll shows that, by 37 to 19 percent, Americans think the quality of their health care would get worse, rather than better, under Obamacare. The same poll's nearly identical question about Hillarycare in 1994 also showed that Americans thought the quality of their health care would get worse, by 38 to 20 percent.

What, then, really happened to Democrats in the 1994 election? We took liberal/conservative ratings from the American Conservative Union and divided congressional Democrats into ideological thirds: most conservative, typical, and most liberal. We then examined how each group of Democrats fared in seeking reelection in the wake of Hillarycare and compared those results with the reelection bids of Democrats in the congressional elections of the last 20 years.

The conclusions are clear, and they defy the notion that the worst thing that Democrats could do is nothing. In the other nine elections over the past 20 years, the typical (middle-third) Democrats have done far better than the more conservative Democrats. In fact, conservative Democrats have lost 67 percent more often than their party's typical members. In 1994, that turned around completely: That year, *typical* Democrats lost 56 percent more often than their more conservative colleagues.

In other words: Voters did punish Democrats for trying to pass Hillarycare, but they didn't punish them evenly—and they certainly didn't punish them for failing to pass it. Instead, voters went comparatively easy on the more conservative Democrats who opposed it.

Conservative Democrats generally do worse than their colleagues in seeking reelection because they usually run in contested districts that either party can realistically win. They are often running on Republican—or at least highly disputed—turf. Conversely, the most liberal Democrats usually run in Democratic strongholds. Over the last two decades—apart from 1994—more conservative Democrats have been twice as apt to lose as other members of their party. Given the districts or states in which they run, this is not at all surprising. But what *is* surprising is this: In 1994, the more conservative Democrats erased that disadvantage.

In 1994, the more conservative third of Democrats ran in states where the average margin of victory for President Clinton had been only 1.6 percentage points (compared to 5.6 percentage points nationally). Meanwhile, the other two-thirds of Democrats ran in states where Clinton's average margin of victory had been 7.7 percentage points. Despite the far greater challenge they faced in running on much less friendly soil, the more conservative Democrats won every bit as often in 1994 as other Democrats did—the only time in the past 20 years that they were able to pull off this improbable result.

Voters did punish Democrats for trying to pass Hillarycare, but they didn't punish them for failing to pass it. Instead, voters went comparatively easy on the more conservative Democrats who opposed it.

But what is most striking is how much better the conservative third did than the typical Democrats of the middle third. Compared with the more conservative Democrats, typical Democrats ran twice as often in the six most consistently Democratic states (those Democrats won by 10 percentage points or more in each of the past five presidential elections) and barely half as often in GOP states (those the GOP won in most of those elections). Despite this huge advantage in voter composition, they not only failed to win more often, they lost 56 percent more often.

Swing-voters apparently (and rightly) blamed typical Democrats for advancing Hillarycare. Where independent voters were not really decisive—such as in the most liberal members' districts—this effect wasn't strongly felt. But where independents held sway, typical Democrats felt their wrath. And in 1994, the voters did this without the benefit of being able to consult concrete votes on the proposed health care legislation. They won't be similarly handicapped in 2010.

In June of this year, a Fox News poll showed that (among those who had an opinion on the matter) 73 percent of independents approved of President Obama's job performance. After five months of debate over Obama's health care overhaul, the same poll now shows that only 40 percent of independents approve of his job performance.

If Democrats want to go on an electoral suicide mission in the face of clear public opposition and try to pass a nation-changing piece of legislation by a party-line vote (both Social Security and Medicare were passed by majorities of both parties in at least one congressional chamber), they should consider one further fact. The proposed legislation won't take effect quickly, much of it not until 2014. Before then, we'll vote in two national elections. The American people would not only be able to vote out members who disregard their wishes and pass legislation they don't want. Through the election of other members, they would be able to repeal that legislation.

In the wake of the Hillarycare debate in 1994, voters harshly punished typical Democratic members. As the calendar approaches 2010, many Democratic members face a potentially career-defining choice that will determine whether their constituents will regard them as being among the more conservative members of their party, or among its typical members. If 1994 is any guide, this determination could well decide their fate. The question for such Democratic members is this: Are you willing to die charging a hill that may well be retaken in 2010 and 2012 in your absence? ♦

Standing Up for Liberty

The health care debate is about insurance; it should be about access. BY JIM PREVOR

The triumph of Reaganism, as represented by the passage of the Kemp-Roth tax cuts in 1981, was a declaration of intellectual independence by conservatives and Republicans who decided to no longer be "tax collectors for the welfare state."

Equally, the current battle to defeat plans for a national health insurance program will be a richer victory if conservatives and Republicans not only defeat the proposed legislation, but articulate a vision that rejects the fearful, risk-averse attitude intrinsic to the bills passed by the House and proposed in the Senate.

Key to the case for Obamacare have been two notions: that getting everyone covered by insurance is some kind of "moral imperative" and that a lack of health insurance is some unique problem in which government must overrule family decisions about how best to allocate funds. Both should be rejected by conservatives and Republicans.

The issue that has moral weight is access to health care, not access to insurance. Many people elect not to buy collision insurance for their cars because they are financially capable of absorbing the loss. If Bill Gates wants to go without health insurance and would rather pay as he goes, would virtue be served by forcing him to buy insurance?

Many wealthy people buy a high-deductible policy—a policy that would not qualify as insurance under the bills in both the House and Senate—and pay for the less-expensive services as they need them. They tend to buy such policies for their children, whose incomes may not be high at all. Yet all these people have adequate resources to procure needed health care. The fact that the national debate has focused on insurance for health care—as opposed to the accessibility of care—is a byproduct of the particular worldview that all "basic needs" should be provided by communal institutions, preferably the government but, alternatively, highly regulated companies that do the government's bidding.

The issue that has moral weight is access to health care, not access to insurance. If Bill Gates wants to go without health insurance and would rather pay as he goes, would virtue be served by forcing him to buy insurance?

If the Republicans want to address the real issue of access to care, there are numerous ways to do it:

■ They could build more medical schools and wreak havoc on the American Medical Association's efforts to restrain the supply of doctors. The slow growth in medical school capacity has forced many perfectly qualified Americans to go to medical school in foreign countries or give up their dream of becoming a doctor all together.

■ No more "certificates of need." Legislation could be passed to prevent states and localities from restricting the ability of hospitals to compete by requiring preapproval for offering certain programs, building certain facilities, and acquiring certain equipment.

■ The government could fund a large ROTC-type program whereby bright students who want to become doctors can go to medical school for free, in exchange for a few years of service in free clinics.

All of this would make care more available (and so lower costs), and none of them has anything to do with insurance.

The push to insure everyone is, moreover, a decision to endorse a risk-averse society. There is little question that if every uninsured family in America were offered a cashier's check in the amount it will cost to provide that family with health insurance—checks that could easily be in excess of $15,000 each year—and simultaneously offered the chance to sign the checks over to purchase health insurance, many, many families would elect to take their chances and do something else with the money. A real question, not addressed in the current debate, is why the Democrats want to avoid giving autonomy to families, who best know their own situation—and why Republicans are not standing athwart the effort to deny families such freedom and yelling, "Stop!"

Perhaps these families would use the money to start a small business, send a child to college, go to night school, or save a child from a horrible inner-city public school system. Is there any basis for thinking that paying for health insurance is morally superior to helping a family in any of these ways?

The Democrats have framed the health care debate as one between their efforts to help the uninsured and Republican concerns about budget deficits. One wonders if Republicans wouldn't do better to focus on freedom and individual liberty. By proposing to give families money or vouchers that they could use to buy

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health insurance or any other thing they deemed helpful to their family's future, Republicans could appropriately frame the health care debate. Let the Democrats be the party of the dictatorial nanny-state, demanding insurance over opportunity. Let the Republicans be, well, pro-freedom.

Insurance is a purchase designed to prevent bad things from having terrible consequences. Investing in a business of one's own is an attempt to make good things happen—increased income and greater opportunities for the whole family. The second is surely as important—maybe more important—than the former. Yet our culture is so transcendentally liberal that even stalwart conservatives often have trouble allying themselves with this optimistic, future-driven vision.

American conservatism stands for the supremacy of the individual and the family over the government. It stands for a society of dynamic growth rather than of a people sheltered from all risk. Obamacare ought to be defeated because it raises government above the family in deciding how resources are allocated and endorses a vision where the national priority is to protect against risk rather than to grow and explore.

The moral imperative is not making everyone buy insurance. The moral imperative is freedom. ♦

HARAZ N. GHANBARI / AP PHOTO

The sage of Wilmington

A Little Learning . . .

Is a Bidenesque thing.

BY MEGHAN CLYNE

The campaign for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination offered a glimpse into the soul of Joe Biden. Asked by a prospective voter where he went to law school, Biden responded with a tirade that, had the claims been true, would have been bizarre. But as most of them were outright lies, it qualifies as one of the strangest political statements on record:

> I think I probably have a much higher IQ than you do, I suspect. I went to law school on a full academic scholarship—the only one in my class to have a full academic scholarship. . . . I won the international moot court competition. I was the outstanding student in the political science department at the end of my year. I graduated with three degrees from undergraduate school, and 165 credits—only needed 123—and I'd be delighted to sit down and compare my IQ to yours.

Got that? Joe Biden wants you to know he is a very smart man.

Two decades later, Biden is just a heartbeat away from the presidency, yet he still exudes the same conspicuous insecurity, the same burning desire to prove his intellectual credibility. These days, his method of choice is cramming his speeches with snippets of borrowed wisdom. His desire to prove his book smarts can lead to awkward mix-ups, as when Biden used a quote at the White House jobs summit that seemed like a threat against a member of the cabinet: "[R]emember your college days, having to study the essayist Samuel Johnson? And one of the favorite quotes I remember, Mr. Secretary, was 'There is nothing like a hanging to focus one's attention.'"

More often the quotes piled upon quotes just make for a mess. In one

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November speech, delivered to military families at a memorial service at Fort Lewis, Washington, Biden cited in quick succession Thomas Jefferson's description of Meriwether Lewis, the poet William Cowper's thoughts on grief, William Shakespeare ("Cowards die many times before their death. The valiant never taste death but once"), Meriwether Lewis himself, and finally, as Biden put it: "and I might add, for all of you who stayed behind, the famous quote, 'Those also serve who stand and wait.'"

This last one, from John Milton, appears to be a particular Biden favorite. He has said it to Czech troops and their families in Prague, Romanian military families in Bucharest, the families of "brave Polish soldiers" in Warsaw, and U.S. soldiers stationed at Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo. The quote also got pulled out aboard the USS *Ronald Reagan*, at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, and at a welcome-home ceremony for the XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg. One can see how the highbrow line would be tempting to Biden. It would be so much more convenient, though, if the verse didn't come from a sonnet about Milton's blindness. (Biden would also stand a better chance of projecting familiarity with Milton if he did not, in several of the same speeches, refer to troops killed in action as "fallen angels.")

So maybe the veep never quite managed *Paradise Lost*. No matter. Shakespeare, Maya Angelou—the Sage of Wilmington quotes them with equal ease. He is especially fond of William Butler Yeats, or at least his poem "Easter Sunday 1916" (as the vice president always terms Yeats's "Easter, 1916"). Biden apparently deemed one verse—"All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born" in the Yeats; in Bidenese, "The world has changed; it has changed utterly. A terrible beauty has been born"—applicable in 2009 to graduates of Wake Forest and Syracuse universities, attendees at the Progressive Governance Conference in Vina del Mar, Chile, and world leaders assembled at the 45th Munich Security Conference—all of whom were surely fascinated by Yeats's thoughts on the Irish uprising.

Biden's affinity for poetry reaches far beyond the familiar giants. In Kiev, he lauded the "great Ukrainian poet, Shevchenko." In Tbilisi, he busted out "a verse from maybe Georgia's most famous poet" (never identified). In Beirut in May, Biden said: "A famous Lebanese poet [Khalil Gibran, who wrote mostly in English and in America] wrote the words—and I want to get them exactly right—'Progress lies not in enhancing what is, but in advancing toward what will be.'" According to prepared remarks posted on the White House website, in Sarajevo in May Biden cited "the English author Rebecca West," who "once wrote that entering Sarajevo was like 'walking inside an opening flower,'" and concluded his remarks with the recitation of 28 lines of verse from a young Sarajevan exile to the United States, Hajat Avdovic. (The poem was published in the Spring 2009 issue of *We the Writers*, the literary magazine of the Academy of American Studies—Avdovic's high school in Long Island City.)

A little philosophy? Who better to cite at a summit on urban policy in Chicago than Aristotle, who, "over two millennia ago . . . recognized the defining advantage of cities. He wrote, and I quote, 'Men come together in cities in order to live; they remain together in order to live the good life.' That is as true today as it was then." Never mind that Aristotle's point in the *Politics* was basically the opposite—that men move beyond their local "villages" to form broader political associations, translated as "city" but also "society," with roughly the connotation of today's "nation." Oh well—it sounded nice.

Biden also dabbles in theology. In May, he quoted a line from G.K. Chesterton ("It's not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting; it's been found difficult and left untried") that must have struck its audience—the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—as an odd analogy. (Biden was likening Christianity to the Middle East peace process.)

Of course, Biden's pretensions generally escape factchecking by the press. Biden's erstwhile rival, Sarah Palin, has come under fire for including in her memoir observations falsely attributed to Plato that were ripped from quote websites. Fair enough. But what about Biden? In multiple speeches, he has credited "the poet Virgil" with the aphorism "the greatest wealth is health." And sure enough, Virgil is credited with the quote in thousands of Google hits, QuoteGarden.com, and even boxer shorts for sale on Amazon.com. But good luck finding the phrase anywhere in the Latin poet's actual writings. A search of the phrase (or even similar terms)—in English and Latin—in databases of Virgil's poetry yields nothing. Richard Tarrant, a professor of Latin at Harvard, says: "I'm not familiar with the quote (which sounds like something my mother used to say), and offhand I would doubt that it comes from Virgil." Two classicists at Cornell, while unable to prove that the poet *never* said anything like it, "doubt whether this quote comes from Virgil." One, Barry Strauss, adds: "It sounds more like a fortune cookie than a poet."

Our vice president is also fully capable of misinterpreting America's founding documents in the service of adding lustre to his speeches. Before the Munich Security Conference in February, Biden said:

> But the very moment we declared our war of independence, at that moment we laid out to the world the values behind our revolution and the conviction that our policies must be informed, as we said at the time, by a "decent respect for the opinions of mankind." Our Founders understood then, and the United States believes now, that the example of our power must be matched by the power of our example.

In context, this line from the Declaration of Independence says only that Americans ought to carefully explain our actions to the world, not that we should do what world opinion asks of us. In Biden's hands, Jefferson's confident assertion of American righteousness becomes an endorsement of policymaking by "global test." Well, we always knew Biden wasn't a strict constructionist.

Biden's desire to show off is also in tension with his carefully calibrated political persona: Mr. Blue Collar, Son of Scranton. Indeed, Biden is fond of littering his speeches with tidbits from his hardscrabble youth: "We don't think—as my grandpop would say—the Recovery Act is the horse that can carry that sleigh alone, but it is, in a sense, the down payment." This is Joe Biden from "little ol' Delaware," who draws economic insight from the view out his train window: "And as that bridge as you go over, on Amtrak, into New York, through Newark, says, 'Newark makes what the world takes.' We ain't making what the world takes." (The bridge actually crosses from Pennsylvania into New Jersey, and says: "Trenton Makes, The World Takes." But you get the point.)

This more avuncular Joe Biden may seem an odd fit with the erudite Virgilian and reader of Khalil Gibran, but in fact the two form the single tale that animates Biden's quest for approval (and the underlying narrative of nearly all his public statements). Whatever the occasion, the vice president's subject is always Joe Biden: the poor boy whose smarts have brought him to the greatest heights of intellectual achievement.

It was to embellish this tale that Biden famously borrowed from a speech by British MP Neil Kinnock when running for president in 1987—not only plagiarizing clever lines, but actually appropriating details of Kinnock's life to make his own biography seem more compelling. It is for the sake of this story that Biden so often paints implausible scenarios of which he is inevitably the star—most famously fabricating a confrontation in the Oval Office in which he schooled George W. Bush on the nature of leadership. This is the Biden who, speaking at the presidential palace in Bucharest in October, said:

> You know, I was telling the—I was telling the president, he and his country have made me look very good. I argued very, very strongly that Romania be admitted into NATO on the first round, as you'll remember. I was—and I tried to the very end, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Now look how smart I was.

Jesse Helms was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the first round of NATO expansion in 1999, as Richard Lugar was when Romania was admitted in 2004. *But look how smart Joe Biden is.*

Behind all his feigned erudition, that, ultimately, is the vice president's sad *cri de coeur*. After all this time, and after all he has accomplished, he still has a chip on his shoulder. Biden's speechmaking-by-Bartleby.com is all part of the same effort: to show, by appealing to the intellectual giants of the past, that he is familiar with them, inspired by them—and perhaps even one of them.

And what it most reveals is Biden's priorities as vice president: more self-serving than public service. What, one wonders, would Aristotle say about that? ♦

Kim Jong Il Gets a Free Pass

. . . from the Obama administration.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

In his Nobel acceptance speech last week, President Obama spoke eloquently on what he called a "just peace"—a peace that is not possible without the recognition of basic human rights. Where human rights are not protected, "peace is a hollow promise," he said.

> No matter how callously defined, neither America's interests—nor the world's—are served by the denial of human aspirations. So even as we respect the unique culture and traditions of different countries, America will always be a voice for those aspirations that are universal. We will bear witness to the quiet dignity of reformers like Aung Sang Suu Kyi; to the bravery of Zimbabweans who cast their ballots in the face of beatings; to the hundreds of thousands who have marched silently through the streets of Iran. It is telling that the leaders of these governments fear the aspirations of their own people more than the power of any other nation. And it is the responsibility of all free people and free nations to make clear that these movements—these movements of hope and history—they have us on their side.

It was an audacious claim. In the aftermath of the stolen Iranian elections in June, the president did indeed "bear witness" to the reformers in Iran but he did nothing else and categorically rejected his "responsibility" to make clear that their movement of "hope and history" had us on their side. Indeed, he argued that doing so would amount to "meddling" and would thus set back their cause.

In Oslo, the president went on:

> Let me also say this: The promotion of human rights cannot be about exhortation alone. At times, it must be coupled with painstaking diplomacy. I know that engagement with repressive regimes lacks the satisfying purity of indignation. But I also know that sanctions without outreach—condemnation without discussion—can carry forward only a crippling status quo. No repressive regime can move down a new path unless it has the choice of an open door.

Kim Jong Il and posse

The promotion of human rights cannot be about exhortation alone, but it should at least start there. And when a president refuses a meeting with the Dalai Lama or neglects to condemn government-backed violence against protesters, then his claims to be on the side of the movements of hope and history ring hollow.

As Obama was speaking in Oslo, his national security adviser, James Jones, released a statement on International Human Rights Day, noting that he and his staff had met with human rights advocates at the White House:

> I reiterated the president's strong and unwavering commitment to the advancement of human rights and democracy around the world, including the right to choose one's leaders, to speak one's mind, to assemble freely, and to worship as one pleases. . . . In addition to civil and political rights, the president has also stressed that our pursuit of human rights and democracy must deliver real improvements in people's everyday lives—by ensuring that people can meet their basic needs and expanding opportunity and prosperity.

Jones touted the "strong record" of promoting human rights by the Obama White House and got specific.

> We have condemned human rights abuses in Sudan, Cuba, Russia, Guinea, Zimbabwe and Syria; deplored the systematic rapes and sexual violence in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo; and called attention to the continued repression in Burma and Iran. The President has also been clear on our commitment to equal rights: for women; ethnic and religious minorities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

But what has the Obama administration *done?* Exhortation alone, as the president said, is not enough. A bigger problem with this list is its glaring omission: North Korea.

Kim Jong Il's totalitarian dictatorship would probably rank at the top of any objective list of cruelest regimes on earth. Human Rights Watch characterizes the state of human rights in North Korea as "dire." It points out in its latest report that "North Korea runs large prison camps where hundreds of thousands of its citizens—including children—are enslaved in deplorable conditions." What's more,

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the government publicly executes individuals for stealing state property, hoarding food, and other 'anti-socialist' crimes. . . . Individuals who leave the country without state permission are often considered traitors and can face lengthy prison terms and possible execution upon return.

So why wasn't North Korea mentioned? Was it merely an oversight—did Obama officials simply forget how bad things are there? Or was it a strategic omission—a signal to Kim Jong Il that the U.S. government will set aside concerns about human rights if his regime will return to the nuclear negotiating table?

The failure to mention North Korea coincides with the return of Stephen Bosworth, the Obama administration's special envoy to Pyongyang, from what the administration has described as "positive" talks with North Korea on nuclear issues. At a press conference in Seoul, after three days of meetings with the North Koreans, Bosworth did not mention human rights.

Why the free pass on human rights? The North Koreans have not committed to eliminating or reducing their nuclear weapons program, and even if they had, such a promise, given their history of broken promises, would be virtually meaningless. In fact, the North Koreans, after three days of meetings, would not even commit to returning to the Six Party talks—hardly a surprise given the administration's stated position of "strategic patience" with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The very fact that the high-level face-to-face meetings took place is a blow to human rights in North Korea, as any such discussions necessarily lend legitimacy to the repressive regime in Pyongyang, particularly when such bilateral talks came after repeated demands for them from the North Koreans. And the fact that the Obama administration seems unwilling not only to "call attention to" human rights abuses in North Korea but even to mention them suggests that Obama's "unwavering commitment" to human rights around the world is mere Oslo rhetoric. ♦

Bye Bye Blanche

Can Republicans finally get their act together in Arkansas? BY KENNETH Y. TOMLINSON

Even before she became the swing vote that forced consideration of Obamacare onto the Senate floor, two-term Arkansas senator Blanche Lambert Lincoln had a dubious distinction: "For 2010, she may be the most endangered Democratic senator in the country," says Public Policy Polling head Dean Debnam.

Political handicappers began to note her vulnerability last summer when, in the face of the tea-party movement, Lincoln refused to hold town hall meetings with her constituents. In a conference call with Arkansas reporters, she called tea-party confrontations with politicians "un-American," and ever since, even though she relented and held a few town halls in September, her negatives have outnumbered her positives in Arkansas polls.

Blanche Lambert Lincoln

BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

In Washington reporters insist on labeling Lincoln a moderate, even if her lifetime ACU rating is virtually identical to Harry Reid's. She voted against the confirmation of Justice Alito. She voted against cloture for judicial nominee Miguel Estrada seven times. She voted against the surge in Iraq.

As noteworthy as her liberalism is her political gamesmanship. In 2005 and 2007, she supported legislation to give unions "card check," eliminating workers' right to vote by secret ballot on whether to unionize. This year she opposes card check.

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And her shifting positions on Obamacare are notorious. On a recent Saturday, Harry Reid needed the vote of every Democrat to block a GOP amendment to the health care bill. Lincoln was there for her leader. But when the amendment went down by a wider margin than anticipated, Lincoln returned to the floor and changed her vote from "no" to "yes," more in tune with the polls showing Arkansans overwhelmingly opposed to the president's plan.

Democratic office holders have a lock on Arkansas politics, but for months opinion polls have recorded a big swing to the right. Already in last year's presidential election, Arkansas gave John McCain a 20-point margin over Obama—and the biggest increase in the Republican presidential vote over 2004 of any state in the nation.

Despite (insiders argue because of) Republican governor Mike Huckabee's long reign (1996-2007), the state Republican party had reached a point of near-dormancy by 2008. When conservative Republican lawmakers opposed Huckabee's moves for higher taxes (to pay for his planned higher spending), the governor began calling them "Shiites." Before Huckabee left office, he even pushed a bill to give in-state college tuition and scholarships to the children of illegal immigrants.

That left a legacy few Republicans wanted to build on. Last year, Republicans fielded not a single candidate

against an incumbent Democrat in the Senate or in three of the state's four House seats.

Now, with Lincoln's terrible poll numbers, there suddenly is no shortage of Republican Senate candidates. But their quality reflects the same problem that has haunted the Arkansas GOP for years.

One is a state senator from the mountains of northwest Arkansas, the home of a majority of the state's registered Republicans. He got headlines when he called New York senator Chuck Schumer "that Jew." Another is Huckabee's campaign manager when he first ran for office. A favorite of some Washington conservatives, he also is a former Baptist preacher who left his church after a divorce action showed an affair with a younger woman.

Then there is Gilbert Baker, a state senator who holds the distinction of being an Arkansas tax pool double dipper, having retired after 20 years as a music teacher and administrator at the University of Central Arkansas. He also has a record of voting for Huckabee spending bills.

For a time this fall there appeared to be a groundswell for Thomas Cotton, a onetime Arkansas farm boy who graduated from Harvard and Harvard Law and who in between had studied Aristotle and Plato at the conservative Claremont Institute. He also served as an infantry officer in Iraq and a peacekeeper in Taliban-infested Laghman province in Afghanistan before leaving the Army earlier this year.

To political idealists, Cotton's candidacy for Lincoln's Senate seat seemed too good to be true. It turned out to be just that, for reasons illuminated in a recent Phillips Foundation study of Arkansas politics by journalist David Sanders.

Sanders examined why the GOP failed to emerge as a power in Arkansas, as it did in other deep-South states. He found the answer in the state's immensely wealthy power base of business leaders in agriculture and oil and banking who are hardly left-wingers, but who find it useful to have Democrats representing them in Washington.

These economic leaders made clear to Cotton, according to confidants, that he would have no shot at their money. Lincoln is a power on the Senate Finance Committee. She is now chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. She is too important to the business elite to let her politics or performance get in their way.

Despite his accomplishments, Cotton and his family are by no means wealthy. Lincoln already has something like $5 million in the bank. Cotton chose not to risk the financial sacrifice of pursuing his political dream.

With Cotton out of the race, political junkies could not help but reflect on the political good luck that has followed Lincoln throughout her life.

Blanche Lambert grew up in the Arkansas delta, the daughter of a sixth-generation planter. "She may have gone to public schools," explains an old hand, "but I doubt she ever rode a school bus. Her daddy's driver took her everywhere."

After graduating from Virginia's tony Randolph-Macon Woman's College, she landed a job in the Washington office of delta congressman Bill Alexander, an Appropriations Committee wheeler dealer who was rising in the Democratic leadership. In two years, fueled by her ties with Alexander, she was working as a Washington lobbyist.

By 1992, however, Alexander faced financial and political ruin. He was deeply in debt from dealings with Florida business operators, ironically funded by Appropriations "research" earmarks.

Blanche Lambert, with support from her family, jumped in the race. She was only 31, and hadn't lived in Arkansas for years. In normal times her record as a Washington lobbyist—Billy Broadhurst, host of the "Monkey Business" cruise that wrecked Gary Hart's career, had been a client—would have been an albatross around her neck.

But Alexander had become the poster boy for the congressional banking scandal, with 487 overdrafts on his House checking account. Blanche told voters, "I'll promise you one thing, I can sure enough balance my checkbook." With Bill Clinton heading the ticket, she cruised to victory in the fall.

Four years later, married to a Memphis physician and facing a difficult pregnancy with twins, Blanche Lincoln decided not to run for a third House term. Soon, however, she entered the 1998 race to succeed retiring Senate veteran Dale Bumpers and won against a weak Republican opponent, as she did again, with ease, in 2004.

It wasn't until late this fall that Lincoln's luck in never having to face a quality Republican opponent suddenly ran out.

On another large farm in the Arkansas delta, Lincoln's indecisiveness on Obamacare and card check and cap and trade had galvanized the thinking of one of the state's leading citizens. Stanley Reed is a wealthy, self-made farmer who holds degrees in engineering and law from the University of Arkansas. He served five terms as president of the Arkansas Farm Bureau and was chairman of the board of trustees of the university. And he doesn't need the support of the state's financial elite to take on Lincoln.

Reed's official biography touts his opposition to "any new taxes" and "cap and trade" and his support for the "market-driven, free enterprise system to create new jobs." And when he was head of the Farm Bureau, Reed went out of his way to work for passage of a state constitutional amendment affirming the traditional definition of marriage.

Reed has an intense personal following. Declares one neighbor, "Stanley is a Baptist deacon and doesn't drink, but I'd rather go to an Arkansas football game with him than any good ole boy I know."

Reed has decided to make the race. Depending on how she votes on health care, Lincoln could face a primary challenge—from the right or the left. But if Reed secures his party's nomination and Lincoln wins hers, political handicappers believe he stands a good chance of capturing an Arkansas Senate seat for the GOP, the party so many Arkansans favor at the presidential level. ♦

Women and the GOP

No problem.

BY MARY KATHARINE HAM

In early November, Democratic representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida accused House Republicans of giving women "back-of-the-hand treatment" during a parliamentary dust-up over a health care debate.

Her ridiculous rhetoric, about what amounted to a heated argument, happened to coincide with the media blitz of newly ordained press darling Dede Scozzafava, playing the role of mistreated moderate woman ousted from the Republican party by rabid conservatives because of her views on social issues.

And thus a storyline was born. The *Politico*'s coverage led the way, under the headline, "The GOP's women problem":

> Conservatives say they pushed Dede Scozzafava out of the House race in New York's 23rd District a week ago because of her left-of-Republican social views—and not because she is a woman. But the growing schism between the Republican party's ascendant right wing and its shrinking moderate core has clear gender undertones.

When did you stop beating your promising, reasonable, moderate female candidates? Hmm?

The storyline relies on a misunderstanding of Scozzafava, willful ignorance of the recent behavior of women voters, and denial of the GOP's 2010 candidate field.

Scozzafava's ouster had little to do with her sex and a lot to do with the fact that she was a "moderate" Republican only if you believe "moderates" are endorsed by Markos Zuniga of *Daily Kos*, support card-check and the stimulus, work closely with ACORN-entangled liberal advocacy groups, and are funded primarily by Planned Parenthood and the Service Employees International Union.

Scozzafava is far from the model for reasonable, moderate Republican women. She's the kind of woman who calls the cops on a reporter for asking her policy questions. But she's the woman liberals *wish* represented Republicans—because she's a liberal herself, which is why she became an improbable fetish of the Fourth Estate.

> While most Republican operatives acknowledge the party needs to extend its reach to more women and minorities, conservatives are loath to turn primaries into a race-and-gender bean count.

If the media had cared to look beyond the fluky, three-way race in NY-23 for national implications, they could have considered women voters in battleground Virginia.

On November 3, Virginia governor-elect Bob McDonnell won women by eight points, 54-46, against Democrat Creigh Deeds. A year before, Obama had won women by seven points; in his historic campaign to turn the state blue, he relied largely on the educated, affluent, suburban vote McDonnell would recover for the GOP. This information was obscured under the CNN headline, "Male, rural, suburban votes boost McDonnell."

McDonnell's edge among women—27 points among white women—is all the more astonishing given the particular line of attack Deeds employed throughout the campaign, with the help of his devoted oppo researchers at the *Washington Post*.

When the *Post* discovered a thesis McDonnell wrote at evangelical Regent University in 1989, the attack was on. In the thesis, McDonnell had controversial takes on working women (federal tax credits for child care were "detrimental to the family"), contraception outside of marriage, and marriage (government policies should favor traditional families and make divorce more difficult).

McDonnell released a statement saying his views had changed. He pointed out that his record in government did not jibe with the '89 policy prescriptions, and lauded his working wife and two daughters, one of whom served in Iraq as a platoon leader in 2005. Then he moved on.

The *Post* and Deeds didn't. A Northern Virginia paper, the *News and Messenger*, accused Deeds of making "McDonnell's thesis the main talking point of his campaign, almost to the exclusion of anything else." His ads leaned heavily on it, culminating in "Why Did You?"—a parodic parade of women pleading with the camera and McDonnell, "Why? Why? WHY?"

In New Jersey, Republican Chris Christie lost women by 5 points, but shrunk McCain's '08 losing margin by 12 points.

The exit polls reveal a model for speaking to women voters in 2010: "Here was a guy [McDonnell] who was a conservative, who was not afraid to speak to that," said RNC chairman Michael Steele. "But what he did was he applied it to the issues that were important to the people in his state. He didn't need to run away from it."

Representative Pete Sessions, head of the National Republican Congressional Committee, which has recruited 26 women to run in 2010, agrees.

"The economy and jobs and debt

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dominate, not just the political landscape, but what people are talking about around their own tables," he said, which was what McDonnell stuck to while Deeds attacked. "The [message] that worked in New Jersey was corruption."

Sitting atop Sessions's list of top-tier young candidates is Martha Roby in the 2nd District of Alabama. She's a Montgomery city councilmember and mother of two, taking on Bobby Bright, a Blue Dog precariously perched in this right-leaning district.

Sessions also touts Nan Hayworth in the 19th District of New York, a well-funded retired ophthalmologist and mother of two married to another doctor, who wants to concentrate on "restoring fiscal sanity to the federal government," she told her local paper.

In Florida's 24th District, a right-leaning seat that went blue in 2008, there were at one point three Republican women vying for the party's nomination.

The message of political newcomers like Hayworth is one Sessions thinks can "widen the bandwidth" of the party's message.

"We're seeing just a lot of people sitting around their tables saying, 'Something's wrong,'" Sessions said. "And then mom and dad look at each other, and sometimes mom says 'I'm gonna do something about it.'"

Senate races boast five high-profile GOP women candidates for 2010: Sue Lowden in Nevada, Linda McMahon in Connecticut, Jane Norton in Colorado, Kelly Ayotte in New Hampshire, and Carly Fiorina in California. As leaders in their communities, business, and politics, several of these women are leading the polls in the early going, and have experience speaking to fellow women, sometimes in powerful ways.

Lowden, for instance, is a well-known face in Nevada for her 10-year stint as a reporter and anchor on local news in the '70s and '80s—a career that made her a symbol of the working woman's life and choices, particularly when she anchored the news through her pregnancies.

"It has nothing to do with politics, necessarily. People remember that," she said. "[Women] say, 'I feel like I know you. I watched you growing up. I remember when you had your kids.'"

Some of these candidates face primary challenges, some from the right, and some may lose. This does not constitute a "women problem."

While most Republican operatives acknowledge the party needs to extend its reach to more women and minorities, conservatives are loath to turn primaries into a race-and-gender bean count, just because an open and fair process might mean a white man gets the nod.

Fiorina illustrated the dangers of treading too close to this line when she told a group of conservative journalists that she'd make a better chal-

lenger to Senator Boxer than her competitor for the nomination, Chuck Devore, because she's a woman.

"With all due respect and deep affection for white men—I am married to one—" Fiorina said, "but [Barbara Boxer] knows how to beat them in California. She has done it over and over and over."

She was knocked for playing the identity politics card on a conservative challenger.

Sessions is more circumspect about what he's looking for in a candidate. "We're after a community leader and we're after someone who has thoughtful articulation to include everybody when they speak," he said. "Does that mean a woman against a woman? Hey, if we find one. . . . My evaluation is our women can speak to a wider group of people."

In the liberal mind, and in media coverage, the GOP woman seems to exist only as a parody of Sarah Palin—all bumpkin, no brains—or as the fictionalization of Dede Scozzafava—all centrist, no cynicism. Both are caricatures of liberals' own invention.

Without resorting to them, we could talk about Meg Whitman running for governor in California, Rep. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee warning Congress about the costs and results of her state's TennCare health care program, or Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington prominently pushing the Republicans' no-cost job-creation plan in Congress. Within two hours of Rep. Brian Baird's retirement announcement last week, a former aide to McMorris Rodgers turned state senator had announced she'd enter the race to replace him. Despite her youth, 31-year-old Jaime Herrera's experience and growing political base have Democrats worried.

The Republican party has work to do, especially with single women, but polling suggests women will be willing to listen to the GOP in 2010, and the GOP is working to speak to them, with the help of women in its ranks. The truth is that neither party can afford to treat women as simplistically as the "women problem" narrative does. ♦

A Bad Neighbor Policy?

The Obama administration loses ground in Latin America. BY JAIME DAREMBLUM

Given the challenges that President Obama faces in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, China, and elsewhere, the fact that he has thus far neglected Latin America is hardly surprising or scandalous. Obama has committed several unforced errors in the Americas, however, most notably in Honduras, and his relatively weak performance has raised concerns about declining U.S. influence.

Obama's Latin America policy has evolved through four stages. During stage one, Obama practiced what might be called Sally Field diplomacy ("You like me!"), marveling over his own popularity in the region while trying to make nice with both friendly and adversarial governments. The administration engaged Venezuela and stayed quiet as Hugo Chávez continued demolishing its democratic institutions. In a May 24 editorial, the *Washington Post* said of Obama's Venezuela policy, "This may be the first time that the United States has watched the systematic destruction of a Latin American democracy in silence."

The president also pursued olive-branch diplomacy with the Cuban dictatorship. Prior to April's Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago, the White House announced a loosening of U.S. sanctions against Cuba—and got nothing substantive in return. Addressing the summit, Obama declared that his administration wanted "a new beginning with Cuba." He did not attempt to refute Nicaraguan leader Daniel Ortega's vicious and hysterical attacks on U.S. foreign policy, which had consumed nearly an hour of the summit's opening ceremony. Instead, Obama stressed the need to move beyond "past disagreements" and "stale debates" in order "to build a fresh partnership of the Americas," adding, "I'm grateful that President Ortega did not blame me for things that happened when I was three months old" (a reference to the Bay of Pigs affair).

If Obama believed that his personal charm and assurances of good will would be sufficient to sway Chávez and the Castro brothers, he was mistaken. Chávez remains as belligerent and dangerous as ever—consolidating an authoritarian regime at home and fomenting instability abroad. As for Cuba, a November 2009 Human Rights Watch report notes that the "machinery" of government repression on the Communist island remains "firmly in place and fully active."

In the opening months of his administration, Obama missed a golden opportunity. He could have—and should have—used his enormous popularity to expand U.S. leadership in the hemisphere. Instead, the president made clear that he would defer to the Organization of American States (OAS) on regional disputes. Unfortunately, the OAS has been weakened by the poor stewardship of Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza, the corrupting influence of Hugo Chávez, and structural deficiencies that lead to operational paralysis. Insulza, a Chilean socialist, has pursued a strongly ideological agenda driven by left-wing politics. Meanwhile, Chávez has used

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economic assistance (namely, oil subsidies) to gain significant influence over the votes of more than half the OAS member countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and most Caribbean nations. As a result, the OAS, once the premier democratic forum in the Western Hemisphere, has lost much of its moral credibility and grown increasingly irrelevant.

The imprudence of Obama's deference to the OAS became more apparent during stage two of his Latin America policy, which began after the June 28 arrest and exile of Honduran president Manuel Zelaya, a Chávez crony and aspiring autocrat who had committed constitutional violations as part of a failed power grab. The Obama administration immediately joined Insulza and other regional officials in denouncing Zelaya's removal as an illegal military coup. As the rhetoric escalated, Costa Rican president Oscar Arias stepped in to mediate between Zelaya and the interim Honduran government. These negotiations failed to produce a resolution, mainly because of Zelaya's intransigence and efforts to stoke a violent uprising.

When Honduran authorities did not restore Zelaya as president, the Obama administration imposed sanctions on the Central American country and announced that U.S. recognition of the November 29 Honduran elections was contingent on Zelaya's reinstatement as president. The administration maintained that Zelaya's removal from office was a coup against democracy. But in fact, as a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service concluded, "the judicial and legislative branches applied constitutional and statutory law in the case against President Zelaya in a manner that was judged by the Honduran authorities from both branches of the government to be in accordance with the Honduran legal system." The release of these findings made it difficult for the Obama administration to continue labeling the interim Honduran government a "coup" regime.

Stage three of Obama's Latin America policy commenced in late October, when U.S. officials helped finalize a deal that established a provisional "unity" government and allowed the Honduran congress to determine Zelaya's fate. Regardless of whether Honduran legislators chose to reinstall Zelaya, the United States agreed to accept the legitimacy of the November 29 elections. By shifting its stance on Honduras, the Obama administration signaled that it was embracing a more pragmatic approach to the crisis, and perhaps to the entire region. However belated the decision, President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton deserve credit for changing course.

Upon hearing news of the anti-Zelaya decision, Obama's newly appointed assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Arturo Valenzuela, told reporters, 'We're disappointed by this decision since the United States had hoped that Congress would have approved his return.'

The Honduran elections saw the conservative candidate, Porfirio Lobo, emerge victorious. The United States and several other Latin American countries—including Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, and Peru—have recognized his election as legitimate. But many other governments—including the pro-Chávez regimes and, more significantly, the governments of Brazil and Chile—have not. Shortly after the elections, Honduran legislators emphatically rejected the idea of returning Zelaya to the presidency to serve until Lobo's inauguration in late January. The vote was 111 to 14.

Upon hearing news of the anti-Zelaya decision, Obama's newly appointed assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Arturo Valenzuela, told reporters, "We're disappointed by this decision since the United States had hoped that Congress would have approved his return." Unless Valenzuela was being disingenuous, his comment was inexplicable: After everything that has transpired, how could Zelaya be allowed to return to the presidency? Furthermore, prior to the 111-14 vote, Zelaya had said that he would refuse to be reinstated by the Honduran congress, so as not to validate the "coup."

Valenzuela's confirmation as senior U.S. official for the Western Hemisphere marked the beginning of stage four of Obama's Latin America policy. His confirmation had been delayed for months by Republican senator Jim DeMint and some of his GOP colleagues who were incensed over Obama's handling of the Honduran crisis. Valenzuela was finally confirmed by the Senate on November 5. At this point, it is unclear whether his elevation (he replaced veteran diplomat Tom Shannon, a Bush appointee) will have an appreciable impact on U.S. policy. Valenzuela's comment on the anti-Zelaya vote was not encouraging.

President Obama deserves credit for changing his position on Honduras, for aiding Mexico's war on the drug cartels, and for expanding military cooperation with Colombia. But he has not succeeded in getting the Democratic congressional majority to approve pending free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama. Moreover, his inattention to the region and assorted policy missteps have weakened U.S. influence and created a dangerous leadership vacuum that is being filled by Chávez and his allies, including Iran (which is collaborating with Venezuela on the development of nuclear technology) and Russia (which in recent years has signed bilateral arms deals with Venezuela worth more than $5 billion). If Obama really does want to construct "a fresh partnership of the Americas," he shouldn't waste any more time. ♦

Belgium Waffles

Two nations, after all?

By Christopher Caldwell

Ever since it was carved by treaty out of the Dutch, French, and German borderlands after the Napoleonic wars, Belgium has been an odd kind of country—short on space, sunlight, and national identity. It was a shotgun marriage of two peoples, the Dutch-speaking Flemings in Flanders and the French-speaking Walloons in Wallonia, who, apart from a shared Catholicism had almost nothing in common. Since Brussels, the Belgian capital, is also the seat of government for the 27-nation European Union, Belgium has become a symbol of the unity-in-diversity that EU bureaucrats aspire to. But the marriage of Flanders and Wallonia, never a love match, has in recent decades entered a thrown-crockery phase. It has become a burning question whether the country is headed for an outright divorce, of the sort that broke Czechoslovakia into two countries after the Cold War.

The question has largely been answered. Belgium already looks less like a country than a loose confederation of two states. Partly thanks to half a dozen reforms pushed through since the 1970s by nationalists on both sides, French speakers and Dutch speakers inhabit different cultural universes. Most people have never heard of the major politicians, the major actresses, and sometimes even the major athletes on the other side of a country that is smaller than Maryland. They inhabit different political universes, too. Except in one nettlesome suburban area of Brussels, Flemings and Walloons are not permitted to vote for the same parties at the national level. They don't even obey the same laws. A major political squabble in recent years has involved whether Flanders or Brussels (which is itself an autonomous region) sets the noise pollution standards for planes flying into Zaventem international airport.

Belgium has seen one of the swiftest reversals of ruling class and subject class in modern history. In the state's early years, French-speaking Walloons were top dog. Today the Dutch-speakers are rich and French-speakers are poor.

The main stereotype that outsiders bring to Belgium is the idea that all of this conflict was sowed for no very good reason by obstreperous Flemish fascists. And that is why the first thing the Flemish nationalist leader Bart De Wever wants to explain as he settles in for lunch in the dining room of the Flemish parliament in Brussels (that's separate from the Belgian parliament a few hundred yards away) is that his New Flemish Alliance party (N-VA) is not to be confused with the Vlaams Belang. Foreign coverage of Belgium tends to focus on the VB, a right-wing party that used to be called the Vlaams Blok. Along with its appeal for Flemish autonomy, the VB mixed in a big dollop of strongly stated anti-immigrant rhetoric. Its style resembled that of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France or the late Jörg Haider's Austrian People's party. The VB was very successful, too, winning key posts in Antwerp and increasing its score every election until it suddenly stalled out earlier this decade.

De Wever's N-VA is not that kind of party. It is true that his party splintered off from the same postwar movement of the nationalist right. Both parties believe that Dutch-speaking Flanders should break away from Belgium, leaving French-speaking Wallonia to fend for itself. But De Wever, who used to be a university professor specializing in 19th- and 20th-century political history, stresses that the VB, by getting wrapped up in anti-immigrant agitation, became an enemy not just of his own party but also of the cause of Flemish nationhood more generally. "They are the 'objective ally' of the Belgian state," he says, "the most principled argument for Belgium. People think: 'If this is the face of an independent Flanders, we're better off with Belgium.'" De Wever favors instead what he calls an "inclusive nationalism."

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The second thing he insists on is that Americans may have an especially hard time seeing what is wrong with Belgian federalism as it now exists. With its already enormous devolutions of political authority to Flanders and Wallonia, Belgium now looks like the kind of federalism that American states'-rights advocates used to dream of. What needs to be remembered, he explains, is that the United States started as a loose confederation of independent states, which have slowly (and perhaps excessively) coalesced over the centuries. "We're different," he says. "We started as a unified nation-state and slowly but surely fell apart."

The Belgian state, in fact, now has little to do. National responsibilities of the smaller kind—from road-building to education—have migrated downward to the regions. National responsibilities of a larger kind have migrated upward to the European Union. Belgium uses the euro. And although there is still no EU army, cash-strapped Brussels has decided to pretend there is. It recently announced the closure or downsizing of dozens of military bases.

One of the roots of Belgium's instability is that it has seen one of the swiftest reversals of ruling class and subject class that modern history affords. In the early years of the Belgian state, French-speaking Walloons were top dog. They remained the country's elite until well after the Second World War. The faded French shop signs you can see in certain old neighborhoods in Dutch-speaking Ghent are a lingering reminder of the time when a Fleming had to speak French to participate in national life. Walloons almost never learned Dutch. Today the Dutch-speakers are rich and the French-speakers are poor, and the two generally communicate, if at all, in English.

Over the summer, Erik Buyst, an economic historian at the University of Leuven, wrote an enlightening short essay on how that happened. In the 19th century, Flanders was behind the eight-ball. You could say it was wiped out by free trade, just as Wallonia was enriched by it. Flemish agricultural products were undercut by cheap foodstuffs from America, and Flanders could not make linens—once the mainstay of its economy—as cheaply or as well as Britain. The country emptied out, much as Ireland did during the potato famine. A lot of Flemish nationalism, in fact—the kind De Wever and other modernizers want to overcome—is of an "Irish," never-forget-a-slight variety. Wallonia, by contrast, had coal and iron mines, which in turn bred engineering expertise, which made its upper-middle classes masters of the cobalt and copper deposits in Belgium's vast, inhumane Central African empire. Wallonia was an exporter of locomotives and other advanced machinery.

In the middle of the twentieth century, though, that situation got turned upside-down. A shift in energy resources was a big reason why. The coal mines of the South were depleted, requiring Belgium to import oil, and convert its industries to it. That meant building refineries on the coast, which was Flemish. Belgians, rightly or not, often describe coastal Flanders as the second-largest petrochemical economy in the world outside of Houston.

Wallonia is described through its own similarly graphic metaphor: as Britain without Thatcher. That the income of Flanders overtook that of Wallonia sometime in the mid-1960s is not just an accident of natural resources. It had political causes too. The heavily unionized South, with its rigid system of wage bargaining and a lavish welfare state won through uncompromising labor agitation, was totally resistant to change. For all the attention Flemish nationalism has received, the Walloons also gave an impetus to the breakup of Belgium, for their own economic reasons. They wanted to seize control over national economic policy in order to protect their dying industries. Wallonia would be an economy of coal, iron, and steel or it would be nothing. It wound up nothing. "In contrast with e.g. Glasgow or Bilbao," Buyst writes, "a successful reconversion to tertiary activities never materialized."

That scared foreign investors, particularly American ones, who were pouring into Europe in the decades after

World War II. Already by the 1960s, 80 percent of the foreign companies present in Belgium were in the Flemish north, according to the Ghent university political scientist Carl Devos. Wallonia is now a basket case. Charleroi, the regional hub, shows a lot of the outward signs of a city run by a Socialist party machine: 30 percent unemployment, life expectancies that have receded to their levels in the 1950s, municipal council members sitting in jail, and a tendency of helpful locals to describe it as "our Detroit."

It is not surprising, then, that much of the rhetoric of Flemish nationalism has a Reaganite ring to it. Flanders, with 58 percent of Belgium's people, is paying for 66 percent of its social services, amounting to 4.4 billion euros in welfare transfers, according to the Action Committee for Flemish Social Security. That is an astonishing amount of money in a country of 11 million people.

Charleroi, which Walloons call 'our Detroit.'

That does not necessarily mean that the Flemish nation is going to storm out of the Belgian household in a huff. A number of things make the Belgian state extremely difficult to dismantle. But these factors for cohesion are all weakening.

First is Brussels, the love child of the Flemish-Walloon pairing, which both cultures claim as their capital. It is historically a Flemish city in the heart of Flanders, but it became the seat of the Francophone elite in the last century, to such an extent that Belgians used to joke that Brussels controlled three colonies: Flanders, Wallonia, and the Congo. It is now the bureaucratic capital of the European Union as well, which has French as one of its two working languages. An independent Flanders would either have a mammoth and expanding Francophone megalopolis at its very heart, or it would be a doughnut-shaped entity with one of the most dynamic cities in Europe excised. For the first time in recent months, though, certain Flemish nationalists have begun to moot the possibility of setting up their own country without Brussels in it.

The second factor holding Belgians together is their monarchy, whose binding capacity comes from a paradox: (a) The royal family is Francophone, and (b) Dutch-speakers have traditionally liked it better than French-speakers do. A referendum was held after World War II on whether King Leopold III ought to be returned to power. (He had been removed by the Nazis and sent to Germany under mysterious circumstances.) Flemings supported his return; Walloons opposed it. But today, the monarchy has been politicized by the task of keeping the country in one piece, and Flemings have grown increasingly republican. Barely a majority of Flemings support the monarchy. Although the royal family now speak Dutch better than they did, most young people see the royals as favoring the Walloons.

Finally, there is the country's national pension fund, which would have to be broken up along with the country, probably along a formula highly unfavorable to Flemings. But in a time of demographic decline and a mounting ratio of dependent retirees to active workers, the Belgian welfare state is no more viable over the long term than any other. (Given the massive unemployment in the South, it is probably less viable.) It cannot fulfill the role of holding the country together if it is an actuarial fiction. A complicating factor is the Belgian government's role in rescuing three major banks in last year's banking crisis. This creates another incentive for the status quo—but it puts pressure on state services, too.

There is an irony here, and one that has given Flanders's nationalistic modernizers an opening. Historically, both Flanders and Wallonia have pushed for more autonomy, but in very different ways. Flanders has traditionally

wanted more respect for its culture, following the model of other great but downtrodden peoples seeking to gain full civil rights. There is a Catalonian or Québécois aspect to the way they lobbied for university instruction in their own language, winning those rights only on the eve of the Second World War. They were willing to give up a bit of economic power, as the economist Olivier Boehme has shown, in defense of cultural purity. Wallonia, by contrast, took its culture for granted. Its priority was seizing the policy levers it needed to keep its dying industrial economy intact. Both sides got exactly what they wanted. But the romantic, ethereal, "cultural" agenda of the Flemings won them real-world benefits. The hard-headed, brass-tacks, "objective" agenda of the Walloons has been a disaster in practical terms.

One of the results of this reversal of fortunes has been a high-stakes battle around history, an attempt to show the Flemish cultural agenda as somehow corrupt at its heart. There are not many places in Europe where the battle rages more furiously over who deserves blame for the country's 20th-century mistakes. (Spain is one.) Each side tries to portray the other as having committed worse excesses of collaboration. One side claims the Nazis freed Flemish POWs before Walloon ones; the other notes that Flanders had no collaborators more zealous than the Francophone fascist Léon Degrelle.

In public relations terms, the Francophones won this battle in a rout. It is the Vlaams Belang in Antwerp, not the National Front in Charleroi, that became the focus of worries that the Belgian right was fascistic and beyond the pale. Over the past couple of decades, Flemish and Belgian conservative parties erected what they called a *cordon sanitaire* around the Vlaams Belang to keep it out of government, citing its position on immigrants as xenophobic. Whether this was good politics or not, today it looks increasingly unfair, as all Belgian parties, left and right, Flemish and Walloon, come to the realization that reforms of immigration policy will be necessary to protect the Belgian school and social-service sector. Gerolf Annemans, the VB's leading intellectual, says that the *cordon sanitaire* is "purely political." Most of his opponents would agree with him, although they do not say so on the record.

On the other hand, De Wever is right that the VB's focus on immigrants was a mighty distraction from the important business of establishing workable Flemish governments. VB leaders used to eschew contacts with serious mainstream nationalist parties where they existed and governed (Catalonia and Scotland), preferring to spend time consorting with unstable atavists like Jörg Haider. Although the VB still gets a quarter of the vote in Antwerp, the N-VA and another liberal nationalist party are, if you take their votes together, quickly catching up. Most analysts believe the VB's star has been falling since the Socialists passed them as Antwerp's largest party in 2006.

Ghent, in prosperous Flanders.

De Wever sees the Catalans and Scots as allies always, and as models sometimes. "Barcelona," he says of the Catalan capital, "is living propaganda for self-rule." It is Catalonia, the engine of the Spanish economy, that offers the best parallel to the Flemish situation at the moment. "Our cultural battles are over," says De Wever. "We are not second-class citizens anymore." He is right about that, but it is a pleasant surprise to hear it. There is nothing rarer than a nationalist party or a civil-rights movement willing to take "yes" for an answer. ♦

NEWSCOM

Reading a newspaper three days before his death, 1885

Soldier-Citizen

Ulysses S. Grant in peace and war

BY MICHAEL PAKENHAM

The bloody war loomed. The next, ominously defining, national election was ticktocking ever closer. The nation's drive for military victory, which the president had vigorously supported, now seemed increasingly bogged in numb confrontation, seeping toward hemorrhaging attrition. The president—still held in near-ecstatic reverence by his enthusiasts—was vividly losing support among the centrist councils of his party, as well as the minority opposition.

Michael Pakenham, a former newspaper editor, writes from rural Pennsylvania.

I am momentarily enchanted by parallels of history and contemporary events. It would be trivializing disrespect for the Civil War to equate it to Barack Obama's challenge of Afghanistan. But the politics are there. They were in 1864. Think ahead—145 years from now—how will today, and three years from today, be assessed? Assuming (I'm an optimist) that there's anyone around then reading history in the English language?

U.S. Grant
American Hero, American Myth
by Joan Waugh
North Carolina, 384 pp., $30

In her *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth*, Joan Waugh recounts that, in the winter and spring of 1864, wise men of most persuasions believed Abraham Lincoln was not electable to a second term. Despite important federal victories in 1863, up until August 1864 the Union armies were entangled in loggerhead confrontation that was immensely costly in blood and treasure. Amid fast-growing public distaste for the war itself, Gen. George B. McClellan accepted the Democratic nomination in late August, running on the Democratic party antiwar platform, though he promised to carry the conflict to "honorable conclusion."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

War opposition was rampant among the Copperhead Democrats, who always, vehemently, had opposed the Union cause. An increasing number of less adamant Democrats and a growing number of members of the Republican, abolitionist party were losing stomach for the federal commitment. Waugh emphasizes that it is easy, and befuddling, to forget that in 1861 the Civil War began with the intent of preserving "the Union as it was"—that is, with slavery intact. It was only in 1863 that emancipation became a federal commitment. That was adamantly rejected by the northern Democrats, who generally stood opposed to emancipation.

Lincoln had brought General Ulysses S. Grant in from his successes on the western front as the apparent standoffs in the East strained loyalties, and his reelection chances. Who *was* Grant? He had been an on-again-off-again soldier. Born to an Ohio tanner, he was graduated 21st in the 39-member West Point class of 1843. He served as an impressive young officer in the Mexican war, beginning in 1846, that led to the acquisition of Texas, California, New Mexico, and parts of what are now Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, and Arizona. At its end, he married Julia Dent, long his fiancée; his best man was James Longstreet, a close friend from West Point. Longstreet and two of Grant's groomsmen, also West Pointers, ultimately became very significant officers in the Confederate Army.

After the Mexican war and marriage, he was assigned to California, and then to the Oregon territory. There, he terribly missed his wife and two children. But it was far too expensive for him to bring them west. He led a miserable life alone and resigned from the Army in 1854. He, Julia, and ultimately four children settled in Missouri, farming. He freed a slave that his father-in-law gave them and refused the offer of labor of other slaves of the family. He was living in Galena, Illinois, working in his father's leather store, when the Civil War began.

Called to lead the Illinois militia and to organize it, Grant was brought back into the Army and became a brigadier general in August 1861. Perhaps his defining accomplishment was the capture of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863—just as Lee's invasion was repelled by Federal forces at Gettysburg. Vicksburg, "the Gibraltar of the West," was the key to the Mississippi River and broke the remaining Confederate armies into more vulnerable eastern and western elements.

Grant's rise to the military top had been further nourished by his securing of Chattanooga, Knoxville, and east Tennessee, leaving the Confederate western command in ruins. Brought east by Lincoln and put in command, Grant sent General William T. Sherman driving south, and crucially, Atlanta fell to him on September 2, 1864. Grant led his forces to a series of other major Union victories. Union morale soared. In November voters gave Lincoln an Electoral College majority of 212 to 21 and 55 percent of the popular vote.

Grant's funeral was the largest public outpouring of population in the history of the nation. Memorial services swept up millions of Americans in virtually every city and town in the North, and many in the old Confederacy.

The war continued, but increasingly the Confederate forces eroded. On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. Grant and Lincoln had agreed that conciliation was vitally necessary to the future of the Republic; Grant's terms for Lee's surrender of the Confederacy and its soldiers were extraordinary in their decency, perceived humaneness, and magnanimity. That contributed hugely to raising Grant's image throughout the country and the world to mythic status, and beyond.

Lincoln was shot on April 14 and died the next day. Vice President Andrew Johnson succeeded. Grant resigned from the Army, overwhelmingly the great hero of the Republic and substantially respected in the South for his generosity toward the Confederacy at and after Appomattox and among black freedman for his role in emancipation. He was elected president, as a Republican, in 1868.

U.S. Grant is of four elements: The first is an excellent, tightly concise but full-life biography of Grant. Interwoven with that is a crisp, if necessarily very selective, history of the war. A third section is what Waugh describes, with no false modesty, as "the first scholarly work devoted to Grant's commemoration, adding a unique perspective to the existing literature." Finally—and centrally—this is a learned and provocative exploration of "memory studies," the phenomenon of examining true records of history in contrast to the manipulated, or invented, popular or collective, contemporaneous or retrospective, "memory" of the same events.

Waugh's reexamination—perhaps rehabilitation is the better term—of Grant's record is startling, and very engaging. But I found even greater fascination in her pursuit of the phenomenon of both spontaneous and contrived revision of events over time: perspectives, prisms, proportions. In one chapter entitled "A Baby Politician" (a Henry Adams excoriation of Grant's presidency), Waugh does a deft juggling of the interpretations of Grant as a post-Appomattox politician and then, on his acceptance of the 1868 Republican nomination, of his campaign and two-term presidency.

Most scholarly, journalistic, even poetic interpretations of that period cast Grant as hopelessly naïve, appallingly corrupt, and something approaching despicable. Waugh sets about to argue an entirely different assessment. She accepts that, since late in the 1920s, "in the long

run, the image of the brutal general and inept president lingers most powerfully." But she demonstrates that in many, or even most, contemporary minds, "Grant was every bit the equal of Washington and Lincoln, and this linkage was made in countless newspaper articles, eulogies, and speeches just before and after Grant's death. . . . Americans honored Washington the Father, Lincoln the Martyr, and Grant the Savior."

Waugh brings a perspective to Grant's life and accomplishments that has been largely lost. She is unswerving in her depiction—indeed, her celebration—of Grant's greatness, while not dismissing his limitations and failings, but recording them as far less serious than detractors would have them. Grant has been portrayed, in many stereotypes, as a drunk; Waugh, drawing on all accessible biographical material, concludes that's a bum rap. He was a drinker—though often abstemious for weeks and months. He was susceptible to alcohol and appeared to show its effects quite easily after a drink or two, she reports. But there is no evidence that it affected his performance as a soldier, politician, general, or president.

Grant's presidency was, Waugh concedes, often inept. He was not an experienced politician, and seems to have detested the practice of politics. He appointed cronies, and some were of doubtful talent, experience, or probity. There was enormous and growing resistance to Grant's aggressive Reconstruction policies, carrying on from those of Andrew Johnson. But his renomination in 1872 was immensely popular, at least among Republicans.

Called by many in his time the most famous living American, after his presidency Grant took a round-the-world tour during 1877-79. Though many historians trivialize it today, at the time the adventure was spectacularly popular and triumphant, with parades, crowds of thousands, visits with royalty and government leaders. It was prominently covered by the foreign and American press.

A movement to nominate him for a third term in 1880 failed, and the James Garfield-Chester Arthur ticket was nominated and elected. Grant turned to generally unsuccessful business enterprises and began writing an autobiography, which he completed only very shortly before he died on July 23, 1885, from cancer of the throat and tongue. He was never baptized until hours before his death, and spent his life (in his son's description) as "pure agnostic." Waugh maintains that the *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* "stands alone as the best presidential autobiography ever published."

Grant's funeral was one of the largest public outpouring of population in the history of the nation. Memorial services swept up millions of Americans in virtually every city and town in the North, and many in the old Confederacy. There were hundreds of public processions lasting, typically, several hours and ending in churches and public buildings, even in the South where, Waugh records, because of the generosity and firmness of Grant's terms of surrender, there was considerable reconciliation, despite remaining tensions and resentment.

Generals Lee and Grant at Appomattox, 1865

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Grant was, in death, celebrated as one of the most powerful, devoted, and beloved leaders in American history, alongside Washington—and of course, Lincoln, at least in the North. Waugh concludes that "a majority of his contemporaries knew in their hearts that Grant, more than anyone besides Lincoln, made sure that the United States defeated the rebellion and prevailed in April 1865, preserving the country for a greater glory." And yet, she records, "Grant's legacy disappeared from popular memory with shocking rapidity." She records in eloquent, intricate detail the origins and erection of the Grant Monument, commonly called "Grant's tomb," and its fall from grace. Built entirely with private donations, it was opened on the West Side of upper Manhattan on the 75th anniversary of Grant's birth, April 27, 1897. It prevailed for more than three decades as a hugely popular and venerated venue. Presidents and visiting dignitaries gave speeches there; it

vastly outdrew the Statue of Liberty as New York's most visited monument. A decline began in the 1930s, and today it has been polished up, but not before having deteriorated into a graffiti-smeared, decaying pile.

Grant's funeral, writes Waugh,

> demonstrated the creative tension that exists between the past and the present, in which a familiar history is reworked to accommodate new meanings. This is especially true of the American Civil War, where individual memory was linked with the collective historical memory in powerfully evocative ways.

Waugh, professor of history at UCLA, has taken a flamboyant story—a writhing intricacy of often conflicting stories—and woven them into a breathtakingly exciting exploration. This is not, as she says, traditional history, or revisionist history, but rather an exquisite act of recounting and balancing those and other perspectives while drawing them all toward a greater understanding. I am not a historian. I am a journalist. But I am not innocent to the reading—and, perhaps more, the witnessing—of history at the lowest and highest levels. Seldom has a book provoked and invigorated me more than *U.S. Grant.* ♦

B&A

Literary Minority

The quest for a modest immortality may be genetic.

BY BARTON SWAIM

Every writer, when young, expects to achieve greatness and notoriety. We hear our names taught in undergraduate classrooms and see our works—even before we've written them—bound in "classic" editions long after we're gone. The melancholy fact that success in writing is rarer than success in professional sports, itself almost a statistical impossibility, is hard to face for a young writer—especially one reared on the corrosive trumpery that you can be anything you want to be.

For my own part, I've long since lowered my sights. I come from a family of minor writers and intend to join that class in due course. By "minor" I mean something like third-tier—not third-*rate*, now. What characterizes a third-rate writer is that he can't write. Not that I would object to being a third-rater myself; many third-raters become fabulously rich, and in any case there's something to be said for a man who can make millions by doing something he's no good at.

The minor writer never gets rich, never achieves anything more than momentary fame, and nobody would call his works important. He has admirers, and he may write a highly regarded book now and again, but he is destined to be remembered, if at all, in the footnotes of monographs nobody reads.

What makes the minor writer worth remembering is that his writings achieve some modest, honorable goal. "[It is] not necessary," writes Samuel Johnson,

> that a man should forbear to write, till he has discovered some truth unknown before; he may be sufficiently useful, by only diversifying the surface of knowledge, and luring the mind by a new appearance to a second view of those beauties which it had passed over inattentively before. . . . and, perhaps, truth is often more successfully propagated by men of moderate abilities, who, adopting the opinions of others, have no care but to explain them clearly.

Literary minority, as I say, runs in my family. My great-great grandfather Joseph Swaim was the first cousin of Mary Jane Virginia Swaim, who married Algernon Sidney Porter. Their son was William Sydney Porter. O. Henry—as he is better known—is just the sort of writer I mean: clever, wise, unpretentious, and unimportant.

My maternal grandmother was a Sewell. Her grandmother was the cousin of Anna Sewell, author of one book, *Black Beauty*. It is a delightful work—a little predictable and, of course, unsubtle in its intentions, but not at all forgettable.

I discovered another minor writer firmly within my lineage not long ago when a book was passed on to me after the death of an elderly aunt. It's titled *William Swaim, Fighting Editor*, published in Greensboro in 1963. William Swaim, proprietor and editor of the *Greensborough Patriot*, was Mary Jane Virginia's father, and so O. Henry's grandfather.

Actually to call William a minor writer is a bit of a stretch: He is completely unknown, without so much as a Wikipedia entry. And yet, in a sense, what he did with his pen was greater than what Hemingway and Sartre did with theirs. William Swaim was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, in 1802. He was raised on a farm and received only a few intermittent months of schooling, between the ages of 12 and 16. At 17, William's father took his boy to the Guilford County Courthouse in Greensborogh (as it was then spelled), and as William watched the proceedings of the courtroom, with all its displays of eloquence, he realized that he wanted to make his way in the world by means of his mind. Yet when he returned home he was dismayed to find that he could barely read, and couldn't write at all.

> My first essay was to cuff the dust off an old Webster's Spelling Book and commence in some of its easiest lessons. 'Twas a mortifying thought, that four years ago, I was able to read the Bible and, now, scarcely qualified to spell in three letters! My resolution formed, every moment of leisure I could gain from the labor assigned me by my father, was spent poring over my book.

The only other book in his father's house was the Bible, and William read

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

it through. He approached a bookish neighbor, a Quaker named Nathan Dick, who let the young man borrow from his collection. The first work William brought home was Richard Blackmore's seven-volume poem *Creation* (1712), which he read from beginning to end. (Johnson, in his *Life of Blackmore*, says that if "he had written nothing else, would have transmitted him to posterity among the first favourites of the English muse.")

Soon William discovered the recently established public library in Greensborough, and from there his education began in earnest. He read every book he could borrow, and within about two years he became sufficiently literate to teach school and join a debating club called the Polemic Society. In 1823, aged 21, William delivered a speech to this club on the subject of reforming the constitution of North Carolina. In itself, the speech holds little interest. That it was written by a young man who had been illiterate a few years before is astonishing. The speech's arguments are not spectacular, but its diction is sophisticated and its sentences are clear.

"Let us approach the subject, then, at once and with firmness," William concludes. (He thought the legislature should call a convention to amend the constitution.) "Let us give our Constitution that honest investigation which its importance demands; and let us select a convention of delegates from among ourselves, to make such alterations as time, experience, and change of circumstances have shown to be essential to the future happiness and prosperity of the entire State."

A few months later William traveled to Baltimore to take on an apprenticeship with an antislavery paper called the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, owned by the antislavery crusader Benjamin Lundy. The North Carolina Swaims were mostly Quakers, and William had been taught to loathe the slave system; his cousin Moses had been president of the Manumission Society of North Carolina, of which he himself had been a member since 1824. Almost immediately William was put in charge of the *Genius*, as it was called, so complete was Lundy's satisfaction with his work.

When he was forced to return home six months later owing to his father's death, William was approached by the proprietor of a local newspaper called the *Patriot* with an offer to purchase it. He bought it and, at the age of 27, became (in his own words) "a bona fide member of the fourth estate."

Over the next six years the *Greensborough Patriot* became a respectable newspaper with genuine intelligence relayed from North Carolina cities and northern newspapers. What made the paper famous, though, was its editor's refusal to avoid subjects many of his readers felt would be better left alone—chief among them slavery. A majority in the South believed slavery should be ended; disagreement arose over how to achieve

William Swaim

that end. William saw that a consensus was forming that the subject should be treated with silence in the hope that it would go away.

"We belong not to that *outrageously* cautious few," he wrote, "who discuss the subject [of slavery], four hours at a heat, and then conclude by saying—'The question is too delicate for discussion!'"

William did not allow the *Patriot* to become a one-issue paper. He editorialized in favor of statewide public education, feeling as he did (and for understandable reasons, given his biography) that it was folly to let masses of poor farmers raise their children in ignorance. He aligned himself generally with the emerging Whig party and inveighed against Andrew Jackson's successful attempt to destroy the Second Bank of the United States, as well as Jackson's inhumane policies towards Indians and generally high-handed use of executive power.

But William's paper became best known for its editorial stance on slavery—so much so, indeed, that he frequently received threats. Once, a paper returned to his office with the words scrawled around the edges, "Reform your manner, friend, or faith keep your paper and your principles to yourself. Tar and feathers are plenty here, and any man who aims at abolition, under however specious disguise, is entitled to a coat of it . . . Look out." William pleaded with his readers time and again not to treat the subject of slavery as unmentionable: "So far as we have been able to understand the laws of the state," he wrote, "it has become an indictable offense to *dream* on the subject of slavery; and much more so to *write* or *speak* on a subject so exceedingly 'delicate.'" When a bill intended to prevent "seditious publications" from inciting insurrection among the black population was debated in the General Assembly, legislators spent an entire day debating whether the *Greensborough Patriot* would fall afoul of the law. The bill, which passed, made this crime punishable by one year in prison on the first offense; on the second, death "without benefit of clergy."

Six years into a literary career that seemed to be on the rise, tragedy struck. Somehow, on a trip to Winston Salem to gather intelligence for the *Patriot*, William received an "injury"—a biographical sketch published in 1866 leaves the matter unspecific. What he thought was a superficial wound became life-threatening, and William died in December 1835, leaving his wife, Abiah, and their two-year-old daughter.

William Swaim wrote nothing of permanent literary value. On the other hand, he changed a few minds, softened a few consciences, and prophesied the consequences of denying men their freedom.

Universal fame would be a marvelous thing. But to spread a little wisdom, then to be forgotten, would be all right, too. ♦

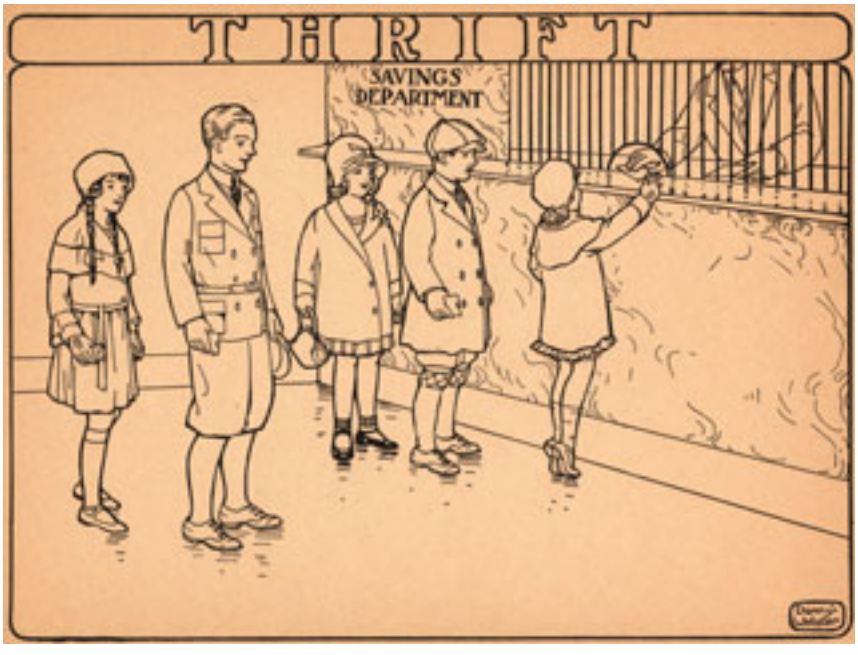
PHOTO COURTESY OF BARTON SWAIM

B&A

Half-Forgotten Virtue

'Charity thrives in the merger of love and thrift.'

BY ROBERT WHITCOMB



BLUE LANTERN STUDIO / CORBIS

The insatiable urge to acquire things, whether or not they are needed, has indeed reached epidemic proportions. This epidemic has caused severe social and cultural dislocations and warped the basic values of American society.

So writes Theodore Roosevelt Malloch. But "thrift" is an old-fashioned word. It's often used pejoratively, as a synonym for "cheapness" and narrowness, perhaps even bigotry. But true thrift is anything but. Rather, its practice suggests that the practitioner is taking the long and broad view of life and its obligations, and, indeed, of its most lasting satisfactions and pleasures. If there's anything we have learned in the financial crisis of the past couple of years, it's that we need a lot more thrift, under the broader heading of "prudence."

Thrift
Rebirth of a Forgotten Virtue
by Theodore Roosevelt Malloch
Encounter, 240 pp., $16.95

Malloch, an economist and management consultant, grounds his earnest and almost boyishly enthusiastic embrace of thrift and other tried and true virtues in a study of the philosophy, religion, and general history behind them going back to the Bible and to the Greeks. Ah, the word "virtue"—what a dinosaur! But Malloch infuses it with life. The heart of his appreciation here is for Adam Smith and other members of the Scottish Enlightenment. Malloch, himself proud to be partly of Calvinist Scottish heritage, expertly separates the ideal of thrift—acting with moderation and care to financially protect and improve ourselves and our families and so society—from that of greed and cheapness. He eloquently demonstrates how thrift—encompassing delayed gratification and careful investing (carefully considered risk-taking)—and its child, wealth, are essential to maintain a nation's long-term prosperity and philanthropy.

Charity thrives in the merger of love and thrift. Few can be generous for long without being thrifty. Being spendthrift causes poverty and suffering and stifles innovation and prosperity. Of course, this is obvious stuff—which we all too often ignore. But as Malloch notes, after Orwell, sometimes the obligation of intelligent and honorable people is to restate the obvious.

Along the way, he drives another nail in the coffin of the idea that Adam Smith was somehow a salesman of selfishness. In fact, the great, kindly, generous, and eccentric Scottish political economist was a brilliant promoter and explainer of the much-confirmed idea that the "invisible hand" of the market, when married to the ideals of the Judeo-Christian and classical traditions, over the years improves the moral and material wealth of society. As Malloch reminds us, Smith was, above all, a moralist and astute judge of human nature. Just read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.*

These Scottish principles and the idea of what Malloch (and others) call "spiritual capital" were central in the creation of modern prosperity and technological progress in the West, and eventually beyond, with the vast reduction of suffering that has accompanied them. Without the hard-work-and-thrift-created accumulation of saved funds and their investment in innovative enterprises, we'd still be working by candlelight.

With the explosion of a particularly extravagant species of greed (not to be confused with prudent and ethically informed *self-interest*) in the financial markets in recent decades, coupled with a sense of entitlement to government programs among special-interest groups (but little inclination to pay the bills for them as they come in), we have the present mess. Malloch's call for a return to the verities, while it may be corny to some people,

Robert Whitcomb, editorial page editor of the Providence Journal, *is the former financial editor of the* International Herald Tribune.

is much appreciated. Tell it to Wall Street—and Washington.

Some quibbles with Malloch, or his editors: One is that he does a bit too much throat-clearing in the early going—telling us what he's going to tell us several times. Another is that he sometimes wanders unduly far from the thrift theme to discuss traditional Western virtues in general and, for that matter, many pathologies plaguing Western economies and the wider civilization—he hits the Europeans as hard as the Americans—thus sometimes stretching himself too thin, and diluting the force of his argument for thrift.

Finally, *Thrift* lacks an index, which a work with so many historical and scholarly references needs. Still, it's generally smooth sailing as the erudite and often-entertaining Malloch presents a panorama of this too little discussed but essential part of Western Civilization, of which he is an unapologetic defender—but then why not? Western Civilization has done far more good for far more people than any of its rivals. He wisely does this, you find out early, from the standpoint of a political, social, and economic conservative but without embroiling himself in the details of current policy fights and without television-style touches. Thus *Thrift* should have a pretty good shelf life, even though Malloch does touch upon the current recession and the excesses that helped lead to it. (He was finishing this work as the economy started to slide toward the cliff last year.)

As a fiscal conservative myself—especially the part about paying as you go, etc.—I found that Malloch hit our current debt crisis spot-on. If only his views had more weight in Washington when the disastrous financial bailout schemes (wherein many perpetrators of the meltdown were richly rewarded) were cooked up in the last panicky months of the Bush administration and the first months of Obama's.

"States are notoriously bad at thrift because they appropriate [wealth] for political ends, rarely rescind bad decisions, and have no conception of public savings," notes Malloch. Right. But then, that's what the *public wants*: more and more programs with lower and lower taxes. He might have done better to have walloped the public more, which has shown itself all too ready to expect the sun, the moon, and the stars not only from their credit cards but from their governments as well. Fine, if they're willing to pay for them!

In my own family—which, like Malloch's, is partly of Scottish origin—I have seen what happens when forward-looking thrift is jettisoned for being hopelessly retro. We often made fun of my moderately affluent maternal grandmother, whose parents were Scots, for her financial wariness and "tightness," a characteristic unfortunately not shared by my feckless mother, who went through most of what she had. Thank God that my "cheap" grandmother, who suffered many tragedies early in her life that compounded her Scottish wariness, stashed some money in a couple of modest untouchable trusts, or at the end very little would have been left for my mother to live on in her many decades of illness. How thoughtfully Scottish of my grandmother! True thrift and true charity—which, as they say, begins at home.

I'm now going to send a copy of *Thrift* to my children. Hope it's not too late. Unfortunately, they live in Manhattan. ♦

B&A

The Human Factor

Understanding man's place in the ethical universe.

BY DAWN EDEN

Last June, in perhaps his least surprising move since entering the White House, President Obama disbanded his predecessor's Council on Bioethics. Throughout his campaign, Obama had derided George W. Bush's ethical concerns as a "war on science." Once he delivered his Inaugural Address—with its promise to "restore science to its rightful place and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality"—it was clear that President Bush's panel of experts were about as welcome as elbow patches on an Armani suit.

And so, when the order came down for the council's bioethicists to haul away their proverbial cardboard boxes, Gilbert Meilaender, who had served on the council since its inception, was prepared. He did the logical next thing, the academic equivalent of going to Walt Disney World: He wrote a book. In his preface to *Neither Beast Nor God*, Meilaender, a Lutheran who chairs the department of Christian Ethics at Valparaiso University, writes that the book "began to form itself" in his mind as he "puzzled over questions that arose" in the council. (Oddly, he doesn't mention that it is essentially a book-length expansion of his 2007 *New Atlantis* article "Human Dignity and Public Bioethics.") He wishes "to distinguish especially two different senses" with regard to appeals to dignity—"human dignity and personal dignity."

Neither Beast Nor God
The Dignity of the Human Person
by Gilbert Meilaender
Encounter, 180 pp., $21.95

Dawn Eden is the author of The Thrill of the Chaste: Finding Fulfillment While Keeping Your Clothes On.

The concept of human dignity is simply a placeholder for what is thought

> to be characteristically human—and to be honored and upheld because it is human. The concept of personal dignity is needed to make clear that, however different we may be in the degree to which we possess some of the characteristically human capacities, we are equal persons whose comparative "worth" cannot and ought not be assessed.

The choice of subject matter, while certainly relevant to contemporary concerns, is not exactly cutting-edge: Questions of human versus personal dignity are older than Plato's beard. Thomas Aquinas was particularly taken with them, providing compelling answers in exacting detail. But Meilaender's muse is Augustine; he prefers leisurely *meditatio* to systematic *quaestio*, relishing the opportunity to reflect upon some of the mysteries of being human.

Although his book is not, strictly speaking, a work of apologetics, Meilaender seems almost apologetic for allowing his faith to enter the discussion. Both at the beginning and end, he admits harboring "doubt" over whether personal dignity may be rightly comprehended on purely rational grounds. His self-consciousness is understandable, given the current philosophical atmosphere: On the one side is liberal academia's much noted hostility towards theism; on the other are natural-law philosophers such as his council colleague Robert P. George, who has argued that John Rawls was essentially correct in asserting that, in philosophical debates about public policy, "appeals to religious authority . . . are legitimate only where they are offered to buttress and motivate people to act on positions that are defensible without such appeals."

In that light, Meilaender's openness about his theism seems daring, and not a little quixotic. Confessing his faith gives him the freedom to begin his meditation by asserting that man is not merely a material creature, but a composite of mind, body, and spirit. He quotes Augustine: God "created man's nature as a kind of mean between angels and beasts." On that foundation, he builds a natural-law argument of humans as living in a state of "needy freedom," depending upon matter and metabolism for functional independence, each individual bearing a "centered identity" and purpose. In trying to parse out ancient philosophical concepts without adhering consistently to a familiar system like that of Aristotle or Aquinas, Meilaender is, to some degree, reinventing the wheel. But the truths he relates are timeless and deserve to be recalled to mind in an age when utilitarianism holds sway at the highest levels of political power.

The difficulty arises when the author attempts to reconcile his purposeful view of the human person with his opinions on issues that came before the president's council, such as human cloning, biotechnology, and caring for the ill. His confidence in human purpose and teleology strains under self-imposed pressure to prove (by way of arguments that would be acceptable to a George or Rawls disciple) that controversies should be resolved in a manner that respects both human and personal dignity.

Arguments based upon natural phenomena can never capture the essence of a human being whose origin and fulfillment is supernatural.

For example, in his only direct mention of abortion, he states that

> even bracketing entirely more general arguments about abortion[,] the ready acceptance of abortion of "defective" fetuses . . . violates the human dignity we share. It sets aside the fundamental bond of parents and children, inserting choice in the place of love and acceptance, and teaching us thereby that we must justify our continued existence, especially when we constitute a burden to others.

All true, and certainly miles away from any kind of philosophizing we may expect from a White House bioethicist between now and 2013. But the point Meilaender is making—that abortion creates a culture of wantedness, where children's lives are valuable not intrinsically but only relatively, according to whether their parents want them—is universally valid. It need not be qualified by the implication that it applies more so to eugenic abortions. Every abortion "sets aside the fundamental bond of parents and children, inserting choice in the place of love and acceptance." Every abortion teaches us "that we must justify our continued existence, especially when we constitute a burden to others." For what is an "unwanted" child but a human life considered to be "a burden to others"?

I don't know why Meilaender fails to make this logical leap. Perhaps, sensitive to accusations that pro-lifers wish to impose upon others their religiously based belief in fetal personhood, he wishes to isolate his criticism of abortion in an area where there may be common ground. But if that is the case, such timidity is unwarranted, for the core of his argument is not that abortion violates the human dignity of the unborn. It is that abortion violates the human dignity of *born* children, by denying or relativizing their intrinsic value. This is a point that can be argued effectively purely through reason, and it is essential if we, as a society, are to accomplish what Meilaender rightly deems "our moral task . . . to seek to recognize the person who is there."

Abortion is not the only pressing human-dignity issue given relatively short shrift in this book that has human dignity as its subject; the death penalty likewise merits little more than a passing mention. Having covered both topics at length in other writings, Meilaender here opts to avoid black-and-white issues in

favor of ones that enable him to distinguish between shades of gray. He casts an especially critical eye upon efforts to make man "more or less than human"—whether by creating perfect "designer babies," medicating away children's natural restlessness, or extending the maximum lifespan. Each of these modern obsessions reflects a need for us to "kindle or rekindle in ourselves a sense of wonder at our humanity, situated so precariously at the juncture of nature and spirit, body and soul."

> We ought not lose the capacity for gratitude. It is good that there should be creatures such as we are. Unless and until we can say that, we are condemned to an endless attempt to be something else—whether that something else seems to be "less" or "more."

Here, he has hit upon something vital, something that provides an answer to his wistful recognition that rational argument alone is insufficient to persuade others of the dignity of every human being. Arguments based upon natural phenomena can never capture the essence of a human being whose origin and fulfillment is supernatural. Meilaender knows this; indeed, he writes, "what an analysis of organic life taken alone does not enable us to see or say, a faith that seeks understanding may affirm." But he stops just short of the next step for the believer: The limits of rational argument are cause not for frustration but for the very gratitude Meilaender upholds. They force us into recognition of the needy aspect of our "needy freedom," without which we would never find our ultimate fulfillment.

In one sense, George and Rawls are not so far off: Those upholding Judeo-Christian values in a democratic society will always be required to explain God's reasons in light of man's reasons. But man's reasons are subject to alteration, just as his spirit is subject to conversion. In the age of Obama, more than ever, the power of the human-dignity advocate to change laws depends upon the efforts of the religious believer to change hearts. ♦

B&A

Only in America

The pictures, not the curatorial sermons, tell the tale.

BY MAUREEN MULLARKEY

'Watson and the Shark' by John Singleton Copley

BURSTEIN COLLECTION / CORBIS

This show could be subtitled "The Politics of Everyday Life." Above all else, it is a splendid walk through American painting from the colonial period to the beginning of World War I. It is also a demonstration of the mischief in ready-to-wear tutorials that serve the mind's eye of curators ahead of the art. When the history of an era and its works—the *story*—is told in terms of the values and preoccupations of the present, art becomes a stage for current creeds.

American Stories
Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915
Metropolitan Museum of Art
until January 24, 2010
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
February 28-May 23, 2010

Divided into four chronological groups, the exhibition is a lively ensemble of paintings that fit under the social historian's umbrella of race, class, and gender studies. This requires substantial omissions in the timespan under review. The artists excluded—Benjamin West, John Trumbull, Fitz Lane, Martin Johnson Heade, Washington Allston, William Harnett, John La Farge, John Peto, and luminaries of the Hudson River School—had their own tales to tell. Trumbull, for one, told of the Revolutionary War, an event strangely absent here.

Happily, the selections on view are inherently engaging. Aspects of the national experience—modes of seeing and feeling—materialize in shifting approaches to pictorial realism as it developed from the indigenous limner tradition, through the influence

Maureen Mullarkey is a painter who writes on art and culture.

of European modes, to the American Impressionists and their usurpers, the Ash Can painters. As the nation grew, so did opportunities for artists. The changing status of artists in the life of the nation threads through the storyline.

American realism's commitment to the concrete begins in portraiture, the one profitable venture in the colonies' infant art world. John Singleton Copley's penetrating portrait of *Paul Revere* (1768) testifies to tensions in the sitter at a fragile moment in pre-Revolutionary history. Revere, pensive and limpidly rendered, holds a silver teapot—a piquant symbol while fellow Bostonians were boycotting tea. The luminist vision begins here in Copley's crystalline surfaces that betray no hint of his hand.

Nearby, Gainsborough breathes warmly on Gilbert Stuart's more painterly 1790 portrait of Anna Foster at her embroidery. In his loose, sensuous glazing lies the difference made by training abroad. For storytelling purposes, adjacent commentary stretches the conventional female pose into a signal of Anna's want of a good match. However, both Copley and Stuart used the same pose to depict older, married women. Potential inheritance was the more likely lure on the marriage mart, not needle skills which cut across class lines.

Emphasis falls naturally on narrative paintings, those often neglected genre scenes that lost the art-historical sweepstakes but open the past to us with striking immediacy. From a Hogarthian vignette of sea captains carousing in a tavern to a slave ball, beautifully and unselfconsciously depicted, every selection rewards the time spent greeting it on its own merits. Men argue politics, women choose beaux, horse traders haggle, Indians gamble, trappers hunt, and languid ladies take tea. Human interest reigns, some of it drawn from life, some translated from literature. Sentimental potboilers, too, have their period charm.

A dedicated Linnaean, Charles Willson Peale painted *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* (1805-08) to commemorate an excavation he had led in the marshes of Newburgh, New York. It is a vivid illustration of the way swamps were drained at the turn of the 19th century: by a hand-cranked ferris wheel of circulating buckets. (Mrs. Peale looks on, standing amiably beside her two deceased predecessors.) Samuel Morse, another in the distinguished American fraternity of artist-scientists, imagined a gallery in the Louvre hung as it would be if Morse had his way. George Caleb Bingham's Missouri classicism is here. So are William Sidney Mount's gracious depictions of dealings between blacks and whites, the race of his subjects subordinate to compositional mathematics and measure. (Though count on the recitations to highlight race.)

Copley's tableau of horror, *Watson and the Shark* (1778), anticipated Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) and initiated a taste for the terrible that excited subsequent romantics. Commissioned by the controversial Watson himself in later life, it is a stirring example of art's abiding utility in renovating a man's public image.

Art that speaks for itself might say the wrong thing. So *The Music Lesson* (1870), a delightful sample of American Victoriana and if-music-be-the-food-of-love scene, comes with a dour reminder of dropping birth and marriage rates in the post-Civil War era. Might the drop be due to a generation of men slaughtered and women left destitute? No. The catalogue is pleased to note that the rise of independent women put paid to the notion that marriage is essential to civilization. The posted blurb adds a swipe at "women who cling to men for support." (An odd snub, given the curatorial class's own dependence on the kindness of museum benefactors and the grant system!)

Along the same wall, a contented couple and their two children take a rest on moving day in Henry Mosler's *Just Moved* (1870). Their good cheer draws frowns from a wall text that smirks at the word *breadwinner* (in scare quotes on the plaque) and casts doubt on the family as the haven it appears.

'The Swimming Hole' by Thomas Eakins

Military history is almost extinct in academia where curatorial sensibilities are shaped. Perhaps that accounts for the sparseness of Civil War paintings, despite the number of artists who treated it. The war appears largely as a backdrop for discussions of the era, some of them forced or fanciful. Winslow Homer's *Croquet Scene* (1866)—to pluck just one example—is a straightforward plein-air vignette built on similar

A.Y. OWEN / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

pictorial concerns as Monet's *Women in a Garden*, painted the same year. To break the stasis of a line of standing figures, Homer depicts the central one, a man, bending to help a woman place her ball on the green. It is a credible device, since hooped and crinolined women were hard-put to set the ball out of range of their own skirts. Unsmiling, the wall plaque knots the scene into an emblem of female "choices" and "opportunities" following the war.

The museum's public role expands here to guardian of mental health. Its audio guide enlists a clinical psychologist to reassure us—soothing violins audible in the background—that nothing unseemly is afoot in Seymour Guy's three radiant, post-Civil War gems of childhood, timeless in their veracity. In one, an older sister dramatizes a scary bedtime story for her brothers. In the second, a younger girl admires herself, baby chest exposed, playing dress-up. (Not to worry, croons our expert: The older girl means no harm; and the little one is quite normal.) The very presence of a clinician on tape raises the specter of disquiet where none exists.

Elsewhere on the guide, artist Eric Fischl, doyen of voyeuristic narratives, looks at Thomas Eakins's *Swimming* (1885), a manifesto for the exploration of human form in motion, and sees his own libidinal interests. Six young men skinny-dipping *must* be a "sexual allegory." Eakins's dog in the water telegraphs the sway of—but of course—"animal instincts."

Frederic Remington's iconic *Fight for the Water Hole* (1903) seems to have been hung, together with Charles Schreyvogel's 1899 cavalry scene, only to shoot down "masculine escapist fantasy." The wall text informs us that it is now fashionable to read Remington's work as an embodiment of xenophobia: "In such reading, the gunmen fighting Native Americans signify Anglo Saxons defending the United States against waves of immigrants." Such interpretation might have surprised those Army officers who invited Remington west to paint them in the field during the last Indian battles.

The exhibition closes with George Bellows's *Club Night* (1907), a gritty boxing scene designed to illumine rippling vectors of force between racked contestants in a darkened arena. Spectators' faces are rendered grotesque, even demonic, by pleasure in combat. Nothing here extols the subject; quite the opposite. By playing reading games, we could easily declare the painting a metaphor for the violence then occurring in the wake of the bloody Philippine-American war. Posted commentary plays Aunt Polly instead. It shakes a finger at masculine ways: "[Bellows glorifies] virile action more than quiet thought, and popular experience more than highbrow culture."

By now, we know who the quiet thinkers are.

In sum, *American Stories* is lovelier and more valuable than its supporting donnishness. When it comes to art, looking is the thing, not reading. The art historian Otto Pacht phrased it nicely: "In the beginning was the eye, not the word." ♦

B&A

Michael's Story

The nicest family yields the nicest movie.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The new high school football movie, *The Blind Side*, is visually drab, poorly paced, and has a near-terminal case of the cutes. Writer-director John Lee Hancock jauntily pours corny humor down your throat in a fashion that will work like Ipecac on the cynical. Given these failings, you might be inclined to wonder why *The Blind Side* is the surprise blockbuster of 2009; sparsely advertised before its premiere and made for a relatively modest $29 million, Hancock's movie is well on its way to grossing more than $200 million.

The Blind Side
Directed by John Lee Hancock

The reason is simple. *The Blind Side* may be the nicest movie I've ever seen; certainly, it's one of the only genuinely nice movies made in America in the past 20 years. Michael Lewis, the peerless journalist of sports and finance, put its true story at the center of the movie in his bestselling 2006 book, *The Blind Side*—an interesting if overlong discussion of the changing face of football that is entirely overshadowed by his astonishing account of the salvation of a Memphis kid named Michael Oher.

The movie sensibly dispenses with the changing face of football and wisely concentrates on Michael. Quiet, gentle, and profoundly guarded, he is the son of a crack-addict mother and a father he never knew. At the age of 17, Michael (the touching Quinton Aaron) is a scrounger who finds himself accommodation on couches and cots, feeds himself with leftover popcorn, and tries to leave as little trace of himself as possible. This isn't easy, as he is a gargantuan 6'7" and 350 pounds, but he is amazingly fleet of foot, as the coach at a well-to-do private school called the Wingate Christian Academy discovers when he watches Michael play basketball.

Having been passed from grade to grade in public school without skills, Michael does not know even how to begin to learn. His teachers discover that he is paying attention and is taking in the information they are imparting,

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

but they have no way of gauging his aptitude. One night, a wealthy school mom named Leigh Anne Tuohy (Sandra Bullock) spots Michael walking down the road, shivering in the same T-shirt and shorts he wears every day.

Leigh Anne orders him into the family car and takes him home to the family manse her husband's 85 fast-food franchises bought them. And then, slowly, and for no good reason other than that Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy are evidently two of the best people on this earth, they make Michael Oher into their third child.

The movie notes the Tuohy family's deep Christian faith, but it doesn't use that faith to explain the million kindnesses Leigh Anne and Sean and their two children, Collins and S.J., show toward Michael. Hancock does a skillful job of integrating Lewis's inspiring details of their acts of grace. When, after months of Michael's sleeping on their couch, Leigh Anne finally installs him in a guest bedroom with a futon, Michael says offhandedly that this is the first time he's ever had a bed.

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Michael also seems like one of nature's noblemen—polite, neat, and thoughtful. But it is Leigh Anne who is the star of the story, and Sandra Bullock takes this glorious part and runs with it in a hugely enjoyable turn as a smart, sassy, flinty, determined, and entirely selfless steel magnolia. For the past few years, Bullock seemed like she was on her way to leading-lady oblivion in the manner of her fellow late-'90s winsomette, Meg Ryan. But suddenly, at age 45, she is contending with Meryl Streep (age 60) as the leading box-office draw in America. Like Streep, who is a much greater actress, Bullock seems to have found a new looseness and zing in her performing, and audiences can't get enough of it: Bullock's *The Proposal* came out of nowhere in June to earn $160 million.

The only real injustice here is that Hancock has tilted the story of Michael's reclamation entirely toward Leigh Anne and turned Sean Tuohy into a supporting player. In Lewis's account, Sean is every bit Leigh Anne's heroic equal, though she is the person who finds the way into Michael's emotional confidence. (The country singer Tim McGraw, who has delivered fiery and stunning supporting performances in *Friday Night Lights* and *The Kingdom*, is entirely lovable and surprisingly soft here.)

A crucial part of the Michael Oher story, both in the book and the movie, has to do with the inability of the world around him and the Tuohys to believe people would act in this manner simply out of the goodness of their hearts. The NCAA assumes that the Tuohys, who met at the University of Mississippi, and who are devoted to the school, have taken Michael on because they are boosters illicitly directing goods Michael's way. But as Lewis writes, "If the Tuohys were Ole Miss boosters—and they most certainly were—they had violated the letter of every NCAA rule ever written. They'd given Michael more than food, clothing, and shelter. They'd given him a life."

Michael Lewis is as cool-eyed a writer as there is, as his accounts of Wall Street perfidy demonstrate; but as this passage indicates, even he is reduced to straight-on, unironic deep sentiment in describing the nobility of this family. In an afterword to the paperback edition, Lewis says that "the initial reactions to this book were as bizarre and self-contradictory as any I've experienced as a writer," in particular when "a few reviewers" read it as a tale of how

> white people only dealt with black people in order to exploit them. That Michael Oher was not dead, or in jail, or living on the Memphis streets, but alive and well and playing football for Ole Miss, was, to them, a species of tragedy. A tragedy with a happy ending.

Unsurprisingly, the same theme was picked up by reviewers of the film as well, with A.O. Scott of the *New York Times* leading the way in dismissively describing *The Blind Side* as the story of a "wealthy, white Southern family" that "adopts a poor black teenager, cultivating his athletic gifts and providing him with the comfort and safety of a happy, loving home." Scott finds appalling how Michael's "pre-Tuohy life is a flurry of flashbacks and vague stories meant—like that drug dealer and Michael's drug-addicted mother, who appears on screen briefly—to conjure a world of violence, dysfunction and despair."

Except that *was* Michael Oher's story, as Lewis's book makes clear in far greater and more dismaying detail than Hancock's movie. That *is* the world from which Michael Oher was rescued. The horror of it only makes the kindness the Tuohys show—kindness that is anything but "impulsive," as Scott describes it, given that it took place over many years and is evidently still taking place—all the more staggering in its beneficence.

Scott is right about one thing. *The Blind Side* is not a very good movie. But it tells a great, and great-souled, story, and how often do you get one of those? ♦

"Some analysts have speculated that the [Nobel Peace] prize could give Obama additional clout as he forms a new strategy for the war in Afghanistan and attempts to engage Iran and North Korea."
—CNN.com, December 9, 2009

New York

THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2010

PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED MEDAL HAS NO EFFECT ON WORLD CRISES

President Wears Nobel Prize on Historic Trip, in Shower

By JEFF ZELENY

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama, who returned this week from his historic 10-day visit to Afghanistan, Iran, and North Korea, was unable to make progress on any front despite wearing his Nobel Peace Prize rather prominently around his neck.

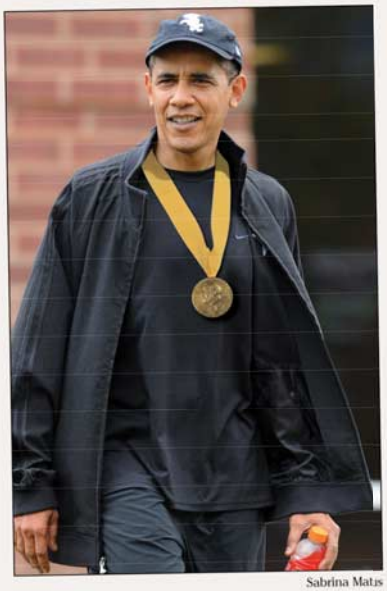
According to White House sources, the president seemed puzzled that merely wearing the prestigious prize did not persuade foreign leaders to do as he pleased. "We were all certain that the sheer gleam of the medal would have a hypnotic effect on Hamid Karzai, Kim Jong-Il, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad," said one adviser. He added, "Aside from a few formalities, we really didn't have anything else prepared. We thought the medal would do the work for us."

Speaking at Tehran University, for example, President Obama opened his address by saying, "It feels like the weight of the world is on my shoulders. Or it could be the weight of this Nobel Peace Prize, made of both 18- and 24-carat gold. See how it shines in the light? You are getting very sleepy."

During a dinner in Kabul, when Mr. Karzai asked about the U.S. timetable for troop withdrawal, the president replied, "I noticed that when you asked me this crucial question, you were staring directly at my Nobel Peace Prize. Keep staring as I explain our one-year commitment to getting the job done." But in Pyongyang, when Kim Jong-Il said he was willing to abandon his nuclear ambitions for a closer inspection of the medallion, Mr. Obama turned away, explaining, "this medal is very delicate and I wouldn't want you to accidentally break it. Mustn't hurt the precious."

At a press conference yesterday, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs was bombarded by questions about the president's growing obsession with his medal and allegations that he even wears it in the shower. Mr. Gibbs insisted the president "simply forgot it was on him because he has the weight of the world on his shoulders—a weight quite similar to

Continued on Page A14



Sabrina Matis

Asked about his prize medal, President Obama would only say, "We wants it, we needs it. Must have the precious."

Tiger Woods Buys TMZ.com

Scandal Ends With 42nd—and Final—Mistress

By RAYMOND