the weekly
Standard

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Happy Birthday, Mr. President

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Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office, 1982

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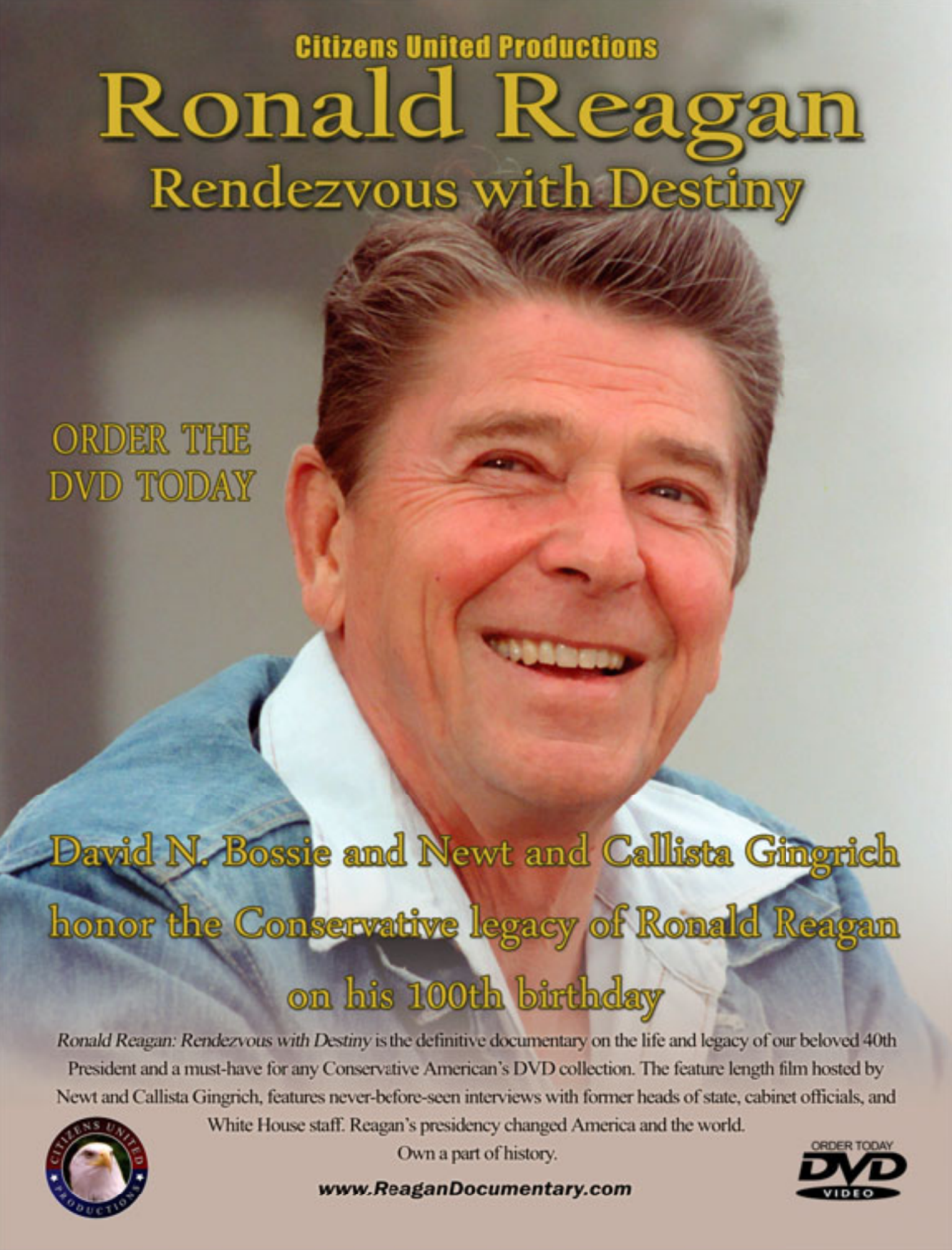
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Contents

February 7, 2011 • Volume 16, Number 20

Articles

Features

Books & Arts

COVER: THE RONALD REAGAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

At Least He Didn't Bow

In Tunisia, a street vendor set himself on fire, antigovernment protests followed, and Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled the country. In Egypt, liberal opposition groups chanted "Freedom, Freedom" in rallies beginning January 25, and by week's end Egypt's authoritarian president Hosni Mubarak was wondering whether his 30-year reign was about to come to an end. Even in Yemen, protesters took to the streets seeking to destabilize the 20-year-old regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. At times recently, it has seemed as if the entire Arab world churned with aspirations of democracy.

There was a day when the United States would have been on the side of the protesters, when an American leader would have used his position to strengthen and support those willing to fight and die for their freedom and the ability to elect their own leaders. But while President Obama made a passing reference to Tunisia in his State of the Union, he did not mention Egypt.

Ambassador Robert Ford (middle) presenting his credentials to Bashar Assad (the tall one on the left). SANA

That's disappointing. But what took place in Damascus on January 27 is a disgrace. As the Arab world tilted toward democracy, the Obama administration was paying its respects to a dictator. The new U.S. Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, presented his credentials to Syrian dictator—and strong supporter of terrorism—Bashar Assad.

Wonder if that's a trapdoor under the circular red carpet. ♦

Environmental Criminals

Believe it or not, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency maintains a website for "EPA Fugitives" charged with "environmental crimes." Among their current most wanted, for instance, are Carlos and Alessandro Giordano, a father and son team on the lam since 2003.

Their crime? They were caught trying to sell Alfa Romeo automobiles imported from Italy that "did not meet the United States emissions standards." According to a former assistant U.S. attorney on the case, "they were importing cars that were designed for the European market, which had less stringent safety and air pollution controls." They've fled to Italy.

Now consider the EPA's own supposedly stringent regulatory process. On October 13, the EPA announced a waiver from its current regulation, which caps ethanol content in gasoline at 10 percent; the waiver would allow 15 percent ethanol (so-called e-15) for cars of model year 2007 and newer. (This is basically a political favor to subsidized ethanol producers and the corn growers who supply them; as tends to happen with federal subsidies, they're making more ethanol than the market will bear.)

The EPA, however, had not completed the required tests to issue this waiver; moreover, the agency chose to ignore other testing, particularly the extensive, still-ongoing auto and oil industry research program on the potential for ethanol to harm engine durability. Then on January 21, the EPA further expanded that waiver to cars of model years 2001-2006, and again did so without complete testing.

The EPA's decision was supposed to be based on testing of 16 different sample engines by the Coordinating Research Council, a nonprofit group with funding from the Department of Energy, to see if e-15 would be suitable for the U.S. auto fleet. When the waiver was issued on October 13, nine of the 16 tests were at best incomplete: Five of the engines had significant problems and were scheduled for retesting and four oth-

ers had yet to be completed. DOE unexpectedly pulled their funding last summer—perhaps not wanting to be an accomplice to the EPA's decision.

What is the relative severity of these crimes against nature? The Giordanos tried to sell a total of two dozen cars in California with "less stringent" emissions controls. The EPA is trying to change the regulations for ethanol—with incomplete or negative testing—that could impact emissions on about 150 million automotive engines made between 2001 and 2010. Not to mention there are 75 million engines models older than 2001 still on the roads. The EPA was not even considering including them in a waiver because they probably would not burn e-15 cleanly or safely. If the new formula is approved, those with older engines may have difficulty finding appropriate fuel.

The EPA is facing a civil suit in the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals filed by various food, agriculture, engine manufacturing, and energy groups for coming to a decision "prior to the completion of thorough testing to ensure the safety, performance and environmental impacts of the new fuel for consumers." They deserve a place on their own most wanted list. ♦

Dr. Moseley Braun, We Presume

Joining Richard "I Served in Vietnam" Blumenthal and Hillary "Sniper Fire" Clinton in beyond-the-pale résumé embellishment is Chicago mayoral candidate Carol Moseley Braun. The erstwhile U.S. senator and 2004 Democratic presidential candidate was on a Chicago radio show on January 12 when she listed among her qualifications for office her "advanced degrees from Harvard."

Moseley Braun, a former American ambassador to New Zealand, never earned any degrees from Harvard. She did, in fact, graduate from the University of Illinois at Chicago and earned a law degree from the University of Chicago.

According to the *Harvard Crimson*, however, Moseley Braun's only connection to Harvard was as a visiting fellow to the school's Institute of Politics in 2007, a post described on its website as a "short-term fellowship [that] periodically brings distinguished veterans of public life to Harvard for a short stay." The Moseley Braun campaign later said its candidate "misspoke." ♦

Gil Meche, Class Act

The Scrapbook has a new hero. Kansas City Royals pitcher Gil Meche has announced his retirement, despite being in the fourth year of a five-year contract that would have paid him an additional $12 million. But the 32-year-old pitcher wasn't satisfied with his own performance (he went 0-5 in nine starts for the last place Royals in 2010 last year).

"When I signed my contract, my main goal was to earn it," Meche told the *New York Times* last week. "Once I started to realize I wasn't earning my money, I felt bad. I was making a crazy amount of money for not even pitching. Honestly, I didn't feel like I deserved it. I didn't want to have those feelings again."

No reaction yet from the MLB Players Association. Though we can't imagine that union or any other will be happy to hear about someone who felt bad for making a crazy amount of money while not working. ♦

Annals of Academe

An important new scientific finding, as reported by the University of Texas at Austin:

> Men are more than twice as likely to continue dating a girlfriend who has cheated on them with another woman than one who has cheated with another man, according to new research from a University of Texas at Austin psychologist. Women show the opposite pattern. They are more likely to continue dating a man who has had a heterosexual affair than one who has had a homosexual affair. The study, published last month in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, provides new insight . . .

Of the provision of new insights, there is no end. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"The president won't give his annual State of the Union address until later tonight, but in an important way, the speech has already worked. For the past week or so, news report after news report has dutifully relayed . . ." (Ezra Klein, washingtonpost.com, January 25). ♦

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Love in the Time of Cell Phones

Not so long ago, I mentioned that I didn't own a cell phone. "But don't you have, like, a real job?" That's what people always say. Yes is the answer; full-time employment as an editor and a writer seems real to me, at least.

"Don't you have kids?" is the next question. Yes again, and the kids are real, too. But for the hour or so a day when I am not within arm's reach of an old-fashioned landline, they somehow get by without me. With only a mom and teachers and a nanny and a small neighborhood of people who know them on sight, how do they do it? I don't know.

My message, in case you missed it, is this: The world turns without me, and I don't mind saying so.

Now, it's possible to be proud of one's insignificance, and I was definitely laying it on a bit thick that day.

Still, it's true that I don't like cell phones. I don't like their showiness. I don't like the guy at my regular coffee shop who's always there talking real estate as if he's Donald Trump. I don't like the girl on the Metro who's puffed up with rage as she treats everyone in earshot to a lipsmacking, hand-on-the-hip account of exactly what he did and he said and that whore and mm-hmm and nuh-unh.

I don't like the social signaling of cell phones. They say, "I am needed elsewhere, unlike you." Now, maybe that last part isn't intended, but it's an accurate reflection of the way the first part of the signal is received, at least by me.

At red lights, I watch the passing traffic and tally the drivers who are talking on cell phones. Sometimes I count seven or eight in a row talking away just as if they weren't traveling 40, 50 miles an hour in rolling two-ton metal missiles.

I know. I'm a little round the bend on this subject. And now my position has become rather awkward. See, I just got a BlackBerry, which of course has a cell phone.

DAVID CLARK

How to explain? First my wife Cynthia insisted I begin carrying her extra cell phone. It was not so bad—pretty much like not having a cell phone, since only Cynthia ever called me on it and not that often. After a few days I gave the number to my grateful supervisor and the five people in my office.

Well, then Cynthia—after changing jobs and surrendering a BlackBerry—took her cell phone back. Easy come, easy go, I thought. Nothing about my life changed as a result. Until one afternoon I was not at my desk when my boss had a question.

Unable to find me, she called my cell phone number, and my wife answered. I don't know for a fact that they used the opportunity to collude against me, but let's just say that if I had really wished to avoid cell phones then it was a poor idea to bring together the only two people in the world who want me to be reachable at all times. Soon afterwards, my boss gave me a BlackBerry to carry around.

For a few weeks, however, I was entirely without a cell phone, which became an issue when I had to leave town for a business trip. Cynthia asked me to take her one cell phone with me so we could stay in touch. I agreed and took her phone with me the day of my departure. But around noon, my new BlackBerry arrived.

I sent Cyn an email saying we should meet so I could return her phone. She responded with a message to call her back so we could arrange an exact time to rendezvous outside my office building as she drove home from work. I called back, but there was no answer. I emailed and heard nothing.

Around the time I thought she might drive by, I went outside and waited for her on the sidewalk, thinking, Oh, if only she had her phone I could call to confirm that I would be here, but then if she had her phone we wouldn't need to meet.

She didn't come by. I sent her a message saying I would drop her phone at her office on my way to the airport. Typing this on my new BlackBerry took about 10 minutes as I struggled to land my thumbs on the miniature keys. Then I signed off, the moment suddenly poignant with the failure of our plan to connect so we might stay in touch. "I love you," I wrote, "more than I can type."

David Skinner

WHO ARE THE 9.2 MILLION AMERICANS WHOSE JOBS ARE SUPPORTED BY THE OIL & NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY?

i'm one

Adam C.
Field Engineer

Adam is a field engineer for an oil and natural gas company. He is one of 2.1 million Americans working directly in a job that brings you the oil and natural gas you depend on. But that's only part of the story. The industry's $1 trillion lift to the U.S. economy each year actually supports another 7.1 million jobs in other sectors, from logistics to manufacturing to research to retail. All in all, that's real fuel for America's recovery.

Let's discuss the state of American energy at **EnergyTomorrow.org**

Source: *The Economic Impacts of the Oil and Natural Gas Industry on the U.S. Economy*, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, September 2009 (Sponsored by API)

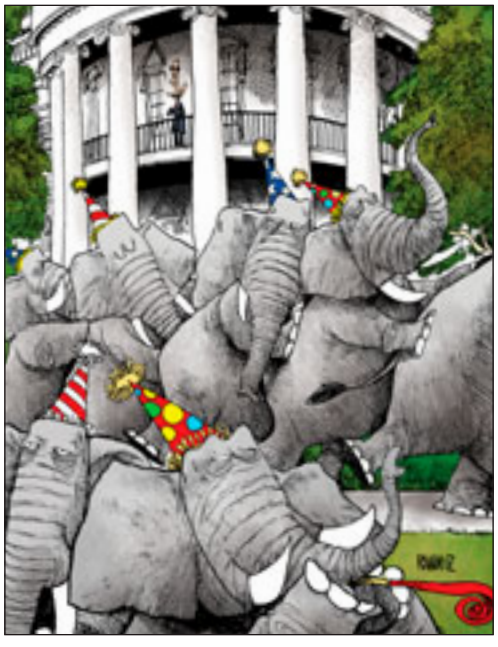
the weekly Standard

To Boldly Go Where No Party Has Gone Before…

After watching the State of the Union address, we've finally figured out which position President Obama could play for the Steelers on Super Bowl Sunday. He'd make a great punter.

Decades of overspending and overpromising by the federal government, combined with a plunge in tax revenues, are pushing America to the brink of fiscal crisis. Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, and interest on the national debt are gobbling up the gross domestic product. The aging Baby Boomers, meanwhile, are waiting in the wings.

President Obama knows the nature and extent of the crisis. His own debt commission reported in December, "If the U.S. does not put its house in order, the reckoning will be sure and the devastation severe." And the debt commission offered plenty of intriguing ways to address the problem. Its plans to overhaul the tax code and Social Security were especially bold. Commissioners Paul Ryan and Alice Rivlin, moreover, delivered their own proposal to turn Medicare into a sustainable defined-contribution system. And a separate presidential commission, led by Paul Volcker, outlined a corporate tax reform that would lower rates while closing loopholes.



Entitlements. The final frontier…

Obama could have adopted any of these policies as his own. He could have used the State of the Union to challenge Republicans to work with him on bringing the government's finances into balance while encouraging economic growth. He could have seized the deficit-hawk middle ground and possibly split the GOP in the process. Instead, he punted. He left it up to Republicans to take the ball and run.

Yes, the State of the Union did include a few airy nostrums about reforming Social Security, Medicare, and the corporate tax code. But these shout-outs arrived detail-free and late in the speech, lost amidst pabulum about alternative energy and high-speed rail. The president spoke as though it were 1995 and the economy were strong and growing stronger. But the greatest challenge to America doesn't come from South Korean high-speed Internet. It comes from a ballooning welfare state that threatens our solvency—to say nothing of burdening our dynamic and entrepreneurial economy.

The day after the president's speech, for example, the Congressional Budget Office projected that the fiscal year 2011 deficit will be $1.5 trillion. The deficit hasn't been less than $1 trillion since 2008. This accumulation of debt is simply unsustainable. The interest payments alone will crowd out spending on defense and other public goods. The only ways to pay off the debt will be inflation or tax increases or both—to the detriment of the economy. And while the bond markets may be accommodating at the moment, America can't count on low interest rates forever. Either the market will impose spending discipline on our government or we will. Whom do you want it to be?

It would be ridiculous for Republicans in Congress, having won an election on issues of government spending, to turn tail on entitlement reform in 2011. No one's saying the politics of overhauling major social programs will be easy. But there's never been a better time to take on this considerable challenge.

The drama of the financial crisis and Great Recession have put people in the mood to take fiscal issues seriously. The pervasive sense that the government is out of control and America could therefore be going into decline helped create the Tea Party movement and spur the Republican revival. Republicans won big despite months of Democratic demagoguery on entitlements. The rise to national prominence of New Jersey governor Chris Christie shows

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

that Americans want to be treated like adults. The experience of Christie and Indiana governor Mitch Daniels also suggests that you can maintain popularity while overhauling government finances.

It's obvious that implementing big changes to entitlement programs will require presidential support. But just because the president is reluctant doesn't mean Republicans can't persuade him to change his mind. They need to make a good faith effort to do so, and then take their case to the voters. For the Republicans to use the president's inaction to justify inaction of their own would be not only cowardly but politically foolish.

By laying out the GOP case for entitlement reform this year, Republicans in Congress would show themselves to be the "adult" party. They'd force 2012 GOP candidates to be serious. They might even find bipartisan support for changes sooner rather than later. They'd also prove to the voters that they know why they were sent to Washington. What would it mean, after all, if the Tea Partying GOP House shied away from attempting to address federal spending in all its particulars—discretionary and nondiscretionary?

Why, it would mean failure.

—Matthew Continetti

Can Obama Pull a Clinton?

So the much-anticipated pivot to the center in the State of the Union speech has happened. As pivots go, President Obama's wasn't the most elegant—there were no triple lutzes or extended camel spins—but he didn't fall on his face either. It seems clear that, for the next two years at least, President Obama is going to give us a break from claims of transforming America, à la FDR, and will work on triangulating to stay in office, à la Bill Clinton. The question is, can Obama pull a Clinton?

We're skeptical.

First, Clinton's pivot in 1995 was all well and good, but the reason he was reelected in 1996 was that the economy was growing at more than 4 percent, and unemployment on Election Day was 5.4 percent. The budget deficit was lower than it had been when Clinton took office. His landmark piece of economic legislation, the 1993 budget—passed despite Republican opposition—seemed more or less vindicated by events.

Will the real world be as friendly to the incumbent president in November 2012? It's doubtful. Moreover, to the degree the economy is coming back, will Obama's stimulus—passed despite Republican opposition—get the credit? Or will it be his move to the center and his acceptance of the Bush tax rates that will seem to have worked? It's more likely to be the latter, which will be of less electoral utility to Obama.

Second, Clinton could walk away from his unpopular health care plan after it died in Congress in 1994. Obama, on the other hand, is stuck with implementing and defending his. The most important piece of domestic legislation Clinton had signed on Election Day, welfare reform, was conservative. The most important law Obama will have signed is Obamacare. The contrast speaks for itself.

Third, the Republicans controlled both houses of Congress in 1996, not just the House. In 2012, it will be harder for the incumbent president to run for reelection as a needed check on possibly unbridled GOP rule. And Newt Gingrich is scarier than John Boehner.

Fourth, consider the five presidential elections since the end of the Cold War. In 1992, Democrats got to run against an exhausted Bush administration seeking a fourth straight White House term for its party—and Clinton still won by just five points. In 1996 and 2000, the incumbent president and vice president, presiding over a time of peace and prosperity, received 49 percent and 48 percent of the vote respectively. In 2004, despite the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the Democratic challenger to George W. Bush couldn't top 48 percent. And in 2008, even with the financial meltdown, the deftness of the Obama campaign, and the McCain-Palin team's problems, Barack Obama still received only 53 percent of the vote.

Underlying support for the Democratic party, in other words, isn't what it was 50 years ago. Now, it's also true that the strength of the Bush-Dole-Bush-McCain Republicans has been limited. So 2012 starts out as a pretty even playing field.

What's more, how likely is it that Obama will carry states in 2012 that he failed to win in 2008? We'd bet against that. We'd bet, further, that Obama is very likely to lose three states he carried in 2008—Virginia, North Carolina, and Indiana. And if that happens, Republicans only need also to pick up Florida, Ohio, and either Iowa or Wisconsin to win the presidency. This seems doable—or at least plausible.

So Republicans shouldn't be too intimidated by Obama's semi-convincing move to the center. It's not as if Obama's center is a vital one, or even a coherent one. It's just a slightly better position than where he's been on the left.

Of course, much will depend on the caliber of the GOP ticket. It would be good if that ticket were superior to—or at least more exciting and inspiring than—the past five. Ryan-Rubio or Christie-Rubio, anyone?

—William Kristol

The Midwesterner

The roots of Ronald Reagan.

BY FRED BARNES

Dixon, Illinois

"If I'd gotten the job I wanted at Montgomery Ward, I suppose I would never have left Illinois." That's the first sentence in Ronald Reagan's autobiography, *An American Life*. It was 1932, the Depression gripped the country, and Reagan had returned to Dixon (working over the summer as a lifeguard) after graduating from Eureka College, 100 miles away.

Montgomery Ward was opening a store in Dixon, a town of roughly 10,000, and wanted a local athlete to run its sporting goods department. Reagan, having played football at Dixon High School and Eureka, figured he was perfect for the job. He didn't get it, and instead went into radio in Iowa, then movies in Hollywood, and . . . you know the rest.

Reagan became a Westerner, or at least that was his image, which often depicted him on horseback. In his second movie, *Sergeant Murphy*, he was a cavalry trooper (Sgt. Murphy was his horse). He starred in Westerns in the 1940s and 1950s before hosting the television show *Death Valley Days*. His statue in Rapid City, South Dakota, has him in a cowboy hat and Western gear. Even in Dixon, Reagan's boyhood home, he's riding a horse in one of the town's two statues of him.

But Reagan the Westerner was mostly for show. The more we learn about him, the more we realize his values, his outlook on life, his embrace of leadership, his political style, and, to a significant extent, his political ideology were shaped by the first 26 years of his life in Illinois hamlets like Dixon, Tampico, and Eureka. Reagan was, first and foremost, a small-town Midwesterner at heart.

"There wouldn't have been a President Reagan without his upbringing in the Midwest," says Craig Shirley, who's written books about Reagan's presidential campaigns in 1976 and 1980. Somewhere around 1,000 books about Reagan have been published, and several of his biographers, especially Lou Cannon and Anne Edwards, have emphasized the Midwestern influence. The academic community, however, has been slow to catch on.

At the end of the rainbow: Reagan's birthplace in Tampico, Illinois

For a "Reagan and the Midwest" seminar in January, Eureka College put out a call for scholarly papers on the subject. The response was underwhelming. Only seven academics submitted proposals. All seven were accepted, and the authors discussed them at the Eureka seminar. One dealt, interestingly enough, with Reagan's experience at Eureka. "I don't think it is stretching things to say that Eureka made Reagan and, in turn, Reagan made Eureka," wrote James H. Capshew of Indiana University.

It is stretching things, but it's also true that Eureka was enormously important to Reagan. He visited the school a dozen times after graduating, served on the board of trustees for 18 years, and was a major donor. "Everything that has been good in my life began here," Reagan said at the Eureka commencement in 1982. It was at Eureka that, as a freshman, he spoke in support of a student strike ("When I walked off the stage that night, my life had changed," Reagan wrote in his autobiography) and that he cultivated the love of theatrics and acting that his mother had instilled in him.

Eureka, in turn, has magnified its association with Reagan, adopting the task of promoting the "Reagan legacy" through a Reagan Forward initiative. The school's president, David Arnold, was instrumental in creating the Ronald W. Reagan Society in 2008, run by John Morris of nearby Peoria, a Reagan admirer but not a Eureka grad. Morris attended George Washington University partly because it's three blocks from the White House, where he worked as a volunteer during Reagan's final year in office.

At the Reagan conference, Devan Bissonette of Delta College in Michigan noted that "part of [Reagan's] remoteness dated back to his childhood" in the Midwest. Reagan certainly thought so. He was nine when he moved to Dixon and "a little slow in making really close friends," he wrote.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Ronald Reagan with his mother Nelle at the Dixon Injun Summer Days in Dixon, Illinois, 1950

RONALD REAGAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

"In some ways, I think this reluctance to get close to people never left me completely. . . . I've been inclined to hold back a little of myself, reserving it for myself."

The most ambitious paper was delivered by Jon Peterson of Ohio University. "Reagan's anticommunist pronouncements, which shook the Cold War world, were rooted in ideas of good and evil that came from his mother and his Midwest upbringing," he wrote. This is a new assertion about Reagan, so far as I know, and one worth taking seriously.

The papers were delivered during the first day of the conference. The second was devoted to a visit to Tampico, where Reagan was born 100 years ago, and Dixon, his home from 1920 to 1932. The Reagan sites in those towns are modest, homespun, charming, and operated by volunteers. No doubt they have a greater impact on visitors than an academic paper or college seminar. And they're more poignant than the vast Reagan Library and Museum in California, which houses Air Force One. "It's like going to visit Abraham Lincoln's log cabin," Morris says.

In Tampico, population 800, one can visit the apartment the Reagans rented above the First National Bank, including the bedroom in which Ronald Reagan was born. The museum next door sells (for $3.50) a postcard with a photo of a rainbow that ends on the Reagan birthplace. Reagan returned to Tampico in 1976 but couldn't get in the apartment. It was rented and the door was locked. Now it's owned by a Chicago lawyer, a Democrat, and open to the public.

In Dixon, the National Park Service offered to take over the two-story Reagan home, also rented, and operate it. The answer was no. "We decided Mr. Reagan would roll over in his grave if the park district owned his home," the curator told me.

Tampico, Dixon, Eureka, and 10 other towns are connected by the Reagan Trail, which consists of roads that Reagan must have traveled while growing up. The trail was the dream of Eureka mayor Joe Serangeli, who lobbied for years to have it officially designated. The Illinois legislature finally went along in 1999.

So what if Reagan had gotten that job at Montgomery Ward in 1932? Might he have wound up as store manager and perhaps mayor of Dixon? Maybe, but I doubt it. Most of what shaped his life in the Midwest, including the sense of humor and lively storytelling he learned from his father, propelled him to greater things, farther from home. And he achieved them. ♦

Downeast Is Red

The revival of the Maine GOP.

BY CONRAD KIECHEL

New Sharon, Maine

The Top of the Hill Grill here is 65 miles away from the coastal summering hole and old-money hangout of Boothbay Harbor—and a world apart. Stop by for breakfast, and you'll be surrounded by guys in blaze orange, retired couples who get their blueberry muffins toasted, and an oil burner repairman who moonlights as the Karl Rove of the Maine GOP. I'm here a few weeks after the November elections to find the remarkable story behind an improbable headline in the *New York Times*: "Overnight, Maine Turns Red." For the first time since 1964, Maine Republicans captured the governorship, the senate, and the house—a trifecta made possible, boasts GOP mastermind Charlie Webster as he chews on his ham and cheese omelet, because "we represent the working people" and were able to convince voters of this.

Sixty years ago, Maine and New Hampshire shared more than a border and their Yankee heritage. Their per-capita income was similar, and so was state government spending as a share of the state's economy. But, starting with Maine's decision to impose a sales tax in 1951, two roads diverged in a fiscal wood. In the decades since, the Granite State has not imposed a personal income or sales tax, while Maine has taken the road of higher taxes and greater regulation. And that has made all the difference for the two states' economies.

By 2009, the share of personal income that Maine residents receive from all government sources was over 36 percent; for New Hampshire, the figure was only 24 percent. As Tarren Bragdon, the baby-faced CEO of the free-market Maine Heritage Policy Center, explains, "Every time there was an opportunity to choose between self-sufficiency and dependence, the state chose dependence. And at the same time you had an increasing social safety net, you had increased hostility toward small business and entrepreneurs."

The results include: no private job growth in a decade, a ranking by *Forbes* as America's least business-friendly state, and an increase in welfare dependence such that nearly one of three Mainers receives some form of government assistance. As newly inaugurated governor Paul LePage sums up the preconditions for the GOP victory: "High taxes, unreasonable regulation, high unemployment . . . and the stars were aligned."

By 2009, the share of personal income that Maine residents receive from all government sources was over 36 percent; for neighboring New Hampshire, the figure was only 24 percent.

A few political groundswells helped move those stars into position. In 2006, antitax forces led by longtime citizen activist Mary Adams, a grandmotherly, northwoods Grover Norquist, succeeded in placing a Taxpayer Bill of Rights initiative before Maine voters. The proposal would have capped any increase in state and local government spending by the amount of inflation and population growth unless voters approved it directly.

The initiative went down to defeat—290,000 votes to 247,000—with considerable spending by special interest groups that opposed it. But the message of limiting government was heard—a tocsin sounded again when Bragdon's think tank sponsored a second, also unsuccessful vote on a Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

Then in June 2009, the Democratic legislature passed a package of tax changes that would have lowered the top income tax rate from 8.5 percent to 6.5 percent, while creating 102 new taxes, chiefly on services, such as auto repair and dog grooming.

It sounded to some like a reasonable reform; even the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page weighed in favorably. But GOP state chairman Charlie Webster saw an opening wide enough to drive his 1997 Ford pickup through. Webster saw the new taxes as essentially a tax on labor and working people. The exchange amounted to "trading a temporary cut in income tax for permanent addition of new taxes." In Maine, acts of the legislature can be forced to a referendum if opponents are able to garner enough signatures. "We got 70,000 signatures in 70 days," Webster says. The tax package would be put to a statewide vote in June 2010—the same day as the party primaries.

Webster put his pedal to the metal. Driving around the state, he set about the task of recruiting Republicans to contest each of the state's 186 legislative districts. He wanted hairdressers, plumbers, homemakers. "We looked at some who had no experience in elective office but were leaders in the community." Webster recruited a half-dozen small business candidates by telling them the new taxes would put them out of business. "We would say, 'This is where we are, this is where we're going,' and ask if they were happy with that."

One of the candidates who definitely wasn't happy was Amy Volk, a 40-year-old homemaker and small business owner in the southern Maine town of Scarborough. Amy and her husband Derek had watched with dismay as businesses left Maine. To them, the state government's bias

Conrad Kiechel is a Washington-based writer and partner at OnPoint Strategies.

against business was symbolized by Senate president Libby Mitchell's proposal to guarantee five days of paid sick leave for employees at private firms. Amy Volk had never so much as run for student council, but she plunged into politicking and quickly found she loved going door-to-door to talk about issues and ask for votes. She was one of 185 candidates the GOP fielded.

Among those who turned out on primary day, Webster estimates there were 16,000 newly registered Republicans. When the results came in, the tax reform had been overturned by 61 percent to 39 percent, a new crop of legislative candidates had already been out talking to voters, and Republicans had chosen a candidate for governor grounded in the tough realities of Maine's working people.

Born to a Francophone family in the "Little Canada" neighborhood of mill town Lewiston, Maine, Paul LePage was the oldest son in a family of 18 children. When he was 11, his father beat him severely, then took Paul to the hospital, giving him a 50 cent piece and instructions to tell the doctors he had fallen down the stairs. Paul kept the coin but did not return home. He lived on the streets for two years, working odd jobs, then crashed with two families that alternately took him in. (His siblings who stayed at home remain to this day, he says, in Maine's welfare system "big time.")

LePage got into college with help from Olympia Snowe's late husband Peter and eventually earned an MBA from the University of Maine. He also started a business career. For the last 14 years, he has run retailing icon Marden's (slogan: "Where the elite meet and misers mingle"), and for the last 8 also served as mayor of the Democratic stronghold of Waterville.

What made LePage run for governor? "Anger—anger at government," he says. His platform focused on getting Maine working again, with the promise to reduce unproductive state regulation and red tape, reform the state's welfare system, and reduce the size and scope of state government. LePage drew on his business experience, comparing the careful budgeting of Marden's with overspending in Augusta and promising to bring business practices and principles to state government. "We have to change the attitude that business is bad, because without business there are no profits to run the place."

In a three-way race with Democrat Libby Mitchell and Independent Eliot Cutler, it was LePage's rough-hewn style ("I can put my foot in it") and up-by-the-bootstraps personal story that connected with the working people Charlie Webster was targeting. In the legislative races, GOP candidates focused on ideas, not personalities. "I told my guys, if it becomes a popularity contest, we're not going to win," says Webster. "We beat Democratic incumbents by talking about issues and saying, 'Whoever is in there is a nice guy, but on these critical issues we disagree.'" According to LePage, in the last weeks of the campaign, the message that Maine had to make changes to create jobs seemed to break through: "Everyone looked in the mirror and said, No wonder it's tough around here . . . no wonder we're unemployed . . . no wonder people are leaving instead of coming."

On Election Day, voters gave LePage a decisive 38.3 percent of the vote, Republicans took the senate 20 to 14 with 1 independent, and—in a surprise to everyone but Webster—took the house 78 to 72 with 1 independent. Amy Volk won her seat, one of a handful of freshmen who were new to politics. They prevailed despite being considerably outspent by special interest groups. (The biggest Democratic donor in Maine is a hedge fund manager from the northwoods of Greenwich, Connecticut.) Maine Republicans seemed to triumph as the party of the working people.

Yet there is little triumphalism among the victors. Maine's new political leaders are starting their jobs with Yankee practicality and what LePage calls "everyday common sense." As much as the governor would like to lower tax rates, for instance, the budget gap he inherits prevents that from being seriously considered. Instead, he is laying out a sequence of small steps—lowering taxes for retirees so they don't leave the state, raising the minimum taxable income to the living wage so people can manage, reducing regulations so business will prosper and the state's revenue base will grow. Welfare reform and regulatory streamlining will be priorities, and

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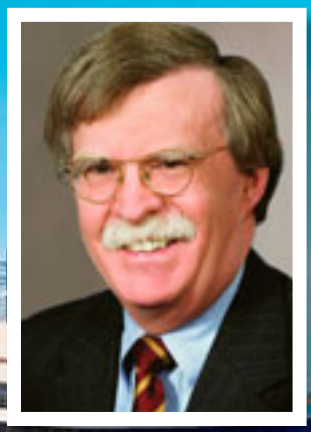

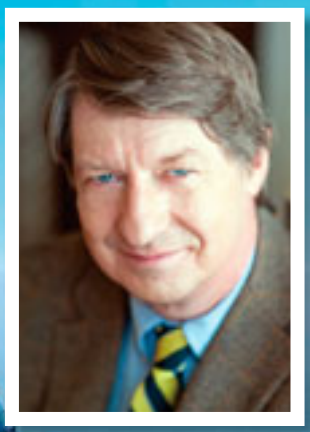

This spring, onboard guests of *The Weekly Standard* will be joined not only by popular faces from the magazine but also by two special guests: American Enterprise Institute Senior Fellow and former Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton *and* best-selling author (and contributing editor) P.J. O'Rourke. We sail May 12 from Barcelona with stops in Lisbon, Bruges, Cherbourg, London, & more.

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the new administration has vowed to overhaul the "disaster" of the state's Dirigo health plan. LePage wants to allow Maine's natural advantages—its fisheries, forests, and farms—to be economic advantages once more. "We will work with inland wildlife to get them to allow bears to sh— in the woods again," he says with a laugh.

Maine Republicans seem well aware that they have a limited time to deliver on these promises. "It's no different than a private turnaround," says LePage, "18 to 24 months." Mainers are accustomed to a steady trickle of people leaving the state. Charlie Webster relates that his two daughters have left, "and if we can't change Maine in four years, then I am out of here." Tarren Bragdon, now working for LePage, says, "We are one of the oldest, whitest states. . . . We're like Japan, facing the dynamics of a demographic winter. The easiest way to deal [with that] is to make Maine a place where people want to move."

Along with the realism, there is an undercurrent of Reaganesque optimism, a kind of "morning in Maine" spirit. LePage doesn't expect the state to hit the top ten list as a place for business investment anytime soon. "But if the cost of doing business is comparable to New Jersey or New York, our quality of life will make the difference." And presiding at the Top of the Hill Grill, Charlie Webster looks to the next electoral cycle and vows, "We're going to make it much deeper red." Maine is a unique state, yet the electoral success of the state GOP's "working people vote Republican" strategy may point the way to party comebacks elsewhere.

Soon after the November vote, newly elected state representative Amy Volk drove up to Augusta for a meeting with the incoming Republican legislators, both old and new, to start planning their priorities now that they were at long last in the majority. "I met all these Republicans who had been waiting for it, planning for it, praying for it," says Volk. "And it wasn't, 'Oh my God, what do we do now?' It was: 'Oh my God, now we get to do stuff!'" ♦

To Live and Die in Philadelphia

The abortionist's house of horrors.

BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

Dr. Kermit Gosnell's clinic at 38th and Lancaster

Dr. Gosnell was a little befuddled at his arraignment on January 20. Indicted for eight murders, the Philadelphia abortionist told the court that he understood the first count, a charge of third-degree murder for the death of a woman on whom he had operated. He didn't understand, however, the seven other counts—the first-degree charges for the deaths of seven babies delivered alive and then killed in his clinic.

No, "clinic" is too antiseptic a word for what the 69-year-old doctor ran for over three decades in a small brick building on the corner of 38th and Lancaster in Philadelphia. A grand jury, led by district attorney R. Seth Williams, began investigating Kermit Gosnell's abortion practice when a drug raid last February (the man ran a profitable side business in dodgy painkiller prescriptions) revealed conditions almost beyond belief.

"Pennsylvania is not a third-world country," the grand jury felt compelled to insist in its brutal 261-page report, and it's a bad sign when you have to preface your description of an American medical office with those words. But this was a story of rooms sticky with the remains of old placenta and fetuses, reeking of urine and feces from the cats that wandered freely through the building, echoing with the screams of women forced into labor and then abandoned for hours. "Furniture and blankets were stained with blood," the grand jury wrote.

Joseph Bottum is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard.

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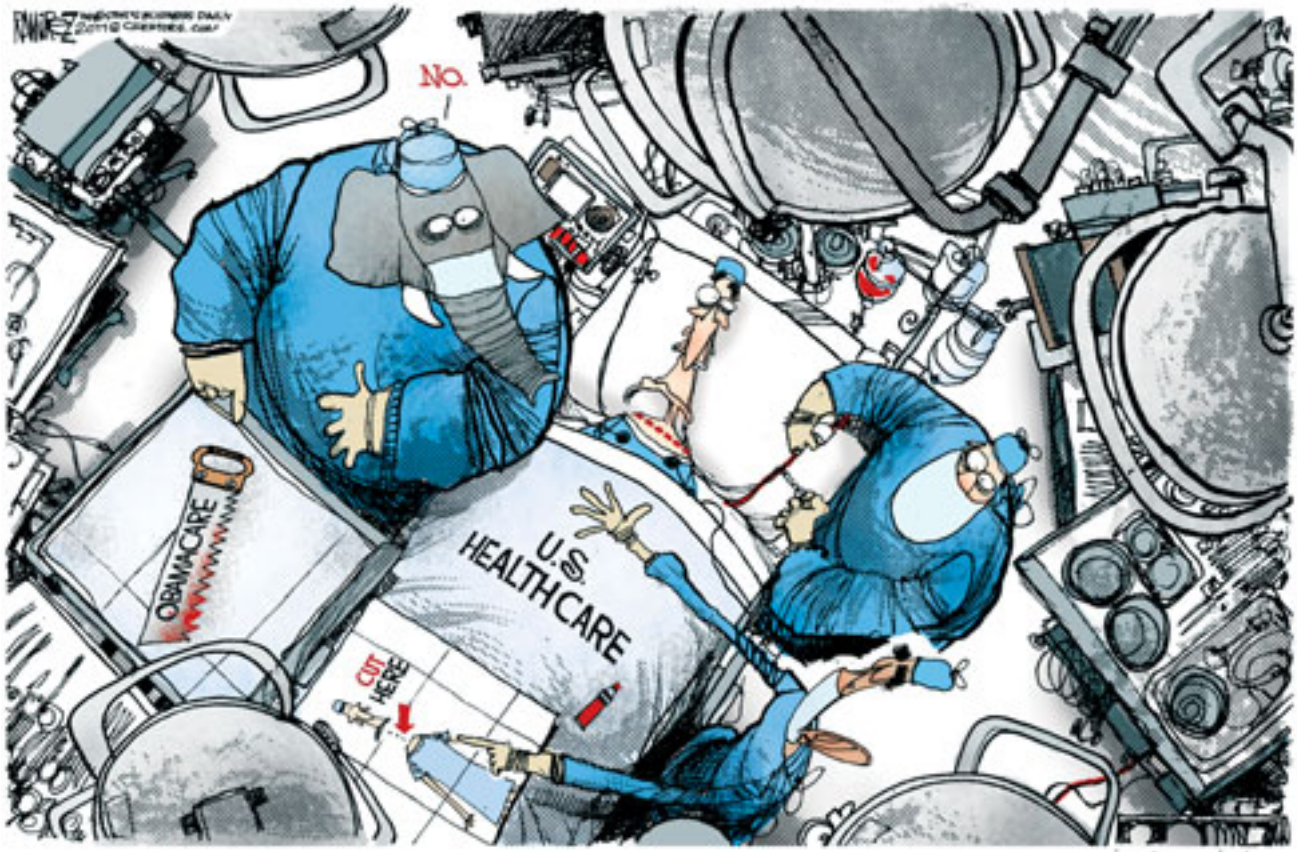
> Instruments were not properly sterilized. Disposable medical supplies . . . were reused, over and over again. Medical equipment . . . was generally broken; even when it worked, it wasn't used. The emergency exit was padlocked shut. And scattered throughout, in cabinets, in the basement, in a freezer, in jars and bags and plastic jugs, were fetal remains. It was a baby charnel house.

Pennsylvania may not be a third-world country, but its abortion mills—like those in most other states—really are reminiscent of one: free and independent entities, uniquely exempt from supervision and regulation, carved out from the rest of medicine. Every other kind of doctor is weighed down by record-keeping and inspection requirements. Abortionists alone are free. "Pennsylvania's Department of Health has deliberately chosen not to enforce laws that should afford patients at abortion clinics the same safeguards and assurances of quality health care as patients of other medical service providers," the Gosnell grand jury explained. "Even nail salons in Pennsylvania are monitored more closely for client safety."

The reason, of course, is what such medical practices involve. Ever since the Supreme Court issued its *Roe* v. *Wade* decision in 1973, ending states' power to outlaw abortion and making it instead an individual right, abortion has distorted American law and snarled American politics. Why should it be any surprise that it has soiled American medicine as well? People like Dr. Gosnell are allowed to exist by the pro-abortion lobbying groups that insist ordinary medical supervision will lead to a curtailing of access to abortion in this country.

As it happens, they're right. Partly that's because laws concerning medical licensing genuinely do offer a chance for pro-life state legislatures to hurt the abortion business by burdening its practitioners with extensive paperwork and expensive equipment. The activists at NARAL and Planned Parenthood are not exactly wrong to worry about what they call TRAP laws (Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers). And yet, there's a more serious reason that medical supervision threatens the abortion license in this country. It's what ordinary medical regulation and supervision would reveal: the fact that the abortion business is the gutter of American medicine.

Make no mistake: Abortion genuinely is a *business* in the United States, and a big one. The grand jury estimated that Gosnell was bringing in nearly $1.8 million a year, mostly in cash, by performing ordinary (or "just a little illegal") first- and second-trimester abortions with his untrained staff every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday night. No one knows how much more he made from the operations he apparently performed most Sundays: the abortions so late in the third trimester that he allowed only his wife to help with them. Add what he made by writing prescriptions for narcotics—he was one of the top three Oxycontin prescribers in the state—and the man



You deserve a factual look at . . .

Myths About Israel and the Middle East (2)

Should we re-examine endlessly repeated clichés?

In a previous installment in this series of clarifying messages about Israel and the Middle East, we examined certain myths which, by dint of constant repetition, had acquired currency and acceptance. We looked at the myth of "Palestinian nationhood," the myth of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") being "occupied territory," the myth that Jewish settlements in these territories are "the greatest obstacle to peace," and the myth that Israel is unwilling to "yield land for peace." And we cleared up the greatest myth of all, namely that Israel's administration of the territories, and not the unrelenting hatred of the Arabs against the Jews, is the root cause of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. But those are not all the myths; there are more.

What are more of these myths?

■ **Myth:** The Arabs of Israel are a persecuted minority.

Reality: The over one million non-Jews (mostly Arabs) who are citizens of Israel have the same civil rights that Jews have. They vote, are members of the Knesset (parliament), and are part of Israel's civil and diplomatic service, just as their Jewish fellow citizens. Arabs have complete religious freedom and full access to the Israeli legal, health and educational systems – including Arabic and Muslim universities. The only difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews is that Jewish young men must serve three years in the military and at least one month a year until age 50. Young Jewish women serve for two years. The Arabs have no such civic obligation. For them, military service is voluntary. Not too surprisingly, except for the Druze, very few avail themselves of the privilege.

> "It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy."

■ **Myth:** Having (ill-advisedly) already given up control of the Gaza Strip, Israel should also give up the administration of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") because strategic depth is meaningless in this age of missiles.

Reality: Israel is a mini-state – about half the size of San Bernardino county in California. If another, even smaller mini-state were carved out of it, Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of 100 retired U.S. generals and admirals. If the Arabs were to occupy whatever little strategic depth Israel has between the Jordan River and its populated coast, they would not need any missiles. Artillery and mortars would suffice, since Israel would be only nine miles wide at its waist. Those who urge such a course either do not understand the situation or have a death wish for Israel.

■ **Myth:** If Israel would allow a Palestinian state to arise in Judea and Samaria it would be a democratic state and would be totally demilitarized.

Reality: There is no prospect at all that anything resembling a democratic state could be created in the territories. There is not a single democratic Arab state – all of them are tyrannies of varying degrees. Even today, under partial Israeli administration, Hamas and other factions fight for supremacy and ruthlessly murder each other. Another Lebanon, with its incessant civil wars, is much more likely. The lawlessness and chaos that prevail in Gaza since Israel's withdrawal is a good prospect of what would happen if Israel – foolishly and under the pressure of "world opinion" – were to abandon this territory. As for demilitarization, that is totally unlikely. Because – with Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, most of which are in a declared state of war with Israel, at its borders – an irresistible power vacuum would be created. Despite pious promises, the arms merchants of the world would find a great new market and the neighboring hostile Arab countries would be happy to supply anything else that might be needed.

■ **Myth:**: Israel should make "confidence-building gestures" for the sake of peace.

Reality: What really is it that the world expects Israel to do for the sake of peace? Most of the 22 Arab countries consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and don't even recognize its "existence." That has been going on for over sixty years. Isn't it about time that the Arabs made some kind of a "gesture?" Could they not for instance terminate the constant state of war? Could they not stop launching rockets into Israel from areas that Israel has abandoned for the sake of peace? Could they not stop the suicide bombings, which have killed hundreds of Israelis and which have made extreme security measures – such as the defensive fence and convoluted bypass roads – necessary? Any of these would create a climate of peace and would indeed be the "confidence-building gestures" that the world hopes for.

Countless "peace conferences" to settle this festering conflict have taken place. All have ended in failure because of the intransigence of the Arabs. President Clinton, toward the end of his presidency, convened a conference with the late unlamented Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, the prime minister of Israel at that time. Mr. Barak offered virtually everything that Arafat had requested, except the partition of Jerusalem and the acceptance of the so-called refugees, their descendants having swollen from the 650,000 who fled the nascent state of Israel during the War of Liberation, to an incredible 5 million. Arafat left in a huff and started his infamous intifada instead, a bloody war that has cost thousands of Palestinian and Israeli lives. Israel is America's staunchest ally and certainly its only true friend in that area of the world. It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy.

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Gerardo Joffe, President

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was running his own little mint on the streets of Philadelphia.

In a powerful recent account of Gosnell's house of horrors, *Politics Daily* editor Melinda Henneberger found herself surprised when she began adding up the abortion stories so grisly that they had managed to break through into the news over the last 20 years. New York's Abu Hayat, for instance: "The Butcher of Avenue A," who killed a 17-year-old girl in a botched abortion and then denied ever having her as a patient. Or the Florida clinic that delivered a baby at 23 weeks and threw it out, alive, in a nearby garbage can. Or New Jersey's Stephen Brigham, who was operating on women in a van, driving them from state to state in the midst of their abortions to skirt laws against late-term procedures.

And now we have Kermit Gosnell, our third-worlder, our poster child for the deadly meeting of shady business and political activism. Gosnell managed to destroy enough records that he was indicted for only the seven cases of infanticide for which sufficient evidence remained. But those cases are enough to sicken anyone. The baby he delivered alive at seven and a half months, for instance—then snipped its spinal cord, packed it in a shoe box, and joked that it was so big it could "walk me to the bus stop." And the 28-week-old baby whose corpse was discovered in the clinic packed in a frozen water bottle. And the baby who lived for more than 20 minutes before an assistant finally came in and cut the spinal cord "just the way," the grand jury was told, "she had seen Gosnell do it so many times."

This was a man who, in hundreds of cases over more than three decades, performed abortions by delivering live babies and then severing their spines with scissors. He routinely overdosed his patients with painkillers and labor-inducers, used instruments infected with venereal diseases, and killed at least two of the pregnant women on whom he worked by perforating their wombs and bowels.

Many people knew what was going on at his Philadelphia clinic; several filed complaints with state and local agencies. But nothing was done, and at the time of his arrest, he hadn't been visited by a medical examiner for 17 years. As the grand jury noted, with the change of governors in Pennsylvania in 1995—when the pro-abortion Tom Ridge replaced the pro-life Bob Casey—"the Pennsylvania Department of Health abruptly decided, for political reasons, to stop inspecting abortion clinics at all," as "officials concluded that inspections would be 'putting a barrier up to women' seeking abortions."

Who could wonder why Kermit Gosnell was confused at his arraignment? No one had stopped him before. No one in more than 30 years had questioned him. No one had ever given him a signal that he might be prosecuted for performing abortions by inducing overmedicated third-trimester labor and then chopping through the spinal cord of the living result. No one had ever dared call his abortion business murder.

No one, in fact, had ever told him he wasn't the absolute ruler of his own little third-world country. ♦

Autumn of the Arab Patriarchs?

Not all Middle Eastern unrest is alike.

BY LEE SMITH

Rabat, Morocco

It is a rough time in the Arabic-speaking Middle East, not least for the United States and its allies. In Beirut, Hezbollah toppled the government of Saad Hariri while he was being hosted in Washington by President Barack Obama. In Egypt, tens of thousands have flooded the streets to protest against current president 82-year-old Hosni Mubarak and his son and apparent successor, 47-year-old Gamal. Jordan is witnessing widespread demonstrations, and the same holds for Algeria, Yemen, and Mauritania—a seemingly remarkable chain of events all kicked off with the self-immolation on December 17 of a 26-year-old fruit vendor in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid.

Hosni Mubarak

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

As street protests brought the reign of Tunisia's president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to an end, imitators around the region lit fire to themselves, perhaps in the hope of similar results, or maybe just out of a chronic desperation that seems to have no limits. Either way, it is not merely the Arab regimes that should be worried by these popular uprisings, but anyone who fears the dangers of political activism carried out under the sign of self-murder.

"My concern is that the same people who recruit for suicide bombers are now going to start recruiting for these self-immolation operations," says Robert Holley, a former U.S. diplomat who worked extensively in the region. "The whole aim of these guys is to destabilize these regimes." The lives they toss away in the meantime are irrelevant to

Lee Smith is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

There is a natural law that determines the results of people's behavior and defines the two behavioral choices that people can make—despite all beliefs to the contrary. Those choices are:

1. Conform to a natural law of behavior provided by whoever or whatever created natural laws.
2. Contradict or ignore that natural law and face failure, injury, and eventual death.

Richard W. Wetherill
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For several years, our one-page advertisements have appeared in national publications, explaining ***nature's behavioral law of absolute right***. The law was identified by the late Richard W. Wetherill and is described in his book *Tower of Babel* published on January 2, 1952.

Nature's behavioral law requires people to think and act in a way that is logical, appropriate, and moral. In other words, ***whoever or whatever created natural laws intends people to behave rationally and honestly rather than in ways that result in confusion, chaos, and suffering for any perpetrator.***

Lacking that knowledge, people have felt free to fight for peace, pollute the environment, abuse children, engage in incredible dishonesty, and in other ways to behave outrageously.

Choice 1 provides guidance that enables people to experience unprecedented joy and success with all their relationships and endeavors. Choice 2 causes every unwanted result experienced for those who fail to conform to this self-enforcing, behavioral law.

In general, people tend to blame outside factors if they get unwanted behavioral results, as comparatively few have known what causes them. Getting a few pioneers to conform to the behavioral law, despite criticism from others, took nearly half a century.

They found that conforming to the law was truly liberating and dealt with situations formerly labeled "cause unknown" because thoughts causing unwanted results release when properly identified.

Keep in mind that the organ of thought inside our heads controls bodily functions, and unless irrevocable damage has occurred, when those wrong thoughts become known, they release.

The evidence is that people often prefer to die rather than face the fact that their conscious and unconscious wrong thoughts could be ruining their lives.

People understand that they must conform to the self-enforcing laws of physics, but they often resist learning of the ***law of absolute right*** because its implications clearly show that people's problems and trouble, therefore, are self-inflicted.

Inasmuch as it usually takes a calamity to get the public's attention for a needed behavioral change, this message intends to draw attention to the calamities that have long been accepted as just a part of life.

Have you ever questioned why people are born to die? Are they born to die or instead are they born to live rational, honest lives? Would a creator of human life destroy that life? Creation by its very nature does not call for destruction.

If people unwarily act on their motivation, the intent of creation is blocked, and it is the blocker who suffers. This writing explains that a natural law provides guidance for people's robust health, congenial relationships, and successful activities.

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This public-service message is from a self-financed, nonprofit group of former students of Mr. Wetherill.

their ends, of which no one can now be certain. Certainly there are democrats in these gatherings, whom Washington should wish well and assist where possible, but there are plenty of others, too, including Islamists and regime insiders jockeying with each other for position. Holley now heads the Moroccan American Center for Policy, sponsored by the Moroccan government. He led me on a recent tour of the country, including Rabat, the capital, Casablanca, Marrakesh, and the Western Sahara.

Morocco is one of the few places in the Arabic-speaking Middle East that isn't in the midst of political turmoil, even as analysts and journalists have predicted that the monarchy is just another prospective domino about to fall like Ben Ali. Not surprisingly, Moroccan parliamentarians, civil society activists, and diplomats are unhappy about being lumped together with their North African neighbors in Tunisia and Algeria.

Morocco has gone through its dark periods as a hard security state and is now squarely on the path to liberalization—including political representation, women's personal status laws, and a wide-ranging reform of the judiciary. The purpose of the latter, explained Ahmed Herzenni, head of the Royal Advisory Council on Human Rights, "is to distinguish between the executive and the judicial branches of our government"—a feat rarely attempted in the Middle East or North Africa.

Herzenni spent 12 years in prison for his left-wing political activism, but credits his onetime jailer Hassan II for initiating the reform process that his son, King Mohamed VI, has accelerated since he came to the throne in 1999. Herzenni notes that their "rights are not merely gifts from the monarchy, but were won by Moroccans." And these rights are exercised regularly. "There are people protesting every day in front of parliament," he says.

The lingering myth of Arab nationalism—the notion that all Arab societies share the same goals, desires, and ideas—has led observers to overstate the similarities of the current unrest in countries that are in fact very different. For example, coups d'état are typically the result of powerful militaries, yet in Tunisia it was the military's weakness that toppled Ben Ali.

Habib Bourguiba, the father of modern Tunisia, kept his military relatively small. "He saw the military coups around the region and feared that a powerful military would be a problem," explains J. Peter Pham, an Africa security expert at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy in New York. "So the Tunisian military wasn't the overwhelming drag on Tunisia that it was on many Arab countries. It was a professional and well-trained corps, which provided a path for Tunisian men that ended with a certain level of reward for their service."

Nonetheless, Bourguiba fell in a coup to Ben Ali, whose family ties were nothing next to those of his wife Leila, who effectively allowed her Trabelsi

clan to rob the country blind. "For the last 15 years Tunisia has been run by a kleptocracy," says Pham. "The Trabelsis drove out anyone wanting to invest in the country, and this prevented sustained economic growth." The inability of educated Tunisians to find jobs was a big factor in touching off the demonstrations. But more important, what toppled Ben Ali was the fact that the Trabelsis had stolen the military's nest egg. "For the army, there was no longer any financial reward after their service," says Pham. Their opportunities for modest participation in commerce and contracting had been gradually taken over by the dictator's in-laws. "When Ben Ali called in the army's chief of staff Rachid Ammar to fire him, Ammar told him, 'No, you're the one who's going.'"

While it's true that pan-Arab satellite TV is apt to inspire revolutionary dreams around the region, the Arabic-speaking Middle East doesn't lend itself to the domino effect. The regimes are not linked but rather ranged against each other, each doing its utmost to destabilize its adversaries. This is why the emir of Qatar uses his Al Jazeera TV network against Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It's why in the past Amman supported the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, while Damascus backed the Jordanian branch. And it's why the Algerians continue to support the Polisario—to destabilize and frustrate neighboring Morocco.

Ever since Spain relinquished the Western Sahara in 1975, the Polisario Front, a Marxist revolutionary separatist group backed by Algeria and Cuba and once supported by former Soviet bloc states, has contested the territory that Morocco says is rightly its own. A 1991 cease-fire brokered by the U.N. brought an end to the fighting, and in 2007 Rabat drafted a compromise political solution that would grant the region a broad autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty. The Moroccans would like the international community, led by the United States, to help resolve the issue, the top priority in Rabat's foreign policy, but there is little will to do so, even as Washington has publicly endorsed the proposal. The Western Sahara issue shows once again that the benefits of being a solid U.S. ally like Morocco are not always clear, and that it can be easier to get Washington's attention by acting up than by acting responsibly.

In the meantime, the Moroccans are building housing in Saharan cities like Dakhla to encourage refugees to leave the Polisario's camps and come home. Families have been separated for three decades. The conditions in the camps are inhuman, explained one former Moroccan captive, 42-year-old Mohamed Cherif. "I was chained for five years in a hole dug in the earth," says Cherif. "Often the Algerians and the Polisario would take the blood of Moroccan POWs to sell it." And for all that he's seen, says Cherif, "I still can't understand why anyone would light themselves on fire. These lives are precious." ♦

The Future of Reaganism

Why American conservatism is alive and well in the 21st century

By Jeffrey Bell

The debate about Ronald Reagan has never shown any sign of ending, but it is less and less about whether his presidency was consequential. As has happened with a few other high-impact presidencies—see historian Merrill Peterson's classic *The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind*—the debate over Reagan's presidency has morphed into a battle over ideas, centering on Reaganism and its relevance, if any, to the future of politics.

For some years following his presidency, the narrative of elite opinion boiled down to something like this: In the early 1980s the Reagan administration radically changed U.S. policy on economics, defense, and Cold War strategy. In unrelated developments later in that decade, the stagflation of the 1970s disappeared, capitalism entered a generation-long global boom, and the Cold War came to an end amid the collapse of European communism.

Examples of such denialism are still around, in high-school textbooks and other precincts dominated by an American left determined to be unimpressed by anything good that might be traced to the astounding, meteor-like passage of Ronald Reagan through American and global politics. Yet now at his centennial, even many of Reagan's most implacable critics feel compelled to concede his political gifts and attempt to analyze the "paradox" of how it came to be that a doddering B-movie actor with a view of reality bordering on fantasy could wind up finding (in the bemused 1988 description of a *Washington Post* editorialist) that when he ventured abroad, it was not just the nation but the world that was his oyster.

Today, Republican and conservative elites invariably speak of the Reagan presidency in terms of greatness. But their descriptions of his politics and explanations of his success are often confused. As an example, I recently heard one prominent Republican attribute the abortion-related term "big tent" to Reagan, rather than to its actual originator, the post-Reagan Republican national chairman Lee Atwater.

What, for conservatives, is the conclusion to be drawn from the Age of Reagan? Was it mainly a matter of a gifted leader and his time coming magically together? Or was it (in addition) a breakthrough for a conservative movement he helped reshape into a more consistent worldview that American voters found compelling? And does something one could call Reaganism provide a way forward in the world of 2011 and beyond?

Far from the stereotype of the passive actor being fed his lines by myriad scriptwriters and directors, Reagan was an avid reader of conservative periodicals like *Human Events* and *National Review*, as well as of leading theoreticians of the post-World War II conservative movement such as Frank Meyer, William F. Buckley, William Rusher, M. Stanton Evans, and Brent Bozell, among many others. He was also greatly influenced well by the free-market revival powered by such libertarian economists as F.A. Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Henry Hazlitt, and Milton Friedman.

In three different areas of policy—economics, foreign policy, and social issues—Reagan was the central protagonist in making conservatism far more populist than it had been earlier. In economics, his embrace of the supply-side insurrection gave conservatives and Republicans a pro-growth agenda rooted in optimism about the willingness of people to respond to economic incentives, whether in the form of lower tax rates or a more stable dollar. Rather than seeing supply side ideas as a replacement for the Taft-Goldwater critique of big government of the 1950s and 1960s, Reagan believed they broadened the case for limited government, providing an explanation of why it works economically.

Jeffrey Bell, policy director of the American Principles Project and author of a forthcoming book on social conservatism, was an issue adviser to the Reagan campaigns of 1976 and 1980.

Reagan waves to the crowd at the 1976 convention, with the old Republican guard looking on.

DAVID HUME KENNERLY / GETTY IMAGES

In foreign policy, Reagan was no less anti-Communist than Barry Goldwater but was more determined to craft a forward strategy for concluding the Cold War in victory for the West. Just as in economics, Reagan brought to U.S. foreign policy a populist optimism about people, in part rooted in his youthful fascination with the Wilson-FDR vision of the United States as an evangelist of global democracy. Against the grain of most left and right elites of his own time, Reagan believed that people all over the world craved self-government just as much as Americans did. This radical optimism fed into such ambitious programs as the Reagan Doctrine and the Strategic Defense Initiative, which served notice on Soviet leaders that they could no longer look on their ideological conquests or military gains as permanent assets.

Breaking from the "realism" of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Reagan delegates demanded adoption of a plank titled "Morality in Foreign Policy" at the 1976 Republican national convention. Over the vehement objections of Kissinger, Ford campaign manager James Baker released the president's delegates to back the insurgent plank as a means of securing Ford's tenuous hold on the convention. It then passed without opposition. Ford held on to win the nomination, but the clock on realism had begun ticking more than four years before the start of the Reagan presidency. Culminating in Reagan's celebrated pro-democracy address to the students of Moscow State University during the successful 1988 summit with Mikhail Gorbachev, public advocacy of universal human rights took center stage in what would prove to be a breakthrough decade for U.S. foreign policy.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the greatest of the three challenges facing conservatism in Reagan's years as an elective politician was the worldwide social and cultural upheaval that erupted in the 1960s, and has continued in one form or another ever since. Certainly it is the issue cluster where the left has been most consistently on the offensive in the politics of the last half century. It has left European conservatism a shadow of its former self, with the richest nations of Europe disintegrating before our eyes. Their churches have emptied and their non-Islamic marriages produce few children when such couples bother to get married at all. A single generation after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact brought democracy to virtually every country in Europe, voters in those same countries have watched their own political elites cede wide swaths of power to unelected bureaucrats of the European Union in Brussels.

The earliest manifestation of this worldwide social

upheaval was militant student unrest beginning in 1964 at the University of California at Berkeley. From the beginning, Reagan's political rise was intertwined with conservative opposition to this unrest. As much as he was influenced by libertarian economics, there was not a trace of libertarian tolerance in his stance on social disorder. Reagan was elected governor by a million votes in 1966 as a firm exponent of enforcing the rule of law, both on campuses and in response to such upheavals as the massive black rioting in the Watts section of Los Angeles in 1965. He did so with some success, as did other conservative political leaders in this country and abroad.

But the 1960s upheavals were anything but one-dimensional. In fact, in the wake of the multinational 1968 uprisings in such diverse nations as Mexico, France, and Germany, as well as in the United States after the King assassination, the threat of violent revolution faded, as did the prospect of breakthrough gains for the economics-centered old left. By the end of the 1970s, the left was deemphasizing socialism and returning to its oldest and most authentic roots.

At Moscow State University, 1988

These lay in the turbulent streets of the Paris of the 1790s, the decade when the left first got its name based on the seating location of the Jacobins and their allies in the National Assembly. The Jacobin left was not about ownership of the means of production, but about liberation as a way of returning to what it saw as Rousseau's vision of Natural Man. This meant, to left politicians like Robespierre, liberation not simply from the key political institutions of the Bourbon monarchy and aristocracy, but (far more importantly) from such social institutions as the church and family. These had to be downgraded or discarded because the left's vision of human freedom tended toward an autonomy that involved zero obligation to other persons.

This is why, given the popular backlash to overt violence by protesters and rioters, the left's successful line of attack became centered on the sexual revolution. In his first term (1967-71) as governor, Reagan signed bills liberalizing abortion and divorce. These were sold to him and to the California public as reasonable if minor adjustments to overly rigid current law, but it soon became evident that they were part of a fundamental revolution in the status of marriage and the family.

Reagan drew correct conclusions about the nature and agenda of social liberalism. He underwent a conversion experience and became a staunch pro-lifer after *Roe* v. *Wade* in 1973. He put the first unabashedly pro-life plank in the Republican platform upon his nomination in 1980—the same year that the Democrats' platform became unequivocally pro-choice. When Reagan picked his chief primary challenger George H.W. Bush as his vice presidential running mate, it was understood as a condition of acceptance that Bush would switch from pro-choice to pro-life. Bush did so and never switched back.

Reagan was also the central figure in welcoming newly militant conservative Christians into the public square. When he did so in a Dallas speech just after his 1984 renomination, Democratic nominee Walter Mondale declared Reagan an "ayatollah." Between 1976 and 1984, Democratic presidential support levels among evangelical Christians fell from around 60 percent to around 20 percent, according to media-financed exit polling. Reagan also made historic gains among Roman Catholic voters

In Western Europe and Japan, conservative leaders and most other established elites folded before the socio-political onslaught of the sexual revolution. The difference in the United States was not in the reaction of elites, but in the ability of Reagan and of social conservatives to mount a popular counterattack and keep the battle going. It is why the United States today has political polarization, and why Western Europe and Japan do not.

So in all three legs of the conservative stool—economics, foreign policy, and social issues—Ronald Reagan successfully refashioned American conservatism in a more populist direction. But in itself this does not prove that Reaganism is the basis of a viable, integrated conservatism in 2011. There appears to be no inherent reason, for example, why a supply-side advocate in the domestic economy would have to favor a forward democratic strategy against the rogues' gallery of dictators and jihadists in today's post-Cold War world.

A good place to start is to ask how Reagan himself saw

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the relationship of the three issue clusters. In his 2001 book *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom*, Claremont McKenna professor Andrew Busch made a count of how often recent presidents alluded to the American political tradition, centering on the founding. Reagan was far ahead of other elected presidents, mentioning such themes more than three times as often as his runner-up, Lyndon Johnson. (The unelected Gerald Ford mentioned founding-related matters almost as often as Reagan, an accident of his serving 40 percent of his presidency during the Bicentennial of 1976. According to Busch, Ford's citations were perfunctory and superficial.)

Reagan's view of the American founding was central to his belief system. To him, American exceptionalism was not something in our mountains and streams. Like Jefferson and Lincoln, he believed that the United States is founded on an idea, the belief that all human beings are created equal, consistent with the laws of nature and of nature's God.

If you believe this, you cannot be neutral about human rights abroad, any more than about the right of the unborn or the unfree here. Belief in the founding principle of God-given equal rights—not as a metaphor or sentiment, but as a reality—is the surest predictor of social conservatism in an individual or group. If you believe in that founding principle, you are probably a social conservative. If you don't, you probably aren't.

The rise of the Tea Party in the last two years vindicates Reagan's belief in the founding as the center of American conservatism. The Tea Party's focus on the size of government and the deficit is not a move away from social conservatism, but will increasingly be understood as a bringing of the normative politics of the founding to a new issue cluster where it belongs.

Social conservatism and the Tea Party, taken together, are making American conservatism less situational or event-driven than before. The Tea Party's orientation to the values of the founding will keep it militant and robust even if the U.S. economy improves under the liberal stewardship of President Obama. If Obama and his fellow Democratic partisans believe economic improvement will make the Tea Party movement fade or disappear, they are likely to be disappointed.

So are those who believe Reaganism can safely be consigned to the past. It can't be. The principles of the founding have reemerged at the center of the conservative movement. The vital political force fashioned by Ronald Reagan is alive and well. ♦

Dissecting Radical Islam

The importance of Representative Peter King's hearings

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

It's easy to understand the trepidation that some Muslim Americans express about the upcoming House hearings on Islamic radicalism in the United States. Such hearings are often theater, where legislators and their staff orchestrate tendentious inquiries into the gravest issues. And there are spiteful voices, predominately on the right, whose exegesis of Islamic history is neither profound nor comparative, who would be eager to damn Islam on Capitol Hill.

But congressional hearings, even when one-sided, do serve the useful function of challenging the executive branch's views, which more than Congress's set the tone of government. And when dealing with Islam, the Obama administration has been incurious and dogmatic. From commendably liberal sentiments of religious tolerance—and in the president's case, probably from his own affection for his father's abandoned faith—the administration can't bring itself to state the obvious: Islamic culture, in both the Old and New Worlds, has had a hellacious time absorbing modernity and has produced a large number of militants with a soft spot for violence against Americans, Europeans, Israelis, Jews, Christians, and, for that matter, Muslims deemed religiously incorrect. It has produced an impressive number of young men and women who are willing to kill those supposed unholy.

Peter King, the New York Republican who chairs the Homeland Security Committee, has announced that his hearings will be tactically oriented. That is as it should be. Given the administration's determination not to talk about Islam, which has caused President Obama and senior officials considerable rhetorical awkwardness on occasions when American jihadists have gone after Americans, what we most want to know is whether this reticence has made the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security shy away from the surveillance of possibly dangerous Muslims. Ten years after 9/11, is the FBI backing off scrutinizing mosques with a penchant for radicalism, Muslim associations deeply impregnated by Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood ethics, and religious groups that receive funding and staff from foreign fundamentalist organizations? Such surveillance should not denote guilt—just well-founded concern that a fundamentalist ambience has proven to be an effective incubator of terrorism in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. What the Pulitzer Prize-winning former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Ian Johnson noted about the Egyptian-born Muslim Brotherhood and its many offshoots in Europe—they create a "mental preconditioning for terrorism"—should be a daily anxiety for the attorney general and other American officials.

Unlike Europe—especially France and the United Kingdom—the United States does not have a well-established scholarly tradition of studying its Muslim inhabitants. Most of the European academics and journalists who've studied Muslim immigration and the growth of Islam in the Old World are sympathetic to the continent's largest non-Christian religious minority. That has not prevented them from offering trenchant insights into the dangerous connections between radical mosques, preachers, and holy warriors. It has not stopped them—especially in France—from productive conversations with domestic-intelligence and security services. Questions that are extremely difficult to answer about the American-Muslim community—how many mosques are receiving Saudi subsidies, for example, or using Wahhabi educational curricula and Islamist preachers and teachers from abroad—are much easier to answer in Europe, owing to this greater scholarly/journalistic interest and the attentiveness of increasingly well-educated European security services.

Much more than is healthy, America's domestic-security services are alone in trying to understand the sociological dynamics of the American-Muslim community, which, as in Europe, is diverse. Big spiritual battles have happened in Europe within neighborhood mosques between Muslims of no clear ideological complexion and militants, who are better organized and financed from abroad (Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states are usually

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the financiers of the fundamentalist establishment in Europe). Given the paucity of European-educated imams or imams from Middle Eastern seminaries that have escaped the Saudi-funded Wahhabization of the region's preeminent religious schools, nonmilitant mosques often unintentionally import puritanical, West-hostile religious intelligentsia. In Europe, the major Muslim organizations usually preach an Islam that is considerably stricter than the faith practiced (or ignored) on the streets.

There are blessedly big differences between the Muslim communities of Europe and America. In Holland and France, for example, where Muslims make up around 6 percent and 10 percent of the populations, respectively, whole towns and vast suburbs of major cities have become majority Muslim. By and large, their Muslim denizens are poor and even when completely secularized—as is often the case—distant from many of the defining features of European culture. Islam in Europe has become for many deracinated urban youth, as it is for many among the urban poor in the Middle East, a political identity. And the identity is exuberantly exclusive, walling out more traditional Islamic tenets and more permissive Western values. In America, where secular sentiments are de rigueur only among the elite, faithful Muslims appear vastly better integrated into the surrounding society. Muslim Americans are more affluent than their European counterparts. Intermarriage with non-Muslims appears easier for those who want it (though, again, the sociological studies are in their infancy, so it's difficult to say for sure). And the anomie that is so striking in Europe and in the major cities of the Arab Middle East doesn't seem to be prevalent in the United States.

The more we know about the sociology of the American-Muslim community the better.

AP / ALAN DIAZ

Even so, the confidence that American counterterrorist experts had after 9/11 that the American-Muslim community was immune to the virus of radicalization has lessened. There have been too many incidents at home and abroad involving American Muslims. Something is afoot. It is possible that we are seeing, as we do with so many radical intellectual trends, a time lag between Europe and the United States.

The seeds of Muslim radicalization were planted in Europe in the 1950s, when the Muslim community was small and Muslim organizations, usually inspired and aided by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, were in their infancy. Although it's difficult to know with precision (European scholarship and security-service interest in European Muslim communities really started only in the 1980s), the wave of radicalization that struck the Middle East in the 1970s and culminated with the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 seems to have hit Europe hard in the mid- to late 1980s. This was the era when Saudi Wahhabi missionary activity, in large part born to counter Iran's revolution, exploded worldwide. By the 1990s, Saudi cash and Saudi-financed instruction and preachers were everywhere in Europe. When al Qaeda's missionaries arrived in the late 1990s, they had only to follow the path already cleared years before by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wahhabi preachers. By the late 1990s, the Brotherhood and the Wahhabis had become nearly indistinguishable.

Missionary cash from the Gulf states probably didn't start arriving in the United States until the 1990s. The Internet revolution in the late 1990s and the coming of easily accessible satellite television, which broadcasts an astonishing array of the Middle East's hard-core Muslim preachers, magnified the influence of Islamic puritanism. Where in the 1980s and much of the 1990s an Islamic radical in Europe needed a mosque to find comrades and fraternity with the larger militant world, a radical in America or Europe today can find communion via the Internet and TV. Although it is still unclear

how much spiritual fortification Major Nidal Malik Hasan, for instance, received from militant mosques in the United States, it is crystal clear that the Internet was indispensable to his lethal radicalization. Although American-Muslim associations do not yet have the structure or variety of their European counterparts, they are developing. If they follow the European model, as they grow, their funding and connections to Gulf states and their intolerant creeds will increase significantly, displacing and preempting the need for contributions from local congregations.

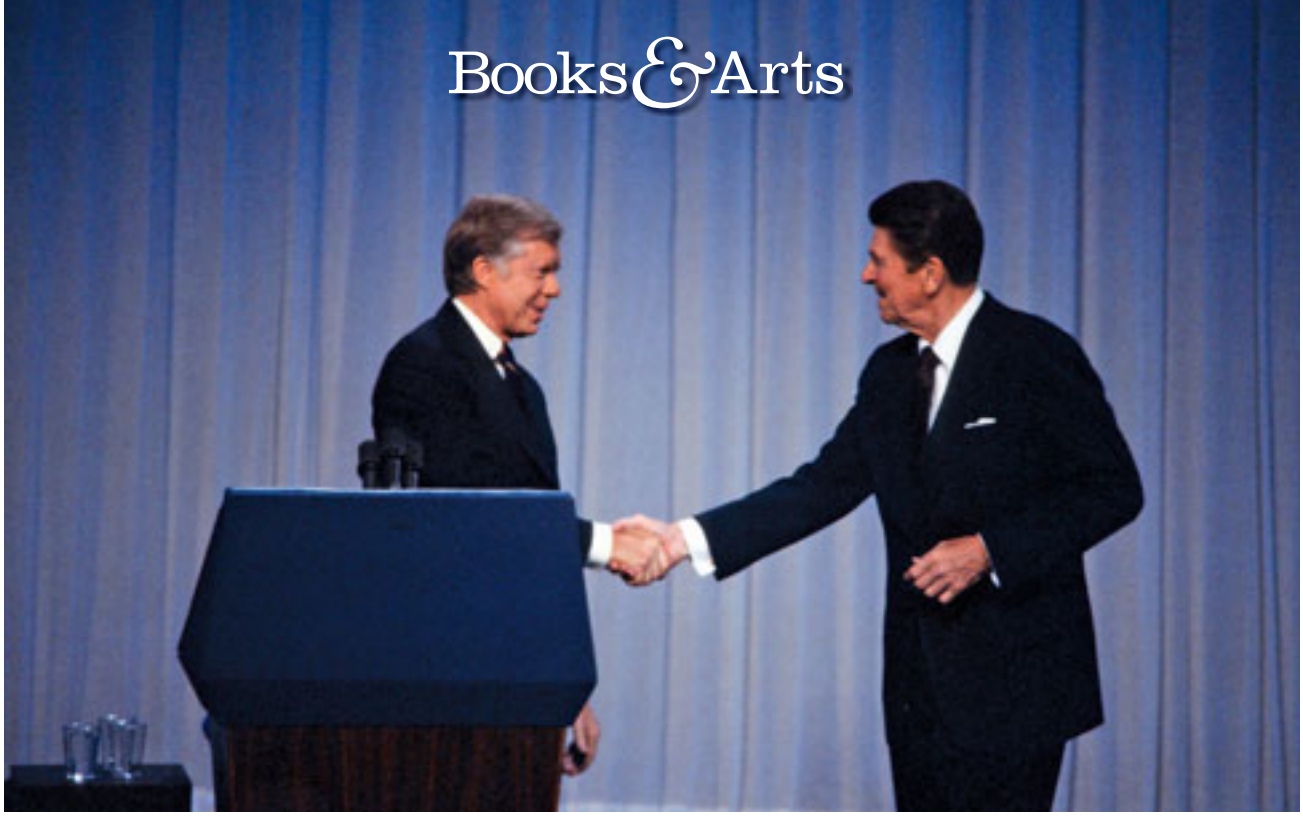
The United States, of course, has a much stronger tradition of decentralized religious authority and independent religious schools than Europe, a tradition more conducive to interfaith ties than is control by national or international organizations. Yet some of America's most prominent Muslim associations have roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, and this ought to give us pause: The Brotherhood is all about fraternity with the larger Muslim *ummah*, the community of the faithful. Its conception of who the faithful are is not, to put it politely, ecumenical. And the Brotherhood's eagerness to accept foreign funds and establish educational institutions that preach a faith tolerant of violence and of virulent Jew-hatred is proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. American exceptionalism should never be discounted: What worked with all the mutually hostile Christian faiths of Europe will likely also neutralize the Islamic virulence that now comes from Europe and the Greater Middle East. But Islamic militancy is a very tough opponent. Its appeal is both ancient and modern. And the eminence of the United States—all militant Muslim conversations describe America as the preeminent threat to the faith—means that if a radical Muslim goes violent, his ideal target is American. This is the downside of the global appeal of Western values.

Representative King can do us all a favor by focusing on two things: the FBI's and DHS's counterterrorist competence and the foreign funding of America's mosques and Muslim institutions. Instead of asking officials in the FBI and DHS whether American-Muslim leaders have been helpful in combating Islamic radicalism and terrorism in the United States—which, according to press reports, is what King may do—the chairman should query the Bureau and Homeland Security about how knowledgeable their field officers and analysts are.

Does the FBI, for instance, still informally discourage officers from spending too much time in the counterterrorism track since fewer arrests can be made in this line of work than in the traditional criminal pursuits where senior officers have usually made their reputations? European counterterrorist officers working the Islamic target are often much better than their American counterparts because they spend much more time mastering the subject. They have years to develop expertise, while in the Bureau, as in the Central Intelligence Agency, "experts" are often made in a year or two. How are the FBI and DHS building up expertise about the American-Muslim community and the Islamic terrorist target at home and abroad? It would be good if King actually called FBI and DHS agents and analysts to testify and just let them talk. Their dedication, knowledge, and finesse should become evident.

King should also ask both Muslim Americans and FBI and DHS officials about Saudi, Qatari, and Emirati money coming into the United States. Does anyone have a good idea of how much money is coming from the Gulf to the United States? And does Gulf money ever fund "moderate" religious establishments or does it only go to Wahhabi/Muslim Brotherhood institutions? Is there actually a permanent office anywhere in the U.S. government trying to monitor the flow of this cash? How does the United States verify the religious pedigree of foreign Muslim preachers? Do we accept, for example, the Saudi embassy's or Qatari embassy's word on their good standing? The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has been on the cutting edge of radical missionary activity for 20 years. Do Jordanian Brothers come here to teach? Does anyone monitor foreign preachers after they're here? Does Homeland Security collect, just for analytical purposes, the textbooks that are being used in Saudi-financed or Muslim Brotherhood schools in the United States? It would be good to have a public hearing on Islamic textbooks used in private schools. They just might be exemplary in their religious tolerance and their condemnation of violence against unbelievers; the odds for this aren't good, however. Some of these questions are obviously sensitive and would best be answered in closed hearings, but they ought to be asked.

There is nothing wrong with America's elected representatives' being doggedly curious about the activities of Muslim militants. It is not bigotry to engage in such questioning; on the contrary, a desire to fight bigotry, let alone terrorism, should motivate our representatives to be much more curious than they have been so far about Wahhabis and Muslim Brothers in our midst. And if any crude Islamophobes rear their ugly heads in these hearings, then Chairman King should be grateful for the opportunity to embarrass them. McCarthyism died, let us recall, in great part because its most egregious practitioners were publicly shamed. ♦



Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter debate in Cleveland, 1980

Understanding Reagan

The literature grows, but he remains as elusive as ever.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

"On the first nine levels, Reagan is the least interesting of men. But if you postulate a tenth level, then he's suddenly fascinating."

—George Will, quoted in *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, by Lou Cannon

"People who had worked for him much of their lives suspected that there was something beneath the surface they had never seen, but they did not know what the something was."

—Lou Cannon, *President Reagan*

If you want the Reagan myth in its purest form, here it is, just in time for the thirtieth anniversary of his inauguration and the hundredth anniversary of his birth: the Official Centennial Edition of *Ronald Reagan: 100 Years*, a thick slab of text and pictures got out by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation. There's a gold-embossed seal on the cover marking it as a token of the "Ronald Reagan Centennial Celebration," which, an endnote inside tells us, is a "year-long series of activities, events, educational programs, and special projects throughout the United States and abroad." Moreover, in keeping with the spirit of Reaganism, "no taxpayer dollars have been apportioned for this occasion." That's good.

The tone of *100 Years* is, you might say, uncritical. No author's name appears on the cover or the title page, which means there's no one to blame for sentences like this: "He would strategize solutions on how to make things right. He believed in making the extra effort if it encouraged positive change and made an impactful difference in someone's life." Other passages are more comprehensible but still have the Parson Weems touch. "He did not need the presidency to feel good about himself." "President Reagan never let his ego get in the way of his work."

He was tireless, too, even after long days on the campaign trail. "Many times, other than the pilots and flight attendants, he was the only person awake on the plane." And so on: "The president understood that life wasn't always about him." "He never pretended to be someone other than who he was."

And who was that? The presidential foundation is offering no clues. True to the task of mythmaking, they give us a creature of improbable goodness. Take the provocative question of personal ambition. The authors want to show that he had none, on the assumption that it might have been unseemly if he had. They note, correctly, that Reagan did not appear to hunger for the presidency's power or perquisites. For many

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ARTHUR GRACE / ZUMA PRESS / NEWSCOM

of us the reticence was essential to his appeal. But it doesn't square. No one will suffer the rigors and indignities of a modern presidential campaign unless the fires of ambition burn hot within him; it wasn't the flight attendant's dazzling conversation that kept him awake in that darkened campaign plane. And he did run for the office four times.

He made his first lunge in 1968. For the rest of his career, that early campaign was a hitch in the Reagan myth, because it suggested that an inner quality beyond sheer public-spiritedness launched Reagan into politics. When he became a candidate in 1968 Governor Reagan had been in politics for all of two years. The authors explain this Palin-like jumping of the gun as an act of selflessness.

"Some party activists thought of him as a potential presidential candidate," they write. "Ronald Reagan, however, was not among them." At last, after much cajoling, he agreed with the utmost reluctance to run as a favorite son, but only as a "formality" that would prevent a messy primary fight between other candidates. He never considered himself a "real" candidate, the authors insist. "Nonetheless," they go on, "a few diehards worked against the governor's wishes to rally support." Darn those old diehards anyway. How embarrassing it must have been for California's diffident favorite son—especially since it was his closest financial backers who were paying for all the campaign workers, posters, buttons, bumper stickers, and rallies.

Narrowly (the official story continues) Reagan managed to escape the nomination, the convention chose Richard Nixon instead, and "the Reagans went on a short cruise in the Florida Keys, giving not a moment's thought to what had happened. . . . So much for that 'Reagan for President' campaign."

If the goal of the Reagan mythologists is to instill respect for their man, the misdirection and party-line fudges don't advance the cause. Hoping to prove he was uniquely modest and self-effacing, they succeed only in making him strange, an evolutionary impossibility: an actor without vanity, a politician without gnawing ambition. These are creatures that cannot exist in nature. You might as well tell us he was a Heffalump or a jackalope.

My Father at 100
by Ron Reagan
Viking, 240 pp., $25.95

President Reagan:
The Role of a Lifetime
(revised edition, 2000)
by Lou Cannon
PublicAffairs, 920 pp., $24.95

Ronald Reagan:
100 Years
from the Ronald Reagan
Presidential Foundation
Collins Design, 256 pp., $35

The New Reagan Revolution:
How Ronald Reagan's Principles
Can Restore America's Greatness
by Michael Reagan
Thomas Dunne, 384 pp., $25.99

On the Outside Looking In
by Michael Reagan (1988)
Zebra, 286 pp., $3.99

The Way I See It
An Autobiography
by Patti Davis (1992)
Putnam, 335 pp., out of print

The Long Goodbye
by Patti Davis (2004)
Plume, 224 pp., $16

Dutch
A Memoir of Ronald Reagan
by Edmund Morris (1999)
Modern Library, 874 pp., $16.95

The Triumph of Politics
Why the Reagan Revolution Failed
by David A. Stockman (1986)
Harper & Row, 422 pp., out of print

For the Record
From Wall Street to Washington
by Donald T. Regan (1988)
Harcourt, 397 pp., out of print

What I Saw at the Revolution
A Political Life in the Reagan Era
by Peggy Noonan (1990)
Random House, 384 pp., $16

The question of Reagan's inner life is interesting because his outer life was so momentous. He invites superlatives. He was the most consequential statesman of the second half of the twentieth century. His tenure was the only successful presidency in the last fifty years, as his successors failed to win reelection or got impeached for perjury or slunk out of office with an approval rating as low as a journalist's. And he simply expands. Since his retirement in 1989 the mythic Reagan has been the Republican party's rhetorical lodestar. In *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*—the most complete Reagan biography—Lou Cannon points out that half of the Contract with America, which helped the Republicans win Congress in 1994, was drawn verbatim from Reagan's 1985 State of the Union address. In the Republican sweep last year his name was everywhere. He is to Republicans what Franklin Roosevelt was to three generations of Democrats—a talisman, a touchstone, a coryphaeus that never fails. But no longer a man.

The truth is, Reagan seemed slightly unreal when he was still in office. "When I thought of him in those days," the columnist Peggy Noonan wrote in her peerless Washington memoir, *What I Saw at the Revolution*, "it was as a gigantic heroic balloon floating in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, right up there between Superman and Big Bird. I felt like the kids in the apartments on Central Park West, watching the giant heads bob by." Noonan was ridiculed for that image at the time, but I knew exactly what she meant. A fixture on TV in our youth, and now the omnipresent leader of the Free World, he seemed too big for ordinary life.

In the 1980s, I took every chance to see Reagan in his appearances around Washington, usually from the press pen in the back of hotel ballrooms, a football field's distance from the podium where he would talk huskily about the shining city or the second American revolution or whatever metaphor was in rotation that week. Though I was seldom under a deadline, I went to all his press conferences anyway. A White House aide had said that Reagan liked to "call on a few oddballs to lighten things up," so I always prepared a question, just in case. Watching the C-SPAN replays later, I'd notice myself three or four rows back in the overlit East Room, transfixed, never glancing at my notepad as a real reporter would. I don't know what I would have done if he'd called on me—faked a heart

attack, probably, so I wouldn't have to say anything.

"It was like seeing somebody in a Reagan mask," a friend of mine told me when I asked what it was like spending time with the president. I wasted many idle hours puzzling over Reagan. I'd read how unnaturally detached he was in his duties, so the newspapers said. I knew that sophisticated people thought he was simple-minded. In meetings, he relied on staff-prepared note cards in making any comment on the subject at hand. He memorized statistics from *Human Events*.

But the facts didn't square, especially right then, in the late eighties, with the memory of the seventies still fresh as a nightmare. If he was an airhead, then how come the things that were so terrible before he became president were so great all of a sudden? The Soviets were in retreat and begging to be our pals, economic productivity was soaring and inflation was dead, patriotism was revived and money seemed to be sloshing around everywhere. Friends of mine who'd been unemployed since college found jobs, whether they wanted them or not. How'd all that happen if he was such a dope? I flattered myself that I could figure him out if I got close enough—neither the first nor the last to pursue that fool's errand, as the Reagan literature proves.

The spring of his final year in office I was invited to a small dinner party where Reagan was to be guest of honor. I arrived late at my friend's house and a pair of beefy guys with earpieces ushered me into the living room for cocktails. I'd been in this room dozens of times, saw each of the guests regularly, was familiar with all the furnishings, except . . . *what's wrong with this picture*? In the center of an admiring semi-circle, cradling a screwdriver, telling stories, was the host of *Death Valley Days*, the most famous man in the world, tall, tan, and rouged. Close up he looked to me like a movie special effect, as though a cartoon character had been superimposed into a live-action frame. Instead of Roger Rabbit it was an amazingly accurate simulation of Ronald Reagan, in a brown suit. I stammered when he said hello.

He continued to tell stories through dinner. In fact, every line of conversation led quickly to an anecdote. As a reader of the Reagan literature I was familiar with every one of them: Ernst Lubitsch and the bedroom scene, WHO radio and the Cubs games, Mikhail Gorbachev and his secret Christian faith. When he strayed too far from the storytelling there were moments of befuddlement. He'd just returned from the Moscow summit with Gorbachev. Two aides sat with us at table, visibly tense, and were quick to correct him when he spoke about visiting "let's see, Tolstoy's tomb?"

"Pasternak's house, Mr. President."

"That's right." He recovered quickly by slipping back into the safe harbor of storytelling. He told our host, the writer and editor Bob Tyrrell, that he knew some of "our conservative friends" thought he had "gone a little soft" on the Soviets since this Gorbachev fellow had appeared on the scene. (And he was right: They did think that.)

"Well, let me tell you a Russian proverb I've picked up."

His listeners knew what was coming, of course. *Doveryai, no proveryai*. Trust but verify, right? He'd been saying it on TV for a year and a half. Johnny Carson made jokes about it. Children recited it in their sleep.

"I think it sums up our approach pretty well."

Sure, trust but verify. Got it.

"And I've told Mr. Gorbachev this in our meetings." He savored the moment, thought he detected mounting suspense.

Okay, okay, *Doveryai, no proveryai*.

"The proverb is this," he said. He paused again, for dramatic effect, and cocked his head.

I shot a look at another guest: Maybe Reagan's got a new proverb?

No.

"*Doveryai, no proveryai*!"

His eyes sparkled.

"It means: trust but verify, Bob." The aides smiled insanely.

At the end of the evening the guests gathered in the foyer, and he went down the line to say good night. His hand was unexpectedly soft. I told him that meeting him was one of the great honors of my life. Which was true—which is still true. And he cupped my hand firmly in return, bowed his head slightly, and said, "No, I'm the one who's honored." Which of course was baloney. I used to have a photograph of the moment. I was grinning like a cocker spaniel.

The tell-all books began to appear halfway through his second term. By virtue of their temerity and a vague sense of naughtiness—no administration had been so beset by turncoats with publishing contracts—it was tempting to take their revelations as authoritative. And there was a surprising unanimity in what they revealed. The template was cast by David Stockman, his apostate budget director, in *The Triumph of Politics* (1986). Stockman's Reagan appeared as a man almost infantile in his passivity and lack of mental acuity. Donald Regan, a White House chief of staff whom Reagan fired gracelessly after the Iran-contra scandal erupted, had a higher opinion of him, as both a man and a president, but was just as puzzled by his unflappable detachment. Regan included in his book stories of the president's sentimentality and kindness—quietly sending generous checks to hard-luck cases he'd read about in the newspaper, for example. But each of these was balanced by some anecdote less flattering: The president never condescended to praise the work of subordinates, and the chief of staff could never persuade his boss to send greetings and thank you's to the White House switchboard ladies when they retired.

Even the aides who resisted tell-all memoirs resorted to paradox and oxymoron in their efforts to explain him. Martin Anderson, a faithful and long-serving aide, called him a "warmly ruthless man." James Baker said Reagan was the "kindest and most impersonal man" he'd ever met. He might dote on persons who appeared in front of him and forget them instantly when they'd turned the corner out of sight—an inverted model of the misanthrope who loves humanity and dislikes human beings.

Among the people to whom Reagan was thought to be indifferent were his children. Their own books were the most harrowing of the tell-alls, and

Reagan mythologists have a hard time wrestling with them, when they've been acknowledged at all. By most recent count there have been nine of them, among four kids. Reagan's daughter Patti Davis became a professional writer on the strength of a memoir, *The Way I See It* (1992), an update of *Mommie Dearest*, with a big role for Daddy, too. She also wrote a pair of novels in which the same theme—parents throttle talented and sensitive daughter—was fictionalized, admittedly this time. With another memoir of her childhood, *Angels Don't Die* (1995), and an account of her father's descent into Alzheimer's, *The Long Goodbye* (2004), Patti is still writing about her parents, much more kindly now, if no more plausibly. Her ear is finely tuned and the prose is lovely, but there's too much of it: Her writing bears the heavy marks of a person who has spent many hours in therapy and can't make herself stop confessing. There are moments when you want to shout, Just say no! ("I had a blanket that I carried with me everywhere. . . . It was called Blankie.") Even the friendliest reader, moreover, will suspect she's an untrustworthy guide to her parents.

The memoir of Reagan's adopted son Michael, *On the Outside Looking In*, was published in 1988 and earned attention initially because the author revealed that he'd been molested by a camp counselor as a boy. But deep resentments toward his father colored every page, and the slights were big and small. Michael married late in life, for instance, after much cajoling from his parents. Yet when the wedding day arrived, he tells us, Ron and Nancy chose to go to Tricia Nixon's White House wedding instead. The child from Michael's marriage seldom saw his grandfather, but on a rare visit to the White House he was elated to get a message from him: Would he like to come outside to make a snowman? The boy threw on his snow boots and rushed down to the South Lawn. He was greeted there by ranks of photographers with their cameras trained on Grandpa, who stood patting snow onto a snowman already built by White House staff.

The only Reagan spawn who didn't write a book about his father has now filled the gap in the public record. Early returns suggest that *My Father at 100*, by Ron Reagan, will not be greeted kindly by the mythologists, but it is a charming and beautifully written book nonetheless, by a son who is both knowing and dutiful.

Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in retirement, 1990

"I have long resisted writing about Dad's life or offering a memoir of our lives together," Ron Reagan writes. "Doing so while he held office always struck me as exploitive, not to mention unfair to a loved one in such a vulnerable position." That unexpected word *vulnerable* is typical of the son's tone and sympathy: He knows that the most powerful man in the world is, in one respect, uniquely weak—publicly exposed to embarrassments and abrasions from his own family that other men would not have been from theirs. If Ronald Reagan weren't president, nobody would have cared that his head-case of a daughter hated him.

This protectiveness is essential to the son's feelings for the father. Ron writes of his exasperation, compounded over decades, with his father's custom of telling jokes and anecdotes over and over again. And yet: "On the only occasion I recall pointedly telling him that we'd all heard that story plenty of times before, he looked so crestfallen that I silently pledged never again to inflict that kind of pain on any living creature."

"Like everybody who was close to my father, I felt protective of him. Bringing that out in people was always among his least recognized talents."

This was true even for those who felt withdrawal pangs from Reagan's impersonal and fleeting kindness, a legion that includes his son. "I never felt that he didn't love or care for me," he writes. But: "You couldn't help wondering sometimes whether he remembered you once you were out of his sight."

Reagan's remoteness, his habit of "wandering inside his own head," may have obscured the first signs of the Alzheimer's that would eventually do him in. *My Father at 100* made big news last month for the author's guess that the disease first showed itself midway through the presidency. The speculation is offered glancingly in the book, but it was enough to set off his brother Michael, who leapt to the battle stations of the digital age, Twitter and Facebook: "My brother seems to want [to] sell out his father to sell books," he tweeted furiously, if tweets can be furious.

For Ron to trade on his father's name in this way, said Michael—founder of the Reagan Group, president of the Reagan Legacy Foundation, promoter of Reagan PAC (Restoring Every American's Government Across the Nation Political Action Committee), owner of www.reagan.com, editor of the *Reagan Report*, and author, most recently, of *The New Reagan Revolution*—was "unconscionable."

The controversy brought back many vivid memories of Reagan fam-

MIKE GUASTELLA / WIREIMAGE / GETTY IMAGES

ily dysfunctionality—it was almost like 1987 all over again!—but it quickly faded when Michael apologized for his rashness, allowing readers to turn their attention to the merits of Ron's book, which are considerable. It comes as a relief that Ron Reagan is still trying to understand Ronald Reagan, too, still feeling around for that tenth level, and having no more success than the rest of us.

But the book does raise the question of how useful the stories of even his children are to either mythologists or revisionists. No doubt the kids had a unique vantage, and still do. They stand and watch as their father turns, literally, into a statue—hundreds of statues by now, in dozens of countries. (It doesn't help that the statues seldom look like Reagan: A bust in the quad of Reagan's alma mater, Ron says, "strikes a nice balance between a rabid leprechaun and James Brolin as conceived by a chain saw artist.")

In *The Long Goodbye*, Patti Davis writes of sitting with her mother in her parents' bedroom one evening and realizing that every object within view—hairbrushes, jewelry cases, tables and chairs, the suits that hung in the closet—was destined for the museum at the Reagan presidential library. There they would be magically transformed from household items of everyday use into historical artifacts, catalogued and labeled by curators, and in time displayed for a curious public.

Reagan's children care about him for reasons different from those that motivate the rest of us, of course. Ron and Patti in particular are deaf to the appeal of his politics. A former talk show host for the left-wing radio network Air America, Ron Reagan at times uses his memoir to plump his own political views, which read like a comment thread at the *Huffington Post*. Present-day Republicans, he insists, are betraying his father's legacy with their "rage-mongering." These passages are as unobjectionable as they are uninteresting. But then he pulls rank: "Many of those who presume to speak in his voice scarcely met him, if at all," Ron goes on. "Dad and I, on the other hand, were well acquainted."

He's making a category mistake—understanding political ideas is a different act from understanding the man who held them. But even in this second category Ron proves no more surefooted than anyone else. "He was easy to love but hard to know," he writes. We've heard that already. "He was as strange a fellow as any of us had ever met." We've been getting an inkling of that, too.

Strange as Ron uses it here is a word of desperation. What it means is, *We give up. We can't figure him out*. It is the same word used by Edmund Morris, the author of *Dutch*, the official biography of Ronald Reagan and a fitting book with which to close this little survey. With sales of 400,000 in hardcover, even more in paperback, and still in print, *Dutch* is the book you are most likely to find in the biography section of the bookstore, even if you find no others, when you embark on your own search for Reagan. Years after he'd finished it, Morris was still exasperated. "He was," he told an interviewer, "one of the strangest men who ever lived."

The story of the writing of *Dutch*, well known as it is, is more revealing of Reagan than the book itself. Morris was hired as the official biographer by Reagan aides in 1984. They were acting under a terrible misapprehension. They had read and admired his *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* and hoped for something similarly evocative on the boy from Dixon, Illinois. And Morris's *Rise* is dazzling indeed. Its greatness lies in the author's ability to re-create scenes, establish mood, and—most dazzling of all—plumb the depths of his subjects by reconstructing states of mind and making them plausible in every psychological detail. With politics and ideas, however, Morris was not so deft, and easily bored. A finely etched portrait of William Jennings Bryan in *Rise*, for example, scarcely mentions the debate over free silver.

Yet can you understand Reagan without understanding his politics? Morris is the most talented writer ever to take up Reagan seriously as a subject. He was given the run of the White House for four years, and kept up with Reagan in retirement. The president sat with him for dozens of interviews lasting hundreds of hours. Diaries and private letters were opened to him. No historian has ever been granted such access to a sitting president.

But he was stymied, as he freely confesses. "Dutch [Reagan's nickname] remained a mystery to me," he writes in a typical passage. So Morris abandoned the idea of trying to write a biography at all and instead produced an act of literary madness—the invented memoir of a doppelgänger Edmund Morris who, it turns out, had grown up with Reagan and followed him to Hollywood, only to be hired decades later as his official biographer. The book is flawless in conveying the anxieties and pleasures of life in the West Wing, the atmosphere of prewar Hollywood, and the lonesomeness of the Midwestern prairie; it taps out the tattoo of Washington life without missing a beat; it is bittersweet, sentimental, affectionate. And it is nuts. When Edmund Morris tried to understand Ronald Reagan, Ronald Reagan drove him insane.

The book comes to a climax of sorts in one of their final interviews. Morris admits to the reader that he has spent much of his time with Reagan "trying to restrain a surge of adoration," and it is dawning on him, as it dawned on Stockman and Regan and most everyone else who knew Reagan and lived to write about it, that his love is unrequited.

"I'm going to embarrass you, Mr. President," Morris tells him in the Oval Office. He mentions a quote from Samuel Johnson and announces that it applies perfectly to Reagan: "The more you explain it, the less you will understand it."

"Dutch looked shocked. 'That's me? I think I'm an open book!'"

Morris never understood Reagan's remark, or weighed the possibility that it might be true. He just knew there was a tenth level down there somewhere. He never found it. Let *Dutch* be a cautionary tale to the rest of us.

Besides, George Will was wrong: The first nine levels are interesting, too, if only because Reagan was . . . you know, Reagan. Maybe that's all he was, and wasn't that enough? ♦

B&A

A King's Speech

Learning the language of Richard and Reagan.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

The setting was the dining room of the *Washington Star*, the time August 1981, the occasion a recent announcement that the *Star* would soon close after more than a century. Our guest, at his own gracious invitation, was none other than the president: It was Ronald Reagan's first official outing after his recovery from the Hinckley shooting. He looked a bit pale but was otherwise in lively form.

At our table, one of three, the conversation turned to spaghetti westerns, a subject with which the president was much at home. James Thurber's funny essay on the comic French subtitles of cowboy movies was mentioned. Taking up the thread, Mr. Reagan suddenly asked: "Where did we get the English language? Where did it come from?" There was an awkward silence. This was not the kind of question one often hears in political Washington. Yielding to a hereditary pedantic streak, I spoke up. English as we know it is, I said, a blend of Norman French and Anglo-Saxon that reached recognizable form in the age of Chaucer, the mid- to late-14th century.

The president thanked me, as if he'd asked a more mundane question; the discussion of movies resumed. I've often reflected on that unusual Q&A in the intervening decades, and for me the overriding reflection is that Reagan was willing to risk a question regarding common lore. Not that it *is* so common: One can easily imagine many self-important politicians, including others who have occupied the White House, who would never have ventured such a query.

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Yet my spontaneous answer that day was inexact, for scholars date the advent of Middle English—one rich dialect of which Chaucer wrote—from as early as the mid-12th century. Had I yielded further to my pedantic streak, I might also have mentioned Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), which is in part about linguistic snobbery, and in which the hostility between English-speaking Saxons and their condescending French-speaking Norman overlords is sharp.

Richard II

More recently, a rereading of Shakespeare's *King Richard II* generated yet another reflection on that exchange with Ronald Reagan. *Richard II* is an immensely popular play and has been so, for various reasons, since it appeared late in the reign of Elizabeth I and went through four quarto editions in the Bard's lifetime. Her Majesty Elizabeth I herself was very sensitive about it—especially after the Earl of Essex had it staged on the eve of his failed *coup d'état* against her. "Know ye not that I am Richard II?" she famously asked of one of her servitors. The reason for her anxiety is clear enough: The play is about the deposition of a royal personage, and her times were unstable, her grip on power fading, and no clear successor was yet in sight.

Richard II, who succeeded his warrior grandfather Edward III at the age of 10, had a troubled reign (1377-99) and was ultimately deposed by his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, the Henry IV of Shakespeare's succeeding history play. Apart from the boyishness of Richard's image as he is pictured in the Wilton Diptych, that king, in Shakespeare's rendering, appears as a neurotic, self-indulgent young man, but also a character of great poetic eloquence. "Fat in the arse and only interested in eating and drinking," wrote his unflattering contemporary Froissart, quoting the Duke of Gloucester. Richard II, in Shakespeare's portrait, moreover, has his own chapter in Ernst Kantorowicz's treatise on "medieval political theology," *The King's Two Bodies*: an exposition of the doctrine (sometimes miscalled "divine right") that the coronation ritual of anointment confers quasi-priestly powers on mortal rulers. In one of his eloquent moments, Richard declares, "Not all the water in the rough, rude sea can wash the balm off from an anointed king." Nonetheless, in the face of his uncle's rebellion, the balm was washed away by his own tears, and he fell and was murdered. Andrew Gurr, in the 2003 Cambridge edition of the play, rightly quotes Theodore Weiss saying that Richard is "Shakespeare's most thoroughgoing study of the absorption in words and the perils such absorption invites."

Back now to my exchange with President Reagan. By necessary implication, the play is a study in the transition to the English vernacular. The telling thematic clue occurs in the first act, the anguished speech of Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, when Richard banishes him from England:

A heavy sentence, my most sovereign liege . . .
The language I have learn'd these forty years,
My native English, I must forgo. . .
Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,
Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips. . .

Just where, apart from his unfailing intuition, Shakespeare gathered that Richard's late-14th-century reign marked the decisive transition to English is unknowable, but he sets the thematic mark of that transition on Mowbray's lips. And here, Geoffrey Chaucer reenters the picture. The father of English poetry was, from boyhood, a courtier and royal friend and servant. A famous 15th-century manuscript at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, shows Chaucer reading his epic masterpiece *Troilus and Criseyde* at Richard's court. It is no very difficult conjecture to imagine the boy-king listening intently to a story of the cruel fickleness of Fortune in that love story, and applying it to himself. It was a favorite Chaucerian theme, and we know that Chaucer, the king's senior, was a royal favorite. Within a few months of reaching his majority in 1389, Richard appointed the poet (and mentor, we presume) Chief Clerk of the King's Works; but the 1390s were the last decade of Chaucer's life and work, and he soon resigned the post.

From this exiguous evidence, taking some poetic license, we can imagine the historic Richard II acquiring from Chaucer's tutelage the magnificent poetry he speaks as the most poetic of Shakespeare's imagined kings. We know that he was the first English monarch to take his oath in English (though some say it was Henry IV who did so).

All this is, of course, afterthought—what the French call *l'esprit de l'escalier*, "staircase wit," the smart retort that springs to mind after the opportunity to speak has passed. I am sure, however, that Mr. Reagan would have listened patiently, had I thus elaborated my response about the origins of English on that long-ago August day in 1981. ♦

B&A

Pick Yourself Up

Among the vestiges of WASPdom.

BY EDWARD SHORT

Dead End Gene Pool is many books rolled into one. It is a fascinating autobiography about what it was like growing up the great-great-great granddaughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt, the railroad tycoon whose fortune left the Burden family one of the richest in New York. It is also a family memoir that merits a place beside the equally brilliant memoirs of Alexander Waugh and Lorna Sage. Then again, it is an unforgettable portrait of a daughter and mother that, in its lacerating comedy, resembles Mary Karr's reminiscential effusions. It is also a social history that revisits Fifth Avenue in the fifties, sixties, and seventies, as well as Mount Desert Island in Maine and the Jupiter Island Club in Florida. And last, it is something of a detective story, with a dénouement that is as sad as it is insoluble.

Dead End Gene Pool
A Memoir
by Wendy Burden
Gotham, 288 pp., $26

Sadness suffuses the book, which makes the author's wonderful jokes all the more welcome. Her father committed suicide when she was six and she spent most of her childhood shuttling back and forth between her mother's houses—first in Georgetown and then in London—and her grandparents' opulent homes in Manhattan and Maine. Burden's descriptions of her grandparents and their 20-odd servants are priceless, as are those of her uncles. But it is her lubricious stepfather who brings out her most acid wit.

Then there is her inimitable mother. After the loss of her husband, Leslie (née Hamilton) took to the role of merry widow with unseemly celerity and became *persona non grata* with the Burden clan. Consequently, Wendy and her brothers were brought up by their grandparents—or, more accurately, by their grandparents' servants, for whose kindness, loyalty, and indefatigable energy the author has great affectionate respect. For her mother, after years of being passed over for boyfriends and booze, Burden can only feel exasperation and a sort of pitying love.

Indeed, the stride in which she takes her life's heartbreaks is admirable: There are no recriminations here, or exhibitionistic self-pity. Readers expecting to encounter a poor little rich girl will come away disappointed. Even when her family is at its lowest ebb—and the ebbs here can be very low indeed—Burden is always ready to confound sorrow with laughter. In one passage, for example, she recalls paying a visit to her grandfather, William A.M. Burden II, the erstwhile president of the Museum of Modern Art, in his palatial apartment on Fifth Avenue, when he had begun to sink into his dotage:

> As my grandfather's drinking worsened, his brain rewarded him by undergoing a series of strokes that deprived him of his two favorite diversions: speech and taste.
>
> He continued to consume food and wine as if his senses were unaltered, but dining with him was a different experience. One could now voice an opinion—on anything: thermonuclear war, the amount of coke being done in the Studio 54 bathroom, genital mutilation, mixed marriages, civil libertarianism, Super Tampax versus Regular. The only word he could get out was a relatively harmless "phooey." Except one time, when we

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were discussing my cousin Connie's upcoming nuptials to a man named Rosengarten, and he began to splutter and thrash around in his wheelchair, and finally managed to choke out, "J… J… J… JEW! JEW! JEWWWWW!!!" He continued to call the word out throughout the rest of the meal, and was put to bed still repeating it. Luckily, by the next morning he was back to good old "phooey."

English and American literature battens on bad drinking. Yet in all the annals of literary dipsomania there are few passages funnier than this: "It's amazing how resourceful an addict can be. In the midst of this self-medicated madness, my grandfather invented and patented the Tippler's Bathroom. Fed up with broken bones and telltale bruises, he designed a john that was entirely padded. … You could bounce around dead drunk in the shower and never hurt yourself." Reading this, no one will be surprised that the author spent a fair amount of her literary apprenticeship working with P.J. O'Rourke, another social critic alive to the contributions drink has made to the nation's cultural ethos.

But it was a mark of her grandfather's selfishness that he did not share his brilliant invention with his wife, Florence (née Partridge), who, as Burden recalls, "bravely and consistently wore the black and blue (and green and yellow) badge of Dubonnet and withstood all four of her slippery, sharp-angled bathrooms like the Christian she was." That their Fifth Avenue apartment was designed by Philip Johnson in the modern minimalist style only added to the hazardous angularity of the place. Indeed, for Burden, for all the falls her poor grandmother sustained, "she might as well have just kept herself packed in ice"—an observation which leads to an architectural aside that would have amused John Betjeman, whose own family, it is said, owed their modest wealth to the patenting of a lockable drinks cabinet: "Modernism is such an inhospitable décor scheme for drinkers; there's a reason the classic English drawing room has remained soft and downy throughout the ages."

Clotheshorses will savor the author's attention to sartorial details, not only the Best & Co. dresses that she wears as a child but the Charvet shirts and ties that her Francophile grandfather favors. Speaking of her grandfather's manservant, Adolphe, Burden observes:

> Impeccably turned out as he was—daytime black jacket, gray waistcoat, and pinstripe trousers; evening tailcoat with white gloves and wing collar—Adolphe ensured his master was too, whether in white tie with decorations for a dinner at the White House, a navy Huntsman business suit for the office, or spotless flannel tennis whites for the weekend court. Not a molecule of lint could be found on either man, and this was before the most important invention of the twentieth century: the rolling pet hair remover.

Wendy Burden

Food is another topic paid sumptuous attention. Burden's grandfather was an A.J. Liebling/Elizabeth David fan and enjoyed entertaining on the grand scale. The author's recollections of the chef Arturo, the undisputed king of the servants, are some of the most vivid: "For my grandmother, a Kon-Tiki enthusiast," she recalls, "he fashioned Tahitian cucumber outriggers with little oars carved out of carrots, filling them with composed salads of lobster or crab or tiny diced vegetables, bound with copious amounts of mayonnaise," which the author nicely calls "French luncheon glue." Burden's mother, on the other hand, who is obsessed with her weight and suntan, only turns to cooking when she has no alternative, and then with calamitous results. After describing the inedible messes her mother prepares, Burden styles the maternal cookery "Early New England Regional Cuisine as Interpreted by an Alcoholic with an Eating Disorder."

Together with the sadness, there is something brave about *Dead End Gene Pool*. To understand this bravery, we have to appreciate why people write memoirs in the first place. In an essay entitled "On Suicide," H.L. Mencken once ventured the hypothesis that "men work simply in order to escape the depressing agony of contemplating life. … Their work, like their play, is a mumbo-jumbo that serves them by permitting them to escape from reality." No one familiar with the solitary toil that writing requires can altogether discount this; and yet, if there is one genre of writing about which none of the above applies, it is the memoir. Someone writing about the Hundred Years' War can lose himself in the labyrinths of military, legal, economic, and social history. But to write a memoir is necessarily to embrace "the agony of contemplating life"—and not just any life but one's own.

A pivotal passage occurs when Burden receives a handwritten note from her crapulous grandmother apologizing for her misbehavior the night before when she had downed too much Dubonnet. "My grandmother had been raised a Christian Scientist," she recalls. "It was ingrained in her to disregard in life whatever she found too distressing to handle. … Her note to me was a bombshell. I knew she had a problem, and I knew she knew I knew, but to admit it was so bleakly out of character, I wanted to vaporize."

But she did not vaporize. Instead, she summoned the old WASP sense of duty, and wrote this glorious memoir which, in its way, is her own handwritten note—not only to her mother and father, but to her grandparents and their servants, her uncles, brothers, and even to the old Commodore himself. And its central message is the same as the one she finds on a New Age website that her dotty brother visits: "Heal Your Life NOW by Healing Your Past Lives!" ♦

CHRIS CALLIS

B&A

As Thousands Cheer

The gift of George Gershwin's sound.

BY DANIEL GELERNTER

George and Ira Gershwin, ca. 1935

Brian Wilson's album is a new take on favorite Gershwin songs, as arranged and sung by the great Beach Boys songwriter, and includes two brand-new songs that Wilson assembled from Gershwin's uncompleted manuscripts. Larry Starr teaches music history at the University of Washington, and *George Gershwin* is a volume in the Yale Broadway Masters Series. As such, and despite its title, it focuses on Gershwin's Broadway hits, especially *Of Thee I Sing*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Lady, Be Good! Porgy and Bess*, as Starr admits, defies categorization but is included in the Broadway set as representing the pinnacle of Gershwin's musical/dramatic development. Starr's book shows a deep and passionate knowledge of George Gershwin; Brian Wilson's album does not.

George Gershwin
by Larry Starr
Yale, 216 pp., $45

Brian Wilson Reimagines Gershwin
Disney Pearl, $13.98

This reviewer first encountered Starr's Gershwin work in the 1999 essay collection *The Gershwin Style*. I wished, at the time, that Starr had written the whole book. His essay was a brief but brilliant defense of Gershwin's "classical" compositions (*Rhapsody in Blue*, *An American in Paris*, etc.) against the common academic criticism that they're too unsophisticated and pop music-like to be taken seriously. That point of view, championed by self-conscious and less fluent composers—Starr takes on Leonard Bernstein, especially—has long prevailed in the world of "art" music, where Gershwin is seen as a talented tunesmith. Starr begins with a case in point: He recalls his first keyboard audition as a college music major. The student who played before him had performed Gershwin's second piano prelude; the instructor said, "Well, that's very nice. Now can you play something serious?"

Which reminds me of my own experience as a music major at Yale. The required history course on 20th-century music didn't include a single Gershwin piece, and Gershwin was mentioned only once—as one of Arnold Schoenberg's tennis partners in Los Angeles. American scholars' disdain for Gershwin makes a remarkable contrast to his "dominating, persistent presence . . . in American musical culture," Starr writes: Gershwin wanted to be "a musical spokesman for his country," and he succeeded. None of his contemporaries so thoroughly embodied the spirit of America between the wars, and none has remained so popular today. Gershwin himself described American life (and, implicitly, his own music) as "nervous, hurried, syncopated, ever *accelerando*, and slightly vulgar." Starr writes that "there is a terrific feeling of healthiness to Gershwin's art." Gershwin's music is always vibrant, the perfect accompaniment for, say, bounding down the streets of Manhattan.

Academics, however, don't just ignore Gershwin's popular success; they hold it against him. Gershwin didn't have the classical European training of Aaron Copland, for example. (Copland studied with Nadia Boulanger, who refused to take on Gershwin, observing that she had nothing to teach him.) Gershwin's music is unconventional and follows no abstract doctrine. Even his purely popular music cannot be classed as swing or ragtime or jazz or

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Daniel Gelernter is collaborating with Bernd Dinter and the Scharoun Ensemble of Berlin on a new series of Gershwin performances and recordings.

blues; he is unique. That ordinary people like him is the final nail in the coffin: Whatever merit might attach to his "classical" works is spoiled for the profs by huge popular success.

Starr's book elevates, perhaps even inaugurates, discussion of Gershwin as a serious composer deserving serious study, and the author explains that he has aimed to produce a book for the general reader as well as the student or scholar. The pace is as brisk as Gershwin's music and nicely balances forward movement and in-depth focus. The scholarship is vigorous and original and gives a clear account of the development of Gershwin's artistic vision. This is for people who want to understand the music: its originality, lasting appeal, and power. It is not a biography. Starr opens with sketches of important events in Gershwin's life, but those who want more detail are referred to the standard biographers: Isaac Goldberg, Edward Jablonski, Robert Kimball, Alfred Simon.

George Gershwin hinges on careful studies of three definitive Broadway scores, each representing a different style of musical theater. *Lady, Be Good!* was a 1920s show, above all a vehicle for Fred and Adele Astaire. It had lots of vaudeville elements, and many numbers were only marginally connected to plot or character. Accordingly, the songs were free of entangling plot references and, in many cases, stood on their own as hits ("Oh, Lady Be Good!" "Fascinating Rhythm," "So Am I," and "The Man I Love," which was dropped from the show). *Of Thee I Sing* was an even greater box-office success, and a new kind of musical: Songs and book were interwoven to make a cohesive whole. Starr emphasizes its integrity as a "work"—a satirical show about 1930s politics—whose musical elements are more like movements in a symphony than scattered hits. Its tight construction helped it become the first musical to win a Pulitzer Prize—George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind for the book, Ira Gershwin for the lyrics—but the Pulitzer was for writing, not composing.

Starr regards *Porgy and Bess* as the pinnacle of Gershwin's genius, and his analysis of the music is engaging, particularly in the way he explains that songs reveal subtleties of character. But he also seems to believe that a song's greatness depends on its inseparable relationship to the play, so he views Gershwin's final years in Hollywood as something of a falling-off in his talent, even though they yielded some of Gershwin's greatest numbers. An interesting thesis, but wrong.

The best of many good things about *George Gershwin* is that Starr finds the essence of Gershwin in rhythm and harmony as much as melody: There's more to Gershwin than his famous tunes. But Brian Wilson seems to know only the tunes. Starr is intimately familiar with Gershwin's own recordings and notes on performance; the style of Wilson's arrangements, and his unimaginative selection of songs, suggests that he may know little more about Gershwin than can be got from 1950s recordings by Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald—or from hotel lobbies and elevators. "Well, I learned that Gershwin couldn't only write *Rhapsody in Blue*," Wilson said in a recent interview, "but he can write actual songs."

Accordingly, *Brian Wilson Reimagines Gershwin* is more Wilson than Gershwin. Wilson has said that he recorded the songs in a way he thought Gershwin would like, but seems to have little idea what that means. If you like classic Beach Boys and have never heard of George Gershwin, you will like this album—and those who would compare Gershwin and Wilson as composers will find Wilson vastly out of his depth. The Beach Boys were famous for their harmonies, but what they were really good at was *harmonizing*, especially their trademark bunched-up falsetto chords. Their actual harmonies (that is, chord progressions) were notably less imaginative than Gershwin's, and many of their best songs adhere closely to 12-bar blues or the one-six-four-five "pop progression." Gershwin was far more restless in his movement from chord to chord and from key to key. "He Loves and She Loves," for instance, modulates twice (and with extraordinary subtlety) in the 16 bars of the verse, and then enters a fourth key for the chorus. When Wilson finally modulates up a semi-tone near the end of his version of "I Got Rhythm," it sounds like an accident.

Wilson's "I Got Rhythm" is a good example of the pitfalls of fiddling around with rhythm and meter. Gershwin wrote it in "cut time"—his favorite running-pace time-signature—to emphasize two beats per bar; in Wilson's arrangement, the rhythm section continuously gushes eighth notes, which slows the song down and steals all its vigor and urgency. And the biggest disappointment is the pair of songs Wilson "completed" from Gershwin's notes: "The Like in I Love You" and "Nothing but Love." There are few greater honors for a contemporary musician than to be allowed access to Gershwin's notebooks and complete Gershwin's own ideas. But the result here is unspeakably bland, and nothing close even to Brian Wilson's best work. ♦

KATHERINE EASTLAND

Royal Fairy Tale

Modern British history as the cinema likes to remember it. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

The King's Speech is a winsome fantasy, as unreal in its way as *Avatar*. The science-fiction blockbuster succeeded in making an entirely animated world seem as though it actually existed. *The King's Speech*, set in 1930s Britain and featuring famous personages, converts a stratified historical past into a comforting egalitarian dreamscape.

The King's Speech
Directed by Tom Hooper

The Duke of York, brother and son to kings of England, has been brought low by a terrible impediment. He masters his affliction through the ministrations and considerations of a lowly commoner, a failed actor from Australia, who insists on "absolute equality." His treatment happens to coincide with his unprecedented accession to the throne in 1936 upon his brother's startling abdication in favor of "the woman I love," which itself coincides with the gathering storm in prewar Europe.

The movie draws a charming connection between the stutterer's salvation at the hands of an ordinary man and the role George VI (the title taken by the Duke of York upon assuming the crown) would be required to play in rallying the ordinary folk of England to persevere during the brutal six years that would follow the speech for which the movie is named and with which it concludes.

The whole notion is a delicious confection, and the movie is terrifically affecting—indeed, I don't recall a movie that has stirred the kind of universal enthusiasm among its viewers that *The King's Speech* has. George's eventual triumph over his stammer becomes a kind of precursor to Britain's triumph over Germany. Sweet. But, upon a moment's reflection, silly.

As is its depiction of British history. Screenwriter David Seidler makes it appear as though the Britons of 1936 were ruefully aware that war with Germany was inevitable, when that was a view held by a distinct minority led by Winston Churchill. The film makes it appear that Churchill had an intellectual influence over George VI in the years before the war, which is transparently ludicrous. Seidler and director Tom Hooper even have Conservative prime minister Stanley Baldwin sounding Churchill-like alarums in George's ear in 1937, when in fact Baldwin was a supporter of his successor Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, which had Chamberlain declaring he had achieved "peace for our time" in 1938.

Seidler does not want the film to pivot on British political controversy, and that is a wise decision dramatically. But making a hash out of stuff any nine-year-old can find out from a glance at Wikipedia is sloppy and calls into question his treatment of the material that really does interest him: private struggles and the king-to-be's relationship with Lionel Logue, the therapist.

Seidler and Hooper worship both men without reservation. We are reminded every ten minutes or so that Bertie, the future king, is the bravest or the toughest or the most courageous man you are likely to meet. Lionel says so; his wife says so; and ruefully, Bertie informs Logue that words to that effect were the last ones out of his father's mouth. "Couldn't say them to my face," he says sadly.

As for Logue, he is masterly and calm, dignified even when he cannot get himself cast as Richard III in a community theater production. He is not flustered in the least when he finds himself face-to-face with the Duchess of York in the basement studio where he treats his patients. He is a loving father, a devoted husband, and a charming conversationalist. And he seems to know that what his patient needs, more than a therapist, is a friend. Logue calls his royal charge "Bertie" and subtly offers psychoanalytic observations that help Bertie understand the sources of his stammer.

These are two glorious parts, and they are played by two glorious actors who are having the times of their lives. Geoffrey Rush, the shape-shifting miracle worker who played the schizophrenic pianist in *Shine* and the theatrical impresario in *Shakespeare in Love*, gives Logue a hilariously plummy voice that is the result of a lifelong effort to remove the Australian accent from his diction. And Colin Firth, as Bertie, shows yet again that he may be the first great British screen actor whose power comes not from the way he represses emotion but from the way pain and grief and rage and unhappiness explode out from him.

There are other fine turns here as well, notably Guy Pearce as the self-besotted Edward VIII and Helena Bonham Carter as the controlled Mrs. Bertie, who would later be the Queen Mum. And there are startling ones as well that offer painful glimpses at the relentless passage of time as only the cinema can offer them. Who is that parched old woman playing Bertie's cold and savage mother? Why, it's Claire Bloom, once one of the most beautiful women on earth. And the odd-looking thin gent playing Stanley Baldwin turns out, shockingly, to be Anthony Andrews, who was the emblematic beautiful British boy of the interwar years in the great *Brideshead Revisited* television series 30 years ago.

The King's Speech says that love and friendship trump station and class. That wasn't true then, and it isn't true now, but it's a nice world to visit. ♦

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

"A privacy law that shields birth certificates has prompted Democratic Gov. Neil Abercrombie to abandon efforts to dispel claims that President Barack Obama was born outside Hawaii, his office says."
—Associated Press, January 22, 2011

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President's birth record located but inaccessible

'I HATE IT WHEN THAT HAPPENS'

Document fell behind enormous filing cabinet

BY DAVID FAHRENTHOLD

HONOLULU — Governor Neil Abercrombie said on Monday that although privacy laws will not permit him to further pursue President Obama's birth certificate, he is quite certain where it is—behind a massive oak filing cabinet in his office. "A few weeks ago I held this document in my hand, actual physical proof that our president was born in Hawaii [pronounced Ha-WAH-ee]. I tacked it to my wall but the tack came loose and the certificate fell behind this bureau," he explained. "I hate it when that happens."

Though "birther" conspiracy theorists will hardly be satisfied by legal explanations, Abercrombie insists the proof is there. "You'll just have to trust me that the birth certificate exists. If I reach back behind the cabinet with all my might, I can brush the very top of it," he said. "It's just a shame this solid oak bureau is so heavy." In his pursuit of the document, the governor has been able to fish out several other items from behind the cabinet, including a grocery list belonging to former Governor Linda Lingle and an ancient tiki. "I've been told the tiki is cursed," said the governor jokingly. (Abercrombie planned on going surfing later this week but threw out his back while trying to avoid a poisonous spider.)

Eventually, said Abercrombie, "a moving crew will get here and, assuming they bring with them the proper equipment, they will finally be able to move that damn bureau." According to Hawaii historian Jonathan Higgins, what they find behind that cabinet could well be a treasure trove. "I am sure that along with the certificate we'll find some spare change from the 1970s, a few macadamia nuts, and a hairpiece belonging to Jack Lord."

While conspiracy buffs continue to conduct their own investigations throughout the islands, one private detective says he has it all figured out. Driving around in his red Ferrari 308 GTS, Thomas

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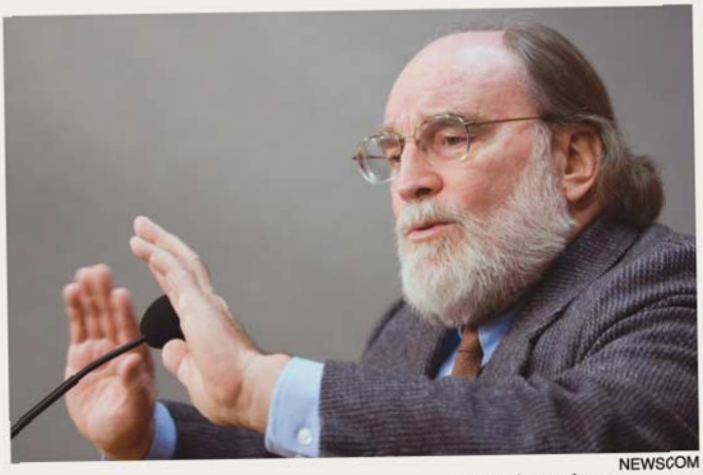

NEWSCOM

Gov. Abercrombie wishes his fingers weren't so short.

Emanuel makes Court 'offer it can't refuse'

Justices report 'mysterious' deliveries of cash, swag, dead fish

the weekly Standard
FEBRUARY 7, 2011