

**THE GOP
ON OFFENSE**
FRED BARNES • MATTHEW CONTINETTI
PETER WEHNER

the weekly

Standard

MARCH 14, 2011

\$4.95

A close-up portrait of Marine Le Pen, looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. She has short blonde hair and is wearing a dark top with a silver zipper.

The Future of the European Right?

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL
interviews
France's Marine Le Pen

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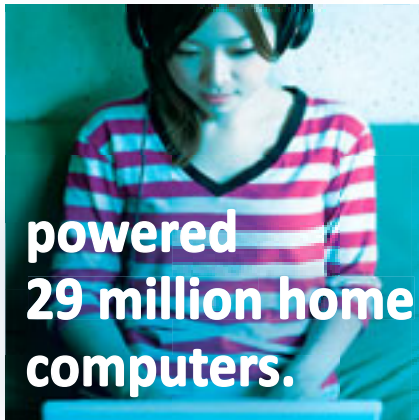
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ROTC Returns to Harvard

Everyone knows that the military's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) chapters were kicked off America's elite university campuses—Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, et al.—because of hostility to the draft and to the armed forces during the Vietnam war. The draft ended, the war ended, but the antimilitary animus endured, though the universities in question increasingly sought to disguise their ideological hostility to ROTC training behind a smokescreen of “civil rights” concerns: namely, opposition to the policy of turning away openly homosexual volunteers, otherwise known as Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

Once Congress repealed that policy during its lame-duck session in December, it might have seemed that the last plausible excuse for banning ROTC had been removed. But that would be to underestimate the creativity and cowardice of university administrators. Early last week Harvard president Drew Faust said that while talks with the military were under way, progress was slow because “issues that are being voiced now by transgender students are ones that I think the military hasn't entirely sorted through.”

Happily—perhaps embarrassed by the transparent lameness of this new talking point—Harvard saw the light three days later and announced the imminent return of ROTC to the campus, after a four-decade hiatus. Faust and Navy secretary Ray Mabus signed an agreement on March 4 to create a Naval ROTC chapter at Harvard.

At the other elite universities, delay is still the order of the day—sorry, make that deliberation. Brown and Stanford have set up “committees” to study the issue. Columbia has a “task force,” and Yale is actually having a “discussion” between the administration and the faculty. But when even Senator John Kerry is calling on his alma mater to follow Harvard's lead, as he did in an open letter to Yale president Richard C. Levin on March 4, it's probably just a matter of time before the holdouts cave.

The return of ROTC to our top campuses is worth celebrating, however grudging that process turns out to be. As Cheryl Miller and Gary Schmitt wrote in these pages a few weeks ago:

“Top-tier schools should aim to have top-tier ROTC programs. In so doing, they would help ensure that

the American officer corps reflects America as a whole—thereby allowing ROTC to fulfill its original purpose. No less important, returning ROTC to elite university campuses will restore a proud tradition of military service. When the first ROTC units were established at the land grant colleges, students at Harvard, Yale, and other prominent schools petitioned for their own programs so they too might have the chance to demonstrate their patriotism. And serve they did. Yale's Memorial Hall is covered from floor to ceiling with the names of students and faculty who fought from World War I through the Vietnam war, while Harvard boasts the highest number of Medal of Honor recipients outside the service academies.

“Not everyone agrees with the decision to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell. But its repeal does provide an opening for repairing relations between some of the nation's top universities and the military services—a rift that has been unhealthy for universities, their students, and the armed forces. It's an opportunity that shouldn't go to waste.” ♦

Frank Buckles, 1901-2011

THE SCRAPBOOK notes, with some sadness, the death of 110-year-old Frank Woodruff Buckles at his home near Charles Town, West Virginia. Buckles was the last American veteran of World War I—leaving, so far as anybody knows, only two veterans of the 1914-18 conflagration in the world, one in England and the other in Australia.

Of course, the peaceful death of any 110-year-old is neither a great shock nor tragedy, and Frank Buckles died full of honors and admiration. He had been a successful farmer and businessman in his long life, and by a curious turn of fate, spent much of

World War II as a civilian prisoner of war in the Philippines, where he had been working in the shipping business. His funeral was attended by the British ambassador and an honor guard from the French government.

THE SCRAPBOOK is just old enough to remember a time, not so long ago, when most gentlemen of a certain age in America were likely to be veterans of the Great War. Today, of course, someone who was 18 at the end of World War II would be 84 years old, and someone who was 18 at the time of the Korean armistice (1953) would be 76. The youngest Vietnam veterans are approaching 60. Every American war has had long-term survivors: The last known veterans of the Revolution survived until the Civil War,

and the last soldier of the Civil War, a Confederate veteran, died in 1959. As recently as the 1970s a substantial number of World War I veterans were alive and well; now they're all gone. The last thread connecting our world to the trenches of the Western Front, the war to end all wars, is broken.

Frank Buckles's service in World War I was supremely typical: Too young to enlist, he was rejected by the Navy and Marines but lied about his age to the Army and joined at 16. He was an ambulance driver in France and, while never in combat, he saw the consequences of combat on a daily basis. His tenure in the Army was routine, representative, unheroic—and yet, we may see in retrospect, heroic all the same. Like soldiers since an-

tiquity, he had joined up out of curiosity, in search of adventure, perhaps for patriotic reasons. And like millions of other Americans in uniform throughout our history, he served faithfully, conscientiously, and without any particular sense of entitlement except the instinct to do his duty. ♦

The Qaddafi Concerts

Muammar Qaddafi has ruled Libya with an iron fist for over four decades. In the 1970s, he helped finance the massacre at the Munich Olympics, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Provisional IRA. The next decade, he had at least two dozen critics of his regime around the world—including in the United States—assassinated. He talked about doing the same to President Reagan. We could fill THE SCRAPBOOK with further examples.

But popular musicians don't keep up with the news, it seems. A number of them have just now discovered that Libya's leader is evil—long after collecting million-dollar paychecks from him.

Nelly Furtado was the first to come clean. The now-estimable Canadian singer, responsible for such wholesome hits as "Promiscuous," admitted over Twitter that she'd been paid \$1 million "from the Qaddafi clan" to play just 45 minutes at a private show in Italy.

Beyoncé was the next to admit she'd been paid—she didn't say how much, but rumor has the fee at up to \$2 million—by the dictator. She played a Qaddafi family New Year's Eve party in St. Barts in 2009; Lindsay Lohan, Usher, and Beyoncé's husband Jay-Z all reportedly attended. What a night that must have been! But the "Bootylicious" singer claims she gave away her fee to Haiti relief when she discovered Qaddafi's true nature—just over a year ago.

Then Mariah Carey did the walk of shame. She was paid \$1 million to sing four songs—four songs!—also on St. Barts on New Year's Day 2009. (The Qaddafis must like that location—and, given that Carey's last

album was called *Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel*, beautiful, naughty singers. They'd fit right into the colonel's Amazonian Guard.) Carey, though, didn't promise to donate the money. Instead, she plans to give the proceeds from a song on her upcoming album to a human rights organization.

Timbaland and 50 Cent have also performed at private concerts organized by the Qaddafis. They've kept quiet so far. But it's not only pop stars who have accepted money looted by a tyrant. The director of the London School of Economics, Sir Howard Davies, just resigned his position over nearly half a million dollars he accepted from Qaddafi's son, and former LSE student, Saif al-Islam Qaddafi. (Whose dissertation, by the way, turns out to have been plagiarized. What? Too cheap to hire a ghostwriter?)

Furtado hasn't announced to what group she plans to donate her fee.

Sending aid to the Libyan rebels trying to take back their country might not be a bad way to atone. ♦

Stealth Unionization Update

Since THE SCRAPBOOK last took note of Michigan's weird scheme for subsidizing unions out of the none-too-full pockets of home day care providers, the lawsuit challenging this racket has bounced around the courts without substantive result. It need bounce no more.

Last week, the Michigan Department of Human Services announced that it will stop withholding "union dues" from the public reimbursements it sends to home-based day care providers who look after eligible low-income children. By then, the practice will already have funneled millions of dollars to a shell subsid-

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ary of the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in an arrangement worked out between the unions and the bygone administration of Democratic governor Jennifer Granholm.

Granholm's successor is Rick Snyder, a Republican businessman who took 58 percent of the vote last November in his first run for office. His new head of Human Services, Maura D. Corrigan, sat on the state supreme court before taking over Michigan's largest executive agency. Her work as a justice must have familiarized her with the suit brought by the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation on behalf of three home day care providers who knew they hadn't joined any union and objected to having their pay docked.

Another suit, brought in federal court by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, is seeking to have those back "dues" refunded. Even so, Patrick J. Wright, director

of the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation, while exultant at the "fantastic news" of his clients' vindication, warns that a law is required to prevent similar shenanigans in the future. The day the Michigan legislature acts, watch these pages for a new item: "Stealth Unionization, The End." ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

For most conservatives, even the mere suggestion that the mind has its own agency, that it can take over and dominate the conscious decisions of the individual in which it lives, smacks of gross foolishness. When we make a bad choice, they believe, such as wasting our money on drugs or failing to search hard enough for a job, we should be punished. When we make a good one, by turning to God or starting a much-needed business, we should be rewarded. As it happens . . ." (Alan Wolfe, *New Republic*, March 24, 2011). ♦

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Whistling Through the Graveyard

My wife Mollie and I have been married just four years, but already we're blessed with two adorable daughters, Evangeline and Linden, aged 3 and 18 months. Like most happy husbands and proud fathers, I am more than ready to produce photographic evidence of just how lucky I am.

However, perusing the family photo album—or, to be more 21st-century about it, flicking through the photos on my iPhone—usually engenders a strange reaction. Nearly all the pictures I have of my family are set in a graveyard.

My wife and I are not especially morbid; as it happens we lived for two years across from Congressional Cemetery, on the west bank of the Anacostia River, just over a mile from the U.S. Capitol. It's one of Washington's more obscure historic landmarks.

It's surrounded by a high, wrought iron fence and sits on a few rolling acres. As old cemeteries go, it's picturesque enough to make you forget you're in the middle of the city—two centuries of crumbling tombstones, interspersed with a few mausoleums and a number of towering, watchful oak trees. A quaint chapel with stained glass windows and a steeple sits at the highest point. (I've conditioned myself not to notice the hideous youth prison complex looming over the east wall.)

Lots of people are put off by cemeteries, and I confess they used to bother me. Then I met Mollie. Her father is a Lutheran pastor, so funerals were a prominent part of her upbringing. As if that weren't enough, her mother's family had a funeral home business.

Years ago, she took me on a tour of the cemetery in Gerald, Missouri (pop. 1,171), where a number of her mother's family members are buried. I realized

then not only how special the place was to her, but that her taking me there was a solid indicator she might finally be seriously thinking about marrying me. If you want to get acquainted with someone's family, a cemetery is a good place to start.

It was somewhat serendipitous, then, when we moved across the street from Congressional Cemetery. Mollie was



pregnant with our second child, and we took long walks, with Evangeline tottering behind, while we scoured the tombstones for baby names.

Of course, this is not your typical graveyard. Among the people buried at Congressional are band leader and composer John Philip Sousa; FBI director J. Edgar Hoover; and former vice president and signer of the Declaration of Independence Elbridge Gerry, whose bigger legacy might be bequeathing to us the term gerrymandering.

It's the final resting place of scores of senators and members of Congress. Three presidents and two first ladies were temporarily interred there. And there are too many other significant military leaders, government officials, and famous Indian chiefs to name, all buried alongside hundreds of ordinary citizens.

The place also contains any number of historical oddities, such as a monument to the first person in the District of Columbia ever killed in an automobile accident. And I vividly remember the night I was channel surfing and came across a History Channel special on the Masons. It seems that William Wirt, U.S. attorney general from 1817 to 1829, once ran for president against Andrew Jackson on an anti-Masonic ticket. Wirt is now a part of Masonic lore, and sometime around 2003 someone broke into his tomb and stole his skull.

According to the *Washington Post*, the skull was returned in January 2004 to a member of the D.C. city council “in an old metal box painted with gold block letters reading ‘Hon. Wm. Wirt.’” What the robbers did with Wirt's skull while it was in their possession is the source of much conspiratorial mystery. Needless to say, I was somewhat astonished to realize Wirt was buried in what I had come to think of as my extended front yard.

Alas, children don't stay young forever. With schooling in mind, we moved from our house in the District to Virginia four months ago.

But our three-year-old still asks to visit the cemetery, so Mollie recently took her to the funeral of one of the parishioners in our church. It was a teaching moment. Even though Evangeline still uses a sippy cup, her time in cemeteries has given her more awareness of mortality than I had long after I was a college graduate.

Sadly, too few people understand why “whistling past the graveyard” is such an unfortunate expression. Believe it or not, Congressional Cemetery was overgrown and nearly abandoned just over a decade ago before being revitalized.

Trust me, you can learn a lot from a visit to your local graveyard. And the first lesson is this: Cemeteries aren't just places where we put our dead. They're meant to be lived in.

MARK HEMINGWAY



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The Gates of Resignation

In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should ‘have his head examined,’ as General MacArthur so delicately put it.”

Thus spoke Defense Secretary Robert Gates, addressing the cadets at West Point on February 25. It’s ironic that President Obama’s secretary of defense cites Douglas MacArthur as a foreign policy authority—a general who was fired, as he should have been, by a Democratic president after he botched a land war in Asia, sought to use nuclear weapons, and defied civilian authority. Perhaps Gates should spend his time rereading Matthew Ridgway, or talking with David Petraeus, instead of quoting Douglas MacArthur?



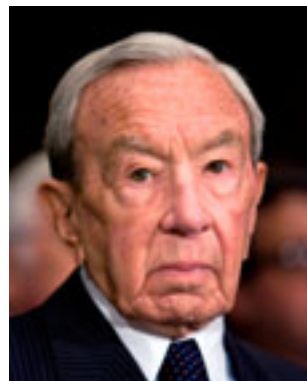
Douglas MacArthur



James Baker

Congress, seemed to dismiss calls to institute a no-fly zone over Libya: “Let’s just call a spade a spade. A no-fly zone begins with an attack on Libya to destroy the air defenses . . .”

Really? Is it right to characterize an attack on the Qaddafi regime’s air defenses and airplanes, and the execution of a no-fly zone that would protect the Libyan people from Qaddafi, as “an attack on Libya”? Can’t we distinguish a regime that’s lost whatever legitimacy it once had from the nation that regime is destroying and the people that regime is terrorizing? When Gates channels not his inner Douglas MacArthur but his inner Jim Baker and Warren Christopher, who were resigned to slaughter in the Balkans and refused to intervene—isn’t he the one who’s failing to “call a spade a spade”?



Warren Christopher



Robert Gates

Or perhaps Gates should look in the mirror? As secretary of defense he has sent “a big American land army into Asia,” increasing the U.S. troop presence from around 57,000 soldiers and Marines in Afghanistan in August 2009 to about 100,000 today. (He also presided over a surge of more than 30,000 troops to Iraq.) Leave aside the facts that our soldiers and Marines are succeeding in Afghanistan, and that history will vindicate Gates’s involvement in the decision to surge. Does Gates really think it appropriate—while he’s still secretary of defense, with troops fighting at his direction—to be undercutting the troops’ mission as though he’s resigned to their failure?

As for the “realism” of his prescription: The United States has sent 100,000 or more troops to Asia and the Middle East five times in the last six decades. Does he really think we may never be called upon to do so again?

A few days after West Point, Gates, testifying before

Of course, Gates’s background is in the intelligence community, where one is trained not to call a spade a spade, and not to speak clearly in the light of day. His memoir of his years in government, mostly at the CIA, is called *From the Shadows*. The title reminded me of a passage a colleague recently happened upon from Theodore Roosevelt who, campaigning for Charles Evans Hughes against Woodrow Wilson in October 1916, threw away his manuscript and gave these extemporaneous remarks (Shadow Lawn was Wilson’s summer White House):

There should be shadows enough at Shadow Lawn; the shadows of men, women and children who have risen from the ooze of the ocean bottom and from graves in foreign lands; the shadows of the helpless whom Mr. Wilson did not dare protect lest he might have to face danger; the shadows of babies grasping pitifully as they sank under the

AP PHOTOS

waves, the shadows of women outraged and slain by bandits. . . . Those are the shadows proper for Shadow Lawn; the shadows of deeds that were never done; the shadows of lofty words that were followed by no action; the shadows of the tortured dead.

Roosevelt's rhetoric was hyperbolic—but it was hyperbole in a good cause. And of course Wilson did end up intervening in Europe. Similarly, we imagine President Obama will end up ordering Secretary Gates to institute a no-fly zone in Libya, and will insist that we see things through in Afghanistan.

In many respects Gates has been an improvement as defense secretary over his predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld. He has been a better defense secretary than many others whom President Obama might have appointed in 2009. But he's doing his president, and his country, no favors now. He has said for a while he wants to retire. Let him go, with all appropriate felicitations and salutations. And let someone take over as secretary of defense who believes in the missions in which American forces are now engaged, and who does not shy away from the understanding that American power is a crucial force for good in the world.

—*William Kristol*

Winning the Real Budget Fight

House Republicans scored major points last week when President Obama agreed to \$4 billion in cuts for fiscal year 2011. The spending reductions were part of a stopgap continuing resolution that will fund the government through March 18. True, \$4 billion may seem small when compared with a \$1.5 trillion deficit, but don't forget that these are the first real-time cuts in government spending in modern memory. The two parties are already negotiating on a follow-up resolution that (we hope) will cut spending further while ensuring government operations through the end of the fiscal year. And the sooner FY11 is behind us, the better, for House Republicans will have cleared the decks for a more important fight: next year's budget.

That document will be important for two reasons. The first is that Congress and the White House have been treading water in recent weeks, struggling to keep the government afloat in the very short term. It's time they got on with crafting a full-year budget, which is a forward-looking exercise. Squint hard at the actuarial tables and charts, and you can discern the author's vision for the country's future. President Obama, for instance, better see an ophthalmolo-

gist: His 2012 budget proposal is too clouded with red ink and marred by a cynical attachment to the status quo. By default, it's up to House Republicans, budget chairman Paul Ryan in particular, to design a clear-eyed alternative that puts America on the path toward sustainable finances and economic growth.

The second reason the 2012 budget matters is entitlement spending. Congress has shown a willingness to reduce discretionary spending, but it could eliminate every last dollar spent on defense, education, welfare, and the environment and America would still be headed toward insolvency. A bike path in Dubuque is not going to break the bank. The main drivers of our growing national debt are Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and interest payments.

With common sense changes in the architecture of the three entitlement programs now, we can avoid cutting benefits for retired Americans or those near retirement while preserving the safety net for future beneficiaries and eventually getting our debt under control. The alternative, which politicians in both parties have been pursuing for decades, is to do nothing while the problem grows worse. Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid cannot live forever in their current form. Either we make the necessary adjustments ourselves, or the bond markets will force them on us. And that could get ugly.

Having pledged on February 15 to "include real entitlement reforms" in the upcoming budget, House Republicans now have to show the country how to avoid a future when Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid consume the federal government and the American economy. And they have to do that without relying on budget gimmicks and bookkeeping tricks stolen from the Enron Guide to Double-Entry Accounting. Otherwise they'll be laughed out of the room.

The good news is that there's a consensus about which reforms are necessary. Begin by focusing on the expensive health care programs: Block-grant Medicaid to the states while suspending the Maintenance of Effort regulations that tell governors how to spend the money they receive from Washington. Allow the governors to use the block-grant money to set up private exchanges where Medicaid recipients use benefits to shop for private insurance plans. Cut the red tape in Medicare that prevents doctors and hospitals from finding new ways to treat patients at a lower price. For Americans 55 years old or younger, gradually move to a system where patients use a fixed Medicare payment to choose the approved plan that's best for them. This is the bipartisan approach proposed by Chairman Ryan and economist Alice Rivlin, a Democrat.

Ultimately, these changes will require a Republican president as well as a Republican Congress. But you can't expect a Republican presidential candidate to run and win on these issues in 2012 unless the ground is laid by the Republican party in the House beginning now. After saving billions in 2011, Republicans have to show how they'll save trillions in

the future. It's not enough to win the argument over fiscal year 2011. We need to win the fight for fiscal year 2012—and beyond.

—Matthew Continetti

The Stakes in Libya

After three weeks, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's ruthless response to the Libyan uprising has resulted in upwards of 3,000 deaths, according to a Paris-based human rights organization, while a Libyan organization believes the fatalities are more than twice the French estimate. And yet, if it is clear that the situation in Libya bears little resemblance to the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings that preceded it, the White House has been slow to adjust to the new reality.

"Going forward, we will continue to send a clear message," President Obama said last week. "The violence must stop. Muammar Qaddafi has lost legitimacy to lead and he must leave."

But Qaddafi isn't going to be persuaded to leave like Tunisia's Ben Ali and Egypt's Mubarak. He's dug in. Not only is he firing on his own people, he's using them as human shields: He warned recently that thousands will die if the West attempts to intervene militarily. That may be one reason why over the last few days the Obama administration has cooled to the idea of establishing a no-fly zone over Libyan airspace.

It's understandable that a Defense Department with two wars already in hand is reluctant to take on additional responsibilities. And there are plenty of other likely rationales keeping the administration on its heels: Does a president who prides himself on his peaceful outreach to the Muslim world really want more American soldiers in Muslim lands? Would American involvement merely further inflame the situation and affect the price of oil? Are we sure we know on whose behalf in Libya we want to shape events?

The danger is that we will allow those questions to paralyze us from acting in America's interest. While the administration dithers, the crisis is steadily building toward civil war. If so, that war would destabilize Africa as well as other Arab states, and cause considerable damage to American prestige and influence. Continued lassitude on our part only heightens the risk.

To understand what is at stake in this war, it is best to see Libya as a large drinking well in the desert fiercely contested by various tribes, but finally brought under the

control of a powerful sheikh. Access to the well means life for the sheikh's allies, and to be denied it means death for his rivals. Because that well is filled not with water but oil, global powers also have a stake in the outcome. The conflict gathering strength in Libya is not over who gets to rule the tribes along the Mediterranean coast and desert interior of a North African country, but who gets to own Libyan oil. It is also about the chances for democracy in the Levant, and whether dictators can massacre their own people at no cost.

Qaddafi's cash has so far attracted mostly an amateurish brand of mercenaries—impoverished youths from surrounding African states who are effectively little more than human sandbags to be stacked up in defense against the rebels. However, that will change the longer Qaddafi is able to hold on. If it becomes clear that Qaddafi has successfully fortified himself, foreign money will take a position in the conflict. And given the nature of regional actors and Qaddafi's past relationships with them, it is not difficult to guess who will back the colonel and who will stake the rebels.



Qaddafi, lashing out against Europe and the United States, vows, "We will fight until the last man and woman," March 2.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sees any hot zone in the Middle East as a potential dumping ground for its homegrown jihadists. In the past, Riyadh dispatched its extremist youth to Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia, and Iraq, in the hopes that they would die there. We know what came next. The Saudis would see a war-torn Libya as another opportunity to get rid of their domestic problem. They have no love for Qaddafi, who tried to have King Abdullah assassinated in 2003.

Iran can hardly be expected to ignore a vacuum where it might enhance its regional strategy. A presence in any place offering a border with U.S. allies like Egypt and Tunisia is good for Tehran. The Islamic Republic's ally Syria would likely come down on Qaddafi's side as well, especially since Syrian intelligence services built their ties to Qaddafi during an earlier Middle East civil war in Lebanon.

The Obama administration, meanwhile, seems to be learning regional history from scratch. But we know what a civil war in the Middle East looks like. We know how these conflicts drag in their neighbors and destabilize bor-

dering states. We know the humanitarian cost and the cost to American interests. We know what happens in the aftermath. American soldiers are in Afghanistan to prevent that country from becoming a failed state and terrorist haven. A civil war in Libya promises to create a dynamic potentially many times worse. Are we really going to forgo the opportunity to influence the outcome in America's favor?

—Lee Smith

Citizens Not Subjects

In recent months, in response to a series of austerity measures, we have seen civic unrest in the streets of London, Athens, and other European capitals. Some of the cuts that sparked the chaos are quite moderate. In France, for example, violence broke out over the government's proposal to raise the retirement age from 60 years old to 62.

We are now seeing protests in America—including in Wisconsin, where over the last couple of weeks tens of thousands of people have marched on the state capitol to register their unhappiness with Governor Scott Walker's request that many of the state's public employees limit their collective bargaining rights to negotiations over pay rather than benefits. What started in Wisconsin appears to be spreading to other states.

In each place there are different factors that explain what we're witnessing. But as a general matter what is unfolding in nations throughout the West, including in America, are the predictable effects of increasing dependency on the state. This dependency creates certain expectations and patterns of thought, including an entitlement mentality. Every concession that has ever been gained is viewed as an unalienable right and therefore irreversible. The result is that government benefits are added one on top of another, with any effort to rein them in viewed as an "assault" (to use President Obama's word) on this or that group.

The great project for this generation is to offer an alternative to this governing philosophy of entitlement, to put in place policies that encourage individual responsibility and dignity, self-reliance and self-government.

We have seen something similar occur with welfare reform, where in the mid-1990s Americans changed the incentives away from chronic dependency toward work. The message was clear: The days of rewarding idleness and irresponsibility were over. Within a matter of years, the welfare case load declined by more than 60 percent. And not only did the numbers of people on welfare plunge, but, in the wake of the welfare-reform bill, overall poverty, child

poverty, black child poverty, and child hunger all decreased while employment figures for single mothers rose.

We are seeing a similar debate with education reform. Governors such as Mitch Daniels of Indiana are pushing for their states to become, in Daniels's words, "the first state of full and true choice by saying to every low and middle-income Hoosier family, if you think a nongovernment school is the right one for your child, you're as entitled to that option as any wealthy family." This, Daniels believes, will encourage parents to become less passive and more involved in the education of their children.

The next arena in which self-government needs to reassert itself is entitlement programs. There is, of course, a fiscal imperative behind the need to address the drivers of our debt. But there is also a civic imperative for entitlement reform. Individual citizens need to be given more ownership over decisions that affect their lives. They need to be treated as citizens instead of clients of the state. Our approach should be to trust individual citizens to make informed, discerning choices about their health care and retirement. The aim is not merely to lift our crushing burden of debt. It is to produce citizens who are more independent and self-sufficient.



A woman does stretching exercises in the state capitol rotunda, protesting Wisconsin governor Scott Walker's budget repair bill, March 3.

In all of this our aim should be to create reasonable expectations for the able-bodied, which will allow us to focus more intensive intervention on those in the shadows of life, to those suffering from addiction, mental illness, and physical disability. We saw something similar occur with welfare reform, where money that was being spent on the able-bodied was freed up to assist those in genuine need.

Beneath the back and forth of daily politics, what we are talking about is the link between public policies and personal character, between the laws we pass and the moral attitudes we produce. Our task is to reclaim the animating ideas of America, including social mobility and equality of opportunity, individual responsibility and republican virtue, and to put government policies on the side of and in the service of the cause of sovereign, self-confident citizens. This has always been, and it will always be, the cornerstone of American exceptionalism. It's time we live up to it.

—Peter Wehner

What a Difference a Year Makes

The Republican counterrevolution is off to a strong start. BY FRED BARNES



During the lame duck session of Congress in December, Democrats sought to take advantage of their large majorities on Capitol Hill one final time before the Republican takeover of the House. Earlier, they had packed a 2011 budget with enough pork and earmarks to increase discretionary spending to \$1.128 tril-

lion. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Republicans blocked that measure. So in December, Democrats proposed to spend \$1.114 trillion. McConnell and company killed that, too, and Democrats settled for \$1.09 trillion.

Last week, chastened Democrats proposed to freeze spending for the remainder of 2011, figuring that a reasonable compromise. Deeper cuts relished by Republicans were outrageous

and unacceptable, they insisted. This wouldn't fly either, and a majority of Democrats in the Senate and House voted for \$4 billion in cuts, leaving spending roughly at the 2010 level.

That's when the White House stepped in. Aides of President Obama said they'd go along with another \$6 billion in cuts. But Republicans, who want \$61 billion, rejected the offer as, McConnell put it, "unserious" and "unacceptable." So expect the White House to acquiesce to still more cuts.

It may not be obvious, but there's something important going on here. No, it's not that Congress has begun to rein in spending significantly. It's that actual cuts, small as they are, are being made. "Four billion in the context of an over \$3 trillion budget is not a lot of money, [but] it is at least the first time since I've been here I can recall cutting anything of any consequence," McConnell said. And Democrats are bragging about how hard they've worked to meet Republicans "halfway" in trimming spending.

The boasting is ludicrous. Democrats have indeed worked hard—to stave off even the most modest reductions. Though Republicans control only the House, they've forced the White House and Senate to swallow cuts unimaginable to Democrats before the November 2 election. So far, that means one sixth (\$10 billion), not one half, of the cuts sought by Republicans.

So a culture of cutting rather than spending has taken hold in Washington. Its grip may be weak. The public may conclude Republicans are overreaching, which is what Democrats are counting on. But I don't think so. The public, I suspect, is way ahead of Washington in recognizing the need to control spending, avert a debt crisis, and reverse the decline of the country they perceive all around them.

We'll find out if Democrats are right in April when the Republican budget for 2012, drafted by Paul Ryan, chairman of the House Budget Committee, is released. Republicans are committed to "addressing" entitlements, but it's unclear if that means meaningful cuts and reforms. In any case, Democrats expect the budget to

THOMAS FLUHARTY

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open Republicans to relentless attacks.

For now, the involuntary retreat by Obama and Democrats goes well beyond spending. The White House appears to understand the unpopularity of its health care law isn't a passing phase. In Rasmussen polls, a majority has favored repeal of Obamacare for 49 of the past 50 weeks.

Rarely has a major domestic program been as beleaguered. Not only have two federal judges ruled Obamacare unconstitutional, but there's one drive to enact a constitutional amendment barring the program and another to create a compact among a number of states to take over the health care duties of the federal government.

And in Congress, there's strong Republican opposition to funding preparations for Obamacare to begin in 2014. Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama believes Republicans will have the votes in the Senate to block the funding the president is seeking for this purpose in his 2012 budget.

To assuage governors who fear the fiscal impact of Obamacare, the presi-

dent said he'd allow states to "opt out" of the program in 2014, three years earlier than planned. As accommodating as this sounds, states would still have to do practically everything that's required under Obamacare. Governors reacted unenthusiastically.

Another Obama albatross is the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to put a national ceiling on greenhouse gas emissions, just as the cap and trade legislation that failed to pass Congress would have done. There's speculation in Washington the president will postpone EPA action at least until after next year's election.

Outside Washington, the new political culture has had the effect of reviving conservative issues either overlooked or forgotten in recent years, three of them in particular: states' rights, right-to-work laws, and curbs on collective bargaining by public sector unions.

The phrase "states' rights" is rarely invoked because of its past association with racism. But the idea is back in circulation, thanks to the growth of Washington's authority and reach

under Obama. Serious talk of shifting programs to the states, or eliminating them, has escalated.

Republican governor Rick Perry of Texas has published a book on the subject, *Fed Up! Our Fight to Save America from Washington*. "Empowering states prevents the accumulation of power in one central government and limits the extent to which the people must be governed by faraway representatives, bureaucrats, and judges who do not share their beliefs," Perry writes.

The last state to enact a right-to-work law was Oklahoma in 2001. As you might expect, organized labor hates right-to-work because it bars a closed shop and gives workers the right to reject a union and refuse to pay dues. Yet a committee of the Indiana House passed a right-to-work measure in February. It has since died. And legislatures in at least six states—Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Missouri, Maine, Wisconsin, and Michigan—are considering right-to-work laws.

Unions love collective bargaining as fervently as they detest right-to-work. And why not? It gives them the power to collect dues from workers who'd rather not join a union. Public sector unions have a still greater asset. Their negotiations are often not with adversaries but with officials whose election they've supported financially. They negotiate with those who owe them.

What's elevated collective bargaining is its creation of a privileged class of government workers who in 41 of 50 states get higher pay than private sector employees. Then they retire early with pensions and health care to which they have contributed little. It's a corrupt and costly system, and governors in Wisconsin, Ohio, and other states are bent on curbing or ending it. Before the 2010 election, few dared.

That election, as commonly understood, was a rejection of Obama, Democrats, and their agenda of spending, debt, and a surge of power in Washington. But it was more than that. It reflected a national shift to the right. It put Obama, Democrats, and liberalism on the defensive. And it created a climate that Republicans and conservatives are just beginning to exploit. ♦

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What Happened to Loeb's Deli?

Nobody talks about the jobs killed by the stimulus.

BY IKE BRANNON

Just because the government spends a lot of money on something doesn't mean a lot of new jobs are being created. In fact, long-delayed, poorly executed projects can end up destroying jobs. And I happen to know of just such a project.

Loeb's NY Deli is an institution of sorts in downtown Washington, D.C. The restaurant opened in the 1950s and today is run by the children of its founder, Walter Loeb. For the past 32 years it operated on the corner of 15th and I Streets, NW, on the ground floor of a government building that housed the U.S. Export-Import bank, along with a handful of other retail businesses.

Last summer the General Services Administration told the Loeb family that they would have to vacate the space in September to accommodate a planned renovation. With so many years invested in building their business at that location, they were reluctant to close and asked how long construction would last. Approximately six years, they were told, give or take a year or two. (As government buildings go, the Export-Import bank is relatively small, occupying less than half of a slender city block that is bisected by Vermont Avenue. So we're not talking about the Pentagon.) When they complained that they couldn't hold out for that long and still return to their old spot, they were blithely informed that they were not going to be given that option anyway: The remodeled building would not have room for any of the ground-floor retail establishments, which were being sacrificed to make

way for a larger lobby and a new stairwell. So much for economic growth.

With their eviction date less than three months away, the Loeb family frantically began looking for a new



Not very stimulating: the old Loeb's

locale, ultimately finding one a few blocks west of the old restaurant. It wasn't ideal—the new digs were a bit smaller and did not come with the nice patio space Loeb's diners had long enjoyed—but it would have to do. A bigger issue was that the space would not be ready until February—over four months after they were being booted from their existing location. They went back to the GSA and asked if they might be able to stay until the end of the year, given that construction plans were not yet in place. No dice, they were told.

They then hired a lawyer to assist them with negotiations, offering to pay a premium for a month-to-month lease with the proviso that they would vacate the moment construction was about to begin. Again they were rebuffed. Undeterred, they sent their lawyer back with an offer to pay an even higher premium to the government to operate for just one month more, in order to keep their employees on the payroll for a little longer and also avoid the loss of income for four months.

The GSA finally set them straight. We don't care about money, they were told: We're the government. And we don't particularly care about your business—it's a bit of a hassle to us for the restaurant to be there, so we don't want you there. End of negotiation. Loeb's closed on schedule last September 17.

On February 3, I trudged across town to attend the grand opening of Loeb's at its new location (on I Street between 17th and 18th). En route I took a slight detour to walk past their previous location for old time's sake. Construction had not yet begun.

The fate of Loeb's in these last few months is a cautionary tale for proponents of the federal stimulus program: Over two years after the legislation passed, the government finally got around to this project, which cost the 50 or so employees at Loeb's and the other ground-floor businesses in the building their jobs. The government couldn't be bothered to make token accommodations to soften or delay the effect of the job loss, even when that move would have brought the government more money. And by doing away with all retail spaces on the ground floor the project actually destroys some jobs in the long term and belies another administration principle of promoting the amorphous tenets of New Urbanism, among which are the joys of a thriving small retail sector.

Maybe the building needed to be remodeled, and there's no doubt that there will be a few construction workers hired once the project finally gets going—but the fate of Loeb's Deli is worth bearing in mind whenever someone tries to sell you on the supposed benefits of stimulus spending. ♦

Ike Brannon is director of economic policy at the American Action Forum.

The Do-Nothing President

The Republicans' surprising new critique of Obama. **BY TOD LINDBERG**

In his underdog bid to retain the presidency in 1948, Harry Truman ran hard against the “Do-Nothing Congress,” so much so that his put-down of the Republicans who controlled Capitol Hill became a permanent part of the political lexicon, far more resonant today than anything Truman ever said about his Republican opponent for the White House, Thomas Dewey.

Since a Democrat is once again in the Oval Office facing down a GOP-controlled House, some have broached the possibility of Barack Obama's doing a reprise of Truman's theme in 2012 and taking on, once again, a do-nothing Congress.

Truman faced a Congress obsessively hostile to the policy legacy of FDR and determined to block Truman's own “Fair Deal” agenda (at the center of which was the first Democratic push for universal health care). Obama faces implacable GOP hostility to the agenda of his first two years, from health care reform to the unsuccessful cap and trade energy legislation to his call for an increase in top tax rates. And, of course, were Obama to propose major new government programs, the GOP House under John Boehner would be happy to vote them down. So there would at least seem to be a decent opportunity for Obama to portray a partisan standoff between the White House and Congress as Republican do-nothingism.

Except that to make a plausible case that your opponent is doing nothing, don't you have to be proposing to do

something? At the moment, it doesn't look like Obama is in a proposing frame of mind.

True, his State of the Union address spelled out a couple of spending initiatives House Republicans will be happy to defeat or let languish, from “clean energy” subsidies to high-speed rail. The speech was memorable (if at all) not for its proposals, but for one of its rhetorical flourishes—not that anyone even now can recollect what our “Sputnik moment” is.

Obama played small-ball. His most far-reaching proposal—which he chose to underplay rhetorically—was to lower the corporate tax rate in exchange for elimination of “loopholes” businesses now enjoy. But that sounds like the beginning of a productive negotiation with House Republicans, one that would end with House Democrats in a rage—not a recipe for obduracy on the part of the GOP.

Next came the Obama budget, which boldly looked trillion-dollar deficits in the eye and told them to stick around forever. Most egregiously, Obama proposed basically nothing that might get spending on entitlements under control, for which he was blasted not only by Republicans but also by fiscal-minded Democrats and the editorial boards of newspapers that never wasted a moment of their time thinking about endorsing John McCain for president.

It's entirely plausible that Obama and congressional Democrats have in mind a replay of 1995-96, when they pilloried budget-cutting Republicans with the charge that they were out to destroy “Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment.” And indeed, some Republicans think that

putting serious budget cuts on the table—in short, proposals to restrain the growth of entitlements—would be a mistake, playing into Democratic demagoguery on these issues.

Yet it seems that House Republicans are prepared to press ahead with proposals at a sufficient level of detail to be credible, and therefore to leave themselves politically vulnerable. The first major move will come when House Budget Committee chairman and big-thinker Paul Ryan unveils his budget proposal in April. He emphasized in the GOP response to Obama's State of the Union that spending restraint can't wait, and since then he has affirmed that tackling entitlements will be a part of his proposal.

If Republicans go through with it, they will be betting that the politics of 2011 are very different from the politics of 1995—that Americans are worried about deficits and debt in a way they weren't in the boom years of the mid-1990s. That's a risky strategy for a couple reasons, the biggest involving a bit of amnesia: Americans *were* sufficiently unhinged about the national debt in 1992 to give Ross Perot 19 percent of the vote, and Republicans won their majority in November 1994 in no small part because of their advertisements for themselves as fiscal conservatives.

On the other hand, a failure to take spending cuts seriously would provoke an intraparty backlash of epic proportions, with the Tea Party faction prepared to vote en masse against a quivering GOP leadership. And for all the grief Republicans took in 1995-96, including the political rehabilitation of Bill Clinton, they actually did end up with a budget heading toward balance (thanks not so much to their own parsimony as to an economy generating tax receipts much higher than projected). And they held on to their majorities, too. If some Democrats have consoled themselves with the thought that Obamacare was worth sacrificing their House majority for, some new GOP members certainly believe losing their seats would not be too high a price to pay for entitlement reform.

And GOP leaders may *not* be wrong. Their arguments about the unsustain-

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ability of current policy and the need to save Social Security and Medicare for future generations may stand a chance against the certain Democratic onslaught. Some of us were hoping the trillions we've been blowing through would have been available to ease the baby boomer retirement bulge. In the words of the great punk ska band Sublime, "Got to find a reason, a reason things went wrong. Got to find a reason why my money's all gone."

So bring on the confrontation. But the emerging GOP strategy seems to have a more subtle element as well. It's not necessarily that Republicans expect to persuade Obama to take meaningful action. It's how they plan to portray their failure.

The *Washington Post's* Ruth Marcus, who is in general a lot more sympathetic to Obama than to congressional Republicans, had a column last week asking the "Where's Waldo?" question of Obama and his administration's nonplan to deal with the deficit (among other instances of invisibility). She did not miss the irony of a developing GOP line of attack on Obama rather at odds with Republicans' characterization of him as the ambitious ultraliberal nationalizer of health care.

No, the GOP lamentation is now Obama's inaction. As Paul Ryan told ABC News in mid-February in response to the Obama budget, "I was actually hoping for some sincere presidential leadership" on bringing down the deficit. "He is not leading."

Rising GOP Senate star Marco Rubio of Florida has lately been taking the next rhetorical step. It's essential to act now on entitlements, he told a Washington audience, while reforms can still be put in place without harming those who now depend on the programs or are about to. Rubio also expressed his doubts about the ability of Congress alone to solve the problems: "Entitlement reform requires presidential leadership."

Maybe that's a plea for Obama to get involved in the issue. Maybe it's also an interesting preview of the line of attack Republicans want to adopt if he doesn't: Barack Obama, Do-Nothing President. ♦

David Cameron's Bad History

He misrepresents neoconservatives, even as he starts to sound like one. **BY ROBIN SIMCOX**

I am not a naïve neoconservative who thinks you can drop democracy out of an aeroplane at 40,000 feet," said British prime minister David Cameron last month. Like most of Europe's political class, Cameron has a long track record of criticizing neoconservatism. What makes Cameron's latest criticism noteworthy, however, is that it came at the culmination of the most neoconservative month of his life.

He got the ball rolling in a speech in Munich, where he said state multiculturalism in the U.K. had "failed." Segregating different ethnic minority communities away from the mainstream and allowing them essentially to live according to their own values had led to social breakdown. What was needed, Cameron said, was a more assertive "muscular liberalism." He then became the first world leader to visit Egypt since Mubarak's overthrow, speaking about the need for immediate democratic reform. From there he went to Kuwait, where he extolled the virtues of democracy promotion. Cameron then became the first leader to threaten the use of military intervention against Libya's Colonel Qaddafi. He concluded with a speech to the Community Security Trust in the U.K., in which he discussed the threat of Islamist extremism. Its "ultimate goal," he said, was "an entire Islamist realm, governed by an interpretation of *sharia*." This is strong stuff.

Acknowledging the existence of an existential threat; the need to

assert your own values and lead by confident example; the promotion of democracy as a foreign policy goal in and of itself; and the awareness that military strength can further these goals when all other avenues have failed. That's a neoconservative clean sweep.

Even so, Cameron is at pains not to be tarred with the neoconservative brush. The term in Europe is now synonymous with extreme right-winger with a penchant for civilian deaths—hardly a vote winner. So Cameron constructs neoconservative straw men in order to obscure the extent of his own agreement. He says that neoconservatives are "naïve" for trying to impose democracy from 40,000 feet (at least the third time he has made such an argument in a public speech).

Ignoring the fact that no neoconservative has ever suggested any such thing, it is an insult to the historical record. Compare Bill Clinton's cruise missiles with George W. Bush's land invasion of Iraq to see who was keener to resort to fixing problems from the air. Perhaps he meant Donald Rumsfeld's take on the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), which might be summarized as fighting war via airstrikes and light and flexible ground forces. Yet that would mean that Cameron regards Rumsfeld as a neoconservative (he is not) and RMA as a neoconservative policy (it is not). In fact, U.S. military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have been the precise opposite of Cameron's butchering of history.

There is, of course, no particular reason why Cameron should defend neoconservatism. There are

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not many rewards for defending an unpopular ideology, and he is not even a neoconservative. Cameron is a realist and, more pertinently, an astute politician. Is there, for that matter, any reason why American conservatives should lose sleep over the currents and eddies of conservatism in the U.K.—a country essentially on the verge of disarming and signing itself up as a middling power and part of a European super-state? Perhaps one British prime minister playing fast and loose with the truth about neoconservatism is of little moment.

But it does matter. Cameron's sentiments encapsulate how effectively neoconservatives' opponents have hijacked the term. Over the past decade, all you needed to do to be "outed" as a neocon was to be sufficiently offensive to the prevailing liberal orthodoxy. Eventually, the term became simply a pejorative liberals used to describe anybody they disagreed with. John Bolton and Condoleezza Rice became as neoconservative as Paul Wolfowitz and Elliott Abrams.

Were the ideology as morally and intellectually bankrupt as its opponents wished, such trivialities would not be important. However, if no effort is made to reclaim neoconservatism from its critics, the egregious lies and conspiracy theories about Leo Strauss, Iraq, and the Project for the New American Century will become assumed truths. No good can come from bad history.

Democratic sentiment exists in the Middle East, and for it to flourish we should do all we realistically can both to nourish it and to hasten the collapse of authoritarian regimes that would stamp it out. Neoconservatism has provided the intellectual underpinning for the push for democracy; it has turned realists into interventionists. It has been an important development in U.S. political philosophy. As recent events show, it is still relevant. It should not be consigned with less salubrious ideologies to the dustbin of history. ♦

Lightning Rod

It's not A-Rod's fault he got a tax break on his condo. BY JIM PREVOR

New York Yankees superstar Alex Rodriguez is in the news again, this time for reasons having nothing to do with Cameron Diaz or baseball.

It seems A-Rod has purchased a spiffy condo in a building newly constructed in Manhattan. The building's developers took advantage of New York's 421a program, which is designed to both encourage new construction and provide affordable housing. In exchange for constructing a new building on vacant or underused land and creating affordable housing in the outer boroughs, developers get their real estate taxes on the improvements phased in over a period of years—in this case, ten.

So a developer who paid \$1 million for a vacant lot and then spent \$10 million on construction would initially pay the same taxes as if the lot remained vacant. A-Rod's new digs, which were on the market for \$6 million and would probably pay at least \$60,000 a year in real estate taxes normally, will initially pay only about \$1,200 a year in taxes under the program.

The fact that a rich guy like A-Rod will get the benefit of this tax reduction has caused outrage in the media, from the *New York Daily News* to Britain's *Daily Mail*. The gist of the criticism is either that rich guys like A-Rod should pay more in taxes or that the whole program, which currently reduces real estate taxes by about \$900 million a year, is too expensive or unnecessary.

Whatever the utility of the program, Rodriguez is certainly getting a bum rap. He didn't seek a tax break—the developer did—and Rodriguez couldn't change his taxes if he wanted to. Obviously if he feels like making a donation

to the government, nothing stops him, and, since he's a celebrity, maybe it would even behoove him to do so.

Whatever A-Rod's individual situation, this incident points to the importance of making sure the budgets used by government at all levels reflect all that government really does and all it really spends. Otherwise the effect of the Tea Party's fomenting scrutiny of public budgets throughout the land could be to move more expenditures off budget and make it even harder to get a handle on bloated government.

Three quick lessons from the media focus on A-Rod's condo that the Tea Party should help bring to the fore:

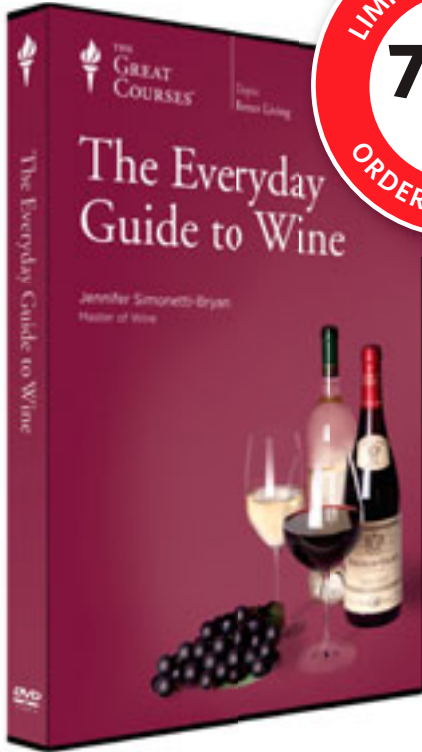
- **Incentives and exceptions enable bad public policies.** The media coverage of the A-Rod controversy is filled with comparisons between A-Rod's taxes and those of someone across the street not covered by the 421a tax abatement program, and they show, of course, that A-Rod is getting a deal.

Politicians always need to demonstrate that they are attracting new business and development to their city or state. There are two ways to make this happen: Either operate in such a way that the overall business climate is attractive or try to trick the voters into not realizing how unattractive the business climate is by offering subsidies and exemptions to favored players so the politicians can forever be announcing they've attracted a new factory or participating in the groundbreaking for a new building.

This could be a high-profile company headquarters, a manufacturing plant, or an entire industry. On the federal level, the process can be observed as the White House doles out exemptions from the health care law to favored parties.

Exemptions enable bad laws and are often a form of corruption. A focus

Jim Prevor is the founder and CEO of Phoenix Media Network, Inc.



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of Tea Party effort should be to end exemptions and exceptions to laws and taxes. This would encourage both business and labor to divert their lobbying from seeking special exemptions to seeking better laws.

If politicians lose the flexibility to get what they want through abatements, they are more likely to work on developing sound laws and policies in the first place.

• **Move expenditures on budget so they can be tallied.** Under normal circumstances if a government, at any level, wants to have affordable housing units built, the cost of building those units should be reflected in the budget.

In the A-Rod saga, the government's policy goals—accelerating development and building affordable housing—were funded without explicit debate and authorization.

Politicians writing budgets should have to ask, openly and continually: Is the priority this year affordable housing or better schools? Does the city need more snow plows or a new library or more inexpensive apartments in the Bronx? Should available funds be used to pay down debt?

Forcing legislators to go through the process of allocating funds is the essence of governing. Removing massive expenditures from the budget and enshrining them in laws that lead private parties to assume the expenditures makes it difficult for government to be effective, much less intelligible to citizens.

Keeping these expenditures off budget has the effect of dramatically understating the percentage of the economy being spent by government. Whether those affordable apartments in the outer boroughs are subsidized via government check or a tax abatement on a different property, the whole enterprise is a governmental drain on the economy.

The Tea Party will be more effective in its push for fiscal sanity if all governmental expenditures are moved onto the budget and are recognized as such.

• **Make taxes explicit so that people don't incorrectly believe that the corporations and the rich are getting**

off easy. One big problem with the A-Rod scenario is that it invites the facile charge of tax breaks for millionaires. A-Rod's taxes are lower because the developer of his building is also supporting subsidized housing elsewhere in the city—though this won't show up in any statistics.

To the extent the 421a program really is a tax bargain, it almost surely is not going to benefit Alex Rodriguez. After all, A-Rod or any buyer would gladly pay more for a condo with a tax abatement than for an identical unit next door without a tax abatement. So perhaps the benefit of the tax abatement went to the developer. In all probability, however, the developer paid more for the land than he would have had the abatement program not existed. So it

may have been some previous land owner who got the benefit of the abatement program.

It is all very complicated, and a big price is paid in public respect for institutions when the statistics on taxes get warped. The public will find it hard to discern the truth about who is paying what in taxes and will easily be induced to think the system unfair.

The long and short of it is that if the government wants to build subsidized housing, it is much better for the country if the government explicitly taxes people, including Alex Rodriguez, for that purpose. Then, instead of the statistics' suggesting that multimillionaires pay no tax, the numbers will reflect reality—and dealing with reality is to no small extent what the Tea Party is all about. ♦

Qaddafi's Pal in Caracas

Hugo Chávez had better hope he doesn't end up like his dictator friends. **BY VANESSA NEUMANN**

If Washington is apt to see the recent uprisings in the Middle East—against U.S. allies like Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak as well as adversaries like the Islamic Republic of Iran—in terms of challenges to and opportunities for U.S. strategic interests, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez sees nothing but an opening to boost his own Bolivarian brand.

Consider Chávez's stance toward his OPEC colleague Muammar Qaddafi. Early during the fighting in Libya, there were rumors, maybe even floated by Chávez himself, that the Libyan dictator was about to flee to Venezuela. The government-

friendly Venezuelan press speculated that when Qaddafi arrived he would be bearing with him the replica of Simón Bolívar's sword that Chávez gave him in 2009 when he bestowed on his "revolutionary brother" the Order of the Liberator, Venezuela's highest civilian honor. "What Simón Bolívar is to the Venezuelan people," said Chávez, "Qaddafi is to the Libyan people."

When Qaddafi started bombing the Libyan people, and showed that he was not going anywhere, the Venezuelan ruler adjusted accordingly, offering to mediate between the colonel and his rivals. Aides to Chávez said Qaddafi accepted the proposal, though his son did not, and, not surprisingly, the rebels rejected his offer, as has the entire international community. But Chávez is hardly

Vanessa Neumann is editor-at-large of Diplomat magazine and a commentator on Latin American politics for Caracol radio.



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finished meddling in the Middle East, for the relationship between that region's state sponsors of terror and the countries under the influence of Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution is more than just a puppet show. The irony is that if the Venezuelan strongman isn't careful, those Middle Eastern revolts might come back to haunt him.

Of course, Libya isn't the only rogue state under internal pressure that Chávez has warmed to. Venezuela has assiduously nurtured its relationship with Iran such that the Caracas-Tehran alliance may now represent the greatest threat to stability in Washington's direct sphere of influence.

Chávez and Ahmadinejad call each other "brothers" and last year signed 11 memorandums of understanding for, among other initiatives, joint oil and gas exploration, as well as the construction of tanker ships and petrochemical plants. Chávez's assistance to the Islamic Republic in circumventing U.N. sanctions has got the attention of the new Republican leadership of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Connie Mack (both R-FL) have said they intend to launch an investigation into the Venezuelan state oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.* (PDVSA). In July, the EU ordered the seizure of all the assets of the Venezuelan International Development Bank, an affiliate of the Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI), one of 34 Iranian entities implicated in the development of nuclear or ballistic technology and sanctioned by the Treasury Department. In the meantime, Tehran and Caracas have announced that PDVSA will be investing \$780 million in the South Pars gas field in southern Iran.

Another key aspect of the two countries' strategic relationship is uranium exploration. Iran is reportedly helping Venezuela find and refine its estimated 50,000 tons of uranium reserves—a deal modeled after Caracas's arrangement with Moscow, which has already signed agreements to build two 1,200-megawatt reactors in Venezuela.

And then there's terrorism and the role that Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese-based asset, plays in the relationship. Hezbollah's past work in Latin America includes its alleged involvement in two Buenos Aires bombings—the 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy and the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center. And now, reports are surfacing that Venezuela has provided Hezbollah operatives with Venezuelan national identity cards—a concern raised in the July 27, 2010, Senate hearing for the recently nominated U.S. ambassador to Venezuela, Larry Palmer.

Elsewhere in Latin America, Iran has developed significant relation-

Libya isn't the only rogue state Chávez has warmed to. Venezuela has assiduously nurtured its relationship with Iran such that the Caracas-Tehran alliance may now represent the greatest threat to stability in Washington's direct sphere of influence.

ships with Chávez's allies and fellow Bolivarian Revolutionaries, Bolivia's Evo Morales, Ecuador's Rafael Correa and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega. For instance, in December 2008 the EDBI offered to deposit \$120 million in the Ecuadorean Central Bank to fund bilateral trade, and Iran and Ecuador have signed a \$30 million deal to conduct joint mining projects in Ecuador through the Chemical-Geotechnical-Metallurgical Research Center in Ecuador. Even as that deal carefully avoids mentioning uranium, the IAEA's March 2009 plans to help Ecuador explore its vast uranium reserves were largely intended to highlight and preclude Iranian involvement. In February 2010 the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force, a multilateral organization that combats money laundering and terrorist financing, placed Ecuador on a list of countries that failed to comply with its regulations.

The problem for Chávez and the Bolivarians is that in aligning themselves with Middle Eastern rogue states they may have made a bad bet. To be sure, even if Chávez loses Tripoli and Tehran as allies, instability in the Middle East will raise demand for Venezuela's higher-sulfur heavy crude, and the spike in price will help solidify his hold on power as he approaches the 2012 elections. But insofar as Middle Easterners have been inspired by the examples of their peers—from Tunisia to Bahrain and Libya to Iran—there is no reason that Latin Americans should not be similarly moved to go to the streets to demonstrate against their own repressive regimes. Indeed, the signs do not augur well for the Bolivarians.

Recently, 63 Venezuelan students went on a hunger strike to protest Chávez's human rights record, his repression of the country's opposition parties, and his gutting of independent state institutions. They campaigned for international pressure to support the release of high-profile political prisoners, including judges, opposition officials, and members of the national assembly.

As another representative from Venezuela's National Assembly, Maria Corina Machado, recently told me:

The building of the society we dream about will be done by us Venezuelans, but we do ask the world not to make it more difficult for us, not to legitimize a regime that consistently violates human rights. Venezuelans have a right to raise their voices in protest and demand that other countries not be complicit. What we want is for the true nature of the Venezuelan regime to be recognized, that they have violated all the pillars of a democratic system: There's no respect for human rights, no separation of powers, and recurrent violation of the constitution.

Chávez and his Bolivarian colleagues are on notice—if an Arab tyrant in exile disdains refuge in Venezuela, there's plenty of space for Latin American despots alongside ousted Arab rulers in the deserts of Saudi Arabia. ♦

Le Pen Is Mightier

Why, just four years after its supposed demise, does France's National Front have its highest poll ratings ever?

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Paris

“I used to worry about the National Front,” a middle-aged writer told me when we met in France in February. “Suddenly I’m beginning to wonder if I’m not further to the right than they are.” The National Front, or FN, has been Europe’s archetypal fascistic party of recent years. Founded by Algerian War veteran Jean-Marie Le Pen, anathematized in the media, manipulated by Socialist president François Mitterrand as a means of dividing his opponents, it was embraced by ex-colonists, ex-Communists, and the unemployed as a vehicle for protesting the changes that mass immigration brought in its wake. Le Pen was offensive, clownish, unpredictable. He defended Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War. He described the Holocaust as a “detail” of World War II. He walked onstage with a photo of the head of a Socialist minister on a platter. And in 2002, he shocked the country by taking 17 percent in the first round of the presidential election, finishing second and eliminating the Socialist candidate. That episode led to a national soul-searching that has not yet abated.

France’s president, Nicolas Sarkozy, seemed to stymie the FN’s appeal in the 2007 presidential election. In head-on style, he addressed the issues they professed to worry about, particularly immigration and the violent crime that most French people associate with it. The FN took a paltry 10 percent of the vote. Le Pen, now 82, retired this past winter, and his party appeared to be a closed chapter in French political life. Suddenly, however, the FN is the hottest political party in the country.

Le Pen’s youngest daughter, Marine, a 42-year-old lawyer and member of the European parliament, won the party’s leadership handily in January, beating a rival who represented the FN’s small Catholic wing. Ms. Le Pen, who has been divorced twice, claims to speak for a more “laic”

sensibility. She lacks her father’s electoral baggage. She has explicitly repudiated the anti-Semitism in which the party stewed throughout his tenure. And she has gifts that her father never possessed. The elder Le Pen had only two oratorical registers—indignation and buffoonery. Marine Le Pen can give a moving speech. The one she gave at Tours on the day she was elected party leader was hailed as a triumph. What is more, she has a platform that a lot of French voters like and no other party will touch: Ms. Le Pen considers globalization a mistake, lock, stock, and barrel.

Just as Nazism and communism were the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century, Islamism and globalism are the totalitarianisms of the twenty-first, Ms. Le Pen believes. France needs to reexamine its membership in the European Union (which has robbed great nations of their sovereignty and saddled them with an unworkable currency) and in NATO (which has subordinated the country’s foreign policy interests to those of the United States), and it should not make a dogma of free trade. “This identity-killing globalization,” she said at Tours, “has turned into an economic horror, a social tsunami, a moral Chernobyl.” Then she led into more familiar FN themes—the International Monetary Fund, the “demographic submersion” of France, self-appointed elites, and the need for French citizens to “pick up the flag.” Ms. Le Pen is a candidate in next year’s presidential election, and a poll released in October showed her hovering at a stunning 19 percent in the polls, which put her just a couple of points behind Sarkozy and Socialist hopeful Martine Aubry, the mayor of Lille. (Dominique Strauss-Kahn, president of the IMF and a former Socialist finance minister, was at 30 percent, but he has not yet decided whether to run.) French newspapers warn that a repeat of 2002 is possible, with the FN knocking one of the major parties out of the running.

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH SARKOZY?

It is not immediately obvious why Sarkozy, who promised a wide-ranging program of reform, should be endangered by an antiestablishment candidate. After all, he has delivered reforms. He toughened criminal penalties for repeat offenders. He fixed France’s labor laws to make it harder for public employee unions to bring the

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD and the author of Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West.

country to a grinding halt with strikes. In the face of massive protests, he stuck to his guns and pushed through a new law that will significantly raise French retirement ages. And he has broadened the so-called “fiscal shield,” a government guarantee to taxpayers that no one will pay the state more than half of what he earns. He brought France back into full membership in NATO, four decades after Charles de Gaulle withdrew from the Western alliance.

Sarkozy nonetheless finds himself in a bad political position, from which his formidable skills as a campaigner may be insufficient to extricate him. The financial crisis has eaten up much of his energy. But in a funny way, he may have been imprisoned by the brilliance of his 2007 campaign. The economist Henri Guaino, Sarkozy’s most important adviser, created a stirring Gaullist narrative for Sarkozy full of references to *la France éternelle*, Mont Saint-Michel, the genius of French poetry, that sort of thing. Sarkozy promised a “rupture” with the way his predecessors had done things. Swing voters put two and two together. They understood Sarkozy to mean that France had been allowed to drift away from what was essentially French about it, into something global, multicultural, undifferentiated—and that a Sarkozy presidency would mean a restoration of an older kind of Frenchness. Sarkozy created a yearning for rupture, but, for all his programmatic tinkering, no rupture happened.

Maybe the biggest cultural event in France over the past year has been the success of the film *Of Gods and Men*, the story of seven Trappist monks kidnapped and beheaded in Algeria in 1996. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) claimed responsibility for the killings. Much as the American movie *Juno* (2007) was discussed for its attitudes towards abortion, even though it is not really *about* that, *Of Gods and Men* is a movie about Christian teachings on peace that has provoked a lot of anxiety about Islam. Such anxiety has been brewing for a while. In the rue Myrha in Paris’s 18th arrondissement, hundreds of Muslims fill the street every Friday afternoon for prayers. The practice is unpopular among local residents, it is much discussed on YouTube, and Marine Le Pen has capitalized on it. “Those who pray in a public thoroughfare are acting like an occupying power,” she said in Lyon in December.

But Sarkozy has been wrong-footed by it. You can make the case—many do—that Muslims are praying in the street because they don’t have mosques, and that the French government should do its part to make sure they are able to build them. So Sarkozy has called for a “debate on Islam.” But this has not satisfied his voters. I attended a magazine editorial board meeting in Paris in February and found the editors in agreement that such a debate would do Sarkozy no good. “The only place this ‘debate’ can wind up is with platitudes like ‘Ninety-nine percent of our Muslim

fellow-citizens are good Frenchmen,’ and so on,” said one of the editors present. “It cannot wind up making contact with anything real.”

This is not to say that Sarkozy’s attitude towards immigration and assimilation has been too “soft.” His problems lie just as much in the other direction. Sarkozy’s model of race (or ethnic) relations bears an uncanny resemblance to the carrot-and-stick mix of harsh punishments and easy promotion on which Richard Nixon built his own approach around 1970. Sarkozy has sought to promote the offspring of immigrants to cabinet and sub-cabinet positions, angering a lot of loyalists who were passed over. But he has also placed an unprecedented emphasis on law and order. Last July he spoke in Grenoble after two episodes of ethnic violence. The city had just seen three nights of battles between police and rioters in the neighborhood of Villeneuve, and that came on the heels of an attack on the police station in St-Aignan by 50 Roms, or gypsies, armed with axes.

Sarkozy gave a speech that leapt way beyond the usual boundaries of tough-on-crime rhetoric. “We are suffering the consequences of 50 years of immigration, insufficiently regulated, that have led to a failure of assimilation,” he said. He urged the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences of unheard-of severity—30 years for serious attacks on police. And he called for stripping French citizenship from any newly naturalized citizen convicted of such a crime. Sarkozy’s critics on the left quickly pointed out that denationalizations had not been carried out since the dark days of the middle of the last century. It was the sort of policy which the National Front has repeatedly been accused of secretly favoring, and here Sarkozy was espousing it openly. While Sarkozy’s Grenoble talk may have pleased some voters, it surely left others wondering why there was a taboo on voting FN in the first place.

THE SOCIALISTS’ UNEARNED MANDATE

Sarkozy’s low rating in the polls creates a situation somewhat similar to that of the United States in 2008. The country is growing more conservative, while the unpopularity of a conservative president makes the election of a president from the left look almost inevitable. The left, however, has estranged itself from its old electoral base in recent decades. More interested in multiculturalism than in socialism, it is now a deeply fragmented collection of elite hobby movements, with little connection to the working class.

This fragmentation explains why the example of 2002 haunts the Socialists so much. There were plenty of votes on the left to beat Jean-Marie Le Pen with, but they were divided among Communists, Trotskyites, Revolutionary Communists, Greens, and others. The very experience of that makes a repeat of the outcome less likely. The think

tank Terra Nova, whose members describe it as the French equivalent to the Center for American Progress, has devised an American-style system of primaries intended to assemble the left into a broad front. It hasn't completely succeeded—a variety of charismatic ecologists remain outside the fold—but it will probably gather enough voters to advance a candidate to the second round. That is why people talk as often of an upside-down 2002—with Sarkozy getting ousted in the first round—as they do of a straightforward repeat.

The Socialists have another problem, though. Their party seems booby-trapped against producing a candidate the electorate at large can tolerate. Martine Aubry—the mayor of Lille and daughter of Jacques Delors, the great technocrat of the European Union—may be the most partisan figure in French politics. This gives her the best network within the party and the worst prospects in a general election. A solution to this problem is at hand, but it is not certain the Socialists wish to take it. Dominique Strauss-Kahn—statesman, economist, author—is outstripping everyone in nationwide polls. He has not yet announced that he will be a candidate, but his American-born wife, Anne Sinclair, has hinted broadly on her blog that he will run. Strauss-Kahn not only sits at the pinnacle of the world banking establishment, he was the minister of finance for

a Socialist government that privatized more enterprises than any in recent French history and ran a considerably tighter fiscal ship than New Labour did in Britain. These are both good things to a free-marketer's eye, but they are not viewed in that light in the Socialist party, particularly not after the financial crisis of 2008. Nominating Strauss-Kahn is a “false good idea,” as one political philosopher put it, the equivalent of the Democrats' nominating Robert Rubin for president. Strauss-Kahn would win, but Socialists, after four years of pillorying Sarkozy as the “president of the rich,” might have to bite their tongue to nominate someone who simply is rich.

EUROPEAN FRONT

The number of French people who don't naturally gravitate either to the Socialists or to Sarkozy's UMP is large, and there is reason to believe it is growing. Hannah Arendt wrote somewhere that right-wing movements appeal to the “déclassé of all classes,” and Marine Le Pen is frank about wanting those votes. “The working class, the unemployed, young people” is Marine Le Pen's first description of who votes for the FN, but she is quick to note that women are backing the party in greater numbers.

Helping Freedom Flourish in the Middle East

By Thomas J. Donohue

President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The Middle East is being transformed before our eyes—dictators in Egypt and Tunisia have fallen, and Gadhafi's regime in Libya could be next. But what happens after tyrants are forced from power? How will the economic and political needs of these people be met? Free markets, representative government, and the rule of law are not inevitable—they are the product of time and effort. That's why the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) is so important.

An affiliate of the U.S. Chamber and a core institute of the National Endowment for Democracy, CIPE's mission is to strengthen democracy around the globe through private enterprise and market-oriented reform. To accomplish this, CIPE works with business leaders, policymakers, and journalists to build the civic institutions vital to a democratic society. Given recent events in Egypt and Tunisia, there is much work to be done.

CIPE is actively engaged in Egypt through local partnerships and a Cairo-based representative office. Since 1993, CIPE has worked to encourage private-sector participation in the democratic process through voluntary business associations, enhance transparency and accountability through corporate governance and anti-corruption initiatives, and enable grassroots opportunities for entrepreneurship. Following the resignation of President Mubarak, these groups are poised to help the private sector play an active role in the reform process.

Democratic reform and the development of a vibrant private sector—one free of cronyism—are essential if the Egyptian people are to realize their aspirations. CIPE is well placed to address both of these needs. In the coming days, it will organize and train private sector representatives to aid in shaping Egypt's new institutions and policies, work with new and existing political parties to develop economic platforms that will be responsive to constituent needs, and advance the fight against corruption through real

institutional reform.

In Tunisia, long-term stability and successful democracy depend on the ability of the private sector to create jobs, grow companies, attract investment, and spur development beyond the capital city. To do this, CIPE will employ many of the same tactics that are being used in Egypt. By impressing on both the public and policymakers the importance of an independent business community, CIPE can lay the groundwork for reforms that will help the Tunisian people.

There's also an upshot for American businesses when CIPE helps foreign institutions develop. As free market economies flourish abroad, trading opportunities expand here at home. Not only does this create jobs for Americans, but it also helps build relationships that can maintain peace. To learn more, visit www.cipe.org.



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Her offices are up a flight of stairs in a modernistic blue cube of a building in a sleepy residential street in Nanterre, a working class suburb a few miles west of the Arc de Triomphe. Ms. Le Pen is wearing jeans and boots, as she has just returned from campaigning among farmers at the annual Salon de l'Agriculture, a command performance for politicians. (Sarkozy, visiting the Salon three years ago, made the newspapers when he called a man who had insulted him an "asshole.")

Ms. Le Pen has a difficult balancing act. It would be unseemly, as a politician, to embrace the anti-Semitic ideas that Jean-Marie Le Pen harbored within the FN. But it would be unseemly, as a daughter, to repudiate her father. As one would expect, she is vague on the personal question, beyond saying that the image of her father, whom she always refers to as "Jean-Marie Le Pen," was "rather sulfurous." But she is straightforward on the political question. "For a long time there has been a suspicion of anti-Semitism hanging over the FN," she says. "I think any statements that would feed that suspicion are out of place. The FN isn't racist, it isn't anti-Semitic. Its politics are not based on religion, race, or national origin but on what's best for France and French people. That goes without saying, even if it's sometimes necessary to say it."

One prominent Socialist told me he thought Ms. Le Pen was an "exceptional leader," and when I asked him what made her so he said only that she had not been alive during World War II. She is used to this. "You know," she says, "politics is about the people who practice it. By changing personalities, the National Front has, by definition, changed its vision. . . . I have three kids I raise alone for reasons that are tied to my personal life. That gives me a sensibility that is different from [Jean-Marie Le Pen's] and brings me closer to certain kinds of French people."

But if, as the Socialist says, the new popularity of the FN under Ms. Le Pen's leadership were just a matter of her personality or experience, that would imply that the ostracism of the FN in years past was only a matter of personality, too. And it clearly was not. The FN's old ideology of interwar rightism was worthy of rejection, and is still. If Ms. Le Pen is winning the allegiance of 19 percent of poll respondents, where her father never rose above 12 percent in preelection polls, there must be some new ideological element.

And that is provided by the European Union. The fact is that, despite the continued enthusiasm for it among their governing classes, the French people have more Europe than they want. In 2005, in an electoral battle as contentious as any in the past half century, a sizable majority voted "no" on a referendum on a new continent-wide constitution. Their reasons may have been varied—some voted no out of nationalism, others out of a conviction that EU membership made France more capitalist than it should be—but

their verdict was unambiguous. That majority has been ignored, and much of the constitution was subsequently enacted through the so-called Lisbon Treaty. Clearly, European peoples have lost hold on the levers by which they once held their politicians accountable, and in France, the FN is the only party that speaks squarely for those who are bothered by this development.

Once Europe is identified as the problem, a political program comes into view—one aimed at restoring powers, formal and informal, that have been relocated abroad. Ms. Le Pen likens her movement to the Tea Party. To an extent that would surprise those familiar with the old FN, Ms. Le Pen is comfortable talking about economics. She would withdraw from the European Union and from the euro, which she rejects on the grounds that it is not an "optimal currency area," in the sense laid out by the economist Robert Mundell. Who can dispute that? Her reading of the austerity plans being imposed on Greece and Ireland is that "they are destroying the peoples to save the currency."

Whether or not Ms. Le Pen's program is workable, it has a logic to it that Europe's major party programs have lacked. Parties of the left tend to regulate business while accepting the free movement of labor, roughly speaking, and parties of the right promote entrepreneurship while cracking down on migrants. Outside of Europe, France would acquire two new policy tools—borders and a currency—and Ms. Le Pen shows an inclination to use them to regulate both labor and capital. She deplores the EU's having opened continental markets to Chinese textiles, and she describes immigration as the "little sister of globalization," not a compliment in her book. "It's meant to lower wages," she says. "That's just supply and demand."

Ms. Le Pen's chances of winning the presidential election next year are vanishingly slim. The FN has a long, mostly unpleasant history with the French electorate, and French voters would be shallow indeed if they forgot it overnight. But the party is evolving, and what it is evolving into is a genuine antiglobalist alternative to the UMP and the Socialists, both of which are sufficiently tied to the present state of affairs that they cannot respond to the French electorate's clearly expressed views on the EU. Recent European history offers a number of instances of parties on the hard right evolving into responsible governing parties. The Flemish nationalist movement in Belgium has produced more than one of these. Gianfranco Fini, Silvio Berlusconi's former coalition partner, began as leader of the Alleanza Nazionale, a party descended from Mussolini, but now he might fairly be considered a politician of the center left. The enthusiasm for Marine Le Pen may be a fad. But it may also be the beginning of a long process, at the end of which we will be left with a new kind of Western European opposition party. ♦

Before the Deluge

Reflections on the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

I was briefly a political prisoner of the regime of Tunisia's now-deposed President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali—which I hope will convince my readers that I'm not carrying water for him, or for his similarly deposed Egyptian fellow dictator, Hosni Mubarak, when I say that the nearly eight weeks I spent last summer in the North African *ummah* (Tunisia and Egypt, to be specific) filled me with the opposite of the euphoric optimism that now seems to be the hallmark of both liberal and conservative commentary on the “jasmine revolution” uprisings in both countries.

Granted, my “imprisonment” by Ben Ali heavies lasted only about five minutes, and it consisted of being frog-marched out of the immigration-control center at the Tunis-Carthage International Airport, where I had just arrived and then filled out a standard form, by two sleek-suited, shaven-headed undercover police officers who suddenly appeared out of nowhere to express disbelief that I was in the country legitimately.

In fact, my purpose in visiting Tunisia in late June could not have been more innocent. I had been chosen, finishing up a doctorate in medieval studies, to join 15 other lucky scholars in a five-and-a-half-week National Endowment for the Humanities-funded seminar in Tunis. We were to study and discuss the autobiographical writings of two Christian saints who had lived in the adjacent city of Carthage during the early first millennium when the area was a prosperous Roman province: Augustine, whose *Confessions* included a famously lust-plagued sojourn in the city during the late 4th century, and Perpetua, a young mother martyred along with her slave-companion Felicitas in the arena at Carthage in 203 A.D.

The cops wanted to know what I was doing in Tunisia. My brain mashed by the near-sleepless night that is a fixture of transatlantic flights, I stammered something about “U.S. government” and “seminar.” They demanded proof. Bleary-eyed and feeling filthy in the intense North African heat, I fished inside my bag for the only evidence I had:

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a rumpled printout of a batch email that the professor in charge of the seminar had sent to the rest of us instructing us what we were to do on arriving at the airport. My mind congealed with panic, not over the prospect of, say, being thrown into a fetid Tunisian jail or being tortured with electrodes, but over what I was going to tell the folks back home—my husband, my mother, my friends, to whom I had boasted shamelessly all spring about being selected for the seminar—when I was put right back onto a plane headed for America after less than a half-hour in the country. I was supposed to fly from Tunis to Cairo at the end of the seminar to meet my husband for a two-week Egyptian vacation—so now what?

Fortunately for me, I remembered that a young Tunisian university student hired to help out the seminar's participants—I'll call him “Houssein” in order to protect his privacy in these uncertain times for his country—was supposed to meet us in the airport waiting room and find taxis for us. Soon enough, two Tunisian cops attired in Armani knockoffs were escorting me from immigration control to the chaotic outer room, filled with veiled Tunisian women and their suitcases, baskets, and offspring, where—oh, bliss!—there he was with his “NEH” placard. Bless you, Houssein! He and the two cops had a brief conversation in Arabic, and then the policemen were suddenly gone, vanished into the crowd whence they had mysteriously emerged. Later I figured out what I had done to provoke their attention: In the blank for “occupation” on the immigration-control form, I had written down “writer.” Why not? It was how I had financed my stint in graduate school. That was the last time I was so honest. When asked my occupation on forms at hotels in Tunisia where our seminar group stayed, and also at the hotels that my husband and I booked in Egypt, I substituted the more innocuous word “editor.”

I like to think egotistically that I was under steady surveillance by Ben Ali's gendarmes wondering whether I would write up some piece of riveting journalism that would break the back of the supreme leader's rule. This was highly unlikely, although on one occasion, when I was taking the rickety train from downtown Tunis to La Marsa, the one-time summer base of the Turkish beys who ruled Tunisia for centuries but now a cigarette butt-strewn proletarian public beach on the Mediterranean (and a favorite destination of

our NEH group in efforts to escape the murderous heat by plunging into water), I joked to one of my fellow academics about “El Presidente for Life,” my nickname for Ben Ali, who had, via rigged elections, been in charge of Tunisia from 1987 until his flight from the country on January 14. Within seconds of my jest—and I’m sure this was sheer coincidence—two more of those close-cropped undercover cops in their Italianate suits materialized inside our car.

When our group visited the mosaic-floored remains of 4th-century Roman villas in Carthage (villas that Augustine might have visited), we were instructed not to train our cameras north onto Ben Ali’s enormous and well-guarded seaside presidential palace. Images of the bespectacled Ben Ali, looking suspiciously younger than his 74 years, were everywhere in Tunisia: on roadside billboards, on posters plastered onto walls, in conspicuously posted photographs in shops and restaurants (probably regarded by their proprietors as a wise move in maintaining good relations with bribe-seekers among local authorities), and daily on the front page of *La Presse de Tunisie*, a French-language newspaper delivered to our hotel that we regarded as a worthless propaganda sheet, although it has become noticeably independent since Ben Ali’s departure.

The hotel that lodged the seminar was close to downtown Tunis, and when I wasn’t prepping for seminar sessions or traveling with the group on bumpy bus excursions to the impressive Roman ruins that dot rural Tunisia (which under its Roman administrative name, *Africa Proconsularis*, had been the economic, political, and cultural center of Roman North Africa for 600 years), I had plenty of time to stroll the sidewalks during the day, often by myself.

Before the January uprising that frightened away most visitors, Tunisia had marketed itself as a cheap tourist destination for Western Europeans, mostly French, Spanish, and Italians. The tourists tended to isolate themselves in the beach resorts along the Mediterranean coast of Tunis (the picturesque blue-shuttered town of Sidi Bou Said was a favorite), venturing into the city itself only to visit the Bardo Museum, a former bey’s palace distant from downtown that houses a huge collection of Roman mosaics, and the rabbit-warren Tunis medina that dates from the Arab conquest of North Africa during the 7th century but whose aggressive souk merchants mainly hawked cheesy made-in-China souvenirs. So I had the city of Tunis to myself, as

far as tourists are concerned. I learned how to pick my way down sidewalks cluttered and chattering with breeze-blown trash and crowded with shoppers and the unemployed, to maneuver through warp-speed, blindingly lethal traffic at intersections (run for it and don’t look sideways!), and to negotiate a rattletrap municipal trolley system where I was usually the only non-*hijab*-wearing woman and non-Arabic speaker in the wobbling, jam-packed cars.

There were draconian unwritten rules to abide by. During the day I was able to wander alone anywhere I felt like. Tunisian women were almost never by themselves on the streets, of course; they were always accompanied on shopping expeditions by their friends, their female relatives, their husbands, or their children. But I was a Westerner, and as long as I abided by the dress code for Westerners—covered shoulders, covered knees—I was free enough. Eating by myself seemed a different story, and I didn’t try it. Cafés were off-limits entirely, except for a handful of sidewalk places that catered to tourists. Cafés were the exclusive domain of men—men who whiled away hours with tiny coffee cups and



Tunis’s medina: Where are all the emancipated women?

sheesha pipes because, well, Tunisia’s unemployment rate is 13 percent and the cafés and their camaraderie were, among other things, day jobs for men with no gainful employment in their lives.

It was not wise for a woman to venture out alone after dark, not because of danger (violent crime was almost nonexistent) but because of the social opprobrium leveled at you by the men, still sitting in the cafés as you walked down a sidewalk where there were no women whatsoever because the women are now inside their homes. More opprobrium awaited those females who ventured, say, into a *shawarma* joint wearing above-the-knee sundresses that would be unexceptional on a summer day in America—as happened to the daughter of one of my seminar-mates and her friend. Going to the beach by yourself was also a mistake. I tried it once, and although I was born in the Pleistocene Era, I was nonetheless stalked by a young local who probably thought I might want to pay for a Shirley Valentine experience. And even if you were accompanied to the beach by a female friend, it could be hazardous to swim by yourself if you are young and female and fair-skinned, even if you are attired in the most modest of one-piece bathing suits, as one of my fellow scholars discovered. She could not place a

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toe into the Mediterranean without being surrounded on all sides by local men—because the beach in the Islamic world, being a public place, is the domain of men, just as the cafés are the domain of men. When I read the reports about the mob sexual assault of CBS reporter Lara Logan in Tahrir Square, I thought: *Her crime was that she was a blonde Westerner in the Dar al-Islam.*

My husband and I similarly found ourselves nearly the only Westerners on the streets of workaday downtown Cairo after we made the mistake—or so it seemed at the time—of advance-booking a room in a perfectly decent and clean pension run by two Frenchwomen atop a rickety office building, except that (as we discovered) Cairo, outside of its most upscale venues, does not have properly functioning plumbing and sewage systems. We were only a five-minute walk from Tahrir Square and the five-star hotels along the Nile that flank it, and we wondered why we hadn't just checked into the Semiramis InterContinental, where we spent a great deal of time using the restrooms and eating lunch during Ramadan because hardly any freestanding restaurants were open. Later, we were grateful that we had chosen our penny-pinching accommodations, because we were forced to see, as I had come to see on my rambles in Tunis, exactly what the everyday Islamic world is like, the world pullulating just underneath the highly educated and highly secularized elite socioeconomic patina that forms the sole contact that most tourists, diplomats, NGO apparatchiks, journalists, and intellectuals have with the Islamic world.

It's not surprising that there's so much optimistic reporting that ordinary Muslims "yearn" for freedom, democracy, human rights, and to be just like the West. But outside the touristed enclaves of cosmopolitanism, I saw just the opposite: societies that were obstinately Islamic in the face of efforts by leaders with vast state-police apparatuses at their disposal to shove them into secular modernity. Indeed, the ordinary Muslims of Tunisia and Egypt seemed determined to be more Muslim than ever, some 50 or 60 years after policies of aggressive Westernization in both countries had been put into place. I could sort of understand why the Ben Ali-loyal airport cops had greeted my arrival in Tunis so heavily-handedly. They probably saw themselves as a thin Armani line between civilization as they knew it and a rolling low-key jihad that threatened to sweep it away and substitute in its place an ominous Muslim near-theocracy.

Cairo, outside of some gracefully ornamented medieval mosques, even older Coptic churches, and a handful of lovely parks, is an architectural and urban-planning disaster. The morning view from our hotel room consisted of an unrelieved vista of yellowed and decrepit office and apartment

towers jutting into a furnace-like haze that passed for a sky. There were no trees to be seen, no birds to be heard singing. Generally speaking, Cairo, with its population of almost 7 million, ringed by fetid suburbs, some with unpaved streets that house another 10 million, looked like Mordor—or like the post-apocalyptic trash-skyscrapers in the movie *Wall-E*.

Tunis, by contrast, was a beautiful city, or at least the tired remains of a once-beautiful city, because it had largely been laid out and constructed by the French, who occupied Tunisia as a protectorate from 1881 to 1956. Until the 19th century, Tunis was merely its cramped medina: a walled maze of narrow streets and overhanging buildings surrounding the enormous 9th-century Zitouna Mosque. The French constructed a *nouvelle ville*: broad boulevards, palm-studded parks, grand hotels, an opera house, block after block of exuberantly adorned civic and apartment buildings with fanciful façades, tall louvered windows, and wrought-iron balconies. Half a century after independence, nearly all are in an advanced state of decay, and Tunis itself has sprawled outward to grow into a metropolitan area of 2.3 million. As in Cairo, litter was everywhere, although not quite so much of it. Our NEH headquarters hotel, for example, was located in what passed for an upscale neighborhood adjacent to the huge and impressively neglected Parc du Belvedere (the Central Park of Tunis and another French creation), but only a block away from its *porte-cochère*, blocking the sidewalk in front of a once-lovely, now abandoned and overgrown colonial gingerbread mansion, was a permanent refuse midden composting odoriferously in July temperatures that usually approached or exceeded one hundred degrees. It was apparently the garbage dump for another hotel down the street.

Tunisia, like Egypt and other parts of the Arab world that became independent during the rapid decolonialization of the 1950s and 1960s, adopted what might be called a Kemalist mode of governance: a combination of the aggressive promotion of secularism and modernity, hypertrophied nationalism, and one-party rule enforced by a large and powerful military (or in Tunisia's case, a state police apparatus) that characterized the regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, whose presence and party dominated Turkey throughout much of the 20th century. Atatürk, although technically a Muslim, despised the traditional Islam that most Turks practiced; he deemed it retrograde and potentially insurrectionary and strove to tamp down, if not outright ban, many of its religious, cultural, and institutional manifestations. So, with a socialist flair, did Habib Bourguiba, the Ho Chi Minh of Tunisia, a Sorbonne-educated revolutionary who became Tunisia's first president (in fact Tunisia's only president before Ben Ali) after independence. Bourguiba nationalized the mosques, got rid of the *sharia* courts, and instituted strict government monitoring of the content of imams' sermons (a policy pioneered by Atatürk and also used by Mubarak

and his Egyptian presidential predecessors, Anwar Sadat and Gamal Nasser). A self-proclaimed champion of women's rights, Bourguiba abolished polygamy, banned the *hijab* in schools and tried to phase it out elsewhere, and opened higher education to females. Alarmed by Tunisia's rising population, he also instituted quasi-mandatory birth control.

Bourguiba's brand of nationalism was also, Janus-like, militantly anti-Western and especially anti-French. Nearly all of the 150,000 or so French who had lived in Tunisia before independence quickly left the country when it became clear they were no longer wanted. So did nearly all of the 100,000 Italians, mostly Sicilians, whose ancestors had emigrated to Tunisia during the 19th century to farm for the French, and most of the 100,000 resident Jews, some of whose families had lived in Tunisia since the Middle Ages. Their lives were made uncomfortable by Tunisia's Islamic-world alignment against Israel (the Palestine Liberation Organization headquartered itself in Tunis during the 1980s). The imposing synagogue on the Avenue de la Liberté, once the center of a thriving urban Jewish community, had its doors open for worship on Saturday mornings (guarded by Ben Ali's police), but I never saw anyone enter or leave.

Christianity enjoyed official tolerance as an obsolete foreign relic useful to tourists and Christian sub-Saharan Africans working for banks and diplomatic entities. During the 1960s Bourguiba had entered into an agreement with the Vatican that allowed his government to seize the vast majority of the properties—churches, schools, monasteries, convents—that the Catholic church had built in Tunisia during the French years. The alternative, as a Catholic priest there informed me, had been for Bourguiba's government to seize 100 percent. Catholicism had flourished in Tunisia under French occupation because of its association with Augustine, other church fathers, and the martyrs. Indeed, French missionary priests were the first archaeological excavators of Roman Carthage. Now, everywhere you looked were testimonials to determined de-Christianization: the massive cathedral of St. Louis (the 13th-century French king who died near Tunis while on crusade) standing atop Byrsa Hill in Carthage shorn of its crosses and turned into a concert hall, a chapel built by the French under the excavated amphitheater to commemorate the deaths of Felicitas and Perpetua that is missing its religious furnishings. One of the few surviving Catholic churches in Tunis houses a

school that is now completely Islamic, its curriculum set by the government. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," the Carthaginian theologian Tertullian wrote during the early 3rd century. I had to wonder about that.

Bourguiba tried to create a new national myth for Tunisia that skipped over the Romans, the Christians, and the French with their evocations of colonialism: that Tunisians were the cultural descendants of the Phoenicians, who had settled Carthage during the 9th century B.C. and fought a losing battle against the Romans for supremacy over the Western Mediterranean. Tunisia's beautiful currency and coinage bear images of Hannibal, who crossed the Alps with his elephants, his father, and Dido (under her Greek name, Elissa),



No crosses, please: the former Cathedral of St. Louis

the Carthaginian queen and tragic heroine of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It is likely that most Tunisians knew little and cared less about this glorious Phoenician past, much as the Cairenes who beheaded mummies and made off with antiquities during the mayhem at Tahrir Square were uninterested in the pharaohs, except insofar as they generated tourist revenue. (There is something deliciously ironic about the plight of the flamboyant Zawi Hawass, antiquities minister under Mubarak,

who has made a career out of trying to guilt-trip supposedly imperialist Western governments into repatriating the head of Nefertiti and other pharaonic treasures and is now under pressure to resign from his post as a Western stooge.)

What Bourguiba paradoxically created was a Muslim monoculture (Tunisia is now 98 percent Muslim) that his police could barely control. There were a series of radical-Islamic uprisings in Tunisia during the 1970s and 1980s fueled by widespread resentment of his efforts to water down and Westernize the faith. After the last one, in 1987, when Bourguiba planned to execute several rebels convicted of plotting to overthrow his government, Ben Ali, then serving as prime minister, seized power, declared his aged predecessor senile, and put him out to pasture in the coastal city of Monastir. Bourguiba died in 2000 at age 96 and was rewarded with a handsome tomb.

His secularization campaign had parallels in Egypt. Nasser, deeming the residence of such "foreigners" as Greeks and Jews (not to mention Western European expats) in his newly created nation inconsistent with the Arab identity he bestowed upon it, drove out populations that had resided in Egypt for more than two millennia. Those who visit Alexandria these days and expect to find any but the faintest traces

of the cosmopolitan seaport that fueled the poems of Constantine Cavafy and Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* are in for a surprise. There are almost no Jews left in Egypt. The centuries-old and—at least until the recent uprising—meticulously maintained Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo's Coptic quarter cannot draw the *minyan* of ten men required for holding Jewish services. It's a de facto museum.

In Tunisia the signs were similar. Bourguiba, toward the last years of his presidency, seemed to realize that socialism was not the economic answer in a small, oil-free country of 10 million that is mostly Sahara desert, with an attractive coastline and a narrow fertile littoral that supports wheat fields (not enough to feed the country), olive groves, and wine-grapes (thanks to the French). He and Ben Ali began to try to lure a few Western capitalist enterprises into Tunisia, and the road to the Tunis-Carthage airport is now flanked by outposts of high-tech firms. Ben Ali turned over swaths of coastal land to developers for five-star beach resorts, infuriating leftists who complained that ordinary Tunisians could not afford to stay there (and at least in the case of Ben Ali, probably enriching himself in the process). As for Bourguiba's best-laid birth-control plans—well, the median age in Tunisia is 29. That's a bit older than Egypt's median age of 24 (in a country of 80 million), where there are no official constraints on large families, but it skews low compared with the West (a median age of 37 in America and 39 in Britain). The unemployment crisis in Tunisia is a youth-unemployment crisis. Even last summer, when a brutally enforced civic peace clamped together a populace that was either fatalistically resigned or primed to resume the religio-political battles of the 1980s, I worried about young Houssein and the master's degree he was pursuing with the hope of securing a teaching job that might pay around \$1,400 a month. The main post office in Tunis (another piece of fine French civic architecture) was always jammed with Tunisians mailing food packages to their relatives who had to leave the country to find work in France.

I also wondered on my walks where all those emancipated women were that Bourguiba's modernization blitz had promised would materialize. After more than 50 years of official campaigning against the *hijab* if not forbidding it outright (Bourguiba called it an "odious rag"), at least half of Tunisian women were covering their hair. That was in downtown Tunis; in the countryside the percentage was close to 100, many of the women wrapped in a Berber veil that folded around the entire body. In Egypt, even in Cairo and Alexandria, almost the only local women who went veil-less on the streets were Coptic Christians. Many married Egyptian women went all the way and curtained themselves from head to toe in black, their shrouded faces an

almost comical contrast to their Western-attired husbands and their small children in kidwear that could have been bought at an American shopping mall.

Those *hijab*-wearers weren't grannies, but, rather, young and pretty girls, many of them university students, who had turned Islamic dress into something chic and figure-flattering: a long-sleeved, close-fitting, high-necked jersey topped by an overblouse or tunic and worn with skinny jeans or a long slim skirt. The *hijabs* themselves were Scheherazade headdresses: gossamer-light and ornamented with sequins, bling, and glittery little crowns. The *hijab* and its male equivalent, the lightly stubbled chin that satisfies Muhammad's injunction in the Koran that good Muslim men wear beards, were ubiquitous among young people in both countries. In that self-presentation they were finding and expressing identity, distinguishing themselves from a West that they deemed decadent and unholy: the tourists in their shorts and mini-skirts and tiny tops. They have resacralized an existence that they believe was forcibly taken away from them by their own Westernizing, secularizing dictators. I'm certain that in some elite and very wealthy sectors of North African society a different ethos prevails. I would occasionally catch a glimpse of this parallel Islamic universe that seemed to exist in exclusive suburbs far from city centers: dark-haired, bikini-clad girls on the upscale beach at Gammarth in Tunisia riding camels for hire and flirting with *sheesha*-smoking young men with plenty of leisure, a nail salon that I frequented whose bareheaded female customers wore elegant slacks and high heels, a billboard depicting a female newscaster who looked like a ringer for Katie Couric. But that was not the world in which the overwhelming majority of the people lived, even in the most sophisticated of their capital cities.

No one can predict what's going to happen next in Tunisia, Egypt, or anywhere else in the Islamic world. The sudden reappearance of the Muslim Brotherhood on Egypt's political scene is troubling, and one of the byproducts of an Islamic monoculture is persecution of Christians. Christianity may have been nearly eradicated in Tunisia, but Copts account for 10 percent of Egypt's population. No one talks much about them right now, and the New Year's Eve bombing that left 23 of them dead in an Alexandria church seems to have been already forgotten. It is not that many ordinary Muslims aren't admirable, likable people making do and living sociably with very little. I enjoyed the small and courteous commercial encounters I had with Tunisians: adding dinars to my cell-phone card, for example, or visiting the bedraggled zoo animals at the Parc du Belvedere. During Ramadan in Egypt, every night was a festival of families picnicking outdoors with their children overjoyed at the glutinous breaking of the fast. It was just that they were different from us. They were living in their own world, and it is a world that is not necessarily friendly to ours. ♦



'Confederate Soldiers on the Line of Battle with Fate Against Them' (1887) by Gilbert Gaul

Sword and Pen

Literary culture after the Civil War. BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

*Tell all the truth, but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies . . .
The truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind.*

When Emily Dickinson, reclusive and wren-like by her own description, wrote those lines, abolitionism was the passion of the hour among her New England contemporaries. But most of them would probably have been baffled by her advice that truth, especially political or social truth, must be “slant”—shaded, indirect, or subtle—if it is not to blind.

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From Battlefields Rising
*How the Civil War Transformed
American Literature*
by Randall Fuller
Oxford, 272 pp., \$29.95

**The South and America Since
World War II**
by James C. Cobb
Oxford, 392 pp., \$24.95

Dickinson punctuated her hundreds of wartime poems with dashes that underscored the gnomic urgency of her diction, often composing several a day during the Civil War. Many were about death: an indirect barometer of the toll of bloodshed that her angry and prophetic contemporaries courted. But the eminent writers examined in Randall

Fuller’s fine book were intoxicated by the certainties of the era, and heedless.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Sage of Concord and the most eminent of New England men of letters in the ante-bellum years, had a great deal to say by way of moral admonition. He embraced “transcendentalism,” an imported version of German philosophical idealism, and his pronouncements tended toward an oracular abstraction. Emerson was, however, subtle by comparison with the more vocal abolitionists—including the “secret six” who had funded John Brown’s incendiary raid of 1859 on the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. True to their Puritan heritage, those eminent New Englanders condemned slavery not as an outmoded

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and inhumane labor system, but as crime pure and simple. No matter that the Constitution protected it and provided for the recovery of fugitive slaves—nor that Lincoln and other moderate foes contemplated schemes of gradual compensated abolition. No, the gathering storm of regional conflict must be a moral crusade. When war came, many New England worthies refused to countenance Lincoln's call for volunteers because it was, at first, unclear that the war would be against slavery. Their attitudes mirrored the fundamentalism of Southern "fire-eaters" who insisted as fervently that their slaves were "property" that they enjoyed a constitutional right to carry (and defend with institutional arrangements) wherever the flag flew.

There is an obvious thematic seam in Fuller's book: the difference between prophecy and art. The New Englanders were prophets, for the most part, and their hatred of slavery often floated free of all earthly considerations. Not so the New Yorkers, Herman Melville and Walt Whitman. When Melville, an Emerson admirer, encountered the puzzling assertion in the sage's essays that poets have "a sense that the evils of the world are such only to the evil eye," he erupted:

If Mr. Emerson traveling in Egypt should find the plague-spot come out on him—would he consider that an evil sight or not? ... His ... errors and illusions spring from a self-conceit so intensely intellectual and calm that at first one hesitates to call it by its right name.

In his skepticism of oracular utterances, Melville shared affinities of attitude with both Walt Whitman and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The latter, though of sterling New England origins, had shown in *The Scarlet Letter* a shrewd doubt of its theological certainties. Like Whitman, he was aware of the human limitations that may render truth "slant." Both Melville and Hawthorne, by Fuller's account, underwent literary transformations in the war years. Melville, hailed in youth as a bestselling writer of exotic South Sea adventures, had launched the radically strange *Moby Dick* to a

baffled public and suffered a resulting neglect that lasted, with little respite, until his death. His later masterpiece, *Billy Budd*, was posthumous and came very near to being lost entirely in an old family breadbox. Melville's stab at "epic" poetic treatment of the battle scenes he had witnessed or imagined sold few copies and is remembered today only in academic studies.

Hawthorne, the most complex of these literary notables, made an effort to write "slant" in the form of an anti-slavery polemic for the *Atlantic*, the house organ of abolitionism. He peppered it with "editor's notes" written by himself that offered an obligato



C. Vann Woodward

of doubt to his assertions. But Hawthorne was not a dedicated prophet: He had written a campaign biography that helped his conciliatory Bowdoin classmate and friend Franklin Pierce win the presidency a decade earlier, only to see Pierce reviled as a crypto-Southern traitor to New England attitudes. The war seems to have depressed him, and he left a last novel unfinished at his death.

Whitman was another outlier who, in the war years, laid aside poetry to work as a hospital volunteer. The war worked a lyric transformation in his sensibility, especially after the Lincoln assassination, replacing the boisterous self-assertion of earlier editions of *Leaves of Grass* with an elegiac note, as in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard

Bloom'd." It was, again, the difference between prophecy and art.

Fuller's deeply considered examination of the literary impact of the war—"transformative," as his subtitle has it—affords a fresh and fascinating look not only at Melville, Emerson, Whitman, and Hawthorne but at lesser lights and the loyalties that drove them. Fuller acknowledges important predecessors—notably Edmund Wilson, whose *Patriotic Gore* (1962) instructed an earlier generation in similar topics. But Wilson was more leisurely and conversational. For instance, the Confederate guerrilla raider John Singleton Mosby is brushed over here, even a bit demonized. Wilson took a more benevolent look at the impudent "Gray Ghost" and raider behind Union lines, and found him chivalrous, erudite, and, in his postwar reminiscences, "literary" in the more dubious sense. The transition may signal a change in tolerances of difference as the Civil War sesquicentennial approaches. Nor does Fuller explicitly address another of Wilson's major themes: the effect of the wartime experience upon American prose in the deromanticized and plainspoken idiom of U.S. Grant, Mark Twain, and others. But then, Wilson had nearly a thousand pages to play with in that more reader-friendly time. *From Battlefields Rising* is a worthy sequel to Wilson and others. It should stand high on any must-read list of books, old or new, as we move into the Civil War anniversary years.

The past is never dead. It's not even past.—to recall another memorable utterance (William Faulkner's) that links these two very different books. James Cobb's treatment of Southern history since 1945 isn't an explicit sequel to Fuller. But it abounds in markers that tell us much about the shortcomings of the abolitionist passion. Slavery and involuntary servitude may have died—officially—during the Civil War with the Thirteenth Amendment. But peonage and second-class citizenship for black Americans replaced slavery and led a persistent afterlife—were, in fact, as

robust as ever when the firing ceased in the later, larger world war.

James C. Cobb's *The South and America Since World War II* is in vital part a chronicle of what C. Vann Woodward called "the deferred commitment to [legal] equality" and its gradual remedy in what he also called "the second reconstruction" of the 1950s and '60s. In what sense had the longstanding commitment to legal equality been deferred? That story is not well taught in our laundered school history texts. Under congressional authority there had been a ten-year experiment from 1868 in military reconstruction of the seceded states, the so-called "Radical" Reconstruction, itself much mythologized. What befell that experiment after 1877 is, or should be, familiar: Party wheeling and dealing, fatigue and cynicism (brilliantly traced by Woodward in two classics, *Reunion and Reaction* and *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*) had, in 1877, overthrown the initial trial of biracial politics in the South. Nineteen years later, the Supreme Court ratified the surrender to legal segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*; and it lasted, effectively, for half a century and more. Little of decisive importance intervened following that collapse of will until the late 1930s, and then only because Franklin Roosevelt was put on notice that equal employment in the burgeoning defense industries would be the price of black cooperation in the war effort. Otherwise, the old order slumbered on, virtually intact at war's end—even in the racially segregated armed forces.

But the legacy of racial discrimination had appeared more incongruous than ever, given that the United States had recently fought what one of its military leaders designated a "crusade" for human rights. Cobb traces the ferment that began in the federal courts (and in Harry Truman's executive order ending racial discrimination in the armed forces). Those initiatives challenged institutional barriers—segregation in education and public accommodations—and constituted the most immediate aspect of postwar change. The South, as the

author shows, was otherwise moving toward national statistical norms: farms dwindling, cities burgeoning, and Southerners as interested as Yankees in the almighty dollar.

Cobb's account of the tortured dismantling of racial discrimination in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s is a tale both heroic and disheartening, and even now gradually fading from historical consciousness. The author writes with an appropriate exasperation of the often violent and bizarre measures of obstruction and resistance—including the shameless subversion of law and order in parts of the Deep South, and determined passive resistance elsewhere. Cobb's admiring readers may wish, at times, that he had burned a few note cards on industrialization, urbanization, and other social trends, and written with the intuitive flair he displays in his fond

and infectious treatment of Southern music and Southern fiction. They are, in some ways, the best pages of the book, as they are the best products of the South since World War II.

Cobb is among the loving critics (as distinct from a surplus of uncritical lovers) of the South, as Southern in his own way as Vann Woodward was. In a final chapter, "Why the United States Needs the South," he explores the familiar hypocrisies of American hubris and echoes Woodward's memorable formulations regarding the truly distinctive Southern sensibility. What lingers over the Southern scene, even now, is an assertive strain of Southern-fried religiosity, too frequently invoked to justify inhumane attitudes on race and sexuality. Evidently, the Bible Belt still reads its Bible. The question, as ever, is whether it reads it well. ♦



Thinking Lunar

Humans by the light of the silvery moon.

BY THOMAS SWICK

Readers of *Nocturne* will probably at some point check the calendar for the next full moon. It will be at once a response to the talents of the author in making our satellite appear irresistible and a confirmation of his belief that—in spite of our high-wattage efforts to shut it out—the moon still exerts a powerful influence on us.

At the outset, Attlee pinpoints the particularity of the moon's light. It "does not reveal," he writes, "it transforms." In art, this means that the

Thomas Swick is the author of A Way to See the World: From Texas to Transylvania with a Maverick Traveler.

moon is seen "either as a symbol or an opportunity, its presence a gateway to another visual universe." And then we're off on a riveting, moonlit tour of late-night illuminations, ancient mythologies, scientific discoveries, artistic achievements, foreign lands, and personal revelations.

It has become popular in publishing to take a subject—cod, the AK-47, Saturday night—research it extensively, and then demonstrate its previously unrecognized importance to the world. A book devoted to moonlight—the source of little other than inspiration—is a bit of a departure, the rich product of a consuming obsession with the gossamer. Attlee

Nocturne
A Journey in Search of Moonlight
by James Attlee
Chicago, 320 pp., \$26



'Two Men Contemplating the Moon' (1820) by Caspar David Friedrich

is an indefatigable and wide-ranging enthusiast: He shows us how Galileo constructed his spyglasses (explaining in a footnote that “the word *telescopium* was not coined until 1611”) and explains how the great astronomer’s finger ended up in Florence as “a holy relic,” an early example “of the modern impulse to ascribe to science the status once held by religion.”

We look with him through a neighbor’s telescope—“So this is the country moonlight comes from”—and a few pages later, we’re treated to a summary of Lucian’s *Icaromenippus* before being introduced to the work of a contemporary British artist who, in a complicated process involving Morse code, bounces Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Opus 27 No. 2 (“Moonlight”) off the moon and back to earth.

To the moon, Ludwig!

One short chapter is a defense of darkness, a salvo against both our irrational fear of it and our ill-advised response to that fear, which is to banish the night with electric lights. Attlee’s point is well-taken—with regard to both energy consumption and constellation appreciation—yet even he, I think, if flying at night over the two Koreas, would choose the bright one as the more livable of

the two. Attlee’s love of the Cimmerian leads him to the desert, at least in his reading and contemplation, where we learn of the importance that Islam puts on darkness. He cites the scholar Fatema Mernissi, who “has written of the distinction between the attitudes of Islamic and Western civilization towards night and darkness, suggesting that the West’s fear of Islam, and of the dark, may have its roots in a suppression of the subconscious.” And since we’re discussing the desert, the name Antoine de Saint-Exupéry pops up, and Attlee neatly slips in a passage from *Wind, Sand and Stars* describing the world as seen after a moonlit crash onto dunes.

Writers, unsurprisingly, have long contemplated the moon, and Attlee quotes an international assortment: Hawthorne, Svevo, Blake, Li Po (who according to legend drowned in the Yangtze while “drunkenly attempting to embrace the moon’s reflection”), Bashō, Goethe, Proust, Conrad (who described the moon’s light as having “all the dispassionateness of a disembodied soul, and something of its inconceivable mystery”). Essayists as well have had a go at it: Walter Benjamin (“The Moon”), Henry David Thoreau (“Night and Moonlight”),

and the Italian Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who gets his own chapter, titled “Let’s Murder the Moonlight!” Nor are painters left out. Attlee “works in art publishing in London,” we are informed, and he expertly takes us from the traditional depictions of the Virgin Mary “standing on a crescent moon” to “a crucifixion attributed to Jan Van Eyck, said to contain the first accurate representation of the moon in Western culture.” (The author visits this painting at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and notes with satisfaction that the detail includes the moon’s large dark areas, known as “maria.”)

Toward the end, a long chapter is devoted to artists of the nighttime Thames, not just Turner and Whistler—whose work was greatly influenced by science—but Abraham (“Moonlight”) Pether and his cousin William, who collaborated with Joseph Wright, another great artist of the night and one of the Lunar Men, a group that met every month on the Monday closest to the full moon. (The date was chosen to make the ride home easier.) Attlee excels at finding these tantalizing connections, and brings to the paintings discussed (especially those readers may not have seen) the necessary detail, background, and passion.

The middle of the book contains the literal journey of the subtitle, as Attlee finally hits the road. Japan allows him to address the enormous significance that the moon has had in Asian cultures. Visiting a Kyoto temple for Tsukimi (the autumn moon-viewing festival), he follows everyone else’s lead and takes a picture of the orb, moved not just by its appearance but by the attention still paid to it by some of the most technologically addicted people on earth. From Kyoto he travels south to Kagoshima to see the city’s active volcano. Some scientists, Attlee writes, believe that a full moon close to earth (“at its perigee”) can influence volcanic eruptions. A typhoon, not an eruption, threatens his stay, but not before he finds Tsukimi burgers at McDonald’s. His next stop is Naples (Kagoshima’s sister city), where he notes that nighttime

paintings of the bay, with Vesuvius in the background, were so popular with travelers on the Grand Tour that they made moonlight one of the region's "principal exports."

From Italy he travels to the American West, starting in Las Vegas. It is his ultimate Sin City, not only deleting the night—what glitters up there stays up there—but doing the deed in the desert, night's long inviolable province. Though the city, he discovers, has its own volcano—in the middle of the Strip—and this one, accommodatingly, erupts on the hour. In addition to whipping boy, Vegas is also his gateway to Arizona, which boasts more large telescopes than any other state. Another interesting, if not necessarily surprising, fact. Fitting into both of those categories, however, is the Interstellar Light Collector outside Tucson, "a five-story-

high array of parabolic mirrors" that, its builders claim, can cure a host of ailments by amplifying and directing moonlight at participants, who are hoisted by a boom lift. Atlee's visit nicely mixes scientific skepticism with reportorial curiosity and human understanding.

One of the most fascinating chapters is on Germans' relationship with the moon. Atlee takes us from the beginning of the 19th century—when the Romantics associated it with the "night side" of life—to the imprisonment of Rudolf Hess who, in solitary confinement at Spandau, eagerly followed the race to put a man there. Intrigued by stars since childhood, Hess corresponded with people at NASA, who rewarded his interest by sending him photos and pamphlets and even "a minute-by-minute timetable for the Apollo 15 mission." ♦

Colleen McDannell is a fair enough recent example, and just about any parent I know would whack her upside the head. With a frying pan, maybe, since the woman has cashed in her mother's life to write a book called *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America*, of all unlikely things. Actually, McDannell's topic is not a bad one. Garry Wills's 1972 *Bare Ruined Choirs* remains an interesting read, but really, we lack a good, solid social history of what the reforms of the Second Vatican Council did to the lives and faith of ordinary American Roman Catholics. *The Spirit of Vatican II* says its purpose is to provide that missing social history, but McDannell structures the whole thing around the experience of her parents' generation—opening the book with a condescending picture of her mother Margaret as a 36-year-old housewife as the council began in 1962 and closing the book with a creepy vision of what the now 85-year-old Margaret's funeral will look like when it soon comes.

Not that *The Spirit of Vatican II* is error-ridden, exactly. When she's doing straightforward religious history, McDannell gives reasonable if unoriginal explanations of the process by which such declarations as *Dignitatis Humanae* (on religious freedom) and *Nostra Aetate* (on relations with non-Christians) were passed at the council—together with clear accounts of the important constitutions *Lumen Gentium* (on dogma) and *Gaudium et Spes* (on pastoral concerns). She does buy the old and somewhat tired narrative that Vatican II, properly understood, was entirely about empowering the laity and, particularly, women. Indeed, "Charting the changes of the Second Vatican Council" through the life of her mother Margaret "helps shift the focus away from priests, men, and boys and instead toward nuns, women, and girls," she writes—praising herself for concentrating on the "grossly underacknowledged" role of women in the church, as though the last 30 years of feminist-dominated scholarship on this and other topics didn't exist.

That old narrative of Vatican II

BCA

Church Social

A personal view of faith turned inside out.

BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

For the last 20 years we've been caught in a wildfire of unhappy childhood memoirs: of adult writers trying to make the bestseller list by dousing their mothers and fathers with gasoline and striking a match. We've been told about anti-Semitic parents, and child molester parents, and adulterer parents, and criminal parents, and drunken parents. We've been burned with scenes of incest, violence, and religious mania—and all to cast a flattering light on the authors

who, they insist on telling us, were strong enough to survive such childhood horrors.

It's all been pretty awful, and if nothing else will convince you of the decline of the family in America,

this ought to do it: an entire generation without a sense of familial unity or belief in duty to protect their relatives' reputations. And yet, bad as it's been, there's something nearly as bad in

that kindly, oh-so-understanding tone some authors use to speak of the past—something almost as insidious in the self-congratulation with which they forgive their own parents for being helpless victims of the backward past.

The Spirit of Vatican II *A History of Catholic Reform in America*

by Colleen McDannell
Basic Books, 304 pp., \$26.99

Joseph Bottum is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



Pope John XXIII, 1963

(standard in this country since the 1960s Vatican reporting that appeared in the *New Yorker* under the pseudonym “Xavier Rynne”) creates two fundamental problems: It leaves conservative Catholics without an explanation for why the council happened in the first place, and it leaves liberal Catholics without an explanation for why their vision of the council’s spirit eventually failed. Left or right, too many still see the church through 1970s lenses—agreeing, in the midst of their raging disagreements, that the Second Vatican Council represents a complete break with historical Catholicism. Is it worth pointing out that a man named John Paul II happened along the way? And that he recast Vatican II as a council entirely in line with church tradition, preserving its gains and rescuing its orthodoxy? John Paul wasn’t on the side of

the liberals, and he wasn’t on the side of the conservatives. He was ten steps ahead of them all.

Colleen McDannell holds the Sterling M. McMurrin Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Utah, which is not inappropriate. McMurrin was an interesting man: a national scholar who was also something of a power in the Mormon Church back in the 1960s and ’70s. Those were the days when everybody already knew that the Latter-day Saints would have to make some moves toward joining—politically, socially, and theologically—the rest of Christianity in America. And the question was whether the Christian churches toward which the Mormons moved would be from the liberal Protestant mainline or the emerging conservative evangelicals.

McMurrin plumped for the lib-

eral mainline, and he lost. Badly. But his spirit seems alive in McDannell, whose ameliorative picture of Catholicism today is designed mostly to maintain the liberalism of the laity that she fears is disappearing. Or, at least, a kind of old-fashioned, mainline-consensus liberalism. Social history is her specialty. *Heaven: A History*, the 1988 book she cowrote with Bernhard Lang, is a nice walk through the world to come, as pictured in various ages, and with the 1996 *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* she managed the difficult task of mocking Christian kitsch without insulting the beliefs of its creators and purchasers.

Through it all, McDannell has worked from a picture of faith as a reasonable and proper thing for people to have—provided, of course, that they don’t carry things too far. That can look quite conservative, in a world with the New Atheists running around declaring religious upbringing a species of child abuse. But it is, at root, a dated and nostalgic thing, uninformative about the times in which we actually live. In *The Spirit of Vatican II*, McDannell finds herself pleasantly surprised at the survival of Catholicism through everything from the first excitement about the council in 1962 to the latest round of outrage about the priest scandals. But she can’t account for that survival, mostly because she has no idea of what to make of John Paul II’s changing of what, McDannell sees, was the trajectory of Catholicism as it emerged from the 1960s.

And of course, to tell her social history of the ups and downs caused by the Second Vatican Council, McDannell uses up her mother’s life. Yes, *The Spirit of Vatican II* isn’t brutal and defamatory, the way far too many memoirs about parents have been over the last 20 years. But even the sweetest, most ostensibly respectful accounts pall a little when coupled with the self-superior view that, after all, we can’t really blame our parents for making the mistake of living in those strange, benighted days that are the past. ♦

Bibi Sings the Blues

A fan's notes on a Chinese pop phenom.

BY REUBEN F. JOHNSON



Zhou Bichang in Beijing

“Hollywood—that’s too far perhaps,” said the petite, soft-spoken beauty sitting at the table with me. We had been talking about her making more feature films in China, and I had asked about going beyond moviemaking in China and on to America. The thought of what the world’s movie capital must be like seemed to turn over, and she stopped for a second before answering: “I would also have to practice harder on my English.”

This understated, unassuming nature, and a very natural and unmanufactured beauty, is one of the many captivating traits of one of China’s top popular recording artists, Zhou Bichang, known as “Bibi Chou” (or “Bibi”) to her fans and the Asian entertainment community. We were in

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a private room at one of Beijing’s more upscale eating establishments; but Bibi was dressed in her everyday style with an artsy T-shirt, plain sports pants, tennis shoes, and a pair of her signature heavy-rimmed glasses. The new iPhone 4 she was playing with that day was as close as she gets to ostentation. During our entire conversation she was the picture of modesty about her talent and ambitions; you would never know that this is a performing artist who has millions of screaming fans who follow her every movement, post endless numbers of messages about her to dozens of blog pages, and have seen every one of her CDs top the unstoppable sales numbers of her previous one.

You would also never know that this sweet, innocent-looking little girl has a singing voice so powerful that it could break glass. She seems able to summon forth such a full-throated, multilayered wall of sound that I suspect some sort of fighter aircraft jet engine compressor

must be inside her. Yet she is equally capable of dropping to a whisper in a way that you can tell she is singing under her breath, but with no diminishment in sound quality. It is a voice that is sultry and seductive, with unlimited power behind it. It was once said that Frank Sinatra was the only singer who could *sing* a semicolon. Bibi is the only vocalist I have heard who can sing the entire library of punctuation marks—parentheses, brackets, dashes, underscores—and her seemingly endless tonal range is matched by an ability to show a full spectrum of inflections and accentuations, and in three different languages: Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese and English.

In 2005, Bibi was in a four-year undergraduate program at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music in Guangzhou. She had released some songs on the web and had tried to broaden her popularity, but had very nearly despaired of entering talent contests because both the style of her voice and her personal, tomboyish fashion taste had fallen flat in the assembly-line, lookalike world that is China’s popular music scene. Unbeknownst to her, one of her friends had entered her in a Chinese version of *American Idol* called *Super Girls*. Only 19 at the time, she dragged herself out of bed one morning for the first round of auditions without washing her face, brushing her hair, or applying makeup. Bibi blazed through all the preliminary rounds until the finals in July 2005 in Changsha, capital of Hunan province. The August finale pulled in some 400 million viewers, where she barely missed winning and ended up a close second place. One of her performances earned her a standing ovation from the five judges, moving one to tears.

It was during the *Super Girls* competition that Bibi acquired the massive following that remains zealously devoted to her. Attend any of her performances today and you find yourself surrounded by a sea of (mostly young) girls wearing green shirts (the color of her fan club) and an assortment of green headgear. All know every word of every one of her songs and sing with her in unison. The *Super Girls* competition was also where her unique singing voice, and the per-

sonal stamp she puts on nearly all the material she performs, acquired its own name in China—the 筆式唱腔 (“Bi Style Vocal”)—a sound not heard anywhere else in the world, as unique in its own way as the bossa nova in Brazil.

In May 2010 she went to Taiwan for a month of what was to be a light-speed makeover of her image, and the creation of an elaborate stage show. This retooling became her “Sing Along” concert series, which picks up again this week in Shanghai. The show features a multiple-level stage that has Bibi descending below one of the moveable platforms—only to rise from another place on the stage moments later.

During her short time below stage she makes instant costume changes; in the course of a three-hour performance there are 11 costume changes, complete with wigs and hair extensions, and she moves with a troupe of dancers in a series of synchronized routines.

“Organizing the costumes, choreography, and arrangements to adapt studio versions of your songs to live performances is an incredible amount of work to complete in just 30 days. Did you sleep much?” I asked.

“Well, not very much.”

“Having produced five CDs in as many years, and being one of the first mainland Chinese artists in many years to also be popular in Taiwan—what’s next for you?”

“I want to make films. We are in negotiation with several studios right now to make feature films here in China.” Now 25, she has already appeared in some feature films in China, although not always as the main character. On a Chinese chat show, she performed imitations of every popular singing artist the audience and host could name. Which emphasizes an obvious truth: Zhou Bichang is a musician’s musician, a creative personality in her own right. She writes much of her own material and described for me how she suddenly gets an idea for a song and finds herself jotting down lyrics or notes and chord patterns on a napkin: “Sometimes, if I can, I will sing the idea I have for a song and record it on my mobile phone.”

What is the life of a Chinese pop phenomenon? “I just live like the other peo-

ple—regular people—do. I read books, watch TV, go to cinema, spend time on the Internet.”

“Is it hard for you to be in public when you are this famous?”

“No, no I often go out in public.”

“Do you wear dark glasses, or something else, to disguise yourself?”

Bibi laughs: “No! I just take off my glasses.” ♦

BCA

Renaissance Guy

Unfortunately, we haven't seen the last of James Franco. BY JOE QUEENAN

For decades, Hollywood has been waiting for the full-service *artiste*—writer, director, producer, screenwriter—who can lay claim to the scepter of Renaissance Man once held by Orson Welles. Woody Allen couldn’t quite pull it off. Neither could Mel Gibson or Spike Lee. But now, in James Franco, who just brilliantly cohosted the Oscars, totally upstaging the radiant Anne Hathaway, Hollywood at last has uncrrypted the Renaissance Man it has been seeking for so long.

Welles is the legendary colossus who gave the world *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, and the cult classic *Touch of Evil*. A groundbreaking director, a volcanic screen presence, and a brilliant screenwriter, Welles is the only bona fide Renaissance Man Hollywood has ever produced. Until now.

Yes, everything has changed with the sudden emergence of the 32-year-old Franco, whom NPR recently dubbed Hollywood’s official Renaissance Man. An actor of no small ability—he stole the show right out from under Seth Rogen with his turn as a lovable stoner in *Pineapple Express*, and has also won universal plaudits for his jaw-dropping work as Peter Parker’s best friend in the three *Spiderman* movies—Franco is also a gifted writer (witness his screenplay for the vastly underrated *Good Time Max* and his astonishing debut as a short-

story writer). A director to be reckoned with (*The Ape*, *Fool’s Gold*), this Yale English Ph.D. student was also nominated for an Oscar for his gritty performance in *127 Hours* as a self-involved slacker who goes into a ravine with two arms and comes out with just one.

In other words, Franco just finished hosting an awards ceremony at which he himself could have taken home the Academy’s highest honor. That he did not trump Colin Firth is an outrage. Yet even as he ascends to the apex of his profession, there are signs that Franco—like Redford, like Streisand, like Stallone before him—has already outgrown the thespian’s craft and yearns to stretch his creative muscles. A talented painter, he has already directed three films, one of which (*The Ape*) deals with a squinting, creatively blocked young writer who gets unexpected help from a gorilla roommate. Think of it as a simian *Bringing Up Baby*. He has also published a collection of short stories (*Palo Alto*), written while pursuing a degree in creative writing at Columbia. The book, drawing on Franco’s own disturbing childhood on the mean streets of Palo Alto, chronicles the adventures of assorted angst-ridden potheads, rapists, creeps, and all-purpose suburban losers; one of the sexual assaults involves a cucumber. *Palo Alto* begins with a citation from *Remembrance of Things Past* and is festooned with blurbs from such luminaries as Ben Marcus, Susan Minot, and Amy Hempel, who said that “these quotable, unsettling stories . . . seem to

Joe Queenan is the author, most recently, of Closing Time: A Memoir.

change the ions in a room.” Added Gary Shteyngart, everybody’s favorite writer after Jonathan Franzen, “This is a book to be inhaled more than once.”

Here is a typical passage:

In eleventh grade we studied the Civil War. There were the Bad Confederates and the Good Guys in the North. Some people still believe the Confederates were right.

And:

Ute was handsome but he was a nerd too. He drew lots of pictures. Ed and I drew pictures with him. We made our own comic called *The Alien Brothers*. We drew ourselves like vicious aliens and killed the people in our school.

Dystopian yet avuncular, effortlessly fusing the cretinous with the sublime, that passage changed the ions in my room so dramatically I had to inhale it three times.

Most people would be happy to be identified as the guy who plays Peter Parker’s friend in *Spiderman*, the guy who gets trapped in a ravine for 127 hours, the guy who stars in *Howl*, the most widely awaited film about Beat Poets since the last widely awaited film about Beat Poets—but not this no-holds-barred, take-no-prisoners Renaissance Man. In addition to his myriad acting accomplishments (*The Dead Girl*, *Deuces Wild*, *Camille*, *Sonny*, *The Great Raid*, *Flyboys*) Franco is a stunningly innovative painter and is currently pursuing a doctorate in English at Yale. Molière, Laurence Olivier, Steven Spielberg, and Titian all rolled into one, Franco has yet to encounter an obstacle he cannot surmount.

The decision to have Franco host the Oscars perplexed many observers. Was he any relation to the Generalissimo? Didn’t he used to pitch for the Mets? But if Franco is not yet a household name, even after hosting the Oscars, this is because for much of his career he has been used as little more than eye candy by cynical directors. Franco serves a primarily decorative function in most of his early movies, squinting his way through *Tristan and Isolde*, *In the Valley of Elah*, *The Dead Girl*, and *Camille*. In fact, his best work to date may be his portrayal of James Dean



James Franco (right) at the Academy Awards

in the 2001 biopic about the brooding fifties superstar. Perhaps in reaction to this sort of crass stereotyping by directors and producers, Franco adapted a grungy look in *Date Night*, *Pineapple Express*, and *127 Hours*, sporting the kind of wan, indecisive mustache normally associated with wheedling card sharps and the Sheriff of Nottingham. This is called playing against type. And it’s working.

One concern about Franco’s career is that, like Leonardo da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, and Ethan Hawke before him, Franco risks spreading his abundant talents too thin. Leonard Bernstein, a wondrous conductor, gifted pianist, and inspired composer of Broadway shows,

never wrote anything to rival Bartók or Stravinsky, and many feel it was because he refused to focus his talents in any one area. The same fate could befall James Franco. At some point this hyperactive, intellectually ravenous, squinting young supernova must decide whether he wishes to be known as the director of *cutting-edge films*, the author of *brilliant short fiction*, the *iconoclastic painter*, or the superlative *squinting actor* who just totally clocks—I mean *clocks*—Seth Rogen in *Pineapple Express*.

For my money, I’d like to see him go down the same path as De Niro, Olivier, and Bogie. Anyone who totally clocks Seth Rogen is going places. Like, straight to the top. ♦

KEVIN WINTER / GETTY IMAGES



High-end Dross

The art of slumming, Hollywood style.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

There's an outrageously entertaining documentary you can watch, right now, if you have Netflix on your computer and you can stomach its gleeful and shameless presentations of cheap gore, exploitative nudity, and extremely bad taste. It's called *Not Quite Hollywood*, and it tells the story of the birth of the Australian film industry in the 1970s.

The movies whose creation *Not Quite Hollywood* chronicles were almost uniformly terrible, despite the hopped-up praise for them offered throughout the documentary by Quentin Tarantino. Indeed, they're so lousy that even listing their titles is pointless because you won't have heard of any of them (unless you spent some time hanging around the movie theaters in the Loop or Times Square in the 1970s as I did).

But what they showed, as *Not Quite Hollywood* reveals, was terrific, devil-may-care, do-it-yourself ingenuity. The filmmakers had little money and even less experience, but they saw an opening in the worldwide explosion of violent and dirty exploitation pictures following the collapse in social and moral standards in the 1960s, and they seized it. *Not Quite Hollywood* is a story of capitalism at its most sophomoric, with all that the word "sophomoric" evokes.

The movies were cheap, they had no airs, they were designed to be disposable, and something surprisingly good arose from their creation—an industry far from the epicenter of world cinema that, from this remarkably unpromising standing start, would end up minting an extraordinary number of good directors, wonderful actors, and bril-

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Drive Angry 3D
Directed by Patrick Lussier



Nicolas Cage

liant technicians. That fact, and the passage of nearly four decades, drains these films, or at least the clips shown in *Not Quite Hollywood*, of their capacity to offend.

The same can't be said of present-day Hollywood's fascination for making expensive movies in the mold of the no-budget films from the heyday of what *Not Quite Hollywood* dubs "Ozploitation." It's one thing to show decapitations and skewerings and naked women firing guns in a movie that cost 11 cents and was intended for a somewhat furtive and embarrassed audience. It's quite another when a Hollywood studio uses investment capital raised from a hedge fund to spend tens of millions of dollars

producing exactly the same kind of fare in hopes of generating a massive mainstream audience here and abroad, later to be followed by teenage boys snapping it up on DVD at Best Buy if they're not smart enough to figure out how to download it illegally from BitTorrent.

Take *Drive Angry*, released at the end of February and starring Nicolas Cage, who remains one of the world's highest-paid actors because he is willing to appear in incredibly low-rent material that scores well at the international box office. Given Cage's paycheck of around \$10 million, it's a fair guess that *Drive Angry*, which was made in 3D, cost somewhere around \$50 million.

Drive Angry plays like a cross between Patrick Swayze's *Road House* (you know, the one about a heroic bouncer that's shown every three days on TNT) and the cancelled television show *Reaper* (about the kid whose parents sold his soul to the devil and must chase down demons who've fled from Hell). It's set in a world exclusively populated by poor white trash. Cage is a blond-headed Hell escapee motoring around the Southwest in pursuit of, and being pursued by, a Satan-worshipping cult and an actual emissary from Satan himself.

I suppose it's all supposed to be in good fun, all the slaughtering and cursing and nudity so amazingly gratuitous it would probably trigger an enthusiastic Tweet from Charlie Sheen. But there's something curdled and gross about such displays in a movie as lavishly appointed as this one. It tries to get a charge out of being so shocking, so out there, so beyond the bounds.

But how can a movie be transgressive when it's being released in 2,300 theaters and advertised on network television? The answer is it can't; it's just trying to trick stupid kids into thinking it is. All exploitation movies are tricks that promise more than they deliver; that's the nature of the beast. Low-rent productions like the Ozploitation movies are three-card monte games, small-time cons. Movies like *Drive Angry* are Bernie Madoff in comparison. ♦

RON BATZDORF / SUMMIT ENTERTAINMENT

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the weekly **Standard**

MARCH 14, 2011

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