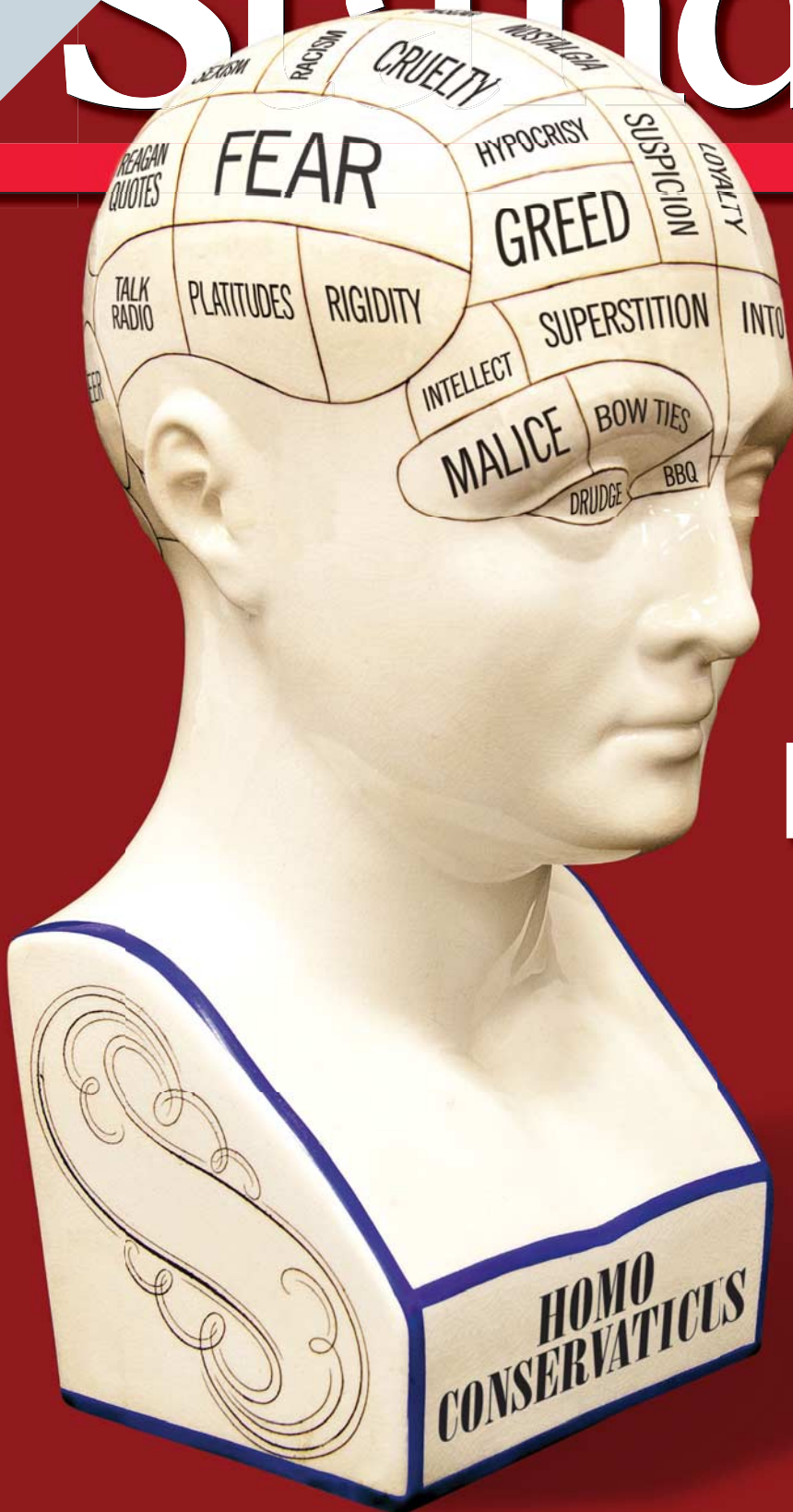


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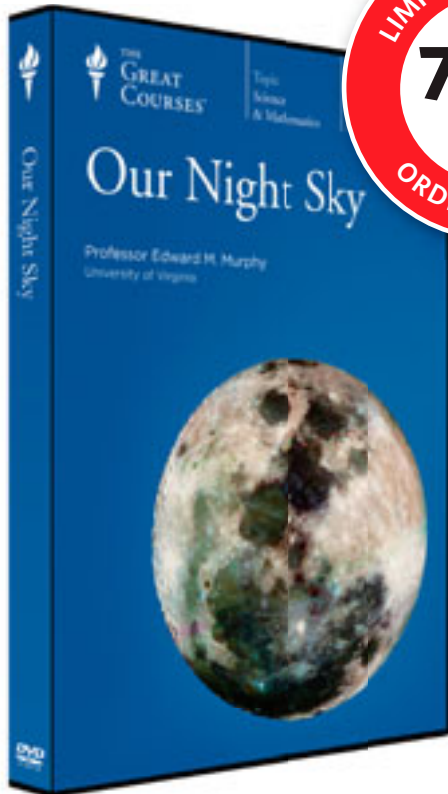
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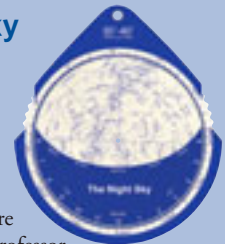
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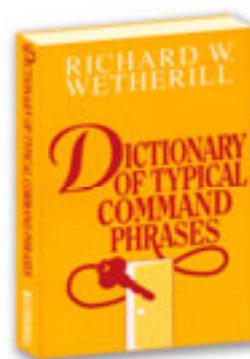
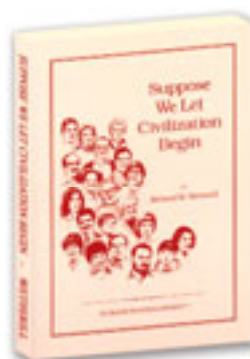
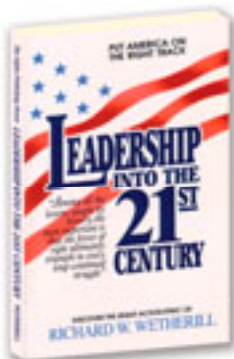
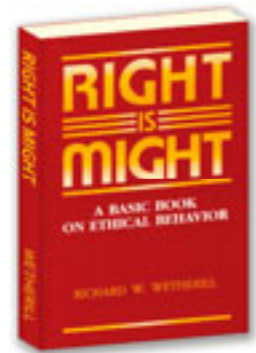
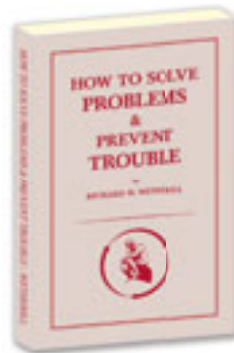
People who accept the logic of the above explanation live by the intent of the behavioral law, as best they can. They know that any problems or troublesome results indicate their deviation from the Law of Absolute Right. Eagerly they drop their intent and return to the safety of the intent of this natural law.

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Contents

May 21, 2012 • Volume 17, Number 34



- 2 The Scrapbook *Satanic verse, required reading & more*
- 5 Casual *Philip Terzian, stumped*
- 7 Editorials
Obama's Choice—and Ours BY WILLIAM KRISTOL
Panetta Plays Chicken BY THOMAS DONNELLY & GARY SCHMITT
What Stimulus? BY JEFFREY H. ANDERSON

Articles

- 11 He's No Pragmatist *Obama doesn't play well with Republicans* BY FRED BARNES
- 12 Spoiling Julia Rotten *The Democrats' clientelism problem* BY JAY COST
- 14 The Breivik Veto *A case study in how to marginalize dissent* BY MICHAEL MOYNIHAN
- 16 The Once and Future Liberal *Obama runs as the progressive that he is* BY TOD LINDBERG
- 20 Indiana Fires a Senator *The end of Lugar's winning streak* BY GEOFFREY NORMAN



Features

- 21 The New Phrenology *How liberal psychopundits understand the conservative brain* BY ANDREW FERGUSON
- 26 Birth of a Nation *With American evangelicals on the ground in South Sudan* BY ARMIN ROSEN



Books & Arts

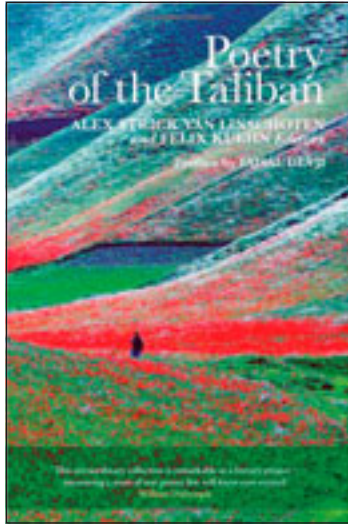
- 30 Why Captain Dreyfus? *The shame and redemption of France* BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN
- 33 Ideas Matter *So long as they are ideas and not partisan talking points* BY MARK HEMINGWAY
- 35 Tough Love *In colonial New England, the ideal was not freedom but conformity* BY EDWARD ACHORN
- 36 Stillman's Vision *The 'WASP Woody Allen' in search of moral truth* BY IAN MARCUS CORBIN
- 38 Super Unheroic *Despite what you read, this is one epic not worth seeing* BY JOHN PODHORETZ
- 40 Parody *A (slightly more) enthusiastic endorsement*

Satanic Verse

THE SCRAPBOOK would not say that politics and poetry are mutually exclusive, but it's an awkward relationship at best. Browning's condemnation of Wordsworth for abandoning liberal idealism (*Just for a handful of silver he left us / Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat*) is hardly Browning's finest hour as a poet. And the contemptuous verse written by John Berryman and, especially, Robert Lowell about Dwight D. Eisenhower (*[T]he Republic summons Ike / The mausoleum in her heart*) is now more embarrassing than rewarding to read. When Robert Frost stood up to celebrate the inauguration of John F. Kennedy's Camelot, God arranged for the glare of the noonday sun to obscure his text—or so THE SCRAPBOOK likes to think. Bill Clinton's first inauguration was commemorated by Maya (*Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas*) Angelou. Enough said.

So we greet the publication this week, in London, of *Poetry of the Taliban* (Hurst) with a certain wonder and reserve. Reserve because THE SCRAPBOOK, like any good citizen, does not

wish to be perceived as a philistine; wonder because it is difficult to imagine a more startling literary venture. The editors and translators are the usual assortment of left-wing apologists and parlor radicals, but their rationale for this extraordinary endeavor—"a way of understanding who the Taliban are"—seems perverse. If there is one segment of humanity about whom we know altogether too much—their homicidal instincts, their hatred of women, their distorted vision of Islam, their rabid anti-Semitism—it is the Taliban.



The irony, of course, is that celebrating the Taliban in art must be weighed against their history of repression of thought, their violent opposition to education for women, their deliberate destruction of Afghanistan's historical and architectural heritage. Unsurprisingly, they are just as bad at poetry as at everything else, except killing: The *Times Literary Supplement*, which is not an especially political publication, complains that the "dominant theme of Taliban poetry is the desire to expel the oc-

cupying forces," which this anthology repeats ad infinitum.

No doubt it is unwelcome for the occupants of jeeps bumping past shady bystanders to know that *We are happy when we are martyred for our extreme zeal and honour; / That is the reason we strap bombs around our waists*, but it is beyond the scope of the imagination to conceive of any profit from reading it as verse.

Then again, since *Poetry of the Taliban* comes recommended by a host of literary fellow travelers, THE SCRAPBOOK can imagine other reasons as well. One of Britain's more repellent apologists for terror, William Dalrymple, hails "this extraordinary collection . . . as a literary project—uncovering a seam of war poetry few will know ever existed, and presenting to us for the first time the black-turbaned Wilfred Owens of Wardak."

Of course, Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) was hardly one to celebrate the glory of murder and suicide as the Taliban routinely do (*Gun in my hand and dagger under my arm, I am going into battle; / I am an Afghan mujahed*). Indeed, quite the opposite: *My subject is War*, he wrote, *and the Pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.*

So THE SCRAPBOOK can hardly object to the right of editors and publishers to present the Taliban to the English-speaking public in heroic verse. But just as poetry illuminates in unexpected ways, its publication is sometimes equally revealing. ♦

The Scourge of Kristof

It's probably not too much of an overstatement to say that American politics went off the rails in the early part of the 20th century. We're still living with the legacy of the many foolish things the first generation of progressives inflicted on us

then and that today's progressives are intent on relitigating.

And so *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof recently found himself arguing against the scourge of legal beer sales. Pine Ridge, a large Oglala Sioux Indian reservation in South Dakota, bans alcohol because of its role in a host of social ills. And yet Sioux who wish to

drink often leave the reservation and head for the next town. According to Kristof, this is happening because of "Anheuser-Busch's devastating exploitation of American Indians."

You might assume that some of these exploited Indians drink Miller, but Kristof is only calling for a boycott of Bud. Kristof notes another "nifty solution" to the Pine Ridge

problem would be to have the state of South Dakota extend the boundaries of the reservation, so that the tribe's alcohol ban covers places where it's currently legally sold.

Kristof's argument for this boycott is nearly identical to the original argument for prohibition: Once you acknowledge alcohol contributes to a host of social ills, from domestic violence to suicide, you're an immoral monster for not having blind faith in proscriptions against vice.

However, given what happened during the 13 years when America road tested a prohibition on alcohol sales, there are few public policy ideas that Americans can dismiss with such certainty.

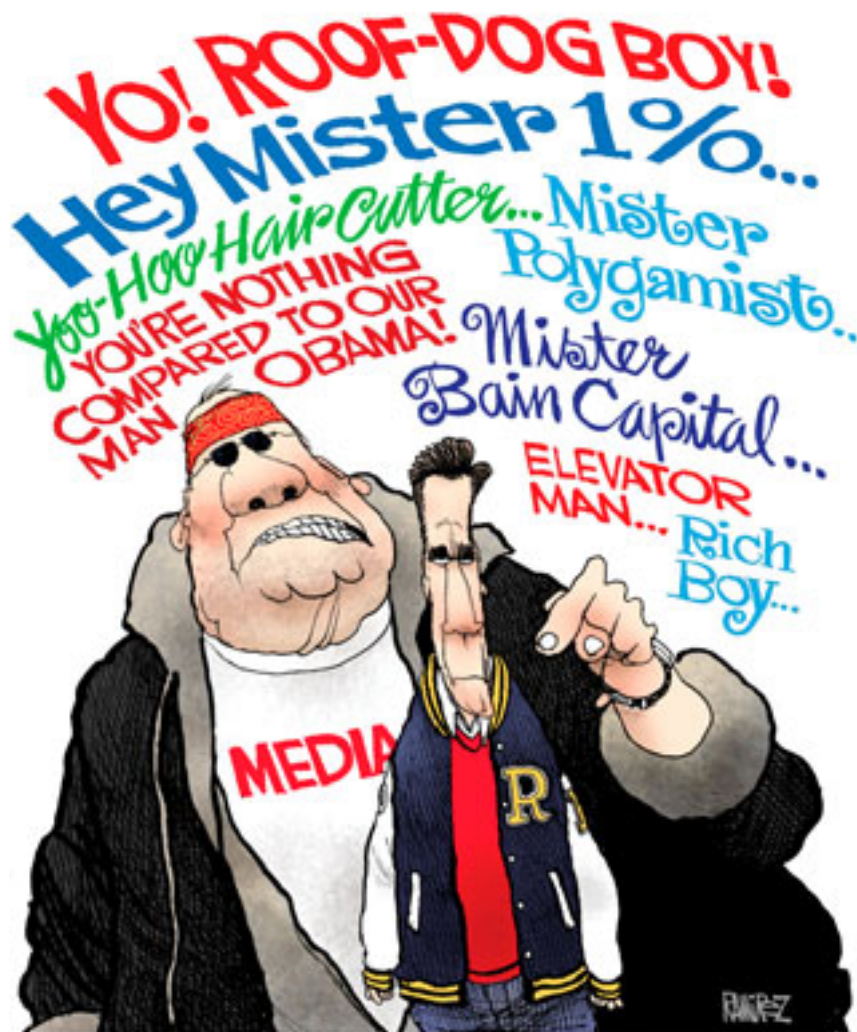
Which is not to say we don't support the Pine Ridge reservation's decision to ban alcohol as a matter of self-governance. Alcoholism on Indian reservations is a problem that sorely needs to be addressed. But how is this ultimately Budweiser's problem?

Kristof has taken on some righteous causes in the past, but it's impossible not to view him as simultaneously arrogant and naïve when he writes: "Brewers market beers with bucolic country scenes, but the image I now associate with Budweiser is of a child with fetal alcohol syndrome." As long as he persists in this kind of hyperbole, the image to associate with Kristof is one of reckless paternalism. ♦

His Cup Runneth Over

Robert Stiller, the man behind those popular single-brew Keurig machines and the founder of Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, is the kind of billionaire liberals idolize. Although *Forbes* estimated Stiller's worth last year at \$1.3 billion, he still lived in Vermont, dressed casually, and donated generously to environmental causes. He also made sure his employees benefited from yoga and had access to meditation rooms. But there was another side to him.

According to the *Wall Street Jour-*



THE BULLY

nal, "Stiller also bought costly real estate and piled up hundreds of millions of dollars in debt borrowed against his company stock and other investments." His properties, the *Journal* reveals, "included a \$17.5 million apartment in New York's Time Warner Center that was previously owned by New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, according to city records. He also bought a three-bedroom house in Palm Beach, on the Intercoastal Waterway."

In order to borrow more, Stiller said his bank (Deutsche Bank) forced him to take drastic measures, selling \$125 million in stock—five million shares—to meet a margin call, which took place last week.

But last week the company was in a blackout period, during which no Green Mountain official was supposed to be selling any stock whatsoever. As a result, Stiller was stripped of his chairmanship (he stepped down as CEO in 2007).

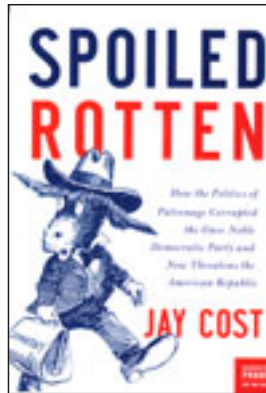
Stiller told CNBC he was "really shocked and hurt" by the board's decision, which he described as "an overreaction." Regarding the criticism that his real estate purchases were lavish, the *Journal* quotes Stiller as saying, "Lavish is all relative."

Talk about a story dripping with irony! Stiller was really pouring it on, wasn't he? The board roasted him, and it seems to have left a bitter taste in his mouth! We'll stop here. ♦

Required Reading

Do you enjoy Jay Cost's electoral analysis at weeklystandard.com and in *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* (for example, his essay on the Obama campaign's "Life of Julia" propaganda elsewhere in this issue)? If you're an intelligent and perceptive reader—and if you're this far into *THE SCRAPBOOK*, that's surely what you are!—of course you do. Well, now you can read Jay at book length—and at a reasonable cost (sorry).

Jay's new book, *Spoiled Rotten: How the Politics of Patronage Corrupted the Once Noble Democratic Party and Now Threatens*



the American Republic, released this week by Harper Collins's Broadside Books, features an unusual and rich mix of history, political science, and polemic. It will be an influential

book, we think, and—just as important to *THE SCRAPBOOK*—it's a gripping read. Jay leads us on a political, electoral, and intellectual history of the Democratic party, from Andrew Jackson to the current occupant of the White House. There's an awful lot to be learned from Jay's account, about America and modern liberalism and the politics of the welfare state. So go ahead and spoil yourself; get it now. ♦

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My Digital Age

WARNING: This Casual contains details that the squeamish may find disturbing. Reader discretion is advised.

On the night of December 4, 1970, I tried to open a wooden swinging door that contained glass panels. Because the wood was slightly swollen, the door required a vigorous push to open. I shoved with the requisite vigor—but on a glass panel, not the wooden frame. The upshot was that, while the door swung open, my right hand succeeded in shattering the glass, and my little finger was very nearly severed.

The bone, of course, remained intact, but the flesh was nicely lacerated and the finger hung by some tendons and other unidentified viscera. Fortunately, there were people around to witness this extraordinarily thoughtless action on my part; I recall remaining comparatively calm while pandemonium broke out. The sight of blood is not especially bothersome to me, and there was plenty to see as I held my traumatized digit on the ride to the emergency room.

The finger was reattached by the surgical resident at Bryn Mawr Hospital—I can still remember his German name and accent—and over the next two years I underwent two operations in an effort to connect the nerves and tendons and restore the pinkie to some semblance of life. Unfortunately, nothing worked; and in both cases scar tissue formed, leaving my finger frozen in a tightly bent posture. In the end, I opted to have the bone surgically broken and the joint fused so that the finger would remain straight, more or less, allowing me to slip my hand in and out of pockets without resistance, wear gloves, and salute.

Accordingly, I cannot make a fist with my right hand, but, in the miraculous way the human body works, I

have otherwise adjusted to this minor mutilation. I am left-handed, so writing was unaffected; but I have long since grown accustomed to playing nine-fingered piano (jazz, mostly) and watching helplessly as coins fall from my palm onto the floor. The surviving nerves remain in some sort of twilight condition, so the finger is exceedingly sensitive and painful to the touch, but I'm used to it.



And so life has proceeded for the past four decades. My comatose finger swiftly withered and is now about half as long as my other pinkie. But until a few weeks ago I had never noticed any particular change in its status until, one Friday afternoon at my office, I observed that it was considerably more painful than usual and, ominously, turning a deep shade of blue.

The next morning, concerned that this might be some sort of staph infection or version of gangrene, I telephoned my stalwart son the medical student, who observed that the symptoms sounded more like bruising than infection, but advised a trip to the emergency room. The ER physician—a former military doc with recent war-

time experience—enjoyed my recitation of the finger's history but was stumped (so to speak) by its condition. After some quick research, however, and comparison with a case she had seen earlier, she announced her verdict: paroxysmal hand hematoma, or Achenbach syndrome.

Andrews' Diseases of the Skin (2006) defines Achenbach syndrome as a condition characterized by "spontaneous focal hemorrhage into the palm or the volar surface of a finger, which results in transitory localized pain, followed by rapid swelling and localized bluish discoloration"—all of which happened to my pinkie. It's a medical mystery, by the way: No one knows what causes it or why, weeks later, the hematoma obligingly dissipates. The ER physician did point out that women suffer from Achenbach more commonly than men. And my aforementioned son, wielding the sarcasm that is a family hallmark, promised to find me an Achenbach support group in the Washington area.

I am pleased to report that the symptoms have, in fact, diminished, although the finger remains more painfully sensitive to the touch, and the hematoma seems to have permanently disfigured it. Still swollen, it bends curiously to the starboard side.

Which leads me back to a conversation, 40 years ago, with one of the hand surgeons who attempted to repair the initial damage. He suggested, at the outset, that the finger be amputated—to which I responded with appropriate horror. But as time goes by, and I seek to adjust to a life blighted by Achenbach syndrome, I can't help but wonder if that might have been the wiser course. The little finger on my right paw is, now more than ever, a misshapen appendage, and more trouble than not. If it ever is surgically detached from my hand, by the way, I intend to plunge it immediately into plexiglass and add it to my paperweight collection.

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Obama's Choice— and Ours

In the early 1980s, Midge Decter famously explained to an acquaintance surprised by her unapologetic embrace of American conservatism, “There comes a time to join the side you’re on.” One could say that last week President Obama followed—as so many of us have!—in Midge’s footsteps. He joined the side he’s on.

That side seeks to change the traditional definition—we would say the more or less natural definition—of marriage as the joining together of a man and a woman as husband and wife. That side seeks to expand—we would say transform—marriage to include the joining together of two persons of the same sex. It’s unclear what principle would restrict that joining to two people, as opposed to various combinations of consenting adults—but for now, that side is limiting its goals. In any case, that side now has the blessing of President Obama. The Democratic party will surely follow suit, adjusting its platform at its convention to endorse the transformation of marriage.

Mitt Romney and the Republican party now stand on the traditional side of this cultural and social divide, in defense of marriage as it has always been understood—and as most Americans, judging from their repeated votes at the ballot box, continue to understand it. And they will have no choice but to fight on this front. They may not be interested in the culture war, but the culture war is interested in them. And so the Romney campaign and the GOP will stand, however awkwardly and hesitantly, athwart History, murmuring stop, wincing at the scorn of their social betters and the ridicule of their cultured despisers.

They will need the encouragement and support of all who seek to defend marriage. Some defenders of marriage

will base that defense on religion, others on their reading of Aristotle or Burke or Tocqueville or Oakeshott, and yet others will make their case based on history or sociology or anthropology or common sense. The intellectual defenders of traditional marriage will quarrel among themselves. And they’ll be vexed when the politicians on their side don’t make all the arguments they should, or as articulately as they might.

So it will be a bit of a mess. But the defense of civilization is always a mess. And out of this mess, the American people will decide in November.

Will victory in November guarantee prevailing over the long run? Aren’t the defenders of the traditional family—or as we would have it, the defenders of the family—destined to be swamped by the



‘I’ve been going through an evolution on this issue . . .’

modern tidal waves of individual choice and sexual liberation? Possibly. In the civilizational struggle of an earlier generation, Whittaker Chambers thought he was leaving the winning side to join the losing side in the battle against communism. But you never know how history will turn out, as Chambers, once liberated from Marxist determinism, would have reminded us.

All one can ask is the chance to make one’s case. All the American people can ask is the chance to decide, rather than having an answer imposed on them by social or judicial elites. Thanks to Vice President Joe Biden, who spurred President Obama to stop “evolving” and to come forward and state his views like a man, there will be a clear choice this November between the candidates and the parties on the issue of marriage. Defenders of traditional marriage need to speak now, or forever hold their peace.

—William Kristol

Panetta Plays Chicken

When he was director of central intelligence, Leon Panetta earned a reputation as an energetic advocate for his agency. When he replaced Robert Gates at the Pentagon, it was reasonable to hope that Panetta would continue to play the role of a senior statesman. And to some extent he has—explaining that defense cuts would heighten risks to the nation’s security and stating that, should the “sequester” mandated by the 2011 Budget Control Act come to pass in January 2013, cutting another \$500 billion from defense, it would be a “disaster” for America’s military. As he told the Senate Armed Services Committee, “Congress must do everything possible to make sure that we avoid sequestration.”

But no longer. Now that the Republican majority in the House of Representatives has actually introduced a plan to avoid this disaster, blocking sequestration and proposing alternative reductions in federal spending to meet the goals

set by the Budget Control Act, Secretary Panetta has reverted to his Democratic-congressman-from-California self. At a press conference Thursday, Panetta said the Republican bill would, “by taking these funds from the poor, middle-class Americans, homeowners, and other vulnerable parts of our American constituencies,” virtually guarantee “confrontation, gridlock, and a greater likelihood of sequester.” To top matters off, the secretary added that “defense should not be exempt from doing its share to reduce the deficit.”

So, naturally, the news accounts portray the fight between the House GOP and the Obama administration as a choice between “protecting defense” and “slashing funds for the poor.”

Except it’s not. Since 2002, spending for the federal government’s food stamp program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), has increased 270 percent, with participation in SNAP growing 160 percent since 2000. The proposed “slash” to the program would leave funding for food stamps in 2013 still 260 percent higher than a decade ago. Indeed, given the liberalized rules for eligibility, even if the economy recovers and returns to normal growth, the CBO projects nearly 37 million people will be receiving benefits in 2020, up from 17 million in 2000.

Or, take the proposed reforms to Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program in the House bill. While

Global Customers = American Jobs

By Thomas J. Donohue

President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Ninety-five percent of the world’s customers live outside of the United States. And the worldwide race among leading global economies to reach them and sell them things is under way—and gaining speed. How is America faring? We’re in the contest, but we risk ceding ground, customers, and, most importantly, jobs to competitors that are ambitiously going after new trade deals.

Worldwide, 100 separate trade agreements are being negotiated, and the United States is only involved in one of them. For the sake of American jobs and growth, we’ve got to pick up the pace around the globe.

Already, trade supports 38 million jobs here at home. Building on this strong foundation, trade can revitalize our weak economy and create hundreds of thousands of badly needed jobs without raising taxes or adding to the deficit.

How do we do it? Congress should quickly pass legislation funding the Export-Import Bank, which provides financing that enables small businesses to export. The bank supports billions of dollars in U.S. exports and sustains nearly 300,000 American jobs. And it’s a good investment of taxpayer money, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to the Treasury every year. When other countries are providing their own exporters with an estimated \$1 trillion in export finance, failure to reauthorize Ex-Im would amount to unilateral disarmament and cost tens of thousands of American jobs.

Next, lawmakers must approve Permanent Normal Trade Relations for Russia, which will join the World Trade Organization this summer. Unless Congress acts, U.S. workers, farmers, and companies won’t reap the full benefits of Russia’s entry into the WTO, which will require it to open its markets, protect intellectual property and investments, and strengthen the rule of law. Meanwhile, European and Asian companies

will build on their already significant head start in tapping the growing Russian market.

The United States should also advance agreements to boost trade with big commercial partners, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the European Union. It should pursue agreements with emerging markets such as Brazil, Egypt, India, and Indonesia. To do so, Congress must renew Trade Promotion Authority, which grants the executive branch authority to negotiate trade agreements without fear of them being picked apart by Congress. Prospective trade partners won’t enter into talks without it.

The longer we wait to move forward on trade, the farther ahead our competitors will get. And we can’t afford to fall behind. Not when global customers are up for grabs and American jobs are on the line.



100 Years Standing Up for American Enterprise
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

the past decade has seen a large expansion in Medicaid spending, the program is projected to grow by some 125 percent in the next 10 years. The House bill would slow that growth to 123 percent.

These proposals hardly justify the Democrats' accusations that the House GOP is rampaging through the federal budget like Attila the Hun.

Not that a little slashing isn't sometimes called for. The health care law passed in 2010 created a "Prevention and Public Health Fund" to prevent disease and promote "wellness." While presumably some of the money was well spent, U.S. tax dollars also went to improving signage for public parks and bike lanes in North Carolina, promoting "urban gardening" in Boston, and helping New York in its lobbying campaign to increase taxes on soda.

Nor is it the case, as Secretary Panetta suggests, that those trying to prevent further cuts to the military budget are ignoring the need to address the deficit or arguing that defense shouldn't share the pain. Over the past four years, some \$800 billion has already been taken from defense coffers. If the sequester stands, defense, though consuming less than 20 percent of federal spending, will bear half the total cuts.

The real issue here is the desire of the administration and its allies on Capitol Hill to keep defense spending as low as possible to make room for the domestic welfare and entitlement programs they want. In this connection, it should be no surprise that the \$800 billion already lopped from defense is essentially the price tag for the 2009 Obama stimulus package that failed to restore the economy to healthy growth.

So, over the longer term, this really will be a matter of "guns versus butter"—with liberals wanting to add oleo, margarine, and extra virgin olive oil to one side of the ledger, while leaving the U.S. military looking more and more like the armless, legless Black Knight from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Under the administration's current plan to flat line future defense spending, and using CBO projections for the economy, America's defense "burden" will drop to just over 2.5 percent of GDP in a decade. This is a remarkable figure—half a percentage point lower than the lowest level reached in the post-World War II era and well below even the post-Cold War average. With this level of resources, the United States simply cannot continue to play the role it has over the past 60 years in keeping the great powers at peace and helping provide the global security environment that has seen America prosper.

The GOP-sponsored plan in the House offers a sensible way forward. It keeps the government's pledge to begin addressing the deficit and does so by only slightly slowing the growth in welfare programs. And it steps back from what the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Martin Dempsey, has called the path to "a hollow force." Unfortunately, Senate majority leader Harry Reid, most of his Democratic colleagues, and the White House seem unwill-

ing even to consider the plan, preferring instead to play Russian roulette with the country's security by letting the sequestration process go forward.

Perhaps this is to be expected given the Democrats' slim hold on the Senate and a president whose record puts his reelection in jeopardy. But it does not excuse Panetta's dismissal of what is, so far, the only plan to prevent the gutting of the department he leads. The Budget Control Act was a piece of national-security folly, for which congressional Republicans deserve a good share of the blame. But the relish with which Democrats, including Panetta, are playing a game of political chicken with the U.S. military is inexcusable.

—Thomas Donnelly & Gary Schmitt

What Stimulus?

On July 24, 2008, candidate Barack Obama toured Europe and drew 200,000 spectators to a rally in Berlin. On May 5, 2012, President Barack Obama officially launched his reelection campaign—which he unofficially launched over a year ago—but couldn't fill a 19,000-seat basketball arena in Columbus, Ohio. While the level of enthusiasm has noticeably declined, the mes-



sage is remarkably similar. Aside from a few stray sentences, Obama sounded no more like a president running on a four-year record of accomplishments when he spoke in Columbus than he had when he'd spoken in Berlin.

Of course, when your two biggest legislative achievements are a hugely unpopular 2,700-page health care

overhaul that most Americans want to see repealed (if the Supreme Court doesn't strike it down first) and a \$787,000,000,000 economic "stimulus" that didn't stimulate much of anything besides the national debt (which has risen from \$9.8 trillion at this point in 2008 to \$15.7 trillion today), perhaps silence is golden.

But it's not only in formal speeches that the Obama administration is steering clear of publicizing the stimulus. It has now been five months since the administration last put out a report card on the so-called American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA—aka the "stimulus"), which the act itself requires the administration to do. In fact, the administration is now three economic quarters behind schedule in chronicling the effects of Obama's second-most prominent piece of legislation—again, in defiance of the very law it's supposed to be reviewing. (Those who live to impose regulations on others aren't always as eager to obey regulations themselves.)

Why hesitate to release these reports? The answer, as you may have guessed, is that there's not much to brag about.

The ARRA requires that the reports in question be released by the White House's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), a group of three economists, all handpicked by the president. The council is supposed to have released twelve such reports by now; it has released only eight. But these eight reports tell a revealing tale.

Last July, *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* highlighted one of the council's reports. Using what it called "mainstream estimates of economic multipliers for the effects of fiscal stimulus," the council at that time estimated that the stimulus had created or saved just under 2.4 million jobs at a cost of \$666 billion—which meant a cost to taxpayers of \$278,000 per job. The administration cried foul, responding that the stimulus "was more than a measure to create or save jobs." It was also an "investment" in things "critical to America's long-term success" and therefore couldn't adequately be judged on the basis of its cost per job created (or saved).

But the stimulus was certainly sold to the American people as a means to get the economy moving and hence to create jobs. In early 2009 (when the reported unemployment rate was 7.3 percent), Obama's first head of the CEA, Christina Romer, said the legislation was needed to keep unemployment below 8 percent. She predicted that, by this time in 2012, the stimulus would have caused unemployment to fall below 6 percent. Instead, after the "stimulus" was passed, the unemployment rate hit 10 percent, and it has now stayed above 8 percent for more than three years.

Whether the Obama administration intended for the stimulus to be a job-creating measure or an "investment" in pet projects and constituencies, this much is clear: For every \$278,000 in taxpayer-funded stimulus money that the administration spent as of the July report, only one job was added or saved. And that's

according to an estimate from Obama's own economists.

And it has gotten worse from there. Last December, Obama's economists published another report, this one covering the period through the second quarter of 2011 (and released five months late). That report showed that the stimulus had by then cost \$697 billion and had created or saved some 2.2 million jobs. That works out to a cost to taxpayers of \$317,000 per job—again, according to Obama's economists.

Moreover, the December report marked the sixth straight quarterly report showing that the stimulus's cost per job is rising: In reports spanning January 2010 through December 2011, the stimulus's cost per job more than doubled, rising from \$146,000 (in January 2010) to \$317,000 (in December 2011). With each passing quarter, the stimulus has become an even worse deal for taxpayers. Given this trajectory, is it any wonder the administration doesn't seem eager to fulfill its legal requirement to release reports from the third and fourth quarters of 2011 and the first quarter of 2012?

What's more, whatever minimal success the "stimulus" might have had, it's clearly not sustainable. As of the third quarter of 2010, the "stimulus" had supposedly created or saved 2.7 million jobs. As of the second quarter of 2011 (the last quarter for which the administration has released results), the Obama economists were claiming to have created or saved only 2.2 million jobs. Over that span of nine months, half a million jobs have disappeared while the costs kept rising, as another \$130 billion went out the door.

As abysmal as this record is, the real performance of the stimulus is probably even worse. After all, one would hardly consider the White House Council of Economic Advisers to be the most unbiased reviewer of the legislation's effects. Still, when the numbers from Obama's own economists imply that the economy would now be generating job growth at a faster rate if the stimulus had never been passed, that's an eye-opening indictment of one of President Obama's two centerpiece initiatives.

Maybe that's why, instead of highlighting the stimulus (or Obamacare or much of anything else in his tenure as president), Obama told his supporters in the partially filled basketball arena in Columbus, "If people ask you what this campaign is about, you tell them it's still about hope. You tell them it's still about change." It's probably also why he added, "I'm asking you to keep believing in me. I told you in 2008 that I wasn't a perfect man, and I would never be a perfect president." And it's presumably why he said, "The real question . . . is not just about how we're doing today. It's about how we'll be doing tomorrow." He also declared, "We have to move forward, to the future we imagined in 2008. . . . That's why I'm running for a second term as president of the United States."

That may be why Obama is running again. But that's no reason for us to be foolish enough to elect him again.

—Jeffrey H. Anderson

He's No Pragmatist

Obama doesn't play well with Republicans.

BY FRED BARNES



The White House, Democrats, and sympathetic elements of the media have been remarkably successful in establishing this idea: that President Obama, a pragmatist at heart, has sought to accommodate congressional Republicans time after time, only to be spurned by a party bent on rejecting his policies across the board. There's a problem with this notion. It's not true.

For sure, Obama and Republicans are far apart ideologically, so much so there probably was no chance of reaching a compromise on health care legislation. But they might have cooperated on the economic stimulus package enacted in 2009 and on a number of smaller issues. Except then and now, Obama has shown little or no interest in taking GOP proposals, alternatives, or tweaks seriously, or even considering them at all.

Since announcing his bid for reelection, Obama has adopted the practice of unveiling a set of proposals ostensibly to create jobs and demanding it be

passed pronto, without Republicans having been consulted or informed. He did this last September with a "jobs bill" and last week in Albany, New York, with what he called a "to-do list" of hiring and housing initiatives.

The first opportunity for a bipartisan compromise between the White House and Republicans involved the stimulus. House GOP leaders John Boehner and Eric Cantor met twice with Obama in January 2009, once when he was president-elect, then shortly after he was inaugurated. Republicans had suffered two straight landslide defeats, putting Boehner and Cantor in a weakened position.

But they gave Obama a one-page "House Republican Economic Recovery Plan" at the second session with five suggestions: a tax rate cut for lower income families, another for small businesses, spending cuts to pay for stimulus, an end to taxation of unemployment benefits, and a homebuyers credit. The president said none of the suggestions looked "crazy."

That was the last the Republican leaders heard from Obama until after House speaker Nancy Pelosi and Dave

Obey, the since-retired chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, had drafted the official Democratic stimulus bill—without a smidgen of Republican input. Meanwhile, Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell sent three "alternatives" to Obama, including loans rather than grants to states in fiscal trouble and a reduction in the tax rate on individual income from 25 percent to 15 percent. McConnell got no response.

The day after Pelosi and Obey finalized their bill, Obama appeared before a gathering of all House Republicans, urging them to consider his ideas for reviving the economy. A few days later, he attacked Republicans for rejecting those ideas by opposing the stimulus. But his ideas were part of a partisan bill that was already a done deal when he offered it to them. It passed the House with no Republican votes.

From this experience, GOP congressional leaders concluded their relationship with the president was going to be "difficult," a Republican leadership aide said. And it has been. The only breakthrough occurred when Obama agreed to spending cuts last year at a time when blocking them would have been politically risky.

On stiffening regulation of the financial industry, the White House made no overtures to the House. But in 2010, Chris Dodd, then chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, conducted weeks of negotiations over a bipartisan bill with freshman Republican senator Bob Corker of Tennessee. "Dodd and Corker eventually found middle ground on nearly every issue," the *Washington Post* reported.

Both the White House and Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner worried the bill wouldn't attract Republicans besides Corker—a not entirely unreasonable fear. But after Obama's health care bill was enacted with no Republican votes, the president and his advisers decided against courting Republican support for Wall Street reform. So the White House pulled the plug on the Dodd-Corker talks. Corker, by the way, had kept McConnell and other

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GARY LOCKE

Republican leaders apprised of how the talks had gone. He was not told to back off. Dodd was.

On health care, Obama did summon Republican senators to the White House. One group consisted of four senators—Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, and Corker. Obama listened but didn't offer concessions or discuss possible terms of a compromise. Before they'd departed the White House grounds, the senators discovered a wire service was already reporting that Obama had met with Republicans. They realized Obama had used them to create an impression of serious consultations with Republicans and nothing more.

The White House paid special attention to Republican senator Olympia Snowe of Maine on health care, and she was receptive. Indeed, she had not only voted for the stimulus, but, in the finance committee, had supported Obamacare. She opposed it on the Senate floor.

Snowe, who is not running for reelection in 2012, is a moderate with a strong preference for bipartisanship. But she came away from sessions at the White House with a less than favorable assessment of Obama. Snowe told Jonathan Karl of ABC News she gives Obama a "close to failing" grade on his willingness to work with Republicans. She hasn't met with him personally in nearly two years.

On occasions when Republicans initiated legislation that might pass muster with Obama, they've generally been ignored. Earlier this year, House Republicans put together the JOBS Act to give small businesses better access to capital. Their bill was designed to find common ground. It included several items from the jobs bill Obama proposed last year and avoided measures that might have been seen as poison pills by the White House.

Still, Republicans got nowhere—until a section was added to make it easier for technology companies to raise capital. With the tech lobby applying pressure, the White House produced a letter of support. But even then, only one Obama appointee spoke out

publicly on the bill, Mary Schapiro, the chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission. And she was strongly opposed. Nonetheless, it passed.

The situation with Obama and

Republicans is pretty clear. His idea of compromise is when Republicans collapse and fall in line behind his agenda. He wants to be bipartisan, but only if that means getting his way. ♦

Spoiling Julia Rotten

The Democrats' clientelism problem.

BY JAY COST

The Obama-Biden campaign made quite a splash recently when it released a new web ad called "The Life of Julia." This unusual piece of campaign propaganda tracks the life of a fictional character named Julia and enumerates the benefits she would receive from the government at successive ages should Obama win reelection. Some examples:

■ **3 Years Old.** "Julia is enrolled in a Head Start program to help get her ready for school. Because of steps President Obama has taken to improve programs like this one, Julia joins thousands of students across the country who will start kindergarten ready to learn and succeed."

■ **25 Years Old.** "After graduation, Julia's federal student loans are more manageable since President Obama capped income-based federal student loan payments and kept interest rates low. She makes her payments on time every month, keeping her on track to repay her student loans."

■ **27 Years Old.** "For the past four years, Julia has worked full-time as a web designer. Thanks to Obamacare, her health insurance is required to

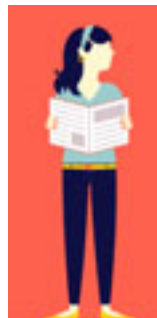
cover birth control and preventive care, letting Julia focus on her work rather than worry about her health."

■ **42 Years Old.** "Julia starts her own web business. She qualifies for a Small Business Administration loan, giving her the money she needs to invest in her business. President Obama's tax cuts for small businesses

like Julia's help her to get started. She's able to hire employees, creating new jobs in her town and helping to grow the local economy."

The ad is certainly a direct play for women voters, and it caused quite a stir in the conservative blogosphere for the blatant pandering. But the pandering is actually quite revealing. In ways Team Obama doubtless didn't intend, "The Life of Julia" illustrates precisely what has gone wrong with the modern Democratic party. To see this, it is helpful to take a few steps back.

We usually conceive of American politics in terms of just two broad ideological tendencies—liberalism and conservatism. But there are of course other lines of thought present in the body politic, including some ideas and principles that both liberals and conservatives claim to embody. Of particular importance in the United States is the concept of *republicanism*, or the idea that the government should represent the interests of all the



Julia' at 23

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people, rather than just a select few.

Both liberals and conservatives believe they are republicans, that their policies will benefit all Americans, not just a privileged elite. Furthermore, both political parties pay lip service to this republican view of government, but in reality they are often ready, willing, and able to play favorites, doling out government benefits to their supporters (paid for, usually, by their political opponents).

And that is what “The Life of Julia” is all about. It is liberalism, for sure, but it certainly is not a republican brand of it. It is almost a perfect articulation of antirepublican, client group liberalism, which unhappily has come to define the Democratic party under Obama. Put simply, the message of the ad is that this woman should vote for Obama because of all the great benefits he will offer her.

Michael Barone has often referred to Obama’s political approach as the “Chicago way,” and here we can see a version of that method at work. It was the urban political machines—like Chicago’s Daley operation and before it New York’s Tammany Hall—that mastered the decidedly antirepublican relationship of patron and client as well as any organization in world history. Politics was not a contact sport in the big cities so much as it was a *contract* sport. Recall Rod Blagojevich’s colorful description of Obama’s open Senate seat: “I’ve got this thing and it’s [expletive] golden, and . . . I’m not going to give it up for [expletive] nothing!” Blago is in federal prison for this style of politics, but it really characterized urban government for over a century: The government has lots of services, and you have votes: Want to trade?

Ironically, it was Franklin Roosevelt—the very president who destroyed the Tammany operation—who adapted its clientelism to national government. This is how the antirepublican practices of urban politics found their way into the national Democratic party. FDR had two purposes in mind with his New Deal: to use the vast regulatory and redistributive potential of the federal government

to fight off the Great Depression *and* to establish a permanent Democratic majority. Whereas Tammany had once been limited to ticky-tacky items like contracts and jobs, FDR could use sweeping legislation like the Agricultural Adjustment Act to buy off the entire Southern plantation gentry at a stroke of the presidential pen.

The problem, though, is that once the door was opened to this brand of clientelism, it could never again be closed. Over the decades, the Democrats have added scores of clients to their operation: trade and industrial unions, African Americans, environmentalists, feminists, government unions, consumer rights advocates, big business, and big city bosses and their lieutenants. All of them are with the Democratic party in part because of the special benefits it promises them when in office, and all have a major say in how the party behaves in government. With more and more clients who needed constant tending, it became harder and harder for subsequent Democratic leaders to focus on the public good. Thus, in the years since FDR’s tenure, the Democratic agenda has looked less like republican liberalism and more like clientele liberalism—big government activism not for the sake of the whole country, but for the sake of the voters whom the Democrats privilege.

And under the Obama administration, clientele liberalism has achieved a kind of apotheosis. The stimulus, the health care bill, cap and trade, and the financial reform package were all designed with heavy input from the party’s clients, and ultimately each reflects *their* priorities, so much so that any kind of national purpose the legislation might have served was totally undermined. The stimulus catered far too much to Democratic clients, hence its measly effect on the economy; Obamacare was a veritable smorgasbord of goodies for Democratic backers, from feminists to unions to big business, while the average American will see no material improvement in the cost or security of his health insurance; and financial reform ultimately won the backing of the mega-banks on

Wall Street, which not coincidentally had given overwhelmingly to Democrats in the 2008 cycle.

When viewed in light of these legislative monstrosities, “The Life of Julia” begins to make more sense. It is not merely an artless appeal to a swing demographic, it also symbolizes the *modus operandi* of the modern party. No longer interested in or capable of operating on behalf of the public good, the party is intent on buying its way to 50 percent-plus-one of the electorate. The message: *Vote for Obama and you’ll get stuff!*

What a tragic decline for the Democratic party. Andrew Jackson founded the party precisely to fight this kind of governmental favoritism. When he vetoed a bill to recharter the Second Bank of the United States in 1832, Old Hickory warned:

Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers—who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government.

This remained a kind of mission statement for the Democratic party for generations. Whether it advocated limited government (as under Jackson) or big government (as under FDR), the party always claimed to be the party of equality, fighting the inevitable tendencies of the government to create “artificial distinctions” that privilege the politically well connected over the “humble members of society.”

Yet today, sadly, the heirs to Old Hickory constitute a party of privilege, and it offers its clients a simple deal: Vote for us and as long as we’re in office, we’ll take care of you. ♦

The Breivik Veto

A case study in how to marginalize dissent.

BY MICHAEL MOYNIHAN

On the first day of his trial, Anders Behring Breivik, the terrorist who murdered 77 people last July in Norway, entered an Oslo courtroom and offered a raised fist to the gallery. The gesture was variously reported as a Knights Templar military salutation, a variant of the Nazi *Sieg Heil*, and a Mussolini-inspired “Roman salute.” The *New York Times* pondered its “varied meanings” to radicals both right and left.

It was an appropriate moment of puzzlement; there still exists no consensus on what, if any, coherent ideology—beyond a hatred of Muslims—underpinned Breivik’s rampage. As in the aftermath of the shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords by a deranged gunman, Breivik’s crimes precipitated a race to apportion ideological blame, with his views variously described as neoconservative, Christian fundamentalist, and Zionist.

Appearing on the left-wing radio show *Democracy Now*, Norwegian academic Johan Galtung, whose granddaughter was nearly killed during the attack, hinted darkly that Breivik drew inspiration from the notorious Irgun bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which occurred on the same date in 1946. In a subsequent speech, Galtung suggested Mossad involvement in the Norwegian massacre, noting for good measure that Jews control the American media.

Like many autodidactic cranks, Breivik treated every stray political thought as a revelation, collecting them in a tedious and vulgar manifesto: 1,500 pages, clipped and plagiarized from both mainstream writers and far-right bloggers. In

his paranoid vision of a forthcoming European civil war, it is clear that Israel was merely an ally of convenience, an enemy of his enemy. Breivik’s manifesto thunders against the “paralyzing Jewish Holocaust religion,” lamenting the “school classes being bussed to former concentration camps and taught to reject their culture.” He proclaims, in perfect fascist pitch, that the United States is suffering from “a considerable Jewish problem.”

His supposed “neoconservatism” is equally tenuous. When asked by prosecutors to identify the point at which he committed himself to anti-Muslim violence, Breivik cited the American-led bombing campaign against Slobodan Milosevic’s Serbia, then diligently murdering Balkan Muslims, as “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” His manifesto complains that the Western media have been unduly tough on Serbian war criminal Radovan Karadzic and Russian president Vladimir Putin (“a fair and resolute leader worthy of respect”), who, after all, converted Muslim Chechnya to a vast pile of corpses and rubble.

In fact, during his trial, Breivik explained that while eliminating future left-wing leaders—almost all of whom were non-Muslim—was the primary goal of his attacks, he also desired to drag mainstream conservatives towards his worldview by making them intellectually complicit in his crimes. “I felt I had to provoke a witch-hunt against moderate cultural conservatives and nationalists,” he told the court, which would force a “radicalization” of immigration critics.

While Breivik induced revulsion, the media have indeed succumbed to the temptation to engage in the witch-hunt he desired. In northern

Europe, prosaic debates over the integration of immigrants are increasingly conflated with Breivik’s odious anti-Islam rhetoric. Thus was born what you might call the Breivik veto: Because a sociopath offered unreasonable answers to perfectly reasonable questions, better not to ask the questions at all.

The Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet*, Scandinavia’s largest newspaper, intoned recently that “Breivik hates multiculturalism and feminism [and] the ‘politically correct’”—opinions that he “shares with many.” The newspaper marveled that, in a post-Breivik world, Sweden’s state-funded broadcaster could even broach the subject “Has immigration gone too far?” during primetime. Who would deign to debate an issue that also consumed Anders Breivik?

In a recent opinion piece for the *Jerusalem Post*, the Swedish writer Paulina Neuding pointed to a correlation between increased anti-Semitic incidents in the southern Swedish city of Malmö and increased immigration from Muslim countries. The Breivik veto was quickly deployed: An *Aftonbladet* editorial writer declared that Neuding was flirting with “the central conceptual model of Breivik’s world.” Underscoring the dramatic demographic shifts the city has undergone, Neuding noted that in 2004, Mohammad was the most popular baby name in Malmö, a useful metric, she argued, because the government doesn’t keep statistics on religious affiliation. Her *Aftonbladet* critic mused, however, that during his shooting spree, Breivik targeted children—an “extreme manifestation” of Neuding’s argument.

Swedish journalist Martin Aagård flatly stated that Breivik is representative of an entire strain of thought: “After having seen Anders Behring Breivik cry while watching his own propaganda film in an Oslo courtroom, I will never again understand those who voluntarily identify as ‘cultural conservatives.’”

It is of little consequence to those deploying the Breivik veto that his ideology, such as it is, consists of a single theme—a pathological hatred

Michael Moynihan is a contributing editor to Reason magazine.

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of Islam—and owes a greater debt to al Qaeda than to Edmund Burke. Breivik, who planned on capturing and beheading Norway’s prime minister and has spoken fondly of “martyrdom,” said in court that “militant nationalists in Europe have a great deal to learn” from al Qaeda.

But while al Qaeda boasts a network of supporters and aspiring *shahids*, Western Europe isn’t teeming with Breivik acolytes. He claimed to have operated within a larger underground revolutionary movement, telling investigators that he was but one soldier in a network of “Knights Templar” warriors, but this was quickly determined to have been fantasy. When the Norwegian media managed to track down a Breivik supporter, it was one twitching college student living outside Worcester, Massachusetts.

The media’s curiosity to discover whether there was a cadre of violent ultranationalists behind Breivik, while entirely justified, isn’t evenly applied. The Muslim extremist analogue to Breivik’s anti-Muslim extremism could be found in Toulouse, France, where earlier this year the homegrown Islamist Mohammed Merah massacred French soldiers and Jewish schoolchildren—lest they grow up to be Zionist enemies. Despite the obvious parallels to the Norwegian massacre, there was considerably less media concern with the rotten ideological milieu that shaped Merah. When the prominent Swiss Muslim Tariq Ramadan weighed in on the killings, he dismissed Merah as “a victim of a social order which had already doomed him and millions of others” to the margins of society, and certainly not a man “driven by racism and anti-Semitism.”

According to Ramadan, Merah found “two political causes through which he could articulate his distress: Afghanistan and Palestine.” But no one has suggested that critics of Israel or opponents of France’s participation in the Afghan war are flirting with “the central conceptual model of Mohammed Merah’s world.” And they are right not to. ♦

The Once and Future Liberal

Obama runs as the progressive that he is.

BY TOD LINDBERG

Much of the loyal opposition’s response to President Obama’s new position in favor of gay marriage centered on the back-and-forth in which he has indulged over the years getting to it. He was for it; he was against it; now he’s for it again (not that he apparently proposes to do anything to advance the cause beyond his “historic” expression of personal support). In short, the “evolved” presidential view is of the genus “political cynicism”: On the eve of a major Hollywood fundraiser (and, hmm, a *Washington Post* exposé on Mitt Romney’s prep school bully-boy days), Obama chose to pander to a group that was feeling under-pandered-to.

One reason for this line of attack on Obama was surely a level of GOP discomfort with the issue. In politics, if you can tag somebody for hypocrisy or flip-flopping, you are relieved of the responsibility of taking a substantive stand. On this issue, it’s mainly only religious conservatives who are willing to give voice to the viewpoint underlying, for example, the North Carolina ballot proposition defining marriage as between a man and a woman, which was approved 61-39 the day before the president’s announcement. Others are wary, and increasingly so, of implying that gay or lesbian coupledom is deficient.

Nevertheless, the charge of opportunism misses the real political import of the gesture. So did the

subsequent debate over the electoral implications: Would supporting gay marriage cost Obama more in the middle than he stood to gain from the enthusiasm of an important constituency? What about Catholic voters in Ohio and Pennsylvania?

The point is that in this case, Obama’s cynicism, opportunism, pandering, evolution, whatever, led him to advocate *the position he really believes in*. It’s a rarefied form of cynicism, perhaps not seen since Diogenes, that causes you to say exactly what you think.

The Obama camp had some backfilling to do, mainly to cope with Joe Biden’s having forced Obama’s hand when the vice president declared his support for gay marriage the previous Sunday. Obama himself claimed he had arrived at the decision to shift his position earlier and was only waiting for a suitable time to announce it.

Was that bit about getting the timing right more cynicism? Perhaps. But it tells us something else as well. Obama makes a distinction between a conviction he harbors and a position he takes. Apparently, such differences do not trouble him deeply—otherwise, he might have felt obliged to announce his change of mind on gay marriage immediately, if indeed he ever believed the position he once took that marriage must be between a man and a woman.

Nor, perhaps, should such discrepancies between convictions and positions be hugely troubling to someone who seeks his fortune in democratic politics. The capacity for a certain amount of disingenuousness would seem to be not so much an

Tod Lindberg, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and editor of Policy Review, is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



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occupational hazard as an essential job qualification. Nevertheless, there are degrees of disingenuousness.

So maybe it's time to consider the broader possibility Obama's shift here raises, namely, that he has decided to run his 2012 campaign in much closer alignment to his genuine convictions.

Exhibit A is gay marriage. But it's hardly the only indication. After having punted on the issue a couple of times in his first term by agreeing to extensions of the Bush tax cuts, Obama seems more adamant these days on the point that the rich must pay more, and the reason seems to be not so much because government needs the money, but because it's only fair they do. The president took the trouble to warn the Supreme Court not to overturn his health care law, which he said (inaccurately) would be without precedent. The insistence on inclusion of contraceptives and abortifacients in health care plans offered by institutions with religious objections to them went a long way to make a point about universality. You can't get rid of fossil fuels in a day, but you can stop the Keystone XL pipeline. The deep cuts in the military budget Obama has called for seem like a reprise of the old-school liberal preference for butter over guns. His campaign slogan is, quite simply, "Forward."

In short, there is a distinct possibility that Obama has decided to go for broke: He will no longer seek to appeal to voters by masking his convictions behind positions carefully tailored to enhance his electability. He will be in 2012 the candidate his liberal supporters always understood him to be by conviction. Rather than the figure he cut in 2008—a candidate almost above partisan politics—the 2012 Obama will do the right thing by his own inner light and by that of his core party constituencies. He will represent, à la Howard Dean in 2004, "the Democratic wing of the Democratic party," only he will make that appeal not just to Democratic primary voters but in the general election. There will be no post-primary pivot to the center. Obama will run as the progressive he is. He will be, unapologetically, the

most liberal Democratic presidential candidate since George McGovern.

Why? This is certainly not the path Bill Clinton pursued to reelection in 1996. Clinton was a "New Democrat" in 1992, not so much beyond partisanship, in the style of Obama 2008, but broadly pitching to the middle. After a leftward lurch in office and an election that wiped out his party's congressional majorities in 1994, he was a New Democrat again in 1996. He signed legislation liberals in his party hated, ending the welfare entitlement. He cut taxes and balanced the budget. He presented himself as the voice of sweet reason between conservative revolutionaries and the tax-and-spend old guard of his own party.

Obama likewise lurched leftward in the early going and likewise suffered a majority-killing midterm congressional election. But after a couple of pivots to the center late in 2010 and in 2011, notably the extension of the Bush tax cuts and agreement to spending cuts as part of the debt ceiling increase, he set the tone for his reelection bid late last year by turning his back on any serious attempt to reach a long-term budget agreement containing entitlement reform. He has made no attempt to rekindle the post-partisan spirit of the 2008 campaign.

Clinton had a good economy going for him in 1996. Obama does not. Growth is slow; jobs are not coming back; Europe is teetering on the edge of a crisis that could trigger another global recession. And nobody outside his own party seems to be giving him the credit he thinks he deserves for averting economic disaster. In addition to systematically disappointing cross-over Republicans, he has lost independents and moderates in large numbers, thanks to the lousy economy and the unpopularity of his signature health care reform. So maybe he has little choice but to build his reelection bid from the base out: Make sure the key Democratic constituencies are happy and motivated, then get independents back by painting the GOP nominee as a right-wing extremist.

And yet it's hardly clear that the Obama 2012 strategy has been driven

by a sense of necessity. On the contrary, it seems plausible that his administration and his campaign expected growth to be increasing more rapidly by now, with better job numbers. Remember Clint Eastwood's Super Bowl commercial, ostensibly on behalf of Chrysler, that "It's halftime in America"? It was not by accident but in accordance with misplaced expectations that the Obama team was testing the theme "America is back"—before abandoning it on the grounds that, well, America isn't back. The intended backdrop for this progressive Obama candidacy was the arrival of better times.

Moreover, throughout the Republican primary season, Democrats were pretty thoroughly convinced that Obama's reelection was in the bag. They saw Romney as unpopular and highly vulnerable, both in terms of background and because of his need to pander to conservatives to get the nomination. It has now begun to dawn on them that they have a bigger problem on their hands than they thought. Romney just spent nine months fending off successive challenges from the right. Only a partisan Democrat could conclude that the impression people took away from that was that Romney must be a conservative extremist himself.

No, the most plausible explanation for the progressive Obama of 2012 is that the man and his campaign concluded that he can cast himself that way and win reelection doing so. There is no need for a centrist turn. And it would be a disservice to the progressive ideals of the Democratic party, as well as a disappointment to liberals, to run a campaign that sought by clever positioning to mask its core convictions in an unnecessary effort to broaden Obama's appeal.

As for the man himself, he does not lack self-esteem. Now he seems to have found the courage of his convictions. If he wins, he will become the apotheosis of Democratic aspiration, a progressive Democrat running successfully for president as a progressive. If he loses, he can console himself in the conviction that his boldness stands alone among the wreck. ♦

Cell Phone Inspires Chicago Doctor to Design Affordable Hearing Aid Outperforms Many Higher Priced Hearing Aids

Reported by J. Page

CHICAGO: A local board-certified Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT) physician, Dr. S. Cherukuri, has just shaken up the hearing aid industry with the invention of a medical-grade, affordable hearing aid. **This revolutionary hearing aid is designed to help millions of people with hearing loss who cannot afford—or do not wish to pay—the much higher cost of traditional hearing aids.**

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—Dr. May, ENT Physician

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Since Medicare and most private insurance do not cover the costs of hearing aids, which traditionally run between \$2000-\$6000 for a pair, many of the doctor’s patients could not afford the expense. Dr. Cherukuri’s goal was to find a reasonable solution that would help with the most common types of hearing loss at an affordable price, not unlike the **“one-size-fits-most” reading glasses** available at drug stores.

He evaluated numerous hearing devices and sound amplifiers, including those seen on television. Without fail, almost all of these were found to amplify bass/low frequencies (below 1000 Hz) and not useful in amplifying the frequencies related to the human voice.

Inspiration from a surprising source

The doctor’s inspiration to defeat the powers-that-be that kept inexpensive hearing aids out of the hands of the public actually came from a new cell phone he had just purchased. **“I felt that if someone could devise an affordable device like an iPhone® for about \$200 that could do all sorts of things, I could create a hearing aid at a similar price.”**

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Indiana Fires a Senator

The end of Lugar's winning streak.

BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

Richard Lugar's long career in the U.S. Senate came to an end last Tuesday night in a primary election. Six years ago, running for a sixth term, he not only faced no opposition within his own party, he ran essentially unopposed in the general election. So this is a bad, undistinguished, and forlorn end. And Lugar took it that way, issuing some spiteful advice on his way out to the man who had beaten him. That advice came down, essentially, to "Do it the way I did it or you'll fail." Strangely defiant counsel from a man who had just been exposed as a failure.

There was a quality to Lugar's last act that put one in mind of a longtime college football coach, hanging on by his fingernails and reminding the faithful of all those good seasons and big wins in years gone by. (For actual football fans, think Bobby Bowden of Florida State.)

There had been great seasons for the old coach. Memorable victories over hated rivals. Conference championships. Trips to the major bowl games. But the years had begun to catch up and the game had begun to pass him by. Where the record at season's end had once been 11-1 or 10-2, it was now 7-4 or 6-5 with a couple of embarrassing, blowout losses. When the fans grew restive, the old coach reacted with equal measures of hurt

and indignation. Don't you remember where this school was before I got here and all I've done since?

"Yeah, coach. But we lost five games last season and that's a fresher memory."

So the old coach talks about how the stadium improvements are coming, how he's recruiting a bunch of



'But I'm Dick Lugar!' Addressing the electorate on primary day.

students who will turn things around, how the graduation rate has improved and none of his players have knocked over a single liquor store lately. Anything but what the fans really care about, which is winning.

Lugar was a Senate insider and a citizen of Beltwaystan. His claim on the affections of Indiana voters was that he knew how to get things done in Washington, that he could work with people on the other side of the aisle, that he was capable of compromise.

Which is to say, whatever the Washington record of the last 36 years, Richard Lugar owned a part of it. To a lot of voters, that record

doesn't look even as good as 6-5, with a possible bid to the Poinsettia Bowl.

Senator Lugar had more ardent support outside of the state and from within the political class than he did at home. The *Wall Street Journal's* Peggy Noonan saw him as one of the grownups in the room and lamented the fact that those impulsive voters in Indiana were going to do something rash and deprive the nation of Lugar's formidable talents.

One wonders how any grownup serving in the United States Senate could not have noticed that the country was sliding into a bottomless pit of debt. Fifteen trillion dollars and counting. What were the grownups doing while this was happening? And, by the way, with Senator Lugar, sage practitioner of bipartisanship, as

one of its starters, the U.S. Senate has gone 0-3 on passing a budget these last three years. Whoever replaces him in the Senate should, in spite of his inexperience, have no trouble matching that performance.

Senator Lugar will be missed in the Senate and in Washington, where extreme self-regard is something you come down with from drinking the water and where the defeat of a long-term

incumbent and quintessential insider is felt as an almost personal rebuke. "How could they? What's wrong with those rubes?" the insiders think, so both John Kerry and the White House press office issued statements expressing their disappointment in the Indiana results and their high regard for Richard Lugar, one of their own. Senator Kerry went so far as to call the loss of Lugar a "tragedy for the Senate," which is laying it on a bit thick, but characteristic of the man.

Meanwhile, out in the country, people are thinking that after a couple of 3-8 seasons, we'll be lucky to go 2-9 this year. ♦

Geoffrey Norman is a writer in Vermont.

AP / DARRON CUMMINGS

The New Phrenology

How liberal psychopundits understand the conservative brain

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

We are entering the age of the psychopundit (we can thank the science writer Will Saletan for this excellent word). Thomas Edsall, for example, is a veteran political reporter widely admired by people who admire political reporters. He has become very excited by social science, as so many widely admired people have. Studies show—as a psychopundit would say—that Edsall is excited because social science has lately become a tool of Democrats who want to reassure themselves that Republicans are heartless and stupid. In embracing Science, the psychopundit believes he is moving from the spongy world of mere opinion to the firmer footing of fact. It is pleasing to him to discover that the two—his opinion and scientific fact—are identical.

Earlier generations of leftists knew the power of Science to discredit their political opponents. Most famously, in the years following World War II, Theodor Adorno and his fellow sociologists developed the F scale—“F” for fascism—to identify the “authoritarian personality” that so often gave rise to political and cultural conservatism. They discovered that conservatives suffered (unconsciously!) from “prefascist tendencies” like “intolerance of ambiguity” and “moral rigidity.” They acquired this scientific knowledge by reading questionnaires filled out by 180 respondents during the last year of World War II. Among the respondents were Rotarians, patients at mental hospitals, San Quentin inmates, students at the University of California, and members of the Lion’s Club.

You don’t hear much about Adorno anymore. As a

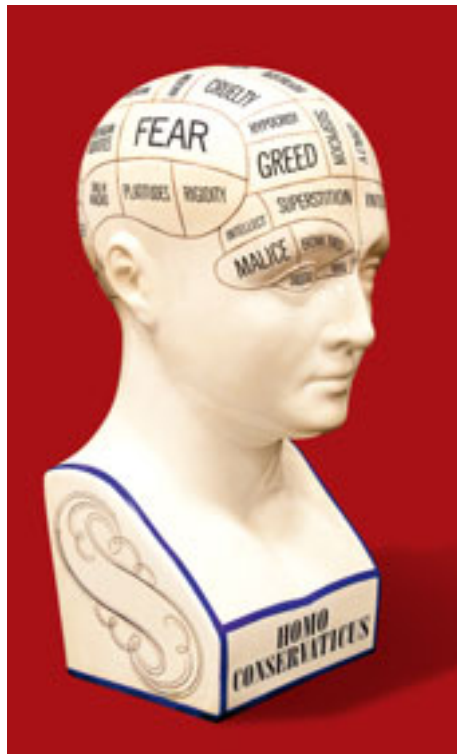
political figure he was too extreme, and as a social scientist he was too transparently political, to remain in good repute with scientists who have persuaded themselves that they have no ideology. In time it became clear that in pretending to plumb the authoritarian personality, Adorno and his “investigators had arrived at their conclusions in advance” through a “set of self-validating procedures,” as the great sociologist Christopher Lasch put it.

Our generation of Democrats, in and out of the press, have now rediscovered Adorno’s methods, and put them to the same purpose. Edsall himself has become a booster of a series of “studies” that together form, in his words, “an extensive academic critique of the right.” The studies are boring, which is why the few people who bother to look them up rarely get beyond the one-paragraph summary. But they’re worth studying for an insight into the way Adorno’s heirs, our own psychopundits, continue his work.

The studies rely on the principle that has informed the social sciences for more than a generation: If a researcher with a Ph.D. can corral enough undergraduates into a campus classroom and, by giving them a little bit of money or a class credit, get them to do something—fill out a questionnaire, let’s say,

or pretend they’re in a specific real-world situation that the researcher has thought up—the young scholars will (unconsciously!) yield general truths about the human animal; *scientific* truths. The scientific truths revealed in Edsall’s “academic critique of the right” demonstrate that “the rich and powerful” lack compassion, underestimate the suffering of others, have little sympathy for the disadvantaged, and are far more willing to act unethically than the less rich and not so powerful.

How do we know this? A paper called “Power, Distress, and Compassion: Turning a Blind Eye to the



Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

"Suffering of Others" describes a study put together by a team of social psychologists at the University of California, Berkeley, a few years ago. Graduate assistants managed to collect 118 undergraduates, most of them under the age of 21. The kids agreed to participate in the experiment because they were given \$15 or class credit for a psychology requirement. A skeptic might point out that the sample of participants was thus skewed from the start, unnaturally weighted toward either kids who badly need \$15 or psych majors. And all of them, by definition, were the kinds of kids who want to go to college at Berkeley. Almost half of the participants were Asian American; only 3.5 percent were African American. Caucasians made up less than 30 percent.

The group the researchers studied is not, in other words, a demographic cross section of humanity. It's not a ride through Walt Disney's "It's a Small World." It has no claim to the randomness that sampling requires. It is therefore an odd gang from which to extract truths about human behavior. Indeed, speaking as a former resident, I can attest that human behavior in Berkeley, California, is unlike human behavior anywhere else in the world. But the method by which these human truths were drawn was even less plausible. The setting the researchers constructed for their experiment was exquisite in its artificiality. To see how powerful people react in real life, the professors began by giving the kids a questionnaire asking them how powerful they felt. ("Agree or disagree: I think I have a great deal of power.") The students were then divided into pairs and seated facing each other, two feet apart. Each student had a video camera trained on him and was wired to an electrocardiogram through receptors taped to his torso.

Then the students told each other traumatic stories from their personal experience, lasting no more than five minutes. The stories were supposed to be upsetting, or "emotionally evocative."

After many regression analyses and much hierarchical linear modeling, the professors discovered that their conclusion matched their hypothesis: The "powerful" students—that is, the students who said on the questionnaire that they were feeling powerful that morning—showed less dramatic reactions to the stories than other students. Or, as the professors put it: "Our data suggest that social power attenuates emotional reactions to those who suffer."

I told you it was boring. It was also preposterous, at least as an experiment designed to test a hypothesis.

The questionable assumptions fairly cry out from where they're buried. Just for starters, can a questionnaire asking a college sophomore how powerful he feels tell us whether he's powerful? Researchers never measured the elements that made an "emotionally evocative story"; the stories were rated by grad-student coders whose own feelings of powerfulness were unrecorded. And underlying the endeavor was the silliest buried assumption of them all, that the way a college kid reacts in a psych lab while he's wired to a machine and jabbered at by a stranger has some—any—relation to how "rich and powerful" people (Edsall's phrase) live their lives.

If such a study claimed to prove a different conclusion, and presumed to tell us that rich and powerful people were more compassionate than those with less wealth and lower social standing, we could expect our psychopundits to approach it with more of the skepticism that journalists are so famous for. But skepticism would put a psychopundit out of a job, and so the violations of logic and common sense simply ramify. Among the studies that constitute the recent "academic critique of the right," one used participants—more than 65 percent of them female—solicited

over Craigslist; another recruited participants through Amazon's Mechanical Turk website. Neither sample could possibly represent any group other than itself.

The samples are even odder when you consider that Edsall and his fellow psychopundits construed these studies, which were about the rich and powerful, to show how conservatives and Republicans behave. In most of the studies, Asian Americans made up nearly 50 percent or more of the participants. But Asian Americans are the most liberal ethnic group in America—"the only group," Gallup says, "that has a higher proportion of [self-identified] liberals than conservatives."

That the "rich and powerful" are identical to conservatives and Republicans—Edsall's assumption—is a hoary idea dear to many Democrats and essential to their self-image as the opponents of privilege. It persists even though many of the plush and most powerful institutions of American life are in the hands of liberal Democrats: public and private universities, government bureaucracies, nonprofit foundations, movie studios, television networks, museums, newspapers and magazines, Silicon Valley . . . Among the fabled "1 percent," according to Gallup, the number of self-identified Republicans

That the 'rich and powerful' are identical to conservatives and Republicans—Edsall's assumption—is a hoary idea dear to many Democrats and essential to their self-image as the opponents of privilege.

is only slightly greater than the number of Democrats. As Christopher Caldwell has pointed out in these pages, political donations from 19 of the 20 richest ZIP codes in the United States go overwhelmingly to Democrats, by a ratio of four to one or more. Democrats are the party of what Democrats used to call the superrich. Only Democrats seem not to realize this.

A lack of self-awareness isn't peculiar to liberals or Democrats, of course, but to judge by the behavior of psychopundits, we can safely say that they are clueless not only about themselves but about their political opposites. A young psychopundit called Chris Mooney has just published a book entitled *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality*, which seeks to explain the Republican “assault on reality.” He is a very earnest fellow, and an ambitious one. He glances over an array of conservative political beliefs and sets himself a goal: “to understand how these false claims (and rationalizations) could exist and *persist* in human minds.”

His list of false claims is instructive. Along with the usual hillbilly denials of evolution and global warming, they include these, to grab a quick sample: that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2009 will increase the deficit, cut Medicare benefits, and lead to the death panels that Sarah Palin hypothesized; that tax cuts increase revenue and that the president's stimulus didn't create jobs; that Congress banned incandescent light bulbs; and that the United States was founded as a “Christian nation.”

The list of errors is instructive because they aren't properly considered errors, though the misattribution is in keeping with the modern ideologue's custom of pretending that differences of opinion or interpretation are contests between truth and falsehood. It's perfectly reasonable for conservatives to assume that offering health insurance to 43 million people will cost a lot of money, and thereby increase the deficit; and it's perfectly reasonable to distrust notoriously mistaken budget forecasters who say it won't. The act redirects vast sums away from Medicare, which should require cuts in service. Palin's “death panel” was a bumper-sticker summary of a rational expectation—that the act will transfer the unavoidable rationing of health care from insurance companies, where most of it rests now, to the government, which will be forced to bureaucratically

reshuffle the vast sums spent on end-of-life care. Mooney is right that Congress did not ban the incandescent light bulbs that most of us are used to; but it did ban their manufacture—a distinction without a difference. As for the Christian nation: The country was founded by Christians who nevertheless resolutely declined to create a Christian government. Mooney's conflation of the American government with the American nation is an error that conservatives are less likely to make. Studies show.

It is a principle of psychopunditry that the political differences between right and left—the differences, in Mooney's scheme, between those who would fearfully deny reality and those who embrace it unafraid—originate in two personality types. As

it happens, the liberal personality, as psychopunditry describes it, is a perfect representation of those traits that liberals say they most admire. Liberals are “more open, flexible, curious, nuanced.” Conservatives are “more closed, fixed, and certain in their views.” But don't get the wrong idea: Mooney insists he is not saying “conservatives are somehow worse people than liberals.” That would be judgmental, and Science is clear: Liberals aren't judgmental. “The groups are just different,” he goes on amiably. Indeed, he warns that

the truths he reveals in his book “will discomfort both sides.” Fairness requires him to be evenhanded. On the one hand, conservatives won't like the scientific fact that they tend to deny reality and treat their errors as dogma. On the other hand, liberals won't like the scientific fact that all their well-meaning attempts to reason with conservatives are doomed.

Mooney's attachment to Science is touching in its insouciance. He relies on studies in social psychology that were spawned by a famous “meta-analysis” about the conservative personality published in 2003. The meta-analysis, which found that conservatives were morally rigid and inordinately afraid of threatening situations, was orchestrated by a left-wing sociologist called John Jost. Mooney consults the studies that Jost inspired among his ideologized acolytes, and swallows them whole. These include a paper teasingly titled “The Secret Lives of Conservatives and Liberals,” published in 2008.

As Mooney tells us, Science crept into the private residences of conservatives and liberals and brought back solid results. Conservatives' bedrooms are filled with “items you use to keep your life organized—calendars,

A lack of self-awareness isn't peculiar to liberals or Democrats, of course, but to judge by the behavior of psychopundits, we can safely say that they are clueless not only about themselves but also about their political opposites.

stamps”; also, lots of cleaning supplies, proving that conservatives are “conscientious,” the scientific term for *tight-assed*. Liberal bedrooms are “messier . . . but also brimming with articles suggesting Openness to Experience.” Among these totems of Openness are books about travel and feminism and ethnic issues, and a “variety of music CDs,” including (duh) folk music.

That’s what Science tells Mooney, and Mooney tells his readers. What really happened was that sometime in the mid-2000s, 76 college students—Berkeley again—filled out a form placing their politics on a scale of one (liberal) to five (conservative). Again, the sampling was statistically worthless: More than two-fifths were Asian American, two-thirds were female. Like idiots, the kids then let psych majors swarm their bedrooms bearing clipboards and tally sheets: Wastebaskets and lamps, rumpled bedspreads and dirty underwear were duly noted and assigned code numbers. Crunch, crunch went the data. You will not be surprised that Science confirmed Jost’s original findings, which in turn echoed those of Adorno, who never thought to check the bedrooms.

Suitably flattered, Mooney’s liberal readers won’t learn that Jost’s meta-analysis from 2003 was crippled from beginning to end with flaws that have been amply demonstrated by other psychologists. Mooney himself appears unfamiliar with the criticism. I don’t think he gets out much. (One accessible critique came from the libertarian psychologist Shawn Smith, whom I learned about from Jonah Goldberg’s dazzling new book, *The Tyranny of Clichés*.)

A quick summary of Jost’s derelictions: His definition of conservatism—“resistance to change and opposition to equality,” with equality undefined—was so arbitrary and confused that he could identify both Stalin and Pinochet as men of the right. (Most American conservatives favor economic deregulation, want to abolish multiple federal agencies, and welcome the creative destruction of the free market, which is a dumb way to resist change.) Other categories and measurements that Jost used were drawn from Adorno’s crackpot methodology and ensured the circular reasoning that made his conclusions conform to the hypothesis. And there was the kid problem again: A large majority of the studies Jost cited relied exclusively on undergraduate participants, who are nearly useless as stand-ins for mature adults with fully developed political views and life experiences. And so on.

Mooney’s wide-eyed acceptance of this social science, no matter how sloppy or ideologically motivated, is the kind of mistake we’re all likely to make once in a while, though seldom with his particular self-confidence and élan. We all of us, on the right and left and in the middle, outsource our understanding of large swaths of the world

to authorities we deem trustworthy, from oncologists to plumbers to priests. Mooney shuts off his skepticism when he is confronted with what other people tell him is Science. He thinks of his intellectual servility as an unshakable devotion to reason, which pleasingly places him at odds with his irrational political opposites.

And according to Jonathan Haidt, perhaps the hottest name in psychopunditry this week, Mooney is right. Conservatives are irrational. But so are liberals. Even Chris Mooney!

Haidt is a professor at the University of Virginia and one of a handful of social scientists in America who don’t consider themselves men of the left. He is, instead, a squish—or a centrist, as he prefers; a lapsed liberal, in any case, who is now an advocate of the Higher Gergenism, a strong believer that our system requires a healthy give and take between conservatives and liberals as long as they don’t overdo it. In the academy these days, political centrism lies just at the furthest rightward boundary of acceptable opinion. Speaking last year to a conclave of 1,000 psychologists, Haidt informally polled the audience and discovered that 3 of them admitted being conservatives. According to an account by John Tierney in the *New York Times*, he proposed an affirmative action plan for the profession that might raise the quota of conservative social psychologists to 10 percent by 2020. (No word on how that’s working out for him.)

Along with many others, John Jost wasn’t happy with Haidt’s apostasy. He told the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that Haidt was offering aid and comfort to those “eager to dismiss our findings.”

Haidt started college as a philosophy student hoping to explore the meaning of life. He soon found that the academic philosophers had offloaded the meaning-of-life business to the soft sciences, so he became a social psychologist. He calls his specialty the “science of morality.” His major theme is that moral judgments, including political judgments, are intuitive or pre-rational, determined by a tangle of genetics, personal experience, evolutionary adaptations, and biological imperatives. We may think we arrive at our beliefs through reason aided by experience. In truth, our heads construct arguments for our views after our hearts have blurred them out.

Haidt came to his view the scientific way, through his own interactions with college kids in the UVA psych labs. He brought in 30 of them, one at a time, and instructed one of his psych students to tell them appalling stories: a brother and sister commit incest (“It’s their special secret”), Mom and Dad cook up the family dog for dinner, and so on. The 20-year-olds were suitably revolted,

but none of them could explain why. “They seemed to be flailing around, throwing out reason after reason,” he recalls in his new book, *The Righteous Mind*, “and rarely changing their minds when Scott [his assistant] proved that their latest reason was not relevant.” They couldn’t offer good, relevant reasons for their revulsion because they didn’t have any. “Moral reasoning,” he concluded, “was mostly just a post hoc search for reasons to justify the judgments people had already made.” And the same process—react first, rationalize later—works for all our thought processes.

There are lots of problems here, many of them having to do with the thoroughgoing artificiality of the experiments that Haidt used to yield the conclusions. Is it any surprise that 20-year-olds are not paragons of moral reasoning? Is forcing a kid to make a snap judgment about a fictional scenario in front of his college professor a fair simulation of the conditions under which people arrive at their moral views? People talk about right and wrong all the time, in many situations, arriving at one idea or revising another after consulting friends and family and sometimes ceding, Mooney-like, their own intellectual authority to traditions, customs, or personages they trust. One thing a psych experiment can’t replicate is life as it’s really lived.

Haidt’s view is in line with that of the philosopher and entomologist Edward O. Wilson, the father of sociobiology, who predicted 30 years ago that Science would come to see morality as essentially a function of biology rather than reason. As an explanation for why we do what we do, reason is out of favor with Science these days. Haidt’s view is increasingly popular among many mainstream sociologists and throughout the soft sciences. It helps explain why liberals like Mooney are so insistent that their opinions aren’t really opinions but facts, that they inhabit the “reality-based community” and constitute the party of Science: If all opinions are essentially pre-rational and determined, then objectively no opinion is truer than another, so what’s the use of having them? Opinions are what conservatives have; liberals are just-the-facts-ma’am people.

Where Haidt flirts with heresy is in his contention that conservatives are not stupid—or rather, no stupider than liberals, and even, in some respects, less stupid. Both are social creatures bound to a community created as an evolutionary adaptation. Chris Mooney himself acknowledges that Science assigns a few admirable traits to conservatives, like loyalty and persistence. Haidt goes further: “Conservatives,” he

told the *Chronicle*, “have a more accurate understanding of human nature than do liberals.” They are less sentimental, less inclined toward wishful thinking. Conservatives also have a more accurate view of their political opposites than liberals do. Seriously—studies show it, Haidt says. Asked to answer a questionnaire as they think a typical liberal would, conservatives are correct far more often than liberals who are asked to fill it out as a typical conservative. Liberals, for example, assume that conservatives would disagree with the statement: “One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.” In the reality-based community, Michael Vick has to be a Republican.

Conservatives have found Haidt’s conclusions congenial, free of the condescension and tendentious research that characterize so much of this Science. It’s disappointing to learn that many of his findings are drawn from a highly self-selected sample of participants. Haidt hosts a website called YourMorals.org, where 250,000 web surfers have come to fill out questionnaires about their personal views and habits. A collection of a quarter of a million people is a sample so large that it’s not properly a sample. And the self-selection problem is unavoidable. For

one thing, respondents are restricted to people who have a computer and are willing to surf the Internet until they stumble across Haidt’s website. Studies show that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who like to fill in Internet questionnaires for an hour or more, and those who don’t. The second kind of people—eminently rational, typically busy, *possessing a life*—will be left out.

The real problem with Haidt’s psychopunditry is that it shares with other kinds of determinism a depressing moral impoverishment. Haidt’s own centrism is an artifact of his Science. If the appeal of one idea versus another is explained by a man’s biology (interacting with a few environmental factors) rather than its content, there’s really not much to argue about. Politics is drained of the meaning that human beings have always sought from it. Haidt criticizes his peers for using psychology to “explain away” conservatism, and good for him. Unfortunately, he wants to explain away liberalism too, so that our politics is no longer understood as a clash of interests and well-developed ideas but an altercation between two psychological and evolutionary types.

This may be one benefit to this new era we’re entering: The latest, most cutting-edge punditry may do away with punditry altogether. ♦

Liberals assume that conservatives would disagree with the statement: ‘One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.’ In the reality-based community, Michael Vick has to be a Republican.

Birth of a Nation

With American evangelicals on the ground in South Sudan

BY ARMIN ROSEN

Juba, South Sudan

The Sudanese conflict has entered a dangerous new phase. Between 1983 and 2005, the Arab-led government in Khartoum and its proxies struggled to defeat a militia movement aimed at establishing a new political order for the polyglot country, one that wasn't based on violent coercion and racial privilege. The current fighting along the disputed border between Sudan and newly independent South Sudan threatens to throw the region back into chaos. Just seven years after a peace agreement successfully ended a war that had killed somewhere between 1.5 and 2.5 million people (in a country with a present population of 8 million), there are daily reports of bombings and border attacks, troubling reminders of the frailty of the post-conflict status quo.

The 2005 peace treaty ended the war while allowing the south to vote on independence, and on July 9, 2011, South Sudan became an independent state, recognized by virtually every other country—including Omar al-Bashir's regime in Khartoum. The region's non-Arab Christians and animists successfully separated themselves from an Islamist regime that imposed a mild form of *sharia* law, depopulated much of Darfur, sheltered Osama bin Laden, and bought advanced weapons systems from Iran. One of the most devastating conflicts in African and Middle Eastern history had apparently ended.

South Sudan is the Arabic-speaking world's only non-Muslim majority state. Here Christian evangelicals are openly welcomed—in particular, a group of American aid workers who have helped build the country, and lobbied on its behalf, and who now have no intention of abandoning it, even on the brink of war.

Armin Rosen is a New York-based freelance writer. He has written about politics in the Middle East and Africa for publications including the Atlantic's International channel and Tablet magazine.

When I visited South Sudan in March, three weeks before the outbreak of the latest hostilities, I found a country exhilarated by the successful end to a decades-long struggle. South Sudan is building its first paved highway, and I met officials who spoke excitedly about a future of nationwide infrastructure, large-scale agricultural development, and even regional leadership. The national capital of Juba is dotted with new construction, and legions of NGO employees, foreign businessmen, and workers from nearby Uganda and Ethiopia give the city a decidedly cosmopolitan character. It feels like a place that is eagerly making up for lost time.

During the war years, Juba was a garrison city controlled by the regime in Khartoum and under constant siege by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, the military wing of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement. The government's rule over the city bordered on totalitarian, recalls Justin Lotio, a pastor in Juba who stayed through the violence. "We were living like people in a cage," he says. "Today, there is freedom."

Walking the bustling and newly paved streets, it's easy to tell which countries stuck by South Sudan during its two-decades-long hell—Juba must be the only Arabic-speaking capital where American and Israeli flags hang proudly from taxi drivers' windshields.

From the beginning of his presidency, George W. Bush took an active role in shaping the peace process that led to southern independence. Bush's first secretary of state, Colin Powell, was instrumental in negotiating the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the 2005 treaty signed by Khartoum and the late SPLM leader John Garang that ended the civil war.

Driving the Bush administration's Sudan policy was an unusual coalition of African-American and evangelical Christian leaders, groups whose involvement in the Sudan issue went back decades. In the 1980s, American Christians began lobbying on behalf of their persecuted coreligionists in Sudan, and evangelicals in Congress, including Sam Brownback, Tom Tancredo, and Frank



It's easy to tell which countries stuck by South Sudan.

ALL IMAGES: NEWS.COM



A destroyed church in the village of Pibor, South Sudan

Wolf, became forceful advocates. Over the decades, Franklin Graham, Billy Graham's son, has established himself as a significant presence here. Graham, who met three times with Bashir, is president and CEO of Samaritan's Purse, a North Carolina-based evangelical relief organization present in over 100 countries.

In South Sudan, Samaritan's Purse has a dozen bases and sub-bases, scores of heavy vehicles, two light cargo aircraft, and a small army of staff. They've opened hospitals, drilled boreholes, fed refugees, and trained rural South Sudanese in farming and water management. Len Levins, a Juba-based 20-year U.S. Army veteran serving as the organization's acting country director, summed up the organization's mission in terms simultaneously pragmatic and theological. "If it's too hard to do for somebody else, we can't take that as an excuse" he tells me. "If people are starving, helping them is what we're called to do."

Samaritan's Purse is a relief NGO, but the group is in South Sudan also to help heal Christian communities wounded during decades of war. "Pastors were taken out and killed simply because they were pastors," says Levins. "They came and took people out of Christian communities and tried to indoctrinate them, and still they held onto Christianity to the point of death. It's something that gives them hope. It sustains them."

Graham's NGO is cosmopolitan in a sense that the polarized American discourse on the evangelical movement would have a difficult time processing. The organization employs conservative American Protestants, but also liberal Catholics, Ethiopian Orthodox, and people of no particular faith. In the Yida refugee camp, many of the local staff, and the majority of the beneficiaries, are Muslims fleeing Sudan. The group's outlook is global rather than parochial, and it uses Christianity as a basis for engaging with the wider world—traits that run against much American stereotyping of evangelicals.

The organization does traditional relief work in Northern Bahr el-Gazal, a chronically undeveloped state with a population of 720,000 along the northwestern border with Sudan and one of the fiercest battlegrounds during the civil war. Shelly Slempe, the base operations manager in Northern Bahr el-Gazal, grew up in Virginia's rural southwestern corner, and earned a spot on Princeton's women's basketball team. Five years after graduation, she oversees a staff of 180 in a desolate, isolated place that very few Americans have heard of. For her, the work is still spiritually centered, even if there's nothing overtly religious about drilling boreholes or organizing farming coops. "One of the first distinguishing features is that we're a Christian NGO that focuses on physical and spiritual assistance," she says.

Samaritan's Purse also engages in activities of a more straightforwardly Christian character. It runs a program

that uses the Bible to teach reading, an imperative in a country with a 27 percent literacy rate. “There are three generations that didn’t go to school because of the war, and there isn’t much more schooling here even after the war,” says James Dhol, the local head of the literacy program in the border village of Gok-Machar. “Now, people are able to read the Bible.” Many students are older adults, which Dhol attributes to a post independence change in attitude. “When you are free, you can do what you like, and your freedom will also encourage you.”

The organization’s most visible mark on Northern Bahr el-Gazal is its church rebuilding program. Over 500 churches were destroyed during the war, as part of Khartoum’s deliberate strategy to fracture and demoralize the civilian population. Samaritan’s Purse has helped rebuild 498 of them. Their sloping, tin roofs tower over the flat landscape, marking villages of scattered, single-story thatched huts. Even an hour from the state’s only highway, a church rebuilt with the group’s assistance is a common sight.

In Northern Bahr el-Gazal, a church brings together poor and geographically scattered communities of cattle herders and subsistence farmers. “When there is no church, people are divided according to clan, and there’s lots of fighting,” says James Garang (no relation to John Garang), a church leader in the market town of Akuem. “Church is the only place where people can agree, and act like brothers and sisters.” According to James Wol, a former SPLA guerrilla who runs the church-sponsored school in Akuem, the crowd for Sunday services often outnumber the population of the town itself.

Sudanese forces destroyed Akuem’s church five times in 15 years; each time, the people of Akuem knew how important it was to rebuild it. “When the enemy came to burn our church, we’d wait for them to go back to town,” says Wol. The Sudanese military would withdraw, and the people of Akuem would begin building their church again. “It never stopped,” Wol says. “Jesus said that whoever follows me will be persecuted. But when you are persecuted, you must still be happy.”

Bahr el-Gazal has seen its share of persecution, with little happiness to temper it. Over 250,000 people died from famine there in the 1990s alone. Since the war ended, more than 350,000 refugees have returned to South Sudan, resettling an area with no large-scale farming or infrastructure, ephemeral water resources, and almost no government services. Fears about the possible collapse of the peace process, along with the Sudanese government’s negligence, kept development stagnant—and tensions high—during the postwar period. The anxiety hasn’t completely gone yet.

I met Wol and Garang near the town’s new Samaritan’s Purse-built church, and while they spoke, a skeletal donkey stumbled around the churchyard, its ribs bulging through dry, sagging skin. The harvest has been thin this year, even as the state’s population explodes. The number of returnees is expected to increase, after Khartoum decided to strip up to 500,000 southern refugees of their Sudanese citizenship in early April.

Independence hasn’t necessarily brought a tangible improvement in the state’s situation. The Khartoum regime, the people who, as Wol puts it, “abducted our children, raided our cows, and burned our houses,” only left nine months ago. But with independence, the past already seems distant. “God gave us our nation,” says Garang. “And since this is a nation given by God to us, we forgive [the Arabs]. God is the one who chooses us to be here,” Garang continued. “If he gives us an independent nation, we cannot live again under the Arabs.”

Nonetheless, South Sudan’s future is still tied to that of Sudan. The economy is dependent on the oil industry, which is in turn dependent on a pipeline terminating in Port Sudan, in the north. In January, the Juba government shut down the country’s entire oil sector (the source of 98 percent of government revenue) in response to extortionate transit costs imposed by Khartoum, as well as evidence that the north was diverting southern oil to its refineries without paying for it. “It is better not to have anything at all than to have Khartoum stealing our oil,” Cirino Hiteng Ofuho, a cabinet minister, tells me. “What would you do? You cook food, and before you touch it someone runs away with it. So you’d better shut down your fire, and you will hunger together.”

Ofuho’s evocation of mutual hunger was apt, as I learned when Samaritan’s Purse showed me its operations in Yida, a camp housing over 16,000 refugees who fled the fighting in the Nuba Mountains, in Sudan’s South Kordofan state. The mountain range is a part of Sudan, but its inhabitants are Nuba, non-Arab Muslims who fought alongside the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM-N) during the north-south war. Because South Kordofan has a large Arab minority, the state remained in the north as part of the 2005 agreement.

Fighting broke out between the Bashir government and the northern wing of the SPLM last summer, after Khartoum rigged South Kordofan’s gubernatorial election on behalf of a regime apparatchik indicted by the International Criminal Court for his role in Sudan’s genocidal Darfur campaign. Munil Tia, a refugee who worked as a journalist with a Nuba newspaper in the state capital of Kadugli, recalls the opening hours of the conflict, when Sudanese tanks leveled buildings associated with the SPLM-N and its supporters. “People stopped cars,” he says. “If they found

a Nuba, they were accused of belonging to the SPLM. We saw two people shot before our eyes.”

Khartoum has banned NGOs and human rights monitors from entering South Kordofan, but one researcher estimated that 350,000 Nuba civilians live in the conflict zone, and that 150,000 of them face famine conditions.

Samaritan’s Purse has the largest presence of any NGO in Yida, where they distribute food and provide emergency medical care. Because the SPLM-N operates on the southern side of the poorly defined border, and Khartoum is convinced that Juba is aiding them, the camp has become a flashpoint. In November, Sudan dispatched Antonovs—Russian-built cargo aircraft that have become Khartoum’s weapon of choice against South Kordofan’s civilians—to bomb Yida, damaging a school and convincing several NGOs, as well as the United Nations, to leave. Samaritan’s Purse stayed.

There are almost no permanent buildings in Yida. Even at the Samaritan’s Purse base, the group’s nerve center is housed in an open-air shelter built out of logs and straw. As he shows me around the camp, base manager Conor Lucas-Roberts guides me through a landscape of flat, dusty expanses interrupted by leafless trees and 15-foot dirt pillars constructed by termites. The area is pockmarked with fox-holes. Antonovs occasionally fly over the camp, a blunt reminder from Khartoum that they could pulverize Yida if they wanted to.

Lucas-Roberts seems unfazed by all this. Even in the intense heat he conducts himself more like a seasoned diplomat than a 29-year-old recently discharged from the military. But as a logistics officer in the Marine Corps, he worked in an environment possibly even more oppressive than Yida—Iraq. “There was an equal amount of stress psychologically,” Lucas-Roberts says, when asked to compare his time with Samaritan’s Purse with his military service. “In combat, you’re worried about your life and the lives of those around you. Here you worry about the same things, but it’s for other people, for the people you’re serving.”

The former Marine says that 100 new refugees arrive in Yida each day. Because of the north’s blockade on humanitarian aid and observers, the flow of refugees is among the only empirical means of measuring the severity of the conflict. The political consequences of the war are less of a mystery.

Khartoum accuses South Sudan of aiding the SPLM-N and of violating the disputed border. The Sudanese regime now faces armed uprisings in three regions—Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile state—as well as an Arab Spring-style protest movement. Bashir likely views belligerence towards his southern neighbor as a means of self-preservation.

In March, Khartoum bombed oil fields and villages inside South Sudan, and by April, Juba had grown frustrated enough with months of provocation to order its army into Heglig, a disputed oil-producing town claimed by



Nuba refugees making the trek to a camp in South Sudan

Khartoum. Sudan responded by bombing Bentiu, a state capital deep inside South Sudanese territory. By early May, full-scale war appears to be a real possibility.

So long as the countries consider each other a threat to national security, pressing issues such as oil revenues and the status of southern refugees still living in Sudan will be impossible to resolve. Khartoum and Juba need oil, development, and peace. But as Ofuho suggested, they might both end up going hungry instead.

Ten months into South Sudan’s independence, the hazards of building a Western-leaning country in a region that’s being shaped by conflict, mass migration, and war criminals like Omar al-Bashir are clear. In ten years, South Sudan could be stable and prosperous. It could just as easily become a dysfunctional failed state. Samaritan’s Purse has little control over which course the country will take. The organization can dig wells and rebuild churches, but it cannot solve the oil issue or stop the war in South Kordofan. ♦

Why Captain Dreyfus?

The shame and redemption of France.

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

A philo-Semite is an anti-Semite who happens to like Jews.

—Old saying

W as the Dreyfus Affair, which in 1894 caused an innocent man to be sent to live in solitary and barbarous conditions in a tropical climate for five years, an act of arbitrary injustice or an act of anti-Semitism? Or is this, as the philosophers say, a distinction without a difference— injustice and anti-Semitism in this case amounting to one and the same thing? The world has known more than a reasonable share of both injustice and anti-Semitism, so why did the Dreyfus Affair cause nearly worldwide reverberations in its day, and why does it continue to hold interest, now more than a century later, in our own?

A vast number of books have been written on the Dreyfus Affair, among them Alfred Dreyfus's *Five Years of My Life*, an account of his arrest, court-martial, and imprisonment on Devil's Island, one of the Salvation Islands off the coast of Cayenne in French Guiana. Two movies have been made on the sub-

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The Dreyfus Affair
The Scandal That Tore France in Two
by Piers Paul Read
Bloomsburg, 416 pp., \$30

ject: *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) starring Paul Muni, and *I Accuse!* (1958) starring and directed by José Ferrer. The English writer Piers Paul Read, author of books on the Andes survivors, the Knights Templar, Alec Guinness, and of numerous novels, has now written a comprehensive account of the Dreyfus Affair in all its labyrinthine twists and turns. His book is a reminder of the intrinsic fascination of all that befell the hapless Captain Dreyfus.

The Affair began in 1894 with the discovery of the *bordereau*, or the letter torn into six pieces, by a maid in the wastebasket of Maximilian von Schwartzkoppen, the German military attaché in Paris. Pieced together by the Statistical Section, the department of the French Army responsible for military intelligence and national security, the *bordereau*, beyond doubt, was written by a French officer. Its author promised to provide information on a new French cannon, notes on modifications of French artillery formations, a proposal for a new firing manual for field artillery, and a few other items.

Who wrote it? The Statistical

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Section got on the case straightaway. Because of the nature of the material which the author of the *bordereau* offered the Germans, the traitor (it was thought) had to have been an officer with experience in artillery. He also must have had a connection with the General Staff. A run through the list of officers who matched these qualifications turned up one Captain Alfred Dreyfus, an artillery officer currently working as an intern with the General Staff. That Dreyfus was Jewish and hence considered not a true Frenchman but a foreigner was, as Eugen Weber calls it in *France, Fin de Siècle*, “frosting on the cake.”

Dreyfus was born in 1859, the youngest child of seven, to a successful textile manufacturer from Mulhouse, in Alsace. In his success, Dreyfus’s father Raphael increasingly parted from the Jewish ways of his past and attempted to Frenchify himself. After the German victory over France in 1870, in which the Germans took over Alsace, Raphael chose to retain his French citizenship. He sent Alfred to the Collège Chaptal, an elite private school in Paris.

The young Alfred Dreyfus’s ambition was to gain entry through the examination system into the *École Polytechnique*, which would pave the way for a career as an officer. This he accomplished, as he did all else that was required for promotion in the French Army. Not least of the ironies of the Dreyfus Affair is that Alfred Dreyfus was a passionate patriot who viewed the French Army as a nearly sacred institution.

An expert horseman and a quick study in finance and scientific military matters, Dreyfus became a model soldier. Normally shy, he was less so when putting forth his own ideas. Because of this, among the more traditional officers, Dreyfus was viewed, according to Piers Paul Read, as “pushy.” Nor was camaraderie his forte, for he tended to disdain the company of fellow officers, living happily within his family—his wife and two young children—in their plush apartment on the Avenue du Trocadéro in Paris. Dreyfus was well off to begin with; his wife’s dowry

made him rich. Considered aggressive, standoffish, and wealthy, Alfred Dreyfus was a perfect target for French anti-Semitism.

Read does an excellent job of setting out the alignments of *fin de siècle* French society: the modernists versus the traditionalists, the still-strong Catholic institutions under attack from Protestants, and secularists struggling for dominance in education and elsewhere. Economic crisis and the recent defeat at the hands of the Germans added a strong streak of xenophobia to French life.

In the spirit of the Revolution, most laws discriminating against Jews were erased in 1791. Napoleon, viewed as a friend by the Jews, removed what restrictions remained. Even though Jews flourished in France—certainly at the upper, or Rothschild, level—anti-Semitism among Frenchmen remained a dormant virus waiting to break out.

Perhaps alone among all Frenchmen, Alfred Dreyfus scarcely thought himself Jewish. Although he married a Jewish woman in a religious ceremony, he otherwise observed no Jewish practices. In later years, despite his own painful experience, he failed to see the point of Zionism. When, after his court-martial for treason, he was formally degraded in the courtyard of the *École Militaire*, the buttons torn from his coat, the stripes ripped from his trousers, the marks of his rank removed from his cap and coat sleeves, his sword broken over the knee of the adjutant of the Republican Guard, a crowd looking on screaming “Traitor” and “Dirty Jew,” Dreyfus himself tells us in *Five Years of My Life* that he cried out: “Soldiers, an innocent man is degraded! Soldiers, an innocent man is dishonored! Vive la France! Vive l’armée!”

At the outset, the General Staff and its minions genuinely believed that, in Captain Dreyfus, they had their traitor. The Affair became morally interesting when doubt about Dreyfus’s guilt crept in. The case against him was never more than circumstantial. No convincing motive was ever adduced. The handwriting experts

brought in to compare Dreyfus’s handwriting with that of the *bordereau* were divided. The court-martial was exceedingly improper in its procedural arrangements. When all doubt dissipated and those in charge of the case for the army learned, definitively, that Dreyfus was *not* the traitor but that the boulderish Commandant Marie-Charles-Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy *was*, they were too heavily invested in Dreyfus’s guilt to retrench and recant. The Dreyfus Affair then entered the stage of cover-up, the longest-lasting and most notorious the world has known.

Found guilty by court-martial, Dreyfus was sent to Devil’s Island, the site of a onetime leper colony. There, he endured conditions in which he was fortunate to elude insanity from isolation or death by disease. He was sequestered in a stone hut, four meters square, separated by an iron grate from the warders (eventually there were 13 of them) sent to guard him. The guard was noisily changed every two hours, preventing him from extended sleep. From this hut, he had a vision of the sky and sea—until a high fence was built around it cutting off his view. No conversation with his guards was permitted, even during the brief period he was allowed out for exercise. Along with bread and water, he was given uncooked food—raw meat, dry vegetables—to prepare for himself. Vermin such as ants, mosquitoes, and spider crabs were a perpetual problem; humidity was overpowering. He developed tropical fever. At one point, when it had been rumored in the European press that he had escaped, the authorities ordered him to be double-shackled to his bed at night, causing sores and extreme discomfort. He taught himself English and read Shakespeare, though Montaigne was his great mainstay. The thought of suicide played at the back of his mind. What kept him alive was the hope of restoring his honor.

Admirable though Dreyfus’s endurance was under these conditions, he is not otherwise an impressive hero, or even an especially attractive man, as Reid and other chroniclers of the Affair show. Until quite late in the day,



he never thought to blame the men who exiled him to Devil's Island, but seems instead to have believed, somehow or other, that no malice had been intended and a great blunder had been made. With the exception of his exclamation of innocence at the time of his degradation, he was invariably found wanting at dramatic moments during his various trials. Resentment, let alone anger, was not in his makeup. Even after being released from Devil's Island, he was, as Reid writes, "uncomfortable in the role of martyr."

"I hate all this moaning about my suffering," he told Julien Benda. Heroic only in his resignation, passive in his response to events, and not notably perceptive, Dreyfus was an unlikely candidate for the man whose fate would divide a country. Dreyfus was "not much hated by his enemies and not much loved by his friends," wrote D. W. Brogan in his *Development of Modern France*. "Had he not been Dreyfus," asked Leon Blum, an Alsatian Jew who would thrice be prime minister of France, "would he himself have been a Dreyfusard?" The chances are, most likely not.

Dreyfus's case would have been forgotten, its victim left to languish in his island inferno, if his family, especially his brother Mathieu, had not persisted in trying to discover the true traitor and in arguing that the verdict against him had been obtained by illegal means. The Dreyfus case turned into the Dreyfus Affair only when Émile Zola entered the lists and, in the January 13, 1898, issue of Georges Clemenceau's paper *l'Aurore*, published his instantly famous "J'accuse," which argued that the conviction of Dreyfus had been ordered by the General Staff. Zola named the officers who had orchestrated the frame-up: General Auguste Mercier, minister of war; General Raoul François Charles le Mouton de Boisdeffre, chief of the General Staff; Commandant Ferdinand du Paty de Clam, Dreyfus's interrogator and tormentor; and the rest. Until Zola, the French were satisfied with the verdict against Dreyfus. "In a nation distrustful, with good reason, of its rulers," D. W. Brogan wrote,

"the conviction of Dreyfus was consoling. . . . In an age of corruption and weakness, one institution [the army] had shown its vigilance."

The force of Zola's "J'accuse" was to argue that this institution, too, was corrupt—deeply so.

As befits a good novelist, Piers Paul Read provides brilliant portraits of the several villains in the Dreyfus Affair. Chief among them are the Jew-hating editor of *La Libre Parole*, Édouard Drumont; the politician Godefroy Cavaignac; the true spy, Commandant Esterhazy; Lieutenant Colonel

The Dreyfus Affair marked the rise of the intellectual as a figure in public life. Without Émile Zola, Alfred Dreyfus would have been left to moulder on Devil's Island.

Hubert Joseph Henry, forger, liar, and bootlicker; and, above all, General Mercier, who used the entrapment of Dreyfus to strengthen his own political position, arguing in defense of the cover-up that the repute of the French Army was more important than the fate of a single Jew.

Heroes were fewer. Dreyfus's brother Mathieu was relentless in his attempts to exonerate his brother, and Dreyfus's wife stood by him even after being presented with public revelations of her husband's infidelity. Bernard Lazare, a Jewish journalist ardent in his hatred of anti-Semitism, wrote in defense of Dreyfus. Dreyfus's first lawyer, Edgar Demange, was steadfast in his support of his client at the cost of risk to his practice and good name. A senator named Auguste Scheurer-Kestner came into knowledge of the forgeries and other shenanigans of the

officers in the Statistical Section, and called for a reopening of the case at a point when it took courage to do so. Zola, of course, was a key player, even though his own novels (as Read points out) are studded with crudely anti-Semitic characters.

The surprise hero was Commandant Georges Picquart, who succeeded to the head of the Statistical Section and, though an anti-Semite, hated lies and injustice more than he hated Jews. He came to Dreyfus's defense by calling out his fellow officers for sending an innocent man to prison, and doing all in their power to keep him there even after they knew he was innocent. The army's case against Dreyfus began to unravel when Picquart, as the new head of the Statistical Section, discovered another letter from a traitor to von Schwartzkoppen—this one sent from Esterhazy, a dissolute with an extravagant wife, heavy debts, and a half-ownership in a bordello. At first, Picquart thought that Esterhazy was a second traitor, but a review of the dossier on Dreyfus showed that Esterhazy's handwriting was identical to that of the *bordereau* on which the conviction of Dreyfus was based. When Picquart brought this to his superior, General Charles-Arthur Gonse, he was told to stow it: "What does it matter to you if that Jew stays on Devil's Island?" Gonse asked. Picquart is supposed to have answered: "What you're saying is vile. I don't know what I will do, but of one thing I am certain—I will not take this secret to the grave."

As the case against Dreyfus unraveled, Read lucidly keeps track of its threads. Most of these were legal. Zola was sued for libel by the officers sitting as judges in Dreyfus's court-martial. Found guilty, he was deprived of his Legion of Honor and forced to depart for England lest he go to prison. (He spent a year there, and returned with the fall of the government under which he had been sentenced.)

Owing to the pressures exerted by his family and the group of intellectual sympathizers known as Dreyfusards, Alfred Dreyfus was finally offered a second trial. His five years on Devil's Island appeared to have



aged him by 20 years. At this second trial, held in the provincial town of Rennes, he was again found guilty, but his sentence was shortened from life to 10 years. World opinion, stirred up by the Dreyfusards, was appalled at this outcome. French politicians were worried that, because of the international reaction, the Paris Exposition of 1900 would be boycotted. To prevent this, President Émile Loubet pardoned Dreyfus on the grounds of his ill health, thinking that by doing so he had put the Affair to rest.

A pardon was not, however, an acquittal, and Dreyfus and his family would not settle for less. The Dreyfusards, in fact, thought Dreyfus's accepting a pardon an act of selling out. In *Five Years of My Life*, Dreyfus claims that he accepted the pardon because his brother Mathieu

told me that my health, already greatly shaken, left little hope that I should be able to resist much longer under the conditions in which I should be placed; that liberty would allow me more easily to strive for the reparation of the atrocious judicial error of which I was still the victim, since it would give me time, and time was the only object of my appeal to the Military Tribunal of Revision.

Dreyfus's full rehabilitation came in 1906, almost 12 years after he had been sent off in disgrace to Devil's Island. Not a military but a civil court composed of combined chambers declared his court-martial annulled, and in the words of the judges, "given that, in the final analysis, nothing remains of the charges made against Dreyfus," he was innocent. "An announcement of their judgment," writes Read, "was to be posted in Paris and in Rennes and was to be inserted in the *Journal Officiel* as well as in 50 Parisian and provincial newspapers chosen by Dreyfus."

"I had never doubted," Dreyfus claimed, "that justice and truth would eventually triumph against error, deception, and crime."

An extraordinary story, with a cast of characters and plot worthy of a great novel by Balzac, the Dreyfus Affair (as the English historian of France Douglas Johnson writes) "has everything."

But what is its significance? People find in it what they are looking for. Hannah Arendt, who devoted a chapter to the Dreyfus Affair in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, claimed that "the case of the unfortunate Captain Dreyfus had shown the world that in every Jewish nobleman and multimillionaire there still remained something of the old-time pariah, who has no country, for whom human rights do not exist, and whom society would gladly exclude from its privileges." Arendt goes on to denote how few French Jews were among the Dreyfusards who came to Dreyfus's defense.

The Dreyfus Affair, as Read and others before him point out, marked the rise of the intellectual as a figure in public life. Without Émile Zola, Alfred Dreyfus would have been left to moulder on Devil's Island. Without Anatole France, Henri Poincaré, Claude Monet, Clémenceau, Charles Péguy, Marcel Proust, and the other

Dreyfusards, Dreyfus's cause would not have been kept alive. The historian Theodore Zeldin holds that "the Dreyfus Affair was important, perhaps above all else, in giving the intellectuals a sense of their mission, and in confirming their importance." Read notes that it was during the Dreyfus Affair that the term "intellectual" first came into general use.

The Dreyfus Affair posed the question of whether it would be worth sacrificing the already-shaky stability of a major institution, the French Army, to remedy the hypothetical injustice done to an individual. The injustice, of course, turned out to be not in the least hypothetical, and the reaction to it on the part of the French is as good a guide to understanding a nation, in its rich complexity, as history has provided. Only in France could such an injustice have been perpetuated. But then, only in France could its resolution have divided a nation. ♦

BCA

Ideas Matter

So long as they are ideas and not partisan talking points. BY MARK HEMINGWAY

Reality has a well-known liberal bias," Stephen Colbert said at the 2006 White House Correspondents' Dinner.

It's hard to say whether the line is original to Colbert: Variations on this specimen of bumper-sticker wisdom have been circulating on the American left for ages. In any event, such a self-righteous and self-negating declaration says a lot about progressive America—none of it good. It's even more revealing that Colbert's line was delivered at Washington's "nerd prom." That such a poor imitation of a deadly quip would provoke hearty laughter

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The Tyranny of Clichés

How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas
by Jonah Goldberg
Sentinel, 320 pp., \$27.95

among the Beltway elite shows how much liberal clichés have insinuated themselves into political discourse.

Thankfully, the idea that only liberals have a grasp on the facts is one of the first notions Jonah Goldberg eviscerates here. Goldberg quotes Barack Obama, arguably the most liberal president in American history, repeatedly asserting that it's his Republican opponents who are "locked into ideologically rigid positions," even as he racks up \$5 trillion in debt, attempts to expand the welfare state more than

any president in nearly half a century, and his administration argues before the Supreme Court that the federal government has the power to compel every citizen to purchase health insurance. In contrast to those dastardly Republicans, of course, none of this radicalism is motivated by ideology: “The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works,” Obama declared in his Inaugural Address. David Axelrod has even gone so far as to claim that his boss is a “committed, practicing non-ideologue.”

As Goldberg notes, this pragmatist pose is nothing more than “self-serving verbiage passing itself off as statesmanlike wisdom.” Or, as he puts it more affirmatively: “Pragmatism is the disguise progressives and other ideologues don when they want to demonize competing ideologies.” No doubt, many conservatives, pummeled for being honest about their ideological preferences by being told that their empirical judgments aren’t liberally biased enough, have surmised as much. But they probably didn’t know this tendentious argument has such an illustrious pedigree. Goldberg takes us on a jaunty tour through history and shows us how that noted pragmatist Napoleon employed very similar appeals decrying the supposedly radical ideology of his opponents on the way to amassing supreme power. The emperor even claimed to have coined the term “ideologue”—as an epithet.

Which is not to say that Barack Obama is a budding Bonaparte; he’s not nearly so canny about his pursuit of power. All evidence indicates that the president truly believes he is unencumbered by ideology. Thus, candidate Obama argued in 2008 that his preferred progressive—er, pragmatic—political agenda is thwarted because rural Americans “get bitter, [and] they cling to guns or religion.” Now ensconced in office, he has signed an executive order monitoring gun sales in border states in the wake of a fatal Justice Department gun-running scandal, and undermines

religious freedom in the name of the mandated provision of free contraception. So it looks as if the president is foisting his own ideology about guns and religion on a country with a majority of religious gun owners who have their own opinions that often run contrary to the president’s—and not the other way around.

Once Goldberg establishes that Obama and the rest of liberal America believe their own hype about their ignorant opponents trapped in ideo-



Jonah Goldberg

logical false consciousnesses, he’s off to the races. This is a Russian nesting doll of a book, with the author unpacking and inspecting one unexamined liberal trope after another, including essays on “Dissent,” “Social Justice,” “Separation of Church and State”—and much more. If many of Goldberg’s readers have intuitively rejected these half-baked conceits, they’ll walk away from this read with some fleshed-out historical and philosophical reasons for being wary. And it’s hard not to agree that these clichés *are* tyrannical, given how often the same dumb ones get recycled. While advance copies of *The Tyranny of Clichés* were circulating in Washington, President Obama accused his Republican opponents of practicing Social Darwinism, a fallacious claim with little historical justification that’s the subject of Goldberg’s eighth chapter. The chapter on “Science” flays attempts to conduct pseudoscientific research proving that conservatism is a mental illness that short-circuits

empiricism (see Andrew Ferguson’s “The New Phrenology,” on page 21).

Yet effectively rebutting liberal arguments isn’t where this book shines the most. Goldberg quotes George Orwell’s famous observation that “we have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.” Of course, the real need goes beyond restating the obvious; it’s finding a way to make the obvious engaging. And here, Goldberg succeeds admirably. Which is not to say that *The Tyranny of Clichés* is without flaws. A few chapters feel needlessly discursive, and some topics could stand to be fleshed out a bit. Given *Tyranny*’s short length and wide ideological/historical sweep, it would be nearly impossible for most readers not to have a few objections, or stumble across places where they feel the argument could be made better. Still, it’s quite a feat to write a polemic about byzantine ideological disputes and political semantics and make it thoroughly enjoyable. If you’re interested in giving a precocious student or open-minded liberal an explanation for why they should take the trouble to understand conservatism, this is the book to give them. There’s a good chance they’ll actually read it; it will likely make them do some rethinking; and it almost certainly will make them laugh.

Unfortunately, those most in need of freeing themselves from the tyranny of clichés are still bitterly clinging to their own transparent attempts to dismiss people who don’t share their worldview. Jonah Goldberg recently found himself on the receiving end of a contentious interview with CNN’s Piers Morgan, who, in the middle of the interview, made a point of defending an Obama attack ad about Mitt Romney while insisting he supports neither political party. “If you’re not batting for Democrats,” responded Goldberg, “it’s a wonderful approximation of it.” To which Morgan quickly responded: “Let’s deal with reality.”

Inadvertently or not, Morgan couldn’t have made the case for reading Goldberg’s book any better. ♦

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BCA

Tough Love

In colonial New England, the ideal was not freedom but conformity. BY EDWARD ACHORN



Quakers hanged as heretics, Massachusetts, 1659

Many of the Founders revered their Puritan ancestors, who had braved the deadly Atlantic, endured bitter winters, and fended off Indian attacks and starvation to establish a new society in New England, free from the oppression of the British crown. When it came time to fight the slide toward tyranny under George III, those who supported the revolution drew strength from their ancestors' courageous insistence on a measure of self-government.

But a book like *The Devil Made Me Do It!* makes you wonder if H.L. Mencken had a better take on the Puritans. The Sage of Baltimore famously defined Puritanism as the "haunting

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The Devil Made Me Do It!

Crime and Punishment in Early New England
by Juliet Haines Mofford
Globe Pequot, 240 pp., \$14.95

fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy," and less famously (and less succinctly) sputtered:

There is only one honest impulse at the bottom of Puritanism, and that is the impulse to punish the man with a superior capacity for happiness—to bring him down to the miserable level of "good" men, i.e., of stupid, cowardly, and chronically unhappy men.

This compendium of Puritan punishments for Sabbath-breaking, public drunkenness, blasphemy, adultery, crooked dealings, marital bickering, witchcraft, and other crimes (or supposed crimes) speaks of a society that tried to bully humans into forming a utopian state that no one could achieve.

And though New Englanders knew full well that man is a fallen and sinful creature, they seemed to believe that severe pressure on society's members to conform, using punishments that ranged from public humiliation to disfigurement (such as slicing off ears), torture, and death, would create a more godly state. Of course, lest we be too snobbish about those times, there are plenty of reckless and arrogant bullies in 21st-century America who want to run our lives in the interest of creating a perfect society, however demonstrably unattainable.

In 1642, William Bradford, the governor of Plymouth Colony, pondered the failure of severe punishments to curb sins effectively, especially drunkenness and extramarital sex. "The Devil should take some blame," he reflected, "being determined to cast a stain and blemish upon us . . . by tempting Saints into sin." The Puritans felt a force of evil coursing through their communities, leading men, women, and children to do things they did not, in good conscience, want to do—hence the defendants' cry that is the title of this book. In 200-plus brief pages, Juliet Haines Mofford sets these crimes and punishments into the context of a society on the edge of extinction, requiring a degree of cooperation and conformity to survive. But there's not a great deal of social analysis here: The bulk of the book is juicy (and ultimately depressing) examples of real 17th-century people running afoul of the law, sometimes through no fault of their own, drawn from the author's remarkably extensive research into trial records, official documents, diaries, broadsides, prison-keepers' records, and other primary sources.

We all know about the stocks on the town square, where such troublemakers as public scolds endured taunts from townspeople and found themselves pelted by children wielding rotten eggs, apples, garbage, or even stones or snowballs. As Mofford notes, Nathaniel Hawthorne surely knew of a 1694 law requiring any woman found guilty of adultery in the Massachusetts Bay Colony to wear a capital

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A “sewn conspicuously upon her garments.” Some of these punishments seem amusingly commendable, as when York County Court (in today’s Maine) filed a complaint against Timothy Yeales “for Instigating people to go to law [sue in court], an evill practice . . . very hurtful to Civill Society and contrary to the Law of God and His Majesty.”

But often, the smile must fade. Readers with teenagers at home may relate to a Massachusetts General Court order of November 4, 1646, which dealt with disobedient sons, 16 or older. The child’s parents were instructed to “lay hold on him, and bring him to the magistrates assembled in court, and testify unto them, by sufficient evidence, that this their son is stubborn and rebellious and will not obey their voice and chastisement but lives in sundry notorious crimes. Such a son shall be put to death.” (Fortunately, Mofford found no evidence that the colony enforced this measure.)

Impulsive teenagers caught in the act of bestiality were hanged after watching the authorities kill, one by one, the animals that they had purportedly defiled. In some cases, acts of homosexuality went unpunished; in others, those involved were flogged or executed. But the book’s most depressing passages pertain to the famous witch trials, in which learned and serious men were deceived by fear and prejudice into sentencing to death people who had been falsely and absurdly accused of witchcraft, or coerced into making phony confessions.

Before his execution at Salem in 1692, the much-admired Rev. George Burroughs recited the Lord’s Prayer without stumbling on the words, something it was thought impossible for a true witch to do. Cotton Mather soothed the crowd with the observation that “the Devil has often been transformed into an Angel of Light.” Page after page of this made me grateful that the Founders, however much they revered their ancestors and shared elements of their Christian faith, created a country founded on liberty and the jealously guarded rights of the individual. ♦

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Stillman’s Vision

The ‘WASP Woody Allen’ in search of moral truth.

BY IAN MARCUS CORBIN

Whit Stillman did not get the memo. Or rather, he got it, scanned it with a frown, shoved it into the pocket of his J. Press khakis, and continued on his way, whistling a jaunty old tune (now at a slightly higher volume). The crumpled-up memorandum, widely circulated among American artists, includes the following:

1. Harvard students and other children of privilege are entitled, narcissistic wastrels.
2. The bourgeois ethos (responsibility, discretion, self-restraint, piety) is to *la dolce vita* (Dancing! Laughter! Spontaneity! Booze!) as tepid tap water is to luscious, golden olive oil; they can’t be mixed.
3. Optimism is for glazed-eyed rubes and tweenyboppers.

Stillman has spent his filmmaking career roguishly flouting these (actually unwritten) rules, and some others. His artful defiance has yielded a small but wonderful oeuvre comprising four films, all of which he wrote and directed: *Metropolitan* (1990), *Barcelona* (1994), *The Last Days of Disco* (1998), and now *Damsels in Distress*. Each of Stillman’s films follows a different group of privileged, highly educated, hyper-articulate young people just emerging from the chrysalis of adolescence. Their naked, earnest search for moral truth is oddly, delightfully interspersed with bouts of rich sensual indulgence. This combination is key

to Stillman’s art: He is a nostalgist and an amateur moralist; but still, through it all, an exuberant, unembarrassed partisan of *joie de vivre* optimism.

Stillman’s focus on the American upper class, a group one of his characters terms the “Urban Haute Bourgeoisie” or “UHB,” has been the easy headline of his career. Stillman has been frequently called “the WASP Woody Allen,” and his first three films are sometimes called the “Yuppie Trilogy.” Some have recoiled at this focus, charging Stillman with snobbery (see rule one above). Evelyn Waugh, one of Stillman’s favorite novelists, tended to write about the English upper classes and answered similar criticism with a perennially sound rebuttal: “I reserve the right to deal with the kind of people I know best.” Stillman’s impeccably WASP lineage and Harvard education are reason enough to justify his focus on the UHB, but this focus also fills a gap in American art and life.

In his classic essay “Manners, Morals, and the Novel,” the great Jewish literary critic Lionel Trilling (another of Stillman’s favorite writers) wrote that most American novelists shared a crippling blind spot. They wanted to understand American society, but they could not reflect with any honesty on American man-

ners because to do so would require engagement with the different manners of the different social classes, and in our theoretically horizontal society, there *are* no such differences. Or if there are, they are the result of showy affectation, and so a good egalitarian conscience requires that the manners



Whit Stillman

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Carolyn Farina, Allison Parisi, and Edward Clements in 'Metropolitan' (1990)

of the upper classes be mocked and those of the lower classes bowdlerized and valorized.

Which is to say, neither of them can be honestly examined. Trilling argues that this failure is devastating for art that seeks to depict social realities because manners are a chief way in which a group's values are embodied in day-to-day actions.

This blind spot is also bad for America's self-understanding. We have not had a president without an Ivy League degree since 1989, and we won't have another until at least 2017. Every one of our sitting Supreme Court justices went either to Harvard or Yale. East Coast elites really do run much of the country, and yet they serve as perpetual whipping boys for sanctimonious artists and Manichean populists on the left and right.

The upshot is that the milieu of our leaders remains woefully underexamined. There is much talk of a growing disconnect between upper and lower in America, and the artistic failure Trilling describes is not helping. Whit Stillman is one of the rare contempo-

rary artists willing to deal sympathetically (if also critically and lightheartedly) with our untitled aristocracy. His humanization of an often-vilified demographic is an artistic virtue and, perhaps, a social service.

But I digress. And even if the preceding observations are accurate, they are somewhat out of place in an essay about Whit Stillman, because no one should mistake him for either a social realist or a moral crusader. At least not in any conventional sense. For reasons that only he could explain (and perhaps he couldn't), Stillman has chosen to spend his artistic career writing dialogue for the young and searching. Authority figures are all but absent from his movies. Preachiness, and there is plenty of it, always comes leavened with a pinch of irony. Edification, when it does come, is stumbled upon by way of incessant questioning, foolish mistakes, or aesthetic transport—often some combination of the three.

Tom Townsend, the protagonist of *Metropolitan*, is a quintessential Stillman character. He is a serious, introspective Princeton undergrad affect-

ing moral certainty, but deep down he is confused and dazzled by the wide world of young adulthood. He comes from a respectable old family but fancies himself a committed leftist, opposed to all manner of elitist, genteel traditions.

Almost against his wishes, he is swept up in the satiny, glittery rustle of the New York debutante season. On the first night of the season, he tells fellow ballgoers that he opposes such events on political grounds because, he explains, "I favor the socialist model developed by the 19th-century French social critic Charles Fourier." Like so much of Stillman's dialogue, the line is delivered in perfect innocent deadpan while Stillman winks impishly at his audience. But it turns out that all that champagne and dancing is serious business: Over the course of *Metropolitan*, Tom comes to understand and embrace the humanizing power of decorous, chivalric debutante society, finally becoming its quixotic defender.

Two decades earlier, with a few minor modifications, that was Whit Stillman. Halfway through a saturnine



freshman year at Harvard, Stillman returned home to Washington and reluctantly attended his first debutante ball with a Students for a Democratic Society button pinned beneath his tuxedo lapel. As it happened, the dreamlike glamour of the deb season saved him from his own despair. By graduation he had traded his fashionable campus radicalism for unfashionable piquant nostalgia.

The Last Days of Disco, Stillman's most recent film until *Damsels*, follows a group of recent college graduates in New York whose social triumphs and tortures center around an enchanting disco club, loosely modeled after Studio 54. The movie ends with the closing of the club, the professional defeat of most of the main characters, and a somewhat ironic soliloquy from one of them, arguing that disco may be dead but its spirit will live on in the hearts of those who loved it.

A somber mood reigns until, in the very final scene, a crowded New York subway car erupts into spontaneous dance (to the tune of "Love Train" by the O'Jays), which then fades into a faltering a cappella rendition of "Amazing Grace" as the credits roll. The old hymn is sung by Kate Beckinsale, whose character in the movie, Charlotte, is arguably the most despicable. Stillman here is hinting at a comprehensive, underlying moral structure—an almost sacramental connection between communal aesthetic rapture and higher redemption. The deep goodness that Stillman's characters seek in their moralizing soliloquies is found, in part, by abandoning oneself to the beautiful. It is a moral schema with a rich pedigree, developed (though somewhat differently) in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*.

With *Damsels in Distress*, Stillman has pushed the last scene of *Disco* even further, and in a different direction. *Damsels* concerns a group of beautiful young women led by Violet (Greta Gerwig) who take it as their mission to civilize the barbaric masculine hordes of their elite East Coast school, Seven Oaks College. They also operate a volunteer suicide prevention center. Their saving and civilizing mis-

sions are pursued by goofily aesthetic means: tap dancing lessons, perfume, good-smelling soap, and, of course, an impeccable fashion sense that evokes a sort of pastel-heavy postwar prep, slightly updated.

The girls *mean* it and, one suspects, at least in part, that Stillman means it, too. What Violet and her friends lack in self-awareness they make up for in perfectly enunciated term-paper disquisitions on how one ought to comport oneself. But for all their quixotic seriousness, the grand finale is boisterous and hilarious. It makes the "Love Train" scene seem like a tea party (the nonpolitical kind), and the viewer leaves the theater in a state of joyous disorientation. There is no "Amazing Grace" to tie the threads into a grand philosophical or theological proposition.

And yet, *Damsels* doesn't feel like mere smarted-up escapism. None of Stillman's films feels that way. He

clearly admires the moral seriousness and altruism of the Seven Oaks girls, even if they are somewhat preposterous. Some enduring part of him longs to be a moralist, and, indeed, he is plainly suspicious of the bohemian ethos that exalts free love, total candor, and self-expression above all. Again, he is nostalgic for a steadier time, and a lingering sadness haunts his recollections. But here, now, given what we have to work with, Stillman's goals are humble. He doesn't advocate a wholesale return to the pre-Woodstock world; what good would that do? But what he does advocate, implicitly, is that we keep asking serious questions about how to live, live in accord with our best answers, and, from time to time, let our seriousness dissolve into the sumptuous, inarticulate joys of sensual reality.

That, Stillman seems to be saying, will be enough—and maybe, more than enough. ♦

BCA

Super Unheroic

Despite what you read, this is one epic not worth seeing.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

It's always a little discomfiting to hold a minority opinion of a universally admired cultural artifact. The very possibility of such discomfiture is part of the process whereby a cultural artifact becomes universally admired. A groundswell begins and people eager to be early adopters of the conventional wisdom jump on the bandwagon, mixing their metaphors just as I did right there.

Case in point: I criticized *Saving Private Ryan* in this magazine, and for a month I was treated as though I were Patrick Buchanan, arguing that

World War II itself had not been worth fighting. Today, at a remove of nearly 15 years, my objections—the movie didn't recover from its bravura opening sequence and told a morally confused story that was profoundly unjust to its own title character—wouldn't be remotely controversial, since they are, in fact, as true now as they were then. But at the time *Saving Private Ryan* was released, the film had

morphed from a movie into a piety, and my impiety was profoundly offensive to a great many people.

At least *Saving Private Ryan* was about something important. Why do I get the feeling that, as I spend the rest of this piece writing about how *The*



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Avengers isn't very good, I am going to generate an emotional reaction in some quarters little different from the two-minute hate that greeted my *Saving Private Ryan* review? This insubstantial comic book superhero movie—and not just any comic book superhero movie, but one that is actually the sixth in a series of Marvel Comics superhero movies, of which only one was any good—is threatening to become the latest cultural piety. The reviews have been not only favorable, but rapturously so.

At the same time, Hollywood has been getting reports of wild enthusiasm from prospective moviegoers. Cinemascore, a firm that has moviegoers rate the films they've just seen, reported an A+ for *The Avengers*, which made \$200 million in North America its first weekend—nearly 20 percent more than the previous record-setter, the final *Harry Potter* film.

The writer-director of *The Avengers*, Joss Whedon, has built up more than a decade of hipster/fanboy cred due to his stewardship of the cult television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly*—not to mention his mastery of spreading his evangel with early adopters in new media, first on the web and then on YouTube. Word began to diffuse outward from the conventions and the breathless science-fiction websites that *The Avengers* was something very special, that it had broken the code of “do a superhero movie right.” (People always forget that every time fans like a superhero movie they say the same thing, only rather than *The Avengers* getting it right it was *The Dark Knight* or *Iron Man* or *Spiderman 2*.)

The combination of a critical hit, an audience pleaser, and a box office smash validates everyone: the critics, the fans, and the green-eyeshade guys. Disagree and you're at best Debbie Downer and at worst a person of infuriatingly limited vision and questionable character. “A man watches a movie, and the critic

must acknowledge he is that man,” wrote the greatest of all movie critics, Robert Warshow. I am that man. So, as a man, I must acknowledge that *The Avengers* got me with a few good scenes and a strong concluding sequence. But as a critic, I have to reach into the extensive vocabulary I learned from studying Coleridge, Eliot, Leavis, and Auerbach and declare that *The Avengers* is *meh*.

The problem is the plot. Which is to say, the plot is just awful. There's

what the head skullface guy is saying).

All the superheroes—Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, Thor, Captain America, and a couple of others—end up on an invisible aircraft carrier that flies through the sky. They catch Loki. Then the superheroes punch each other a lot instead of being friends, which seems pointless, since they can't actually hurt each other. Loki escapes. We spend 20 minutes watching the superheroes try to save the flying aircraft car-



Thor (Chris Hemsworth) and Captain America (Chris Evans)

a cube that opens a window between worlds. The Norse god of mischief, Loki, wants to harness it to dominate mankind. We saw Tom Hiddleston play Loki in *Thor* last year, and as was the case in that misfire, he comes across as a combination of a catty hairdresser and a mean judge on a TV dancing competition. This is a villain?

Loki comes to earth with a magical stick. It hypnotizes a couple of good guys and turns them into bad guys. They destroy a government building where Samuel L. Jackson works. Jackson's character gets a bunch of superheroes together to save the earth from Loki and his friends—some weird space creatures who have skull faces and otherwise never make their reasons known for behaving badly (besides which, you can't hear a word of

rier from crashing (which could have been avoided by not getting on a flying aircraft carrier in the first place). Eventually, New York is threatened by alien aircraft that look like giant caterpillars—which look suspiciously like the alien aircraft that attacked Chicago in *Transformers 3*. Spoiler alert: The feuding superheroes stop feuding! They get together as a team!

There's a good line or two, a good performance or two (Mark Ruffalo and Robert Downey Jr.), and a couple of funny moments when the Hulk punches people unexpectedly; certainly I've seen worse than *The Avengers*. But as far as superhero movies go, it's nowhere near as fun as *Iron Man*, nowhere near as powerful as *The Dark Knight*, and nowhere near as touching as *Spiderman 2*.

So there. ♦

“There was no press conference, no television cameras, no reporters and it didn’t even arrive when the sun was up. Instead, Rick Santorum’s endorsement of presumptive Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney came in paragraph 13 in an email to supporters at approximately 11 P.M. Monday night.”

—CNN.com, May 8, 2012

PARODY



May 14, 2012

Dear Friends,

It has come to my attention that there is some concern that my recent endorsement of the presumptive Republican nominee for president was not wholehearted and sincere enough. I am here to tell you that it is enough.

When I decided to run for president, I knew it wouldn’t be easy. I’d be attacked for my beliefs and convictions. But my family convinced me the stakes are too high and that someone must defend all that is right and just. That person was me—and it still is me. Not that I have to tell you: Without your courage and conviction, I would not have won 11 states—states my former opponent took for granted.

I wasn’t born into a wealthy family. I don’t have a fortune in the hundreds of millions of dollars. I don’t believe in socialized medicine—not even at the state level. I don’t take pleasure in firing anyone. My wife doesn’t drive “a couple of Cadillacs.” I don’t make \$10,000 bets. But I do take good care of our pets and leave them in a kennel whenever I travel. I am a Christian.

So believe me when I say that my endorsement of the former governor of a New England state that he has no chance of winning in November is sincere. My relationship with him is smoothed over like the pomade-slicked hair on his head. We might not see eye to eye on every issue—or any issue. But we do agree that President Barack Obama does not deserve to be reelected. Someone, anyone—an animal, vegetable, or mineral—can do a better job in the White House. And though our presumptive nominee has the personality of a mineral, he is our mineral. Let’s deposit him in Washington.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Santorum". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Rick Santorum