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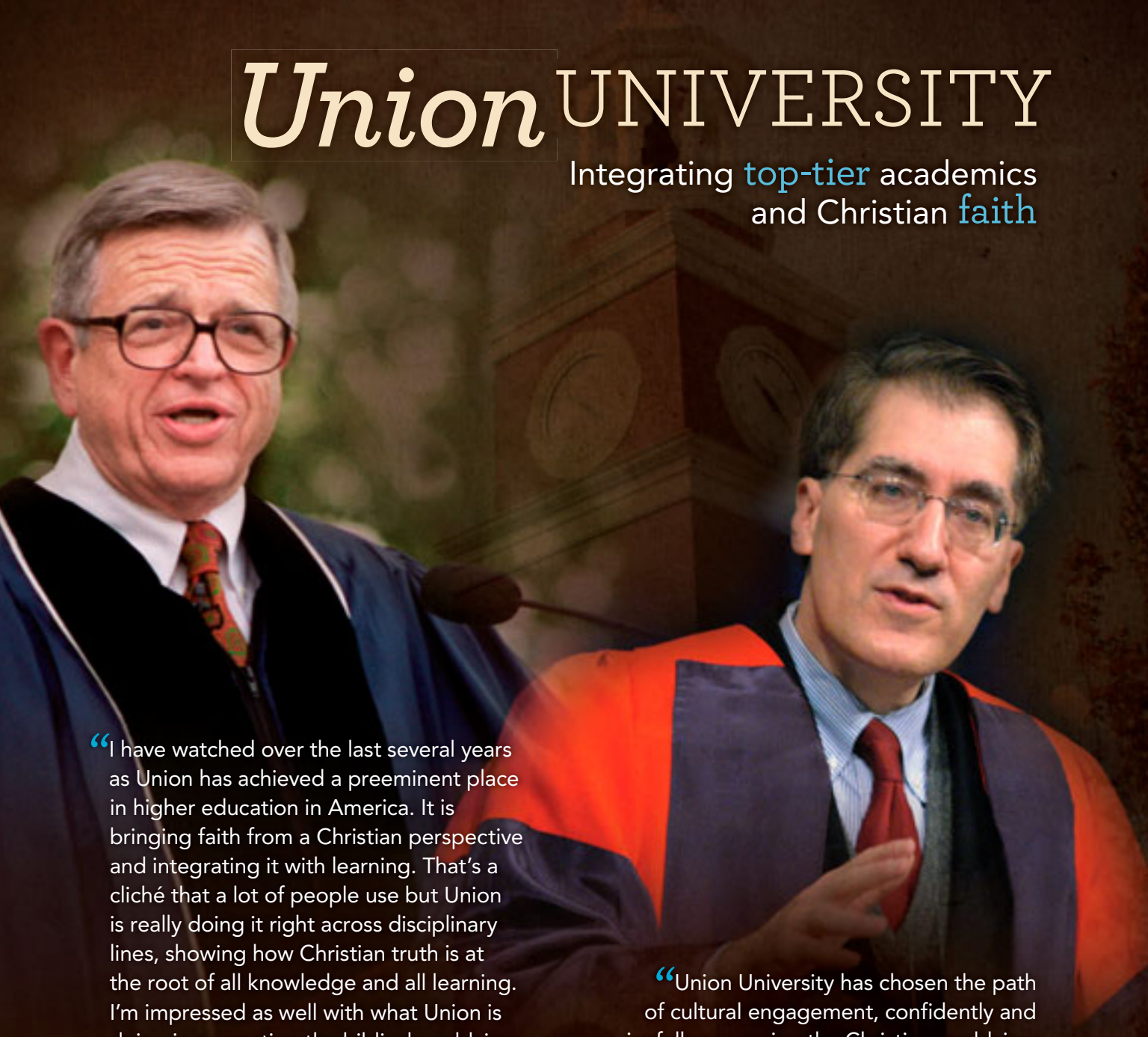

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COVER BY MARK FREDRICKSON

Damned Lies and 'Fact Checking' (cont.)

It was just two issues ago that The Weekly Standard published Mark Hemingway's devastating brief against media "fact checkers" and their systematic bias against the right ("Lies, Damned Lies, and 'Fact Checking,'" December 19, 2011). But Fortuna is a capricious sprite, and The Scrapbook awoke last week to find the left spitting nails about PolitiFact, the influential column produced by the *St. Petersburg Times*. For its "Lie of the Year," PolitiFact selected Democrats' claim that Rep. Paul Ryan's budget—passed by the House GOP earlier this year—would "end Medicare."

Practically the entire liberal wonkery cried foul, including writers at the *New Republic*, *Slate*, *Mother Jones*, and *Washington Monthly*. Paul Krugman, the *New York Times*'s attack-pundit, conjectured that PolitiFact was "terrified of being considered partisan . . . so they've bent over backwards to appear 'balanced'—and in the process made themselves useless and irrelevant."

On the merits, they have a point. Sure, saying Ryan's reform "ends Medicare" is arguably inaccurate and certainly misleading. But to what extent is it a "lie"? The Medicare program is $30 trillion in debt. We simply can't begin to address that fiscal black hole without ablating Medicare as it currently exists. Accordingly, Ryan has been fairly explicit about the need for fundamental change in the program. Anyone who's honest about our fiscal predicament knows that "ending Medicare" in favor of a program structured differently is the point.

However, as a political matter, the timing of PolitiFact's dubious honor is not helpful to Democrats. Senator Ron Wyden just signed on to a version of Ryan's plan, and other congressional Democrats want to end the Medicare cost control plan in Obamacare, aka the Independent Payment Advisory Board. IPAB is Obama's scheme to empower federal bureaucrats to set the Medicare budget without congressional approval. Sarah Palin famously called it a "death panel," an obviously hyperbolic opinion that PolitiFact made its 2009 "Lie of the Year." The same liberal pundits angry at PolitiFact now clucked in approval then.

And until last week, they had good reason to be pleased with PolitiFact. If, as Krugman's column suggests, PolitiFact is terrified of being considered partisan, that's because they are partisan. A University of Minnesota survey found the organization has accused Republicans of telling more falsehoods than Democrats by a rate of two to one.

Thanks to PolitiFact's latest effort, our friends on the left, such as the *New Republic*'s Jonathan Cohn, are belatedly noticing that "fact checkers" have "a tendency to confuse statements of opinion, or interpretation, for statements of fact." Indeed.

It's high time liberal pundits figured out that there's more going on in this fact-checking bordello than raucous piano music. If they'd been paying attention, they would have long ago stopped patronizing these journalistic houses of ill repute. ♦

Occupied Trinity

To The Scrapbook's knowledge, there is no evidence Jesus ever said "no good deed goes unpunished." But if He had, the clergy at Trinity Wall Street in Lower Manhattan would know precisely what He meant.

When the Occupy Wall Street mob first assembled in neighboring Zuccotti Park, the Trinity clergy did what Episcopal clergymen have been reliably doing for the past half-century: embrace the latest left-wing fad. According to the *New York Times*, Trinity offered the enclave of superannuated hippies, assorted thugs, anarchists, student radicals, and anti-Semites not just "expressions of sympathy, but also meeting spaces, resting areas, pastoral services, electricity, bathrooms, even blankets and hot chocolate." Go to the Trinity Wall Street website and savor the photographs and accompanying essays. (Our favorite: "Occupy Everything!" by the Rev. Daniel Simons.)

But of course, the character of OWS swiftly turned from peace and love and equality to vandalism and violence and intimidation, prompting Mayor Michael Bloomberg (belatedly) to eject the trespassers and scour the park. This left the diminished ranks of Occupy hangers-on with no place to squat until they settled on a parking lot adjacent to another open space called Duarte Park—both owned, as it happens, by Trinity Wall Street.

This time, however, the rector of Trinity, the Rev. James Cooper, decided that enough had been done on behalf of OWS, and he refused to allow the squatters to occupy church property. Which produced the inevitable reaction: Occupiers have threatened clergy and parishioners, invaded the church precincts, held loud demonstrations, and even enlisted the rhetorical aid of friendlier clerics ("Trinity blew it," says the Rev. Milind Sojwal of All Angels Church on the Upper West Side). Scrapbook readers will not be surprised to learn that Archbishop Desmond Tutu has weighed in, very publicly, on both sides of the issue: demanding that Trinity "find a way to help" the protesters while admonishing the protesters to behave themselves.

Good luck with that. In the meantime, however, and to The Scrapbook's surprise and gratification, Cooper has not budged: "Trinity has probably done as much or more for the protesters than any other institution in the area," he writes on the church website.

> Calling this an issue of "political sanctuary" is manipulative and blind to reality. Equating the desire to seize

this property with uprisings against tyranny is misguided, at best. Hyperbolic distortion drives up petitions signatures, but doesn't make it right.

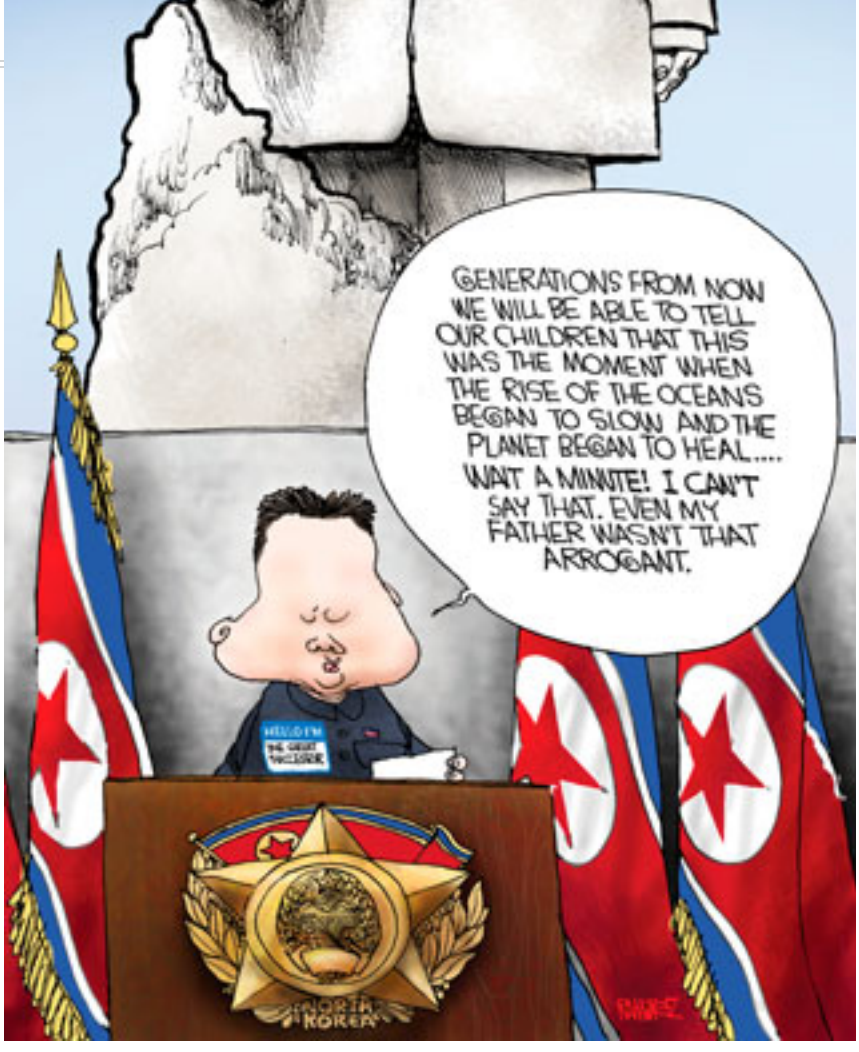
To which The Scrapbook can only say, Amen. ♦

Who's Afraid of the Arab League?

Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., is apparently surprised that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad won't stop killing just because he's been asked to cut it out. Reports of mass slaughter from Syria, Rice wrote last week on her Twitter feed, came "just 2 days after #Syria committed to the #ArabLeague initiative."

It is unclear what Rice expected. If a ruler is leading a bloody campaign against the people to whom he is supposed to be accountable, it is foolish to expect him to respect the diplomatic entreaties of foreign institutions. Rice merits some credit for her outspoken support of the Syrian opposition, and even more for her impassioned speech in October attacking Russia and China for blocking a Security Council resolution condemning Assad. But again, did she expect two notorious human rights abusers would pave the way for Western democracies to quash an authoritarian regime? And why does the Obama administration expect anything useful of the Arab League? This is the triumph of that hopey-changey stuff over experience.

Founded in 1945 in Cairo, the Arab League showed its colors when it relocated to Tunisia from 1979-1989 to protest Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's peace treaty with Israel. The last general secretary of this august body was Amr Moussa, now a candidate for the presidency of Egypt. In 2000, an Egyptian musician named Shaaban Abdel Rahim recorded "I Hate Israel, but I Love Amr Moussa." The wildly popular response to the song so alarmed Mubarak that he removed Moussa, then his foreign minister, from his cabinet and emplaced him at the Arab League. This reshuffle indicated that Mubarak, like other Arab rulers, considered the institution weak, ineffective, and a dark closet where interlopers could be sent to spin their wheels.



It's true that the Arab League's condemnation of Muammar Qaddafi was something of a prerequisite for the NATO campaign in Libya, lending cover as it did to a White House that seeks legitimacy in the strangest quarters. But with the Syrian crisis escalating toward civil war, the White House has essentially farmed out its policy to an institution that many in the Middle East understand is a joke.

Nonetheless, as Frederic Hof, the administration's pointman on Syria, crowed last week, the Arab League initiative is "the main game in town"—suggesting that the White House doesn't have its own playbook. The initiative calls for monitors who will bear witness to the violence and thereby, as administration spokesmen have explained, shame Assad from committing more violence. The game is silly enough—a regime that posts YouTube videos of its own atrocities to intimidate the opposition is incapable of being shamed by witnesses—but the game's players are plain evil.

The head of the Arab League's mission to Syria is General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, a close colleague of Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese president who has been charged by the International Criminal Court for crimes of genocide in Darfur. Dabi became chief of military intelligence the day that Bashir came to office in 1989, and in 1996-1999 was head of military operations against the insurgency in what became South Sudan. In other words, the Arab League has sent Assad a man who can explain to the Syrian dictator how best to get away with murder. After all, the ICC may want to get its hands on Dabi's friend and boss, but Omar al-Bashir still rules Sudan. Wouldn't Assad like a similar outcome?

"It is past time for the killing & suffering in #Syria to come to an end," Ambassador Rice tweeted last week.

That's correct—but there's no use in the White House looking to the Arab League to stop it. ♦

Insidious Bias

The Scrapbook has always maintained that the media deny the existence of left-wing bias for a very good reason: It is invisible to them. Most journalists are so successfully indoctrinated, so reflexively liberal, so submerged in the culture of the left, that they simply don't see what is obvious to everyone else. It's a little like expecting fish to notice the ocean.

We were reminded of this when we read Joe Nocera's op-ed column in the *New York Times* about the financial meltdown. For the past couple of years, Nocera and economists Peter Wallison and Edward Pinto of the American Enterprise Institute have been dueling over the extent of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's culpability in the crisis: Wallison and Pinto assign a fair amount of blame to the hybrid agencies; Nocera thinks their guilt is exaggerated.

The Scrapbook will spare readers details of the column—needless to say, Nocera sticks to his guns and, in *Times* op-ed fashion, persists in characterizing Wallison/Pinto as "loony." What caught our attention, though, was his rhetorical sleight of hand. Early in the piece, Nocera refers to Wallison and Pinto as resident scholars "at the conservative American Enterprise Institute." But when he searches for outside validation of his views, he calls upon "David Min, a leading Wallison critic at the Center for American Progress."

Anybody notice the difference? That's right: While Peter Wallison and Edward Pinto are employed by "the conservative" AEI, there is no comparable epithet to describe David Min's employer. It's just the plain Center for American Progress, an innocent bystander in the ideological wars.

Except, of course, that it isn't. CAP was founded by ex-Clinton White House chief of staff John Podesta and proudly proclaims its left-wing character. The Scrapbook happens to believe that CAP is infinitely more hack-partisan, and considerably less scholarly, than AEI; but that's beside the point. The left-wingers at the Center for American Progress are entitled to their opinions; Nocera, however, is being underhanded when he pins an ideological label on AEI but fails to do the same for CAP.

Indeed, The Scrapbook is more disappointed than annoyed about this, since Joe Nocera is usually better than the standard *Times* ideologue. Which goes to show how pervasive, and insidious, that ideological bias can be. ♦

Indefensible

You might think it hard to find a way to praise a totalitarian regime that urges its starving subjects to do their patriotic duty and eat less, but think again. Writing in the London *Times* about the death of Kim Jong Il, bestselling author Simon Winchester, who has written some fine books, managed to put a blot on his literary escutcheon:

> The State's founder, Kim Il Sung, claimed that all he wanted for North Korea was to be socialist, and to be left alone. . . . Perhaps inevitably, North Korea's attempt appears to be tottering. But seeing how South Korea has turned out—its Koreanness utterly submerged in neon, hip-hop and every imaginable American influence, a romantic can allow himself a small measure of melancholy: North Korea, for all its faults, is undeniably still Korea, a place uniquely representative of an ancient and rather remarkable Asian culture. And that, in a world otherwise rendered so bland, is perhaps no bad thing.

A country memorably described by the late Christopher Hitchens as a "necrocracy" doesn't strike us as romantic. Authentic Korean culture has been supplanted in the North by oppressive Maoist and Stalinist precepts far worse than, say, hip-hop. And if being free of outside influences is such a good thing, why did North Korea's late dictator kidnap people from other countries for his own amusement? We trust Winchester will come to regret defending such a grotesque regime. ♦

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Render Unto Caesars

Las Vegas

"This is, like, your third eye," my massage therapist told me as she dripped a mango-based oil onto my forehead, letting it trickle back through my hair, before she worked her fingers firmly over my scalp. The lights were dimmed and a sensual native beat was emanating softly from the speakers. My hands and feet, meanwhile, were lathered in warm coconut milk and wrapped in towels bearing hot stones.

It was a relaxing feeling, don't get me wrong. But it seemed a bit unmanly. After all, I was a man with mango oil in my hair (not to mention those hot stones). Of course, it was entirely my doing—I had casually mentioned to Caesars Palace public relations I was interested in writing about spa culture and, thanks to their generosity, received a complimentary pass to the hotel's acclaimed Qua Baths and Spa plus the above "Tops and Tails" treatment.

Vegas is legendary for its "comps," especially for the big spenders, or whales, as they are called. Terrance Watanabe, the largest whale ever, flew on private jets, resided in a three-bedroom suite, and went fishing in Alaska, all of it gratis. Of course, he did gamble away approximately $127 million. But even if to a far lesser extent, an ordinary guest can still get comped (anyone can drink for free while gambling—just be sure to tip).

For journalists, being comped is a bit trickier. I, for instance, am in the awkward position of writing about a spa to which I had free access—over and above my free massage. What am I going to say? That I hated it? (I didn't.) *Esquire* food writer John Mariani famously receives free meals wherever he goes but explains it's all legitimate because he's not reviewing restaurants—he's just writing about them. Sounds good to me.

Now about that spa: Despite the economic downturn, according to the International Spa Association, Americans spent $12.8 billion in spas last year, up 4.3 percent from 2009. My massage therapist told me I was the seventh customer of her day, which began at 8 in the morning and ended around 5 at night.

Aside from the massage, I was also interested in the "Roman Rituals." As a pamphlet explains, "These rituals are based on fundamental traditions of Roman culture, specifically communal activities, where people gathered to relax, tell stories, and free themselves from the common day." Communal activities? I envisioned scenes from *Caligula*.

In fact, these gatherings center largely around the baths: the Tepidarium (filled with warm mineral-enriched water), the Caldarium (a smaller and hotter pool), and the Frigidarium (chilled to shrink your, shall we say, pores). The spa is also divided by gender—men to the right, ladies to the left. And when I turned the corner, I realized why: All of the men enjoying the inviting waters were naked. It was a mostly older crowd, to be sure—the kind who no longer care who's around and are more than happy to, in the words of Eric Clapton, let it all hang down. I, on the other hand, stood out in my flower-patterned Gap swim trunks.

Afterwards I briefly checked out the herbal sauna and then the Arctic Ice Room, where I sat on a warmed bench as snowflakes drifted down from a ceiling vent. A burly man clad in a towel explained his routine of alternating between the ice room and the sauna at 20-minute intervals. "It's sort of like detox," he said, following a night of debauchery.

That is certainly one way to relax, although there is another option—the Caesars Palace barber shop, tucked inside the spa. The master barber is Sal Jeppi, a native of Baltimore who's been at the casino for almost 20 years and has been cutting hair since he was 15.

Following the precision haircut, Sal wrapped a steaming towel around my face while *Sinatra at the Sands* was playing in the background. He then applied the hot lather and gave me the smoothest shave I've ever had. "All with a straight edge," he proudly proclaimed. There is no other barber at Caesars—there is no other Sal. He said one of the most important aspects of his job is gauging the customer, knowing if he is in a chatty mood or just wants a quiet cut. "And you never want to say the wrong thing," he added. We talked about the old Vegas and the new, the unbearable traffic, and how Caesars has been mobbed ever since *The Hangover* movie came out. "Everyone wants the *Hangover* suite—then they find out it's $4,000 a night," said Sal, whose shave and a haircut will cost you $150. It didn't cost me $150—I was comped—but that's really beside the point, isn't it?

Victorino Matus

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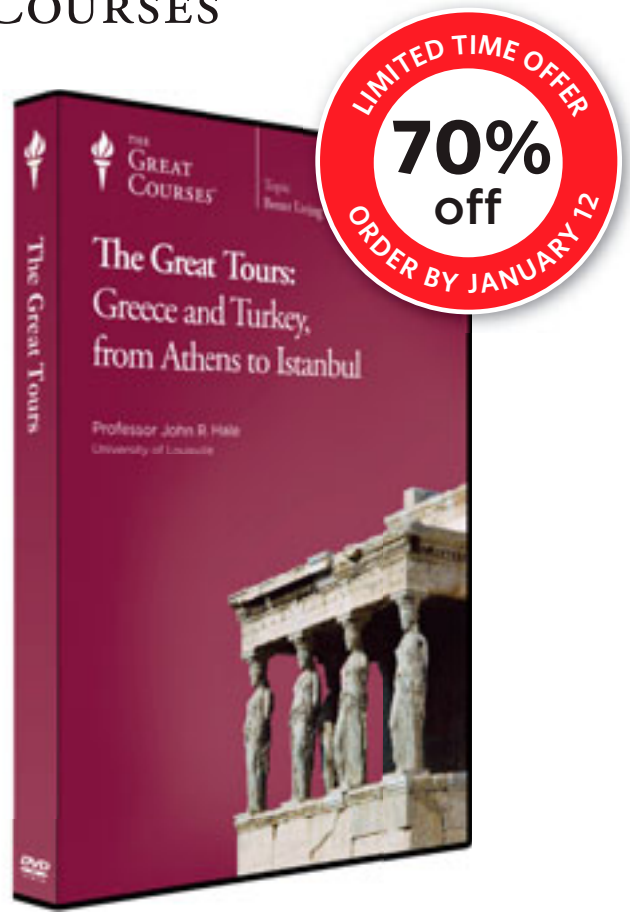

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the weekly Standard

A Time for Choosing

To the Republicans of the states of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Florida:

At this moment of great peril for our nation, you have the privilege of beginning the process of selecting the 2012 Republican presidential nominee—the individual who will save us from the ghastly prospect of an Obama second term, and who will then have the task of beginning to put right our listing ship of state, setting our nation on a course to restored solvency, reinvigorated liberty, and renewed greatness.

Your responsibility is great. Your votes will affect which candidates survive January's electoral gauntlet, their likelihood of ultimately prevailing, and even whether others will feel impelled to enter the race. You, the voters of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Florida, will shape the range of choices for your fellow citizens elsewhere in the nation in this crucial year.

How should you decide for whom to vote?

Vote for the person you think would be the best president of the United States. Ignore the proclamations of the pundits, the sophistries of the strategists, and the calculations of the handicappers. Ignore the ads, the robocalls, and the polls. Be skeptical of those who would seek, whether from national stage or local perch, cavalierly or presumptively to instruct you how to mark your ballot. That ballot is yours alone to cast.

Here the people rule. So you, the Republicans of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Florida, can step back, consider the individual candidates in the totality of their public lives, study their records and platforms, judge their abilities and views, imagine each of them in the Oval Office making major decisions for the nation . . . and choose the individual who you think should be our next president.

As Hamilton puts it in *Federalist* #1:

> The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences nothing less than . . . the safety and welfare of the [Union], the fate of an empire in many respects the most interesting in the world. It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis at which we are arrived may with propriety be regarded as the era in which that decision is to be made; and a wrong election of the part we shall act may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind.

Clockwise from left: State flags of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida

The crisis of 2012 isn't the crisis of 1787. But it is still a crisis. It is not a moment to be swayed by capricious accident or compelled by political force to a wrong election of the part we shall act. It is a moment for reflection and choice.

And it is a moment, as you prepare to cast your vote, for others to reflect on whether they don't owe it to their country to step forward. As this is no time for voters to choose fecklessly, it is no time for leaders to duck responsibility. Those who have stood aside—and who now may have concluded, as they may not have when they announced their original decision, that the current field is lacking—will surely hear the words of Thomas Paine echoing down the centuries: "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." Now is not a time for leaders to engage in clever calculations of the odds of success, or to succumb to concerns about how they will look if they enter the fray and fall short. Now is a time to come to the aid of our country.

—William Kristol

The Real Main Street Agenda

Ladies and gentlemen, prepare for battle! The 2012 campaign is shaping up to be a struggle over which candidate best represents the interests and aspirations of the American middle class. Unable to run on his record, President Obama wants to recast the election as a choice between stolid defender of middle-class values and radical pawn of selfish billionaires. We'll let you figure out who's who.

So far, though, only one side is on the warpath. Since September, when he unveiled his jobs bill before a joint session of Congress, the president has attacked Republicans for sacrificing the middle class on the altar of the rich. The jobs bill may not have gone anywhere, but that wasn't the point. The point was to shift blame for Obama's failures onto the Republicans in Congress.

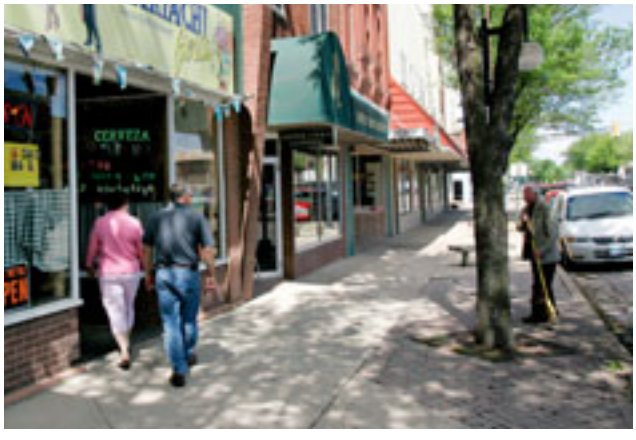
The moneyed interest and its conservative henchmen, Obama is suggesting, are responsible for America's continued economic and political doldrums. Forget about those two years when Democrats controlled the elected branches of government, during which time Congress passed and the president signed into law bills that continued the bailouts, spent a trillion dollars on stimulus, and overhauled the health care and financial systems. History actually began on January 5, 2011, when the 112th Congress was sworn into office.

The president has developed this theme throughout his recent Teddy Roosevelt revival tour. He mentioned the "middle class" no fewer than 21 times during his hyped address at Osawatomie, Kansas, in early December. Last week's insipid manuevering over the payroll tax cut was designed to make House Republicans look as though they were eager to raise taxes on 160 million people. The president's defense of public- and private-sector labor unions—if the UAW can still be considered a private-sector union—conflates the jobs, salaries, and health and retirement benefits of 12 percent of the workforce with the "middle class," broadly defined.

What have Republicans said in response? Well, not much. With the exception of Jeff Sessions of Alabama, ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, not enough spokesmen for conservatism have stated the obvious: President Obama's agenda, in practically every aspect, has been and continues to be either irrelevant or inimical to the future of bourgeois America.

A thriving middle class depends on a thriving economy. Yet Obama has been unable to restart the American jobs machine. Trillions in annual deficits, historically low interest rates, and short-term gimmicks like Cash for Clunkers have given us an unemployment rate of 8.6 percent in November 2011, still higher than when the president was inaugurated. Obama's response to these dismal numbers is to say that things could've been worse. But how does that help the 13 million Americans out of work and stuck with Obama's tab?

Middle-class incomes have fared poorly over the last decade not only because of the recession, but because increases in health premiums have soaked up wage growth. In 2007 and 2008, then-candidate Obama pledged time and again that if elected he would reduce premiums by $2,500 per year. Obamacare was sold as an exercise in cost-containment. But the administration's own actuary says the Affordable Care Act will increase, not decrease, health care spending by hundreds of billions of dollars. And premiums have gone up, not down, by more than $2,000 since Obama has been president.



AP PHOTO / JIM MONE

If you think the middle class is hurting now, wait until it has to cough up the money for $62 trillion in unfunded entitlement obligations. Here, too, the president has failed to address the problem. Whether it's the Bowles-Simpson Commission, the Rivlin-Domenici Commission, or Paul Ryan and Ron Wyden's plan for Medicare reform, Obama has passed on bipartisan opportunities to put America's finances on sustainable ground. He remains fixated on increasing taxes on the wealthy, a controversial position among Republicans and some Democrats and a policy that will do next to nothing to close the budget gap.

A real middle-class agenda would break from the Obama administration's failed economic strategy. The tax code would be reformed by ending handouts and special favors and by lessening the burden on working families through permanently lower payroll taxes and a generous child credit. Jobs would surge thanks to an energy sector liberated from the green lobby. Obamacare would be repealed and replaced with legislation that emphasizes consumer choice and competition in health care, increasing productivity and lowering costs.

Medicare and Medicaid would be tamed before their runaway spending ends in a fiscal crisis.

These measures wouldn't just help the middle class. They'd help every American. Which is one more reason the coming fight is so important.

—Matthew Continetti

In Praise of the House

On the night Republicans won control of the House of Representatives in November 2010, John Boehner laid out the new Congress's key priorities: to restrain the growth of government, cut spending, reform how Congress works, and end the uncertainty in the economy to help get Americans back to work. But then he offered a cautionary note to voters: "While our new majority will serve as your voice in the people's House, we must remember it is the president who sets the agenda for our government."

As the first year of the 112th Congress draws to a close, it seems that Boehner, like so many other Americans, may have overestimated Barack Obama's ability to govern. It would not be easy to say just what the president's agenda has actually been over the past year. But House Republicans have done an impressive job of using what leverage they have had to pull Washington a bit rightward, and to set the stage for a real change of direction after 2012.

To begin with, Republicans have put a stop to the explosion of liberal activism that characterized President Obama's first two years in office. Those years saw a massively wasteful stimulus boondoggle, a vast expansion of the government's role in the health care system, a formalization and reinforcement of the too-big-to-fail approach to financial regulation, a 25 percent increase in domestic discretionary spending, and the two largest federal deficits in American history. Regulatory discretion, crony capitalism, and interest-group giveaways were the order of the day. The economy stagnated. It will take a great deal of work over many years to undo the damage, but House Republicans at least managed to halt its further reach.

They have also managed to restrain the growth of spending—though by less than they would have liked. In the budget they proposed in April, they laid out exactly what they hoped to do, looking to spur economic growth and avert fiscal catastrophe by cutting $6 trillion in federal spending over the budget's first decade, and then cutting far more (balancing the budget and beginning to pay down the debt) in subsequent years through a transformation of Medicare.

That budget set an agenda, but putting it into effect would require more than just a Republican House. For fiscal year 2012, for instance, the House GOP budget proposed to spend $3.529 trillion, while President Obama's budget proposed to spend $3.708 trillion. In the end, after a series of dramatic showdowns, the federal government will spend $3.618 trillion, according to the Congressional Budget Office. On nondefense discretionary spending, Republicans proposed to spend $581 billion in 2012 while the president called for $644 billion. In the end, the government will spend $628 billion. That's a start, but a very modest one. Doing more requires further victories.

But, while Republicans recognized the limits of their power, they also saw the potential of their House majority to change the conversation in Washington. They have changed the question that guides the policy process from how much to spend to how much to cut. The past year has seen one showdown after another between the president and House Republicans (while Senate Democrats have been largely derelict), but almost every fight has taken place on the Republicans' turf. The Democrats have been forced to talk about the deficit, even if they still decline to do anything about it, and they have been forced to acknowledge the scope of our entitlement problem.

And it is on that front—the coming entitlement crisis that is easily the foremost cause of the impossibly grim fiscal projections that now confront the federal government—that House Republicans have made the most progress of all. This would not have been easy to predict a year ago, when it was far from clear if House Republicans would even propose any reforms of the Medicare program, which is at the core of the entitlement crisis. But, thanks especially to the leadership of Budget Committee chairman Paul Ryan, they proposed a bold reform that would turn Medicare into a premium-support system starting in 2022, and so could improve American health care in the coming decades while saving the government trillions of dollars.

Politically, the proposal was a daring gamble. Democrats at first thought it offered them a huge opportunity to scare seniors away from Republicans, and even many Republican politicians were wary of lining up behind the House budget. But by now it is becoming clear that the move will pay off. It has, for one thing, solidified conservative support for such a reform of Medicare, making it the new Republican orthodoxy. A year ago, no Republican presidential candidate would have backed a premium-support proposal. Today, they all do (except Ron Paul), and thus there is little doubt that the party's nominee will too.

As the year drew to a close, there were even glimmers of movement toward such a reform among Democrats. In November, the *New York Times* reported that some congressional Democrats were quietly coming to the conclusion that not only was premium-support *not* an assault on the elderly, but that, "if carefully designed, with enough protections for beneficiaries—it might work." In December, one of those Democrats—Senator Ron Wyden

of Oregon—stepped forward to offer a premium-support proposal together with none other than Paul Ryan. Not even the most optimistic champions of market-based entitlement reform could have imagined such a thing a year ago.

There were, of course, serious missteps this year too. In the debt-ceiling talks, Republicans agreed to an arrangement involving steep defense cuts if the "supercommittee" failed to reach its deficit-reduction target, as it was all but destined to do. And at times the House majority has refused to take "yes" for an answer—indeed, if not for a needless delay in passing Speaker Boehner's debt-ceiling proposal, some of the defense cuts in the final deal might well have been avoided.

But, given the fact that they controlled only one house of Congress while Democrats held the other and the presidency, Boehner and his members have a lot to be proud of. They showed that it is not always true that "it is the president who sets the agenda for our government." Confronted with a very liberal but weak and ineffective president, House Republicans managed to play an outsized role in setting that agenda, and in helping the public to see why electing a new president should top the agenda for 2012.

—Yuval Levin

The Candidates and Repeal

During a recent *60 Minutes* interview, President Obama revealed that he was being modest when he awarded himself a B+ grade near the end of his first year as president. "I would put our legislative and foreign policy accomplishments in our first two years against any president—with the possible exceptions of Johnson, FDR, and Lincoln—just in terms of what we've gotten done in modern history," the president said.

While remarkable in its arrogance, the most striking thing about Obama's comment on *60 Minutes* is that it could prove true. Obama might indeed deserve a high rank in terms of his success in deliberately changing the course of American history. And in Obama's case, not for the better. If Obama is reelected, it's quite possible that Americans will never again enjoy the liberty, fiscal solvency, or economic prosperity enjoyed by our forebears. That's how bad Obamacare, the centerpiece of Obama's legacy, truly is, and why it must be repealed.

Not all Republican leaders realize this. The rank-and-file Republican and independent voters who gave the GOP an overwhelming victory in the 2010 elections understood how urgently important it is to repeal Obamacare before it would really go into effect at the start of 2014. Meeting that goal requires defeating Obama. But many of the candidates running for the GOP nomination in 2012 don't seem to be focused on the prospect that Obamacare could become a permanent part of American life.

In the immediate aftermath of Obamacare's passage, most Republicans were determined—as they are now—to repeal the law in its entirety. Yet Mitt Romney merely called for repealing "the worst aspects of Obamacare," saying he hoped we could ultimately "repeal the bad and keep the good." When comparing his Massachusetts health care overhaul with Obamacare, Romney said, "I like some of the similarities." Since then, Romney seems to have come around to full repeal, but he's been rather evasive about the similarities that he once claimed to like. These include requiring essentially everyone (not just 8 percent of the population, as Romney has repeatedly maintained is the case in Massachusetts) to buy government-approved health insurance under penalty of law; substantially expanding Medicaid; offering huge taxpayer-funded subsidies for insurance purchased through government-run "exchanges"; and increasing access to taxpayer-subsidized abortion.

Of further concern is Romney's lack of emphasis on repeal. In his economic plan, Romney talks about repealing Obamacare, but he doesn't list a repeal bill among the first five pieces of legislation he'd propose to Congress. He has talked a lot about issuing Obamacare waivers, but little about shepherding full repeal legislation through the House and Senate. He has given almost no indication that he'd make repeal a cornerstone of a general election campaign.

Romney is hardly the only Republican candidate who appears to be less than fully consumed with advancing repeal. Ron Paul simply lumps Obamacare in with all other excessive expansions of federal power. Rick Perry seems dedicated to repeal in theory, but too often his comments on health care veer off into energy policy. Rick Santorum and Jon Huntsman also support repeal, but neither has made it a centerpiece of his campaign.

Only Newt Gingrich and Michele Bachmann have prioritized the issue to the degree that it would seem to merit. Gingrich unequivocally lists repeal as the first item on his legislative agenda and has said, "I think that'll be the campaign theme in September and October of next year." As for his earlier support of an individual mandate, Gingrich now plainly states, "I concluded I was wrong." Bachmann has repeatedly made it clear that she rightly regards the repeal of Obamacare as a matter that will define us as a nation.

Whoever eventually wins the Republican nomination will represent the party in the most momentous presidential race in generations. The Republican nominee will be positioned to beat Obama and sign into law the repeal of his signature legislation. If, and only if, the GOP nominee completes both parts of that task, will he or she leave behind a historic legacy—and replace Obama on the list of consequential presidents.

—Jeffrey H. Anderson

Inconsequential Iowa

Ignore the caucus results. They won't matter.

BY FRED BARNES

GARY LOCKE

When Senator Paul Simon of Illinois was running for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1988, one of his first stops was in the backyard of a residence in Wartburg, Iowa. About 100 people had assembled to hear him. The first question: What's up in Namibia?

Iowa is different. It was in 1988 and it is now. Nowhere else in the universe would a Third World country be the subject of the first question for a candidate for the White House. So Iowa is an odd place to have the first votes cast in a presidential race. Yet that's what will occur on January 3 in Republican caucuses around the state.

But never mind Iowa. The candidates, the political community, and the media pay a dizzying amount of attention to the state, though the results of the caucuses rarely matter. They aren't predictive. The winner doesn't usually capture the nomination, much less the presidency. Ronald Reagan came in second in 1980 and went on to become a two-term president. John McCain essentially skipped Iowa in 2008 and won the nomination anyway.

There are exceptions. Since Jimmy Carter in 1980, incumbent presidents have been unopposed and have swept the caucuses effortlessly. George W. Bush in 2000 and Barack Obama in 2008 won Iowa, the nomination, and the White House.

In all likelihood, though, they would have won even if they'd lost Iowa. And having won the caucuses, they both proceeded to lose the next contest, the New Hampshire primary. Bush had a juggernaut of a campaign and was too well financed for the caucuses to matter in his stroll to the nomination. As for Obama, he defeated Hillary Clinton by splitting the primaries and prevailing in caucus states other than Iowa that Clinton ignored. Iowa helped, but it was far from decisive.

Bush and Obama are hardly trivial exceptions to the rule that Iowa is irrelevant. But compared with the one-hit wonders who disappeared after Iowa, and the Iowa losers who triumphed elsewhere, their success looms small.

Among Democrats, "uncommitted" ran ahead of Jimmy Carter in 1976. Dick Gephardt won in 1988, Simon was second, and the eventual nominee, Michael Dukakis, finished third. Four years later, favorite son Tom Harkin won, then went nowhere. Among Republicans, the 2008 winner was Mike Huckabee, now a Fox News television personality.

Iowa victors who gain their party's nomination have a distinct habit of losing general elections. Democrats John Kerry, Al Gore, and Walter Mondale are members of this club. Republicans George H.W. Bush and Bob Dole also belong.

And let's not forget the ballyhooed Ames straw poll in which Republican presidential candidates compete. It's a media swarmfest that tests a candidate's ability to drag voters to Ames on a Saturday in August prior to election year. The winners: the elder Bush in 1979, Pat Robertson in 1987, Bob Dole and Phil Gramm (tied) in 1995, the younger Bush in 1999, Mitt Romney in 2007, and Michele Bachmann in 2011. Only Bush junior won the White House, though Bachmann still technically has a chance.

Like the straw vote, the caucuses are tailor-made for candidates with little chance of becoming president. The broad complaint against Iowa is that it's unrepresentative of the country, with few minorities and lots of rural voters. Indeed it is unrepresentative, but so are New Hampshire and South Carolina, the first two primary states.

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What makes the caucuses unique are two peculiarities. Iowa has a robust pro-life movement that overlaps with Christian conservatives, including homeschoolers, who are politically active and well organized. This powerful coalition was responsible for catapulting Huckabee, a former Baptist preacher, to victory in 2007.

This year, social conservatives are divided among three candidates—Rick Santorum, Rick Perry, and Michele Bachmann. Santorum got the endorsement last week of Bob Vander Plaats, the influential president of t he Family Leader. In a TV ad aimed at social conservatives, Perry says he's not embarrassed to call himself a Christian.

The second trait, which Iowa shares with several other states in the Midwest, is a legacy of isolationism. This is more pronounced on the Democratic side, but it has manifested itself this year in tolerance among Iowa Republicans for Ron Paul's fervent isolationist views and support for a diminished American role in the world, at least militarily.

In a televised debate in Sioux City on December 15, Paul didn't sugarcoat his foreign policy pitch. He waved his arms while claiming there's "no evidence" Iran is building nuclear weapons. If his harangue caused a dip in his support, it didn't show up in polls. He has also suggested the United States provoked the 9/11 terrorist attacks by interfering in Middle East countries.

Paul is the perfect candidate for the caucuses. His prospects of winning the Republican nomination are poor. But he appeals to conservatives impressed by his libertarianism, his plan to cut $1 trillion in spending in his first year as president, and his desire to shutter the Federal Reserve. Paul has focused his campaign on Iowa at the expense of other states. And starting with his 2008 presidential bid, he's built a devoted Iowa following, loaded with non-Republicans.

Republican leaders are increasingly worried about Paul. Should he win, "it would make the caucuses mostly irrelevant if not entirely irrelevant," veteran Iowa Republican Becky Beach told *Politico*. Nothing new about that. ♦

Is Iraq Lost?

Things fall apart . . .

BY KIMBERLY KAGAN & FREDERICK W. KAGAN

With administration officials celebrating the "successful" withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, thanking antiwar groups for making that withdrawal possible, and proffering outrageous claims about Iraq's "stability," "sovereignty," and the "demilitarization" of American foreign policy even as Iraq collapses, it is hard to stay focused on America's interests and security requirements. Especially in an election year, the temptation will only grow to argue about who lost Iraq, whether it was doomed from the outset, whether the current disaster "proves" either that the success of the surge was inherently ephemeral or that the withdrawal of U.S. troops caused the collapse. The time will come for such an audit of Iraq policy over the last five years, but not yet. For the crisis in Iraq is still unfolding, and the United States continues to have a huge stake in the outcome. The question of the moment is not "Who lost Iraq?" but rather "Is Iraq definitely lost?"

It certainly seems so. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki appears to be undertaking a deliberate and rapid strategy of driving the principal Sunni leaders out of his government and consolidating his personal control over parliament, the executive branch, and the security forces. He had been moving in that direction for several years, but generally with caution and occasional reversals.

The impending withdrawal of U.S. military forces and the revelation of a plot to assassinate him at the end of November seem to have brought his normally conspiratorial mind to fever pitch. He appears to have dramatically accelerated this Sunni purge after his meeting with President Obama in Washington.

Maliki has acted in the political realm with the same suddenness and determination with which he launched the military operation in 2008 that retook Basra from Iranian-backed Shiite militias. He has thus once again taken both Iraqis and Americans by surprise.

He began the escalation of the crisis by sending tanks of the Baghdad Brigade, commanded by his son, to surround the residence of Vice President Tariq al Hashimi, arresting several of Hashimi's bodyguards and forcing confessions from them implicating Hashimi in terrorist plots—including one to assassinate Maliki. Almost before that news could be assimilated, he revealed an arrest warrant for the Sunni vice president and demanded a no-confidence vote in the Sunni deputy prime minister, Saleh Mutlaq. As Iraqi parliamentarians were mulling over that demand, Maliki let it be known that he had decided he had the power to fire Mutlaq without vote and that he had already done so.

Mutlaq and Hashimi have both fled to Erbil, where the Kurds are sheltering them. Maliki wasted no time, however, in demanding that the Kurds hand Hashimi over for trial, thus escalating a sectarian conflict into an ethno-sectarian struggle.

Events in the provinces are even more worrisome. Provincial councils in three of the four principal Sunni provinces (Anbar, Diyala, and Salahaddin) have declared their intention to form autonomous federal regions similar to the Kurdish Regional Government, in accord

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with the relevant provisions of the Iraqi constitution. Maliki has angrily denied that they have any such right, and has dispatched security forces to Diyala to prevent secessionist activities. Diyala has always been among the provinces most fraught with sectarian tension, and this political escalation is mirrored there by the reemergence of local militias, including Moktada al-Sadr's Jaysh al Mahdi, preparing for sectarian violence. With both the Sunni political leadership and local Sunni groups seceding from or being driven out of the government, the stage is set for a return to sectarian civil war.

Terrorist groups seem to be seizing this opportunity to accelerate sectarian and political conflict, as they have in the past, to create openings in which they can operate freely. Sixteen bombings occurred in 11 neighborhoods of Baghdad on December 22, killing scores and wounding hundreds. Most of these neighborhoods had been heavily contested either as Al Qaeda in Iraq safe havens or as sectarian fault lines at the height of the 2006-07 conflict. It is unclear as of this writing who conducted these attacks, but their locations, along with the escalation of tensions in Diyala Province, are likely to be significant accelerants to the renewal of sectarian fighting.

The reemergence of civil war in Iraq would be disastrous for the United States and its allies. It would be an enormous political and moral defeat for the United States and could rapidly expand to spark a regional conflict with the Sunni Arab states led by Saudi Arabia confronting Iran and its proxies in Mesopotamia. It would also very likely shock the oil market, which has been pricing in expected increases in Iraq's oil production that will very likely be delayed, possibly significantly. Considering that the Obama administration had accepted the European position against sanctioning Iran's Central Bank for fear that rising oil prices could undermine fragile economic recoveries, the prospect of falling Iraqi oil production should also raise concerns about the well-being of the global economy. State fracture or collapse in Iraq, finally, would create conditions favorable to the reemergence of both Sunni and Shiite militias and terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The withdrawal of all American military forces has greatly reduced America's leverage in Iraq. U.S. military forces were a buffer to prevent political and ethno-sectarian friction from becoming violent by guaranteeing Maliki against a Sunni coup d'état and guaranteeing the Sunnis against a Shiite campaign of militarized repression. The withdrawal of that buffer precipitated this crisis and removed much of our leverage. The withdrawal is complete and unlikely to be reversed. Still, the United States maintains some leverage in Iraq and considerable leverage in the region. The Obama administration will have to use all of its skills to maximize the impact of what leverage it retains.

Nuri al-Maliki: L'Irak, c'est moi.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

The key players in the denouement of this political crisis will be the Kurds, who hold the swing bloc of votes in the Iraqi parliament. If the Kurds back Maliki, either explicitly or simply by refusing to vote no-confidence in him, then the prospect of any Sunni-Kurd alliance will evaporate, and the Sunni Arabs will very likely move toward federalism and, when Maliki opposes the partition of Iraq, violence.

If the Kurds align with the Sunnis and threaten to vote Maliki out, more options open. A Kurd-Sunni alliance would have to resolve disputes in Nineveh Province, which is also central to Baghdad politics since the Nineveh provincial governor, Atheel Nujaifi, is the brother of the speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Osama Nujayfi. Such a Kurd-Arab deal could secure stability in Nineveh and possibly provide a more stable cross-ethnic base to create a soft landing for federalist movements in neighboring Salahaddin and Anbar Provinces. Such a Kurdish position could conceivably persuade Maliki to back away from the most extreme steps he has taken—causing the arrest warrant for Hashimi to be revoked by the "independent" judiciary that issued it, for example, and restoring Mutlaq to his position. If Maliki retreated in that way, the crisis would not be resolved—fundamental elements of trust have been shattered, and it is almost impossible to see a stable cross-sectarian government in Baghdad now with Maliki as prime minister. But it would open the way to negotiations both among the Shiites (who are by no means monolithically aligned with Maliki) and between the Shiite and Sunni leadership at both national and provincial levels.

The United States does continue to have significant leverage on the Kurds, who still look to Washington as guarantors of their security in the event of a renewed ethnic civil war. Above all, the Kurds are extremely leery of the planned sale of F-16s and M1 tanks to an Iraqi military that could be attacking Kurdistan again should things go badly. Turkey has even more leverage with the Kurds, since Erbil sees Ankara as the alternative to the United States should a Kurd-Arab fight reemerge. U.S. policy should now be heavily focused

on getting Erbil to play a constructive role in mediating the intra-Arab dispute rather than pursuing shortsighted attempts to capitalize on it. This requires the kind of "smart power" that this administration supposedly excels at, and it requires the full backing of the Congress and the full attention of the White House and the State Department.

We can relitigate the wisdom of the invasion, the course of the war, the success of the surge, and other important questions endlessly, but one thing should be perfectly plain. From the moment U.S. forces left Iraq, President Barack Obama owned the policy and its outcome. Yet the administration has never articulated a strategy or policy for Iraq after the withdrawal. It has focused on spinning the collapse of both U.S.-Iraqi negotiations and the Iraqi political settlements as success, and on throwing all responsibility for whatever happens next in Iraq on the Iraqis, who—the administration never tires of reminding us—are sovereign. Iraq is, indeed, a sovereign state, although possibly not for much longer if trends toward state collapse continue, and Maliki bears personal responsibility for his own actions and decisions. But Iraq's sovereignty and Maliki's personal responsibility do not eliminate Amerian interests in Iraq or relieve the administration of the obligation to pursue them.

Like it or not, the timing of the moves against Hashimi et al. upon Maliki's return from Washington has created a perception in Iraq that these actions were authorized by Washington. The United States must counter that perception publicly and privately.

Further, the administration must recognize that a return to the status quo ante is not tenable or desirable. Maliki has gone too far down his current path; besides, the political arrangement that emerged after the elections of 2010 was always fraught with problems. Now, Maliki has shown his true colors. If the president and his administration admit this, they may see policy options they previously hadn't considered or weren't willing to employ. ♦

Still Romney's Race to Lose

A candidate custom-made for the nominating process. BY JAY COST

We are just days away from the start of the caucus and primary season, and while many questions remain, it is nevertheless possible to get a sense of where we have been, where we are going, and what all of this means for the Republican party.

It is undeniable that this race remains Mitt Romney's to lose. While his position in the national horse race matchup is far from decisive—at this writing the RealClearPolitics average of the national polls shows Newt Gingrich with a slight lead—Romney dominates in all of the structural categories that typically correspond with victory. He has a huge money advantage—with more than $14 million in cash on hand as of the last report mandated by the Federal Election Commission (and that does not include the financial assistance he has received from "SuperPacs" that operate freely on his behalf). This financial edge gives Romney the ability to flood the early states with television advertisements and employ plenty of professional staffers to manage his ground game. Romney also has a runaway lead in the race for endorsements by Republican officeholders; while these move few voters, they reinforce Romney's institutional advantages, giving him greater access to well-heeled donors as well as on-the-ground campaign intelligence.

Mitt Romney

NATE BEELER

What's more, Romney also has the clearest path to victory. He is obviously trying to re-create John McCain's 2008 coalition—uniting moderate Republicans with those who consider themselves somewhat conservative. While these voters are not the loudest voices in the GOP, they nevertheless constituted a majority of Republican primary voters in 2008, so it makes sense for Romney to go after them. And unlike McCain, Romney faces virtually no formidable competition for these center-right voters. McCain had to contend with Rudy Giuliani, who was making a serious play for them and had put together a well-funded operation, while Romney has to deal only with the Jon Huntsman candidacy, which has so far failed to gain traction.

Still, huge questions remain about the Romney candidacy. Historically, such massive institutional advantages have usually corresponded with a commensurate lead in national polling, as candidates with a strong enough reputation to attract insider backing usually draw widespread public support. Yet that is not the case this time around: Romney has struggled to move beyond 25 percent in the national polls, and while he has consistently enjoyed a strong lead in New Hampshire and Nevada, he has rarely been in first place in the other early states—Iowa, Florida, and South Carolina.

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That said, the conventional wisdom about Romney's candidacy—that there is a huge "not Romney" bloc of GOP voters out there—is massively overstated. Romney's favorable rating among prospective Republican primary voters is quite high, upwards of 60 percent, and the latest CNN poll of GOP voters shows that 80 percent of Republicans either support him now or would consider supporting him at some point; this is a larger number than that of any of his major competitors. Yet the theory about a "not Romney" bloc has some merit; what is particularly noteworthy about his numbers is that a relatively large proportion of the GOP electorate—between 40 and 50 percent—believe he will eventually be the nominee, but his actual support tends to be about half that size. So, if there is no vehement "not Romney" faction of Republicans, there is at least a group of GOP voters who are hesitant for some reason.

This remains Romney's big concern, and while history might favor his candidacy, recent history does not, at least not nearly to the same extent. McCain's victory in 2008 came despite a relative lack of money, endorsements, and the attention usually accorded a frontrunner. Instead, McCain caught fire at just the right moment, won New Hampshire narrowly over Romney, then defeated Mike Huckabee narrowly in South Carolina, and that was pretty much that. It's possible that this could happen again: While voters do not actively dislike Romney, they are not particularly drawn to him either, and might end up flocking to a reasonable alternative who emerged at precisely the right moment.

But who is that person? This pre-primary year has seen a series of candidates contend as the "not Romney": Newt Gingrich in early 2011, followed by Michele Bachmann, then Rick Perry, then Herman Cain, and now back to Gingrich. None of these candidates has been able to withstand the scrutiny that goes along with frontrunner status, and while Gingrich is the most recent "not Romney" candidate, he is also arguably the weakest. He has been a creature of the Washington establishment for decades, he has little institutional support, he has a ton of personal and political baggage, and he regularly displays a lack of discipline as a candidate.

In the end, it is hard to see how any of these candidates besides Romney can win the nomination. Is there a plausible scenario in which a Perry, a Gingrich, or a Bachmann carries the day, despite their limitations? Perhaps, but none comes easily to mind. Consider in particular Gingrich. Despite his polling lead nationwide, his numbers have plummeted in Iowa because of Romney's and Ron Paul's relentless attacks on his record. This is a pattern that could easily be repeated in state after state if need be, and Gingrich has not yet formulated an effective response. Thus, his national lead looks terribly ephemeral. Similarly, the other "not Romneys" have baggage that could be exploited, which explains why none of them has caught on to date.

And the latest candidate to see a polling boost—Ron Paul—will never be the Republican nominee for the simple reason that he is not actually a Republican. He caucuses with the congressional GOP for strategic reasons, but he is at his core a libertarian, and too far out of step with the Republican electorate on a host of issues, most obviously national security. Paul might be able to win the Iowa caucuses because turnout there will be very small, but he will really have nowhere to go after that. If anything, Paul's rise probably helps Romney in that it diminishes the supply of voters from which another "not Romney" could draw.

When all is said and done, we might conclude that Romney had this nomination sewn up in September. By that point, all of the most impressive GOP figures who could have competed as "not Romney"—Jeb Bush, Chris Christie, Mitch Daniels, Bobby Jindal, Tim Pawlenty, Marco Rubio, and Paul Ryan—had either declined to run or dropped out. You cannot beat someone with no one, after all, and if none of the actual alternatives to Romney is of sufficient stature to challenge him, then *he will not be challenged*.

Therein lies the enormous problem with our current presidential nomination system. It is uncontroversial to state that Mitt Romney is not really in step with the post-2008 Republican party, and yet he looks likely to win its nomination. Why? Because the rules of the game favor a candidate like him—somebody with insider connections, capable of raising tens of millions of dollars, spending more than a year toggling between Iowa and New Hampshire, and so on. The other candidates the current rules might also have favored dropped out or declined to run, so Romney is set to win by default.

Grassroots conservatives who are upset about this can complain about Mitt Romney's alleged heterodoxies or the iron grip that the Beltway elite supposedly has over the system, but in the end they have only themselves to blame. Political parties, after all, are open institutions that anyone is free to join, and if the system is in disrepair it can only mean that Republican partisans—the grassroots—have failed to fix it. It is worth remembering as well that the current nomination system has been in place for nearly half a century, and despite a mountain of evidence from nearly a dozen presidential cycles that it is grossly inefficient, conservatives have spent no intellectual or political effort in reforming it. Apparently the chickens are coming home to roost.

Perhaps 2012 will be the year that the GOP grassroots finally takes a cue from the progressives of 100 years ago, who made a point of focusing on the political process in addition to public policy. Those early 20th-century liberals made a lasting mark: They understood that a broken process cannot yield good policy, so they backed significant, lasting reforms like the direct election of senators, recall petitions, ballot initiatives, and so on. It is high time that conservatives start thinking seriously about ways to fix our many broken political institutions, and our terrible candidate-selection process should rank at the top of the list. ♦

What If Ron Paul Wins Iowa?

He's crazy, they're not.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

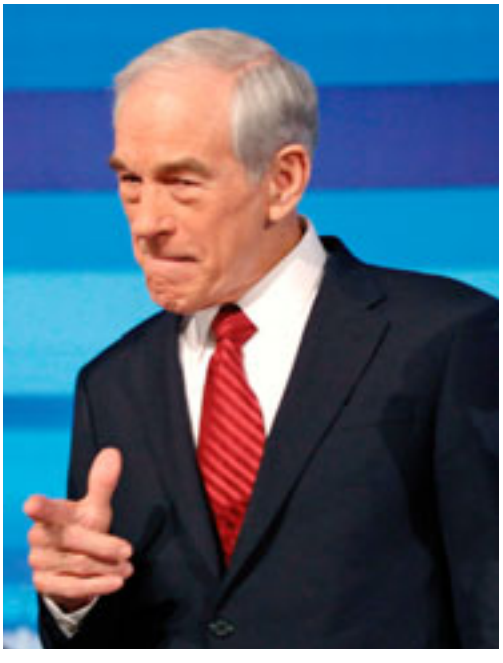
It's started early this time. Nobody in Iowa has cast a vote in the 2012 Republican presidential caucuses. It's not even 2012. But the quadrennial calls for an end to Iowa's first-in-the-country caucuses have begun.

The problem this year: Ron Paul might win. Less than two weeks before the voting on January 3, the libertarian is leading several polls of likely Iowa caucusgoers. For many commentators, this is taken as evidence that Iowa cannot be entrusted with its role as the state that kicks off presidential voting every four years.

That's the problem this week, anyway. When Michele Bachmann won the Ames straw poll in August, that, too, was taken as evidence that Iowa voters were too unsophisticated to be trusted with voting. And when Mike Huckabee won the caucuses in 2008 with 35 percent of the vote, the state was declared unrepresentative because it was home to a disproportionate number of conservative evangelicals.

Over the last several years, Iowa has been criticized, often by reporters from the East Coast, for being too white, too agrarian, too Christian, and now too libertarian. Is the alarm over Ron Paul perhaps a tiny bit insincere?

There's no doubt that Paul is in many respects an unattractive candidate. He published newsletters with racist and anti-Semitic commentary and refuses to offer an explanation as to why. He seems open to several nutty conspiracy theories or at least friendly to others who believe them. His national security views are sometimes to the left of President Obama and require a denial of basic reality that makes them not just naïve but dangerous. And finally, he is not going to win the Republican nomination.



There's a reason he's doing well in Iowa.

But is the problem Iowa? Or is the problem the Republican field?

An Iowa voter could look at his choices and see: (1) a former Obama administration official whose top strategist called Republicans "cranks"; (2) a former senator who lost his last race by 18 points and who has run largely on social issues in this time of economic uncertainty; (3) an inexperienced congresswoman from Minnesota with a tendency to misstate facts and a staff with higher turnover than a fast-food restaurant's; (4) a former speaker of the House who praised Hillary Clinton on health care, worked with Nancy Pelosi on global warming, made $1.6 million from Freddie Mac, wants mirrors in space, and has demagogued Medicare reform from the left; (5) a big-state governor who doesn't know the details of his own tax plan, who doesn't know what government agencies he's promised to cut, who claimed that those who disagree with him on immigration have no heart, and is best known for his many painfully awkward moments in debates; (6) a moderate former governor whose health care plan served as a model for Obamacare, who once called himself a "progressive" Republican not in the tradition of Ronald Reagan, who flip-flopped even on the question of whether he is a flip-flopper, and who largely ignored Iowa until he decided a few weeks ago that he had a chance to win there.

Uncharitable? Yes. Untrue? No.

If this is how you view your choices, a protest vote—even for Ron Paul—isn't really so irrational. And in such a scenario, doesn't the fact that Paul cannot win the Republican nomination argue in favor of such a protest vote, not against it?

Of course not all votes for Paul will be protests. So what explains his ability to increase his share of the vote from 10 percent in 2008 to, say, the 28 percent in an Iowa State poll of likely caucusgoers taken in mid-December? Issues and organization.

Consider some other findings of that poll. When voters were asked to pick the most important issue from a list of 12, 35 percent said "jobs and the economy," 24 percent said "the size and role of the federal government," and 21.5 percent said "national debt and the deficit." Asked the most important quality they were seeking in a candidate, more voters answered "takes a strong stand" (32 percent) than anything else.

Is there a candidate in the race who

AP / CHRIS CARLSON

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has taken stronger stands than Paul? Who has focused more directly and consistently on those top three issues than Paul? How has Paul overcome his often-wacky, sometimes indefensible foreign policy views? In a state that historically has some strong noninterventionist tendencies, it doesn't take much. And he's had help from his rivals and Republicans in Washington. Republicans generally have downplayed the importance of the issues that would hurt Paul. Several candidates have echoed the (erroneous) claim from Admiral Mike Mullen that the greatest national security threat facing the country is debt. And congressional Republicans signed onto a plan that would automatically cut some $500 billion more from the defense budget than the $450 billion proposed by President Obama.

Furthermore, Paul has been building an organization in Iowa for more than four years. Newt Gingrich sent out a press release earlier this month touting the co-chairs he had recruited in 23 Iowa counties. Iowa has 99 counties. Paul's campaign has been active, to some degree, in all of them. He finished second in the Ames straw poll thanks in part to this organization, and it's a safe bet it'll help him do well on January 3, partly by appealing to independents and even some Democrats willing to cross over and register as Republicans for the caucus. "Paul's rise is contrary to the assertion that grassroots caucus organizing doesn't matter," says one Iowa Republican operative. "He is running the most traditional of caucus-organizing campaigns."

Finally, if Ron Paul were to win the Iowa caucuses, he would likely do so with something like a quarter of the vote. He won't be the nominee. But a quarter of Iowa caucus voters will have rewarded a traditional grassroots campaign and a message of aggressive free-market solutions to our problems, and will at the same time have chosen to send a message about the weakness of the rest of the field. If they do this, why couldn't one say the Republicans of Iowa are doing their job? ♦

Hoping for Another Surprise

Rick Santorum's last stand.

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

Rick Santorum is back where he began his career in politics, running like crazy in an election no one thinks he can win. As a 32-year-old long-shot Republican candidate in 1990, Santorum wore out a lot of shoe leather knocking on doors (more than 20,000, he says, between him and his wife) in a Democratic congressional district outside of Pittsburgh. He won, to the surprise of many, and four years later he scored another surprising upset, against Democratic incumbent senator Harris Wofford.

At age 53, Santorum has brought that same quixotic tenacity to the Iowa Republican presidential caucus. "We've done 349 town hall meeting-type events and been to every county in the state and spent not just 10 minutes, but an hour or two," he told me during a December 21 phone interview. Santorum's hard work, as well as a string of solid debate performances, may finally be paying off, according to two polls from mid-December.

Both Rasmussen Reports and Public Policy Polling showed Santorum moving in the right direction in a very fluid race at just the right time, jumping from single digits to 10 percent. Santorum is still in the second tier in Iowa, with Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry, just behind a sinking Newt Gingrich, as Ron Paul and Mitt Romney vie for first place in the low 20s. But Santorum could get another much-needed bump: Both polls were conducted before he was endorsed by two influential Iowa social conservatives, Bob Vander Plaats and Chuck Hurley.

John McCormack is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

"[Santorum] is the one candidate in the race who hasn't caught his wave yet," says Vander Plaats, who served as Mike Huckabee's 2008 Iowa campaign chairman and now heads the Family Leader, a coalition of socially conservative groups. "We believe he's going to catch his wave. And we believe he's the one candidate who can withstand the scrutiny of being on top."

Vander Plaats, who lost the 2010 Iowa GOP gubernatorial primary by 9 points, urged Santorum to stay in the race after coming in fourth at the Ames straw poll in August. "I just saw him as a guy like Mike Huckabee," he says.

The Santorum 2012 campaign certainly bears some resemblance to the Huckabee 2008 campaign. Like the former Arkansas governor, Santorum has been the most outspoken candidate on the issues of marriage and the right to life. And Santorum's economic message, like Huckabee's, is attuned to the working class. He draws attention to the decline of manufacturing jobs in America and has proposed eliminating the corporate income tax on manufacturers.

Santorum has also proposed a pro-growth personal income tax reform with two rates of 10 percent and 28 percent (Paul Ryan's fiscal Roadmap proposes 10 percent and 25 percent). But even when the topic is the economy, Santorum finds a way to bring the conversation back to social issues.

"If you really want to solve the economy, there's two ways we know we can prevent poverty," he says. "One is that everybody graduates from high school. And everybody gets married before they have children. You do that, there will be virtually no poverty in America," he says. "There's things

we can do [to encourage education and marriage]—I wrote a whole book about it called *It Takes a Family*."

There are, of course, some notable differences between Huckabee and Santorum. Huckabee is an evangelical, Santorum a Catholic. It was a little bit surprising that leading Iowa evangelicals like Vander Plaats backed Santorum over evangelicals Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann. But Vander Plaats says their religious difference is just not an issue. "Although Rick and I attend different churches, I see him as a deeply committed brother in Christ." Santorum says that at "an occasional town hall meeting, someone will come up, very, very, very rarely" with concerns or questions about his faith.

More important, the two men have different personalities. Huckabee was charismatic and quick with a quip. Santorum is combative and earnest. Asked on the *Tonight Show* for a word to describe Santorum, Herman Cain said "stressed."

But Santorum's seriousness redounds to his credit when it comes to foreign policy. The former third-ranking Republican in the Senate has spent a lot of time thinking about America's role in the world. And during the debates, he's been a hawk's hawk, sparring with Ron Paul over the Iranian threat. "I think Michele Bachmann understates how dangerous Ron Paul would be," says Santorum. "Many conservatives would fear literally for their safety if Ron Paul would get in there to work with liberal Democrats to gut the Defense Department, to pull back every forward-deployed troop all over the world."

Santorum also laces into Paul on the issue of abortion. "Ron Paul would do absolutely nothing at the federal level to advance the pro-life cause," he says. "He can say he's pro-life. John Kerry can say he's against abortion. But, again, if you don't do anything to stop it, then you're not really against abortion, are you?"

So why are some Iowa voters worried that they'd be throwing their vote away by backing Santorum? "Why do they think I can't win? It's because, no offense, all of these pundits are out there saying I can't win," he says. "It's sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy."

There are reasons why pundits say Santorum can't win. One is that he's washed up—having lost his Senate seat by 18 points to Bob Casey Jr. in 2006. Santorum counters that he won two of his three statewide races as a conservative running in Democratic Pennsylvania—first in the 1994 Republican revolution and again in 2000, when he won by 6 points while George W. Bush was losing the state by 5 points.

"Mitt Romney never ran a race as a conservative and won anything," says Santorum. The only reason Romney didn't lose in 2006 is that he chose not to run for reelection in Massachusetts. That year was poisonous for Republicans because of disapproval of Bush, the Iraq war, and Republican scandals. Santorum was up against the son of sainted former governor Bob Casey, and there was no way any Republican could have won.

Then there are concerns that Santorum would be a polarizing figure in a general election because of his outspoken opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion. He says that the GOP nominee will be painted as an extremist on those issues no matter who it is. But the left and the media do reserve a special level of hatred for Santorum, because he's a true believer—former Democratic senator Bob Kerrey once remarked that the name Santorum is "Latin for a—hole"—who is willing to defend his position in detail, perhaps too much detail sometimes.

Another criticism of Santorum is that he was tarnished by the Bush years. Santorum says he has a few regrets, such as voting for the No Child Left Behind Act. Still, it's much harder to attack him as insufficiently conservative than Romney or Paul.

Now in the closing days of the Iowa caucuses, Santorum may be cash-strapped, but he isn't slowing down. Every day except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day he plans to be out on the campaign trail in Iowa, making his case to anyone who will listen. He just might surprise the world again. ♦

Fortress New Hampshire

Romney's redoubt.

BY MICHAEL WARREN

Bedford, N.H.

What does it take to win the New Hampshire primary? Depends on whom you ask. "You have to be a straight shooter," says Judd Gregg, the former senator and governor, and Mitt Romney supporter. "You can't be superficial."

"You want to be somewhat of an underdog," Jon Huntsman tells me in the lobby of his hotel in Manchester—but that's just the sort of thing you expect an underdog to say.

Ed Pare, a former manufacturing engineer living in Manchester who's come to see Ron Paul, says he's looking for a candidate to just come out and say it: "Obama's a Marxist."

Despite a shortage of straight-shooting, truth-telling underdogs in the race, the state's "first in the nation" primary on January 10 hardly looks up for grabs. It's the week before Christmas, and the RealClearPolitics New Hampshire poll average shows Romney maintaining a steady lead at 34 percent; Newt Gingrich is at 21 percent; Paul and Huntsman round out the field at 17 and 12. Michele Bachmann and the Ricks, Perry and Santorum, are afterthoughts.

The consensus here is that New Hampshire is Romney's to lose. And if road signage is any indication, he sealed his victory somewhere between Nashua and Manchester on the Daniel Webster Highway. "[Romney] has essentially done everything right," says Michael Dennehy, a New Hampshire political veteran who worked for John McCain in 1999-2000 and 2007-2008. "He's come to New Hampshire when he's needed to."

Michael Warren is a reporter at The Weekly Standard.

Romney's operation is considered the hardest working in New Hampshire, and it is by far the most professional. He's kicking off a three-day bus tour with a speech at the Bedford town hall, and a dozen Romney staffers are running around the second floor, wearing headset microphones and looking very busy. With only five days before Christmas, they've successfully filled the hall with more than 100 locals. A wall of reporters lines the back corners, and major media outlets have wheeled out their big guns: Dan Balz of the *Washington Post*, Chuck Todd of MSNBC, Mark Halperin of *Time*. The fire marshal is here, too, actually enforcing the room's capacity. We're told before the main event that in case of an emergency, we should try to evacuate, "If you can."

Winning the signage war

Luckily, there's no cause for alarm, as Romney delivers what could be his January 10 victory speech: "If I am president I will wake up every day and remind Americans that not only must we do better but also that we can do better! I believe in America!" (The exclamation marks are in the official transcript.) Like any self-respecting frontrunner, Romney focuses on the top dog, Barack Obama, and not on his primary opponents.

Gingrich is almost nowhere to be seen in New Hampshire. But there's an understanding he has to focus on the Iowa caucuses, now two weeks away. He's been struggling there lately, under a barrage of negative television ads from Paul and Romney. Additionally, Gingrich's lucrative relationship with Freddie Mac has heightened concerns about his conservative credentials. "I'm becoming a little Newt-disenchanted," says Dan Ostrouch of Sandown. Baruch Broderson of Nashua calls Gingrich the "felon in waiting."

"Nobody's written off," says Sharon Stewart of Rochester. "Well, maybe Gingrich is written off."

"I think undecided voters in New Hampshire will be watching Iowa very carefully," says Bruce Keough, another GOP politico in the state and Romney's 2008 New Hampshire campaign chairman. Keough, who isn't aligned with Romney this time around, says if Gingrich is still standing after Iowa, conservatives in New Hampshire will probably rally around the man they'll consider their alternative to Romney.

Meanwhile, Huntsman, who hopes to displace Gingrich as the not-Romney, just can't seem to connect. At each town hall meeting, Huntsman announces the latest tally of events—126! 127! 128!—he's held around the state. He touts the fact that a recent Suffolk University poll moved him up to third place in the state, ahead of Paul. But three subsequent polls from other firms, including Rasmussen Reports, place Huntsman in fourth. With a conservative record as Utah's governor, a tax plan endorsed by the editors of the *Wall Street Journal*, and a moderate demeanor that supposedly appeals to New England Republicans, Huntsman nonetheless sounds

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a bit desperate when he pleads, "I just want your vote. That's all I want."

Perhaps he spends too much time telling voters what he won't do. "I want you to know that I'm not going to pander," he tells a crowd of 40 in Rochester. "I'm not going to contort myself into a pretzel. I'm not going to sign those silly pledges like everybody on the debate stage has done. I'm just not going to do that."

No pandering? Huntsman tells New Hampshire voters that they are in a "unique position" to "change history." At a small gathering in Plaistow, Mary Kaye Huntsman sashays in wearing a New England Patriots football jersey over her blouse. "My wife does not pander," Huntsman winks, letting the folks know he's in on the joke. There's a ruffle of laughter, but those who might be most swayed by the jersey are at home, watching the final minutes of New England's victory over Denver.

Huntsman says Republicans have balked at the fact that Obama appointed him ambassador to China. "I was raised, I guess, in a different era, where you serve your country first," Huntsman tells me. "[I understand] now full well that there were many who, when they saw me in the race, they glossed over me. They said, 'He crossed a partisan line, that's unacceptable. And he served in China, and that's totally unacceptable.' I mean, come on, please."

Back in Bedford, Romney closes his speech. "In this election, let's fight for the America we love," he says. "Because we believe in America." The town hall erupts into applause as Kid Rock's country-rock anthem (and Romney campaign theme song) "Born Free" blasts from the speakers. Clad in a blazer, an Oxford shirt, and a pair of blue jeans, the former Massachusetts governor steps off the stage. A mob of voters and television cameras descend upon the candidate, all trying to see a man who could actually be the next president of the United States.

If you're Mitt Romney, Fortress New Hampshire looks pretty secure. Of course, that's how fortresses always look before the battle. ♦

Russian Thaw

Putin loses his grip.

BY CATHY YOUNG

"We went to jail in one country and came out in another," Russia's most famous blogger, 35-year-old anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny, said on December 21 after serving two weeks' detention for alleged disorderly conduct during demonstrations against vote-rigging in the parliamentary elections of December 4.

In the country where Navalny and his fellow activists came out of jail, protests against the Kremlin regime had swelled to levels unseen since the twilight of the Soviet Union; the authorities had given up trying to suppress them, and state-controlled television newscasts were providing respectful coverage. Even more shocking: In this new Russia, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin could be mocked on national TV.

Only recently, Russia's deeper slide into authoritarianism seemed near inevitable. Many thought the last hope for liberalization anytime soon had died in September, when Putin announced his plans to retake the presidency in the election due in March, elbowing aside his handpicked successor Dmitri Medvedev.

Yet there were signs of trouble in Putin paradise. The news of Putin's impending return as president drew little enthusiasm from the public, perhaps because the "trading places" Putin-Medvedev farce was too blatant. In October, the biggest YouTube hit in Russia was a music video titled "Our Looney Bin Votes for Putin." It showed grotesque scenes of patients and doctors in a mental ward dancing to celebrate Putin's comeback, alternating with clips of police beating protesters.

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In late November, Putin was booed—on live TV—at a mixed martial arts fight at a Moscow arena when he stepped into the ring to congratulate the winner. While the jeers were muted in later news broadcasts, the attempts at censorship and spin only worsened the damage.

To some independent Russian journalists, the boos signaled the beginning of the end for Putinism. At the time, most dismissed that prospect as wild-eyed wishful thinking. A month later, it looks less implausible.

On December 4, United Russia garnered 49 percent of the vote—down from 64 percent in 2007—in a heavily stacked parliamentary election where most opposition parties were kept off the ballot by various ploys. On the face of it, the ruling party's losses offered little encouragement to pro-freedom forces. United Russia still got enough votes to retain a slim majority in the next Duma, since some smaller parties fell below the 7 percent threshold for getting seats. The three other Duma parties are of the "loyal opposition" type that usually toe the line.

Many observers, however, such as Carnegie Endowment analyst Nikolai Petrov, argued that the real impact of the election had nothing to do with seats in the Duma: What mattered was the symbolism of the ruling party failing to get even half the vote. Suddenly, change seemed possible.

It was this sense of new possibility that drove the protests sparked by reports of rampant electoral fraud. On December 10, tens of thousands gathered on Bolotnaya Square in downtown Moscow; the crowd was officially estimated at 25,000 and unofficially at up to 150,000. The overwhelming majority were not dissidents or activists but professionals, managers, and white-collar workers

—Russia's new middle class, once the base of the Putin regime, perceived as the guarantor of stability. Today, more and more of these people chafe at the corruption and the petty tyrannies of a power structure that treats them as subjects rather than citizens.

While Medvedev has promised an investigation of vote-rigging, there is virtually zero chance that the protesters will succeed in their demand for a new vote, despite backing by the European Parliament. The real impact will be on the presidential election in March: If protests continue, the Kremlin will be under pressure to provide at least the appearance of competition. Puppet candidates aside, keeping genuine opposition figures off the ballot may become difficult.

So far, the momentum of protest shows no sign of slackening—and the government's ham-fisted reaction suggests that it will not. In the days after the election, the Kremlin tried a crackdown, with fairly toothless measures—such as two-week jail sentences—that angered more than they deterred. Navalny's stint behind bars raised him closer to political stardom.

Clumsy smear tactics have backfired, too. On December 19, recordings of private phone conversations of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov in which he made unflattering, often crude remarks about some fellow activists popped up on a Kremlin-linked news site. But instead of discrediting and splitting the opposition, this stunt helped further discredit the government. After a public apology from Nemtsov, one of the activists he had disparaged, Evgenia Chirikova, appeared with him on the Web TV channel Dozhd in a show of unity. He also filed a criminal complaint for illegal wiretapping.

Putin's live televised call-in conversation with the public on December 15 further stoked the fire. The once and future president sounded by turns conciliatory and insulting—now praising the demonstrations against electoral fraud as a healthy expression of democracy, now making a crude joke about mistaking one gathering for an AIDS-prevention event because the protesters' white ribbons looked like condoms. The crowning moment of the four-and-a-half-hour chat was Putin's bizarre message to those Russian citizens who, he said, were serving foreign interests and unreceptive to dialogue: "Come to me, bandar-logs." The bandar-logs are

Protest in Bolotnaya Square, December 10

foolish and destructive monkeys in Kipling's *Jungle Book*; but, while the term disparaged the opposition, it also cast Putin in a dubious role, since the line is spoken by a killer python hypnotizing his prey.

Putin's TV appearance reportedly caused a massive spike in Facebook signups for the December 24 protest rally in Moscow (scheduled speakers include former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev). This time, according to Nemtsov, the demands would exceed fair elections: The slogan would be, "Putin must go."

The Russian opposition has been saying this for years, to little effect. But something has changed. On December 18, the *Central Television* program on the state-controlled NTV channel included an 11-minute segment that amounted to a direct attack on Putin. It opened with news that, as host Vadim Takmenev pointedly noted, "no one would have dared to publish a few days ago": Putin's approval rating had dropped to 44 percent (from 70 percent in 2008). The rest of the segment was an acidic commentary on Putin's televised chat—his remarks intercut with clips of the hissing python from the Russian *Jungle Book* cartoon.

Was this a momentary lapse in censorship, or a sign that someone in the corridors of power is preparing to dump Putin? It's too early to tell. But suddenly, Putin's defeat at the polls seems plausible. In a November survey, only 31 percent of Russians said they would vote for Putin if the election were held the next day. Few of the remaining 69 percent, however, could name a candidate they would support.

This could be the opposition's chance, if it can rally behind a strong candidate. Many have hopes for Navalny, who offers a rare combination of pro-capitalist liberalism and muscular populism. This populism has an unsavory side: Navalny has flirted with Russian nationalism and, at times, pandered to prejudice against minorities from the Caucasus (his video ad promoting gun ownership featured self-defense against caricatured Chechen assailants). Navalny's nationalism—which, unlike the Putin brand, has no anti-Western content—may be sincere or demagogic; yet his principal message is that Russians must reclaim their dignity from the "party of crooks and thieves" that has held the country in its grip for over a decade.

If Putin does get reelected, it will likely be to a morally weakened presidency and without true popular support. In this new environment, even the tame pseudo-opposition "within the system" may get more assertive, while the opposition "outside" may grow too numerous to silence or intimidate—at least, not without giving up any pretense of democracy. For the first time since Putin's rise to power, the winds of a Russian Spring are truly in the air. ♦

NEWSCOM

A Worthy Heart

Václav Havel, 1936-2011.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Was it Western strength that triumphed over communism or Western freedom? It was both, of course, but Václav Havel, who died last week at the age of 75 in the Czech Republic, has always had a special place in the hearts of those who stress the latter. Lech Walesa, with his shipyard electrician's demeanor, seemed like a character out of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* or some other proletarian novel of the 1920s. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, particularly after he went into exile in Vermont and began to rail against American materialism, often came off like a medieval monk. Havel, a son of real-estate moguls who had a country house and a wine cellar and a collection of Frank Zappa records and a marriage that didn't tie him down overmuch . . . now, that's more like the Western idea of a role model. But we sell Havel short if we don't reckon with his personal strength and self-abnegation.

President Obama stressed Havel's "peaceful resistance" this week. That is the wrong emphasis. It is not that Havel was particularly given to violence, but he was no pacifist. He came to take a Manichean view of the Cold War as a clash between "two enormous forces, one a defender of freedom, the other a source of nightmares." His one driving obsession as Czech president was to get his country into NATO.

Havel was not easygoing about his opposition to communism. He spent five years of his adult life in prison—this in a country where conformism was extreme and dissidents were few. "Dissident," curiously, is a word that Havel chose not to apply to himself. That may be because the Czechoslovak opposition to Soviet-style communism that culminated in the Prague Spring of 1968 was carried out by "reform" or "nondogmatic" Communists around Alexander Dubcek.

If those were dissidents, then Havel was something different and more durable. He never belonged to the Communist party, and a case can be made that he was genuinely apolitical. Morality, as much as politics, was at the root of his abhorrence of communism. In his great samizdat essay of 1978, "The Power of the Powerless," he complained that to describe Communist rule as a mere dictatorship "tends to obscure rather than clarify the real nature of power in this system." Whereas Stalinism had assaulted the bodies of its opponents, this "post-totalitarian" communism assaulted their souls. Dishonesty, not brutality, is its besetting sin and the foundation of its power.

Havel asks us to imagine a manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop who receives a sign from his supplier that reads "Workers of the world, unite!" This man understands quite well that he is supposed to put it among his goods where everyone can see it. If he doesn't, there will be trouble. With a dramatist's keenness, Havel shows that if the greengrocer wants to give in to the authorities' wishes, he has an easy rationalization: The greengrocer doesn't believe what's on the sign. Neither do his customers. Neither do the authorities who are so insistent that he display it. In fact, should those authorities decide to destroy the greengrocer's life, they "will not do so from any authentic inner conviction." So, really, it makes no difference whether he displays the sign or not.

But there, writes Havel, the greengrocer is terribly, culpably wrong. The sign really does convey a message, even if it is one that has nothing to do with the words printed on it. It means "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do" or "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient." The function of Communist ideology, writes Havel once he gets worked up, is to conceal from the greengrocer "the low foundations of his obedience" and "the low foundations of power."

The government is not stupid: It does not need, or expect, to convince citizens that the lie is right or plausible. "It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it." Communism poisons the soul by compelling everyone in a society to tell such lies to himself.

That is one truth that Havel did not forget as president. In his televised New Year's Day address in 1990 shortly after becoming president, he told his listeners: "We are morally sick, because we have grown used to saying one thing and thinking another."

The gap that some people perceive between the freedom-oriented anti-Communists like Havel and power-oriented ones like Solzhenitsyn is largely illusory. Havel sees the moral imperative to resist lies precisely as Solzhenitsyn did in his great essay "Live Not By Lies." "Even if all is covered by lies," Solzhenitsyn wrote, "even if all is under their rule, let us resist in the smallest way: Let their rule hold not through me!" Certainly Havel learned from Solzhenitsyn. In his 1984 essay "Politics and Conscience," he expressed the hope that "on this exposed rampart where the wind blows most sharply, it is possible to oppose personal experience and the natural world to the 'innocent' power and to unmask its guilt, as the author of *The Gulag Archipelago* has done." It is probable that Solzhenitsyn learned something from Havel as well. As he left the Soviet Union for exile in February 1974, he drew encouragement from the resistance in Prague. "Betrayed and deceived by us," he wrote, "did not a great European people—the Czechoslovaks—show us how one can stand down the tanks with bared chest alone, as long as inside it beats a worthy heart?" ♦

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A Tale of Two Dissidents

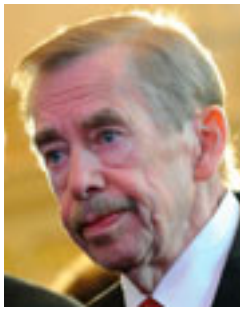
There's a difference between resisting dictators and accommodating them. BY MICHAEL MOYNIHAN

The death notices for Christa Wolf, one of Germany's most celebrated novelists, were telling. The German *feuilletons* heaved with tributes and mild dissents, steering debate away from the quality of her literary output—it was variable—to the political controversies she engendered. Wolf was, a critic once spat, the "state poet" of the deformed and misnamed German Democratic Republic. Indeed, it is more appropriate to call Wolf an *East* German novelist, a nostalgic for the regime she romanticized and unofficially served—including a three-year stint as Stasi informant. In 1989, when jubilant *Ossies* breached the Berlin Wall and sprinted towards the well-stocked shops of Kurfürstendamm, Wolf argued that East Germany should continue to exist.

The American obituarists allowed room for the Stasi controversy, and a few offered an incomplete précis of her political stupidities and toadying to party bosses. But these were waved off as unimportant. The *New York Times* declared Wolf the "public conscience of a long-divided people" (a title often applied to another GDR nostalgic, Günter Grass) and a "loyal dissident." The *New Yorker* insisted that she "spoke out strongly" against a government that applied brute force to those who did speak out, strongly or otherwise, while failing to note that she never resigned her party membership.

If Wolf counts as a "dissident," if loyalty to a state that excelled only in terrorizing its subjects counts as possessing an impressive "conscience," if releasing a novel critical of the system *after* the collapse of communism can be deemed "strongly" registering complaint, what words are left to eulogize Václav Havel?

Havel, who died last week of lung cancer, was one of the fearless founders of Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 movement, a group of intellectuals who challenged the Communist government to abide by its own Potemkin laws; a playwright in the tradition of Beckett; a dystopian writer in the tradition of Orwell and Zamyatin; and—minor career detail—the former president of both Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. While Wolf compromised with the monstrous government in East Berlin, which allowed her to live as a protected intellectual, Havel denounced "the world of 'rear exits,'" in which well-known writers—himself included—were left unmolested by authorities, while lesser dissidents languished in prison.



Václav Havel

The authorities in Prague quickly acceded to his demand for equal treatment and locked him up. While writers like Wolf established a rapprochement with their dictators, publishing at home and abroad while periodically signing a statement of solidarity for a persecuted author, Havel spent five years in prison and, when released, was placed under house arrest, followed, threatened, prevented from traveling, and constantly spied on. A foreign documentary crew once filmed Havel walking his dog around the perimeter of his house (which featured its very own secret police outpost across the street), while a uniformed intelligence agent followed two feet behind at all times. As late as 1989, when dissidents were taking advantage of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Havel was considered subversive enough to earn another nine months in prison for antiregime comments made to Radio Free Europe.

His politics are, in many ways, secondary to his preternatural courage and principled antitotalitarianism. Havel was variously accused of being a reactionary rightist and, by some of his former comrades, a squishy crypto-leftist. He insisted he was neither. "Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world," he wrote in his most famous essay, "The Power of the Powerless." Havel's politics confounded many on the left; he was hopelessly cool, a shaggy-haired, chain-smoking playwright who listened to the Velvet Underground and befriended Frank Zappa, but who loathed utopian scheming, supported the expansion of NATO, backed both American wars in Iraq, and vigorously defended the Western intervention in the Balkans.

And how déclassé that he upbraided the European Union for indulging Cuban totalitarianism! ("Time and again," he wrote, "Europe paid a high price for policies of compromises with evil that were dictated by economic interests or the illusion that evil can be appeased.") He took to the *New York Times* to attack the U.N.'s sinister Human Rights Council, which provides cover to the world's worst human rights abusers.

Nor were the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament types amused by Havel's coruscating 1985 essay "Anatomy of a Reticence," an examination of the fraught relationship between the Eastern European dissident movement and the Western European "peace movement." Even from behind the Iron Curtain, it was clear to the Chartists in Prague that calls for peace often masked a radical political program, something they rejected because of a "fundamental skepticism about utopianism." If the

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antinuclear activists denouncing Reagan and Kohl didn't understand the dissident's skepticism, Havel reminded them that "the Czechoslovak citizen tends to ask who is proposing still more 'glowing tomorrows' for us this time?"

Such comments rankled comrades living comfortably outside the Soviet zone of occupation. When Havel addressed a joint session of Congress in 1990, Noam Chomsky denounced him as "embarrassingly silly and morally repugnant," profanely comparing the victim of a Stalinist government to a "Stalinist hack." Writing in the *Guardian* after his death, Neil Clark complained Havel had insufficient respect for his Communist warders: "Havel's anti-communist critique contained little if any acknowledgement of the positive achievements of the regimes of Eastern Europe in the fields of employment, welfare provision, education and women's rights." In the Czech Republic, the Union of Czechoslovak Young Communists—alas, such groups persist—said Havel's death was a moment to "rejoice."

But when it came to his tormenters, Havel was forgiving, opposing the policy of lustration—preventing former high-ranking Communists and collaborators from holding government jobs—because of his discomfort with treating secret police files as trustworthy. When he was elected president of Czechoslovakia, he was shown a list of friends and colleagues who had betrayed him and took no action, instead telling an interviewer that "I lost that list [and] I forgot who was on it."

In totalitarian societies, the totalitarians rely on a simple truth: Heroes are always in short supply. What the geriatric leadership of Communist Czechoslovakia understood about Václav Havel was that this courageous "counterrevolutionary," selfless and brave opponent of the regime, had the makings of a hero. Christa Wolf, the accommodationist novelist, did not, as the East German authorities gathered. Wolf doesn't deserve the appellation "dissident." For Havel, it's inadequate. It's depressing that so many journalists still can't tell the difference between the two. ♦

Rules for Republicans

Use Obama's playbook against him.

BY LISA SPILLER & JEFF BERGNER

The Obama brand isn't what it used to be.

The two of us—a marketing professor and a political analyst—have just published a book about the highly successful Obama presidential campaign of 2008. We have distilled a number of lessons from our research. Since the Obama camp already knows these lessons firsthand, we call them "rules for Republicans" and have presented them to a number of the 2012 Republican presidential campaigns. In summary, here they are:

Rule 1: Define your "big idea." What is the overarching theme of your campaign? What is the first thing you want people to think and say about you? What do you stand for? What does your candidacy mean? This is harder than it looks. In answering these questions—which are really all the same question—you are creating your brand. In doing so, remember two things. First, a successful brand will reflect what people actually want, not what you think they should want. Your campaign needs to be voter-centric, not candidate-centric. You are a vehicle for responding to the hopes and fears of the American electorate. Second, your brand must connect with voters emotionally, not just rationally. Your campaign must speak to voters personally and create an emotional bond between you and them. "Change" was a beautiful brand in 2008.

Rule 2: Sell your benefits, not your features. Electoral success is not a reward for past services rendered; it is about promises for the future. Virginia governor Bob McDonnell has correctly said, "It's not where you are that matters, it's

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where you're headed." Do not put your biography, however eminent, at the center of your campaign. Your "experience" is not important in itself; what's important is how your experience can get voters where they want to go. You have to explain the benefits of voting for you, not tediously list your qualifications. Both Hillary Clinton and John McCain found this out the hard way in 2008. If your campaign is centered around your "experience" or your "record" or your "competence," you are on the road to defeat. Your biography is useful only in a supporting role. You need to put front and center what President Bush 41 dismissed as "the vision thing."

Rule 3: Do not dilute your positions to win over middle-of-the-roaders. If that worked, the moderate John McCain would have defeated the very liberal Barack Obama. And Jimmy Carter would have defeated Ronald Reagan. You will never win the presidency by being the lesser of two evils; you have to attract voters to win. Boldness, directness, and honesty will trump subtlety and nuance every time. Just ask Mike Dukakis, George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole, or John Kerry. Stand for something.

Rule 4: Do not let the Obama campaign brand you. Brand him. Your campaign must clearly shape the choices for the American voter. If you do not, the Obama campaign will do it for you—to your detriment. You must relentlessly advance your own brand, and you must relentlessly aim to brand President Obama. If you are not on the offensive, you will be on the defensive. You may not like this, but you have no choice about it if you want to win.

Rule 5: Locate your campaign headquarters outside of Washington, D.C. You will be running against Washington. This may seem obvious—though somehow it wasn't to the Clinton or McCain campaign in 2008. Even the ultimate Washington insider—the president of the United States—is locating his headquarters far from Washington. Why would you do otherwise?

Rule 6: Develop an electoral strategy with multiple avenues to success. You can't take for granted the states that John McCain carried in 2008, but you can reasonably expect to win them. The 2012 election will be all about the same 16 "battleground states" it was in 2008. Compete aggressively in all of them. You have good reason to think that the Republican nominee can recapture Indiana, Virginia, and North Carolina. Beyond these three states, you need to pick up only Florida, Ohio, and one other state to prevail with 270 electoral votes. Give yourself multiple ways to reach 270. A corollary: Don't waste your time and resources where you can't win. And don't waste your time with demographic groups you will never win over. Choose the markets that are advantageous to you; it is a mistake to try to convert your clear opponents.

You have to attract voters to win. Boldness, directness, and honesty will trump subtlety and nuance every time. Just ask Mike Dukakis, George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole, or John Kerry. Stand for something.

Rule 7: Quickly and categorically reject public financing. Do not be defensive about this. If a longtime champion of public financing like Barack Obama can turn his back on public financing when it suits him, this should be easy for you. Be as cavalier about it as he was in 2008. Raise as much money as you can. Cede no financial advantage to the Obama campaign; there's nothing in it for you to participate in another lopsided financial contest like 2008. Focus especially on the Internet to raise funds—it is the quickest and easiest way to do so.

Rule 8: Run a good ground game. Nothing beats your or your surrogates' direct contact with the voters. Take a page from Obama campaign manager David Plouffe's 2008 playbook: Do not treat your staff and volunteers as pawns, but as valued customers and colleagues. Provide them with tangible and intangible rewards throughout the campaign. This is the path to creating an army of committed volunteers, a legion of Internet supporters, and, by the way, vastly expanded Internet fundraising.

Rule 9: Consider someone like Marco Rubio as your running mate. You need to bring energy and freshness to your campaign. Choosing Sarah Palin was not wrong in 2008; letting her twist in the wind in the face of media attacks was. A positive, Reaganesque running mate like Marco Rubio will help you. The fact that he is Hispanic will help even more. And the fact that he is from Florida makes choosing him a trifecta. A bit of the "cool factor" will be a big help, especially with younger voters who will not be as monolithically for Obama the second time around. Choose someone obviously fit to succeed you as president if necessary, and neither the Obama campaign nor the press will get traction in suggesting otherwise.

Rule 10: Go all in. The vast majority of Americans believe the country is on the wrong track. A sizable number believe the country's very future is at stake in this election. Act like it. Do not pull your punches, especially in a vain and benighted effort to curry favor with the media. The days of neutral media, if they ever existed, are over. The media are partisan, as in the early days of the republic; they have chosen sides. You must—or at least your campaign and surrogates must—take on Barack Obama directly. When you are criticized for doing so, know that you are having an effect. Double down on it. Your media critics are not your friends—they are on the other team. Be absolutely insensitive, even impervious, to any and all media criticism. Your market is the electorate, not the media. And one more thought: The most devastatingly effective form of negative campaigning is ridicule. This is liberalism's tool against Republicans, and the left hates it when it is turned against them. That's why the Paris Hilton "celeb" video was the most effective ad of the McCain campaign. Ridicule exposes how joyless, humorless, and brittle is today's political left. ♦

Popular Culture and the Baby Boomers

One more thing we've ruined

By P.J. O'Rourke

Did the baby boom wreck popular culture? "D'oh," to borrow from the subject in question. On the other hand, consider the source. A generation ago was there anything with as much brains, sly cunning, human comedy, and broad public appeal as *The Simpsons*?

There was Nixon, with his landslide reelection and hilarious one-liners. But that's politics. Politics is easier to measure qualitatively than popular culture. Failures of quality control are more evident in politics. The president of the United States surprised by Pearl Harbor versus your mother surprised by the Village People.

Popular culture is hard to qualify, and the baby boom is hard to quantify. Definitions vary. I choose a strict interpretation—people born from 1946 through 1960. You're not a baby boomer if you don't have a visceral recollection of a Kennedy and a King assassination, a Beatles breakup, a U.S. defeat in Vietnam, and a Watergate. (Unless you were stoned for a decade, in which case bring a note from your drug dealer.) Plus, and I rest my case, Barack Obama was born in 1961. What a typical frustrated, cynical, overeducated, under-informed member of Generation X he is, with his slacker attitude toward institutions, specifically the Constitution.

Then there's the matter of time frame: In comparing then and now, when's the then? It's a popular (as it were) misconception that the baby boom's influence on popular culture began—and maybe ended—in the 1960s. But while there was a great deal of "talkin' 'bout my generation" (Pete Townsend, b. 1945) back then, my generation didn't actually have much to do with "What's Going On" (Marvin Gaye, b. 1939). We were the tailgate party, not the team on the field, during the "Youthquake" (a coinage from *Punch*, a magazine edited by people who were young when mastodons roamed the earth). A birth year checklist proves the point:

Bob Dylan, 1941
John Lennon, 1940
Mick Jagger, 1943
Timothy Leary, 1920
Ken Kesey, 1935
R. Crumb, 1943
Peter Max, 1937
Che Guevara, 1928
Malcolm X, 1925
Muhammad Ali, 1942
Abbie Hoffman, 1936
Gloria Steinem, 1934
Jane Fonda, 1937
Jimi Hendrix, 1942
Jerry Garcia, 1942
Chairman Mao, 1893

The most influential sixties scene-making baby boomers were Donovan (1946) and Twiggy (1949).

We are not the generation of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, expanded consciousness, the New Left, Black Power, or Women's Lib. We are the generation of the fanboy (Jann Wenner, 1946), Grand Funk Railroad (all born in the early 1950s), and Ben and Jerry (both born in 1951).

The baby boom begins to produce, rather than consume, popular culture in the mid-1970s. As Year Zero, I'd pick 1974, when the youngest baby boomers are in high school, the oldest are in their mid-twenties, and Bill Clinton is running for Congress, so there's ample sexual tension, a key component of popular culture. Stephen King (1947) publishes *Carrie*. Steven Spielberg (1946) makes his big screen debut, *Sugarland Express*, with its eerie prefiguring of the highway pursuit of O.J. Simpson (1947). And Spielberg is working on something that will demolish the intellectual pretensions of an entire art form—*Jaws*, the movie that killed cinema.

Demolishing pretensions, especially worthy ones, is a hallmark of the baby boom. Note the lack of artistic pretensions—or art—in Patti Smith's 1974 "Hey Joe," supposedly the first example of punk rock. Uncoincidentally, that same

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year, "Rock the Boat" becomes the first disco release to hit Number 1 on the pop charts. *National Lampoon*'s circulation peaks. And *Saturday Night Live* is being planned at 30 Rock. "Irony" has begun its long march to pandemic.

Some aspects of baby boom popular culture are not yet evident. Bill Gates is still cutting classes at Harvard. And Steve Jobs is knocking around India looking for transcendental iPhone apps. But Pong machines are showing up in the bars, and electronic darkness is starting to fall.

Now we baby boomers are 50- to 65-year-olds, the age cohort upon which everything always can be blamed. No matter what happens in the world, somebody over 50 wrote the check for it. And how are we doing? Obviously we've screwed up love, marriage, the dress code, the economy, politics, and the brief hope, when we were in our forties, that there would be a peaceful, cooperative New World Order (Vladimir Putin, 1952). But popular culture has thrived in our hands.

Popular culture has become engorged, broadening and thickening until it's the only culture anyone notices. Name a living poet, playwright, novelist, serious composer, artist, or architect who holds the place in public esteem once occupied by Robert Frost, Arthur Miller, Norman Mailer, Leonard Bernstein, Pablo Picasso, or Frank Lloyd Wright.

But also admit we're well rid of some of the above (all of Miller, most of Mailer, a lot of Bernstein—score for *West Side Story* excepted—and the decorative influence if not the indecorous output of Picasso). And did highbrow culture really used to be so high? In fact the aesthetic and intellectual atmosphere of 1974 was already stupid. Gerald Ford's sideburns. Gerald Ford.

Popular culture is all about stupid. Popular culture is democratic, majoritarian, decided by the people. Fifty percent of people are below average in intelligence, mathematical fact. The popular culture of the distant past seems more intelligent because only parts of it survive—*As You Like It*, not bear-baiting. The popular culture of the recent past seems more intelligent because we were younger, hence stupider, when it was in vogue. My working hypothesis is that stupidity in popular culture is a constant. Popular culture cannot get more stupid.

The part of contemporary popular culture that I know best, because I have kids and can't avoid it, is music. Music pounds on the ride-to-school car radio, blares beneath doors from teen and tween bedroom speakers, and leaks out of iPod earbuds. And the music's not too bad—melodically complex, rhythmically inventive, with a use of studio recording effects that make Phil Spector's Wall of Sound into a plywood room divider by comparison.

Billboard's pop picks are not to my taste, but, at age 64, nothing is. I can't make out the lyrics, probably a good thing or I'd be washing my kids' ears out with soap. Particularly, I'm told, for listening to Foster the People's "Pumped Up Kicks." It's about a mass schoolyard shooting. But then so was 1979's "I Don't Like Mondays" by the beloved Boomtown Rats.

The thoroughly idiotic "Sexy and I Know It" by LMFAO contains at least a hint that the rappers are kidding. And I can hardly object to rap, having once claimed to be an avid fan of the talking blues. Meanwhile there's one young lady named Adele who seems to be genuinely talented. Her recent hit "Rolling in the Deep" is quite pleasant.

Pitting the Top 10 of 1974 against what's being listened to at the moment gives 2011 little, except blatant language, to be ashamed of. "The Way We Were" is a scientific experiment to test whether saccharin causes cancer. Worse, it causes a Barbra Streisand/Robert Redford movie. "Seasons in the Sun" by Terry Jacks is the world's worst popular song. Although 1974's No. 1 hit, Paul Anka's "(You're) Having My Baby" could mitigate that rating. "Dancing Machine" does more to tarnish the memory of the Jackson 5 than Michael did. "Bennie and the Jets" is the most annoying song ever written by Elton John, though not for lack of trying. *Exempli gratia* baby boomers Grand Funk Railroad, in their cover of "The Loco-Motion," subtracted what modest charm there was from Little Eva's 1962 original. I confess to a sentimental

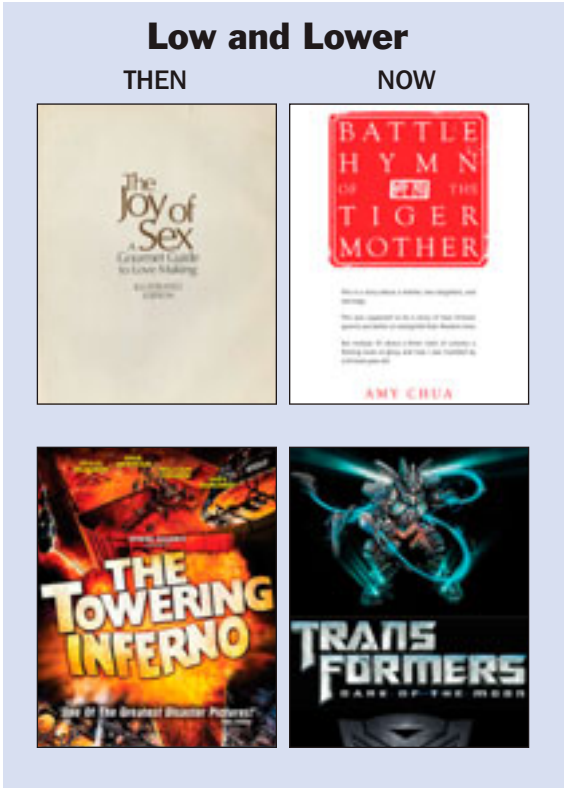
Plumbing the Depths

THEN	NOW
	
Barbra	*Lady Gaga*
	
Havin' Anka's Baby	*LMFAO and I Know It*

fondness for "Love's Theme" by Barry White and the Love Unlimited Orchestra, but that's because it was playing on the stereo 37 years ago while I was doing something I shouldn't have been. And then there's "The Streak" by Ray Stevens, a rare example of a popular tune that provokes the opposite of nostalgia—*not*stalgia. Goodbye 1974, and don't let the door hit you in the butt on your way out.

Whether the stupidity standards of popular culture are being upheld is less clear when comparing bestselling books. To be found in the Barnes & Noble report of 2011 bestsellers, the *New York Times* bestseller lists, and Amazon's record of its most-sold books of the year is a bunch of junk.

At Amazon.com Bill O'Reilly brings us the news that Lincoln is dead, ditto Chris Matthews and (separately) Stephen King about Jack Kennedy, and likewise with Joan Didion's whole family. Walter Isaacson notes that Steve Jobs didn't used to be dead. But he is now, with excellent timing from a publishing point of view. One serious novel made Amazon's top 20. "Challenging" is, I believe, the polite critical term for Haruki Murakami's *IQ84*. And there's one worthy item of nonfiction, Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. Well-written, no doubt, but off-putting in the bathetic, very 21st-century last word of its title. The rest is the customary midden of imagination-minus-thought for juveniles, self-helplessness, unmemorable memoirs, and gift books never to be opened.



Information from the prestigious newspaper and bookstore chain about purchases by readers who actually can read indicates that fiction is now mostly thrillers. The etymological root of thrill is "to pierce," from the Old English *thryl*, meaning hole. What kind need not be mentioned. These are the works of James Patterson, James Patterson, and James Patterson plus *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* with its implicit subtitle *Because It Makes as Much Sense as Anything that's Done in a Stieg Larsson Book*. Meanwhile good novelists—Julian Barnes, Jeffrey Eugenides, Nicholas Sparks—have created a gosh-we're-getting-old genre that's as depressing about age as Ann Beattie was about youth. And there's the book-clubbed-to-death *The Help* arriving a little late at the Civil Rights Crusade Ball.

In nonfiction we can add gossip gal Jackie Kennedy to the Important Dead People pile. And I guess we can add everybody in America judging by the "we're doomed" stuff from Michael Lewis in *Boomerang*, Pat Buchanan in *Suicide of a Superpower*, and Thomas Friedman, human slop bucket of received wisdom, in *That Used to Be Us*.

The memoir, literary guarantee of a place in hell for the baby boom, seems somewhat on the wane. Thank you, God, for baby boom memory loss. Scrap paper from the floors of rooms where clever young writers do the work for famous comedians abides with *Bossypants* and *Seriously . . . I'm Kidding*. And *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is full of excellent advice about how to treat your children if you hate their guts and want them to grow up to be like Howard Schultz, who founded Starbucks and wrote a bestseller about, I presume, why his coffee costs like sin and tastes like paint.

To go from this to the 1974 *New York Times* bestsellers is to throw your Kindle in the trash and step through the doors of the Bodleian Library. Here are novels by Joseph Heller, James Michener, John le Carré, and Frederick Forsyth, and books about history, politics, and current events such as *The Gulag Archipelago*, *All the President's Men*, *A Bridge Too Far*, and *Alive* by Piers Paul Read (survival and resilience, yes, redemption, no).

Look closer at the 1974 bestseller list and you see a musty corner in the Bodleian with the ghost of J.R.R. Tolkien scribbling about hobbits. Not that hobbits were topping sales in '74. The series disease of youth fiction was not yet chronic and still curable. But worse than hobbits are the rabbits in *Watership Down*, where the anthropomorphism is so strong you wouldn't try it on humans. *All Things Bright and Beautiful* is almost as twee. Lovable critters are the happening thing in the mid-'70s. The Pet Rock would arrive the next year, and it could not have been worse to curl up with on a rainy afternoon than *Cavett* by Dick of the same name, which outsold Solzhenitsyn. My favorite 1974 bestselling

animal protagonist appears in *Jaws* by Peter Benchley, who was, I'm sure, aware that most people who have visited Long Island were rooting for the shark. My least favorite are the rats in *The Woman He Loved*, Ralph Martin's biography of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

The best writers of 1974 were not necessarily in their best form. Michener's *Centennial* became the miniseries it deserved to be. In Heller's *Something Happened* nothing does. *The Dogs of War* does not withstand rereading. And, while *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* is good le Carré, the moral relativism is getting relatively irksome and will soon be joined by less attention to craft and more anti-Americanism in *The Honorable Schoolboy*.

There's pulp, some clever—*The Seven-Per-Cent-Solution*—some not—*The Pirate* by Harold Robbins. And one novel is godawful, *The War Between the Tates* by Alison Lurie. Bulletin to all authors making satirical attacks on academia: *Lucky Jim* was published in 1954. Cease fire.

The *Times* had not yet begun to winnow the chaff from the other chaff on its nonfiction list. Included are *You Can Profit from a Monetary Crisis* (surely ripe for reissue), *The Memory Book* by . . . I forget, and the sequel to *The Joy of Sex* called *More Joy*, or, as it should be titled in my case, *Sleep*. Plus, of course, *All the President's Men*, a valuable study of Nixon and politics the way *The Satanic Verses* is a valuable study of Muhammad and religion.

While book publishing is different in its stupidity than it was in 1974, television has changed out of all recognition. Cable, satellite, pay-per-view, TiVo, video streaming, and I-know-not-what other technological marvels have brought modern television to a perfect state of unlimited variety: innumerable Punches and countless Judys walloping each other with infinite sticks.

Therefore television can't tell us what it used to about popular culture. We're not all watching the same thing at the same time, and we're lying to Nielsen about what we are watching, which is porn. Between episodes of post-depilatory *Grey's Anatomy*, the imbecilic are gaping at "Billy the Exterminator" or Ken Burns documentaries, while a more discerning audience has found its own niche with a total of nearly nine million viewers for Nickelodeon's two daily broadcasts of *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

But though the TV market is splintered, the most popular TV shows remain popular indeed. As of this fall (before the annual fresh hell of holiday specials skewed viewing patterns), 24.5 million Americans are watching *NBC Sunday Night Football*. That's nearly 10 percent of

everyone sitting up and taking solid food (or not out in the kitchen complaining that no one will come to dinner). The *NCIS* cops-at-sea drama was seen by 19.4 million. *60 Minutes* attracted 18.6 million old farts (minus Andy Rooney), which equals about a third of baby boomers or, to use another metric, everyone who thinks erectile dysfunction drugs still might be worth the bother. The other seven top ten programs—with viewerships ranging from 17.2 to 10.9 million—were *Dancing With the Stars*, Sunday night's NFL pre-kick off show, *NCIS: Los Angeles*, *Dancing With the Stars Results* (J.R. Martinez and Karina Smirnoff beat Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse), *Two and a Half Men*, *ESPN NFL Regular Season*, and—I'll buy a vowel and a consonant in a book by James Patterson and read that instead—*Wheel of Fortune*.

None of this stuff is any good, but who wants "good" TV? The problem, when comparing contemporary television to television in 1974, is that TV has become not just bad but sad.

All in the Family, *Sanford and Son*, *Chico and the Man*, *M*A*S*H*, *Rhoda*, *The Waltons*, *Good Times*, *Maude*, *Hawaii Five-O*—gosh, the gang we had back then, great guys, fun gals, what a crazy bunch, and, oh boy, the high jinks we got up to, seems like just yesterday we were all hanging around every night, never a dull moment, those were the days.

Thirty-seven years from now, two gray heads on a pillow, will husband turn to significant other and say, "Gee, Honey, remember when Bob Costas used to dress in women's clothes to try to get out of his NBC contract on *Sunday Night NFL Pre-Kick Off*?"

Television makes me question the idea that there's a stupidity constant, an "*S* Factor," if you will, in popular culture. Movies destroy my hypothesis.

1974 TOP GROSSING FILMS

Towering Inferno
Blazing Saddles
Young Frankenstein
Earthquake
Chinatown
The Godfather Part II
Murder on the Orient Express
Airport 1975
The Great Gatsby
Death Wish

2011 TOP GROSSING FILMS

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2
Transformers: Dark of the Moon
Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides
Kung Fu Panda 2
Fast Five
The Hangover Part II
The Smurfs
Cars 2
Rio
The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part I

Comment is superfluous, however tempting. (Spoiler alert, Voldemort loses.) No change in demographics, loss of the studio system, advent of multiscreen cineplexes, special effects innovation, alteration in moviemaking economics, marketing ploy, or death of Marlon Brando can excuse the existence of parts II of *The Godfather* and *The Hangover* in the same universe.

But it isn't the same universe. The cosmos of popular culture has entered another dimension, where the rules of stupidity physics no longer apply. Stupid time and stupid place are unbounded on the Internet, the great pop culture innovation of boomers. Now omnipresent and illimitable is the bore on the next barstool with his hobbyhorse. Bet you're wondering whatever happened to Eddie Haskell on *Leave It to Beaver*. I suppose it's a blessing that, with a Google search, we're allowed to choose our barroom bore. Actor Ken Osmond became a Los Angeles police officer, was shot and wounded by a car thief in 1980, retired from the LAPD in 1988, is happily married, and has two grown sons. But there's no booze. There's the rest of the World Wide Web instead, making the cultural arts and crafts of us common folks ubiquitous.

The sparkling dialogue once confined to coffee klatsch, water cooler, diner booth, back fence gabfest, and dorm room bull session has gone viral, as have the friends' slide show of their vacation trip to Weeki Wachee Springs, parlor tricks performed by drunk uncles, and backyard kiddie magic acts with a bedsheet on a clothesline for a stage curtain; likewise the prose beneath the photos of seniors in high school yearbooks; the gum-beating and chin-wagging of barbers, cabdrivers, and random coots; your cousin's mimeographed Christmas letter; schoolyard exegesis of the facts of life; gripes, beefs, and bellyaches; snitching and tattling; listening in on party lines and peeking through the neighbor's Venetian blinds; rumors, gossip, poison pen letters, heavy breathing on the telephone in the dead of night; "kick me" signs scotch-taped between shoulder blades; and messages tied to bricks and thrown through plate glass windows.

Did the baby boom wreck popular culture? We have left not one stone of elegance upon another. We have plowed civilization with salt. We have killed refinement and sold sophistication into bondage. And we stand triumphant in the ruins. ♦

A Ph.D. in Torture

Why is Rafsanjani's son studying at Oxford?

By Emanuele Ottolenghi

When NATO planes launched their air campaign over Libya's skies last spring and Western leaders said that Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi had to go, the first regime to change was at the London School of Economics. Its director, Sir Howard Davies, resigned following embarrassing disclosures about LSE's financial links to Libya and sizable donations from Qaddafi's anointed heir, his son Saif al-Islam, who'd been awarded a doctoral degree from LSE. It seems that British academic institutions have yet to learn the lesson. For now it's the United Kingdom's oldest and most distinguished university, Oxford, that has brought scandal upon itself by giving a place to a Middle Eastern despot's son—a scion of the Islamic Republic of Iran who has already distinguished himself as a human rights abuser and a torturer.

Oxford University's Wolfson College, which the late Sir Isaiah Berlin helped establish, is now the academic home of 42-year-old Mehdi Hashemi Bahramani Rafsanjani, the fourth child of former Iranian president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. These days, Rafsanjani the elder styles himself a champion of Iran's reformists. But having tied the family fortune and its connections to the cause of challenging current president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad does not make Rafsanjani a liberal democrat. In addition to the violence and repression he is responsible for inside Iran, he has also been one of the Islamic Republic's chief exporters of terrorism. As president, Rafsanjani dispatched Iranian hitmen to kill Iranian exiles across Europe. There is an arrest warrant against him from Argentinian prosecutors for the 1994 bombing of a Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people. The son it seems has followed in his father's path.

When Rafsanjani was president, he lent a hand to his youngest boy, Mehdi, who was trying to make a living in the oil industry. In 1992, a former Iranian oil ministry official, Houshang Bouzari, managed to line up a $1.8 billion contract for the exploration and development of Iran's offshore natural gas resources in South Pars field, and Mehdi wanted a cut. He approached Bouzari and demanded $50 million in exchange for his services—presumably, access to the sitting president of Iran. Bouzari turned the offer down and found himself thrown into jail in June 1993. He spent several months at Evin prison where he was tortured. He was released after his family paid ransom and the state had taken away his contract. Eventually, Bouzari managed to flee the country and, after taking up residence in Canada, sued Iran for damages in an Ontario court. According to the Ontario Court of Appeal judgment in the case *Bouzari* v. *Iran*,

> In the summer of 1993, the National Iranian Oil Company cancelled the contract it had with the consortium. Iran then incorporated the Iran Offshore Engineering Construction Company, appointed the president's son as its managing director and caused the new company to enter into a contract with the consortium for the South Pars project that was identical to the one that Mr. Bouzari had obtained. Not surprisingly, he was entirely excluded from the new arrangement.

Although Bouzari failed to get a favorable judgment in this first round, Ontario judges accepted the facts of his circumstances and dismissed the case only because state immunity laws applied to a foreign government. Neither Iran nor Mehdi ever contested the case. Bouzari did not give up, and eventually his efforts bore fruit. In August 2011, Ontario's Superior Court handed down a default judgment for torture against Mehdi, with an order to pay damages of around $6 million, plus interest at 5 percent from 1994. Mehdi dismissed the judgment and indicated it was so ludicrous he did not plan to fight it. If unchallenged, the judgment is final—which is to say that Oxford University is educating a torturer to whom it may one day wind up granting a doctoral degree.

How Mehdi ended up parked in one of the world's most prestigious universities not only highlights the moral torpor of British academe, but also offers a window onto the dark universe of Iranian political backstabbing.

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During the 2009 presidential election, Rafsanjani backed Mir Hussein Moussavi, which gave President Ahmadinejad cause to retaliate. Unable to go after the much too powerful father directly, Ahmadinejad targeted his proxies, family included. Mehdi was a natural choice. He ran an electoral center at Islamic Azad University, a giant academic institution offering affordable higher education across the country and at campuses abroad to over 1.5 million students. It trains the future cadres of the Republic and can mobilize student protests. Rafsanjani is one of the founders of Azad University and currently a governor. Recently, Azad has served as a battleground pitting Rafsanjani's camp against Ahmadinejad, who tried to snatch it from his adversary's control. Eventually, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei told both sides to back off.

Ahmadinejad had other means. He had already targeted many Rafsanjani loyalists and an institution considered Rafsanjani's personal think tank, the Center for Strategic Research. Now he zeroed in on Mehdi, whose judicial problems began in August 2009. Accused of economic malpractice, corruption, and embezzlement, Mehdi skipped town before the head of Iran's judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani (brother of Ali Larijani, the current speaker of the parliament), could get his hands on him.

Mehdi Hashemi Bahramani Rafsanjani

Having engineered the show trial of the late Ayatollah Montazeri's son-in-law in the 1980s, Rafsanjani is familiar with the practice of going after an adversary's close relatives. He found a convenient excuse for his son to leave the country. Mehdi was made an external inspector for Azad University and sent to tour campuses in faraway places, like Eynsham, a sleepy hamlet in the Cotswolds, just up the street from Oxford University. It did not take long before rumblings began to make their way into Iran's public sphere. What was taking the younger Rafsanjani so long that he had to stay in the United Kingdom for months? Rafsanjani the elder put the matter to rest on December 5, 2009, when he told an audience in Tehran that his son was still traveling world campuses, adding that he had advised him to get a Ph.D. Soon after, Mehdi applied for a DPhil at Oxford.

Mehdi Hashemi was not in the Cotswolds for a prolonged inspection, then, but was actually staying for a doctoral degree. His focus was "the Iranian constitution," a peculiar subject of inquiry for a man who tortured a recalcitrant business partner, and a vague topic for an Oxford doctoral dissertation. But in British academe, it appears, nothing can stand in the way of the son of a powerful Middle East notable. For mortals wanting to study at Oxford, there are some stringent qualifying criteria. Candidates must speak good English. They must complete an application process that includes submitting a résumé, three written references, transcripts, and other proof of proficiency in their subject, and their research must be their own original work. None of this, it appears, applied to Mehdi, who allegedly benefited from waivers, discounts, and solicitous help from some of his father's loyal lieutenants.

First, Mehdi's English: Ali Reza Sheikholeslami, a retired Oxford professor of Persian studies, wrote in a sworn affidavit that "Mr. Hashemi Bahremani did not have the minimum requisite level of English mandated at Oxford." Mehdi contends that he had studied English in Australia, at "Canberra's State University"—an institution that does not exist.

Next, his three referees are all Rafsanjani loyalists. According to Sheikholeslami, the three academics are: Nasser Hadian, formerly director of the political development program at the Center for Strategic Research, the Rafjsanjani-affiliated think tank; Ambassador Mohammad Javad Zarif, a former Ministry of Intelligence operative who was deputy foreign minister during Rafsanjani's presidency, later became Iran's ambassador to the U.N. thanks to Rafsanjani's patronage, and is now the vice president for international relations at Azad University; and Hossein Seifzadeh, a professor at University of Tehran. It is doubtful that any of his referees would be familiar with Mehdi's scholarly skills since he holds a degree in engineering, not in political science. As Sheikholeslami pointed out, "Mr. Hashemi Bahremani's academic background and his university degrees had no relevance to his proposed field of study and on this ground alone he was not a suitable candidate for admission."

Most important, it is alleged that someone else wrote Mehdi's research proposal. Sheikholeslami noted in his affidavit that the current Persian instructor at the faculty of Oriental Studies, Mohammad Javad Ardalan, "had been asked by my successor, Edmund Herzig, to help Mr. Hashemi with his application." When I queried Professor Herzig, he refused to comment. Ardalan, according to Sheikholeslami, met Mehdi in Oxford's poshest hotel—the Randolph—where over tea they negotiated his fee and the nature of his services. Ardalan replied to my queries through Oxford University's press office by denying the allegations.

When these accusations surfaced, the university

launched an investigation and appointed a former vice-chancellor of the university, Sir Peter North, to head it. University authorities have not released its findings to the public. According to Oxford's press office, "The university does not publish investigations relating to individuals." Asked if, based on the North report, they considered Sheikholeslami's sworn affidavit to be false, the press office did not rebut his accusations, but only said,

> To the extent that we have made 'claims' and 'assertions', they go no further than this: Sir Peter North investigated allegations made about the admission of a postgraduate student and found no evidence to support claims that he paid someone to assist with his application. The investigation also found no evidence of impropriety on the part of the admitting tutor.

Mehdi Hashemi is enrolled at Wolfson and at the Faculty of Oriental Studies not with his father's city-of-origin name, Rafsanjani, but with the family's village-of-origin name, Bahramani. Perhaps Oxford University's admission offices, as well as British visa authorities, may be able to plead ignorance concerning the provenance of Iranian names. Less certain is Professor Homayoun Katouzian's claim that he did not know of Bahramani's pedigree. Katouzian, who alongside Herzig evaluated and approved Mehdi's application, is the Iran Heritage Foundation research fellow at St. Antony's College, and a member of the Iran Heritage Foundation's academic council. Katouzian has published extensively on 19th- and 20th-century Iranian history and is a fluent Farsi speaker. Not knowing the identity of his prospective tutee is inconsistent with Katouzian's encyclopedic knowledge of Iran and his academic stature. The same goes for Herzig, a professor of Persian studies at Oxford and is Medhi's thesis supervisor. How could they be fooled?

In the middle of November 2011, Oxford's student paper, the *Oxford Student*, reported Mehdi's problems with the law and challenged Katouzian's claim that he did not know Mehdi Bahramani was a Rafsanjani. The paper also discussed a possible link between Katouzian and Rafsanjani allies and interests. It argued that Katouzian may have been asked to fix up something for a friend, namely Vahid Alaghband, the chair of the board of trustees of the Iran Heritage Foundation, which supports Katouzian's research at Oxford. Alaghband is also the chairman of the Balli Group, a British-based business conglomerate with a vast international presence, reaching even the United States. Balli's portfolio includes Balli Aviation, which in 2007 leased three Boeing 747 airplanes through an intermediary to Mahan Air, a private Iranian carrier linked to Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and accused by U.S. authorities of being a vector for Iranian proliferation and terror activities.

To some, the links suggest that Rafsanjani leveraged his Balli Group connections to find shelter for his fugitive son at Oxford. In any case, this is no longer simply a matter of doing a favor for the privileged son of a blood-soaked official from a faraway dictatorship, where the boy is wanted for some white-collar crimes, probably on trumped-up charges. The judgment of the Ontario court makes plain that the son himself is a criminal. Why would Oxford University admit a torturer?

As Robin Simcox documented in a 2009 report for the Centre for Social Cohesion entitled "A Degree of Influence": "The U.K.'s finest universities are taking money from some of the world's worst dictatorships—Iran, Saudi Arabia and China, all nations with appalling human rights records, are significant contributors to venerable U.K. institutions."

Money usually comes with strings attached. As the Simcox report's most significant and disturbing findings indicate, "There is clear evidence that, at some universities, the choice of teaching materials, the subject areas, the degrees offered, the recruitment of staff, the composition of advisory boards and even the selection of students are now subject to influence from donors. These problems are heightened by the undemocratic nature of certain donor governments."

Academic institutions often bend their ethical code to accommodate the dumb children of rich princes in exchange for a generous donation. There is no evidence of Oxford profiting financially by enrolling Mehdi—and yet the fact is that it is not just greed that numbs the judgment of those who bow before tyrants. In many cases, it is something equally or even more sinister. It is the morbid fascination with dictatorial regimes, one that is especially strong in Middle East Studies departments, where a peculiar blend of postcolonial rage against the West and a grievance-driven pseudo-scholarship cloaked in the language and footnotes of the late Edward Said has taken hold of scholars and their pupils. This angry worldview, in turn, has offered the moral pretext for getting sanctimonious about Western governments' mistakes and imperfections while getting cozy with tyrants, dictators, satraps, and their prodigal, violent children.

As Dennis Hayes, the founder of Academics for Academic Freedom, told Simcox, "British universities are funded by a government that invaded Iraq and Afghanistan. Does that make their funding suspect or a dangerous influence?" This is a convenient way to suggest a moral equivalence, and an argument designed to quell the consciences of those who are tutoring torturers. ♦

A Falun Gong pantomime of religious repression in China (2006)

Unfree to Be . . .

Religious liberty and human rights. BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

This book is yet another riposte to the late Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington's incendiary and much-discussed *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). Huntington's book had been itself a response to Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Fukuyama had argued that, what with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire, the era of political and ideological conflicts ("history") was over, and the whole world was now lumbering, in an immense metaphorical wagon train, toward Western-style liberal democracy with all its blessings and ills.

The Price of Freedom Denied
Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century
by Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke
Cambridge, 272 pp., $24.99

Huntington maintained, contra, that the Soviet implosion merely signaled the reemergence of older cultural and religious conflicts that had long predated Marxism and other ideologies of modernity. The most significant of those resurgent conflicts, Huntington predicted, would be that between Islam and the West, the former invigorated by an exploding population and a resurgence of traditional Muslim religiosity in defiance of the aggressively secularist governments that held sway in many Islamic countries during much of the 20th century.

Huntington believed that the "fault lines" between cultures, whether they lay along political boundaries between countries or within the boundaries of a single country, were and would continue to be loci of violence, especially religiously motivated violence that included the formal and informal persecution of religious minorities. Unlike Fukuyama, who believed that religion was a spent historical force, and that cultures were irrelevant except insofar as they embraced or rejected modernity,

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NEWSCOM

Huntington argued that culture and religion were inextricably intertwined and continued to be powerful human motivators. He was thinking of the Balkan wars of the 1990s, but his book did not do a bad job of predicting 9/11 and its geopolitical aftermath that pitted the West against militant forms of Islam. Huntington argued that Western nations needed to recognize that their treasured values and institutions were not universal and that it was necessary to assert and defend them politically and militarily in order to survive in recognizably Western form.

Needless to say, Huntington's theories came in for much criticism from his fellow academics, especially the progressives among them who had embraced the idea of multiculturalism: the idea that there was nothing inherently superior about Western civilization and that Western nations should accept and even promote a diversity of ethnic and religious cultures within their borders. Multiculturalism appeared to be an especially appealing and tolerant way of dealing with the Muslims who streamed into Western Europe during the last decades of the 20th century, challenging the highly secularized and demographically declining Christian (or more accurately, post-Christian) hegemony there and demanding to be governed by their own mores. The most virulent of Huntington's critics was the Columbia English professor and Palestinian apologist Edward Said, now also deceased. In a lengthy review of Huntington's ideas in the leftist magazine the *Nation*, Said accused Huntington of racism, jingoism, reductionism, Islamophobia, and many other sins. Huntington's leftist critics tended to attribute rising levels of religious conflict to a surge of "fundamentalism" that equally afflicted Christianity, Judaism, and other faiths.

In *The Price of Freedom Denied*, Brian J. Grim, a senior researcher at the Pew Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, and Roger Finke, a professor of sociology and religious studies at Penn State, offer a different sort of critique of Huntington—although, as I shall argue, they end up advocating the same sort of multiculturalism as Huntington's progressive foes. Grim and Finke belong to what they call the "religious economies" school of analysis of religion pioneered during the 1970s and 1980s by the sociologists Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge. It is essentially a free-market and supply-side approach to religious affiliation, arguing that people adhere to specific religions not because those religions are embodied in their cultures but because the religions respond effectively to their individual needs and desires. They cite as an example the sixfold growth of American-style Pentecostal Christianity over the past 20 years in Brazil, a country whose Portuguese culture once made it solidly Roman Catholic. Thus, Grim/Finke argue, it is illogical to hypothesize a "clash of civilizations" as an explanation for religious conflict, although they concede that such clashes do exist.

They contend instead that religious conflicts, including (and perhaps especially) religious persecution, arise out of efforts by governments and societies to regulate individual religious preferences. This can include government policies that explicitly favor a majority religion, or "cartel" of officially approved religions, as well as government acquiescence in societal prejudices against minority religions, such as the pervasive anti-Semitism in Europe that generated violence against Jews long before Hitler made it official policy.

"[W]e propose that the higher the degree to which governments and societies ensure religious freedoms for all, the less violent persecution and conflict along religious lines there will be," Grim/Finke write. They add:

> We propose that diverse religions can coexist in the same geographic space without conflict. But when the restrictions on religion become heavy and deny the religious freedoms of some or all, violent religious persecution and broader social conflict are likely.

Grim/Finke argue that religious conflict is pervasive throughout the world because nearly all countries in the world (86 percent by their reckoning) restrict or regulate religion in some fashion and thus generate religious violence, even though their constitutions typically guarantee religious freedom. The regimes include that of China, where members of unapproved religions are regularly imprisoned; that of Russia, where Jehovah's Witnesses and other adherents of nontraditional faiths complain that police are slow to respond to vandalism of their property and disruption of their worship services; and those of Western Europe, where anti-cult movements encourage discrimination against members of so-called new religions. Indeed, "start-up costs" for a new religion, such as registering with the government and finding a landlord willing to rent it worship space, can be daunting enough to exact social costs: a "decline in the supply of religious options . . . meaning less religious plurality and choice," Grim/Finke write.

Even the United States, with its strong First Amendment protections for religion, is not immune from official intrusions upon religious liberty, Grim/Finke insist. They cite the Supreme Court's 1990 decision in *Employment Division of Oregon, Department of Human Resources of Oregon* v. *Smith* upholding a denial of state unemployment benefits on misconduct grounds to two men fired from their jobs as counselors at a drug rehabilitation clinic for using peyote in a Native American Church ritual. Congress attempted to nullify the *Smith* ruling with the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) in 1993, but in 1997, the Supreme Court ruled that RFRA was unconstitutional, at least to the extent that it applied to the actions of state and local governments. Furthermore, Grim/Finke point out, the *Smith* ruling had a chilling effect on subsequent First Amendment litigation. Many more plaintiffs lost their cases, and many more felt reluctant to take their claims to court in the first place. Members of minority religions suffered the most, especially with respect to zoning disputes involving their places of worship.

Grim/Finke also point to persistent reports of religiously motivated

hate crimes in all 50 states: assaults, church-burnings, synagogue defacements. Quoting Alexis de Tocqueville, Grim/Finke decry what they describe as a growing Supreme Court-blessed "tyranny of the majority" in America regarding toleration of the beliefs and practices of minority religions.

Grim/Finke devote much of their book to case studies of countries—China, Japan, India, Brazil, Nigeria, and others—whose statistics support their correlation of incidences of religious conflict with those countries' restrictions or lack of restrictions on religion. The governments involved offer an array of justifications for the restraints: national security, decreasing interfaith tension, nation-building (as in Kemalist Turkey), maintaining strict secularism in public life (the rationale for the 2004 French ban on the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by students in public schools), and in the case of the Supreme Court in the *Smith* decision, upholding the validity of a religiously neutral state law—classifying the mescaline in peyote as an illegal drug—that applied equally to all residents of Oregon. Then Grim/Finke turn their attention to the elephant in the religious room, the same elephant that caught Samuel Huntington's attention: Islam.

Muslim-majority countries lead the world in violent religious persecution. During the first seven years of the 21st century, the two scholars note, there was violent religious persecution in every single Muslim-majority country with a population of more than two million, compared with 78 percent of Christian-majority countries and 86 percent of other countries. Furthermore, 46 percent of Muslim-majority countries have "the highest levels of persecution," which Grim/Finke define as leading to the displacement or abuse of more than 1,000 persons because of their faith. Only 11 percent of Christian-majority countries fall into that category. Interestingly—and this is why Grim/Finke reject the surge-of-fundamentalism rationale offered by leftists—in 1945, a year in which some of the most egregious and lethal government restrictions on religious freedom in human history prevailed in the Christian-majority countries of Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, Muslim-majority countries had even higher levels of religious regulation than Christian-majority countries overall. And when those countries, which were largely under European colonial rule during World War II, won their independence during the postwar years, their levels of religious regulation soared still higher, while those in the Christian-majority West, determined not to repeat the Holocaust, declined.

During the first seven years of the 21st century . . . there was violent religious persecution in every single Muslim-majority country with a population over two million, compared with 78 percent of Christian-majority countries and 86 percent of other countries.

In other words, fundamentalism has always been the rule in Islamic-majority countries, its persistence masked in recent years by the secular-nationalist policies of their leaders.

The reason for this lies in the nature of Islam itself, Grim/Finke argue. The prophet Muhammad first and foremost "established a social order that was to be lived in conformity to the will of the one true God as revealed in the holy Quran," they write. In the Dar al-Islam there is no distinction between religion and society, and religious apostasy is not only the gravest of sins against God but the gravest of sins against the social order, treason. *Sharia* law—the science of interpreting the Koran and sayings of Muhammad and applying them to social situations—is integral to Islam. Grim/Finke argue that the most significant religious clashes involving Muslims have taken place not along the fault lines between Islam and the West but within the Dar al-Islam itself, where theologically motivated factions jostle, often violently, to impose their competing visions of the "true" Islam and *sharia* upon their fellows. That means that victims of religious persecution and religious violence in Muslim-majority countries are likely to be other Muslims—and indeed, statistics show that Muslims are far more likely to be persecuted in Muslim-majority countries than they are in Christian-majority countries. As for Muslim-launched terrorist acts against the West, Grim/Finke argue that their true aim has been "to claim [the terrorists' own] country for Islam." Al Qaeda, for example, started out as a group of Wahhabi purists outraged by the decadence of the Saudi royal family and its hosting of infidel American troops on sacred soil.

Grim/Finke's analysis of *sharia*'s centrality in Islamic society, and on the brutal internecine warfare that has characterized much of Muslim culture since the prophet's death is shrewd—although their it's-not-about-you breeziness regarding a stream of West-directed Islamic terrorism, especially the 9/11 massacre (which was neither the first nor the last Muslim attempt to blow apart a U.S. commercial airliner laden with passengers), stopped me short. Grim/Finke cite a 2000 survey by the First Amendment Center indicating that 73 percent of Americans believed that all religious groups are entitled to freedom of worship "regardless of how extreme their beliefs are." They continue: "Only seven years later, however, the number agreeing dropped to 56 percent."

I wonder why.

I am not advocating persecution of Muslims, or even making Muslim girls take off their headscarves as the French make them do; but there is something off-key about tut-tutting the Supreme Court for upholding the firing of two drug counselors—yes,

drug counselors—after they tested positive for the cactus equivalent of LSD. Grim/Finke contend that the *Smith* ruling set America on a slippery slope to "tyranny of the majority" in religious matters. That seems a hyperbolic projection. For one thing, little harm was done by the ruling. Since the Native American Church is a real church dating to the early 20th century, believe it or not, not an invention of sixties hippies, both the Oregon legislature and Congress quickly amended the law to accommodate peyote use in Indian religious rites. For another, had the Supreme Court ruled otherwise, America would have been set on another kind of slippery slope: forced to condone polygamy (a bona fide practice of dissident Mormons and also, ahem, some Muslims) and even human sacrifice (a bona fide practice undoubtedly of some of the ancestors of the members of the Native American Church). Grim/Finke have little faith in American tolerance and American common sense.

Which leads to the second problem with Grim/Finke's analysis. Like the leftists with whom they disagree on most other issues, Grim/Finke are strong proponents of religious multiculturalism. They write that "multiculturalism with religious pluralities does not lead to violence as Huntington suggests—the attempt to prevent multiculturalism and religious pluralities does." Perhaps so. But how should a multiculturalism-friendly government respond when, say, its Muslim population agitates to be governed by *sharia* law, as Islam demands of its societies? In 2004 Canada's Ontario province came within a hair's breadth of turning over Islamic divorces and child-custody disputes to Muslim clerics in the name of multiculturalism; the transfer was stopped only after feminists pointed out that *sharia* is not a legal system that promotes anything resembling a Western concept of women's rights.

Toward the end of *The Price of Freedom Denied*, Grim and Finke display a graph that correlates the religious freedom in given countries with a number of other freedoms, including gender equality—and also with lower poverty, economic freedom, and a higher percentage of GDP spent on public health. The graph is a picture of . . . the West. The good things shown in the graph, including religious liberty, exist because they are the products of values that are specifically Western, deriving from the West's admittedly secularized Christian heritage.

If Western cultures are unwilling to stand up for those values, they will find themselves in a clash of civilizations that they will surely lose. ♦

B&A

Downhill from Here

The unedifying spectacle of an unruly ruling class.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

Anglophobes or egalitarians still looking for confirmation that the English aristocracy is no longer what it was may find Marcus Scriven's *Splendour & Squalor* the most satisfying read since whatever it was that Sarah Ferguson last wrote.

Splendour & Squalor
The Disgrace and Disintegration of Three Aristocratic Dynasties
by Marcus Scriven
Atlantic Books, 414 pp., $16.95

These are well-told tales of well-born ruin to savor, complete with grubby interludes, penny ante crises, and tawdry finales that all combine to make a wider, and even more conclusive, point about the decline of the old social order: The aristocratic fiascos of the 20th century are those of a shrunken and shriveled caste. They simply cannot compete with the epic follies of Britain's gloriously ignoble noble past, tantalizing flickers of which illuminate the introduction of Scriven's marvelously off-kilter chronicle.

England's older generation set the bar high, and would, in many ways, have been better suited to Scriven's wry tastes than the later 20th-century dross to which he has dedicated his efforts. Scriven's four aristocrats furnish him with squalor, certainly, but not so much in the way of splendor. For an example of the latter we have to turn to the past, making do with glimpses of exotics such as Henry Cyril Paget (1875-1905), the 5th Marquess of Anglesey, the "dancing Marquess" who scandalized an earlier era and brings his own peculiar glamour to Scriven's introduction. His was a whirling, twirling saga of madness, camp, narcissism, waste, and style. The misfires of the more modern noblemen to whom Scriven's book is devoted come across, by comparison, as distinctly damp squibs.

Anglesey devoted himself to his wardrobe, walking sticks, jewelry, yachts, cars, and, as his sobriquet would suggest, dancing. He converted the family chapel into a theater and "commissioned . . . a production of *Aladdin*, for which he pioneered 'the Butterfly Dance,' a solo which he alone performed," both in the former chapel and then on tour. He died in Monte Carlo, after running up spectacular debts, a blow to a distinguished lineage made no easier to bear, as Scriven notes, by "doubts over his legitimacy," a blurred hallmark he shared with Edward FitzGerald (1892-1976), the 7th Duke of Leinster, serial husband and serial bankrupt, who is first of the scapegraces to feature in the main section of Scriven's roll of dishonor.

Andrew Stuttaford works in the international financial markets and writes frequently about cultural and political issues.

Disappointingly, perhaps, for some of his relatives, there were no such worries about the paternity of Angus Charles Drogo Montagu (1938-2002), the eventual 12th Duke of Manchester, and the least interesting of Scriven's far from fantastic four. The dullard second son of one of the many branches of an ancient family, he had few skills, a demanding sense of entitlement, and a fondness, when he could get it, of the high life and repeat marriage (he managed four wives, equaling Leinster's haul). This would have been tricky in more capable hands, but when combined with a love of alcohol, a yen for gambling, a nose for a bad deal, and resources that were generally as modest as his talents, the consequences tended to be messy, and included a spell in an American prison after one of his "bits of business" went wrong.

Scriven, a deft writer, makes what he can of Drogo's dreary decline. No Icarus, Montagu aimed low, and landed lower, scrabbling for survival while failing to take advantage of the breaks that came his undeserving way. He was a man with little to commend him, and yet, such was the lingering appeal of a title, the mere fact of his persuaded a surprising number of people to throw some bones his way. He was recruited by fraudster and law firm alike to lend the sheen of his forebears to their business. The state chipped in, too. As the senior peer he eventually became, Montagu was entitled to play legislator (which was of no interest) in the House of Lords and to be paid whenever he turned up (which was), facts that may lead some readers to sympathize with Tony Blair's purge of almost all the hereditary element from Britain's upper house. That would be a mistake. Manned as of old, the House of Lords was too obviously and indefensibly archaic to be taken seriously. Dominated these days by cronies, stooges, *bien-pensant* worthies, and burnt-out grandees, it has become a more subtle, and thus more effective, insult to democracy.

But noble birth comes with an old, dangerous magic. Montagu used his to beguile, but was beguiled himself. It gave him both a sense of entitlement, and obligation, too. He could afford neither. No matter. Appearances mattered: "A duke must be seen to behave like a duke." His tips were generous, his hospitality was lavish, and his pockets were emptied.

The 'dancing Marquess' of Anglesey (ca. 1900)

No British book on hereditary catastrophe would be complete without the Hervey family, long the poster boys for disorderly DNA, and Scriven gives starring roles to two of them, while scrupulously noting that if there was a "bad" gene, it was unusually recessive. The unorthodoxies of various 18th-century Herveys (including homosexuality, promiscuity, "exhibitionism of a specialist kind," sadism, murder, and—impressive in a bishop—something close to atheism) were followed by a century in which they were, despite the "discordant" tendency of their Irish cousins to emigrate to Canada, "very nearly the embodiment of aristocratic virtue."

The same could not be said of the dysfunctional duo at the heart of Scriven's narrative, Victor Hervey (1915-1985), the 6th Marquess of Bristol, and his son John (1954-99), the 7th. The heir to a vast fortune, Victor went in for conventional aristocratic misbehavior—extravagance, brutal violence, reactionary politics, pathological snobbery, invented Ruritanian uniforms, absurd business ventures, immoderate matrimony, and immoderate drinking—with considerable enthusiasm. He then added flourishes that were all his own, including crooked Finnish arms deals, jewel theft, and episodes of fraud.

Of all the wreckage that Victor created, however, the most disastrous was his eldest son, John. Starved of paternal affection and kept away from his mother (Victor had moved on to another wife), this poor little rich boy's upbringing was doubtless made more confusing by its toxic mixture of neglect, luxury, and frequent reminders of his elevated social status, a cocktail that cannot have left him well-equipped to deal with the temptations that the age of disco put in his way. The money was there, the drugs were there, and in the Dionysian interlude between the waning of traditional sexual morality and the waxing of AIDS (gene or no gene, John was one of the gay Herveys), playtime was what you could make of it.

But John's was a compulsive hedonism, with not a lot of joy about it, marked by boorish displays of excess, sporadic stints in jail, and the humiliations of addiction. In the end, the money was exhausted, and so was his health. His life ended after only 44 years. It's hard to believe that it was much fun while it lasted.

And was his aristocratic birth at least partly to blame? John could be a caricature of rampaging nobility—bullying,

destructive, and arrogant—yet traces of noblesse oblige hint at a more rounded sense of self. He was kind to his household servants, a kindness that was repaid with devotion. They knew their place, and he knew his. That was in the script, too. He was, or would become, the marquess, and, like his father, he was not shy about proclaiming it with displays of don't-you-know-who-I-am alien to the patrician restraint that has contributed so much to the survival of the English upper classes. There was a coronet on his bathrobe, his tie-pin, and on the top of his four-poster bed. There were heraldic crests on his slippers and coats of arms on his car.

Perhaps it's kindest to see John's doomed, wild ride as containing a strong element of performance. Was this not notably imaginative man, like the hopeless Manchester, merely trying to live up to what he imagined was expected of an aristocrat? Scriven is too disciplined a writer to indulge overmuch in long-distance psychiatry, and doesn't say. This reticence is a pity: A touch more speculation from this shrewd, perceptive writer would have helped the story along.

In the end, John proved a dud even at debauchery, comfortably outclassed in that respect by the new rock 'n' roll aristocracy with which he sometimes socialized and probably, at some level, tried to compete. They outdid him in vice, vigor, achievements, and, generally, lifespan. There's probably some vaguely Darwinian lesson to be drawn from this, but if this book suffers from Scriven's reluctance to act as a psychiatrist, it gains from his decision not to turn teacher, preacher, or leveler despite the obvious opportunities with which his material has presented him.

The social history that emerges is fascinating, but oblique, only there for those who wish to find it. There are no tiresome leftist tirades against the hereditary principle, no leaden sermons on the need for a sober life; merely dark, but all-too-human tales of privilege and disaster, drolly, drily, and not unsympathetically told, that together conjure up a spectacle as appallingly irresistible as the crash of an extremely expensive car. ♦

B&A

Working Man Blues

Eric Hoffer: longshoreman, writer, prophet.

BY FRED SIEGEL

Not long ago Thomas Edsall told readers of the *New York Times* that the 2012 Obama campaign had essentially given up trying to win the support of white working-class voters. The Democrats, explained Edsall, had become a top-and-bottom coalition of highly educated professionals, many of whom work directly or indirectly for government, at one end, and the low-income recipients of government benefits on the other.

American Iconoclast
The Life and Times of Eric Hoffer
by Tom Shactman
Hopewell, 244 pp., $19.95

What's missing from that alignment are the producers, people who make things and those who maintain and repair them. The starkness of the division was anticipated 45 years ago in the writings of the San Francisco dockworker Eric Hoffer (1902-1983).

Hoffer, a major intellectual figure for three decades, became famous with his 1951 essay on communism and fascism, *The True Believer*, which bypassed Marx and Freud to explain totalitarianism. Tom Shactman has brought this extraordinary, but unfortunately forgotten, figure back into the public eye with this new biography.

Born in the Bronx roughly at the turn of the 20th century, Hoffer was the child of Alsatian immigrants: a gruff, highly literate father who worked as a cabinetmaker and a homemaking mother devoted to her only child. But Hoffer's mother took a terrible fall that led to her death and his own blindness. He had already been reading English and German, but he remained blind from ages 7 to 15 when his sight inexplicably returned, along with his love of reading. The family maid, who was devoted to him, returned to Germany just before World War I, and his father died in 1920. Hoffer, who had never attended school or received religious instruction, was a solitary man.

In the wake of the Great War, with the $300 death benefit he had received from his father's union, he headed off alone for Los Angeles, settling on a skid row. There, apart from the books he read such as Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Ernest Renan's multivolume history of the ancient Israelites, he led a desultory existence for a decade. But after a failed suicide attempt in 1931, devoid of self-pity, he headed off for a decade in the California fields as a migrant farm worker picking cotton, thinning beets, and mining gold.

Building on his experience working in the fields, Hoffer saw that the undesirables of Europe, the freewheeling pioneers of early generations, bore more than a passing resemblance to the vagabonds and tramps he worked with as a migrant farmworker.

In 1936, fearing that he would be trapped by the bitter winters of the Sierra Nevada while mining, he took with him the collected essays of Michel de Montaigne. Hoffer read through the small print of that massive tome twice, and then skimmed through it a third time. Montaigne was famous, in the midst of the wars of religion, for such aphorisms as "It is to put a very high value on your surmises to roast a man alive for them"

Fred Siegel, scholar in residence at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

and "Reason is a two-handed pot: You can grab it from the right or the left."

Hoffer, drawn to the Frenchman's stoicism and self-reflection, declared that Montaigne "knew my innermost thoughts." Hoffer tried to emulate both Montaigne's writing style—in which Montaigne noted that "the speech I love is simple, natural speech, the same on paper as in the mouth"—and his approach to knowledge: "I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics; that is my physics."

Hoffer took this to heart, declaring that "my writing grows out of my life just as a branch from a tree."

In 1942 he volunteered for the Army and was rejected because of a hernia. Short but powerfully built, he went to work on the San Francisco docks to be part of the war effort. He listened to what his coworkers had to say, sometimes arguing with the Communists in his union; but he lived alone, and kept to himself after work, devoting himself to reading. He would later write in his notebooks: "It's only when the oyster keeps its mouth shut that a grain of sand within may become a pearl."

In 1951, Hoffer's efforts to think about "the inner nature of things" produced *The True Believer*, the short book on mass movements that made him famous. In it he saw the inner similarity, the "alchemy of conviction," between the Nazis and the Communists in their fanatical devotion to a seemingly selfless ideal. He saw that in both movements self-contempt was transformed into pride by way of "deprecat(ing) the present on behalf of a glorious future" in which the devil—who was essential for fanatical mass movements, be it Jews or the bourgeoisie—was to be exterminated. Hoffer saw that the tensions inherent in pluralist societies were preferable to the alternatives. Grasping the essential irony of benevolence by way of indirection, he wrote,

> By keeping clear of the guilt of selfishness . . . we commit atrocities and enormities without . . . fear of remorse. . . . A sense of duty and devotion to an idea often produces a selflessness more ruthless and harmful than extreme selfishness.

Eric Hoffer, Lyndon Johnson (1967)

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Devoid of pretension, steely in his independence, even after he achieved fame with *The True Believer*, Hoffer went back to work on the dock for another 25 years. A man apart, he made it clear that he didn't represent the working class; rather he was proudly *of* the working class. At one point he suffered a severed thumb in a work accident that cost two men their lives, but he kept working. Work, and America's respect for it, was central to his sense of identity.

Reading Tom Shactman's engaging and clearly written account, I found myself compelled to reread all of the Hoffer essays of the 1960s. Here I came across the one obvious failing of Shactman's book: It scants the brilliance of Hoffer's conceptual demolition of the pretensions that took hold in the mass movements of the Age of Aquarius. Supportive of the civil rights movement, Hoffer saw the racialism of the black power movement as an expression of a pride that masked self-doubt, even self-contempt. He recognized that the black power movement was, in part, a "racket," an opportunity for race hustlers and charlatans to promise a short cut to prosperity that they could cash in on but that would leave most blacks even worse off. There was, he rightly insisted, no substitute for the self-discipline, the relentless work, required to make the long, hard slog to well-being.

America, as Hoffer rightly understood, was exceptional: "Only here, in America," he wrote, "were the common folk of the Old World given a chance to show what they could do on their own, without a master to push and order them about." It was the practicality of working people, untutored by intellectuals, that was integral to America's success. "Scribe-dominated" societies, he argued, derived "a rare satisfaction from tearing tangible things out of the hands of practical people. . . . America is the only country where the masses have impressed their tastes and values on the whole of the country."

It was precisely this egalitarianism that alienated intellectuals, who felt they weren't given their due in the land of the common man. Intellectuals thrived, he noted, in social orders dominated by autocracies and aristocracies. But "one cannot escape the impression that the intellectual's most fundamental incompatibility is with the masses."

In the early 1960s, when containerization arrived on the San Francisco docks, and automation took hold in manufacturing, Hoffer welcomed them as relieving people of their burdensome tasks. We were at the Gates of Eden, he wrote. But he soon also

saw the underside of this transformation. In "America just now," he wrote in the mid-1960s, "the masses are on their way out." With the coming of automation, he wrote with exaggeration, "90 percent of the common people will become unneeded and unwanted." The future, he argued (anticipating Silicon Valley), is being shaped "by laboratories manned by supermen" with little use for the average guy: "The elites are finally catching up with us. We can hear the swish of leather as saddles are heaved on our backs. The intellectuals and the young [student radicals], booted and spurred, feel themselves born to ride us."

Where others saw idealism in the student radicalism of the 1960s, Hoffer saw a drive for power:

> There is nothing in contemporary America that can cure or alleviate their chronic frustration. They want power, lordship, and opportunities for imposing action. Even if we should banish poverty from the land, lift up the Negro to true equality, withdraw from Vietnam, and give half the national income as foreign aid, they will still see America as an air-conditioned nightmare. . . . What [they] cannot stomach is the mass of the American people—a mindless monstrosity devoid of spiritual, moral, and intellectual capacities.

Hoffer feared that the liberals' and student radicals' sympathy for the criminality of some African Americans, combined with their hostility to working-class whites, was the expression of a would-be aristocracy in the making. Writing about the contemporary campus hero Herbert Marcuse, he noted Marcuse's disdain for the sight, sound, and smell of the average American. For Marcuse, "there is something fundamentally wrong with a society in which the master and the workers, the typist and the boss's daughter, do not live totally disparate lives." Today we've achieved what Marcuse and the intellectuals hoped for: a far more stratified society in which liberals can live in upper-middle-class bubbles insulated from the masses.

Hoffer was the first to anticipate the coming of the top-bottom coalition: "An interesting peculiarity of present-day dissenting intellectuals," he noted, "is their lack of animus towards the rich. . . . I doubt whether anyone had foreseen that affluence would radicalize the upper rich and the lowest poor and nudge them toward an alliance against those in the middle. What we have of revolution just now is financed largely by the rich."

The plight of African Americans became, as he recognized, the means by which the masses, stigmatized as hopelessly racist, could be displaced from the center of American life. Hoffer saw the underlying logic of the question that has emerged as we approach the 2012 election: Does the voice of the middle-class black and white still define our polity or culture? ♦

B&A

Square's Roots

As the Cold War ended, the compass went haywire.

BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

There was a time when John le Carré mattered, really *mattered*—back when he seemed a major talent and one of the best observers of our time: the man who had turned genre fiction into literature.

It started when he produced *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* in 1963, built to the 1974 *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, and reached a crescendo with *Smiley's People* (1979). The films helped, of course: the popular Richard Burton movie that Hollywood made from *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* in 1965, the James Mason movie that director Sidney Lumet adapted from *Call for the Dead* in 1966. The widely acclaimed seven-part television miniseries of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, for that matter, which the BBC released in 1979, with Alec Guinness playing le Carré's quiet spymaster, George Smiley. But mostly it was the books—all those volumes from le Carré. *The Looking Glass War* (1965), *A Small Town in Germany* (1968), *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977): For decades, you could find them on library shelves and used-book tables—dog-eared paperbacks, faded book-club editions—and to pick one up was to fall deep into the strangely placid waters of its agitated plot.

I was going to say that readers may have forgotten just how good le Carré's writing was; but even as the years went by, le Carré never lost his writing talent. Indeed, in many of the later novels, from *Single & Single* (1999) to *A Most Wanted Man* (2008), prose was really all he seemed to have left. If anything, in a book like *The Constant Gardener* (2001), the writing had become even more careful, more delicate, more precious. Too precious, in fact. Somehow, after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, each new volume felt a little less substantial, a little less incisive, a little less important, until—at this book, or that—you dropped off the le Carré express: not so much disliking him as ceasing much to notice him.

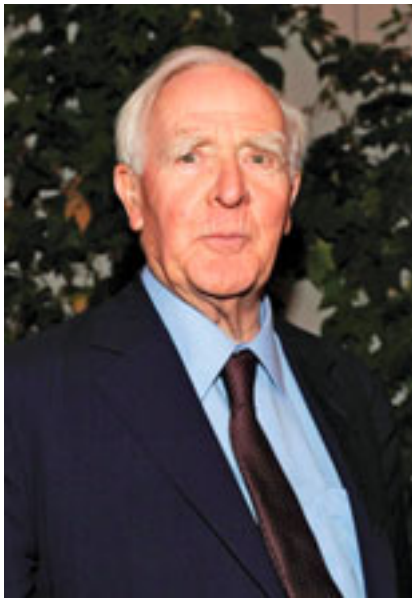
In the early books, however, the unhurried precision of that prose, the slow movement through those Cold War plots, made each new publication a mandatory read. He gave a wonderfully languid quality to the adventure tales of his spy fiction, as though Henry James had decided to rewrite Ian Fleming—Daisy Miller wandering into *Casino Royale* and having a rather tawdry little affair with James Bond.

Joseph Bottum, a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, *is the author, most recently, of* The Second Spring: Words into Music, Music into Words.

Tawdry, in fact, has the authentic le Carré ring to it. A word of class distinction, just a little dated, and capturing in the prose what all the best le Carré seemed to be about: that moment when the classic British manner of affected amateurism and indolence fell over into genuine exhaustion—a spiritual, social, and even physical ennui that pervaded everything. Bit by bit, the old colonies had fallen away, till old England just didn't count for much, le Carré was telling us, and the struggle against the Soviets was fought, in the final decades, only through a kind of inertia. A dull stone rolling slowly down the tail end of a slope. *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* showed us a Cold War so much more vile than previous fiction had taught us to expect. *The Looking Glass War*, a spy profession so much more incompetent. *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, an England so much more corrupt.

Right at the moment he came along, espionage fiction needed someone like John le Carré. (His real name was David Cornwell. He had to use a pen name—"John the Square" in French—because he was still working for the British secret services when the first novels appeared.) By the early 1960s, the genre had grown somehow both enormously popular and enormously dull, the lift the Cold War had given spy novels hardening into formula and cliché. Yes, there had been spies in popular fiction before fears of the Soviet Union began to dominate the category. Back in 1907, Joseph Conrad used the genre to explore the murderous psychology of leftist terrorists, but Germany remained the central worry through most of the era. And of those books, Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) remains almost worth reading. E. Phillips Oppenheim's *The Great Impersonation* (1920) is better than the universal dismissal of its author would lead you to suspect, as, for that matter, is John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915).

W. Somerset Maugham's Ashenden stories (1928) and Eric Ambler's late-1930s volumes, from *Epitaph for a Spy* to *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, started to change things. (In fact, for years until le Carré burst on the scene, Ambler was thought to be the one genuinely good writer the genre had produced.) But spy fiction, as distinct from pure adventure stories, came into its own only with the Cold War, from Graham Greene's *The Third Man* (1949) to Adam Hall's *The Quiller Memorandum* (1965). Desmond Cory's *Secret Ministry* (1951), Ian Fleming's *From Russia, with Love* (1957), Len Deighton's *Funeral in Berlin* (1964)—the British owned the genre in those days, and they were killing it. Such parodies as Colin Watson's *Hopjoy Was Here* (1962) and Donald Westlake's *The Spy in the Ointment* (1966) were already revealing the essential emptiness of the genre, and the fantastical film versions



John le Carré (2011)

of Fleming's already fantastical spy were turning the whole thing back into adventure thrillers.

And then we found John le Carré. If James Bond was an old-fashioned figure out of E. Phillips Oppenheim or William Le Queux—a multitalented hero against mastermind villains, updated with a little more brutality and a lot more sex—then le Carré's George Smiley was . . . well, what was he? He had a touch of the quiet eccentricity of an elderly Oxbridge don, coupled with a curious bit of dissociation that seemed at times like something out of Camus. A deliberate self-effacing and hiding of intelligence reminiscent of T.S. Eliot, as well, together with the sad, enduring love of a cuckold that could have come from James Joyce's everyman figure of Leopold Bloom. He was, in fact, basically the aging Alec Guinness, who was perfectly cast as Smiley in the 1979 setting of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* and 1982 version of *Smiley's People*—the pair of BBC miniseries which stand as the closest approximation that film has ever managed to le Carré's vision. So defining has Guinness's portrayal become that it's hard to imagine any other way to set the character.

Hollywood has come out with a movie version of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (see "Slow Motion Smiley" by John Podhoretz, Dec. 26), but the book resists being compressed into the two hours of a movie, and besides, the star Gary Oldman isn't playing George Smiley: He's playing Alec Guinness playing George Smiley, and not quite achieving it. You might think, with le Carré's name back in the news, that he's ready for a revival. There's the new film; the Acorn Media release of the old *Tinker, Tailor* BBC series on DVD; the Indian summer of what le Carré has suggested may be his last work, the surprisingly good *Our Kind of Traitor* (2010).

But really, le Carré was always slightly disappointing when the topic wasn't the Cold War. His 1983 foray into the Middle East, *The Little Drummer Girl*, seemed at the time a dead end from which he backtracked in *A Perfect Spy* (1986) and *The Russia House* (1989). But then the Soviet bloc came crashing down, and le Carré never quite seemed to find another subgenre deep enough to hold all he was capable of pouring into it. Moral undertone was the problem. He could still construct a puzzle plot; he could still do a more complex character study than anyone imagined the spy tale could actually contain; he could even maintain the languid perfection of that distinct prose. But in the exhaustion of Great Britain that le Carré imagined, what was left after the fall of the Soviet empire?

The tension of his best books came from a moral certainty that, all the way down at the bottom, the enervated self still knew that communism was worth resisting. And after that, what resistance? Less and less and less until, at last, nothing at all. ♦

NEWSCOM

B&A

This Way Out

An elaborate meditation on the strikingly obvious.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Young Adult
Directed by Jason Reitman

The word "slight" could have been invented to describe *Young Adult*, the new collaboration from the director and screenwriter of *Juno*, the beautiful teen-pregnancy movie from 2007—which has a far more involved and involving plot and many more characters. By contrast, *Young Adult* tells a tiny little story with no twists and turns and only four characters of note; it unfolds over a few days in a Minnesota town and comes to an abrupt end with a black screen barely 90 minutes later. You stare at the screen as the titles roll, baffled that what you saw was all there is.

Dramatically insubstantial though it is, *Young Adult* is thematically rich and really rather sneaky. What seems to be an unsparing portrait of the prettiest mean girl in high school floundering two decades after her reign, *Young Adult* is in fact a full-bore defense of everyday Americans living homely lives in dull places in the middle of nowhere. Like *Juno*, which was also set in a Minnesota town, *Young Adult* contrasts the spiritual hollowness of wannabe sophisticates with the unassuming goodness of unpretentious people who are just trying to get through the day.

Charlize Theron plays Mavis, still drop-dead gorgeous at 36. Divorced, childless, and unmoored to life by anything except a furry little dog she can barely take care of, Mavis earns her keep ghostwriting a series of novels for teenage girls from an arid high-rise apartment in Minneapolis dominated by a big-screen television on which reality television plays in an endless loop. As the movie begins, she is having trouble completing what is to be the last book in the series, when she receives an email featuring a birth announcement—the baby of her high-school boyfriend. She cannot figure out why it was sent to her, but on the spur of the moment she decides to go back to her hometown of Mercury and do something about it.

Aside from her beauty, Mavis is all but bereft of redeeming virtues. She drinks too much, she sleeps around, she has no sense of humor, and her exaggerated opinion of her own self-worth is a thin mask for a deep sense of her own worthlessness. She is determined to win her old boyfriend back, but once we meet Buddy (Patrick Wilson), her passion for him seems misplaced. He is perfectly nice and perfectly dull, with a middle-management job at General Mills that allows him to have lunch with his dad most days. Buddy's idea of a good time is to go have a beer at the new sports bar, Champion O'Malley's.

Indeed, most everybody in Mercury is dull: her parents, the girl who works the desk at the Hampton Inn, the people at the bar, the people attending the christening of Buddy's baby. Director Jason Reitman and screenwriter Diablo Cody allow us to see Mercury through Mavis's eyes, and it does indeed seem like a place to flee, without a shred of physical beauty and dominated by mall buildings. (Interestingly enough, the movie was shot not in Minnesota but on Long Island, in the depressing town of Massapequa.)

But then there is Buddy's adorable wife Beth (Elizabeth Reaser), who plays the drums enthusiastically in a rock band made up of new mommies called Nipple Confusion. She is, as we discover through the course of the movie, a far more substantial and goodhearted person than we expect. And there is "the hate crime guy," Matt Freehauf (Patton Oswalt, in a memorable performance), so called because he was nearly beaten to death and left crippled when he and Mavis were in high school because the jocks thought he was gay. When it turned out he wasn't, the story died down and Matt was left to take odd jobs and share a house with his terminally depressed sister and the action figures he paints.

Matt is the saddest of sad sacks, but he's smart and funny and he's onto Mavis, who confides her plan to rip Buddy from the bosom of his newly enlarged family and take him away from all this. But while Mercury has its failings, the movie asks, what is so special about Mavis's life? Why would you trade Mercury for what she has?

There is something very wise and moving about *Young Adult*, and its depiction of Mavis is as refreshingly unsentimental as Theron's performance. But the movie is so determined to expose the aridity of Mavis's existence that it cheats itself. Had Cody and Reitman found a way to make Mavis and the escape she offers Buddy more seductive, a real battle might have been set up. But we see the dead-end nature of Mavis's life in Minneapolis before we are given a close-up view of the banality of the life in Mercury, so that it's not much of a contest. And when the dull people of Mercury prove to have more moral mettle than Mavis realizes, it might come as a surprise to her but it doesn't come as a surprise to us.

Young Adult could have been a small classic; as it is, it's just a small, decent, small film. Did I mention small? ♦

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

"Much information about Mr. Romney's wealth is not known publicly."
—New York Times, *December 19, 2011*

PARODY

DECEMBER 26, 2011 ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

NEW EVIDENCE: MITT ROMNEY HAD 'JOB,' MADE LOT OF MONEY

Rumors of Past Income Dog GOP Frontrunner

By PETER BAKER, JEFF ZELENY, NICHOLAS CONFESSORE, CHRISTOPHER DREW AND JULIE CRESWELL

WASHINGTON — After years of speculation and rumor about Mitt Romney's life as a private citizen, new evidence suggests that the former Massachusetts governor and current presidential candidate is rich. According to a months-long investigation by the New York Times, Mr. Romney, whose work in the private sector has long been shrouded in mystery, appears to have amassed a large personal fortune.

"Uh, yeah. Have you seen his house?" said a friend of Mr. Romney, who asked to remain anonymous because he too is rich. That Mr. Romney has a house is an issue sure to rile independent voters still reeling from the housing crisis.

Before entering public life, according to one former colleague who also asked not to be named, Mr. Romney had something called a "job" that "paid really well." Though the details of Mr. Romney's job remain unclear, according to one expert, it could have been any number of things. "He could have been involved in money, managing money, or building things, or selling something. He probably wasn't a teacher or a nurse, but rather some kind of greedy boss-type guy," reports Martin Handrow, the Ed Asner Professor of Econo-Racism at Southwest Albuquerque College. "What's clear is that he got a lot of money, which raises a lot of questions."

In fact, questions about Mr. Romney are all the public has known from the moment he entered public life after appearing suddenly out of a cloud of red smoke just six months before the 2002 Massachusetts gubernatorial election. "Where did he come from? What was that smoke? Is he rich?" asked Senator Edward M. Kennedy at the time. That Mr. Romney looks rich has never been in dispute. His shiny hair and well-tailored suits, his impeccably white smile, his game-show-host good looks, all have prompted speculation that Mr. Romney might be rich. But for the last nine years, the public has been left to wonder, as Mr. Romney has repeatedly deflected answers about his private-sector experience by talking about his Mormon faith, never referencing what he did for a living or how what he did might affect how he governs.

John Smith / Corbis / AP Images

This money is like the money that Mitt Romney is rumored to have, except much less.

This new evidence could cause Republican voters to reconsider their support for Mr. Romney, after a series of heroic protests across the country, known as the Occupy movement, have brought attention to rising income inequality as the dominant issue of the campaign. While some rich people, like President Barack H. Obama, display a tremendous sensitivity about their own wealth, Mr. Romney

Continued on Page A3