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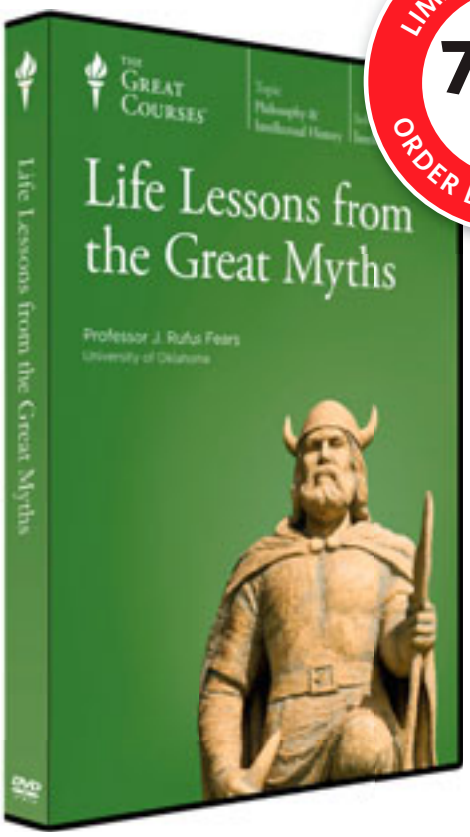


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# Contents

February 6, 2012 • Volume 17, Number 20




## Articles



## Features



## Books & Arts



COVER BY GARY LOCKE

# Pants on (three-alarm) Fire

In recent weeks, these pages have contained thousands of words on the laughable bias and general incompetence of the mainstream media's cherished "fact checking" columns. We've gone back to the well so many times we risk becoming the Baby Jessica of media criticism. Alas, it's hard to ignore these pompous gatekeepers.

In last week's issue, Mark Hemingway noted that there is a special congressional election in Oregon's 1st District being held on January 31, thanks to the resignation of disgraced Democrat David Wu. It's a surprisingly close race, and Democrat Suzanne Bonamici and Republican Rob Cornilles have been making rather pointed accusations against each other.

So PolitiFact Oregon—which works in partnership with the state's most influential media outlet, the *Oregonian*—has been trying and failing to play referee in the race by evaluating the candidates' statements. First, PolitiFact gave Cornilles its "Pants on Fire" rating for an ad claiming that Bonamici, a state legislator, voted to raise taxes 60 times. Now depending on how broadly you define "tax," the claim is defensible. But if you want to split hairs—and boy, does PolitiFact ever like to do that—then you would say not that Bonamici has raised taxes 60 times, but that she has raised taxes *and fees* 60 times.

Even if you accept that Cornilles may not have been 100 percent accurate, it's still hard to argue he deserved a "Pants on Fire" rating—the acme of dishonesty on PolitiFact's scale. His underlying message that Bonamici has raised taxes and generally made life more expensive for people in a state where the tax rate tops out at a whopping 11 percent strikes us as far from misleading. In any event, Cornilles modified his line of attack in a later campaign ad, claiming that Bonamici "voted for higher taxes and fees on the middle class and small business," which would be deemed accurate by the criteria PolitiFact had laid out.

But not content that PolitiFact was, as usual, playing fast and loose to make Republican rhetoric appear false, Bonamici doubled down. She responded to Cornilles's revised advertising with an ad of her own, claiming that "*Oregonian*'s PolitiFact found this attack to be so FALSE that it was rated 'Pants on Fire.'"

This in turn prompted PolitiFact to give Bonamici's ad a "Pants on Fire" rating for saying that Cornilles's second ad had been given a "Pants on Fire" rating, when the truth was Cornilles had been given that unfair rating for a substantively similar claim that was phrased differently in his previous ad.

If you find sorting that all out bewildering, we don't blame you. We have no idea whether the people writing Bonamici's ad were themselves confused about which "Pants on Fire" referred to which. Perhaps they were hoping to hide Bonamici's record on taxes and fees behind the smokescreen PolitiFact created by wantonly incinerating all those trousers. Either way, it's "Pants on Fire" all the way down.

We'd ask that God have mercy on the souls of Oregon's needlessly confused voters, but PolitiFact is adamant there is no higher authority to appeal to. We're not kidding. In its latest declaration that Bonamici's britches are burning, PolitiFact's website admonishes the candidate: "Do not take PolitiFact Oregon's name in campaign vain."

The Scrapbook is unsure why PolitiFact is so arrogant when it's obvious to all they've (again) eviscerated their credibility by mucking up a pretty simple debate. We can only assume their casual blasphemy was an attempt at humor. But frankly, who cares whether their tongue is in cheek when their head is so far up their own incendiary posterior? ♦

## 39 Years Too Many

Last week marked the 39th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe* v. *Wade* decision. One of the most distressing things about observing this annual disgrace is how liberal America uses the occasion to pay obeisance to the court's reasoning. One may argue abortion should be legal; in that case, the answer is legislation. As many pro-choice scholars have been forced to concede, the *Roe* majority tortured the Constitution to make it say what they wanted. As a piece of legal reasoning, *Roe*'s finding of a "right to privacy" in the "emanations" and "penumbras" of the Constitution was an embarrassment.

This latest anniversary The Scrapbook found itself marveling at how inconsistent *Roe*'s liberal cheerleaders are in celebrating this alleged "right to privacy." Our ruminations were prompted by the gloved finger of a federal employee inserted in the waistband of our pants. Of course, The Scrapbook had it coming. We were guilty of the crime of being present at an airport with intent to travel.

The Scrapbook could have opted out of this humiliation had it chosen to enter a scanner and allow the government to view what is essentially a nude rendering of itself. However, contra Ronald Reagan, The Scrapbook believes that the scariest words in the English language are "I'm from the government and I'm here to irradiate you."

So The Scrapbook was really not in the mood for President Obama's

statement marking the anniversary of *Roe* v. *Wade*. It reads:

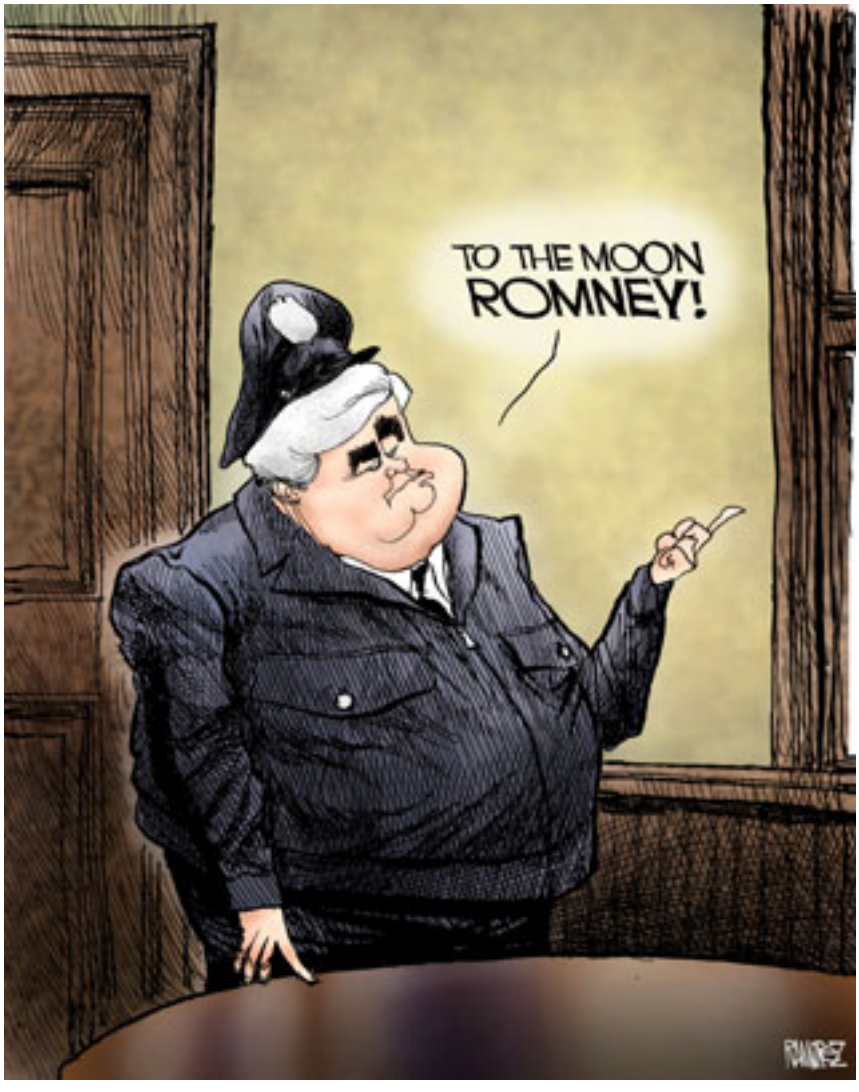
> As we mark the 39th anniversary of *Roe* v. *Wade*, we must remember that this Supreme Court decision not only protects a woman's health and reproductive freedom, but also affirms a broader principle: that government should not intrude on private family matters.

In other words, the government should not intrude on private family matters, unless of course it wants to intrude on your family's privates. Which thanks to the Obama administration's changes to the Transportation Security Administration, it does with astonishing frequency. Making matters worse, the barely competent and often corrupt TSA has been unionized by the Obama administration. Should a TSA officer fondle your private family matters inappropriately, you can bring charges against him knowing full well that the agent's right to molestation will be defended tooth and nail by a union lawyer paid for with your tax dollars.

Further compounding the tragic irony, the same day The Scrapbook found itself subject to its fourth "freedom grope" in two months, there was a small brouhaha when Kentucky senator Rand Paul ran afoul of the TSA at the Nashville airport. Paul was en route to speak at the March for Life in Washington, D.C. After he set a scanner off, the TSA wanted to pat him down. Paul then exercised his right to privacy by leaving the airport, and didn't get the chance to address the hundreds of thousands who attend the annual protest of the *Roe* decision.

The TSA issued a blustering response about Paul being uncooperative. But the *Tennessean* newspaper later reported, "A security video of U.S. Sen. Rand Paul at a Nashville International Airport checkpoint doesn't show him being 'irate,' as police asserted."

Paul responded calmly to what he viewed as an illegitimate government intrusion on his privacy. Given that the Obama administration's working definition of a "right to privacy" protects the termination of human life even while allowing the government to regularly inspect the genitals of millions of Americans, perhaps the senator should have been irate. ♦




## The Mullahs' Apologist

In the heat of a negative review, most authors, even running up against the considered advice of their friends or spouse to ignore the criticism, will dash off a letter to the editor of the offending book section. That would be the conventional approach. But let's say you're a political activist masquerading as an objective analyst with an interest in defending the Islamic Republic of Iran. The closer you get to your subject, the more sympathetically you make its case. You become ever more likely to adopt its ideological convictions as your own, and even its methods of proxy warfare. Just as Tehran enlists Hezbollah to fight against Israel, you, too, task out retaliation to a hireling.

Meet Trita Parsi, head of the National Iranian American Council, whose recently published book about U.S.-Iran relations, *A Single Roll of the Dice*, earned a negative review in the *Wall Street Journal*. Instead of rolling with the punches, Parsi appears to have gotten NIAC's research director, Reza Marashi, to do his fighting for him—on Twitter, the social media network that these days seems to be the first recourse of scoundrels.

Marashi attacked the review's au-

thor, Sohrab Ahmari, an Iranian-American author (and occasional contributor to this magazine), who moved to the United States from Tehran as a child in 1998. Marashi referred to Ahmari on Twitter as a "Neocon #MEK terror cult supporter."

In fact, Ahmari has gone on the record at least twice denouncing the shadowy MEK, or Mujahedin e-Khalq, an underground Iranian group designated by the State Department as a terrorist organization. However, it's hardly surprising that NIAC employees are undeterred by this fact. Indeed, the thesis of Parsi's new book is a fantasy that willfully ignores empirical evidence for the sake of an argument that whitewashes the Iranian regime.

During the Bush years, an Iran expert like Parsi had little trouble getting a favorable hearing for his message that the tension between the United States and Iran was the fault of a Republican president who had gone to war in two Muslim countries. It was easy for the mainstream media to embrace Parsi's advocacy and overlook the number of times Bush administration officials had actually met with Iranian counterparts and sought to come to some sort of accommodation with Tehran. What a relief it was for such apologists when a Democratic president promising to engage the mullahs came to office—after all, Obama believed the same thing they did, that Washington's difficulties with Tehran were all Bush's fault.

But in spite of Obama's desire to meet with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, there has been no engagement, no accommodation, and no peace. Indeed, in October, U.S. law enforcement officials and the intelligence community announced indictments against two figures related to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps who were plotting to blow up the Saudi ambassador in Washington in an explosion that might have cost the lives of hundreds of bystanders as well. The White House was understandably upset, as well as embarrassed. Why? Because engaging Iran was one of the president's top priorities from the moment he hit the campaign trail.

The reality of the situation spells big trouble for Parsi. If the Iranian regime truly is incorrigible, then his career is jeopardized. His analysis, such as it is, has been exposed as faulty and worse, and he is going to have trouble raising money from the Iranian expatriate community. Who wants to write checks to advocate on behalf of a state sponsor of terror? Accordingly, the regime must be exculpated. It can't be Iran's fault that engagement came up empty. Someone else must be blamed.

In Parsi's account, the culprits are Congress, America's Sunni Arab allies in the Middle East, and, of course, the Jews. "Israel and some of its supporters in the United States," Parsi writes, "have feared that a thaw in U.S. relations with Iran could come at the expense of America's special friendship with the Jewish state."

In addition to the unsavory logic at work here—Jewish money runs powerful networks that exert control over U.S. policy—there's an implicit argument that American officials are ignorant of their nation's true interests. That is, the United States could not possibly have its own problems with Iran dating back to the 1979 siege of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the kidnapping of our embassy personnel. Washington has no reason to be skeptical of the Iranian regime's intentions, even as its minions developed improvised explosive devices that killed and wounded thousands of American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nor does Washington really have cause for concern over the regime's march toward a nuclear weapons program. There would have been a peace deal between Washington and Tehran, if only the president of the United States could see the truth of the matter, if only he weren't taking orders from the Zionists.

In effect, these are the same talking points coming out of Tehran, only wrapped in a shroud of objective analysis and published by Yale University Press, which should be ashamed of itself for publishing this trash. As for Parsi, it's apparent he has no shame. ♦

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# The Plague

I read an essay by a senior editor at the *Atlantic* recently that began, "I finished up *Middlemarch* two days ago, and had a good debate about it on Twitter."

Twitter (for the five people in America still blissfully ignorant of it) is a publishing platform that allows one to fire off bursts of written thought from just about anywhere onto the Internet for all to read. You Twitter on your computer while you fritter away the workday. You Twitter on your iPad while watching *American Idol* at night. You Twitter on your cell phone while standing in line at the grocery store. Or eating dinner at a Wolfgang Puck's. Or milling at a party pretending to make conversation.

The goal of Twitter is to make publishing as frictionless as possible. As soon as a thought pops into your head you shunt it out to Twitter before your mind has a chance to edit it, reject it, or simply forget it. Goodness knows how many truly wonderful thoughts went unuttered before Twitter arrived on the scene to preserve them all.

For people who believe that writing should be effortless, Twitter is a boon. Its only downside is that your zipless thought must be expressed in no more than 140 characters. (Note: That's 140 *characters*, not 140 words.)

So this poor fellow at the *Atlantic* made his way through all 900 pages of George Eliot and then within the hour began "debating" it using a medium that limits thoughts to 140 characters. *Middlemarch*—considered by some the greatest English novel—runs roughly 320,000 words. Concerning the question of Rosamond's ultimate happiness, for instance, he tweeted, "I thought she was all 'Gimme the loot, gimme the loot, gimme the loot.' And she got it." In another burst he rendered his final verdict on Eliot's opus: "She has a total handle on language, but I just thought she couldn't bring it all together, as you say."

Well.

This is the part where we're supposed to lament how far a magazine that once published Ernest Hemingway and Henry James has fallen. But the truth is, you can no more blame the *Atlantic* for succumbing to Twitter than you would scold a Florentine townsman in 1350 for catching the Black Death.


DAVID CLARK

A few weeks earlier the *New Yorker*'s television critic enlivened her review with the comment: "On Twitter, a sitcom observer pointed out . . ." It's hardly worth noting that this nameless sitcom observer's bon mot wasn't particularly *bon*. Neither is it worth Twittering that the *New Yorker* now enlists the critical faculties of anonymous Internet denizens.

What *is* worth examining, however, is that I suspect it was Twitter that made the remark seem worthy of inclusion at all. If one of the writer's friends had given her a good line over drinks or dropped her a note, I doubt it ever would have made the cut, because it would have been considered on its merits. But because the line came from Twitter, well, stop the presses and ring Si Newhouse! To journalists, Twitter is San Francisco in late 1967: Everything worth knowing happens there. At least, that's what everyone says.

You can understand why journalists have approached Twitter like sailors on shore leave: Technology has introduced a great deal of uncertainty into our business, and there is a perception that if journalism doesn't adapt, then soon we'll all have to make do earning double our salaries as corporate communications flunkies. And it doesn't hurt that Twitter enables a general tendency toward exhibitionism and the belief that one's every thought should be presented to the world at large.

My friend Stanley Kurtz has long held the theory that, at heart, you can only be one kind of reader: You can read books, or newspapers and magazines, or the Internet. There simply isn't enough time to live in all three of those worlds. And the type of reader you are affects the kind of thinker you become.

I'd propose a corollary: At heart, you can only be one kind of writer. There are rare writers with such overbearing talent that they master many domains. But in general, the strictures of one form limit proficiency in others.

The problem with Twitter isn't Twitter per se. It's the habits of mind it fosters. And the way those habits spread through the writing food chain, infecting practitioners and readers of other mediums. Seen in that light, Twitter is less a platform than a disease.

The good news is that, like even the plague, it must eventually run its course.

**Jonathan V. Last**

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# Yes, We Can…

These days one can sense a palpable fear among Republicans that the 2012 presidential election is slipping through their fingers. Their constellation of concerns includes the (perceived) weaknesses of the two frontrunners, Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich; the increasing ferocity of their clash; the public's antipathy toward Congress (including the GOP-controlled House); and a slight uptick in the economy (including a drop in the unemployment rate), which is redounding to the benefit of the incumbent. Barack Obama may be a lousy president, the argument goes, but he's a very good campaigner.

It's certainly true that the president is in better shape now than he was just this fall. His approval ratings have nudged up a bit. The country is less pessimistic than it was. And consumer confidence is the highest it's been since last April. Still, the incumbent remains exceedingly vulnerable.

Jimmy Carter, 1980 State of the Union

Barack Obama, 2012 State of the Union

NEWSCOM

For example, the president's Gallup approval-disapproval ratio is 43 percent to 49 percent, which would translate into a huge defeat for Obama on Election Day. His standing in a dozen key swing states is lower than his standing nationally. And there's more. An Allstate/*National Journal* Heartland Monitor poll taken in December found that just 35 percent of whites say they approve of Obama's performance. Among whites without a college education, fewer than one-third approve. And among college-educated white voters, who have generally been favorably disposed to Obama, just 39 percent say they approve. Even among college-educated white women, who gave Obama 52 percent of their votes in 2008, his approval rating has dropped to 42 percent.

The president is also near a low point with independents, with only 38 percent approving of his performance. Ronald Brownstein of *National Journal* points out that President Obama's approval rating has dropped 14 percentage points from his 2008 level among independents; 12 percentage points among young adults (aged 18-29); 11 points among African Americans; 10 points among college-educated white women; and 7 points among families earning between $75,000 and $100,000.

In addition, only 28 percent said they expect Obama's policies to increase the opportunity for them to get ahead; 37 percent say his agenda will diminish their opportunities. "That's the biggest tilt toward the negative that the poll has ever recorded on this question," according to Brownstein. When asked if they intend to vote for Obama, 39 percent said they were now inclined to, while 54 percent said they will definitely or probably back someone else.

As for the mood of the nation, the most recent ABC News/*Washington Post* poll finds that two-thirds (68 percent) say the country's on the wrong track, 6 points higher than a year ago. Fewer than half as many, 30 percent, say it's headed in the right direction. And on the most important polling question of all, the president's handling of the economy, Obama has a dangerously low 41 percent approval rating. Only 9 percent of Americans see a strong economic recovery. Twice as many say they are worse off financially since Obama became president than say their situations have improved. And more than half the respondents—52 percent—say Obama has accomplished "not much" or "little or nothing" as president.

No historical comparison works perfectly, of course, but the situation we're in resembles nothing so much as 1980, at least in this regard. By the fourth year of his presidency, the public had concluded that Jimmy Carter was a failed president. The economy was in very bad shape, his policies were unpopular, and the nation was in a funk.

The public's verdict on Carter wasn't impulsive or easy to undo. It was, in fact, a perfectly reasonable assessment based on his almost four years at the helm. As a result, most Americans were disposed to vote him out of office. The question was whether Ronald Reagan would provide enough of them sufficient reassurance to vote for him.

It wasn't always clear he would. Many forget that Reagan was savagely attacked by Carter as a racist, a warmonger, and indifferent to the poor. Those attacks took their toll. Only nine days before the election, the Gallup organization showed Carter with a 3-point lead.

Then came the October 28, 1980, debate in Cleveland.

It was on that stage that Reagan once and for all shattered Carter's myth of Reagan. The Gipper gave a majority of Americans all the confidence they needed to vote for him, and they did, in an overwhelming fashion.

To be clear: There are important differences between Barack Obama and Jimmy Carter, and the eventual Republican nominee, whoever he is, will be no Ronald Reagan. But where the 2012 race resembles the 1980 race is that the public, which still likes Obama personally for the most part, is very much inclined to vote him out of office. They believe he's overmatched by events.

This doesn't mean the GOP nominee will win the presidency in 2012. It only means he should.

*—Peter Wehner*

# …But It Won't Be Easy

On January 23, 1980, Jimmy Carter gave what turned out to be his final State of the Union address. Ronald Reagan's victory over Carter that November spared us any more of them. Will Barack Obama's appearance before Congress on January 24, 2012, be *his* swan song?

'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.

But there are differences between 2012 and 1980. One is that the Republicans have no Reagan. Another is that it may not be as clear that Obama has failed as was the case with Carter. That's not to say Obama is a superior president to Carter. In fact, Obama may end up having done more damage to the country, even if he only gets one term. But how evident will Obama's failure be when voters go to the polls on November 6?

Thirty-two years ago, Carter had no choice but to acknowledge the perilous state of the union: "At this time in Iran, 50 Americans are still held captive, innocent victims of terrorism and anarchy. Also at this moment, massive Soviet troops are attempting to subjugate the fiercely independent and deeply religious people of Afghanistan."

The events of 1979 had proven, as much as any set of events can, the failure of Carter's foreign policy. There aren't yet such obvious markers of failure in the case of Obama. Indeed, in his State of the Union, Obama could cite as achievements the departure from Iraq and the beginning of a drawdown in Afghanistan—knowing that the dangerous consequences of these policies, and for that matter of his defense cuts, aren't yet glaringly clear, and trusting they won't be too obvious by Election Day. And of course Obama could celebrate the killing of Osama bin Laden. The next day we learned of the successful rescue by Navy SEALs of two hostages in Somalia. Three months after Carter spoke, the attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran ended in failure.

The case against Obama's foreign policy is a strong one, as Thomas Joscelyn, Bill Roggio, and Reuel Marc Gerecht suggest elsewhere in this issue. But it will have to be prosecuted; it won't speak for itself. Carter's foreign policy was a self-evident fiasco. Obama's is a slower-motion disaster, its consequences mostly beneath the waterline for now. In his speech, Carter announced the boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. All will presumably go swimmingly at the 2012 Olympics in London. In his speech, Carter praised the men and women of America's military, and then announced that though he believed our volunteer forces were adequate to our needs, he was asking Congress to resume draft registration just in case. Obama praised our military too, but was—however foolishly—able to announce a shrinking of our force because the tide of war seems to be receding.

So the world may well *seem* safer on Election Day 2012 than it did on Election Day 1980.

And on the economic front, things may at least seem to be gradually getting better. We've had growth in every quarter since the summer of 2009. Unemployment is creeping down. Obama did not have to mention, as Carter did, the prospect of gasoline rationing, or have to explain an increase in the inflation rate. Our massive debt, the entitlement crisis, Obamacare—these are all looming disasters. But unlike in 1980, the disasters haven't yet fully arrived.

And the disasters of 1980 were clearly the result of big government liberalism. Democrats had controlled Congress for a quarter century. Even Nixon had governed as a Keynesian. Today, by contrast, Republicans have controlled the presidency or Congress for much of the last 30 years. Responsibility for our problems can be given—to some degree legitimately—more of a bipartisan cast. Deregulation has had its problems along with overregulation. Our current tax rates are Bush's, not LBJ's. And it was John Boehner, a Republican speaker, who sat behind President Obama as he delivered his address. In 1980, it was Tip O'Neill. In 2012, the GOP challenger will not be able to run as unambiguously against years of Democratic misrule in the service of an exhausted liberalism as could Reagan in 1980.

Finally, as he spoke, Carter was facing a serious primary challenge from within his own party. Obama has none. And as Carter spoke, the GOP was in the midst of developing fresh ideas (supply-side economics, most obviously), adding fresh recruits (the Reagan Democrats), and nominating an attractive leader who could advance the conservative case clearly and powerfully. As Obama spoke, it wasn't evident *his* opposition was evidencing comparable intellectual or political vigor.

We had better.

*—William Kristol*

# The Inequality Trap

Why are America's political, media, and intellectual classes engaged in a head-spinning debate over inequality? Beats us. The difference in incomes between rich and poor is neither the most important issue facing the country nor even a pressing one. Certainly the public doesn't think so. Recent surveys by Gallup and Pew show that the electorate's top priorities are the economy and jobs.

Yet the press goes wild at the mere mention of the words "income inequality." They covered Occupy Wall Street as though it were the American version of the Arab Spring. They slobbered and wagged their tails in December when President Obama did his best Teddy Roosevelt impersonation in a speech at Osawatomie, Kansas. They thought the takeaway from Obama's State of the Union was his call for a new alternative minimum tax for millionaires, even though the president buried that proposal under a mound of patriotic gauze and technocratic red tape. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last week, heads of state and billionaires from around the globe lamented the fact that some people are not as well off as they are, and called for government to do something about it. Then they went skiing.

Maybe the reason for the focus on inequality is that it deflects attention from the terrible record of the Davos elite. Europe is a mess, and green shoots are few and far between in the forest of weeds that Americans call an economy. The Obama years have given us 1.7 million lost jobs, a credit downgrade, falling median incomes, fewer people participating in the labor market, a hemorrhaging deficit and debt, a housing market that still hasn't hit bottom, an unpopular and ineffective economic stimulus and health care overhaul, and no pipeline from Canada to bring jobs and energy to the Lower 48. Every minute spent tickling Occupy Wall Street's fancy is time not spent discussing the best ways to increase economic growth, make entitlement programs sustainable, and attack the roots of poverty, which lie in broken families, decrepit education for low-income youth, and teenage pregnancy.

Worse yet, Republicans seem happy to join in the diversion. They've fallen into the inequality trap, where the rules are rigged to favor Democrats. You can argue, correctly, that Mitt Romney's effective tax rate is actually higher than 14 percent until you are red in the face. Liberals won't be satisfied, and voters will go with the candidate who promises "fairness" over one who does nothing but discuss, explain, and defend his personal fortune. If the American people decide over the next nine months that President Obama will be more effective than the Republican nominee at balancing the interests of wage-earners with those of investors, he will win reelection.

The solution is to seize the banner of fairness. Start by asking which is more fair: a tax reform that encourages work and investment, closes loopholes while lowering rates, and ends penalties for marriage and childrearing; or a policy that narrows the base while increasing rates, creates opportunities for rent-seeking with loopholes and subsidies, and adds a new layer of complexity to the tax code? Which is more fair: an energy plan that unlocks America's oil, natural gas, and nuclear resources so that they might reach their fullest potential, or a policy that caters to the green lobby and shovels taxpayer dollars at pie-in-the-sky, bankrupt wind and solar companies? And while we are on the subject of fairness, exactly how "fair" is it to the young and unborn to do nothing as America's fiscal liabilities pile up higher and higher?

NEWSCOM

**Osawatomie High School in Kansas, December 6, 2011**

One could also point out that ensnaring working people in networks of dependence is the very opposite of fairness. Safety nets can protect, but they can also capture, and important research by John D. Mueller at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and Charles Murray at the American Enterprise Institute shows an inverse relationship between means-tested welfare benefits and participation in the workforce. So, to help the poor, enact policies that promote growth, job creation, hard work, self-discipline, and thrift. There are many such policies. A tax increase isn't one of them.

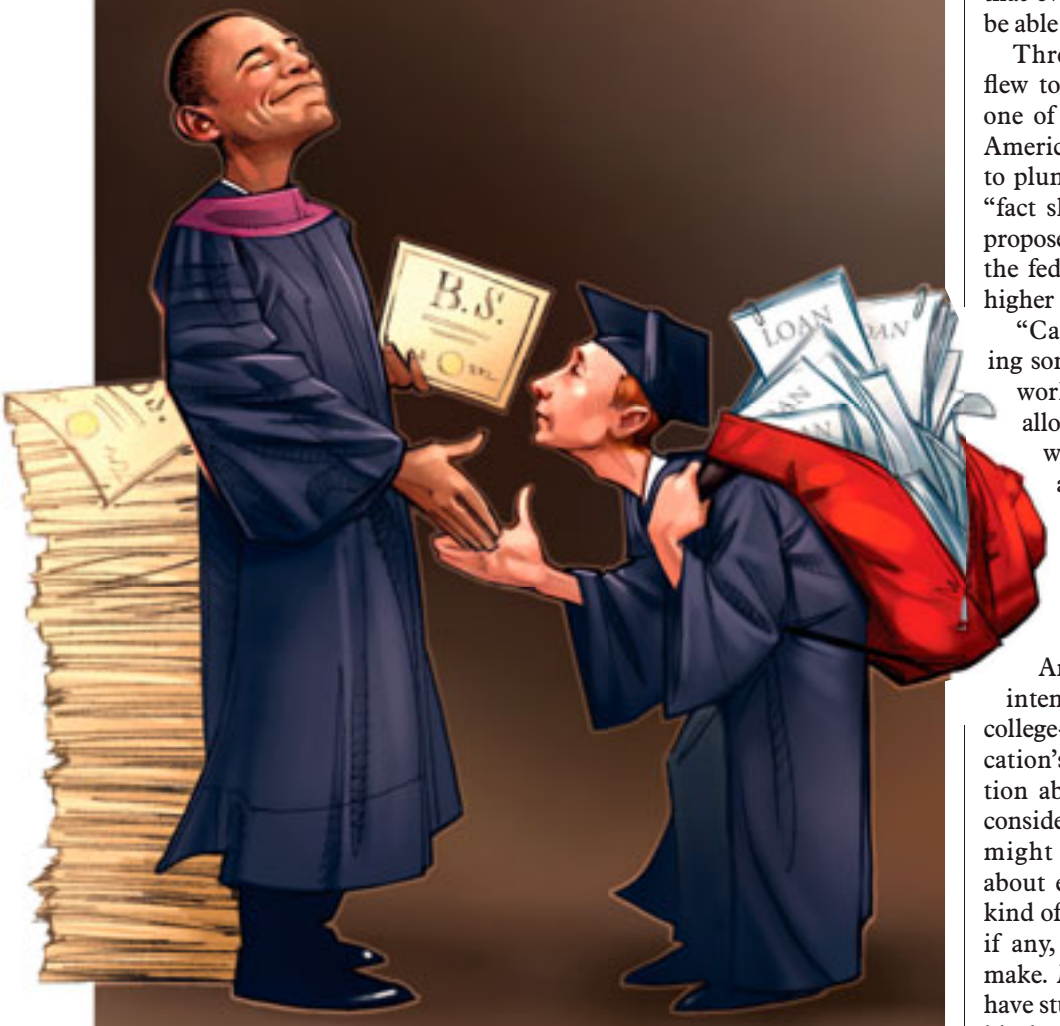
What the Republicans teetering at the edge of the inequality trap need to do is catch a screening of *The Iron Lady*. A generation ago, another raving band of egalitarians claimed more power for the government in the name of "fairness." The result was stagnation. It was Margaret Thatcher who had the courage to point out, as she put it in her final prime minister's questions appearance in 1990, that for egalitarians, it didn't matter if everyone got poorer, "so long as the gap [between rich and poor] is smaller." Listen to the lady. And don't go wobbly.

*—Matthew Continetti*

# The Great Tuition Pander

## Obama versus the bursars.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON




To the long list of constituencies at whom President Obama is righteously cheesed off—millionaires, billionaires, international terrorists, those sorts of people—we may now add the bursars of America's colleges and universities. He devoted a passage of his State of the Union address last week to the problem of unaffordable college tuition. His face took on that no-nonsense, determined look when he spotted the subject rolling up his teleprompter.

"We can't just keep subsidizing skyrocketing tuition," he said. "We'll run out of money. [Wait—haven't we done that already?] . . . Colleges and universities have to do their part by working to keep costs down.

"So let me put colleges and universities on notice: [Super-determined now.] If you can't stop tuition from going up, the funding you get from taxpayers will go down. [There was applause.] Higher education can't be a luxury—it is an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford."

Three days later, the president flew to the University of Michigan, one of the greatest universities that America's swing states have to offer, to plump his plan. His staff issued a "fact sheet" with details. Mostly he proposes to use the mighty muscle of the federal government to bring the higher educrats to heel.

"Campus-based aid"—meaning some kinds of student loans and work-study programs—would be allocated to schools based on how well they "provide good value" and "set responsible tuition policy." A new piñata stuffed with federal money, totaling $1 billion, will be dangled before state legislatures to inspire them to reduce costs. And several new initiatives are intended to give parents and their college-bound children—higher education's customers—more information about the various schools they consider. These "College Scorecards" might even include information about each school's graduates, what kind of jobs they get after graduation, if any, and how much money they make. Most colleges and universities have stubbornly refused to gather this kind of follow-up information, for good reasons (it's very hard to collect) and bad (it would make most of them look terrible).

Conservatives and libertarians will object that Obama's plan is top-down reform, a gross violation of federalism and limited government generally. So it is. But with a few notable exceptions—Hillsdale College in Michigan, for instance, which rejects any federal funding on

DAVE MALAN

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grounds of academic hygiene—the institutions of American higher education are dependencies of the federal government, for better or worse. The government guarantees the loans that students use to pay tuition and pumps billions of dollars of research money into schools that use it to pad their accounts. Withdraw federal money from the schools, or even reduce it significantly, and a large number of them would collapse. Even a few mild threats from Washington might be persuasive.

And in truth the threats are very mild. Details of the administration's plan make it clear that the president isn't too terribly cheesed off at American higher education after all. For every demand of "transparency" and "accountability," he offers more of the kind of aid that has helped make it possible for schools to raise tuition in the first place. Beyond the billion-dollar piñata, the president wants to double the number of work-study jobs, keep guaranteed loan rates artificially low, and steadily raise the maximum award for Pell grants and loosen eligibility requirements. Whenever you see phrases like "investment initiatives to incentivize innovation," you know some bureaucrat is getting ready to throw money.

But this is a campaign year. Put questions of merit to one side. Obama is both correct and clever to identify surging tuition prices as a major concern. He's correct as president, because the tuition crisis is intimately related to the larger crisis of quality and waste in higher education, which is quickly becoming a national disaster. (Adjusting for inflation, we spend 40 percent more on higher education than we did a decade ago, with no increase in quality.) And Obama is clever as a presidential candidate, because the affordability of college has caused a widespread anxiety that his opponents have left politically unaddressed.

The anxiety is everywhere and well grounded in reality. Writing in *Inside Higher Ed*, Hamid Shirvani, a president in the California State University system, calculates that the average tuition at a public four-year university in the United States increased three and half times between 1980 and today, adjusting for inflation. And there's no end in sight. Two years ago, tuition rose 7.9 percent from the year before. Last year tuition rose another 8.3 percent. Unconstrained by market pressures, private schools have been gouging their customers at a similar pace.

And yet 94 percent of parents expect their children to go to college, according to a Pew Research Center survey last year. At the same time only 22 percent said college was affordable for most people, and 57 percent said "the higher education system in the United States fails to provide students with good value for the money they and their families spend." With the unemployment rate of college graduates at an all-time high, the failure to provide good value looks even more irresponsible.

**It's not clear why Republicans have been slow to turn tuition anxiety to political advantage, aside from the customary cluelessness.**

It's not clear why Republicans have been slow to turn this anxiety to political advantage, aside from the customary cluelessness. A populist crusade against the gluttonous pointy-heads on college campuses is made-to-order. One reason for the hesitation might be demographic. Obama's proposal plays on an anxiety that is particularly acute in a cohort of voters that Democrats are keen to appeal to: suburban and exurban families who desperately want to send their kids to college but see only difficulty ahead. They don't make enough money to pay the "sticker price" tuition at selective colleges, and they make too much money to qualify for need-based aid. The president's jawboning will sound as music through the McMansions of Fairfax County, Virginia, and Henderson, Nevada.

Republicans find themselves in a different situation. It's become a commonplace to note that working-class whites are now the most reliable segment of Republican voters. Many of them lack college educations. A college degree may be within reach of their children, though—if they get a Pell grant and a federally subsidized student loan. This is the same kind of federal aid that Obama proposes to increase, and which is plausibly deemed one cause of the shameless rise in tuition. A good way to stop the cost spiral, therefore, is to cut financial aid provided by the federal government—cuts that will be unavoidable anyway if Republicans hope to reduce federal spending for other reasons. (Pell grants alone totaled nearly $41 billion last year.) Which Republican wants to go first in offending the party's most reliable voters?

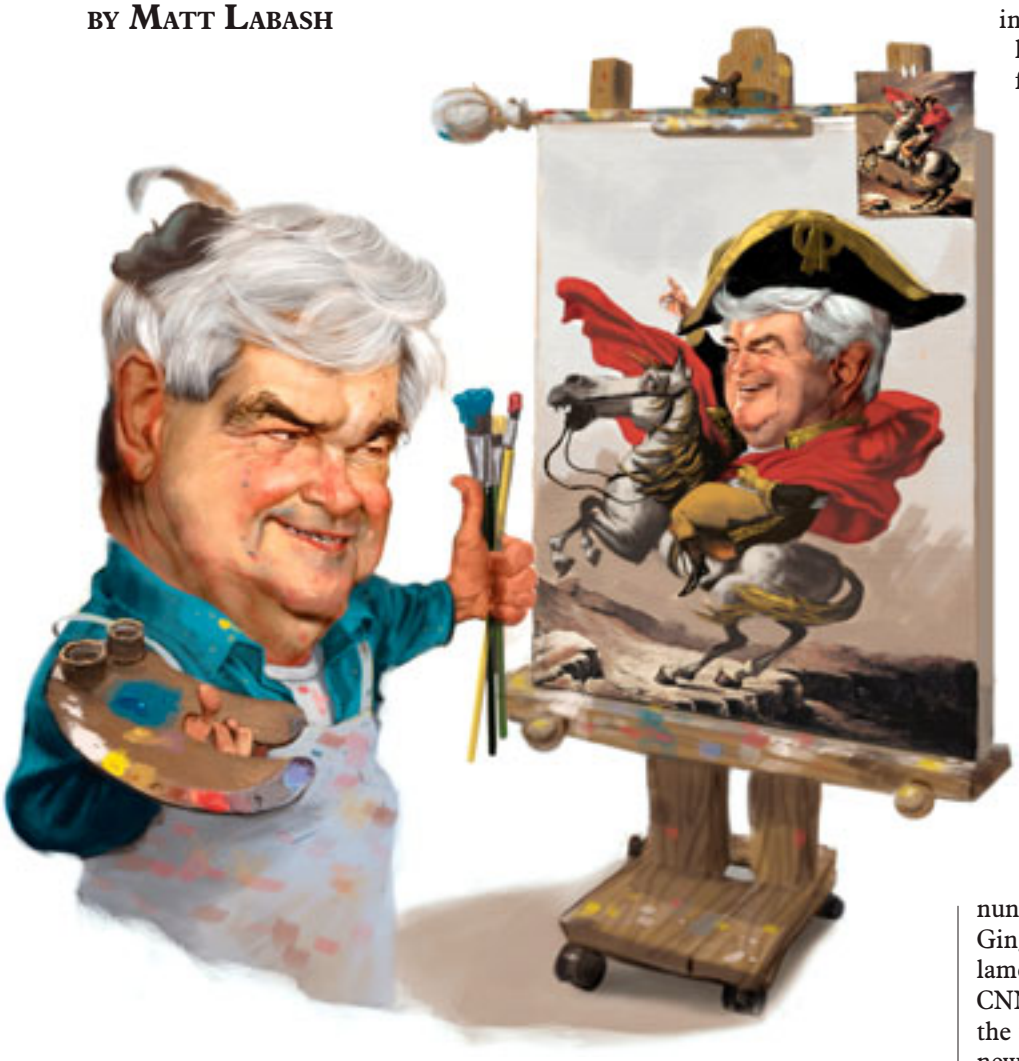
Yet there may be a way out of the Republican pickle—and, more important, a way out of the crisis of American higher education. In a recent report from the left-wing Center for American Progress, Clayton Christensen, a professor at Harvard Business School, notes that 10 percent of college students took at least one online course in 2003; 30 percent did so in the fall semester of 2009. And he predicts 50 percent will be taking online courses two years from now. Already several online universities, such as Western Governors University, are offering cheap and reputable degrees.

Christensen isn't alone in thinking the web will remake colleges and universities. Many institutions will simply fail when their economic illogic is exposed by the competition that online study—inexpensive, measurable, flexible, convenient, and efficient in providing what employers want from graduates—will inevitably create for them. The trick for policymakers will be to let this market develop. Get out of its way, in other words. This is what Republicans are supposed to be good at. ♦

# The Conscience of a Conservative

## 2012 edition.

**BY MATT LABASH**



A few days ago, after the last presidential debate in South Carolina, I was gauging the reaction of some Real People, as opposed to the Fake People who populate my seedy little racket. I don't talk to Real People often if I can help it, as they tend to confuse the emerging media narrative with their common sense, consistency, and almost touching naïveté.

The Real Person in question was a little puzzled about the outcome of the primary. She wanted to know, "Did I miss something? How did Newt appeal to South Carolina conservatives right after the 'open marriage' accusation by his ex-wife? Is adultery now an asset for Republican candidates?" What could I do but look at the little lamb with pity?

But here's what I was thinking: O you poor, gullible values voter! I remember your kind. You probably still have your laminated Moral Majority card from the mid '80s—as dated now as your Members Only jacket, your Belinda Carlisle records, and your Care Bear collection. Those were more innocent days. A time back when lefties used to mock conservatives for voting their conscience. Back when conservatives had something as unfashionable as a conscience, currently regarded as the stirrup pants of character traits.

But South Carolinians have sent a message: Those days are over. How does anyone expect us to be cross with Newt Gingrich for dumping his multiple sclerosis-stricken wife over the phone, in order to take up with someone so genuine and warm as Callista Gingrich? Especially when, according to Newt's own ex, he was generous enough to offer to share himself with both women? And people say Republicans are selfish!

No, South Carolinians made themselves clear: The real crime here wasn't the so-called crime, which just so happened to be all over the headlines on debate day, a story further dragged out by Newt's daughters, whom he pushed forward to issue a nondenunciatory denunciation of Marianne Gingrich. No, the real crime was the lamestream media, in the person of CNN moderator John King, who had the unmitigated gall to ask about the news of the day as though he were some kind of journalist or something. Right there in the middle of a debate! Didn't he realize that a question like that would draw attention away from the platitudes, empty promises, and self-comparisons to Ronald Reagan that the candidates are constitutionally obligated to make, that primary audiences applaud like trained seals, and that have helped make our country great? Or at least mediocre, which passes for great these days. (Do you

THOMAS FLUHARTY

*Matt Labash is a senior writer at* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.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think they compare themselves to Ronald Reagan in Greece? I doubt it.)

Sure, South Carolinians could've voted for the goody-goody Mormon, whose idea of licentiousness is undoing a button on his magic underwear top. Or maybe for that sweater-vested moral crusader, the one who is always prattling on about the sanctity of family (as if Newt doesn't love families—he's had three of them already). Or South Carolina could've gone all retro, playing to bible-belt type by sticking with the candidate who is technically the only evangelical left in the race—the chaste dullard Ron Paul, who has been married to the same woman since 1957 (yawn). It's like Ronald Reagan said, "You can tell a lot about a fellow's character by his way of eating jelly beans." (What that quote has to do with anything, I've no idea. I just thought I'd work in a gratuitous Reagan reference like Newt does about every five minutes, the thinking being that if you mention Reagan often enough, people might forget that you bear little or no resemblance to him.)

If you've noticed, as South Carolinians did, morality doesn't matter. Character doesn't count. "You must not give power to a man unless, above everything else, he has character. Character is the most important qualification the president of the United States can have." Guess who said that. James Madison? Abe Lincoln? Teddy Roosevelt? None of the above. It was Richard Milhous Nixon. Whose lack of character was rivaled only by his lack of self-awareness.

Instead, South Carolinians took a good hard look at the only issue in this race that really matters—sticking it to the lamestream media, loudly and often. Which Newt does nearly as frequently as citing Ronald Reagan, since he likes his applause the way he likes his redemption—cheap and easy. South Carolinians also took a gander at history/their Democratic competition. And anyone who studies history can appreciate that every skirt-chasing cad of the Democratic presidential persuasion in the last 50 years, i.e., JFK and Bill Clinton, proved either exciting or competent, presiding over Camelot and unprecedented prosperity, respectively. Whereas seemingly virtuous one-woman men, i.e., Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama, have presided over some of the greatest calamities in modern history, namely, the Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama administrations.

This must not be lost on Newt Gingrich, who is not only a student but a professor of history (why else would Freddie Mac pay him $1.6 million?). So Newt rolled the dice, pushed back hard, and won big. Demonstrating in the process a new Republican paradigm. I call it the Jim Thompson Strategy, named after the great writer of noir pulp fiction, who laid it plain in his 1954 book, *The Nothing Man*:

> I may be wrong—I have been wrong about so many things—but I can't recall ever hearing or knowing of a son-of-a-bitch who did not do all right for himself. I'm talking about *real* sons-of-bitches, understand. The Grade-A, double-distilled, steam-heated variety. You take a man like that, a son-of-a-bitch who doesn't fight it—who knows what he is and gives his all to it—and you've really got something. Rather, *he's* got something. He's got all the things that are held out to you as a reward for being a non-son-of-a-bitch.

Remind you of anyone? As Newt correctly calculated, it turns out that the reprise of the adultery story was a break for him. The excitement caused by his reaction to it might even have won him the primary. Now he just needs a few more similar breaks. With a little luck and a lot of hard work on Newt's part, Callista might come down with a debilitating disease. He can then break up with her, via Twitter, while simultaneously announcing that he's taken up with a Hooters waitress, preferably from a swing state like Ohio. He'd better get cracking, though. The election is only nine months away. By the time some lamestream media moderator like John King pops the question again in a debate against Obama, Newt will want to be able to castigate him for bringing up ancient history. As a professor of history, Newt knows that those who ignore their past get to keep repeating it as often as they'd like. ♦

# The Gingrich Road Show

## He still commands a crowd.

**BY MICHAEL WARREN**

*A Gingrich rally in Naples, January 24*

*Jacksonville, Fla.*

It's morning in St. Petersburg, and Newt Gingrich is talking to a packed house at the charming Tick Tock diner. "I can describe and explain my candidacy with three simple questions," Gingrich says. "How many of you believe that the United States is seriously on the wrong track?" Everyone raises their hand, and a few clap to affirm.

"How many of you believe that in addition to changing the White House, we have to change the way Congress behaves, the bureaucracy behaves, the courts behave,"—so much for simple questions—"that it's bigger than Obama, that while he's the start, there's a lot more to getting America back on the right track than just [beating] Obama?" More hands go up, and more folks applaud.

"And how many of you believe that even if we win the election the left and the established forces will fight us every single day to try to stop us from changing things?" Heads are nodding. A woman cries out, "Yes!"

"That's why I'm running," says Gingrich, though what he is doing on the trail might better be described as "racing."

Gingrich keeps a full schedule, crammed with events big and small. The talk in St. Petersburg is the first of four public appearances that day, spread out along Florida's long western coast. The day before the South Carolina primary, he and his wife Callista made a long stop at a children's hospital in Charleston to tour the facilities and read to a selected group of patients. One afternoon, as I'm driving up I-95 from Ft. Lauderdale, the "Newt 2012" campaign bus, emblazoned with a six-foot-tall photo of Gingrich on its side, zooms past me at over 80 miles an hour. We're both trying to make Gingrich's "Space Coast Town Hall Meeting," where the founder of the Congressional Space Caucus will make the case for manned colonies on the moon. It's hard to keep up.

The busy calendar may be necessary, since people keep turning out in droves to see Gingrich. Nearly 1,000 people came to a town hall meeting at Bobby's Bar-B-Q Buffet in Warrenville, South Carolina, while more than 3,000 in Naples, Florida, wait for Gingrich to show up for an outdoor rally 90 minutes late. Most folks don't seem to mind the delay so long as they can hear and see for themselves the legendary former House speaker's big show.

And what a show it is. In Coral Springs, Florida, organizers of a rally outside an eatery play a dramatic, patriotic tune over the loudspeakers while the crowd awaits Gingrich's arrival. When the music hits its stirring crescendo, the Gingrich campaign bus unwittingly emerges, perfectly in sync, from behind the building, as if on cue.

Gingrich has a popular comedy routine, too, which makes him a hit with the talk radio crowd. One enduring humorous jab at Barack Obama concerns the president's refusal to allow the Canadians to build the Keystone XL oil pipeline through the United States, leaving our neighbors to the north with no choice but to sell the oil to the Chinese. "It's one thing to say the White House can't play chess. It's another thing to say they can't play checkers," Gingrich says. "But if they can't play tic-tac-toe?" The joke kills every time.

But like any stand-up comic, Gingrich has his hecklers. As he begins his speech in Coral Springs, a woman interrupts. "Do you work for the people or Freddie Mac, Newt?" she shouts out.

"I'm glad you asked that," Gingrich says, not missing a beat. "I work for the people. Of course I work for the people."

AP / NAPLES DAILY NEWS, LEXEY SWALL

*Michael Warren is a reporter at* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

This heckler is persistent, though, and she keeps yelling as the crowd tries overpowering her voice with their own. Gingrich responds with a smirk. "This is a free country," he says. "People are allowed to come and be noisy. It's part of the American tradition."

Gingrich cites a 2008 article in the *New York Times* as the "only reference" to his talking with members of Congress about Freddie Mac. "I told the House Republicans to vote 'no' on giving them any more money. I was opposed to giving them any more money. That is a fact," he says.

But the woman is relentless, and the diversion is becoming a distraction. So Gingrich squelches it, Newt-style. "Abraham Lincoln once said, if you're debating somebody who will not agree that two plus two equals four, you'll never win the debate because facts make no difference," he says. "We've just met one of Abraham Lincoln's debating partners for whom facts make no difference. . . . Noise without knowledge is not a free society. It's anarchy." Cheers and hoots and hollers greet the putdown. The heckler isn't heard from again.

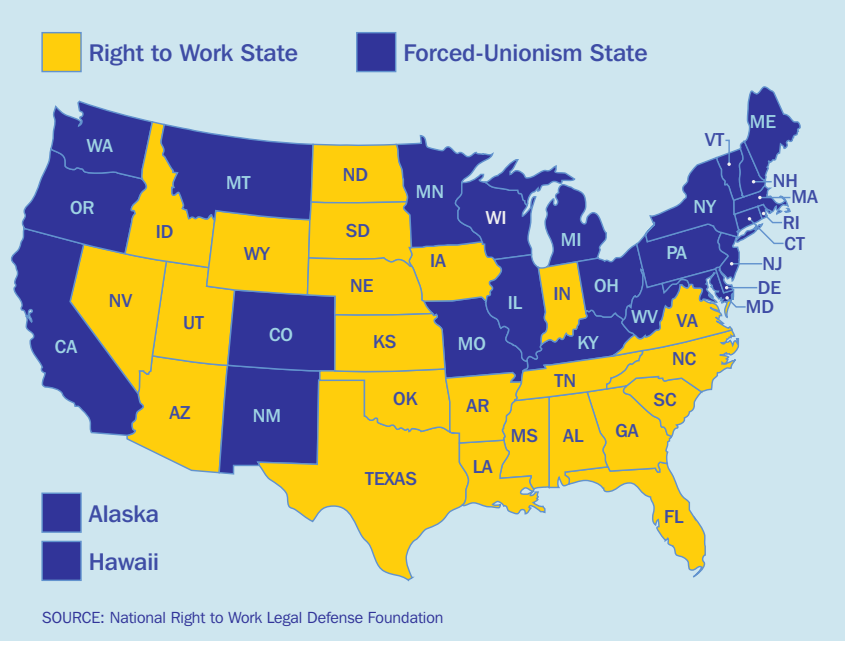
Gingrich thrives in front of a participatory audience, so the raucous televised debates have been a boon for his campaign. But in the more subdued Florida debates, where the spectators in the hall actually adhere to commands from the networks to pipe down, Gingrich is missing his secret weapon. At least, that's what the campaign believes. "The two debates that we had in Florida . . . were not staged in the same way," says former congressman and former state attorney general Bill McCollum, co-chair of the Gingrich campaign in Florida. "The opportunities were not there. He doesn't have the home run here."

So Gingrich continues to knock them out of the park during batting practice, hitting everyone from Obama to the news media to his top Republican rival, Romney. The simple question, as the primary season extends beyond the early states, is whether Gingrich can slug it at game time, especially when he's thrown a curveball. ♦

# Freeing Workers from Union Bosses

## The Employee Rights Act.

**BY FRED BARNES**



SOURCE: National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation

For the first time in decades, union power is under serious threat. Indiana is on the verge of becoming the 23rd state to enact a right-to-work law, liberating workers from being forced to join a union. New Hampshire may also adopt some form of right-to-work. Murmurs about a national right-to-work law are growing. Public sector unions continue to face efforts to curb their power and trim their lavish contracts.

And now there's a shrewd new challenge to organized labor: the Employee Rights Act. It would take labor law in a new direction. Unlike right-to-work statutes, which help businesses escape unionization, the ERA would protect union workers from high-handedness and abuses of power by their union leaders.

The measure was formulated by Richard Berman, a Washington lobbyist and longtime foe of excessive union power in labor relations and politics. It's been passionately embraced by Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah and 20 other Republican senators. In the House, its chief sponsor is Tim Scott of South Carolina, a star of the freshman class of 87 Republicans.

Though it has dazzlingly high poll numbers, the measure is unlikely to be enacted any time soon. Unless Republicans capture the White House and the Senate in the November election while keeping control of the House, it's a sure loser. Even if Republicans gain full control in Washington, passage is not guaranteed.

As expected, labor leaders view the ERA with dread. Indeed, it threatens to diminish their authority

*Fred Barnes is executive editor of* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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significantly. And when labor chieftains feel strongly about an issue, congressional Democrats reflexively line up on their side.

Yet the ERA isn't doomed to oblivion. In fact, depending on where you live, you may be hearing about it. Berman has pledged to raise and spend $10 million in 2012 on TV ads promoting the proposal. So far, ads have been aired only in Washington, D.C., but Berman says they will soon be broadcast in Las Vegas, a strong union town, and then in states like Missouri and Montana with tossup Senate races.

What the ERA would do is entirely sensible. The most striking of its seven reforms would force unions to face a "recertification" election every three years, allowing workers to decide if they want to stick with their current union. Hatch says that "less than 10 percent" of union members today have ever voted on whether to have or keep a union. Another part of the measure would prevent union leaders from "intimidating or coercing employees from exercising their rights, including the right to decertify the union."

That's strong medicine. The rest of the ERA would guarantee secret ballot elections, give members the right to refuse to back their union's political operations, require at least 40 days to hear both sides before voting to certify or decertify a union, require a secret ballot vote before a strike, and make it a crime for unions to use violence or threats to coerce members.

Notice the emphasis of all seven provisions. It's on the individual rights of employees, not on economic concerns. Right-to-work laws let workers decline to join a union, but they are usually promoted as a tool for attracting business to a state and increasing jobs. By the way, 108 economists have endorsed the act.

Berman hired the Opinion Research Corporation to survey union and nonunion households to gauge the ERA's popularity. Only the secret ballot requirement drew less than 80 percent support. It was backed by 78 percent of both union and nonunion households.

Here's the most surprising result: Eighty-four percent of nonunion and 83 percent of union households favor an election every three years to recertify or jettison the union. And 85 percent of nonunion and 88 percent of union households back the need for a majority of members to approve a strike.

Hatch says he expects to be attacked as an opponent of unions. But he insists the ERA isn't anti-union. "I don't think it's pro-business. It's pro-worker." Nor does he regard it as dead legislatively for the foreseeable future. "I would never count it out. The polls show union workers are with us."

Berman sees the ERA as a long-term project. What matters, he says, is that the ERA puts the cause of union reform on the offensive. "Offense takes a long time to penetrate and become part of mainstream thinking."

His goal for 2012 is for the issue to enter the campaign debate. With Democrats normally pro-union and Republicans usually critical of union power, one aim is to interest independents.

The ERA is "foundational," Berman says. It's not designed to nullify a ruling of the National Labor Relations Board. Nor would it affect the relationship between workers and management. Instead, it seeks to change the balance of rights and obligations between unions and employees, a balance that now strongly favors union bosses.

If enacted, the ERA would be the most important labor legislation since the Landrum-Griffin bill in 1959, which dealt mainly with labor racketeering. Even today, most labor law was created in the Wagner Act of 1935. The Taft-Hartley law in 1947 legalized right-to-work laws.

So the ERA represents a dramatic step. But it would be a step in the right direction, with the twin benefits of vindicating individual rights and removing some of the drag on the economy imposed by union bosses. ♦

# Romney at the Retail Level

## Winning votes one at a time.

**BY JOHN MCCORMACK**

*How about a kiss? The candidate and a two-week-old supporter in Jacksonville.*

*Lehigh Acres, Fla.*

"Do you realize that one-quarter of all foreclosed homes in America are in Florida?" Mitt Romney asked the crowd gathered in the front yard of one such home outside of Fort Myers.

"We know! We know!" a woman yelled back.

"Housing has become a mess in large measure because government got in the middle of it," Romney said, before politely smacking "influence peddler" Newt Gingrich for taking on the government-backed mortgage giant Freddie Mac as a client. Romney then argued that the Dodd-Frank financial regulation bill signed into law by President Obama had made the housing mess even worse.

The Freddie Mac attack—relaunched by Romney at the debate in Tampa two days after Gingrich's South Carolina victory and reinforced by a barrage of TV ads—appeared to be successful in tearing Gingrich down. But even as Romney was regaining his lead in the Florida polls, there was a potentially troubling sign for the former governor: His events were drawing mere hundreds of voters, while thousands were showing up to Gingrich rallies.

Romney's professional and poised demeanor has served him well during the debates. But on the campaign trail, he struggles at times to connect with voters. Among the small number who came out to see Romney, many said they were voting against the other candidates as much as they were voting for him.

"I think he's more stable," said Joe Vetrano of Fort Myers. "The other guy is more of a loose cannon." Vetrano decided during the January 23 debate to back Romney. "I think he put Newt Gingrich on the run, and you can see in Newt Gingrich's face when [Romney] was talking about lobbying—you could see it, a weakness coming over Newt's face."

"It's the lesser of the evils," said Steve Elcock of his support for Romney. Elcock, a resident of Port Charlotte, immigrated to the United States from Grenada as a child. "Reagan freed us from socialism," he said. "I've loved Republicans ever since." But it was Elcock's dislike of the other candidates that led him to Romney. "Newt Gingrich lost my vote when he said he wanted black people to demand paychecks and not welfare checks. So he got the X. And Santorum said he wants black people to earn their own money and not demand other people's money. So that left me with Mitt Romney."

Romney definitely endeared himself to some voters as he signed baseballs, held a baby, and even let a woman's Yorkshire terrier lick his chin after his speech in Lehigh Acres. But his occasional stiffness was on display. "Love the Kid Rock song," one voter said to Romney as music blared in the background. "You know who that song is, huh?" Romney replied. "You know Kid Rock? That's what that is. That's what you're listening to."

As Romney worked his way down the ropeline, he met a voter who said he was unemployed. "We'll get you back to work," Romney said. He shook the voter's hand, thanked him for his support, and quickly moved on without asking the man about his family, or how long he'd been out of work, or where he had been employed.

Attacks over Romney's wealth have increased in the past two weeks as his opponents probed his record at Bain Capital and his tax returns. And he's still figuring out how to respond.

"Governor, how much money do you have?" Univision host Jorge

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*John McCormack is a staff writer at* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Ramos bluntly asked Romney at a candidates' forum in Miami.

"Well, you tell me and I'll tell you —I'm kidding," Romney replied, with a characteristic Romney chuckle. He said he'd already released an estimate, but Ramos wanted specifics. "Two hundred and fifty million?" he asked. "It's between 150 and 200-some-odd million dollars," Romney finally replied. "And, by the way, I didn't inherit that money."

While his opponents try to paint him as a plutocrat, Romney tries to counter by portraying himself as a champion of everyday American workers. "I know what it takes to make America the most attractive place for jobs again," he said. "I want to do that not because I'm worried about the 1 percent. The 1 percent's doing fine. I want to help the 99 percent. I want to help middle Americans get jobs that pay good wages."

In Miami, Romney matter-of-factly defended his tax rate. "One of the reasons we have a lower tax rate on capital gains is because capital gains are also being taxed at the corporate level. So as businesses earn profits—that's taxed at 35 percent. Then as they distribute those profits in dividends, that's taxed at 15 percent more. So all total the tax rate is really closer to 45 or 50 percent," he said. And then he pivoted to his tax plan to help the 99 percent. "I have a proposal for those in middle income. Anyone earning under $200,000 a year, I would propose pay no tax whatsoever on their savings. I think the people who have been most hurt in the Obama economy should be able to save money tax-free." Of course, for most middle-income Americans their savings—that is, their retirement plans—are already untaxed.

It's not just Romney's record in Massachusetts or his personality that is leaving many voters lukewarm. Some of his policies seem timid. Enough Republican voters may find Romney to be the best of the lot, but the lack of enthusiasm among his supporters could complicate his plans to lock up the nomination and take the White House. ♦

# Between Hard Power and Soft

## We need a new type of foreign policy professional.

**BY ROY GODSON**


*Mexico City policemen protest against corruption.*

As troops come home from Iraq and we draw down forces in Afghanistan, there is little reason to breathe the sigh of relief that should accompany the end of conflict. American troops are being drawn down in a region whose political actors include extreme jihadists and Salafists, dangerously armed regimes eager to maintain power, and criminal groups. Instead of stable governments there are many fragile political experiments. The demise of a few egregious despots does not make the Islamic world stable or peaceful. We face years, even decades, of uncertainty and potential turbulence, where regimes can shift or implode quickly, creating crises that may require American forces on the ground to protect our interests.

And it's not just the Middle East. With half of the world's 200 nation states weak or failing, there are many potential hot spots that could erupt in vaguely comprehended political dramas. We could be forced to choose between ceding territory—de facto isolationism—and sending our troops to occupy territory. Neither should be our first choice.

There is a third approach. The United States could embrace a smarter, more adaptive security paradigm that complements military capabilities with new and improved intelligence and political operations, some relearned during our experiences in the first decade of

*Roy Godson is president of the National Strategy Information Center in Washington and a professor emeritus at Georgetown University.*

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this uncertain century. A U.S. leader who wants to prevent military conflict while maintaining America's national security and global preeminence must be committed to understanding—and shaping—politics in volatile places. That entails bolstering leaders, political groups, and movements that share our values. Human rights and honest justice systems, in particular, are pillars of legitimate, stable governments.

U.S. intelligence has improved greatly over the past decade, with enhanced skill sets and expensive hightech systems. But if our goal is to know what is happening in a country, particularly in critical regions, we need to expand and reconfigure our human intelligence capabilities. We will need large numbers of trained professionals with local knowledge, foreign language skills, and the ability to operate for long periods in a given region. Building this force is difficult, though now we have a pool of resourceful veterans with years of experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose knowledge it would be a pity to waste.

What is the payoff? Consider how much better off we would be had we anticipated the series of events known as the Arab Spring. The region is critical to U.S. interests, yet we still have little concrete sense of where politics are headed. U.S. leaders are forced to negotiate with a multitude of emerging political actors we don't sufficiently understand. We don't have to accept this vulnerability. Given that we are competing around the globe with dedicated Islamic extremists and corrupt and criminal elites, our civilian leaders and military planners can't afford to be blindsided again.

Another way to enhance intelligence gathering is by training the intelligence forces of our smaller allies. In the last decade we have honed the ability to train partners in Iraq and Afghanistan in methods that do not reveal ours, and which can be practiced by people limited to low-tech operations. Helping train these willing partners can dramatically multiply eyes on the ground, increasing the acquisition of information both nations need.

Creating a corps of professional political operators to help governments, as well as nonstate political organizations, achieve legitimacy and stability is a complicated endeavor. Some of it we have done for decades: helping emerging democracies set up a free press, hold elections, and bolster the technical capabilities of law enforcement and security forces. Some problems are better solved—and ideally avoided—with political reforms. Cultures that lack institutions of modern statehood, or have long traditions of corruption or political violence, need help achieving political goals. Many of them welcome such assistance. The United States has pieces here and there.

**U.S. intelligence has improved greatly over the past decade. But if our goal is to know what is happening in a country, particularly in critical regions, we need to expand and reconfigure our human intelligence capabilities.**

But a serious capability to head off crises and military conflict that might involve us will require a new U.S. force of political operators. They will need appropriate training and career paths that include embassy-based work, as well as more entrepreneurial political work "outside the wire" in civil society. To be effective at building local trust and connections, operators should remain in place for long deployments.

At the nation-state level, helping an ally change a dysfunctional political culture requires inculcation of values that undergird civil society. A culture of lawfulness needs to be built by broadly fostering principles such as equality under the law. If attempting that seems like hubris, consider the real success in the past in Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan) and more recently in Eastern Europe. There are signs now that Mexico is moving along this path.

It helps that both Mexican president Felipe Calderón and major opposition and civic leaders have concluded that corruption in the police and other security forces, along with the great reach of criminal cartels, is crippling their country. Mexico has put up more than 15 times the money the United States has provided, and is beginning to take action to change a culture that has allowed the growth of debilitating corruption. With our help, the Mexicans are revamping training for police and military officers and developing internal incentives—including new standards for promotion, and rooting out offenders. They realize that hiring more cops does not help if they are easily corrupted.

Effective foreign security forces are our second line of defense, especially among our allies and partners. Shockingly, our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have not included serious human rights and anticorruption training for new security forces, despite billions spent.

This matters, because in many places we are engaged in a great political competition with forces of tyranny, which operate in the name of fundamentalist religions, crime syndicates, or authoritarian warlords. In a world where half the sovereign nations are weak and likely to remain so, we can only win with a competitive vision. Clean government, fair justice, and minimal corruption are bulwarks of that vision. It is time to have a new, specialized professional corps of Americans, drawn from military, diplomatic, and other backgrounds, with dedicated career tracks that allow them to stay in a region and develop long-term trust and connections that allow us to help shape a freer, more stable future. This strategic, hard-edged but softer approach is our best bet for precluding the need for a large and expensive U.S. military footprint on the ground. ♦

# Afghanistan 'Outside the Wire'

## The other frontline of the counterinsurgency.

**BY MINDY BELZ**

*Air Force Major Christy Barry speaks with Afghan national army officers.*

On her second deployment to Afghanistan, Capt. Felisa Dyrud, U.S. Air Force Academy Class of 2006, landed in front of live cameras in a Kabul television studio, in full camo fatigues and a chef's hat, baking an apricot tea ring.

"They asked me to wear the uniform," explained Dyrud, a little apologetically, as we watched a YouTube rendition of her September appearance on Ariana Television Network's *Bakery Show*. Founded in 2005, ATN is the largest private TV network in Afghanistan and claims to cover 33 of 34 provinces.

Dyrud is a member of Afghan Hands, an elite group of officers trained in local languages and assigned to long-term community outreach—what some deride as nation building. Her unit operates under a joint anticorruption task force called *Shafafiyat* ("transparency" in Dari). It's based at NATO's ISAF headquarters in Kabul. Dyrud, who just spent her third Christmas in Afghanistan, has gotten to know her share of locals, including the television producer who invited her to host the cooking show during Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that marks the end of Ramadan.

The California native made the most of the opportunity. Throughout the 30-minute segment, she spoke in Dari, counting out cups of flour and spoonfuls of sugar alongside an Afghan assistant. The apricot tea ring is a family favorite from a childhood spent partly in the United States but mostly in South America, where her parents were missionaries.

As Dyrud worked, expertly turning pans to show the at-home audience her progress, she explained the holidays her family celebrates. She also managed to work in a lesson from her current assignment: "If dough contains even a drop of poison, the cake will look normal but is really dangerous and fatal. And corruption is like poison."

For comic relief while the dough rose, two male officers from Afghan Hands joined her in front of the camera, dancing and playing a bongo drum and kitchen tools turned percussion instruments.

Starring on a cooking show is just one way Afghan Hands embed with the culture as part of the broader U.S. counterinsurgency strategy. "Until you understand the Afghan reality you cannot craft solutions that are meaningful," Dyrud contends.

The United States still has near-record levels of troops in Afghanistan, but few have clearance to venture "outside the wire." Dyrud and her colleagues defy the standard rules of engagement. For too long in this long war, they believe, U.S. military personnel have been seen by locals operating from a zone of safety that bars them from the realities of Afghan life. Even when Gen. David Petraeus commanded U.S. forces, and officers around Kabul took to quoting from his counterinsurgency manual (all about "securing the civilian population"), the rise of suicide bombings and IED attacks kept U.S. soldiers behind barriers. Most carry out their deployments from inside a fortified military installation, within the safety of an up-armored convoy, or—if they venture out on foot—distanced from local people by a ceramic-plated ballistic vest, helmet, and weapons.

In contrast, Dyrud usually goes to community functions in local dress, including a headscarf. The relaxed standards for Afghan Hands allow her to visit college campuses, take part in student-led seminars, dine with local officials, fly kites, and cook.

What's the point, when bombs continue to go off in the streets? Officers like Dyrud believe that if all the United States does here is train security forces, it will end up with another

*Mindy Belz is editor of* World *magazine.*

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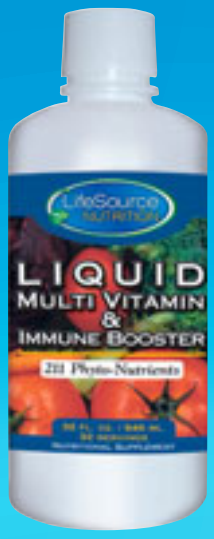


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Pakistan, a militarized Islamic state threatening other states. Their objective is to influence the cultural mindset from the ground up.

On 9/11 Dyrud was a freshman at the Air Force Academy. "I was sitting in class when they turned the televisions on and we watched the footage of the planes going into the towers." She resolved to go to Afghanistan, raising funds over the next year and dropping out of the Academy. She arrived in Kabul—with the U.S. war against al Qaeda in full swing—to work as a teacher in a public orphanage.

A year later, Dyrud decided to return to the academy. She had to reapply for a nomination and again win acceptance. She graduated in 2006, got married (her husband is stationed stateside in the Air Force), and eventually found herself back in Afghanistan, this time on military deployment and better prepared with street-level expertise than many of her fellow officers.

For one thing, she has no fear of Afghans. "Too many of our people deploy here to sit inside an office all year in front of these," she said, tapping her laptop, open on a table at the Tora Bora Bar inside the walled compound of ISAF headquarters. "We need a lot less of this sort of communication," she said, pushing the laptop away, "and a lot more real contact with the people we're trying to win."

Dyrud likes Afghans and draws courage and hope from them. She's a full believer in the Petraeus counterinsurgency doctrine that says 20 percent of the population may support the insurgency, 20 percent may favor U.S. and NATO objectives, and the target population, the group to win over, is the 60 percent in the middle.

"The toughness of this assignment . . . can hardly be compared to what the Afghan people go through day in and day out," she told KVOI-AM radio in Tucson in a long-distance interview last year. "I look at the Afghan people and I think these are the resilient ones, these are the heroes."

When Adm. Mike Mullen launched Afghan Hands (also called AfPak Hands) in 2009, he envisaged a 900-member corps of officers and highly trained enlistees who would go through a 17-week language course and commit to deployments of up to five years. One year later, only 172 had signed up.

Yet Mullen and other commanders were convinced that a lack of continuity and of military and cultural expertise was hampering U.S. efforts to train not only security forces but also civilians who would take over the U.S. mission. Shaida M. Abdali, assistant to President Hamid Karzai and deputy national security adviser, agreed: The newly trained Afghan security forces boasted "quantity but not quality," he said, and U.S. and Afghan strategists had failed "at engaging the majority population where they live."

**The United States still has near-record levels of troops in Afghanistan, but few have clearance to venture 'outside the wire.' Capt. Dyrud and her colleagues defy the standard rules of engagement. For too long in this long war, they believe, U.S. military personnel have been seen by locals operating from a zone of safety that bars them from the realities of Afghan life.**

Mullen and Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, then commander of forces in Afghanistan, launched Afghan Hands to bolster the war effort and signal the United States' long-term strategic interest in the region. In a December 14, 2009, memo to the service chiefs, Mullen called AfPak Hands "the military's number one manpower priority."

At the time, Mullen was embroiled in the Obama administration's protracted review of strategy in Afghanistan. Assembling a seasoned corps of expert officers was urgent as it became clear the president would announce a timetable to withdraw troops. "The program demands the best and brightest leaders our Services have to offer," Mullen wrote in the memo to the chiefs. When one of his own—his chief speechwriter at the Pentagon and a highly regarded Air Force officer named Lt. Col. Tim Kirk—volunteered for the assignment, Mullen signed the order to let him go.

Kirk, now a full colonel, began language training two years ago. When I met with him last fall in Kabul he had just signed on for his third deployment (leaving his family in Virginia). He says he has no regrets about stepping off the Pentagon career track, where he'd likely be on his way to becoming a one-star.

Despite the long stay in Afghanistan, Kirk carries with him a breathless sense of having a lot to do in a short time. Over the summer he prepared a PowerPoint presentation on battling corruption—what he calls "breaking the cycle of impunity with the cycle of integrity." He shows it to Afghans all over the country, from top government officials to aspiring business students at Kabul University.

Kirk says that being a student of U.S. military history and now of Afghanistan's past and present makes him an optimist. He can tick off Afghanistan's challenges—"corrupt officials, weak law enforcement, narcotics, criminal networks, insurgency"—but he also likes to point out that George Washington was 15 years old when the first Afghan election took place, the Loya Jirga of 1747.

"It may be naïve to think this is possible, but I believe the founding of our country is based on the principle that man can govern himself," said Kirk. "So I don't believe there is anything fundamental about any other culture or ethnic or regional group of people that makes this impossible."

What remains to be seen is whether Kirk and the others who've joined Afghan Hands can actually exert a significant influence on the political culture of a country of some 30 million in whatever time they have left. ♦

# Drones Are Not Enough

*Getting counterterrorism policy wrong*

**By Reuel Marc Gerecht**

Has Barack Obama been a good counterterrorist president? On the left, and even on the right, we usually hear a resounding "yes": Obama has maintained, sometimes amplified, the programs that really keep us safe (predator drones, expansive use of domestic intercepts, unsavory intelligence liaison relationships, and rendition). Some on the left may be disturbed by the president's actions, but their moral indigestion is contained by the belief that Obama is still better than George W. Bush. And after SEAL Team Six went for the kill in Abbottabad, the right posed few questions about the action, or the way the administration and the Central Intelligence Agency have characterized the supposedly diminishing al Qaeda threat in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The two leading Republican presidential nominees, Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich, aver that the president appears weak, especially to the regime in Tehran. But apart from highlighting how weak presidents tempt our enemies, they have not really questioned Obama's counterterrorist credentials.

*As menacing as ever: Ali Khamenei*

That's a mistake. Since September 11, 2001, Washington has been enamored of the idea that the principal terrorist threat to the United States comes from "independent" actors like al Qaeda. Whereas George W. Bush at least combined this analysis with his recognition of an "Axis of Evil" (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea were highlighted for their support for terrorism as well as their appetites for weapons of mass destruction), Barack Obama has assiduously avoided underscoring state sponsorship of terrorism. His minions may occasionally say unkind things about Pakistan and the Islamic Republic, but the president has steered clear of depicting the military junta in Islamabad and the clerical regime in Tehran as terrorist threats to the United States. Even after Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is responsible for the nuclear program as well as terrorist operations, was caught trying to orchestrate a bombing run on the Saudi ambassador in a Washington, D.C., restaurant, the administration chose not to dwell on the incident—the first time, so far as we know, that any foreign state has planned a possibly mass-casualty terrorist attack in the U.S. capital. The White House quickly turned the discussion of retribution back to sanctions—the president's preferred method of responding to Tehran on the nuclear issue, human-rights violations, and now, it seems, terrorism.

But by doing so—by not talking loudly about the increasing evidence of a longstanding alliance between Iran and al Qaeda, by not talking more openly about the horrendous problem we have with Pakistan, and by intentionally misrepresenting the nature of al Qaeda and the alliances among Islamic militant groups—the president has turned a blind eye towards probably the most dangerous terrorist threat to the United States over the next decade: state sponsorship of "independent" Islamic terrorist groups and the likely partnering of Iran and Pakistan against the United States.

The president and the counterterrorist cognoscenti in his administration may think they are doing the country

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a favor, since focusing on state actors conjures up war. The White House has exchanged the "global war on terror" for a smaller, supposedly safer, more manageable confrontation with "extremists." But strategically and tactically, little of what the administration is doing makes sense. We are more likely to find ourselves in a state-to-state confrontation precisely because of Obama's intentions and methods.

Let us look at Iran. Although the administration and our European allies appear to be getting much more serious about rigorous sanctions against the Islamic Republic because of its quest for nuclear weapons, the White House has shied away from the possibility that Tehran will respond with terrorism, not negotiations. Perhaps the most stubborn wish in U.S. foreign policy has been the three-decade-old bipartisan determination to engage with and moderate the Islamic Republic. Ever since Ali Khamenei put on Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's mantle as guardian of the revolution, Western observers have wanted to describe him as "pragmatic" and "moderate," even though his outpouring of virulently anti-American speeches, let alone the crackdowns and killings he's unleashed at home since 1999, might engender skepticism. Iran's much vilified and lampooned president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is probably less hardcore—even on the villainy of world Jewry—than Khamenei is. Unlike the fallen reformist president Mohammad Khatami, who could rage against the United States and the destructiveness of Western culture but also wax envious about the ethical sensitivity of occidental thought and the democracy-bred decency of Americans, Khamenei has never once emitted a smidgeon of affection, empathy, or even old-fashioned, highbrow Persian distaste for the United States.

Like Khomeini, Khamenei hates America comprehensively. The United States is, simply and infinitely, "the enemy of God." He has at times allowed his minions and his opponents to reject the United States with less vehemence—most famously after the election of Khatami in 1997 and the American triumph in Afghanistan in 2002—when internal and external events spooked him. But when the United States was the most forward-leaning during his rule—when Barack Obama first started sending not-so-secret engagement letters—the supreme leader told Washington to stick it. *Shaytan-e mojassim*, "Satan incarnate," the phrase Khamenei hurled back at Obama after the president first extended his hand, contains a truth that the administration, and many other liberals and most realists, just won't grasp: The more the president reaches out to Khamenei, the harder Washington tries to find a modus vivendi, the more the supreme leader will hate the president of the United States. (If Khamenei used voodoo dolls, Obama's would be larger than Bush's.)

And it isn't conspiracy that fuels the supreme leader's loathing; it's a keen understanding that America's enrapturing wickedness is central to the Islamic Republic's faith. Although Obama had nothing to do with the explosion of dissent on Tehran's streets in the summer of 2009, the protesters used the president's why-can't-we-be-friends rhetoric, confirming the insidious danger of America's new leader. American diplomacy towards Tehran, which has often been fairly active behind the scenes, has never been seen as more provocative than under Obama.

American liberals, who live to manage domestic affairs, like to believe that foreign affairs, too, can be handled rationally. Thus, Obama ratchets up the economic pressure on Tehran, assuming that in response, Khamenei the "pragmatist" will eventually change his behavior. Even though this scenario beggars the Iranian revolutionary imagination, it has one small chance for success: if the supreme leader knows that he cannot counter with violence. Violence—terrorism—is in the DNA of this regime. It's how it deals with internal opposition; it's regularly been part of Tehran's foreign statecraft.

Yet Obama's inconsistencies signal the opposite. On the one hand, the president describes Iran's nuclear program as "unacceptable" and has backed an ever-more-punishing sanctions regime. On the other hand, Obama has made it clear that he would prefer to avoid a military confrontation with Tehran even when the regime is caught planning a terrorist strike. Following in the footsteps of George W. Bush but with much more conviction, Obama has ignored Iran's extensive aid to Iraqis and Afghans who specialize in killing American soldiers.

Yet the president's contradictions have been the most harmful—and for Tehran perhaps the most instructive—on the growing evidence of an al Qaeda-Iran alliance. Like the Bush administration, Obama's people have not wanted to follow up on the *9/11 Commission Report*, which depicted regular operational contact and likely training between Osama bin Laden's men, Iran's security services, and Hezbollah. Before and after 9/11, the clerical regime unquestionably abetted al Qaeda's movement with *laissez-passers*. Since 2005, evidence has been mounting that the Islamic Republic has allowed al Qaeda to use Iran as a safe haven and an operational hub. In January 2009, the Treasury Department designated four members of al Qaeda who were "managing the terrorist organization from Iran." All four of these operatives, one of whom was bin Laden's son Saad, had supposedly been under "house arrest."

Then barely two months ago, in December 2011, the State Department and Treasury announced a $10 million bounty on the al Qaeda financier Ezedin Abdel Aziz Khalil, better known as Yasin al-Suri, who, according to the U.S. government, has been operating in Iran with the assistance

of the Iranian authorities since 2005. "Al-Suri's network has served as a financial conduit, collecting funds from donors throughout the Gulf and moving those via Iran to al Qaeda's leadership in Afghanistan and Iraq," according to Treasury. "Al-Suri's network also serves as the core pipeline for al Qaeda to funnel operatives and facilitators from the Middle East to Afghanistan and Pakistan."

Even so, neither the president, nor the vice president, nor the secretaries of defense and state, nor the director of the Central Intelligence Agency has managed to remonstrate publicly against this alliance, let alone threatened Ali Khamenei with dire consequences. The White House is held hostage to its dream of negotiating an end to the nuclear crisis. It doesn't seem to realize that using economic coercion without plausible military deterrence is an invitation to the Revolutionary Guards to kill more Americans. The Islamic Republic has been ramping up its ties with al Qaeda, and Obama's administration has done nothing.

The administration's frightful timidity with the clerical regime can mostly be ascribed to bad analysis born of good intentions (it *would* be great if Ali Khamenei would just say, "Hi," in response to President Obama's letters). That's not at all the case with counterterrorism policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where it's become increasingly difficult not to accuse the administration of crudely manipulating and politicizing intelligence and being deceitful about the strategic ramifications of its current policy.

According to the White House, America has al Qaeda on the run in Afghanistan, its numbers reduced to fewer than 100. And as Marine Corps War College professor Jim Lacey has fairly inquired, if the United States is confronting fewer than 100 members of al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and we are not at war with the Taliban, which increasingly appears to be the administration's position, then why do we still have more than 100,000 soldiers in that country?

But as Bill Roggio and Thomas Joscelyn of *The Long War Journal* tirelessly point out, the figures the U.S. government gives for al Qaeda membership in Afghanistan are, quite simply, made up. They are asserted often and with such confidence that the probable source is the CIA, which, as those who've had the pleasure of reading national intelligence estimates know, tends to insert earnest self-confidence where information is lacking. Roggio and Joscelyn have consistently shown that the U.S. military regularly kills large numbers of al Qaeda holy warriors only to have the total remain unchanged in official accountings. As both gentlemen have written in this magazine, NATO and U.S. military press releases that still show al Qaeda and its affiliated groups to be all over most of Afghanistan's provinces belie the impression given by President Obama and other senior officials that al Qaeda has been bottled up and "decimated."

Roggio and Joscelyn have tried unsuccessfully to get U.S. officials to explain to them how the CIA and the Pentagon differentiate between al Qaeda and other holy-warrior groups in Central Asia. Are we counting just Arabs—meaning that ethnic Pashtuns, Punjabis, Sindhis, and Kashmiris who've caught al Qaeda's global-jihad bug fail to qualify as members? That shouldn't be a difficult question to answer and certainly doesn't compromise sources and methods. Yet the CIA and the Pentagon are mum. (And the press hasn't bothered to push the inquiry.)

*Not going away: captured Taliban fighters in Afghanistan with weapons, December 2011*

NEWSCOM

We can assume that any information the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence agency provides to Langley is viewed with extraordinary skepticism, given the close relationship the ISI has with so many terrorist groups, especially the Haqqani network and Harakat-ul-Mujahedeen, which maintain operational ties to al Qaeda. Daniel Benjamin and Steve Simon, who now head counterterrorism at the State Department and Middle Eastern affairs at the National Security Council, respectively, are probably the two best counterterrorist minds the Democrats have. In *The Next Attack*, their scathing critique of the Bush administration's war on terror published in 2005, they wrote that, whereas "before September 11, extremists focused their hatred on

India and the issue of Kashmir, now they seek to mobilize support by inciting others against America." Benjamin and Simon were deeply concerned that Pakistan could become the breeding ground for a new anti-American jihad, as the language and ideology of transnational holy war spread. And things haven't gotten any better: Since 2009, hardcore Pakistani Islamic militant groups, which historically have had the closest relationships with al Qaeda, have gotten much bolder at home and often abroad, as British MI5 officers who monitor the Pakistani community in the United Kingdom can testify.

The truth: The CIA has no way of knowing how many members of al Qaeda remain in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Worse, neither it nor the Pentagon has any meaningful rubric for identifying al Qaeda's jihadists. If they are counting young men who've given their allegiance, their *baya*, to the organization, they must have al Qaeda's inner command circle penetrated with moles. We know from the long hunt for bin Laden, in which interrogations far from the battlefields of Afghanistan played a critical role, that this is not the case. There are sometimes real virtues to using predator drones aggressively against al Qaeda and senior leaders of the Taliban and other Islamic militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but an enormous downside is missing opportunities for capture and interrogation. In Afghanistan under a liberal president, America has returned to victory-by-head-count reminiscent of Vietnam: If we've killed X number of al Qaeda and Taliban leaders by predators—even though both organizations enjoy safe haven in Pakistan, where their members can undertake R & R, recruitment, training, and planning with little fear of drones—we are winning.

**An enormous downside to relying primarily on drone attacks is missing opportunities for capture and interrogation. Take away the computers and files seized at bin Laden's home in Pakistan, and the quality of intelligence gathered in the last three years has probably declined.**

We don't know whether al Qaeda will survive as an effective organization without bin Laden, but we certainly do know that Pakistan's and Afghanistan's myriad radical Islamic groups are doing okay, if not prospering. We know for a fact that bin Laden intended early on—even before he returned to Jalalabad in 1996—to marry his organization, operationally and ideologically, to radical groups in Central Asia. Once in Afghanistan, he successfully integrated his personnel into the Taliban, incorporating them throughout the chain of command in units fighting the Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. No information has surfaced indicating that the Taliban of Mullah Omar, let alone groups like the Haqqanis and the forces behind Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the fiery Pashtun Islamist who has long received assistance from Tehran and the ISI, has backed away from al Qaeda in the field. Mullah Omar, who lost his realm after 9/11, has had ample opportunity in his safe haven in western Pakistan to state, with whatever poetic obfuscation Islamic sensitivities require, any regret he has about his alliance with bin Laden. He has not done so.

Neither the Pentagon nor the CIA has released any evidence that these organizations have ever turned al Qaeda members in (for propaganda purposes, we would surely hear about it). It's a decent guess that America's intelligence on al Qaeda and the groups closest to it hasn't improved since Obama came into office. Take away the computers and files seized at bin Laden's home in Pakistan, and the quality of intelligence gathered in the last three years has probably declined. The United States presumably still has no spies in senior al Qaeda and Taliban circles. And, given the current political and ethical difficulties of long-term detention of Islamic militants, the extensive interrogations and debriefing of volunteers that are the key to first-rate intelligence, per senior administration officials who should know, have become rare.

The surge of American forces in 2010 and 2011 has improved tactical intelligence—boots on the ground are indispensable to getting the natives to open up about the movement of enemy forces. But there are real limits to the kind and quality of information so gathered if American soldiers are capturing low-level fighters while predators kill commanders. It is also downright bizarre that the administration intends to negotiate with the Taliban while it's killing the group's elders, who are probably less radical than the young men who've enlisted since 2001. Predators have created headroom for the religiously and operationally ambitious. Such "negotiations" really cannot lead to anything, as the French expert on Afghanistan Gilles Dorronsoro has quipped, except to "America's surrender." After all, President Obama is not threatening to stay.

One of the great losses that came from the president's ill-conceived decision to kill, not capture, bin Laden is the opportunity to interrogate the founder of al Qaeda about absolutely everything. Under intensive interrogation we could have learned the depth of his ties to Iran and the Pakistani military, let alone to other Islamic groups and intelligence services. There are good rumors that the computers seized by the SEAL team in Abbottabad have information

about how bin Laden continued to plant his people into the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. That information, let alone the facts on the battlefield, could make mincemeat of the administration's hope to find some diplomatic means to a "decent interval" for American forces to leave Afghanistan. For this plan to work, the Taliban must be philosophically recast into a Pashtun nationalist movement that no longer wants to abet al Qaeda or other radical Islamic groups with a taste for killing Americans.

What President Obama is likely leading the United States to is a Taliban victory in Afghanistan that will reinvigorate al Qaeda and its allies. Much of Pakistan, especially within the military, has been hoping to get back to a pre-9/11 world, where Pakistan's considerable Islamic fervor could be directed again towards Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the United States and away from the Pakistani military, which really didn't want to get into a shooting war with Islamist groups it had once supported. The attacks of 9/11 forced the Pakistani military, which has become an increasingly Islamist outfit over the last 30 years, to shoot its children. This is a distasteful and ultimately unsustainable position.

As is President Obama's drone campaign in Central Asia. The Pakistanis already restrict the use of predators from bases on their soil. Pakistani intelligence, heretofore critical to targeting Afghan Islamic militants based in northwest Pakistan, has surely become a lot less fulsome, too. If President Obama is serious about withdrawing the bulk of American forces from Afghanistan by 2014, Pakistani cooperation will likely dry up. It's America's force of arms, more than Washington's financial aid to Islamabad, that keeps Pakistan from completely reverting to its old ways. We would do well to remember that it was the "old" Pakistan, with its officially sanctioned A.Q. Khan proliferation network, that delivered nuclear technology and know-how to Tehran. Civil war in Afghanistan, which will surely arrive when the Americans leave, may complicate Iranian-Pakistani relations, since they must support opposite sides. Pakistan will back a Taliban drive to retake Kabul and reestablish Pashtun Islamist supremacy throughout Afghanistan; Iran will perforce back its Persian-speaking Tajik and Shiite Hazara allies. But this ethnic split in Afghan aid was already present in the 1990s when Islamabad allowed Khan to help Tehran.

In the years since, both sides have come to despise the United States more intensely. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" is an old Middle Eastern adage. President Obama, who has a hard time grasping intractable enmities in foreign affairs, would do well to appreciate its full ramifications. ◆

# Strategic Retreat

*The war on terror is far from over. Why are we coming home?*

**By Thomas Joscelyn & Bill Roggio**

The killing of Osama bin Laden was a monumental tactical success in the war against al Qaeda. For millions, bin Laden had come to symbolize American weakness. His mere existence was a reminder that the United States, for all its military might and economic dominance, could not bring to justice a man responsible for the deaths of nearly 3,000 Americans. And bin Laden was more than a symbol. Documents recovered from his safe house in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011 reveal he was still an instrumental leader within the global terror network he established. For these reasons and more, the death of bin Laden at the hands of an elite band of Navy SEALs was a cathartic moment for the nation. But the Obama administration has used that moment to justify a strategic retreat from the global war against al Qaeda, its allies, and the terror-sponsoring states that threaten American interests.

During his State of the Union address last week, the president did not say that America was retreating from the September 11 wars. Instead, he wanted Americans to believe that those wars had been won: Mission Accomplished.

"Last month, I went to Andrews Air Force Base and welcomed home some of our last troops to serve in Iraq," Obama began.

> Together, we offered a final, proud salute to the colors under which more than a million of our fellow citizens fought—and several thousand gave their lives. We gather tonight knowing that this generation of heroes has made the United States safer and more respected around the world. For the first time in nine years, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq. For the first time in two decades, Osama bin Laden is not a threat to this country. Most of al Qaeda's top lieutenants have been defeated. The Taliban's momentum has been broken, and some troops in Afghanistan have begun to come home.

You would never know from the president's words that America's enemies continue to fight on, even as he calls our soldiers home from the battlefields.

The justifications for this retreat were set forth in a document released by the administration in early January entitled "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense." Its purpose is to provide "strategic guidance" for the Defense Department. In a page-and-a-half introductory letter, President Obama twice used the phrase "as we end today's wars" when discussing the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Our Nation is at a moment of transition," wrote the president. "Thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, we have responsibly ended the war in Iraq, put al Qaeda on the path to defeat—including delivering justice to Osama bin Laden—and made significant progress in Afghanistan, allowing us to begin the transition to Afghan responsibility."

The president's words are disconnected from reality. Iraqi security quickly deteriorated in the weeks following the complete withdrawal of American combat troops in December. Al Qaeda in Iraq has stepped up its attacks on civilians and security forces, threatening Iraq's fragile government. A political crisis pitting Shiite prime minister Nuri al-Maliki against Kurdish and Sunni politicians, including Iraq's vice president, has also ensued. American forces are no longer in a position to influence these events, which has made them worse.

The administration argues that in drawing down U.S. forces it was simply abiding by an agreement reached by the Bush administration in 2008. But as Max Boot has explained, the president and his advisers did not really want to extend or modify that agreement. The Obama administration did little to convince the Iraqis to alter its terms. In the end, the agreement provided the Obama administration with political cover for an outcome it desired. President Obama had long talked of bringing an "end" to the war—an end for American forces, mind you. Al Qaeda in Iraq and Iranian-backed militias fight on. According to the *Washington Post*, Iraqi officials counted about 2,640 deaths for the year ending December 31. And, according to the *Post*, Iraq Body Count, a nonprofit group that tallies civilian deaths using published reports, estimates "460 civilians died violently after the troops' departure, a 35 percent increase over monthly averages for last year."

It is impossible to see how President Obama can consider this a "responsible" end to the Iraq war. Nevertheless,

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if the president gets his way, America's military forces will leave Afghanistan as well in the next two years.

President Obama is right that American troops and their allies have made "significant progress" in parts of that war-torn country, but the gains are tenuous. Other areas of Afghanistan remain infested with jihadists. And the insurgency organizations based across the border in Pakistan will be happy to take advantage of a security vacuum once the Americans are gone.

Within hours of the Abbottabad raid, those seeking to end America's military involvement in Afghanistan were on the march. Speaking to reporters the day after President Obama announced bin Laden's death, Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, expressed the view that the successful raid should "reinforce" the president's desire to draw down forces.

"I think there is going to be a lot of strong feeling on the part of most Democrats and many . . . independents and even some Republicans," Levin said, "that the decision of the president to reduce the number of troops in Afghanistan starting in July [2011] should be a robust reduction. It shouldn't be just a symbolic reduction; it should establish the point [that] the security of Afghanistan needs to be in the hands of Afghans."

Levin's timing was off, but not by much. In June 2011, President Obama announced that 10,000 troops sent to Afghanistan as part of a surge he ordered would be withdrawn by year's end. The remaining 23,000 surge troops would leave by September 2012, Obama declared. In October 2011, the president announced the U.S. pullout from Iraq by the end of that calendar year.

The Obama administration is desperate to find a way out of Afghanistan. The problem is that the Taliban, al Qaeda, and their allies have not been defeated. So, then, how to justify retreat? The administration makes three key arguments, each based on politicized intelligence.

First, administration officials argue there are only 50 to 100 al Qaeda operatives inside Afghanistan at any one time. It is not clear how anyone could possibly know the exact number of al Qaeda fighters, as they typically do not hand over rosters to Western officials. But the administration's intent is clear: to downplay the centrality of Afghanistan in the fight against the terror network that attacked us on September 11. If al Qaeda is barely present in Afghanistan, the logic goes, there is no reason for U.S. forces to be there either. (Never mind that al Qaeda's core leadership is based in Pakistan, and a foothold in Afghanistan gives American forces a place from which to launch operations against them, such as the raid that killed bin Laden.)

The administration's estimate relies on an absurdly narrow definition of al Qaeda. Fighters from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a close ally in both ideology and operations, are excluded. So are other non-Arab groups, even though bin Laden's grand strategy was to bring these organizations under al Qaeda's banner. The deceased al Qaeda master made strides in that direction long before September 11.

NATO's command in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), regularly issues press releases on its raids. A review of these statements from March 2007 forward shows the presence of al Qaeda and affiliated foreign groups such as the IMU in 94 districts in 25 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. Al Qaeda's own martyrdom statements confirm ISAF's reporting. In other words, the enemy's footprint is much larger than the administration would have us believe.

Second, administration officials contend—as Vice President Biden told *Newsweek* in December—that the Taliban "is not our enemy." This was a rather callous statement given that the Taliban has spilled much American blood over the past 10 years. But the intent is plain to see. It is easier to justify retreat if you can claim that the Taliban—former ruler of what it still calls the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" and the backbone of the insurgency there—isn't an enemy at all.

The Obama administration has tried to open peace talks with the Taliban on a number of occasions and has failed. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has listed the goals for the talks as (1) the Taliban lays down its arms, (2) the Taliban accepts the Afghan constitution, and (3) the Taliban separates itself from al Qaeda (implicitly conceding that the two work together, though this is inconsistent with both Biden's opinion of the Taliban and claims that al Qaeda has little to do with the insurgency). There is no reason to believe the Taliban is serious about meeting these goals. In January, the Taliban opened a "political office" in Qatar to facilitate negotiations; the administration took this as a significant step. In announcing its new office, however, the Taliban stated that this

> does not mean a surrender from jihad and neither is it connected to an acceptance of the constitution of the stooge Kabul administration but rather the Islamic Emirate is utilizing its political wing alongside its military presence and jihad in order to realize the national and Islamic aspirations of the nation and its martyrs.

While the Taliban thus openly rejects two of the administration's goals, it doesn't mention the third—that it break with al Qaeda. But this is fantasy as well. It is based on the mistaken belief that the Taliban and al Qaeda were not really close allies when al Qaeda struck

America on 9/11 and, furthermore, that the decade of war since has not made them blood brothers. The irony is that the administration's own attempt at peace talks reveals just how wrongheaded this view of Taliban-al Qaeda relations is.

To move forward with talks, the Taliban demands the release of five senior Taliban leaders held at Guantánamo. All had extensive ties to al Qaeda going back well before 9/11, according to leaked Joint Task Force-Guantánamo (JTF-GTMO) memos. One of the five, for instance, is a former senior Taliban intelligence official named Abdul Haq Wasiq. JTF-GTMO concluded that Wasiq "utilized his office to support al Qaeda and to assist Taliban personnel" in eluding capture in late 2001. Wasiq also "arranged for al Qaeda personnel to train Taliban intelligence staff in intelligence methods." The al Qaeda trainer was one Hamza Zubayr, who was killed during the same raid that netted Ramzi Binalshibh, al Qaeda's point man for 9/11.

The high degree of collusion between the Taliban and al Qaeda has continued in the past decade. Jalaluddin and Siraj Haqqani, the father and son who run the most lethal part of the Taliban coalition, are thoroughly indoctrinated in al Qaeda's global jihadist ideology. The Haqqanis hold a seat on al Qaeda's elite Shura council and have harbored senior al Qaeda leaders in northern Pakistan for years. Even if some Taliban commander forswears al Qaeda, the Haqqanis will not.

ISAF frequently reports on raids targeting dual-hatted al Qaeda/Taliban operatives in Afghanistan. The Taliban recently appointed Sheikh Mohammed Aminullah, who is closely tied to al Qaeda, as the head of its Peshawar Regional Military Shura, which is responsible for operations in eastern and northern Afghanistan. The Peshawar Shura is one of four Taliban committees responsible for waging jihad in Afghanistan. Two of the other committees are also controlled by al Qaeda's allies.

There are many more examples, but the important point is this: There is no reason to believe the Taliban will betray al Qaeda, after refusing to do so for nearly two decades, now that America is on the verge of retreat.

President Obama's third justification for withdrawal is that al Qaeda is "on the path to defeat." Other administration officials have made the same assertion. Visiting Kabul in July 2011, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said the United States "is within reach of strategically defeating al Qaeda." The Obama administration had narrowed its list of targets to between 10 and 20 key al Qaeda operatives in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and North Africa, Panetta told reporters. "If we can be successful in going after them, I think we can really undermine their ability to do any kind of planning, to be able to conduct any kind of attack on this country."

Although administration officials have not defined what they mean when they say we are close to "strategically defeating al Qaeda," it appears from Panetta's comments that they mean eliminating al Qaeda's ability to attack "this country," the United States. This assumes that al Qaeda's sole strategic aim is to strike the American homeland again. Undoubtedly, al Qaeda's most senior leaders, including Ayman al Zawahiri, would love to execute another September 11. Al Qaeda has repeatedly plotted such attacks, including during the Obama years. This is not al Qaeda's only strategic aim, however, nor is there reason to believe al Qaeda has devoted most of its resources to achieving it. In fact, there are good reasons to think that al Qaeda has allocated most of its assets to other initiatives, mainly waging insurgencies in jihadist hotspots around the globe—including the very areas President Obama has ordered American troops to leave.

While al Qaeda has failed to launch a single successful terrorist attack against the United States since September 11, 2001, "homegrown" terrorists (such as Major Nidal Malik Hasan) have had some success. And Sunni extremists have pulled off thousands of attacks elsewhere in the world, killing tens of thousands of people, most of them Muslims.

Each year the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) releases data on the global threat. The latest figures, for 2009 and 2010, show that in the first two years Obama was in office, Sunni jihadists killed more than 18,000 people. Tens of thousands more were wounded. And even this stunning figure probably underestimates the casualties. A significant number of attacks likely go unreported, and purely military engagements don't count.

Not all Sunni extremists take their orders from al Qaeda, of course. But they are part of the same ideological movement that gave us al Qaeda in the first place and which al Qaeda has sought to galvanize into action. Al Qaeda and affiliated parties, moreover, are by far the most prolific Sunni extremist organizations. The NCTC noted that in 2009, for instance, the deadliest groups were the Taliban (a close ally of al Qaeda, Vice President Biden notwithstanding), al Shabaab (al Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia), and Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The nations most afflicted by terrorism (both Sunni and non-Sunni) in 2009 and 2010 were Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia. It is in this context that President Obama has ordered his drawdown of American forces—in precisely the nations hardest hit, Iraq and Afghanistan. There is no reason to believe that the situation in Afghanistan will improve once American forces are gone, any more than it improved in Iraq.

And while the administration is right that al Qaeda's ability to hit the continental United States has been severely degraded, we should not forget how close we've come to mass casualties: Both Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's attempted bombing on board a jetliner on Christmas Day 2009 and the Times Square attempted bombing by an agent of the Pakistani Taliban, a close ally of al Qaeda, in May 2010 were near misses. Luck saved the day in both cases—not vigilance.

President Obama has sounded the horn of strategic retreat. No doubt administration officials would disagree with that characterization. The president has ramped up drone attacks in northern Pakistan and elsewhere, they argue. And those attacks have killed numerous senior terrorists, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who was involved in multiple plots against the United States.

This is true, and the president deserves credit for these actions. But drone strikes are merely a tactic, one that is insufficient to contain the advances of al Qaeda and its allies. "From Pakistan to Yemen," President Obama argued during his State of the Union address, "the al Qaeda operatives who remain are scrambling, knowing that they can't escape the reach of the United States of America." But this is true only for those select terrorist operatives who find themselves in the crosshairs of American drones. It is not true for the vast majority of jihadists who fight under al Qaeda's black flag.

On January 16, for instance, Rida became the latest Yemeni town to fall to AQAP fighters. They are led by Tareq al-Dahab, brother-in-law of Anwar al-Awlaki. AQAP relinquished the town only after negotiating a favorable deal with local authorities, who agreed to free imprisoned al Qaeda fighters. Elsewhere in Yemen AQAP continues to hold territory. The killing of Awlaki hurt AQAP's ability to hit the United States and other Western countries in the short run. But it has not stopped AQAP's growing army from seizing and holding territory. These gains only increase AQAP's lethality—and its ability to strike American targets in the long run.

Across the Gulf of Aden in Somalia, another al Qaeda affiliate, al Shabaab, remains a potent force; it controls a large part of central and south Somalia and has expanded its operations into Uganda, Kenya, and elsewhere in Africa. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) remains a significant problem in North Africa. New terrorist groups that proclaim their affinity for al Qaeda, like Boko Haram in Nigeria, are popping up. There are reports that a new al Qaeda affiliate has set up shop in Egypt, too.

Meanwhile, al Qaeda's allies continue to hold turf in northern Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan. There is no evidence that the al Qaeda and Taliban strongholds in northern Pakistan, where drones buzz overhead, will fall any time soon. Pakistani citizens are routinely ravaged by al Qaeda's allies, including the Pakistani Taliban. Other Pakistani jihadist groups allied with al Qaeda continue to plot international attacks—especially Lashkar-e-Taiba, which shot up Mumbai in 2008. In Iraq, al Qaeda's franchise still launches spectacular attacks, even if it can't hold large swaths of territory as it once could.

Drones are not enough to contain this menace. But President Obama has done away with COIN, the U.S. military's counterinsurgency doctrine centered on building up allied local forces and good governance, for more limited counterterrorism measures such as drones and special forces raids. It apparently does not matter to the Obama administration that such tactics failed to stop al Qaeda's armies from previously controlling parts of Iraq and continuing to control territory elsewhere.

Al Qaeda is hardly invincible. It has been greatly weakened, in some ways, during the past decade. But al Qaeda and its allies can only be strengthened by America's retreat from the lands of jihad. And they are not the only ones watching as President Obama takes his eye off the ball. Terror-sponsoring regimes like those in Iran and Pakistan have learned that there is no substantial price to be paid for spilling American blood. They've learned, too, that America's commitment to fight its enemies is severely constrained by domestic political considerations.

The Obama administration lauds its counterterrorism partnerships with friendly governments. Allies, indeed, are invaluable. But the Arab Spring has introduced uncertainty into some of these relationships. In Egypt, a government dominated by the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood has replaced the regime of the friendly, if despicable, Hosni Mubarak. In Yemen, a duplicitous but sometimes helpful President Ali Abdullah Saleh has given way to chaos and a growing al Qaeda insurgency. In Libya, the gangster-terrorist Muammar Qaddafi, who also occasionally provided counterterrorism assistance, has fallen to a coalition that includes jihadists. We should not be sad to see the Mubaraks, Salehs, and Qaddafis go. But now that they are gone, we should be worried that the American government under President Obama will not seek to influence the course their nations take.

We must end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama argues, to "focus on a broader range of challenges and opportunities, including the security and prosperity of the Asia Pacific." The Defense Department tells us it is necessary to "rebalance" its assets "toward the Asia-Pacific region." So to China and its neighbors President Obama looks—as the fires of jihad rage, barely abated. ♦

*Scene from 'Metropolis' (1926) directed by Fritz Lang*

# Modern as Yesterday

## *How the culture evolved from Old to New* BY MARTHA BAYLES

What was modernism? Many well-educated people would be hard pressed to answer, even (especially?) if they were exposed to it in college. Of all the topics in the humanities, modernism may be the most ill taught, because it is both too close (having flourished between the 1880s and World War I) and too distant (having been eclipsed by postmodernism, whatever that means). At the same time, modernism has in recent years been extensively researched, and as noted by Michael Levenson, professor of literature at the University of Virginia, "we have reached a moment when many self-contained and specialized studies can be brought together."

**Modernism**
by Michael Levenson
Yale, 336 pp., $40

As for who will bring these studies together, the promotional materials accompanying this book say that Levenson is our man. A scholar who has written extensively about literary modernism, he is also conversant with the visual and performing arts, and recently edited the *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. It's a daunting task to weave together the wildly varied strands of modernism, an international phenomenon affecting all the arts over a half-century of world war and revolution; but Levenson seems well positioned to try.

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What's needed, of course, is an overarching idea, or set of ideas, to serve as a framework for the countless "provoking artifacts" and "succession of individual careers" that comprise modernism. The obvious framework, of course, is the clichéd view of modernism as "revolutionary art" that pops up out of nowhere and flings itself against "static bourgeois resistance." To his credit, Levenson rejects this view in favor of a broader conception, namely that the multiple innovations of early modernism were part of an "oppositional culture" that, rather than pose an external challenge to late 19th-century bourgeois society, were an organic part of it. Modernism, he says, was an expression, albeit indirect, of the "thrusting and ambitious" dynamism of that same society.

This is what the Marxists argue, I know. But as it happens, they are right. Objectively speaking, the changes wrought by industrialization, urbanization, railroads, telegraph and telephone, newspapers, and post-Darwinian positivism were far more disruptive to traditional beliefs and customs than anything occurring on the canvas, page, or stage. Indeed, so disruptive were these changes, the wealthy bourgeoisie created an idealized domestic sphere—tranquil, comfortable, refined, and virtuous—to serve as a bulwark against them. The trouble was, that domestic sphere proved stifling to many of its occupants, especially the women who were expected to preside over it, and thus the bourgeoisie became a ready market for the shocks and thrills imagined by artists.

From the perspective of pedagogy, the best method for conveying this idea to students would be to draw a parallel with horror films, violent video games, kinky sex comedies, and all the other shocks and thrills routinely served up by our commercial media. When Levenson describes how "[s]nugness and shock became intimates within a tight circle of exchange," and "the inwardness of home life was interrupted by startling accounts of novelty," he could be describing the entertainment choices of today's suburban families. To draw this parallel is not to violate historical accuracy: There are many lines of descent between artistic modernism and American popular culture, some dating as far back as the 1930s, when Coleman Hawkins incorporated the dissonance of European art music into jazz, and Walt Disney urged his animators to sober up and study modern painting. Some of this inheritance has been enriching, some impoverishing. It all depends on which aspect of modernism we are talking about.

Possibly Levenson draws such parallels in the classroom, but he does not do so here. Of course, given the vast territory he covers, it is probably unfair to expect him to include references to how modernism has affected contemporary culture. But *Modernism* comes packaged as a "wide-ranging and original account of Modernism" offering "not only an excellent survey but also a significant reassessment." So at a minimum, the reader expects a full articulation of the pattern by which modernist "artists depended upon a civil society they often despised" and bourgeois "audiences were drawn to the art that frightened them."

*It's a daunting task to weave together the wildly varied strands of modernism, an international phenomenon affecting all the arts over a half-century of world war and revolution.*

But the reader will be disappointed. After highlighting this pattern, Levenson more or less abandons it.

> My hope is to stimulate more synthetic thinking. But this is not to say that we should aim toward a new coherence for Modernism. . . . Rather than presenting an argument for an encompassing framework or a set of governing techniques, the book has an emphasis on intersections and transitions, moments and phases, continuities and interruptions.

By making this confession, Levenson spares the reviewer the trouble of pointing out that his book lacks an encompassing framework. To my jaundiced eye, the key word in the above passage is *should*—as in "this is not to say that we *should* aim toward a new coherence." For all his fine erudition and sensibility, Levenson is also a professor of critical theory, which suggests that he is loath to embark upon that most dreaded of academic undertakings, the intellectually confident, epoch-spanning "meta-narrative." (The last white male literary scholar to try that was boiled alive some years ago.)

Levenson's refusal to pull his material together is frustrating, because this book contains many valuable insights. And yes, they are valuable in part because they reveal some striking connections with our own "post-modernist" era. (One of the topics Levenson *should* have addressed is the difference between modernism and postmodernism. Indeed, the definitive book about modernism, when it appears, will take this comparison as its starting point.)

But let us consider some of those insights, even if to do so we must pluck parts of them from different sections of the book and reassemble them here. The first such insight has to do with the modernist treatment of the industrial city. Writing about Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*, Levenson describes a deeply subjective, phantasmagorical vision of Paris "as rife with plots and plans, the streets as scenes of chaos, looming faces, and receding backs, but also rife with malevolent intention." Later on, he contrasts this vision with that of Apollinaire, Baudelaire's presumed heir (I'm working on the limerick). The difference, Levenson argues, is between Baudelaire's "vertical" search for meaning in the lower depths of the psyche, liberated but also lost in the faceless crowd; and Apollinaire's

"horizontal" sprint across the surface of the urban landscape, with the self reduced to a "shallow eye" that rejects "persistence, duration, continuity . . . in favor of half-detached perceptions that move without punctuation and at great speed."

In a later discussion of cinema, Levenson distinguishes between "deep Modernism" and "montage Modernism." Predictably, he follows the film theorist André Bazin in giving full credit for montage to the great Russian director Sergei Eisenstein as opposed to the Hollywood pioneer, D.W. Griffith, who had developed "cross-cutting" editing 10 years earlier. Again, it may be too much to ask Levenson to connect montage modernism, which exploits "the resources of speed, discontinuity, and juxtaposition," with contemporary Hollywood movies. But I can't resist thinking how much Apollinaire would appreciate the way 21st-century films hurtle through the heights and depths of 21st-century cities from Toronto to Tokyo, Mogadishu to Mumbai.

Equally striking is Levenson's distinction between "textual" and "gestural" modernism. The former he defines as the making of "a resonant and memorable artifact"—in the language of art history, the production of *objets*. The latter, gestural modernism, he defines as "includ[ing] all those events that live beyond the artifacts," ranging from the "personal style" of the artists to "ephemeral happenings" such as "the spectacles engineered by Marinetti and the futurists and the riotous evenings at the Cabaret Voltaire among the Dadaists." The contemporary significance of gestural modernism should be obvious, as we live in an era where publicity is the medium of choice for many of our most popular artists. Where would Lady Gaga be if all she did was sing?

*'Apollinaire and His Friends' (1908) by Marie Laurencin*

In an earlier chapter, Levenson links the "theatricality" of modernism with the spectacle of public protest in the era of mass media. For example, he observes, "When [British] suffragettes chained themselves to the railings around government buildings, set mailboxes aflame, or paraded through the streets, they were making resourceful use of the power of spectacle." With full appreciation for the irony involved, Levenson then relates the suffragettes' tactics to those of their exact contemporary, the futurist artist Filippo Marinetti, whose manifesto, published on the front page of *Le Figaro* in 1909, urged not only the demolition of museums and the glorification of war but also "contempt for woman" and fierce hostility to "feminism."

It is, of course, impossible to write about modernism and politics without delving into the vexed topic of modernist enthusiasm for Italian fascism and Soviet communism. This Levenson does in the penultimate chapter, which compares modernism before and after World War I, and the conclusion, which examines "the ends of modernism" as found in the right-wing affinities of Ezra Pound and the left-wing activism of Bertolt Brecht.

In the chapter on the war, Levenson resorts to the clichéd view he rejected earlier, writing that "the prewar experiments of Picasso and Matisse, Stein and Joyce, and others were often directed at a stagnant and complacent society that felt, in Wyndham Lewis's phrase, 'as safe as houses.'" But let us forgive him, because his emphasis here is on the traumatic collapse of the safe bourgeois house. As he writes, "the broken field and unsheltered sweep" of trench warfare scarred the artistic imagination with "indelible memories of the open, exposed horizon, . . . pictures of traumatically broken space," and images of "the outspread, uncontrolled, and perilous terrain: the waste-land." Levenson regards these images as "a return of the Real," and by extension, the cause of a shift of artistic attention away from horror and meaninglessness and toward the project of remaking a broken world.

Writing about Dada, the gleefully nihilistic art movement that arose in Zurich at the height of the war, he describes it as a "reaction to a violence that overwhelmed the illusion of safety." In its original form, Dada had no political program. How could it, when its guiding spirit was, in the immortal words of Tristan Tzara, *Ideal, ideal, ideal, / Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, / Boomboom, boomboom, boomboom*? But during the tumultuous interwar years, many modernists concluded that "boom-boom" was not an adequate response to what was happening in Europe.

At this point, Levenson could have joined the current debate about

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whether modernism was complicit in the creation of totalitarian culture. This past year saw the publication of two remarkable books, Igor Golomstock's lengthy *Totalitarian Art* and Tzvetan Todorov's succinct *The Limits of Art*, which joined the debate with a focus on the visual arts. The visual arts are, of course, where the similarities between the official art of fascist Italy, the Soviet Union, and Nazi Germany are most uncannily vivid. Both Golomstock and Todorov enter the debate instigated by Boris Groys, whose *The Total Art of Stalinism* (1992) traced a direct link between the vaulting ambitions of the Russian modernists and those of their Soviet masters. Both dreamed of creating a new humanity purged of selfishness and stupidity, and both woke to a nightmare of terror.

What Levenson could have added was the perspective of literature. His pages are replete with quotations from authors—Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Jarry, Strindberg—who boasted of using their creative power to fashion a New Man. In the same vein, Levenson's conclusion focuses on Pound, who joined forces with the fascists, and Brecht, who cast his lot with the Communists. Prudently, Levenson refrains from putting a black hat on the former and a white hat on the latter, writing instead that "Pound the Fascist and Brecht the Communist were cousins" both "in their technical ambitions" and in their "belief that art could be of great social consequence."

Yet here, too, Levenson backs away from coherence. In one breath he pays mild tribute to "the power that Modernism claimed for itself, the power to lead history." In the next he expresses mild regret that neither Pound nor Brecht chose to affirm the independence of art from "those forces that live beyond the aesthetic and that determine its goals and hopes." Such bland equivocation does a disservice to the many modernists who did affirm their independence, sometimes at the price of silence or death. And it marks a retreat, all too typical of contemporary academia, from the challenge of grappling with modernism's most troubling legacy. ♦

B&A

# Freedom in Exile

*Life before and after Tiananmen Square.*

BY DAVID AIKMAN

Many of us who had spent years reporting on China watched with a feeling of slow-motion tragedy the unfolding of events in the Chinese capital in the spring of 1989, when student-led democracy protests started in Beijing and then across the country. Ultimately, it ended two months later in brutal suppression of the protest by the Chinese Army.

*David Aikman, a 23-year correspondent for* Time, *was an eyewitness to the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.*

**A Heart for Freedom**
*The Remarkable Journey of a Young Dissident, Her Daring Escape, and Her Quest to Free China's Daughters*
by Chai Ling
Tyndale House, 370 pp., $22.99

Some of us predicted that it would end very badly. How come? First, the Chinese Communist party had achieved power and secured it through violence. Second, China's number-two leader at the time, Li Peng, had made it clear he was enraged by the challenge to his premiership posed by the students. Third, China's paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, had not hesitated to do Mao's bidding when he was asked in 1958 to crack down brutally on the political dissent seeded by the "100 Flowers" movement that had begun a year earlier.

The Chinese students themselves, however, and some in the foreign press corps, didn't share these misgivings. In her remarkably frank—and indeed vulnerable—account of the student leadership discussions, Chai Ling, elected the movement's "commander in chief," makes it clear what a thorough job China's Communist propaganda gusher had done in brainwashing China's young people. Many, perhaps most, of them believed the slogan that "the army loves the people," and simply couldn't imagine that the military might turn against the youths who had idolized them from childhood if the political leadership gave them the orders to do so.

Chai Ling's story illustrates this phenomenon powerfully. The daughter of a husband-wife medical team who had served the People's Liberation Army almost since the establishment of the People's Republic, Chai Ling herself admired such dedication and loyalty. She grew up on an army base in coastal Shandong Province and deeply loved her father, who proudly escorted Chai Ling to the famous Peking University campus in 1983. Her parents had been almost dizzy with pride at their first-born's academic success, but her father had also grown irritated at her occasional rebellious streak. He was even more outraged when she later had three abortions, the first of which (of a total of four) he himself angrily insisted on after discovering the "shame" of her unmarried pregnancy. Chai Ling was a popular and attractive female student and, though not promiscuous, had allowed serial romances to evolve into physical affairs.

The 1989 student movement was triggered by the death of former party chief Hu Yaobang, a sometime protégé of Deng Xiaoping who was popular

among college students. He had been supportive of their protests against the party's corruption and resistance to reform, but because of widespread student demonstrations in the winter of 1986-87, Hu had been demoted from party secretary-general. When he died on April 15, 1989, the party leadership insisted that his death be acknowledged as that of merely a senior party leader. Students from Beida (the Chinese nickname for Peking University) and nearby Tsinghua University, however, insisted that he deserved better. They began the protests that led to the Democracy Movement with the demand that the party honor Hu in grander fashion. One of the student leaders was Feng Congde, whom Chai Ling had married a short time earlier.

The couple had discussed the possibility of going to graduate school in the United States, but those plans were put on the shelf as the movement took on a life of its own. The leaders engaged in endless smoky, coffee-filled meetings to discuss policy, and from these Chai Ling was selected chief spokesman because she was passionate about student rights, eloquent, and clearly idealistic. The narrative of events leading up to the massacre is detailed and complicated, reflecting the chaos of the largely unplanned movement. What makes Chai Ling's account so revealing is her candid irritation with the egotism, vulgarity, and verbal coarseness of some of the male students active in the cause. Her book provides fascinating glimpses into the movement's internecine rivalries for leadership. There are also vivid glimpses of the charismatic Uighur student Wu'er Kaixi and a Nanjing University student, Li Lu, who showed decisiveness at key moments but who cynically squelched Chai Ling's idealism.

About a month into the protests, Chai Ling orchestrated a mass student hunger strike on Tiananmen Square, during which several students (including Chai Ling herself) had to be hospitalized for dehydration and exhaustion. As the likelihood of an army assault on the square grew, Chai Ling, perhaps unwisely, agreed to an on-camera conversation with an American freelance reporter that would haunt her for years. In that distraught interview, some of her remarks were interpreted as expressing the view that a bloody massacre might actually be the only thing that could shock China and the world into making room for democracy in China. Here, Chai makes it clear that she never wanted any bloody massacre to take place but was sensitive about accusations of cowardice from other student leaders.

*Chai Ling in Tiananmen Square, June 3, 1989*

GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY IMAGES

In the predawn hours of June 4, as the People's Liberation Army swarmed into Tiananmen Square, she supported an older Chinese writer and dissident, Liu Xiaobo, and three other Chinese, including the Taiwanese pop-singer Hou Dejian, in negotiating with military leaders to permit an unhindered exit for the thousands of students who still remained camped out in the square. Chai Ling and her husband retreated with them to the temporary safety of Beida, only to be advised to leave Beijing immediately because she and her husband, along with several others, topped the party's most-wanted list.

What follows are the little-known details of their escape from Beijing by train and the tense months of hiding from the authorities in private homes in China's far south. Their protectors were Buddhists who shared the student movement's antipathy to the Communist authorities. Time and again, these Buddhists risked their liberty and even their lives sheltering the fugitives. Moved by their courage and sacrifice, both Chai and her husband became for a while ardent Buddhists themselves. The Buddhists completed their good work by finally arranging for Chai and her husband to be smuggled out to Hong Kong in a cargo crate on a small motorized craft.

Once in the safety of Hong Kong, however, then later in Paris and the United States, the stress of a new life in the West moved her in a different direction. She was buffeted by a

series of fresh uncertainties after her husband deserted her, after the fourth abortion, this time in Paris, and when finally she decided to seek political asylum in the United States. Initially speaking hardly a word of English, Chai navigated the financially and socially challenging world of a penniless immigrant. She was eventually able to help support part of her family who legally left China to join her, first earning a master's degree at Princeton and then, amazingly (because she had not planned on a business career), winning a spot at Harvard Business School. Success there led to job offers that were always poisoned, however, by the suspicion of some corporations that the Chinese government might not want to do business with any American company that had hired such a prominent dissident. The consulting company that eventually hired her after Harvard was shamed into not withdrawing its initial job offer by a courageous corporate officer who asked his colleagues, in effect, this question: Is it right to allow a dictatorial foreign government to determine our normal American hiring practices?

Chai Ling's idealism for China, and particularly for Chinese women, took a decisive new turn when she became a Christian shortly after the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown. Since then, she has not abandoned her campaign for justice for the victims of the crackdown, but acquired another passion: drawing attention to China's compulsory one-child policy, which leads, every month, to thousands of gender-selective forced abortions and, in consequence, one of the highest female suicide rates of any country in the world. Her new organization, All Girls Allowed, seeks to campaign against China's policy and alleviate the child-kidnapping and sexual trafficking that China's gender imbalance has created. ♦

B&A

# Ain't Necessarily So

## *Who speaks for the English language?*

**BY JACK LYNCH**

In *Gambit*, Rex Stout's 1962 mystery novel, the quirky and housebound detective Nero Wolfe sits before a fireplace on a too-small chair, "tearing sheets out of a book and burning them. The book is the new edition, the third edition, of Webster's New International Dictionary, Unabridged." Why? "He considers it subversive because it threatens the integrity of the English language." Able to cite "a thousand examples of its crimes," including using *infer* and *imply* interchangeably, the detective calls it "a deliberate attempt to murder" the language.

**The Language Wars**
*A History of Proper English*
by Henry Hitchings
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
416 pp., $28

Nero Wolfe's lexicographical auto-da-fé reveals he's an eccentric, but Stout was far from alone in fantasizing about committing *Webster's Third* to the flames. The dictionary was positively scandalous when it appeared in September 1961: Critics said it had abandoned all standards and forfeited its role as a guardian of the English language. The battle over high standards versus relativist chaos was played out against the background of the Cold War: For some, the permissive dictionary was a Bolshevik document, its publication tantamount to passing the nuclear launch codes to Nikita Khrushchev.

The hostilities over *Webster's Third* were the most high-profile battle of the 20th century between the prescriptivists, those who would prescribe what is correct and improve the language, and the descriptivists, who believe all such attempts are futile and think the only responsible course is to describe the way the language is used by real people. *Webster's Third* was the product of a team of descriptivists, for whom any new word, meaning, usage, or pronunciation, once it has been adopted by the majority of English-speakers, was correct *de facto*. For prescriptivists like Dwight Macdonald, on the other hand, "If nine-tenths of the citizens of the United States, including a recent President, were to use *inviduous*, the one-tenth who clung to *invidious* would still be right, and they would be doing a favor to the majority if they continued to maintain the point."

This clash of sensibilities is the subject of Henry Hitchings's book. People have been working to "fix" a broken English language at least since the 17th century, and *The Language Wars* tells their story. Many of the quarrels are surprisingly ill-tempered: Passions run high when the conversation turns to the language. Reviewing *Webster's Third* in the *New Yorker*, Macdonald used powerful metaphors when he reflected on the removal of obsolete words from the dictionary: "This incredible massacre—almost half the words in the English language seem to have disappeared between 1934 and 1961—is in fact incredible." John Humphrys, Britain's most prominent champion of correctness, recently described text-messaging teenagers as "vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbors

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eight hundred years ago," including "savaging our sentences" and "raping our vocabulary." Others may not go as far as invoking "massacre" or "rape," but they still think in terms of wasting disease. "The prognosis for the ailing language is not good," declared Jean Stafford in 1970. "I predict that it will not die in my lifetime, but I fear that it will be assailed by countless cerebral accidents and massive strokes and gross insults to the brain and finally no one will be able to sit up in bed and take nourishment by mouth."

Hitchings offers an entertaining and informative collection of episodes like this, with pundits and mavens sometimes protesting, and sometimes hyperventilating, over split infinitives, sentence-ending prepositions, misplaced apostrophes, and teenage textspeak ("u k m8" for "Are you okay, mate?"). He tells the stories of masters of style, professors of linguistics, splenetic grouches, ill-informed cranks, even "punctuation vigilantes" ("no joke," he adds) who roam the modern urban landscape "blotting out rogue apostrophes and rejigging punctuation" on signs. His cast of characters includes plenty of eccentrics, a few of them certifiably insane, but there are also serious and sober experts and distinguished writers among them: Samuel Johnson, Noah Webster, Henry Watson Fowler, William Strunk and E. B. White, and dozens of other more or less familiar names.

Considering how much ire these hangups, fixations, and antagonisms have provoked over the centuries, Hitchings remains admirably even-handed, neither a hidebound reactionary nor a wild-eyed revolutionary. He has many descriptivist tendencies: He recognizes that change is inevitable, and reminds us that many of the things we assume are traditional have in fact never been the practice of serious writers. And he repeatedly chastises those who argue in bad faith. Purists often base their arguments on the need for clear communication, but those arguments can be unconvincing. No real person is in danger of misunderstanding "You ain't seen nothin' yet." Let the taboo *ain't* and the double negative do their worst.


STAGE BROADWAY SCREEN

VARIETY 25¢

WALL ST. LAYS AN EGG

Going Dumb Is Deadly to Hostess In Her Serious Dance Hall Profession

DROP IN STOCKS BOPES SHOWMEN

Kidding Kissers in Talkers Burns Up Fans of Screen's Best Lovers

FILTHY SHOW OF SHUBERTS GOOD FOR SCREEN

BROOKS COSTUMES

But Hitchings isn't entirely on the descriptive side. He has his own pet peeves and eccentricities that he refuses to disavow; in fact, he admits to wincing when he sees his name altered by incompetent users of apostrophes in phrases like *Hitching's book*. Even as he decries some of the sillier so-called rules, his own prose would receive a seal of approval from even the most demanding Mrs. Grundy: The prohibition on split infinitives is a poorly grounded prejudice, but Hitchings doesn't split his own infinitives. Most of all, he recognizes the tendency we all have to think we alone have found the sweet spot between ignorance and pedantry. *My* favorite rules are essential to proper communication while *your* favorite rules are old-fashioned superstitions. Those who follow fewer rules than I do are illiterate dunces, while those who follow more rules than I do are stuffy purists.

Hitchings's background prepared him well for this subject. His first book was an account of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*: not, as legend would have it, the first English dictionary—not by a long shot—but the first really great English dictionary. After that came *The Secret Life of Words: How English Became English*, a lively overview of loanwords and the process by which words enter the language.

Hitchings, a Londoner, draws his examples almost invariably from British English, with the result that some American readers may feel lost from time to time. But most of the book makes sense anywhere in the English-speaking world. The first few chapters offer some meditations on the philosophy of language before giving a general history of English, a language once spoken by just a few tens of thousands of Germanic tribesmen on an island off the northwest coast of Europe, now spoken in some form by perhaps a billion people.

The finer points of the language may seem dry—comma placement and the fate of objective-case relative pronouns may be less than thrilling to most readers—but Hitchings keeps the discussion animated, offering interesting digressions on politically charged topics like political correctness, feminism, globalization, and the English-only movement. Hitchings

BETTMANN / CORBIS

knows that language can never be separated from morality and politics. This leads him to take on subjects like the relationship between language and national identity, as with Theodore Roosevelt's impatience with what were being called "Hyphenated Americans"—Italian-Americans, Chinese-Americans—more than a century ago. "There can be no fifty-fifty Americanism," Roosevelt declared in 1906; "I think the most un-American thing in the world is a hyphen," echoed Woodrow Wilson a decade later.

And politics is still tied up with ideas about the language. The political right today tends to cluster on the prescriptive end of the spectrum—think of the late William Safire—but it's not at all obvious that conservatives should be prescriptivists. On the one hand, resisting linguistic "decay" is consistent with a fondness for tradition and maintaining standards against the ravages of relativism. On the other hand, history shows us that the language won't stand still without serious intervention, and that sort of intervention is often toxic to the right. A changing language, after all, is an almost perfect model of the free market. It's telling that, while many of the major world languages have official academies to rule on what's right and wrong—the Académie française is the most famous—no English-speaking nation has an official governing body, probably because of the long Anglophone tradition of liberty and a distrust of institutions and social engineering.

Anyone who cares about the language—and that almost certainly includes everyone who reads this review—would do well to read *The Language Wars*. It's important to approach it with an open mind; those who expect Hitchings to confirm their prejudices will inevitably come away disappointed. And every reader will be frustrated from time to time. But they all stand to learn from this entertaining, wide-ranging, and unusually balanced account of the blood that has been spilled in the name of proper English. ♦

B&A

# Innocence Abroad

*Edith Wharton, at 150, is introduced to Cultural Studies.* **BY VICTORIA ORDIN**

*New York*

Sitting somewhat soaked in the lush auditorium of the Morgan Library a few weeks before Christmas—no cabs in the rain, of course, and no umbrella—I listen with pleasure and interest, but not without reservations, to CUNY professor Hildegard Hoeller's lecture on "Edith Wharton: Old and New New York."

Her ambitious talk explores four texts from Wharton's career, early to late, to portray her as both a great woman writer and great writer of New York. A major Wharton scholar who specializes in 19th- and 20th-century American literature, Hoeller boasts an impressive and provocative list of publications. Still, it's instantly apparent she is also a creature of Cultural Studies.

"Mrs. Wharton," wrote Louis Auchincloss in his introduction to her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, "was always determined to be surrounded with a beautiful world, even if she had to build it herself." Yet what we might consider a quintessentially Romantic/Idealist impulse to "make," rather than "find," a world is at odds with aspects of Wharton's brief *ars poetica* in *A Backward Glance*. For Wharton, there is a moment when characters, "these people . . . actually begin to speak within [her] with their own voices." She describes the emergence of dialogue in surprisingly passive terms, given what Auchincloss calls her perpetually "tid[y] . . . fussy . . . and controlling" nature:

> I become merely a recording instrument, and my hand never hesitates because my mind has not to choose, but only to set down what these stupid or intelligent, lethargic or passionate, people say to each other in a language, and with arguments, that appear to be all their own.

Hoeller's talk is highly informative, and, for a lecture of 50 minutes pitched not to literary critics or graduate students, is excellent, too. Still, my dominant impression leaving the Morgan Library is that Cultural Studies really has become entrenched as the literary-critical way of the world. I can't object to the substance of what Hoeller is saying, but you have to approach Edith Wharton's ambivalent, vexed, and ever-shifting relation to Manhattan in the context of her profound investment in all forms of beauty, from the natural to the material to the aesthetic. I am ill at ease when what lies *beyond* the text begins to overtake what lies *within* it.

Hoeller describes, for instance, what she regards as a persistent and intense racial anxiety running through Wharton's work, an anxiety pervasive in New York throughout Wharton's life. That Wharton takes up race to greater and lesser degrees in her writing is beyond dispute; but how much critical energy this should absorb is less clear. And Hoeller's unsurprising rejection of Wharton as a writer of the leisure class, exclusively or predominantly, is not unpersuasive: Though conventional wisdom has it that Wharton was the female Henry James, the two writers were, in fact, very different, and their relationship, while close, was complicated. But Hoeller doesn't press on the James connection, nor is she interested in situating Wharton's aesthetics or philosophical assumptions in a larger contemporary context.

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Hoeller is right to consider the *New York Times*'s 1937 obituary as narrow and simplistic: Edith Wharton's vision of New York was not confined to Fifth Avenue, nor was the theme of "innocence" as unambiguous and central as the *Times* took it to be. In her complex and near-obsessive rewriting of New York throughout her life (much of it as an expatriate), Wharton's "mode" was seldom nostalgic. Hoeller argues, however, that Wharton was investigating through fiction what it meant to record and relate to the past in order to forge what Gerald Kennedy calls "a relation between an authorial self and a world of located experience." This was all the more urgent, Hoeller argues, because of the vast and constant changes in New York itself.

To illustrate her ambitious and varied claims, Hoeller focuses on four texts: "Mrs. Manstey's View" (1891), *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Age of Innocence* (1920), and "The Old Maid," the most famous novella in *Old New York* (1924). "Mrs. Manstey's View," a very short story which first appeared in *Scribner's*, is about a poor, solitary old woman living in a dingy tenement surrounded by disorder and debris whose only joy and experience of beauty is the view past all this from her apartment window. The landlady proposes an addition which would block her view, the only thing which makes life "worth living." This is a constant, nagging question throughout Wharton's fiction, and Hoeller conceives that it has a particular resonance in ever-changing New York.

But of course, the question was not unique to Wharton in her time: It was also posed by William James in his *Will to Believe*, and while Hoeller cannot be certain if Wharton had read Henry James's older brother, it is reasonable to suppose that she might have been influenced by William's preoccupation with the same question. In *The House of Mirth* the question acquires life-and-death significance, since Lily Bart ultimately cannot answer in the affirmative.

When the landlady rejects her plea not to go forward, Mrs. Manstey sets the structure on fire. The damage is minimal, but when she learns that Mrs. Manstey is dying, the landlady agrees to halt construction until her death. Joking that Mrs. Manstey is an early housing activist, Hoeller cites a lament familiar to New Yorkers: "It's a disease, like drink. . . . But there's no help for it; if people have got a mind to build extensions there's no law to prevent 'em that I'm aware of."

*The House of Mirth* provides the best evidence that Wharton is not merely writing about Fifth Avenue. Hoeller focuses on the plot function of the charwoman who catches Lily Bart in Lawrence Selden's apartment building and later blackmails her.

*Lily Bart*

For her, it is crucial that the opening scene takes place in Grand Central Station, a structure whose centrality and meaning in the lives of New Yorkers cannot be overstated: Between 1903 and 1913 it underwent massive renovation, raising questions about New York's true identity. By locating Lawrence Selden's first view of Lily Bart in such a public place, rather than a private home, Wharton "opens up" her novel from the beginning. A 1905 illustration, in which the charwoman figures prominently, also underscores Hoeller's view that Wharton's vision is more expansive than generally assumed. Spatially, it captures Lily's tragic truth that there is no room for her to live, much less to flourish, in New York.

It's a leap from 1905 to 1920 and *The Age of Innocence*, not least because of the Great War, which Wharton saw firsthand, writing about the destruction in France and the notion that anyone close to the trenches could never be the same again, never recapture any former state of "innocence." But the Cultural Studies approach becomes clearest in Hoeller's daring and sustained reading of the most famous novella in *Old New York*. As I later reread the novella I can only scratch my head: Hoeller's thesis is that "The Old Maid" is a *roman à clef* which reflects not only Wharton's anxieties about her own parentage but the possibility that Wharton was, herself, the little girl in the story who is not only part African American but also ignorant about her true parentage.

Curiously, Hoeller devotes not a moment to Wharton's disparaging remarks (quoted earlier) on the subject of the *roman à clef* in *A Backward Glance*. Moreover, such autobiographical facts (even if true) aren't terribly useful on an interpretive level. A richer avenue of inquiry about the psychologically intricate study of Delia Ralston and her spinster cousin Charlotte would be Wharton's use of words such as "natural," "unnatural," "bond," "alliance," and "avowal" and what these tell us about her sense of how the cultural and social and economic impinge on the natural. Outside a small corner of the literary-critical landscape, it may not be fashionable to cite Stanley Cavell, but he stressed the value of "explaining the obvious" to his students.

I'm not suggesting that the critic must choose between strictly formal and aesthetic analysis, and attention to cultural, historical, and political forces. Wharton *was* an acute observer of society, culture, and history. But an artist deserves to be explored not merely for what she says but the way she says it, and if American writers must be subject to the Cultural Studies approach, Edith Wharton is among the least likely candidates. ♦

B&A

# Valentin's Daze

*The bearable lightness of a charming stunt.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**The Artist**
Directed by Michel Hazanavicius

*Singin' in the Rain*, the best movie musical and perhaps the most sheerly exuberant film ever made, tells the story of a silent film star played by Gene Kelly whose career is upended by the arrival of talking pictures. The movie has one and only one serious scene, when Kelly realizes to his shame that he is nothing more than a melodramatic ham on screen. The scene lasts about two minutes before Kelly decides to save his career by becoming a song-and-dance man instead, whereupon he, Donald O'Connor, and Debbie Reynolds burst into the glorious number "Good Morning."

*The Artist*, widely considered the frontrunner for this year's Best Picture Oscar, is a movie for everyone who ever wanted that single serious two-minute scene in *Singin' in the Rain* to last for an hour and forty minutes. It's almost impossible to dislike *The Artist*, a sweet backstage tale so gorgeously made and conceived that complaining about it might seem a bit churlish.

It wants nothing more than to be lovable, and to remind you of the power of the movies to tell stories almost entirely through images rather than words. It was the conceit of writer-director Michel Hazanavicius to tell his story about a silent-film star in the manner and style of a silent movie, and the conceit works marvelously—especially because of the inspired casting of a French actor named Jean Dujardin, who truly gives a performance for the ages as the dashing, proud, likable, and wounded George Valentin.

Hazanavicius, whose only previous films were two extremely silly spy parodies that made a lot of money in France, achieves the kind of confident control over every element of his production that marks the arrival of a master director. Every element of *The Artist* is meticulously rendered, from the sets to the costumes to the vintage movie posters announcing Valentin's latest work. Photographed in a creamy and lush black-and-white with a dazzling wall-to-wall musical score by Ludovic Bource that manages to evoke almost every kind of movie music you've ever heard, *The Artist* instantly conjures up the kind of absurd happiness that can grip you when you land on an old Hollywood classic on TCM.

But there's no getting around this fact: *The Artist* tells exactly the same story as *Singin' in the Rain*, except that the interval between its star's shame and his exhilarating song-and-dance seems to go on forever.

As the movie begins, Valentin is on top of the world at the premiere of his latest epic adventure at a grand Hollywood palace in the year 1927—just as *Singin' in the Rain* begins with the premiere of Gene Kelly's latest picture. On that night Valentin bumps into a journeyman actress (the unimaginably gorgeous Bérénice Bejo, also known as Mrs. Michel Hazanavicius, and lucky for him) and has a flirtation with her, just as Kelly bumps into Debbie Reynolds and has a flirtation with her.

Her name is Peppy Miller. She gets a bit part in his new picture, and in the film's most inventive sequence, Valentin and Peppy have to dance together for ten seconds—a scene they keep muffing because they are, inexorably, delightfully, and winningly falling in love. But he is married, and years older, and nothing happens.

*Jean Dujardin, Bérénice Bejo*

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

The arrival of talking pictures turns her from a potential love interest and protégée into a rival when his studio begins grooming her as part of its commitment to new young talent and as he persists in believing the audience that adored his pantomime won't desert him now that pantomiming is no longer necessary.

It is at this point that *The Artist* turns from a portrait of a professional melodramatist into a melodrama of its own, and begins to grow tiresome. Hazanavicius turns from *Singin' in the Rain* as his inspiration to the heartbreakingly great German silent picture *The Last Laugh*, made by F.W. Murnau in 1924, about a proud hotel doorman who is cashiered when he grows too old and is so reduced in status that he goes mad. But *The Artist* is too feather-light to pull off the shift in tone, as evidenced by the fact that it relies on a scene-stealing dog (a Jack Russell terrier named Uggie) to tug at your heartstrings and provide the film with a dramatic climax.

All in all, then, *The Artist* is a pretty amazing stunt. But a stunt is really all it is. ◆

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***"Mitt Romney's campaign released hundreds of pages of tax documents on Tuesday morning, providing an inside glimpse into his sprawling investments … in an effort to dampen the attacks on his wealth that have become a central focus of the Republican presidential nominating battle."***

**—New York Times, *January 24, 2012***

**PARODY**

So we w… right. So doesn't that ma…

*JANUARY 31, 2012* *ONE DOLLAR CHEAP*

# NEW ROMNEY DOCUMENTS REVEAL 'MAN OF THE PEOPLE'

## *Release Includes Receipts from Whole Foods, Ruby Tuesday*

By PETER BAKER AND JEFF ZELENY

MIAMI — In an effort to show he is not out of touch with the average voter, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney consented to the release of additional documents along with his most recent tax returns. These documents include receipts from the grocery store, car wash, Saks Fifth Avenue, a local cineplex, and a Ruby Tuesday.

"I'm hoping we can finally put to rest this nonsense about my being out of touch with Americans," said Romney, who held in his hand two tickets from the movie "Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked." The cost of his recent movie night with Mrs. Romney came to $45—the couple had ordered popcorn and two drinks. From the Tampa Commons Ruby Tuesday, a receipt indicates an appetizer of shrimp fondue and two Boston Blue Burgers. The former governor tipped 15 percent, saying, "I tip as much as I get taxed. Not every one can say that!"

Meanwhile, a grocery receipt from a Cambridge Whole Foods Market listed two pounds of prime dry-aged ribeyes for $60. Romney was quick to explain he had waited until the steaks were on sale. As for the women's clothing bill from Saks Fifth Avenue, an aide to the Romney campaign later clarified that it was actually for the outlet Saks Fifth Avenue Off 5th. The aide added, "It's where the housekeeper gets her uniform."

Not to be outdone, former House speaker Newt Gingrich made public his hotel bills from last month. "As you can see, I tend not to order room service," Mr. Gingrich pointed out proudly. But reporters did question one of the entries simply entitled "MOVIE" and which cost

*Continued on Page A3*

Worldwide Photo

Gov. Romney takes his car for a wash in Belmont, Mass., but skips the Simonizing.


## *Debates To Allow 'Tepid Applause'*

### *Rules Also Permit Guffaws, Groans, Tittering*

the weekly Standard

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