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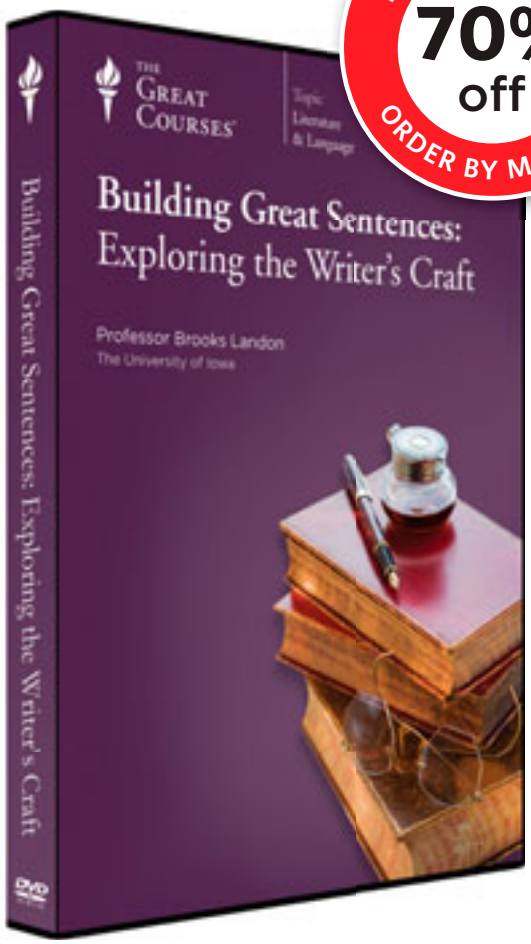

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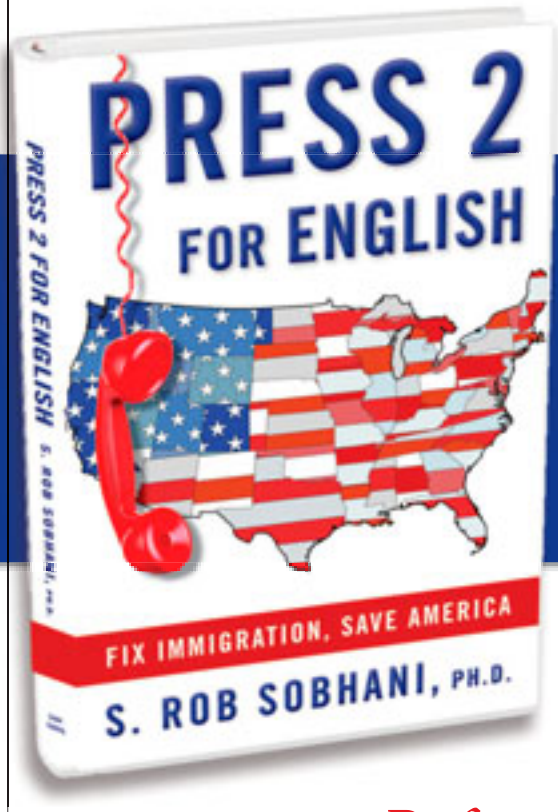

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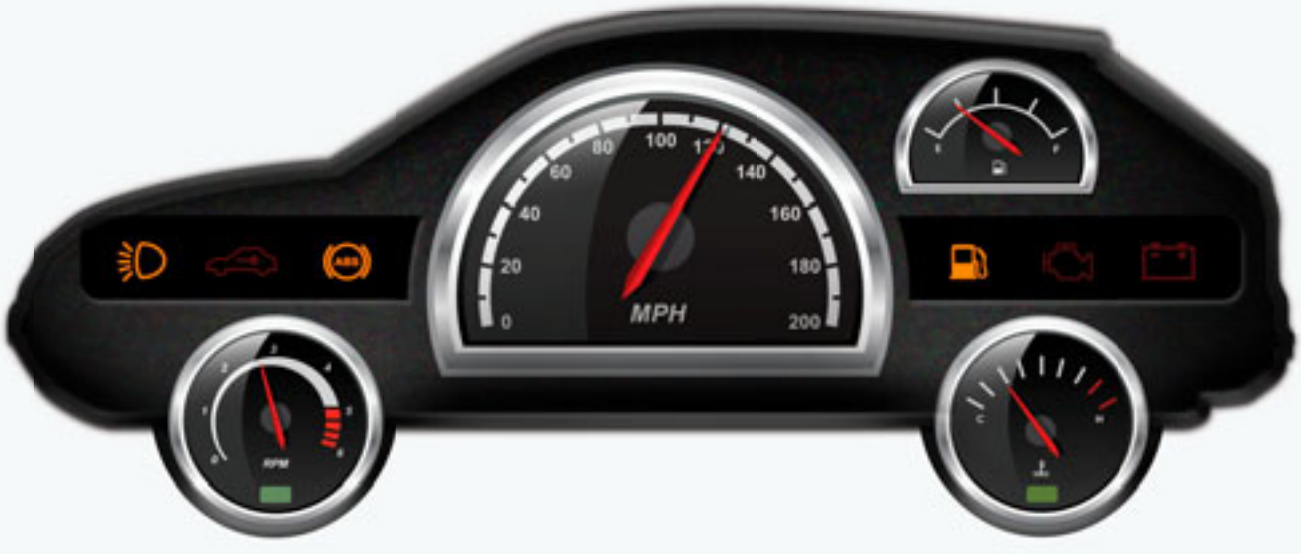

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COVER BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

Andrew Breitbart, 1969-2012

I met Andrew Breitbart back in the late '90s. I had just graduated from college and started working at The Weekly Standard, and my first grown-up trip was to fly out to Los Angeles for a long weekend. I had a touristy list of things to see and do—get a drink at the Brown Derby, play basketball at the court next to Muscle Beach in Venice. High on this list was meeting Arianna Huffington, still a conservative in those days.

We had, technically, met a month or so before, at which time she politely said that if I were ever in Los Angeles I should drop her a line. So the day I touched down, I rang her and, to my slack-jawed amazement, she invited me over to her house.

My afternoon at the Huffington manse in Brentwood was, at least for my 22-year-old self, full of wonderment. She poured me a glass of wine in her living room. She introduced me to her very sweet, very Greek mother. And then she took me upstairs to her library toward the back of the house. Tucked away in a little room off the library's second floor—it struck me at the time as being like a secret passage in the Bat Cave—was her guy Friday, Andrew Breitbart.

Arianna introduced us, and I liked him immediately. He was gregarious and smart. We were interested in a lot of the same things—politics, movies, and technology. We started gabbing about BBSes and Usenet groups and the Clinton scandals. The next day we met for lunch and sat together for close to three hours. I wanted to know all about his glamorous life in L.A.; he wanted to know about life in Washington. I'll never forget how animated he got when he told me how lucky I was to live in a town where not only could you talk politics with just about anyone, but you could even talk conservative politics with most people. "I'm starved for that out here," he said, "because everyone is liberal. There is, literally, no one I can talk with about this stuff."

Breitbart had a peripatetic mind—lots of ideas, most of them big, some of them very, very good. (I remember one conversation with him, about 10 years ago, where he spun out, at length, a concept for a microblogging

Andrew Breitbart

service that I told him was crazy. In nearly every particular, he conceived of Twitter four years before Twitter was invented.)

Even as Arianna was transitioning away from conservatism, Breitbart began to pilot his own ship. He became Matt Drudge's wingman at the Drudge Report and wrote a terrific book (with Mark Ebner) on celebrity corruption, *Hollywood, Interrupted*. He helped Arianna launch the *Huffington Post*. And finally, he started his own business, Breitbart.com and the "Big" conservative sites—Big Government, Big Hollywood, etc.—which made him (1) really famous, (2) a giant star in the conservative movement, (3) high on the left's Public Enemies list. I honestly couldn't guess which of these pleased him most.

Breitbart's success gave me genuine pleasure. Because he deserved it. Because he earned it. Because it's rare when one of the good guys wins.

The last time I saw him was at the 2011 CPAC. I was meeting a friend for coffee upstairs at the Marriott Wardman Park and Andrew was in a corner of the restaurant, in animated discussion with probably a dozen people. I didn't stop over to say hello—there's a lesson. But I smiled as I watched him holding court, and remembered what he had said at our first lunch together.

And I'm smiling today at my luck to have met him that first time, as he stuck his head out of the secret passage in the Bat Cave.

Jonathan V. Last

***

I woke up last Thursday morning to about 10 emails from journalists asking if our mutual friend, Andrew Breitbart, was really dead. "Really" was the operative word. Some meant it in the traditional sense: Is it possible for the human inferno that Breitbart resembled to have actually been extinguished at age 43, leaving behind his elegant wife Susie and his four beloved children? Several, however, meant it as in: Is Andrew *really* dead? Many of us didn't know if we could trust the announcement, thinking this could be another Breitbart caper, as he always had two or three in his back pocket.

By way of greeting, I used to ask Breitbart what kind of evil he was up to. "Most kinds," he'd say, gamely.

So one could easily have envisioned this being the latest Breitbart media stunt: Fake your own demise, go missing for 24 hours, thus encouraging all your ideological adversaries to bleat and fume and make asses of themselves just to prove what kind of sonsofbitches you were up against. Let the record show that tasteful blogger Matt Yglesias came through like clockwork, nearly getting ahead of the Los Angeles coroner's announcement by crowing: "Conventions around dead people are ridiculous. The world outlook is slightly improved with Andrew Breitbart dead." (Well done, Matt! Perhaps you could pass your thoughtful sentiments on to his fatherless children, since they likely don't follow you on Twitter. Prick.)

But sadly, it was not Andrew's last, greatest caper. Breitbart himself, of course, would've not only expected such aggression, but laughed at it, and even egged it on. One of his favorite pastimes was retweeting his own hate mail, which was voluminous. As a partisan warrior and a guerrilla theater aficionado—half right wing Yippie, half Andy Kaufman—he made it his vocation to drive people crazy. Whatever detractors say, or more likely, whatever they spray, Breitbart clearly excelled at his job.

His intensity could be alternately amusing and taxing. When he'd call you in the white-hot fever of one of the headline-garnering skirmishes that he'd inserted himself into—ACORN, Shirley Sherrod, Anthony Weiner's schwantz pictorials—you knew that you could set the phone down, run some errands, and do some light yard work, then return without his ever realizing that you'd been gone. One of the many benefits of being friends with Andrew was that when he was on fire, which was often, there was no need to carry your share of the conversational load.

But at heart, he was in it for more than scoring points for "The Movement," as he unironically called it. As anyone who has seen his recent CPAC speech knows, Breitbart had the brains, the talent, and the animal charisma to get people to set cars on fire for him, or to run off with him to the desert, where he might start his own anti-Obama doomsday cult. But while he believed in what he espoused, perhaps a little too much, he was also in it for other reasons—for action and for amusement. He didn't just hit scandal head-on. He enjoyed coming at it slyly. He gloried in the art of presentation. A few years back, when Andrew, his wife, Fox News host Greg Gutfeld, and I were having drinks at a Washington, D.C., hotel, Breitbart showed me his Twitter mug shot.

Since he knew that I despise Twitter on principle, I thought he was deliberately sticking me in the eye. But he wasn't. "Seriously," he said. "Take a look. Do you notice anything different about me?" In the photo, he had newly grown facial hair. He was looking off into the middle distance in a way that did not quite resemble himself.

"I don't know," I said. "Did you lose weight? Get a haircut?"

"NO!!!!" he exclaimed, with some disappointment. "It's exactly like Eric Boehlert's Twitter picture! I'm mirroring him!" he said of his bête noire from the liberal media watchdog group Media Matters, which regularly tormented Breitbart, and which in turn, he tormented.

There's not a chance I could pick Eric Boehlert out of a police lineup. But there's no way Breitbart would've known that. He was a man who both loved and hated with his whole heart, often getting wrapped around the axle of his own narrative. When I looked at his long-suffering wife, asking her what she made of this, she affectionately shrugged her shoulders. The universal loving-wife symbol for "What can you do?"

The last time I saw Andrew was just a few weeks ago in what turned out to be one of his last capers: dinner at a swank Chicago penthouse with former Weather Underground terrorists/Obama confidants Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn. Andrew and I often disconnected on politics. Even though we were both conservatives, his mode was a little ferocious for my taste. We knew this, however. And so, it was never an issue. What was important was that he had the quality that all the people I like most have: He made me laugh. Whatever his faults, he was wicked and loyal and funny.

Our friend, *Daily Caller* editor Tucker Carlson, had won the Ayers dinner at a fundraising auction for the Illinois Humanities Council, and had brought us along. Tucker and I were a little worried that we had a human grenade in Breitbart, though if we were being honest with ourselves, that's precisely why we brought him. With Andrew, every day was an anything-can-happen day.

Breitbart, though, was on his best behavior. "I'm here to learn," Andrew said facetiously. It was part of the pleasure of keeping company with him. He wasn't just a friend, he was a co-conspirator. Once we arrived at the apartment, much to Andrew's and Ayers's chagrin, they got along famously. Just two guys having dinner, finding commonality, even if Andrew regarded it his hidebound duty to passive-aggressively heckle Ayers as he served us plates of hoisin ribs and farmhouse cheeses. ("This is the bomb, Bill," Breitbart said to the former explosives-rigger.)

When Ayers asked me what I was reading right now, I told him *Moby-Dick*, which actually lived up to its billing. Ayers agreed, though added, as any good academic would, "You've picked up the gay subtext?" Breitbart nearly choked on his tofu and quinoa. "You mean in *Moby-Dick*?" Andrew asked. "Or at this dinner?"

Though the dinner took place on Super Bowl Sunday, Ayers and Co. abruptly dismissed us before halftime, leaving our plan of attack only half realized, as we were attempting to ease into the evening like gentlemen and polite dinner guests. When we adjourned to the Drake Hotel bar to catch the end of the game and commiserate about how we got rolled, or "community organized" as Breitbart put it, I still had a list of Ayers questions that needed answering. So as I ticked through my list, I asked Breitbart to help fill in the blanks, in character, as Ayers. He eagerly obliged.

Me: "Who taught you how to make bombs? And could you still rig one up if pressed?"

Breitbart, as Ayers: "That's interesting. I'd like for you to try this Chilean sea bass that's been encrusted with a special phyllo dough."

The next morning, we rode together to the airport. As usual, I didn't have to do much talking. Breitbart was full of stories and ideas and asides. He sang along lustfully when our cabdriver blasted Teena Marie's '80s hit "Lovergirl." He told me of his super-secret guerrilla PR campaign for an upcoming documentary on him, appropriately titled *Hating Breitbart*. He would start an anonymous website asking people to up-

load their hating Breitbart videos, in which they'd be encouraged to cap on him mercilessly. He would secretly commission—for high five figures—Obama propagandist Shepard Fairey to put up anti-Breitbart posters all over L.A. Then he'd call a press conference, announcing who the sponsor of all the anti-Breitbart animus was—Andrew Breitbart himself. It would've been a fine caper.

As we took our seats on the plane out of Chicago, Andrew was a row behind me. This I counted a blessing, thinking I could get some much-needed work-related reading done. But no such luck. Andrew asked his row-mate, "Would you switch seats with him, so I can talk to him?" Andrew often seemed like he just wanted someone to talk to.

And so we did, for hours. We talked about his kids, whom he was crazy about. And we talked about one of his favorite films, *Grandma's Boy*, about a slacker video-game tester forced to move in with his grandmother. We talked about his sterling academic credentials (he pulled a solid 2.0 at Tulane, the New Orleans party school), and at his good fortune in finding his way in the world, even if finances were sometimes tight.

We talked about getting older, as two middle-aged guys who get into the Bloody Mary cart at 11 in the morning sometimes will. I told Andrew that his good friend, Five for Fighting's John Ondrasik, had a hit song called "100 Years"—about aging—that never ceases to freak me out. The protagonist sings about the different ages of his life—15, 33, 45, and so on—that tick by in a blink. It doesn't help, I told Andrew, that I was 33 when the song seemingly came out yesterday, but that I am closer to 45 now, thus illustrating Ondrasik's point.

In a very rare spell of silence, Breitbart stewed for several minutes. Then, he wistfully replied, "Don't worry, man. It's something that bothers me, too. But I have it all figured out. We all need to go to work together every day from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M., whether we need to or not. In a classroom. We'll even sit at those peninsula-shaped desks, with our pencil sharpeners and Elmer's glue. And we'll do it for nine months out of every year."

"Why on earth?" I asked, puzzled.

"Because," he said. "When we were in school—that was the last time we watched the clock, and wanted it to hurry up. The last time it took too long to get to the next thing."

As we parted company at baggage claim, Andrew was still talking (as always) about how we needed to meet for drinks, about his next caper, about a proposed *Grandma's Boy* viewing party. Neither of us knew that the time we were just speaking of was in shorter supply for him than for the rest of us. Makes me wish we were sitting at our peninsula-desks, stalling the clock.

Several years ago, when Breitbart was in the middle of one skirmish or another—I don't even remember which one—I told him that I didn't know whether I should encourage him, but that he made me laugh, as always. I asked him if when someone finally shot him, "Can I read a poem at your memorial service?"

"I think I should stop," he admitted of his latest caper. "But it's so fun and the hate mail is something to behold. . . . And of course you can read my favorite poem, William Carlos Williams's 'The Red Wheelbarrow,' at my wake." Well, my friend, you mercifully didn't get shot. But here you go anyway:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

I've never had any idea what the hell that poem means. And I suspect that neither Breitbart nor William Carlos Williams had a clue either. But it doesn't matter. As Andrew held, sometimes absurdity is worth it for its own sake. And as he once wrote to me, "I hope people see that I'm dead serious about what I'm dead serious about, and besides that, it's all about a good laugh."

Matt Labash

***

I suspect many of Andrew Breitbart's friends thinking about how they'll remember Andrew will picture him charging through the lobby of a hotel followed by opponents hoping to trip him up, supporters cheering on the confrontation, or journalists taking it all in. Some will recall seeing him give a speech to hundreds of conservative activists as he did in Michigan the last Saturday in February. Many will remember having drinks or dinner or coffee with Andrew and a large group of people crowded around a tiny bar table or spilling out awkwardly into the aisles of a restaurant.

This is who he was and what he did. His influence on journalism is indisputable. He was the silent partner in the Drudge Report for a decade. He helped start the *Huffington Post*. He created Big Government and the associated "Big" websites. He advised the founders of the *Daily Caller*. He was a pioneer of the kind of "combat journalism" practiced by the new *Washington Free Beacon*.

Andrew didn't always get it right. None of us does. We had differences about a number of things, including the wisdom and utility of engaging political opponents willing to just make stuff up. Andrew thrived on confrontations and sought them out. He believed that someone had to fight the distortions and misrepresentations of the left, and that it was important to do it without the conventional politeness of those who use words like "distortions" and "misrepresentations" instead of "lies." He went after his opponents aggressively and made enemies. But he made just as many friends, including quite a few who disagreed with him vehemently.

He brought together people who would have never met were it not for his insistence that they would get along or learn from each other. He was almost always right. And following the

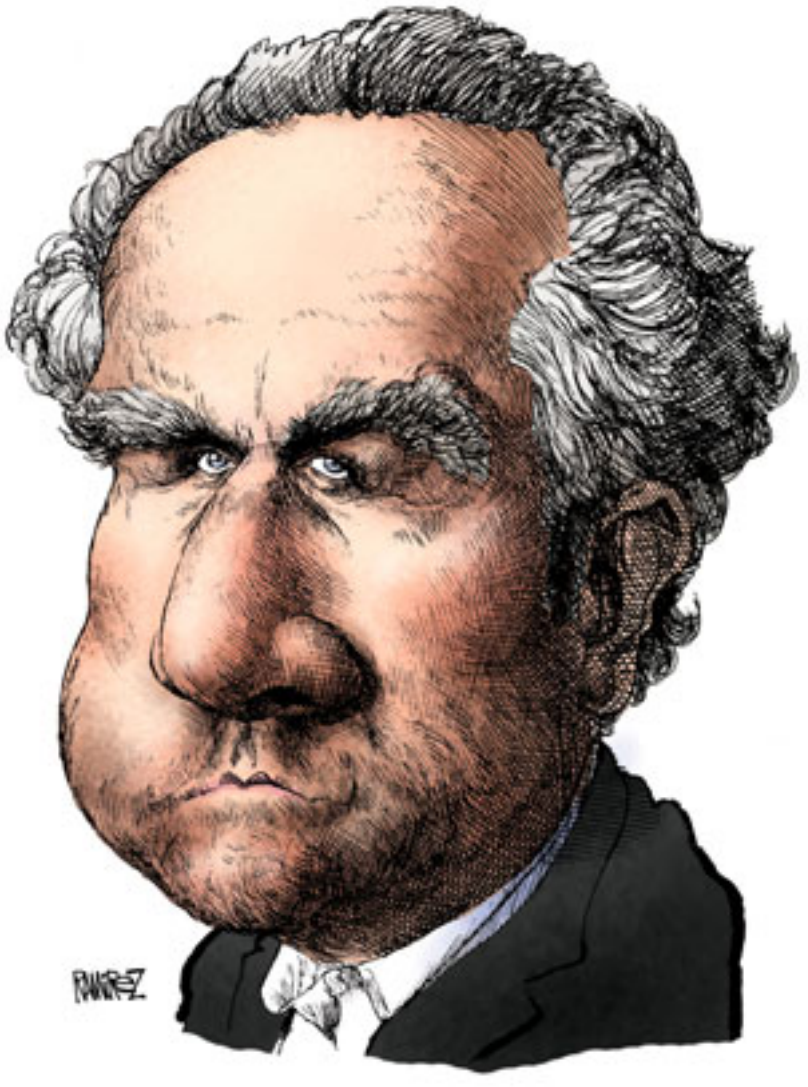
confirmation of his death last Thursday—after many minutes believing, hoping, and praying that it was a big hoax—I thought of the many people I had met because of him.

John Wordin called early. He runs Ride 2 Recovery, a charity that helps soldiers recover from battle wounds, physical and mental. Andrew introduced us by email because of our common interest in those who fight our wars. Three weeks later I was on a 350-mile bike ride across Texas with several dozen soldiers and Marines and, for one hilarious day at the end, Andrew himself.

Andrew wasn't exactly a natural cyclist. To the extent that he exercised at all, it was usually some kind of activity that didn't require a ton of exertion. He knew—we all knew—that he was unlikely to finish the ride of some 70 miles, but he didn't much care. That night, we had one of those only-in-Breitbart-world dinners, spilling out of a booth at a Dallas steakhouse. Actress Kristy Swanson was there. So was Chad Fleming, a decorated special-ops soldier. Andrew had brought Jon David Kahn, a former Stanford tennis player and songwriter who worked at the time under a pseudonym because of his conservative politics. There was a lawyer from Dallas and a friend. As usual, Andrew did most of the talking, flitting from subject to subject as a fruit fly jumps from banana to banana. There were snatches of conversation about reality television, nighttime raids in Iraq, the left-leaning bias of the mainstream media, our families.

The last subject was inescapable. Andrew had brought to Texas, and to dinner, Samson, the oldest of his four children, who was perhaps 10 years old. So we talked to Samson a bit about surfing and school and girls. He answered politely, but I got the sense the adults were more interested in talking about those subjects than he was. He was content to sit and listen. He was just excited to be along with his dad.

Andrew and I talked about Samson, his siblings, and their mother at some length when I saw him at a



Tea Party conference in Troy, Michigan, the Saturday afternoon before he died. He'd just finished giving a highly entertaining and, as always, provocative speech to an appreciative crowd. (The ovations for Andrew were far louder than the ones for either of the two presidential candidates who would speak to the crowd that day.) We talked about his recent confrontation with an Occupy Wall Street crowd at CPAC and the fact that he'd decided to shave his beard because he thought he looked more slovenly with it than the protesters he was mocking.

On Saturday, Andrew was more contemplative than usual. He was concerned about being away from his family as much as his hectic schedule seemed to require. The blessing of a career like the one Andrew had is that he could make his own schedule. He traveled more than a father and husband with a typical 9-to-5 job, but when he was not on the road he often worked from home and got more family time than a normal job would provide. He told me again, as he had dozens of times earlier, what a saint his wife Susie was to put up with all of the complications that went along with being his spouse. The balance is difficult for anyone in our profession and Andrew wanted to be sure he was finding the right one. We had barely started that conversation when our pressing schedules made us end it, for good as it turns out.

Andrew brought Samson when he

picked me up at LAX several years ago. I stayed at his house, as I did nearly every time I was in Los Angeles, and we woke early the next morning so that Andrew could host Dennis Miller's radio show. The show was disjointed, hilarious, scattered, irreverent, and fun—all Andrew.

Afterwards, we picked up a 30-pack of Miller Lite and a boxful of L.A.'s legendary Zankou Chicken before returning to his house. The group there included, at various times, Dennis Miller's producer, Christian Bladt; Andrew's good friend and business partner, Larry Solov; a good friend from his high school, the liberal lawyer who lives across the street; and Micheal Flaherty, the head of Walden Media, a film production company. Andrew gave us newcomers a tour of his house—the new sport court in the back for the kids, the multimedia setup in virtually every room, the custom-made Starbucks bar he'd set up.

We stood around the island in his kitchen that afternoon for hours, talking about big questions—the American Revolution, classical liberal political philosophy, homosexuality and conservatism, preemptive war, and the meaning of life. Andrew led the conversation and asked most of the questions, using those of us who shared many of his views to take the arguments to those who did not.

But it was the end of the conversation that was the first thing I thought of when I finally understood that he had died. It was the first thing that Flaherty, a friend of Andrew's who became one of mine that day, remembered too:

"Fittingly, the last question was about heaven and the afterlife. On this one Andrew just sat back with a smile and listened to a lot of us talk about it from our different faith perspectives, particularly Buddhists and Christians, thrilled to hear different points of view. Little did we know when we wrapped up our conversation on heaven that day that Andrew would be the first of us to get there and hear those words we all long to hear—'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"

STEPHEN F. HAYES

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Pretty Woman

Everyone is talking about Angelina Jolie's leg.

Her right leg, to be specific. The actress presented at the Oscars last week in a striking Versace dress with a thigh-high slit—and proudly stood so as to highlight her stunning gam.

Almost immediately, the leg had its own Twitter account. Even the non-tabloid press obsessed over it, and the star's figure generally: The day before important Republican presidential primaries, Bill O'Reilly devoted much of his show to concern that Jolie is wasting away, improbably claiming, "Once again the media largely ignoring Ms. Jolie's physical profile."

I'd like to bring your attention to another part of Angelina Jolie's body, one that doesn't get the notice it deserves: her brain.

Am I speaking about the same Angelina Jolie once described as crazy as often as she was called beautiful? Who wore Billy Bob Thornton's blood in a vial around her neck? Who shared an unsororal kiss with her brother at the 2000 Oscars? Who considered hiring a hitman to kill herself?

We all, if we're lucky, grow up. Two months ago, I met Jolie when she came to Washington to promote her directorial debut, *In the Land of Blood and Honey*. I'd interviewed plenty of celebrities, from Los Angeles to New York City, but I'd never witnessed a scene as electric as that in the Ritz-Carlton Georgetown as reporters awaited their appointments with the actress. Grown men who normally affected a cynical pose about the famous people they met were too nervous to sample the complimentary food and drink. My sister in rural Alberta was treated like a star for being close to someone meeting Angelina Jolie.

Forbes has called her Hollywood's best-paid actress and the most powerful celebrity in any field. The paparazzi follow every move she, Brad Pitt, and their six children make. Most important, she's gorgeous.

And, like most bewitching women, she has trouble being taken seriously. With Jolie's time at a premium, I met her with two other reporters. They approached her much as they might have Marilyn Monroe five decades earlier. But what do you ask one of the world's most beautiful women?

CHRIS MORRIS

In the Land of Blood and Honey is set in the brutal Bosnian war of the 1990s. "Is it a political film?" one reporter timidly ventured. Jolie is goodwill ambassador for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I knew she'd been to Syria in 2009 to visit Iraqi refugees—alongside Syrian president Bashar al-Assad—and last year met Syrian refugees in Turkey. So I asked her point-blank—hey, she's a member of the Council on Foreign Relations—whether she'd support a U.N. resolution to oust the murderous Assad. "It's not for me to say, because I don't know what the repercussions of that are. I know that something must be done," she responded. Regime change might be necessary, but it wouldn't be a simple solution. "We have to make sure that if he is removed, who comes in next is not worse," she said. "It's not just, we replace it, and then a neighboring country takes over, and it's just an expansion of one of its neighboring countries that might be even more extreme."

It took some effort to hold my jaw in place. I ask a woman better known for her tattoos than her thoughts about deposing a dictator; she brings up the Islamic Republic, warning we shouldn't allow Syria to devolve into a satellite of Iran.

Some professional pundits haven't thought that far ahead. But Jolie had visited Libya—after Qaddafi was killed. That morning, she'd called the U.N.: Syrians are crossing into Lebanon and she wants to meet them. Going into Syria itself makes little sense. "Even if you were allowed in, you'd be directed in what access you'd be given. So I don't trust it" (a tip for Sean Penn the next time he visits his friend Hugo Chávez).

Jolie won't run for office any time soon—and let's face it, attractive women haven't fared well in the arena. But she has strong sentiments about the American political scene. "This should not be a Democrat or Republican issue, but I've spent a lot of time visiting soldiers in hospitals, and I feel that it is a sad day when citizens of a country really can feel so distant from our young men and women who are at war across the world, and dying and in hospitals. It just ended in Iraq and they're coming home, and they should be able to, whether you're for or against the war, hold their heads high with the service that they did. They risked their lives."

But to address the question you really want answered: Angie, as she's called, looked angelic. Her white blouse was too loose to confirm much about her figure. Her right leg, however, did stand out in a slitted skirt.

Kelly Jane Torrance

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The High Price of 'Free' Health Care

Today, in the United States, the federal government does not force insurers to provide free contraception. Yet contraception is as widely available as it is cheap. Most insurance policies cover it. The federal government gives birth control to the poor through Medicaid. The federal government spends an additional $300 million per year to provide it to low-income and uninsured Americans who don't qualify for Medicaid—spending that the staunchest conservatives in Congress supported even when Republicans controlled the presidency, the Senate, and the House. If a middle- or upper-income woman happens to be in one of the small number of plans that don't cover contraception—say, an employee at a college run by Catholic nuns—she can buy birth control pills for as little as $9 per month at Target.

President Barack Obama and HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius

AP IMAGES / ORLIN WAGNER

Yet by the logic of the Obama campaign and many Democrats in the House and Senate, the current policy amounts to a "ban" on contraception. And the federal government can only right this injustice by forcing private insurers—including insurers of religious institutions—to provide free contraception, as well as free drugs that can induce abortions early in pregnancy.

"Let's admit what this debate is really and what Republicans really want to take away from American women. It is contraception," New York Democrat Chuck Schumer said on the Senate floor. He said Republicans were trying to enact a "contraception ban" that would send the country back to the "19th century." Not to be outdone, Democratic senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey said that Republicans want to take us back to "the Dark Ages . . . when women were property that you could easily control, trade even if you wanted to."

The Obama campaign claimed that Republicans effectively wanted to force women to get a "permission slip" from their employers to "access birth control pills, intrauterine devices, or any other type of contraception." Obama's deputy campaign manager wrote in an email to supporters: "If you're a woman, who do you think should have control over your choice to use contraception: You or your employer?" The *New York Times* and others in the mainstream press reported Republicans were backing a measure to allow employers to "deny coverage" for contraception, mimicking the Democrats in substance if not in style.

Of course, the bill the Obama campaign and friends were demagoguing wouldn't have denied anyone access to birth control. The amendment, sponsored in the Senate by Republican Roy Blunt of Missouri and Democrat Ben Nelson of Nebraska, would merely let private employers or insurers opt out of Obamacare's benefits mandates for moral or religious reasons—taking the country all the way back to . . . 2012. Americans currently have this right—the mandate doesn't take effect until August for most employers and next year for religious institutions.

The conscience protections in the Blunt-Nelson bill are identical to the protections included in many federal health care laws on the books and even the 1994 Clinton reform that never became law. The bill wouldn't affect state birth control mandates or federal laws that already require insurers to cover pregnancy, childbirth, mental health, HIV treatments, and other services.

Before a vote on the Blunt-Nelson bill last week, the *New York Times* reported that "Republicans appeared to be divided." In fact, just one Republican, liberal Olympia Snowe of Maine, voted against the measure. Three Democrats—Nelson of Nebraska, Bob Casey of Pennsylvania,

and Joe Manchin of West Virginia—voted for it. The measure narrowly failed in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

The question now is whether supporters of religious freedom will keep up the fight. A number of freshmen Republican senators, like Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire and Scott Brown of Massachusetts, have tackled the issue head-on. Polls taken before and after the fight over the issue show no erosion of support for Brown in the most liberal state in the country.

Yet other Republicans seem skittish about the issue because polls have supposedly shown support for President Obama's "accommodation" of religious institutions. A Quinnipiac poll, for example, asked voters: "Do you think the federal government should require private employers to offer free birth control coverage as part of their health insurance benefit plans or not?" The results: 47 percent said the government should require free contraception, 48 percent said it should not. In other words, the federal mandate in general split the country down the middle.

The poll then purports to show that the Obama administration's method of imposing a mandate on religious institutions is popular. Voters were asked:

> As you may know, President Obama recently announced an adjustment to the administration's health-care rule regarding religiously affiliated employers providing birth control coverage to female employees. Women will still be guaranteed coverage for birth control without any out-of-pocket cost, but will have to seek the coverage directly from their insurance companies if their employers object to birth control on religious grounds. Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama's decision?

Worded this way, 54 percent approved, 38 percent disapproved. But the question didn't poll the policy, it polled Obama's spin. There was no mention that the federal government would require anyone to do anything. At the very least, a fair question would also present the other side of the argument—that Obama's "adjustment" is an accounting gimmick to which religious institutions still object.

Rasmussen polls show that support for Obama's policy depends on how you ask the question. Although voters are divided 43 percent to 39 percent on the general policy of requiring contraception coverage, voters oppose mandatory free coverage of the "morning-after pill" 50 percent to 38 percent. No polls have yet been taken on Obamacare's mandatory free coverage of the "five-day-after pill" called "ella" that can induce abortions during early pregnancy, according to animal testing. And how would voters respond when asked if the federal government should fine religious institutions that refuse to comply with the mandate?

The debate may still be won or lost. The pro-mandate Democrats and their allies in the press have framed it as a fight about "denying access" to birth control. But recall that the "health care reform" bill itself was popular in polls in the spring and summer of 2009. Democrats and the press misled the public about how much it would cost, how many would lose their current insurance, how it would use tax dollars to help pay for abortion-on-demand. Yet opponents of Obamacare managed to get the word out and turn public opinion against the law—because it is a bad law and the facts are on their side.

The opponents of Obamacare's newest mandate requiring free coverage of abortion pills and contraception again have the facts on their side. The mandate provides opponents with the opportunity to again make the case against Obamacare. As one popular sign from the 2009 and 2010 Tea Party rallies read, "If you think health care is expensive now, just wait until it's free." The price of "free" health care will be steep in terms of dollars, but even steeper in terms of freedom.

—John McCormack

Re-Gendered Ike

Last week the chairman of the House administration committee, Dan Lungren of California, sent a letter to the National Capital Planning Commission, one of the many administrative bodies charged with safeguarding Washington's "memorial core." Lungren's tone was polite but firm. Soon the commission will decide whether to approve a design, concocted by the très chic architect Frank Gehry, for a memorial to Dwight Eisenhower in the nation's capital. "The memorial, as currently envisioned," Lungren and a colleague wrote, "does not adequately commemorate [Eisenhower's] accomplishments nor does it enjoy the necessary level of support to be accepted as a national tribute to General and President Eisenhower." Lungren is a powerful chairman with some say over $100 million in taxpayer money being spent on the memorial, and reading the letter we liked to think that we detected beneath the good manners the slightest undercurrent of menace: "Gee, that's a nice appropriation you got there. Hate to see something happen to it." Perhaps our imagination was overheating again. But we can hope.

For without some kind of serious intervention, by Congress or an outraged public, Gehry's appalling design will become a reality, rising unpleasantly at the foot of Capitol Hill, adjacent to the National Mall, for years to come. How appalling is it? For a clue, consider the rave review it received in an unintentionally comical notice from the (always unintentionally comical) art critic for the *Washington Post*. He praised Gehry for de-emphasizing the "mas-

culine power" that has traditionally marred Washington's memorial architecture. (And you thought the Washington monument was just an obelisk?) Gehry, the critic discovered, "has 're-gendered' the vocabulary of memorialization, giving it new life and vitality." A re-gendered Ike! Don't anyone tell Mamie.

Gehry is a clever fellow—along with guile, cleverness is his most conspicuous gift—and his design, after a fashion, is improbably ingenious, which is to say that it manages to be at once grandiose and pointless, offensive and vague, pretentious and kitschy. It's hard to describe because it's hard to decide what it is, precisely. The plan calls for closing down a span of Maryland Avenue in Southwest D.C., one of the original spokes in L'Enfant's grand scheme of crisscrossing streets and avenues, and laying out a four-acre public square in its place. Is the square itself the memorial, or does it merely contain the memorial? Hard to say. Two sides of the square will be defined by a series of unadorned columns. These aren't any of those fussy old classical columns, the kind with a base and a shaft and a capital like you see holding up the roof in those other fuddy-duddy memorials on the National Mall. These are Gehry columns, plain shafts rising 80 feet high, which, as visitors will discover, is very high. Unexpectedly and refreshingly, given the purposeless elaboration in most of Gehry's work, the columns do serve a function. Unfortunately their function is to hoist between them giant screens of metal mesh depicting winter scenes of Kansas prairie.

Mock-up of the National Eisenhower Memorial designed by Frank Gehry, to be built on a four-acre plot at the base of the U.S. Capitol

"As Eisenhower did," say the publicity materials too cutely, the wire mesh screens with their forbidding images of bare trees and lonesome farmhouses "bring a bit of the heartland to our nation's capital."

But what about Eisenhower? Good of you to ask. He will be there, too, depicted in a diminutive statue as a "barefoot farm boy." This will serve to illustrate a point that Gehry and his supporters find unusually compelling, for some reason—that the man who did as much as any other to save Western civilization at its moment of maximum peril got his start wearing overalls on a farm. The statue of little Eisenhower, this Ike tyke, will be casting a plaintive gaze at twin bas reliefs of his older self, as both president and general, mounted on two enormous stone boxes. Quotations from two of Eisenhower's speeches will be carved back there somewhere too. And trees. The design calls for trees.

NEWSCOM

Among the many articulations of horror at Gehry's handiwork, the most poignant come from Eisenhower's son and grandchildren. David Eisenhower recently resigned in disgust from the Eisenhower Memorial Commission, which recruited Gehry and approved his design. In a recent letter, the family said they are puzzled at the design's emphasis on Eisenhower's early life over his years as general and president, which were, after all, the proving ground of his greatness and the reason he deserves a memorial. They question the durability of Gehry's gimmicks—the big wire screens and an inevitable array of hard-to-maintain and soon-to-be-obsolete "interactive technology" for children of all ages. (The devices are in keeping with the current requirement that any public work involving history be relentlessly pedagogical rather than celebratory or commemorative.) It doesn't take an overheated imagination to see what will likely become of Gehry's square 10 or 15 years hence: an acre here or there under repair and cordoned off by cyclone fencing, leaves tumbling across the empty plaza and gathering in remote corners, interactive displays broken and untended, and a handful of puzzled tourists wondering what they're supposed to be looking at. This is not a memorial for the ages.

Indeed, as the family points out, it's not really a memorial at all. But it is many other things. It's an advertisement for the self-conscious quirkiness of an overpraised architect and a shrine to the pathetic intellectual insecurity of the commission that hired him. It's a testimony to postmodernism's ability to corrupt everything it touches. It's an expression of the contempt one class of people feels for another far larger but less powerful class of people.

Listen again to the *Post*'s critic in his rave review: "The effect will be that of a giant stage set enveloping a relatively small representation of Eisenhower, yet another inversion of traditional hierarchies that suggests a powerful sense of the finitude of man and the vastness of history, nature, and fate."

And here are the Eisenhowers, from their recent letter: "Great monuments to our leaders are simple in design and made of durable stone for a reason. This memorial must speak to the ages and last just as long."

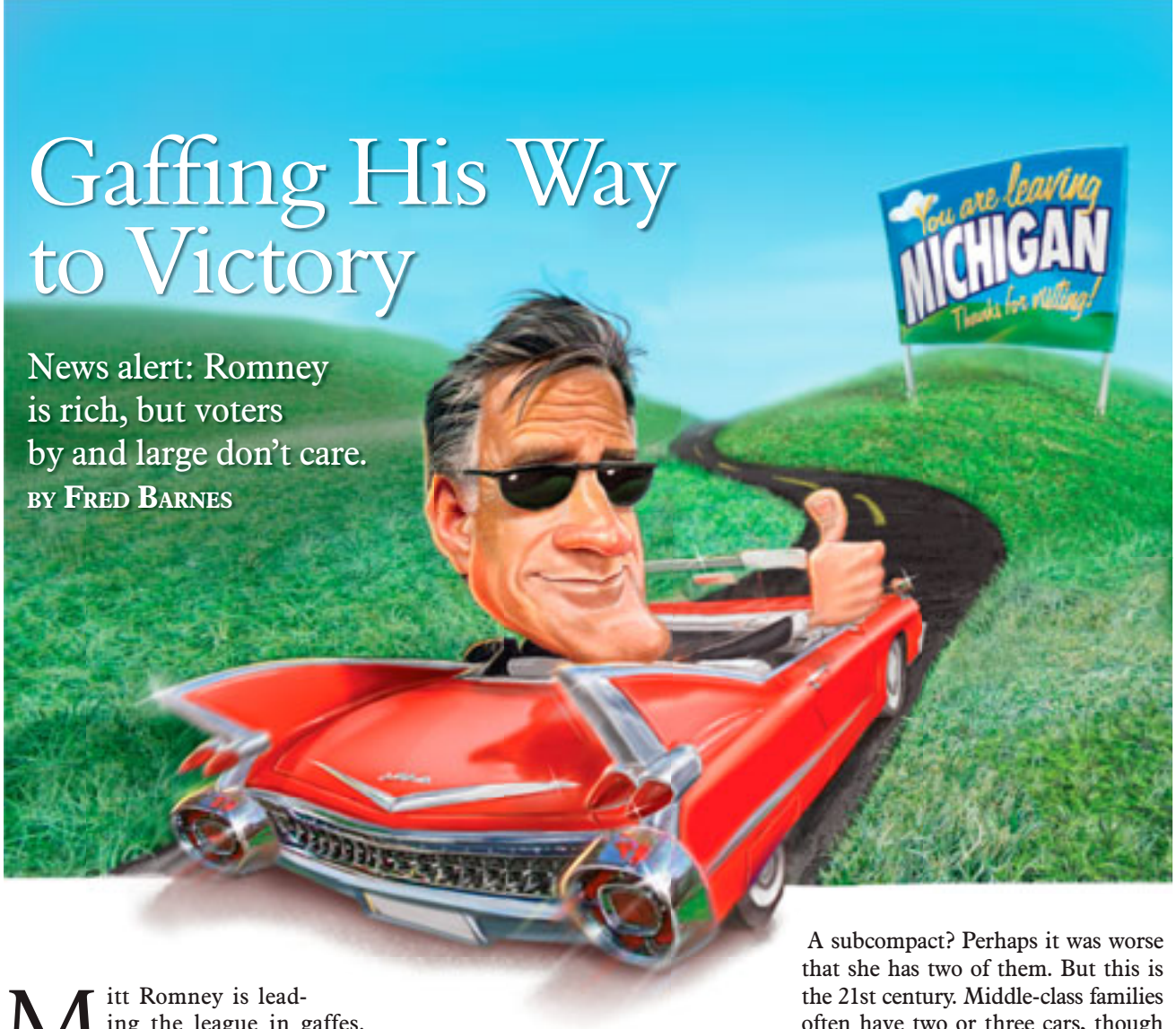
We side with the Eisenhowers. The National Capital Planning Commission should too.

—Andrew Ferguson

Gaffing His Way to Victory

News alert: Romney is rich, but voters by and large don't care.

BY FRED BARNES



GARY LOCKE

Mitt Romney is leading the league in gaffes. We know this because the media are counting. *The Week* lists his "9 worst clueless-rich-man gaffes." The *Wall Street Journal* trumps that with "Romney's Top 10 Wealth Gaffes." The *Christian Science Monitor* refers to the "Mitt Romney gaffe monster."

This is bad for Romney. Next to being called racist or a homophobe, the worst thing that can be said about a candidate is he's gaffe-prone. It suggests his brain-to-mouth hookup is faulty when he talks off-the-cuff, and he lacks a grip on political reality. Thus the candidate's image and campaign suffer.

But it's not Romney, it's reporters and commentators who are out of touch with reality. They insist on applying a Depression-era mindset to anything Romney says that in any way whatsoever might make people suspect he's rich. And if that happens, folks are bound to dislike him.

There are three things wrong with this. One, people by and large don't hate the rich. They don't think the well-to-do are evil, as they might have in the 1930s. Two, by definition, a gaffe is a social blunder or faux pas. Romney's supposed gaffes don't qualify. Three, everybody already knows Romney is rich. Next to the fact he's a Mormon, it's the personal detail for which he's most famous.

Let's look at a recent "gaffe." In a speech to the Detroit Economic Club on February 24, Romney departed from his text and noted his wife Ann "drives a couple of Cadillacs." Wow! Those are expensive cars. The Romneys must be rich.

For heaven's sake, what did the media think she would drive? A Jeep? A subcompact? Perhaps it was worse that she has two of them. But this is the 21st century. Middle-class families often have two or three cars, though maybe not Cadillacs.

Mike Murphy, once a Romney strategist, sneered at the alleged gaffe. He noted, in a tweet after last week's Michigan primary, that Romney won the district where Cadillacs are manufactured by 8 percentage points. "He should drop by the plant and buy another one today," Murphy said.

Two days after the Cadillacs comment, Romney did it again. "I have some great friends who are NASCAR team owners," he said. Now it might be better, for the purpose of appearing to be a regular guy, if his NASCAR buddies were drivers or oil-stained members of a pit crew. But did his statement suddenly alert anyone that Romney hangs around with wealthy people like himself? I seriously doubt it. Or did it remind people of his exalted financial status and make them less likely to vote for him? I doubt the media have any

---

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

evidence it contributed to a falloff in support for Romney.

Another "gaffe" occurred during a debate in Des Moines on December 10. Rick Perry persisted in claiming Romney favors a health insurance mandate. "Rick, I'll tell you what," Romney responded. "Ten thousand bucks? Ten-thousand-dollar bet?"

For sure, this was an unusual comment for a candidate to make in a televised debate. Was Romney acting like a rich guy? Or simply like a guy? Hard to tell. But not every untoward moment like this one is a gaffe.

Nor is a statement the media construe to say what Romney wasn't really saying. In a CNN interview on February 1, he said: "I'm not concerned about the very poor. We have a safety net there." He added that if programs for the poor are insufficient—he cited several—he'd fix the problem. Nonetheless, he was criticized for not caring about the poor or at least being tone deaf to their plight. This was number three on *The Week*'s gaffe list.

One more example of media mischief. On January 9, while discussing health insurance, Romney said he likes "being able to fire people who provide services to me." He wasn't talking about the joy of firing employees, but of choosing among service providers. That was clear. Yet it's number five on *The Week*'s list. Why? Because when saying it, he looked like a bad boss.

Romney is guilty of another sort of gaffe: accidentally telling the truth at his own expense. This type was first identified by Michael Kinsley, the journalist and former editor of the *New Republic*. "A gaffe is when a politician tells the truth," he wrote.

On January 24, Romney released his tax returns. Most of his income came from investments, but he earned $374,000 in 2011 from speaker's fees. He said those earnings amounted to "not very much." Most Americans probably wouldn't agree with his assessment. So it was indeed a gaffe, or maybe a mini-gaffe.

Oddly enough, his rival Rick Santorum is guilty of more Kinsley gaffes than Romney is. Santorum said John F. Kennedy's hallowed 1960 speech on church and state makes him want to vomit. True, that's what he believes. But it hardly did his presidential campaign any good.

Candid to a fault, Santorum attacked President Obama for wanting "everybody in America to go to college." He called Obama a "snob." Again, it was an accurate reflection of Santorum's thinking, not a poll-tested, insincere remark to win votes. It clashes, however, with the widespread aspiration of Americans to get a college education and doubtless did more harm than good to his candidacy.

A good question is why the media have identified so many gaffes. Brit Hume of Fox News says political reporters, when confronted with a peculiar, off-the-wall comment by a politician, don't know how to label it except as a gaffe. Besides, Hume says, much of the media are living in "a parallel universe in which wealth is a vice and poverty a virtue."

Though Romney's millions put him at a disadvantage, there's a way out. "He needs to embrace his personal history and then joke about it," says political scientist Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia. JFK was adept at this. When his father's role in financing his campaign became an issue, he quoted his father as saying he'd be willing to buy the election, "but I'll be damned if I'm going to pay for a landslide." Too bad Romney isn't as witty as he is wealthy. ♦

Who Can Beat Obama?

An experiment shows the scales tilt toward Romney. BY MICHAEL WARREN

Is Mitt Romney the best remaining Republican candidate to go up against Barack Obama in the fall? Or would Rick Santorum, the most likely alternative, fare better in a general election? An experimental study conducted by the firm Evolving Strategies suggests Romney may have the advantage over Santorum in a general election, but not for the most obvious reasons.

First, a note about the survey model. Evolving Strategies uses experimental data to understand how communication and advertising strategies affect voters, much in the way product advertisers determine how to craft television and radio commercials. In this experiment, survey respondents were broken into three groups. The first group watched two television advertisements about Mitt Romney: a positive one and one attacking him. The second group watched two similar ads about Santorum, one positive and one negative. The third group, the control, watched nonpolitical ads. Then, each respondent answered questions to gauge how he or she would vote in a general election. This method attempts to measure the effect of the campaign ads on voting preferences.

The results of such an experiment can be predictive. In December, when Newt Gingrich had reached his peak popularity within the Republican presidential field, Evolving Strategies conducted a similar survey among Republican primary voters. The most telling result was that the former House speaker seemed to be very vulnerable to negative ads. Those who viewed both positive and negative ads about Gingrich were considerably less

Michael Warren is a reporter at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

supportive of him than those in the control group. In other words, the negative ads worked. The experiment prefigured what weeks later became reality, when a barrage of negative advertising from Romney and his super-PAC effectively sank Gingrich.

So what did this latest survey discover? The results suggest that Romney is the superior general election candidate. While the control group—those respondents who watched nonpolitical advertisements—split their support evenly at 40 percent between Obama and Romney (standing in as a "generic" Republican candidate), those who watched the Santorum ad treatment, both positive and negative, favored Obama to Santorum 45 percent to 38 percent.

On the other hand, those who watched the Romney ad treatments favored Romney over Obama 44 percent to 35 percent. That's a statistically significant difference. Based on these results, Romney would perform better against Obama than would Santorum.

Why is that the case? The general election ads the respondents viewed were specially created for this study. The positive ad the Romney group watched featured two sides of the Romney pitch: an explanation and defense of his business experience, and a contrast between his free-market vision for the economy and Obama's government-driven vision. "President Obama's brand of capitalism sends your money to his friends' companies," Romney says in the video. "I will, instead, make America the most attractive place in the world for entrepreneurs and innovators and job creators, and get America working again."

The negative Romney ad, something akin to what Obama might run in the fall campaign, focuses on Romney's years at Bain Capital. "Why isn't Romney concerned about the poor?" the text reads after video of Romney's post-Florida primary gaffe. The ad ends with Romney arguing with protesters about the nature of corporations. "Everything corporations earn ultimately goes to people," says a haggard-looking Romney in the hot Iowa sun. "Where do you think it goes? Whose pockets? Whose pockets?"

The results suggest this line of attack against Romney may not hold up in an election about the economy, particularly if Romney rebuts the criticisms by directly challenging the president's own economic policies. In fact, when the survey asked respondents whether or not they believed Obama's economic policies would work, those in the Romney group were less inclined to believe they would work than those in the control group.

What about the Santorum ads? The positive ad focuses first on Santorum's vision for the country. "It's an election about what kind of country you're going to leave the next generation," Santorum intones. "Are we going to be a country that believes, as our Founders did, that our rights don't come from the government, they come from a much higher authority?" Following that, Santorum clarifies his position on contraception by explaining that his "public policy position is that this contraception should be available." The ad also shows Santorum touting his economic plan, quoting the *Wall Street Journal*'s definition of it as "supply-side economics for the working man."

The results suggest that Romney is the superior general election candidate. There is a substantial difference among college-educated voters, who overwhelmingly prefer Romney to Obama, but prefer Obama to Santorum.

The negative ad features a string of video clips showing Santorum discussing his socially conservative beliefs. On contraception: "I don't think it works. I think it's harmful to women. I think it's harmful to our society." On abortion: "I would advocate that any doctor that performs an abortion should be criminally charged for doing so." On social issues as a whole: "These are important public policy issues."

The focus on social issues (but not necessarily the substance of his positions) would apparently hurt Santorum against Obama, but the breakdown doesn't cut across gender lines. Santorum doesn't perform any worse with women than he does with men—37 percent of men support him and 38 percent of women. Both Romney and the "generic Republican" of the control group have the same one-point margin of difference between the genders.

The more substantial difference is how Santorum performs with college-educated voters compared with voters without college degrees. In the control group, Obama trailed among college-educated voters, 43 percent to 38 percent; in the Romney group, Obama trailed by an even greater margin, 53 percent to 37 percent. Romney's 10-point swing among the college educated, among those who viewed the ads, is statistically significant.

But college-educated voters overwhelmingly prefer Obama to Santorum, 57 percent to 33 percent. But Santorum performs slightly better (39 percent to Obama's 38 percent) with non-college-educated voters than does the generic Republican (38 percent to Obama's 41 percent).

There are, of course, limits to the survey's conclusions. Respondents watched two minutes of content rather than experiencing two months of post-convention campaigning. But the advertisement treatments are instructive in which messages can work for Republicans in the general election campaign, and which can't.

If voters continue to worry about the economy, and Obama's handling of it, Romney looks well-suited to respond. If Santorum is the nominee and the economy is still stuck in the doldrums, voters will want to hear how his economic vision contrasts with the president's. But with a media culture primed to focus on Santorum's social views, even if the candidate himself tries to steer the discussion back toward the economy, the GOP could be in a worse position to take back the White House. ♦

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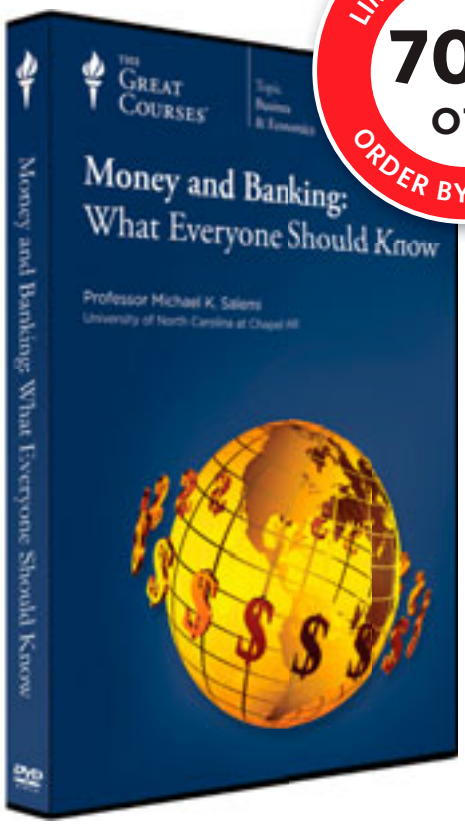

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How to Kill an Economy

Egypt sours on its (lucrative) gas deal with Israel.

BY LEE SMITH

Late last week Spanish authorities announced that they're extraditing Egyptian businessman Hussein Salem, a close associate of former president Hosni Mubarak. Salem is a central figure in the post-Mubarak narrative of the regime's rampant corruption. He has already been sentenced in absentia to seven years in prison by an Egyptian court for his alleged role in selling natural gas to Israel at below market rates. The problem with that narrative is that Israel pays top dollar for Egyptian gas. How that cash was distributed within Egypt is an entirely separate matter.

Even before Mubarak was toppled last February after three decades ruling Egypt, the sale of Sinai gas to Israel was an obsession of the opposition. The deal was one of the few major trade agreements between the two states and a symbol of normalized relations after decades of war. Despite the belief that the anti-Mubarak protests had nothing to do with Israel and focused solely on corruption and other domestic complaints, the reality is that the peace treaty was always one of the major beefs that the opposition—Islamists, Arab nationalists, and leftists alike—had with the regime. The widespread belief, more like an urban legend, that Israel and Mubarak had conspired to cheat Egypt out of its gas revenues bespeaks an abiding hostility to the treaty.

With Egyptian elections now giving the Islamists a majority in parliament, it's perhaps only a matter of time before the gas agreement is canceled. And the 30-year-old peace treaty may also be in jeopardy, an ominous sign for the rest of the region. Worse yet for Egyptians, an end to the gas deal may doom an economy that is already plumbing the depths of third-world despair.

An attack on Egypt's gas pipeline, July 2011

Post-Mubarak Egypt is ungoverned, one Israeli energy executive told me, and on the verge of ungovernable. In the 13 months since the uprising, there have been 12 attacks on the pipeline that supplies Egyptian natural gas to Israel (and to Jordan). The first occurred during the midst of the anti-Mubarak protests and the most recent was February 5, leading to a three-week disruption in service. In the last year, there were 245 days during which no gas flowed. When it did flow, the gas came in quantities substantially smaller than what had originally been contracted.

The issue, according to the Israeli executive, is not that it takes that long to repair the pipeline. The delays rather are due to the political uncertainty in Egypt. Ruling authorities from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces are afraid to make decisions that might land them in jail or force them into exile, like Salem and other Mubarak associates.

Israel counts on Egyptian gas for roughly 20 percent of its electricity, but the stoppages have forced it to dip further into its own gas resources from the Mari-B field. The problem, explains David Wurmser, an energy analyst and head of the Delphi Global Analysis Group, is that "this field will soon be tapped out. There is a gap emerging and it's unclear whether Israel will be able to bridge it."

Israel's large natural gas finds, especially the enormous Leviathan field, in the eastern Mediterranean basin may in time make the country not only self-sufficient but an exporter of natural gas. However, those fields have yet to come on line. The Tamar field, says Wurmser, is supposed to come on line in late 2012 or early 2013. It was thought before the Egyptian stoppages that the Mari-B field would not be depleted until late 2013. But at current rates, that field will be depleted well before Tamar comes on line, which Wurmser thinks may lead to some blackouts.

Before 2006, Israel relied on fuel oil and coal to generate electricity. Natural gas was cheaper than the former and cleaner than the latter, and a deal with Egypt would normalize relations. "Both governments wanted to show that the peace is real," says Yosef Maiman, chairman of the Merhav group and Ampal-American Israel Corporation, which partnering with institutional Israeli investors, owns 25 percent of the Egyptian company, East Mediterranean Gas (EMG), that sells Egyptian gas to Israel.

In 2000, Maiman set up EMG with Hussein Salem. According to a WikiLeaks cable from the U.S. embassy in Cairo, "political concerns in Egypt" delayed the signing of a gas deal. The Egyptian government sought to isolate itself from political repercussions by encouraging the formation of EMG, which brought together Maiman and

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Lee Smith is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Hussein Salem, who owned a majority share of the company.

Maiman tells me at his home in Herzliya, a few miles north of Tel Aviv, that Salem said that "he was about as good a friend as Mubarak had. But even then it was very compartmentalized. Salem could laugh with Mubarak about the old times they had together, but nothing about politics."

The agreements were signed in 2005, but Egyptian gas didn't reach Israel until 2008, two years after Israel started to tap its own fields. In May 2009, the Egyptian government amended the gas purchase agreement to double the price, while also applying a higher price retroactively to the gas that had already been supplied. Israel was now paying Egypt more than what Cairo was charging customers like Jordan (which relies on Egyptian gas for 80 percent of its electricity), and twice what it paid for its own gas.

Far from getting a sweetheart deal from the Egyptian government, says Wurmser, Israel was being blackmailed. "The Israelis had to stomach an unfair situation because the consumer agreements with the Israeli customers were already signed." As for the notion that Israel was paying Egypt much less than the going rate, Wurmser explains that there's no such thing as an international market price on gas. "Gas infrastructure can only be built by market agreements. You don't have free-floating Liquefied Natural Gas tankers. It's run like a railroad system. There are specific calculations regarding how to service that particular train, which routes it will run, etc."

Obviously, a precise understanding of market mechanisms will have no bearing on the case of Hussein Salem. The Egyptian street wants blood and the current rulers in the military will be only too happy to slake its thirst—if only to keep the mob from coming after them.

But if the gas agreement with Israel was on the level, then what is the basis for the charges of corruption against Salem? That he didn't spread the wealth evenly among his fellow Egyptians? This is hardly an atmosphere conducive to business or investment. Rather, it suggests Egypt is perched, once again, on the precipice of an Arab socialist nightmare.

The country's economy is bottoming out. Maiman notes that between the lack of tourism, a steep drop-off in workers' remittances from neighboring Libya, the flight of capital and a lack of foreign direct investment, the country desperately needs money. Egypt is going begging to the Arab states, the IMF and World Bank, while it is sitting on natural gas that it refuses to profit from for political reasons. And if Egypt fails to meet its contractual obligations to Israel, it is difficult to see investors taking further risks in a political climate dominated by Islamists.

With the entire region now in upheaval after the Arab Spring, Maiman still thinks that Israel and Egypt "are two countries that could provide stability and create a tone for the region, by cementing their relationship." Mubarak's fall gave hope to many that Egypt, static for 30 years, might once again lead the Arab world. The sad reality is that the largest and still most influential of Arab states may drag the Middle East in the wrong direction. ♦

Nuclear Overreaction

Just how dangerous are low doses of radiation?

BY TOM BETHELL

After Japan's tsunami a year ago, about 20,000 people either drowned or were lost along the country's northeastern coast. The same tidal wave overwhelmed nuclear reactors at Fukushima Daiichi. But no ill-health effects from radiation have been reported to date.

Separately, a professor of toxicology at the University of Massachusetts analyzed decades-old data on the biological effects of radiation. He concluded that studies after World War II claiming that low-level radiation is hazardous were deceptive. Since the 1950s, the U.S. government has relied on these studies to argue that there is no safe level of ionizing radiation.

U.S. policy was established by the National Academy of Sciences in 1956. The risk of harm was deemed proportional to the dose. A low dose would still do some harm, in other words, and there is "no threshold" below which radiation can be considered harmless. In 1977 the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Safe Drinking Water applied the same standard to chemicals, imposing huge cleanup costs on society; for example, at "Superfund" sites.

The research on which the "no threshold" policy was based was recently challenged by Edward J. Calabrese, a public health professor who researches toxicology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In a new paper for *Toxicological Sciences*, he said that "Hermann J. Muller knowingly made deceptive comments in his 1946 Nobel Prize Lecture concerning the dose response."

Muller, who won the Nobel for Physiology or Medicine, had earlier shown that atomic radiation can induce mutations in fruit flies. There is no doubt that it can—if the dose is high enough. The contentious issue is whether low doses are also harmful. After months of research at the American Philosophical Society, Calabrese has concluded that

Tom Bethell is a senior editor at the American Spectator.

U.S. radiation experiments conducted after 1945 failed to confirm that low doses are hazardous.

A test in 1946 by a well-known radiation geneticist at the University of Rochester, Curt Stern, helped by one colleague and showing no safe dose, was contradicted by a later and better-designed test, also by Stern but with a different colleague. The later test showed a "threshold" below which no effects are seen. The second test used effective dose levels that were far lower, but still well above normal background radiation levels.

Muller knew that the latter result had contradicted the earlier one: But as though nothing had happened, he said in his Nobel lecture that there was "no escape from the conclusion that there is no threshold." No safe level, in short. Both studies were later published in the journal *Genetics*, then edited by Curt Stern. But a key sentence published earlier, noting "the possibility of a tolerance dose for radiation," was omitted.

In the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* last December, Calabrese wrote that the U.S. government's "no threshold model" for the assessment of risk became the regulatory standard "as a result of ideological motivations and manipulations of the scientific literature at the highest possible level." He was referring to Muller's Nobel speech.

As to his political views, Muller was employed as a geneticist in the Soviet Union from 1933 to 1937. The experience is said to have cured him of his earlier Communist sympathies, but he remained a socialist. Elof Carlson's biography of Muller notes that from the mid 1950s, Muller "favored a cessation of nuclear tests as a step to disarmament."

In an email to me, Calabrese wrote that he has received some criticism for his remarks on Muller, but his critics "have not been able to attack any factual basis."

For years, Calabrese has argued that low-level radiation not only does no harm, but is actually beneficial. There is much to support that claim, and the evidence for it was favorably reviewed by *Science* in 2003 [v. 302, p. 376]. Here is some of that evidence.

Since the 1960s, the Atomic Bomb Disease Institute of Nagasaki University kept records of approximately 120,000 survivors of the Nagasaki bombing, comparing their health with that of matched cohorts of unexposed Japanese. Conclusion: Low doses of atomic-bomb radiation increased the lifespan of atom-bomb survivors.

The world is constantly exposed to natural radiation—from uranium in the rocks, from radon gas, and from cosmic rays from outer space. Areas

Ahhhh: Radon springs in Misasa, Japan

of high background radiation in the United States (the Rocky Mountain plateau) have cancer rates markedly lower than areas with low background radiation (the Mississippi Valley).

With the passage of time, as the half-lives of various radiation sources dwindle away, background radiation is constantly declining. Calabrese told me that we live in a "radiation-deficit environment."

Theodore Rockwell, who worked on the Manhattan Project at Oak Ridge and was hired by Admiral Hyman Rickover to work on the Naval Nuclear Propulsion program in the 1950s, says that locations with high natural background radiation have levels "as much as a hundred times greater than the forbidden areas" around the Fukushima accident site in Japan.

One of these high background radiation places is Misasa Hot Springs in Japan, which advertises itself as containing "a high percentage of health-promoting radium."

Radium emits radon, and many of the traditional European spas, celebrated since the 19th century for reducing aches and pains, correspond to what are now known to be high-radon sites. Klaus Becker, who was head of applied dosimetry at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and is now retired in Germany, told me that in Bad Gastein in Austria customers pay $550 for ten hours' inhalation of radon at over 1,000 times the EPA-recommended level.

The irony is that the Austrian government pays for antiradon remediation measures while the public health service pays for treatment (for bursitis, rheumatic and asthmatic conditions) at the radon-rich spas.

For antinuclear activists, meanwhile, Fukushima has been the gift that keeps on giving. Germany— its reactors provide 23 percent of the country's electricity—will phase out all nuclear power by 2022. The engineering firm Siemens will stop building nuclear plants. Italy's plan to generate 25 percent of its electricity with nuclear power was rejected in a June referendum. Switzerland's five nuclear reactors (yielding 40 percent of its electricity), will not be replaced at the end of their life span. Only two of Japan's 54 reactors, which previously provided 30 percent of its electricity, are still running. Most have been shut down for safety checks, and this winter the country is facing power shortages.

Plans to start up a newly constructed nuclear reactor on the southern tip of India have been obstructed by antinuke activists, some of whom came from as far away as the United States and Australia. They effectively demonstrated that environmental activism is an indulgence of the wealthier classes. Many people are so confused that they believe an accident at a nuclear power plant could turn it into an atom bomb; antinuke activists do nothing to allay such fears.

The "no threshold" theory is also convenient for antinuclear activists because government regulations do their work for them. The government says that additional radiation will cause additional cancers—end of story. Crusading journalists have no need to

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delve into details about rems, sieverts, rads, and roentgens. Tokyo residents can detect "hotspots" with store-bought dosimeters, but the radiation levels are low enough to be harmless, or perhaps beneficial.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo wants to shut down the Indian Point nuclear plant 36 miles north of New York, which faces license renewal challenges. As Indian Point supplies 25 percent of the city's electricity, it might provide a salutary lesson if Cuomo were to prevail.

Meanwhile, in France, where nuclear power provides three-fourths of the country's electricity, there has been no retreat. President Sarkozy said that "one has no right to play up medieval fears." Also undeterred is China, which is continuing with plans to build 36 new reactors over the next decade. Vietnam's plan to build two reactors (with help from the laid-off Japanese reactor companies) also remains on track.

In view of the ease with which public fears can be aroused, and the huge costs involved in shutting down reactors and replacing them (as is optimistically planned in Germany) with offshore wind farms, those old experiments with irradiated fruit flies should be repeated. This time the exposure should be as low as that found near a damaged reactor. ♦

Political Scientist, Par Excellence

James Q. Wilson, 1931-2012.

BY HARVEY MANSFIELD

James Q. Wilson, a longtime teacher in the government department at Harvard, and an all-time political scientist, has died. He was a Californian who went to college at the University of Redlands, got his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, and then came to Harvard. At the end of his career, he went back home, taught at UCLA and Pepperdine, and with his wife Roberta, made a dream home in Malibu.

He was the most complete political scientist of his generation, always at the forefront, active in "the profession" and prominent in the university. His long list of books began with a study of the McGovernite phenomenon, *The Amateur Democrat*, and then a book—*Negro Politics*, in the nomenclature of the time—introducing the subject of ethnicity to the study of political science. He did not lead a life of crime, but he contributed several books to the study of crime and human nature, including a book on the FBI and another with the wonderful title *Varieties of Police Behavior*. He coauthored the famous theory of "broken windows"—arguing that law enforcement needed to be concerned with the details of orderliness and with preserving the appearance of a "good neighborhood."

Wilson accepting the 2007 Bradley Prize

He wrote on political organizations and on bureaucracy, carrying these subjects beyond the traditional field of public administration by comparing public with private administration. While he was developing new specialties, he authored the best textbook on *American Government*, proving he could make money as well as find truth. At the end of his life, he turned away from the facts of politics to consider what they showed about the nature of morals, and wrote books on the moral sense and the notion of character.

Jim Wilson himself had a character that was inspiring yet persuasive. He was a fearless man who never needed to be fearless because he never took a false step. He had a strong heart, aided and somewhat concealed by his sovereign prudence and remarkable sang-froid. He never said a word that he later had to regret. No one was more conservative, but no conservative was ever more presentable than Wilson. In the late sixties, he saved Harvard from a time of turbulence and outrage, not all by himself but at the lead and from the top. In return, Harvard should have made him its president but did eventually reward him with an honorary degree.

His students and friends are legion. Above them all was his friend and mentor, the great Edward Banfield, a party of one that Jim joined—the kind of party he always preferred. From the day I met him, he was a friend for life, as useful with invaluable advice as he was company to be enjoyed. His wife Roberta was his high school sweetheart, a woman of verve and beauty, and his lifelong companion. They went deep-sea diving together and wrote a book, *Watching Fishes*.

This man was a professor and never really wanted to be more, but one always had the feeling that a little more love of the limelight would have made him president of anything, including the United States. ♦

NEWSCOM

Harvey Mansfield is professor of government at Harvard and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. This is adapted from remarks he delivered at a Harvard luncheon seminar, just hours after James Q. Wilson died on March 2.

Time travel at the speed of a 1935 Speedster?

The 1930s brought unprecedented innovation in machine-age technology and materials. Industrial designers from the auto industry translated the principles of aerodynamics and streamlining into everyday objects like radios and toasters. It was also a decade when an unequaled variety of watch cases and movements came into being. In lieu of hands to tell time, one such complication, called a jumping mechanism, utilized numerals on a disc viewed through a window. With its striking resemblance to the dashboard gauges and radio dials of the decade, the jump hour watch was indeed "in tune" with the times!

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'The Rich People's President'

Will France's Nicolas Sarkozy be the next European leader to fall?

By Christopher Caldwell

If you understood how French president Nicolas Sarkozy found himself holed up in a barroom in Bayonne last Thursday afternoon, it would take you a long way towards figuring out what is going to happen in France's two-round presidential election, coming up in April and May. Sarkozy, who heads France's conservative UMP party, was making a surprise visit to the Basque country, along the border with Spain. The Socialists, who have not held the presidency since 1995, got wind of his visit. Together with local Basque separatists, they succeeded in blocking the center of Bayonne. When Sarkozy emerged from his car, he was surrounded by a whistling, hooting, chanting mob, taunting him as "the rich people's president" and telling him he ought to go home. That is when Sarkozy ducked into the bar to talk with locals while eggs flew, along with anything else in Bayonne that grows, rots, and can be thrown.

BLING IT ON

Sarko, as he is called, is not popular in Bayonne. At this point, he is not especially popular anywhere in France. For a while after his election in 2007 he had the highest poll ratings of any French president ever. He promised a regime of law and order and a strengthening of French national identity that appealed to the far-right National Front. This meant standing up to Muslim immigration but not in any violent or intolerant way. In fact, Sarko's greatest achievement before becoming president was to set up a national council under which Muslims could assert their religious rights. His plan for bringing France's different ethnic groups together involved a defense of *laïcité*, or secularism, and the left liked that. The centerpiece of his campaign, though, was a defense of hard work, of the "France that wakes up early." In a country prone to conspiracy theories, where people often feel they've been bled white by fast-talking politicians and sleazy business moguls, this appealed to almost everybody.

Things started to go wrong the moment Sarkozy was elected—literally. Instead of celebrating with supporters in the Place de la Concorde, according to political tradition, he let his proletarian foot soldiers cool their heels for a couple of hours while he went to Fouquet's, an upper-crust bar and restaurant on the Champs-Élysées, to meet with his big donors. We now know that Sarkozy's real problem was that his wife Cécilia, who had already begun divorce proceedings against him, was nowhere to be found. No matter—this was the beginning of Sarko's reputation as *le président des riches*. When he got married again, months into his term, to Italian chanteuse Carla Bruni, he was cast as *le président bling-bling*—"bling" having the same meaning in France that it has in the American ghettos where it originated, implying the flaunting of ill-gotten gains.

So Sarko was cast as a phony, whose real allegiances were to those same fast-talking politicians and sleazy business moguls he had railed against. His conversation on national identity stalled when opponents accused his interior minister of racism and his allies lost their nerve. His attempts to put more disposable income into the hands of French consumers foundered along with the economy. His efforts to strut France's stuff on the world stage backfired similarly. France was *sort of* leading the coalition against Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, but in a way that made clear its dependence on American airpower. France was *sort of* joining Germany in rescuing the euro, but in a way that made clear Germany's interests were paramount.

At some point, people began to tune Sarkozy out, as if his pronouncements were all theater and damage control. The dozen candidates competing for the presidency in the first round of the election have been rising and falling in the polls in a volatile way, with Sarkozy winning the allegiance of just under 30 percent of voters. But polls also show that if he and Socialist candidate François Hollande make it into a runoff, Hollande will beat him by 58 percent to 42. Those

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard *and the author of* Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West.

numbers have not budged in weeks, even as Sarkozy has splashily rolled out his campaign.

But Sarkozy has something that would make it premature to rule him out. It is not just that he is good at "working a crowd" or that he has a "head for policy" or a "first-rate organization." It is that he has an absolutely daemonic gift for campaigning, for political improvisation, for recasting disaster as triumph. In the half-century since Lyndon Johnson left the Senate, Bill Clinton is the only American politician who is Sarkozy's equal at this game of *Who-you-gonna-believe?-Me-or-your-lyin'-eyes?*

So when Sarkozy emerged from the barroom in Bayonne at which the crowd had been heaving eggs, he was not cowed by their disapproval as, let's say, Rick Santorum might have been. He was indignant. "Is this the conception of democracy that the Socialists share with the Basque separatists?" he asked. "What is it they want to prevent? What is it that they can't stand? That a few hundred people want to support me and come speak to me?" The eggs being thrown were a judgment not on him but on Hollande: "If people who claimed to be on my side behaved this way towards François Hollande, I would condemn them immediately." Suddenly the sentiment that Sarko Must Go, held by a large majority of French people, was not an expression of democracy. It was a threat to democracy.

Sarkozy visits Bayonne, Hollande enjoys Laval.

FRONT AND CENTER

Sarkozy won last time because he captured half the votes of the National Front (FN), a party that has seethed at the rightmost frontier of French politics for about three decades, rallying about 15 percent of the public behind a platform of (thus far) impotent rage. It is hard to see how Sarkozy will get those votes back. The FN leadership has passed from fascistic Algerian war veteran Jean-Marie Le Pen to his more modern daughter, Marine, a single mother. The party no longer trades in offensive jokes and anti-Semitic innuendo. The transformation may not yet be quite complete ("Marine Le Pen waltzes in Vienna with pan-Germanists," ran a recent headline in *L'Express*). And the FN is, rather like late-stage al Qaeda, more a current of thought than a political organization. It is difficult to find a single party member beyond Marine Le Pen who is competent or willing to pronounce on any policy matter whatsoever. Finally, the party's anti-Europeanism is couched in an opposition to globalization and free trade that is not to every right-winger's liking.

But the FN is a more appealing political party than it was five years ago. The so-called *cordon sanitaire* that surrounded it is breaking. And once it becomes possible to vote for the FN without ostracism, the party will have some great strengths. It is the most popular party among the working class. It splits the allegiance of voters under 25 with the various parties of the hard left. It is the only major party to oppose further European integration—and it does so for the same (protectionist) reasons a majority of the public does. That majority was expressed, clearly and overwhelmingly, through a "No" vote in France's 2005 referendum on whether to ratify a European constitutional treaty. Sarkozy ignored the verdict and made France a party to many of the treaty's provisions, via the Treaty of Lisbon. That is why he is not going to get back all of those FN voters he won last time, not even in a second round against Hollande.

Ms. Le Pen, however, has a big problem. To run for president, you need to gather 500 signatures, or *parrainages*, from elected officials: mayors, deputies, senators, regional councilors, and members of the European parliament. (There are about 47,000 people you can ask.) These sponsorships do not imply support of anyone's candidacy, and Ms. Le Pen's father never had a problem getting them. Yet Ms. Le Pen must submit her 500 signatures by March 16, and as of March 1, she was stuck at 452. What happened?

Some speculate that Ms. Le Pen is just playing for publicity, trying to paint the French electoral system as freezing her out, and that the 500 signatures will somehow appear before mid-month. But two other explanations are possible. First, Ms. Le Pen's father spent a good deal of party money and time cultivating networks of *parrains* (the word means "godfather"). Ms. Le Pen was so busy stripping her party of its post-fascist overtones that she didn't have time to reap the fruits of having done so. Second, there have been reforms in the rules. Small-town mayors are now bound together in "intercommunal" groups of 10 or so. This increases their bureaucratic muscle but subjects them to peer pressure. And this time, unlike last time, the *parrainages* will be a matter of public record. It is one thing secretly to help the National Front get on the ballot. It is another thing to do so publicly.

Some allege that Sarkozy is trying to keep Le Pen out of the race. "Sarkozy is like Putin," a leftist politician quipped to me. "He wants to choose his own opposition." Polls show Sarkozy running even with Hollande in the first round if Le Pen is absent.

At any rate, Sarkozy is behaving as if the best place

to look for votes is on the far right. In early February in the National Assembly, Claude Guéant, the interior minister, remarked that "not all civilizations are equal" when it comes to women's rights, among other things. Serge Letchimy, a Socialist from Martinique, accused Guéant of Nazi sympathies. "Day after day you lead us back to those European ideologies that led to the concentration camps," Letchimy scolded him.

Ordinarily, you would look at a moment like this as further evidence of Sarkozy's political genius. And in a way, it is: At a time when he needs to shore up votes, he has provoked his foolish opponents into demagogically invoking the Nazis. Sarkozy nonetheless remains in big trouble.

HOLLANDE DAZE

On one hand, the president needs to fish for votes on the hard right. On the other hand, he is facing, in François Hollande, a man who is synonymous with personal and ideological moderation and might seem like a low-risk option for centrist voters who worry that Sarko has gone over the top. A graduate of the elite École Nationale d'Administration, Hollande used to teach macroeconomics at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris. Hollande is a real party man—his then-common-law wife, Ségolène Royal, was the party's nominee against Sarkozy in 2007. And although Hollande has never held a cabinet post, he was party chairman for a decade. That was the decade, starting with the Socialist government of Lionel Jospin in 1997, when the party embraced business, privatizing more state enterprises than any government before or since. The Socialists also completed their migration from the factory floor to the faculty club. You might describe Hollande as Dominique Strauss-Kahn with a bit less economic brilliance and a good deal less personal baggage. Hollande is known as a fine *tribunicien*. This is a qualified way of complimenting his oratory. It means he is good at spelling out the party program to those who already agree with it. At Le Bourget on January 22, he gave a barn-burning address that rallied a lot of the party behind him.

But not all of it. Hollande has a problem that will be familiar to those following the U.S. election: He doesn't sufficiently fire up the hard-liners. He is a Gallic Mitt Romney. So comfortable is he in the reasonable-sounding consensus-oriented part of his party that the fire-breathers never take his loyalty for granted. Hollande is constantly having to swear he'll do radical things if anyone ever lets him near real power. So, as with Romney, half the country thinks him dangerous, and the other half thinks him insincere. Having spent the 1980s and 1990s under the tutelage of Jacques Delors, France's leading advocate of transferring powers to the European Union, Hollande may be the party's most dyed-in-the-wool technocrat. He is most comfortable in front of an audience of bankers, like the one in London last month to whom he boasted that "today there are no Communists in France."

Well, there are more than Hollande thinks. And whenever they attack him, he blurts out radical-seeming sound bites that confuse people. Since many on the left of his party oppose the EU "fiscal pact" negotiated two months ago to protect Greece and other debtor countries from bankruptcy, Hollande promised to renegotiate it. A big mistake. His aside infuriated Angela Merkel. Everyone *except* Chancellor Merkel, however, understood that Hollande had no intention of doing any such thing. That is why Sarkozy opened his own campaign with a speech attacking Hollande: "Someone who tells the English press he's a free-marketer and then tells the French that finance is the enemy," Sarkozy said in Annecy in mid-February, "is lying—lying morning, noon, and night—and this lie does no honor to the person who voices it."

One of the big surprises of the campaign has been the strength of hard-left movements within and without the Socialist party. Jean-Luc Mélenchon bolted the party in 2008 to form the Front de Gauche, a movement that resembles the ex-Communist Left party in Germany. One of their ideas is to win back the Communists who defected to the National Front in the 1980s and 1990s. Mélenchon's movement may seem illogical. It vilifies Europe but somehow can't work up the gumption to call for withdrawal from the euro. It seems to believe that the only purpose of a nation-state is to nationalize industries. It extols Hugo Chávez, along with various 19th-century leftists. But about other issues, the Front de Gauche has a clarity that certain people like. One of these is taxation. Its plan is to tax all earnings over 20 times the median income (that is, all earnings over about $500,000) at 100 percent—to confiscate them, in other words. Socialists may snicker at the Front de Gauche as a mere bunch of "angry professors," but new polls show the party bumping up against double digits—and these are all votes that the Socialists see themselves as having lost by being insufficiently socialist.

Last week witnessed one of the strangest moments of the campaign. Hollande was on the television channel TF1, being interviewed about an important question—the ability of rich people to avoid high tax rates by declaring income as capital gains. He was tongue-tied. He began to stammer a bit, and you could almost see him doing math in his head. Then he blurted out that he planned to establish a new 75 percent tax bracket on French people making more than a million euros a month—no, sorry, he corrected himself a few minutes later, a million euros a *year*. Now, it's worth noting that, even at the high-water mark of France's self-proclaimed socialism, taxes never rose as high as those here during the New Deal. The tax Hollande was proposing

would be the highest since the Herriot government was floundering in the aftermath of World War I.

Hollande appeared to be winging it. His top budget adviser, Jérôme Cahuzac, was on another network, France2, just a few minutes later. He told the questioner that he frankly had no idea what tax plan Hollande was talking about. Yet there was method in Hollande's seeming madness. Perhaps he was reading the same polls as U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, who had said days earlier that paying high taxes was the least one could do for the "privilege" of being American. Hollande's way of putting it was: "It's patriotism to accept paying an extra tax to put the country back in order." French people seemed to agree: A TNS Sofres poll released Friday showed 61 percent backed the tax.

HISTOIRE D'O

Sarkozy, then, is not the only candidate being pushed to extremes, but he would be unwise to take too much solace in that. France's president has much in common with our own. Both Sarkozy and Obama come from the ideological wing of their parties, and yet both were able to romance undecided voters in the center of the electorate, winning almost all of them. Sarkozy and Obama are politicians who were nominated in the naïve days of the credit bubble but have had to govern when everyone understands that Voter A's government-funded health plan, let's say, comes directly out of Voter B's paycheck. They are pre-crash politicians trying to get reelected in a post-crash world.

Obama is in a better position. For one thing, Sarko's economic model was based on rewarding work. "Work more to earn more" was his slogan. *Spend less to keep from going under* is more like the way most people have experienced the last half-decade. Obama's campaign did not promise anyone anything about the rewards of work. Sarkozy's second problem is that, unlike President Obama, he has no big, base-rallying achievements. True, Sarkozy's modest raising of the French retirement age, from 60 to 62, was an Augean labor in a country so committed to the welfare state. But it does not win the gratitude of taxpayers in the way that Obama's health plan pleased Democratic true believers. Nor does it provide a piñata to anybody, as the stimulus bill and the automobile bailouts did to labor unions. True, Sarkozy has introduced a rational system for military-base closings, a reform of universities that has left teachers reasonably satisfied, and minimum sentences for certain crimes. He has given voters many good reasons to reelect him. But he has given nobody a *really* good reason. ♦

Mischief in Mali

A model African country confronts subversion—with U.S. help

By Roger Kaplan

Mopti, Bamako

Mali Defense Forces (MDF) backed by attack helicopters made a successful counterthrust against a column of Tuareg rebels assisted, according to Mali military sources, by jihadist fighters over several days in the middle of February, routing them from the approaches of Tessalit, a village in the far north of this embattled West African country that is key to America's strategy for keeping jihadist forces out of black Africa.

The U.S. strategy calls for the drawing of a line in the sand across the Sahel, the region on the southern edge of the Sahara. Mali, vast as California and Texas combined, is critical because Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other bands of violent Salafists have found a circumstantial ally in the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA), which is bent on carving out a nation for the Tuareg, a Berber people native to this region. The proposed new nation would cover much of Mali's Saharan north.

Mali's population is only 14 million, most of which lives along the great Niger River, which flows lazily across the middle of the country, separating the fertile south from the barren north. A breach in the Sahelian line here would immensely complicate the U.S. plan for partnerships with sub-Saharan nations, based on mutual strategic interests and a commitment to free trade and free markets as the framework for the kind of development to which Mali has committed itself for the past 20 years.

Reports of fighting around the garrison town of Tessalit were picked up by journalists in the capital, Bamako, and credited to MDF sources, who indicated the helicopters supporting the Malians were flown by contract pilots from Ukraine. Odd as this unconfirmed detail may sound, it is not untypical in African wars. The MDF, some of whose air force Americans are training, numbers only about 7,000.

If the sources are correct, the Tuareg strategy consisted of encircling Tessalit (population 1,500). But the rebels failed to foresee the strength of the Malian Army's counterattack, lulled perhaps by the somewhat passive reaction of Mali's leaders when the rebellion broke out in mid-January. The MDF garrison, according to its own spokesmen, withdrew after the initial Tuareg assault but regrouped under two officers with reputations for aggressive combat leadership, Col.-Major Alhaji Ag Gamou and Col. Abidine Guindo. On the last weekend in February they claimed control of most of Tessalit after inflicting severe losses on the rebels, whose spokesmen counterclaimed they made an orderly retreat with men and vehicles. The Mali paratroops picked up reinforcements near Gao and, crucially, assurances from the government that there would be no appeasement of armed sedition—a sore point among many officers.

The action in Tessalit brings some bitter respite after a string of bad news, in particular evidence of the massacre in late January of nearly 100 disarmed soldiers in the garrison town of Aguelhoc, slaughtered in a mass atrocity that bears the imprint of armed Islamism. By the third week of February, the rebellion's raiders had reached villages near Mopti, a town of strategic and economic importance hundreds of miles south of the areas claimed by the MNLA.

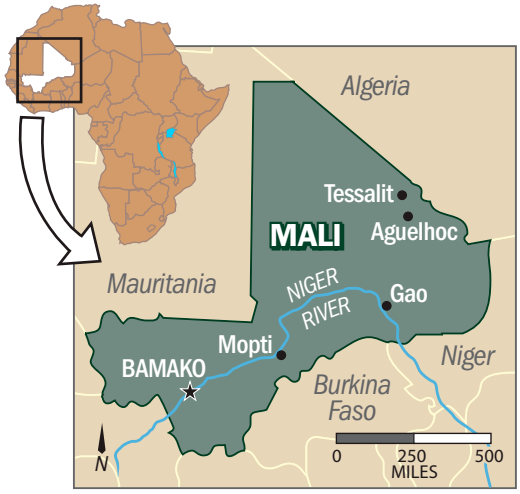
Whether there really is a Tuareg national movement, or the MNLA and other militant bands represent only themselves or their tribes, is difficult to ascertain absent normal political life. Northern Mali has been the scene of Tuareg rebellions since independence from France in 1960. The Tuareg, who number about half a million in Mali (and as many elsewhere, mainly in Algeria and Niger), include many who are perfectly well integrated into the social, economic, and official life of the country (including its army). Nevertheless, they sometimes claim neglect and abandonment as the source of their discontent, though there is no evidence their leaders could rally a majority for an independent state. Liberation movements, of course, are rarely concerned with political majorities. Their detractors accuse them of ignoring the issue of democratic representation, preferring to work on the principle that if they can keep raising demands—which in the case of the Tuareg could affect Mauritania, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad—they may eventually succeed in imposing an agenda that no majority voted for.

Indeed, there is no mistaking the international dimension of the Tuareg question. They are a nomadic people who were left on the sidelines of history when the end of the colonial period created borders that made no sense to them. Mali's foreign minister was in Algiers almost as soon as the

Roger Kaplan, a longtime contributor, was embedded with the 369th Sustainment Brigade, New York National Guard.

crisis began in January, seeking a way to jump-start Algeria's longstanding mediation efforts. The president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Campaore, met with Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré and called for "dialogue." Touré is all for it, but the MNLA has said it will talk only about secession.

While Mali hardliners claim the popular "President ATT" encouraged the rebellion through years of neglect of the army's fighting mission and an inability to focus on security in the north, the Tuareg rebels claim that talk is cheap, as the experience of failed peace accords (the most recent one signed in 2008) and broken truces over the past 50 years shows. If they cannot get what they feel they need for the well-being of their region, they say, they prefer to keep fighting. But southerners respond that sponging off the south is cheap too, and happens to be the usual m.o. of the Tuareg. "They are either sponging or stealing, when they are not killing," one told me. "But you will never see them working."



This view surely reflects the intensity of the current crisis. Malians, in fact, have evolved a remarkably consensual and laid-back attitude toward the multitribalism that characterizes their country (like others in the region). The anger directed at the Tuareg has a certain tribal or even racial basis that it would be vain to blame on one side or another, but in the current context it reflects disappointment more than hatred. Even severe critics of President ATT give him credit for promoting a united Mali and not playing the tribal card, just as he rejected the single-party card of previous postcolonial regimes and insisted that pluralistic democracy, however flawed, was a basic requirement for progress. Progress, however, comes slowly. Most Malians do not vote in elections and live on scarcely a dollar a day. USAID is building the country's first highway linking north and south. In the north, where poverty is most acute, leaders of the Songh ai group have said change is inhibited by Tuareg banditry. Indeed, during the 1990s the Songhai organized their own self-defense militias; these evolved into improvement associations during the years of democratic opening promoted by Touré, and they are at present among the main supporters of hardliners in the army.

The Tuareg, however, are much set upon and much maligned. In common with other Saharan tribes, they have a bad rap as a result of historical circumstances they never made. They have beautiful music—introduced to many Americans through the success of the Tuareg ensemble Tinariwen at this year's Grammy Awards—an admirably spare cuisine, astonishing resilience in a harsh environment, and, pertinent to the present context, one of the most intensely tribal cultures in the world.

The significance of this characteristic is that it underscores the need for caution in referring to a "Tuareg problem." Many Malians deny there is such a thing, pointing to the perfectly successful integration of Tuareg in areas outside the Sahara. They say rather that small numbers of militants have a problem, and some observers note that the militants come repeatedly from the same tribes, who usually have no more love for neighboring Tuareg tribes (or such nomadic Saharans as the Sahrawis of the desert's far west, themselves involved in a decades-old dispute over territory with Morocco) than they have for other Malian groups.

The other regional presidents play their own parts. The strategy of Mauritania's Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz is regarded with suspicion in Bamako. A proponent of a hard line against the jihadist bands from AQIM and other remnants of Algeria's 1990s civil war, Abdelaziz is thought by leaders of Mali's southern groups (who distrust him as a "white Moor") to want to use the Tuareg against the jihadists. But Malian hardliners disagree, deeming both Tuareg and jihadists little more than criminal bands specialized in kidnapping and drug-running.

The Moroccans' hard line toward the Sahrawis, and the Algerians' contrasting support for their demand for a referendum on their status, show how difficult it is to forge a political consensus on the Sahara.

Mahamadou Issoufou, the president of Niger, to the east, argues that Touré's current problem stems from failing to enforce a zero-tolerance policy toward the Tuareg returning from the Libyan civil war last year with huge stocks of advanced weapons. Many Malians share this view, though obviously it benefits from hindsight. Quite a few Tuareg served in the Libyan Army for many years (rising in the ranks and adopting Libyan citizenship), while others were brought in to defend the regime from the insurrection in Benghazi, which was supported by a truncated NATO led by France and largely supplied in munitions and tactical intelligence by the United States.

Issoufou warned early on that the unintended consequences of the Libyan crisis would include the seizure of power in Benghazi and Tripoli by Islamist extremists. But he also foresaw what he called the "Somalization" of the country: a complete breakdown of central authority that would

facilitate the scattering of well-equipped fighters toward the points south and west whence they had originated. Niger itself fought off an intense Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s. Its policy toward returning "Libyans" was to disarm them when they approached their homes in Niger, while offering programs to assimilate them into either the armed forces or civilian life. Thus far this seems to have paid off.

Implicitly, Issoufou deplored Touré's laissez-faire approach of letting the "Libyan" Tuareg make their way back to Mali without interference, despite the almost perennial history of Tuareg armed militancy. No less implicit is Issoufou's criticism of the Western powers that intervened in the Libyan affair apparently with no concern for its possible perverse consequences. This is all the more ironic as the United States has been building, painstakingly, something like a containment policy in the Sahel to try to avert the opening of a new jihadist front there.

A recent mission pursuant to this policy, planned and led by the 369th Sustainment Brigade with help from other U.S. Army and National Guard units and the Air Force's 19th Airlift Wing, arrived in Mali shortly after the outbreak of the Tuareg offensive. While that was entirely coincidental from the American perspective—the exercise was planned long in advance and fits into a multiyear program—from the MNLA and AQIM angle it represented an opportunity to preempt an agenda based on compromise and democracy.

It certainly had the effect of spoiling the broad consensus in Mali to let Touré finish his presidency calmly, put through some constitutional changes strengthening the executive (and the judiciary), and watch a smooth transition after a free and fair election. Even Touré's most loyal opposition, in the person of former prime minister Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, quickly broke ranks, stating in early February that the security situation in the north was being neglected—along with everything else, he added. This took a certain chutzpah, coming from a pillar of Mali's political establishment in the past 20 years. He is his party's candidate for president, however, and politics brings out this sort of thing in politicians. But there have been criticisms all along that ATT is overly mindful of getting high marks from the EU, the State Department, and the IMF.

The prescriptions of Western globalists, inevitably, are viewed with less satisfaction in the Malian countryside than they are in Washington and Brussels. Mali's cotton growers, for example—the country is Africa's leading cotton producer—ask why they should play by free trade rules and put up with expensive credit to satisfy accountants in air-conditioned buildings on the other side of the globe when America and Europe continue to subsidize their agribusinesses.

All this seems far away from massacres and bloody counterattacks (the Malian Army claimed 100 rebels killed in Tessalit), but it provides a hint of the patience that will be required of Americans in our African strategy. Africa's calamities and contradictions provide innumerable opportunities for mischief because they cause so many distractions. As President Issoufou himself pointed out, a few weeks of fighting in Mali are threatening his country with a humanitarian crisis, as refugees for whom he has no resources flee the trouble next door. The fighting has produced 130,000 refugees by the last count, who find themselves in Mauritania and Niger, as well as internally displaced in Mali. This comes on top of the burden of Nigeriens returning home from a Libya that no longer wants them. There will be no more remittances from them, but there may well be demands. All this at a time when the Sahel faces a water crisis requiring huge expenditures it cannot afford.

The most principled Malian opposition to the ATT administration, the leftist SADI (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence), was quick to condemn the rebellion, while demanding greater social investment. SADI accused the government's security police of using the emergency as an excuse to harass its leadership. But, desirable as social investments may be, it is not true that the "root causes" of political violence—that of the Tuareg or AQIM or any other group—lie in social or economic conditions. The root causes of violence are violent men, and when they receive the manna of vast arsenals of modern weaponry, at least in part as a result of the poorly conceived strategies of a smart-but-stupid French president feckless enough to launch a war on the basis of a phone call from a bored man-of-letters with T.E. Lawrence fantasies, they produce political violence. Malians welcome our help; after all they have put up with from the French, they certainly are happy to find Western friends who are neither condescending nor cruel.

The blue men of the desert, as the Tuareg are sometimes called, may try another hit-and-run campaign, or they may retreat to their hiding places in the Ifoghas Adrar mountains above Tessalit, or wander away altogether—for a while. In the last days of February, both sides brought fresh troops to the village, whose control may be as much symbolic as strategic at this point. There is surely much the United States can do to help the Sahelians, but the first rule to be applied is caution. What strikes the Malians as most remarkable about their encounter with the 369th Brigade and the other American units they have met (and more will follow) is the mutual respect cultivated—indeed demanded—on the American side. We come and we see, but we have no intention of conquering. An American special operations team—or a Malian one—may sooner or later find itself with the feared Iyad Ag Ghaly, the man blamed for forging the tactical alliance between the MNLA and AQIM, in its crosshairs, and that will be what he himself asked for. But the long line in the sand will still need watching, and that can only be done by the Malians themselves and their neighbors. ♦

Ordinarily people are very proud of what they believe is their intelligence. Those same persons would be shocked and perhaps made angry to be told that intelligence is not a personal attribute. Rather, intelligence is a component of every element of reality. Thus, intelligence is the property of creation—not of mankind!

For example, the intelligence that people lay claim to is an attribute of creation in the laws of nature. Who are we to express pride? Those created laws are autonomous and self-enforcing. When obeyed, their obviously intelligent action is expressed through the obedient person but is not part of him/her.

Each natural law is specific in its purpose and function, but when contradicted or plagiarized, penalties result. That explains why there are so many conflicts and other kinds of trouble-inviting situations among people and nations everywhere.

It is helpful to realize that people were created to express the will of the creator. But people mistakenly arrogate to themselves the credit for discovery of those laws as if their identification of them were somehow a personal achievement.

On the opposite end of *that* mistake, it is people's popular attitude to access blame on other factors rather than on themselves for most wrong results.

The first scriptural recounting of the relationship between the creator and the created illustrates the mistaken act of the created. Contradicting the creator's will caused the created harsh penalties and subsequent banishment.

In a certain sense, people have been wandering in the wilderness of their own making ever since, not understanding the pattern of their defection from the will of the creator to their self-will.

A mistake that is rectified in the "twinkling of an eye" as our behavior yields to the creator's will. And what is the creator's will? That insight was given to Richard W. Wetherill several decades ago in the form of a natural law. ***The law requires mankind's behavior to be rational and honest*** to conform to the will of the creator of natural laws.

Wetherill called it the ***law of absolute right***—absolute as all natural laws have a specific right function in the creator's plan for rescuing the deluded human race.

Persons who are obedient to the behavioral law are learning the fine art of right action. When wrong results develop, they do not place blame elsewhere. They know it is their deviations from right action that cause their wrong results, and they change. ***They are not perfect.*** They reason from a ***perfect system***, giving them a life of fulfillment and well-being.

We have seen that living in accord with self-will results in warfare, economic disasters, political mayhem, rioting groups, and fear for what the future might hold.

Situations are made right as people devote their attention to letting the intelligence of the creator's behavioral law express itself through them. Most important, they now understand that letting the created behavioral law motivate them is returning the creator's pristine will to the present population on planet Earth.

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

Patrick Stewart as Shakespeare, Richard McCabe as Ben Jonson, in Edward Bond's 'Bingo' (2012)

In Shakespeare's Shadow

A splendid life of rare Ben Jonson. BY EDWARD SHORT

On the cover of Ian Donaldson's new biography of Ben Jonson (1572-1637) there is a portrait of the poet and dramatist by the Flemish painter Abraham van Blyenberch showing him regarding the viewer with amused intentness, as if poised to make some choice rejoinder. Here is the man of the theater, the bon vivant, the exuberant conversationalist whose table talk William Drummond recorded with such zest. Here is also the controversialist, who delighted in taking courtiers to task as much as fellow wits, and paid for his barbs by being sent to prison again and again for sedition and disorderliness. Indeed, he was even locked up for manslaughter after killing a man in a sword fight.

Edward Short is the author of Newman and his Contemporaries.

Ben Jonson
A Life
by Ian Donaldson
Oxford, 512 pp., $39.95

But there is another portrait in this generously illustrated book, an engraving by Robert Vaughan showing Jonson looking disconsolate and world-weary. Here we see more of the private Jonson, the scholar, the convert, the affectionate father, the disappointed husband, the meditative, vulnerable, rueful man whose lyrics, epitaphs, odes, and epistles place him among our finest poets. In this magisterial biography, Donaldson does justice to all aspects of this fascinating figure.

Born in London in 1572, he was the son of a poor clergyman, probably from Carlisle, who died before Jonson was born, after losing his estate in the reign of Mary Tudor. When Jonson was still a child, his mother remarried a bricklayer. At Westminster School he studied under the famous headmaster William Camden, who gave him not only his lifelong love of Terence, Plautus, Horace, and Virgil but his passion for long-distance walking. Camden set his charges to write out their verses in prose before casting them in meter, which would become Jonson's accustomed practice. George Herbert, Henry King, Abraham Cowley, and John Dryden all studied at Westminster after Camden left his legacy.

It is also from Camden that Jonson learned another useful lesson: "ready writing makes not good writing."

After returning from St. John's College, Cambridge, where he purportedly could not afford the fees, Jonson had no alternative but to enter the bricklaying trade, to which he would

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be periodically forced to return even after he had found success on the stage. Indeed, he could often be heard on building sites regaling his fellow laborers with swaths of Homer. However, in the 1590s, he left the trade to become a soldier in the Low Countries where, as he told Drummond, he "had, in the face of both camps, killed an enemy and taken *opima spolia* from him." Once returned to civilian life, Jonson "betook himself to his wonted studies," though the wolves were never far from the door. Early and late, poverty was one of his great themes. In "Epistle Mendicant," addressed to the Lord Treasurer, he describes himself as a besieged city awaiting royal rescue.

Disease, the enemy, and his engineers
Want, and the rest of his concealed compeers,
Have cast a trench about me, now, five years;

And made those strong approaches, by faussebraies,
Redoubts, half-moons, horn-works, and such close ways,
The muse not peeps out one of hundred days;

But lies blocked up, and straitened, narrowed in,
Fixed to the bed and boards, unlike to win
Health, or scarce breath, as she hath never been,

Unless some saving honour of the crown
Dare think it, to relieve, no less renown
A bed-rid wit than a besiegèd town.

In his commonplace book, *Discoveries*, Jonson went further and insisted that "no great work, or worthy of praise, or memory, but came out of poor cradles. It was the ancient poverty that founded Commonwealths, built Cities, invented Arts; made wholesome Laws; armed men against vices; rewarded them with their own virtues; and preserved the honour, and state of Nations, till they betrayed themselves to Riches." Jonson captured the betrayal of his own generation in this regard in his "Epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland," in which he speaks of the power of money at court:

. . . whiles it gains the voice
Of some grand peer, whose air doth make rejoice
The fool that gave it; who will want, and weep,
When his proud patron's favours are asleep;
While thus it buys great grace, and hunts poor fame;
Runs between man and man; 'tween dame and dame;
Solders cracked friendship; makes love last a day;
Or perhaps less: whilst gold bears all this sway
I, that have none (to send you), send you verse.

Sometime after his return to London in 1592, Jonson entered the theater,

The van Blyenberch portrait

where he would write *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), *Every Man out of His Humour* (1599), *Sejanus* (1603), *Volpone* (1606), *The Alchemist* (1610), *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616), and *Staple of News* (1626), among others which have not survived. The last is a satire on the first stirrings of what would become journalism, which Jonson assessed with prescient wit, speaking of it as "the House of Fame":

Where both the curious and the negligent,
The scrupulous and careless, wild and staid,
The idle and laborious, all do meet
To taste the cornupcopiae of her rumours
Which she, the mother of sport, pleaseth to scatter
Among the vulgar. Baits, sir, for the people!
And they will bite like fishes.

As a result of his lost play, *The Isle of Dogs* (1597), Jonson was imprisoned. A year later, he was nearly sent to the gallows for killing a man. In jail, he converted to Roman Catholicism after meeting with a Jesuit. In 1610, after 12 years as a papist, he rejoined the Church of England, though Drummond characterized his friend as "For any religion, as being versed in both."

In 1594, Jonson married Anne Lewis, whom he described to Drummond with acerb succinctness as "a shrew yet honest." In 1603, Jonson lost his son Benjamin, which inspired some of his most moving lines: *Rest in soft peace, and, asked, say here doth lie / Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry*. In 1633, when his good friend and patroness Venetia Digby was found dead of a cerebral hemorrhage, Jonson confessed, *Twere time that I died too now that she is dead / Who was my muse, and life of all I said*. Here is his usual eloquent economy combined with deep personal feeling that made Jonson so beloved of later poets, from Herrick and Dryden to Coleridge and Swinburne.

Then, again, no other English poet mines classical models as sedulously or as inventively. Tradition was never a set of oppressive precedents for him but a summons to rethink the past in terms of the present, and vice versa. This was the aspect of Jonson that made him so congenial not only to Eliot but Joyce, who read Jonson very closely. The author of *Ulysses* (1922), after all, used classical scaffolding to rear his vision of Edwardian Dublin in much the same way that Jonson used such scaffolding to rear his vision of Jacobean London, especially in *Sejanus*.

Eliot saw this before Joyce published *Ulysses* when he observed how "in order to enjoy [Jonson] at all, we must get to the centre of his work and . . . see him unbiased by time, as a contemporary. And to see him as a contemporary does not so much require the power of putting ourselves into seventeenth-century London as it requires the power of setting Jonson in our London"—or our Washington, as the case may be. Certainly, when we read *Volpone* in light of the dishonor that characterizes so much of our own

age, it is not difficult to see the playwright as a very trenchant contemporary indeed, especially when he has Corvino exclaim, *Honour? tut, a breath / There's no such thing in nature; a mere term / Invented to awe fools.*

Speaking of Jonson's career as a whole, Swinburne was full of admiration: "There is something heroic and magnificent in his lifelong dedication of all his gifts and all his powers to the service of the art he had elected as the business of all his life and the aim of all his aspiration." Proof of this is in the work itself. However, despite its range and power, it has not always been given the due it deserves.

Indeed, if after the death of Shakespeare, whom Jonson confessed to admiring "this side idolatry," there was no poet in England who enjoyed greater esteem than Jonson, after his own death in 1637 his reputation began to decline. The 18th century found Jonson a sort of bungling Waller and the 19th only read him to compare him unfavorably with Shakespeare. It was not until Yeats, Pound, and Eliot paid him mind that he and his work began to receive renewed critical attention. Hugh Kenner added to this belated acclaim when he wrote of how Jonson

> attached himself to a company of actors, began writing plays, got into trouble more than once with the law, even carried to his grave the hangman's brand on his thumb; but never amid the twistings and turnings of a merely picturesque existence lost sight of his self-imposed obligation to reform the English stage according to the best models, and simultaneously to establish in his own person, the dignity of the profession of letters.

The new seven-volume edition of Jonson's works that Cambridge University Press is publishing (of which Donaldson is an editor) will give this dignity a proper showcase.

In June 1618, at the peak of his success, Jonson set out on a "foot voyage" from London to Scotland on the Great North Road, arriving in Edinburgh in late August. He intended to fashion a first-rate travelogue out of these heroic peregrinations, but his draft was lost when his house burned down in 1623. Nevertheless, it was in Scotland that he met the bibliophile Drummond, who left behind the fullest record of Jonson's life, even though Drummond appears to have skewered the record.

In this sense the Scottish Drummond was not unlike the Scottish Boswell in coloring his subject's prejudices to suit his own. For example, Jonson's great regard for Shakespeare was not one Drummond shared. After all, as Donaldson points out, when Jonson wrote of Shakespeare, "He was not of an age, but for all time," he was not reaffirming "an uncontested truth" but venturing "a bold prediction." Drummond may have attributed to Jonson so many slighting references to Shakespeare to try to qualify a prediction that he found unwarrantable.

From Donaldson's scrupulous labors, Jonson emerges as witty and urbane, gregarious, combative, sworn to eternal truth without ever being unaware of the feverish fashions of his age, humorously self-effacing, and yet coolly proud. Both of the latter qualities are evident in a poem Jonson wrote on writer's block, brought on by a few too many glasses of wine, which he addressed to one of his friends:

> *Would God, my Burges, I could think*
> *Thoughts worthy of this gift, your ink,*
> *Then would I promise here to give*
> *Verse that should thee and me outlive,*
> *But since the wine hath steeped my brain,*
> *I only can the paper stain;*
> *Yet with a dye, that fears no moth,*
> *But scarlet-like outlasts the cloth.*

Although James I granted Jonson a royal pension in 1616—the writer called himself "the King's Poet"—Jonson was not overly impressed by the honor, referring to the position as "A kind of Christmas engine: one that is used, at least once a year, for a trifling instrument of wit." That he also declined a knighthood won him the everlasting respect of Robert Graves, who commended the great poet for referring to titles as "birdlime for fools" and poetry as "The Queen of Arts, which had her original from Heaven." Ian Donaldson has written a splendid life of this extraordinary man, which all claimants to the "tribe of Ben" will savor and prize. ♦

B&A

TR in Brief

A quick introduction to the indomitable Roosevelt.

BY KEVIN R. KOSAR

Theodore Roosevelt
by Lewis L. Gould
Oxford, 104 pp., $12.95

Two Christmases ago I received Ron Chernow's *Washington: A Life*. I felt both delight and angst. I find our first president endlessly fascinating, and I have enjoyed previous Chernow books. But it is more than 900 pages long; when would I have the time to read it? It sits on a shelf above my desk with many other thick, uncracked tomes, such as David Cannadine's 800-page *Mellon: An American Life*. Collectively, these books form the *Ulysses* portion of my library, thousands of pages of an aspirational monument that silently rebukes me. I leaven my guilt by telling myself that, one fine day when my children are older and less needy

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of me, I will tackle these books, every last one of them.

The arrival of Lewis L. Gould's *Theodore Roosevelt* provides a temporary buck-up. I tore through it in a few hours and felt slightly less negligent. Oxford, certainly, is not the first publisher to peddle short presidential biographies: Burton Doyle and Homer Swaney's short *Lives of James A. Garfield and Chester A. Arthur* came out in 1881. More recently, Holt's Times Books has been pumping out succinct, 200-page texts, with mixed success: John Patrick Diggins's *John Adams* is very good; Kevin Phillips's *William McKinley* is egregious.

But Oxford seems to have upped the ante with this volume. *Theodore Roosevelt* is a mere 104 pages, and 13 of those pages are endnotes. Call it a microbiography, perhaps designed to appeal to the short attention spans of the Internet age. Gould gives readers cradle-to-grave coverage of the man who became our 26th president. He uses the theme of fame as the prism for viewing Roosevelt's life, and this works well, as TR spent his adult life drawing the public eye.

Roosevelt was born to privilege on October 27, 1858, in Manhattan. His mother was Martha Bulloch, a Southern belle descended from Archibald Bulloch, a Revolutionary War officer and third governor of Georgia. His father, Theodore Sr., was a glass importer and philanthropist who devoted much time and wealth to aiding the poor children of New York. Theodore Jr. rejected the staid, George Apley, blueblood life. He was pugnacious and outspoken. Gould quotes Roosevelt's Harvard geology professor as chiding him, "Now look here, Roosevelt, let me talk. I'm running this course." Nor was Roosevelt loath to extol his achievements. "I think I have been the best Governor within my time," he said after two years' service, "better than either [Grover] Cleveland or [Samuel] Tilden."

Theodore's self-assuredness helped him buck the old system wherein young politicos slowly rose in power by supporting party leaders. Roosevelt had not the patience for that. His genius, Gould notes, "lay in grasping that fame and celebrity could enable him to leap up the political ladder." Roosevelt proceeded from Harvard (class of 1880) to the New York state legislature (1881), the U.S. Civil Service Commission (1888), the New York City Police Commission (1895), the United States Navy (1897), the New York governorship (1898), the vice presidency (1901), and the presidency (1901). Along the way he wrote books, spent time ranching (not especially successfully), and dashed off articles that extolled his view of the "strenuous life."

Roosevelt's genius for fame ultimately devoured him. After he left office in 1909 he proved incapable of abandoning the limelight. He embarked on extended hunting/scientific expeditions to Africa and South America, toured Europe, and then publicly railed against his two successors, William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson, and ran for an unprecedented third term. As a Progressive ("Bull Moose") candidate he drank deeply from the cup of populism, advocating a national living wage and referenda on judicial decisions, and in his 1912 campaign sounded like the evangelical William Jennings Bryan when he proclaimed, "Our cause is based on the eternal principle of righteousness. . . . [W]e stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord."

Theodore Roosevelt bags his party's symbol, 1909

Gould's use of the prism of fame highlights Roosevelt's transformation of the presidency. He seized upon the nascent communications technologies of his time to mobilize public support for his positions. Reporters who wrote supportive articles retained access to him; those who criticized him were shut out. He was wildly popular with the public and drew often-frenetic crowds who cheered his rambunctious oratory. Like other modern presidents, Roosevelt read Article II of the Constitution broadly, and, when he could not cow the Congress, drew upon the inherent executive authorities he divined to compel government action.

Gould's thumbnail portrait well serves the casual reader, but his brevity can be befuddling. Roosevelt the man comes off as one-dimensional, a vainglorious dilettante, which he was not. We read about Roosevelt's peacemaking in the Russo-Japanese War, which earned him a Nobel Peace Prize; but why those two nations fought goes unmentioned. We learn about the application of a new foreign policy doctrine to the Dominican Republic, but what that means is not explicated.

For a more substantial biography the reader might usefully turn to Gould's 350-page *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt*, or, more usefully, to Edmund Morris's 2,500-page trilogy, which comprises *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, *Theodore Rex*, and *Colonel Roosevelt*. And which, in fact, I *have* read. ♦

B&A

Purpose in Life

The glorious burden of a Down syndrome child.

BY PETER WEHNER

The fear many soon-to-be parents face is the question, "What if?" What if my child is born with a learning disability? What if my hopes for having a "normal" child are shattered? What if I find I can't love my special needs child as I should? And what if my marriage and faith are broken by the stress and strain of caring for a child with severe learning disabilities?

A Good and Perfect Gift
Faith, Expectations, and a Little Girl Named Penny
by Amy Julia Becker
Bethany House, 237 pp., $14.99

For Amy Julia Becker, "What if?" quickly turned to "What now?" She was a 28-year-old woman who, immediately after the birth of her daughter Penelope, was told that her child had Down syndrome. At that moment, "the world began to break into pieces, as if I had been looking at a scene through a plate-glass window that suddenly cracked, jagged lines distorting my vision."

The rest of this beautifully written, emotionally powerful narrative is about Becker and her husband, Peter, trying to put the pieces back together, to rethink almost every assumption they had, and to replace one vision of life with another.

A Good and Perfect Gift focuses on the first two years of Becker's life with a Down syndrome child. Her account of those years is honest and introspective as she chronicles her emotions, which drift from fear and grief to sadness and uncertainty to anger. At the core of her struggles were unmet expectations: It's not as though Becker didn't love her child; it's that this emotion was twinned with sorrow, "sorrow that you are not who I thought you would be," as Becker wrote in her journal shortly after Penny was born. Sorrow that so many of the hopes she had for her child would be beyond Penny's reach. Sorrow that her life was going to be so much harder than it is for most mothers. Sorrow that she didn't get the baby she thought she deserved.

It didn't help that several of Becker's friends and acquaintances, in their effort to be helpful, inflicted inadvertent wounds. "Everywhere we turned," she writes, "I found people with marvelous intentions and misplaced compassion." Some tended to downplay the hard part and overemphasize the good; others portrayed Penny as either a rebuke or a reward from God; and still others referred to Penny as Becker's "cross to bear."

Then there are the encounters with physicians, genetic counselors, prenatal screeners, and even biology teachers, many of whom have embraced certain cultural assumptions about children with special needs. They are viewed not as gifts but as burdens, not children to love but mistakes who should be eliminated, with abortion the most efficient means. That was very rarely the direct message that was sent, but it was the indirect message that was conveyed in a dozen different ways. Becker and her husband, when contemplating having another child, came face to face with a culture that believes children with disabilities are not worth bringing into this world. It's little wonder that women who receive a prenatal diagnosis of trisomy 21 terminate their pregnancies the vast majority of the time. The Beckers didn't buy into the cultural presumption that certain children are more worthy of life than others, and now have three children. Only Penny has Down syndrome.

The reason Becker and her husband didn't embrace the assumptions of our modern culture has to do with viewing life through the lens of their faith. Both were devoted Christians when Penny was born: Peter, even-keeled and optimistic, never really wrestled with theological questions surrounding Down syndrome; he just loved Penny. "Two days after our return from the hospital," Becker writes, "Peter finished grieving and walked outside and never looked back." Becker, however, wondered whether God was trustworthy: She argued with Him, struggling to see God's presence in the midst of raising a Down syndrome child. Yet she never lost her faith, and could never escape it. It was the only lens through which she could interpret the world.

One of Becker's closest friends, upon learning the news about Penny's Down syndrome, was upset. But she relayed that when she was praying for Becker, the words of Jesus came to her mind: "Whoever receives this child, receives Me." At first those words haunted Becker; but over the course of two years, they gradually reassured her. What she learned is that what God values is often profoundly at odds with what we prize. We place tremendous importance on intellect, on outward beauty, on physical excellence. We admire people who can speak well, who dazzle us with their erudition, or their wealth, or their awards. And while those things are not unimportant in and of themselves,

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Becker discovers that they are not nearly as important as we think.

> Can [Penny] live a full life without ever solving a quadratic equation? Without reading Dostoyevsky? I'm pretty sure she can. Can I live a full life without learning to cherish and welcome those in this world who are different from me? I'm pretty sure I can't.

What Becker also came to understand, amidst the pain and through grace, is that there is purpose in Penny's life simply as she is and who she is—God's child, His gift, an instrument of mercy and illumination. Her extra chromosome is not only associated with delays and impairments but also sweetness, joy, wonder, patience, and love.

Shortly after the birth, Becker was speaking with her mother about how she should think about Down syndrome in terms of God. Is it a manifestation of sin in the world? Her mother responds: "The only evidence of sin that I see in Penny's birth is in how we respond to her." Becker writes that it was as if she had been looking through a kaleidoscope, and it turned a notch: "All the same pieces and parts, the same colors even, but a totally new pattern. A new way of seeing."

In the West we have succeeded in domesticating the Jesus of the New Testament. We have fit His ways into our ways, rather than vice versa. And so the person who told us that the last shall be first, that His strength is perfected in weakness, that the poor in spirit are blessed, and that it is the meek who shall inherit the earth, has been housebroken and diluted, made safe and reassuring, a ratifier of our cultural presuppositions and old patterns.

And yet sometimes, if we are lucky, we encounter people in our lives who remind us how fundamentally different truth is from the shadows we take to be real. They might even point out to us, in their particular way, that a God who took on the nature of a servant and became obedient even unto death might also consider a child with Down syndrome to be of inestimable worth. ♦

B&A

Huston Chronicle

The man who filmed the stuff that dreams are made of.

BY ALGIS VALIUNAS

John Huston (1906-1987) had the talent and the courage to live as he pleased. Who would not wish to be able to say the same for himself? Who does not feel diminished beside someone who has done as much? Yet one can live as he pleases and still fall well short of the life he might have lived if he had demanded the very best of his talent and courage. In his milieu, where success means winning some of the world's most coveted prizes, Huston was a monumental figure: perhaps the greatest film director to come out of Hollywood. And he enjoyed the virile roistering natural to a man of his temperament, and which fame, wealth, power, and the superabundance of willing beauties in the movie business made virtually compulsory, and on a titanic scale.

John Huston
Courage and Art
by Jeffrey Meyers
Crown Archetype, 496 pp., $30

Isn't this the role an ordinary man would imagine for himself if only he could be born again in a bold and gifted incarnation? It sure sounds sweet to have been John Huston. Was it really as sweet as it sounds? This vivid and rousing new biography by the ceaselessly prolific Jeffrey Meyers raises the question of whether the enviable and the admirable are two different things.

John Marcellus Huston, the only child of Walter Huston and his wife Rhea, was born in the small town of Nevada, Missouri. The family settled in Texas soon afterward, but not for long. Walter itched to resume his premarital life as an itinerant actor and Rhea stormed out for good after four years of marriage to the man she considered an utter failure. For years Walter Huston *was* a failure, marrying again and forming a vaudeville act with a crass and pretentious woman whom he would divorce. But then success as a serious stage actor, friendships with Eugene O'Neill and Sinclair Lewis, and steady work in the new talking pictures changed his life. After years of wandering from one newspaper job to another, Rhea too struck it rich, marrying a vice president of the Northern Pacific Railroad. The stodginess of the high life in St. Paul, Minnesota, bored her, however, and she left her second husband two years later.

John hardly saw his father until he turned 18. He adored his mother one moment yet could barely stand her the next. In his 1980 autobiography he remembered her as "dominating, demeaning, hysterical, overbearing, proud, protective. She was an adventuress, a gambler, a horsewoman, hardened by convent training, embittered by an alcoholic father, unlucky in love, frustrated in her dream of being more than a sob-sister feature writer for newspapers." Jeffrey Meyers observes, "John never experienced a normal family life and had no stability as a child." The biographer does not hammer the point home, but it is clear that the disorderly roving Huston knew as a boy he would duplicate as a man.

Doctors erroneously pronounced a death sentence on the boy when he was 11: The diagnosis was an enlarged heart and failing kidneys, and the prescription (which would only delay slightly the inevitable early end) was a starvation diet, complete bed rest, and a move from Minnesota to Arizona. Two years

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of this desperate regimen proved more than he could tolerate: John slipped out of the house one night and dove into a nearby canal, where the current pouring through open floodgates sucked him under and nearly finished him off. Survival was so exhilarating he would go back for more and more.

This daredevil hydrotherapy helped cure whatever ailed him. His heart and kidneys would be fine the rest of his life, and the thrill of danger became a driving force. The boredom he suffered as an invalid would always haunt him, and perpetual excitement in heavy dosage was the only known antidote: "The trouble with me is that I am forever and eternally bored. . . . If I'm threatened with boredom, why I'll run like a hare."

School bored him. Although he would rate, in Hollywood, as an intellectual, he dropped out of high school at 15; as Meyers notes, his formal education roughly equaled Marilyn Monroe's, but he would read three or four books a week all his life. Boxing excited him. He took it up to recover his strength after the ordeal of doing nothing, and developed into a crackerjack amateur, going 23-2 and winning the California lightweight belt with no worse than a broken nose to show for it. Drawing and painting excited him even more. He honed a real talent and aspired to be remarkable.

Invited to New York by his father in 1924, John tried on Greenwich Village for size, and liked the rough-and-tumble combination of art and sport that no place else could rival. Acting swam in the blood, and there was no harm in trying: Cape Cod's Provincetown Playhouse, where O'Neill was the reigning master, became the site of Huston's stage debut in a dreary one-act based on a Sherwood Anderson short story.

After mastoid surgery laid John low, his father gave him $500 to recover in Mexico and he wound up an honorary lieutenant in the Mexican cavalry as an equestrian competitor. The yearlong interlude was not exactly warlike but furnished danger enough to keep Huston amused:

> Always going places in Packards. You'd go the rounds of the cafés. Then you'd go to somebody's *finca*. Then you'd play the next thing to Russian roulette. You'd cock a pistol and throw it up and hit the ceiling with it. It was great. Just great. I was their top jumping rider.

Marriage followed his return to Los Angeles—wives and lovers will get more detailed treatment shortly—and the couple promptly headed for Greenwich Village. Huston painted, boxed, and wrote, both fish-wrap journalism and upper-middlebrow art for would-be hard guys. Two boxing stories of his made the rounds from his father to Ring Lardner to H.L. Mencken, who published them in the *American Mercury*. A prestigious publisher paid him handsomely for a marionette play, *Frankie and Johnny*.

The next year, John tailed Walter to Hollywood. The son started out contributing dialogue to movies starring the father, and soon caught on as a screenwriting regular. But his marriage fell apart, he took to heavy drinking, got into two drunken car wrecks, and then killed a woman with his car—through no fault of his own. John took heat from the press, and Walter lined up a short-term screenwriting contract for him in London so that things could cool off. When the job ended, John was reduced to singing for his supper in the streets. A providential score in the Irish Sweepstakes and a screenplay sale brought in enough money that he could take off for Paris and a shot at serious painting. This time he realized for certain that he did *not* have the talent to win distinction as an artist.

But he needed to distinguish himself, somehow, and he would do that in Hollywood. After working on several screenplays between 1938 and 1941, he bulled his way into the chance to write and direct *The Maltese Falcon*, the archetypal private-eye movie, cold-eyed and wittily sinister, against which all others are measured and come up short. This first big success pointed Huston at 35 toward his life's work, and he would direct 40 films, writing 20 screenplays by himself or in collaboration.

Telling the story straightforwardly, eschewing flashbacks and fancy camera maneuvers, became his artistic credo. He considered casting the indispensable directorial skill. And he honored the integrity of the original works from which he adapted his screenplays. Much of the stinging patter in *The Maltese Falcon* comes directly from Dashiell Hammett's novel, the notable exception being the final, signature line, the most famous in any Huston film, lifted from *The Tempest*: "The stuff that dreams are made of," the cynical hero calls the statuette that men (and a woman he fell in love with) were willing to kill for.

The life Huston led after that first smash hit would have fulfilled many men's dreams. As a Signal Corps officer, he made stunning war documentaries in the Aleutians and in Italy, risking his skin and loving the action. During congressional investigations into communism in Hollywood he stood up for freedom of speech, although he admitted that in some of his political activism the anti-Soviet liberal had been a Red stooge. While filming *The African Queen* in the Belgian Congo, he devoted almost as much energy to hunting big game as he did to the picture. He drank too much, gambled too much, smoked 20 cigars a day, shot a Bengal tiger from the back of an elephant. In 1953, he bought and restored a Georgian manor in the west of Ireland, St. Clerans, and carried on like a lord, filling the house with art treasures, fishing in his private trout stream, foxhunting as Master of the Galway Blazers.

When St. Clerans grew too expensive to maintain, he decamped to an outpost on the then-primitive Mexican west coast near Puerto Vallarta. Although he regarded directing as his true business, he made a reputation as a character actor, best known for the incestuous, murderous, rich Noah Cross in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*. For the last two decades of his life he suffered from emphysema, and directed *Under the Volcano*, *Prizzi's Honor*, and *The Dead* from a wheelchair.

And of course, there were the women. When does a man who is catnip to women cease being a charming rascal and qualify as a scoundrel? When he treats his wives, mistresses, and casual flings the way Huston did—as though they deserved his contempt for having

Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, Mary Astor, Sydney Greenstreet, 'The Maltese Falcon' (1941)

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fallen for him. Almost from the start of his first marriage to Dorothy Harvey, his high school sweetheart and a philosophy student in college who intended to become a poet, tarty actresses rumpled his bedsheets on a regular basis. "There were so many pretty girls," Huston recalled. "It was completely inconsequential, never serious—until Dorothy entered a room at the wrong moment." Dorothy proceeded to drink herself into oblivion. They divorced and he accepted responsibility for the damage done. After his second wife, Lesley Black, delivered a stillborn girl, she was unable to conceive again and became deeply depressed. Huston's affairs with Mary Astor and Olivia de Havilland, who starred in his movies, propelled her into a complete breakdown.

He married his third wife, the actress Evelyn Keyes, on the rebound from Marietta FitzGerald, the love of his life, a woman of grace, refinement, and Brahmin bloodlines who adored Huston but knew better than to marry him. Evelyn, for her part, was a luscious ex-chorus girl who proposed to Huston soon after they started seeing each other. Her gaucherie rubbed Huston raw, however, and his public humiliation of her served as heartless entertainment. Huston's pet chimpanzee that smashed Evelyn's perfume bottles and defecated in her dresser drawers spelled the end. Evelyn announced that it was her or the chimp, and Huston went for the chimp.

A prospective replacement bride already awaited: Ricki Soma, a former Balanchine student and cover girl, 23 years younger than Huston and barely 20 years old when they began their adultery. He married her in 1950, their son Tony (who would cowrite the screenplay for *The Dead* with his father) was born two months later, and his daughter Anjelica (who would star in *Prizzi's Honor* and *The Dead*) was born the next year. Marital boredom arrived with paternity: Neither Ricki nor his growing children counted for much with Huston—though like Walter with him, he would show an interest in his children once they were old enough to be interesting. The usual run of available lovelies kept him whirling. He fathered another son, Danny, by one of them; Ricki countered by having a daughter with the (married) English peer and historian John Julius Norwich. In 1969, when Huston got word that Ricki had been killed in a car crash, he paused for a tearless moment, and then said, "Well, we'd better have our lunch."

The woman Huston married in 1972, Celeste Shane, was a Beverly Hills knockout exactly half his age. Some of Huston's closest friends couldn't understand what he saw in her; they were offended by her coarseness. But what he saw, as he told Danny's mother, was incomparable skill in the sack.

"Rather than moralizing about Huston's conduct," Jeffrey Meyers advises, "I would urge readers to take pleasure in his impressive achievements." In fact, however, Meyers's own distaste for Huston's sexual conduct tinges this biography. And Huston himself knew that he had failed the women he claimed to love, and had failed them all the same way. The achievement is impressive for all that, as Meyers says: "The intensely productive Huston probably made more great films than any other director," outdoing his contemporaries Orson Welles, Billy Wilder, and David Lean. Meyers rates eight as masterpieces—*The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), *The African Queen* (1951), *The Misfits* (1961), *Fat City* (1972), *Under the Volcano* (1984), and *The Dead* (1987)—and I would add *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975).

Huston's heroes tend to want more than they have any chance of getting, or of keeping once they have it. If they come through their ordeal alive, sad resignation is the best they are left with. (*The African Queen*, in which Humphrey Bogart not only kills Germans but gets the girl, is a happy exception.) Huston's work also exhibits a clockwork artistry that has passed out of style. Apparently slight touches in his films delineate the emotional landscape of the entire picture. Early in *The Maltese Falcon* Sam Spade's partner is murdered, and a police detective, trying to be decent to Spade, says, "I guess he had some good qualities." When Spade (who had been sleeping with his partner's wife) replies, "I guess so," the nearly affectless tone suggests the brutal carelessness that rules this amoral world. Yet in Spade's demeanor there is a shading of regret that a man should have to build up such a callus in order to protect himself from his own feelings.

In *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* the camera cuts back and forth and lights up the faces of two prospectors ablaze with avarice as the third partner (Walter Huston), who studies them impassively, measures out the daily take from their gold mine. Later, Fred C. Dobbs (Bogart) will shoot his partner Curtin and, thinking he has killed him, stare into his campfire as into the flames of hell. Mexican bandits corner Dobbs, and one repeatedly lifts his trouser leg to check out his boots. The bandit's greed has a feral lewdness, and after the bandits murder Dobbs, two of them fight for his boots. The gold is there for the grabbing, but the bandits mistake it for dust and the wind scatters it.

John Huston in 'Chinatown,' 1974

The opening shot of *The Dead*—Huston's final film, based on James Joyce's supreme short story—shows snow falling at night and shadows moving behind thin curtains; the dim grayish forms will prove to be dancers at a party, and from the start they evoke the ghostliness of the visible world. Joyous feasting, compulsive drinking, faces rapt or bored at a poetic recitation, the dance that goes on and on while those too old to join sit apart, a husband's discovery that before his wife ever met him she loved a boy who died for her at 17: "One by one we're all becoming shades."

Among Hollywood filmmakers, Huston was about the best at what he did. Yet he understood that even his was a middling talent practicing a lesser, derivative art. As Meyers puts it, "He didn't consider movies a high art, like painting and writing, and respected the author, not the director, as the *auteur*. Thirty-four out of thirty-seven of his feature films were adaptations of novels, stories or plays."

But Meyers gets the great theme of Huston's films exactly right: "the tremendous struggle to achieve the impossible and the loss of the goal at the moment of triumph." Perhaps this theme attracted Huston because he had turned aside from determined struggle and chosen easier success with its alluring perquisites.

In his memoir, Huston tells of taking a ditzy babe to dinner at "21" during World War II and being seated next to the table of H. L. Mencken, "just about the greatest man of our time." Overcoming his shyness, Huston introduced himself and Mencken glowingly remembered his stories in the *American Mercury* some 15 years before. To turn out screenplays and direct films would be all right for some people, Mencken told him, but not for a writer of Huston's abilities: "You were meant to be a serious writer." When the conversation was over, Huston's date asked him who the man was, and Huston told her the "greatest man's" name. "Who's he?" she said.

John Huston braved enemy fire and tiger charges and elephant stampedes. He made terrific movies. But the moral courage required for true excellence in life and art? That he lacked, and he knew it, and maybe in the end he was the one to suffer most for it. ♦

NEWSCOM

B&A

Action in Character

A film without pretension about warriors as heroes.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Act of Valor, a movie with no major stars made for $12 million, shocked everyone in Hollywood by earning $24.5 million its first weekend. Why? Simple. It advertises itself as "starring active duty Navy SEALs," and the commercials make it look like a full-length version of one of those action-packed military recruitment commercials that run during football games. Sometimes there is truth in advertising, because that's exactly what *Act of Valor* is, for good and ill. Come on; who wouldn't want to give it a shot?

Act of Valor
Directed by Mike McCoy & Scott Waugh

Act of Valor is set up like an old-time world-hopping melodrama, bouncing from Russia to Costa Rica to the Philippines to the South Seas to the Mexican border. And for its first five minutes, as a placid schoolyard in Manila is quietly set upon by terrorists in a tinkly ice-cream van, the movie I fear it most resembles is *Team America: World Police*, the hilariously filthy 2004 puppet show parody of just such fare by Trey Parker and Matt Stone of *South Park*. (In *Team America*, the city is Paris, and a little boy walks across the street singing "Frère Jacques.")

The plot has to do with cooperation between a Russian-Jewish arms smuggler, a Chechen jihadist, and a Mexican drug cartel, and it has its *Team America* aspects as well. The movie was written by the guy who cowrote *300*, the Spartans-at-Thermopylae live-action semi-cartoon, and it has that massive hit's sledgehammer subtlety.

But whenever the SEALs are on camera, doing their thing, playing fictional SEALs, *Act of Valor* is pretty thrilling. Not surprisingly, these almost unimaginably physically accomplished men are amazing camera subjects. Even less surprisingly, they're not much in the performing department; the stoicism and emotional reserve their work requires of them are pretty much the polar opposite of what acting requires. The movie tries to introduce them to us with video-game-like dossiers that pop up on one side of the screen, but their character names are as unimportant as their characteristics are interchangeable. One of them is a surfer; another likes Mondrian paintings; a third has a beard; they all talk and sound alike.

They're just SEALs, that's all, and they're giving us a sense of what they are called upon to do, and just watching them even in these highly overdramatic and fictionalized circumstances feels like we're being given some kind of gift. Especially after the heroics of SEAL Team Six last year.

We also get an idea from the movie, which was made with extensive cooperation from the Navy, what our soon-to-be-decimated military budget is buying us. That allows throwaway shots of great beauty and originality (the movie is sensationally well photographed by Shane Hurlbut); an offhand scene of a SEAL talking on a cell phone to his wife on the active runway of an aircraft carrier while a plane is taking off is jaw-dropping.

That cooperation was canny, for like *Top Gun* a quarter-century ago, *Act of Valor* is an unashamed celebration of American martial know-how that will not only inspire teenagers but also instill in its viewers a renewed sense of awe for what the U.S. military is capable of doing. There are tiny drones and tablet computers used as GPS devices in jungles; mini-subs and machine guns are also flashlights and other stuff. All of this does succeed in creating real dramatic tension.

The SEALs are called upon to rescue a captured CIA agent from some bad guys, and when they do so, in a brilliantly rendered action sequence by directors Mike McCoy and Scott Waugh, the audience feels some of the same gratitude the CIA agent feels.

Act of Valor is, therefore, beyond criticism in a sense. It's not a good movie, if by "good movie" you mean that it tells a credible story well with skilled acting, strong dialogue, and well-developed characters. But it is watchable, gripping, and more memorable than many far more accomplished films.

And consider this: In its first weekend, *Act of Valor* grossed more at the box office than *The Hurt Locker*, which deservedly won the Best Picture Oscar for 2009, made during its entire theatrical run. Perhaps Americans do like movies about warriors—so long as the warriors are portrayed unambiguously as heroes. ♦

RELATIVITY MEDIA

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

PARODY

"On the eve of the Michigan primary, musician Kid Rock sang a live version of 'Born Free,' the official campaign song of the Romney campaign. . . . The odd couple—Romney, a squeaky clean family man who obeys the pillars of his Mormon faith, and Kid Rock, a Hollywood bad boy who has a sex tape and a criminal record—apparently met last week behind closed doors, when Romney went to the singer's suburban Michigan home on February 23." ***—ABC News, February 27, 2012***

Rolling Stone Q&A ROLLINGSTONE.COM | MARCH 8, 2012

Insane Clown Posse

On Detroit-area soda pop, the Republican presidential race, and the future of horrorcore

By Austin Scaggs

Recently, *Rolling Stone* sat down for an exclusive interview with Violent J (real name Joseph Bruce), a founding member of the Insane Clown Posse. The rapper talked about the groundbreaking horrorcore rap-metal duo's future, including the group's newfound interest in politics and world affairs.

Like Kid Rock, the Posse just endorsed Mitt Romney. Why is he your man for president?

Yo homes, let me tell you that Mitt Romney is a ninja, a true juggalo. He's the only one that don't put up with these damn excuses for Washington to keep spending cheddar like they got it growing on trees. In those debates, yo, them wannabe juffalos like Santorum and Gingrich be trying to shank him, and that wicked ninja just turn around and split their wigs with some of that Mitt truth. We don't need no more big spending politicians in Washington.

Most of your lyrics incorporate themes about clowns, murder, voodoo, drug use, street violence, and cannibalism. But on your current tour, you unveiled your new song, "Repeal It, Motherf—ers." When did you guys decide to get political?

Obamacare is the single biggest threat to our freedoms and liberties, my ninja. It makes us more dependent on government and creates another lame-ass entitlement. More spending in Washington? We ain't got the cheddar, homey! That's when I started to wake up, when they be bailing out Wall Street banks and car companies and all that shniz, while the national debt going through the f—ing roof. Those politicians in Washington just wanna spend that cash money, you know what I mean?

So for you, the biggest issue is government spending. Do you consider yourself a Tea Party member, then?

We the wicked clowns that started the first Tea Party, ninja. The first Gathering of the Juggalos was really a protest against high excise taxes on Faygo and face paint. Them politicians been using those taxes for programs that justify taking away our sacred liberties. It was the original wicked clown, Benjamin Franklin, who once said that those who sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither. Snooganz, motherf—ers. Ninja was straight up on that, yo, like he was with them Silence Dogood letters. Straight up dope.

You seem to be well read in history and politics. What have you been reading recently?

I tore up Mark Levin's latest book, *Ameritopia*. That ninja can see we is headed for the echo side if we keep pursuing the socialist state like it was Shangri-La or something. Ninja gets all this messed up utopia s—. Real deep. We gotta get Levin to come on tour wit us. And I love Ann Coulter, I read that juggalette's column every