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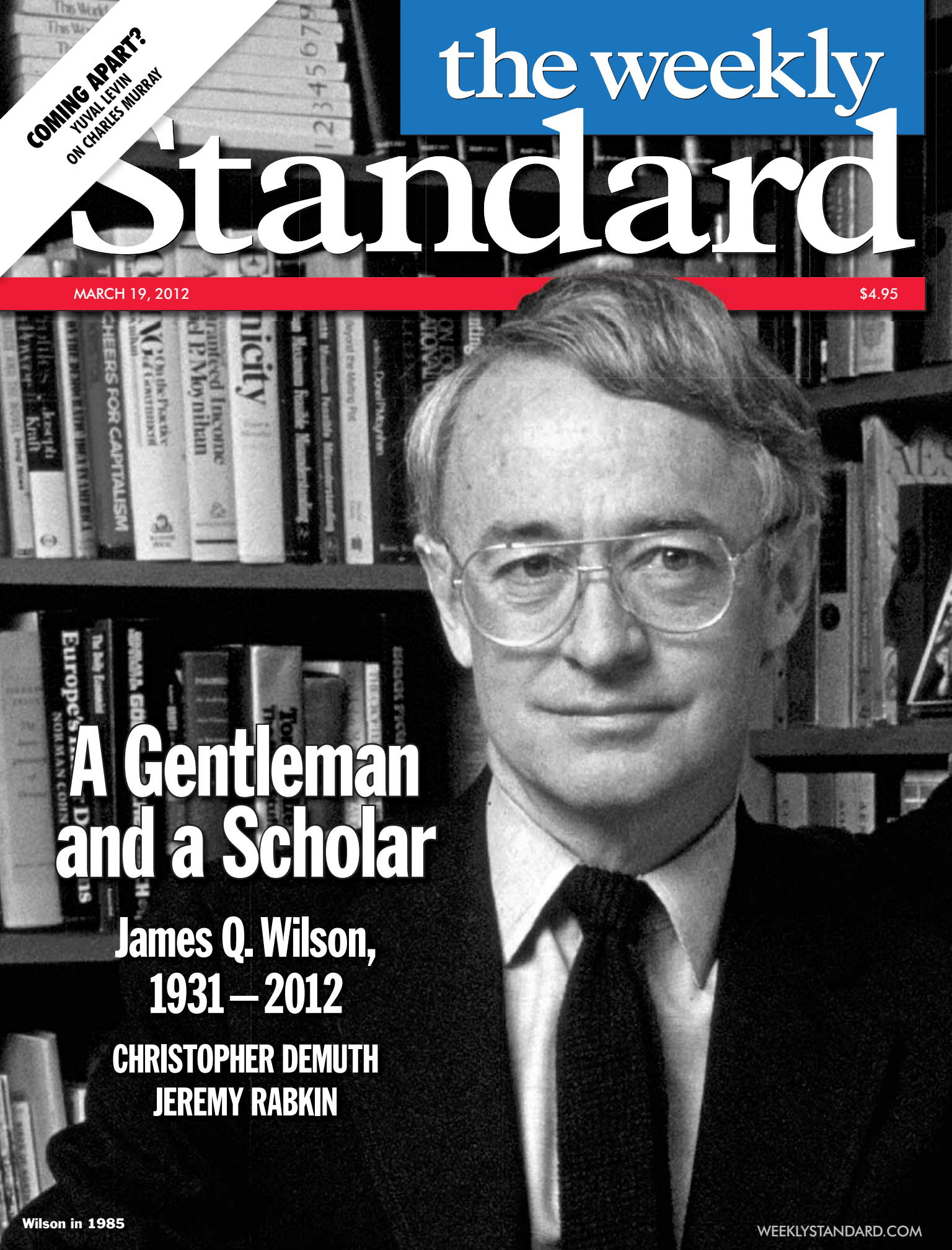

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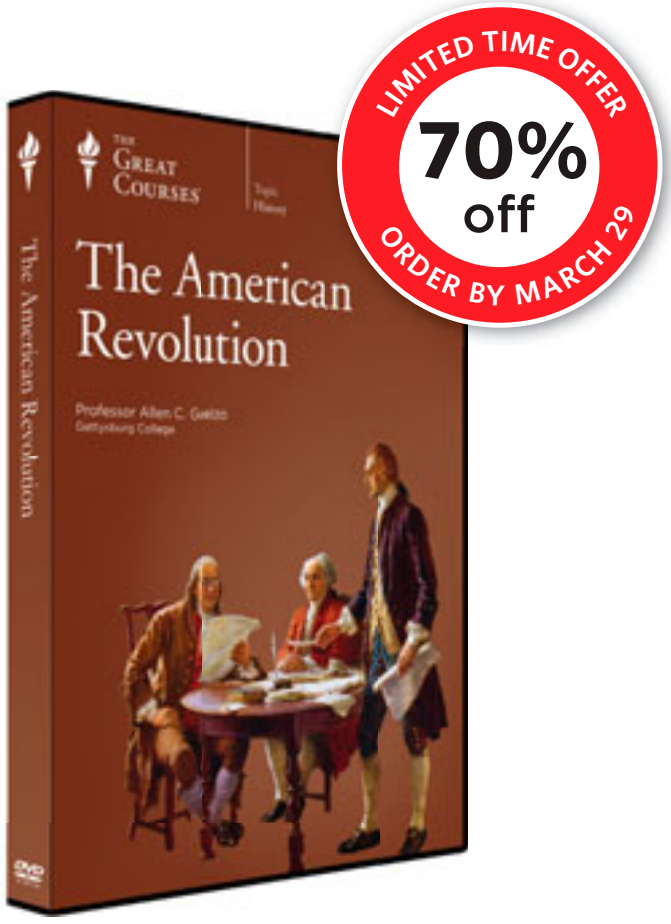

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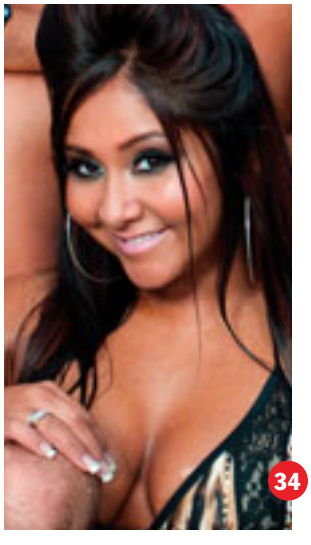

Books & Arts

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The Twilight of the Volt

In July 2010, President Obama paid a visit to a General Motors plant in Hamtramck, Michigan, and gave a speech making the case for a revitalized American auto industry. To paraphrase the former governor of Alaska, how'd that hopey-changey stuff work out for Hamtramck?

That December, the *New York Times* reported that city leaders were pushing for Hamtramck to file for Chapter 9 municipal bankruptcy. Aside from the failing economy, 60 percent of the city's general operating budget went to pay for the salaries and pensions of just the cops and firefighters. The city tried to renegotiate employee contracts, but the union reps were intransigent. "They kind of have the Cadillac plan," Hamtramck's city manager told the *Times*, "and we'd kind of like the Chevy."

Chevrolet Volt

Speaking of Chevrolet, shortly before the *Times* was reporting on the city's desire to file for bankruptcy, the first federally subsidized, electric-powered Chevy Volts started rolling off the assembly line at a GM plant in, you guessed it, Hamtramck. Chevy has actually produced an ad called "Morning in Hamtramck" that scans the worn scenery of the town to a plaintive guitar soundtrack. The narrator solemnly intones: "For our town. For our country. For our future. This isn't just the car we wanted to build; it's the car America had to build."

Obama recently declared he wanted to buy a Volt when he left office, but at this rate, it's going to be a used one. GM announced on March 1 that they're suspending production of the Volt in Hamtramck—for the third time—leaving 1,300 people temporarily out of work. Despite selling only 7,671 Volts last year, GM had planned to expand production to 60,000 this year. Something tells us that won't happen. Forget "Morning in Hamtramck." *Truth About Cars* editor Edward Niedermeyer has declared recent events to be the "Twilight of the Volt," and produced a handy graph last week showing that production of the Volt thus far has been nearly twice its sales.

And so, Hamtramck, Michigan, has become a nearly perfect metaphor for Obama's America. The city's bankruptcy claim has been denied by the state, so they're stuck overpaying unionized city employees with money they don't have. And the taxpayers don't have any money because the auto plant in town is laying people off en masse. It was manufacturing "the car America had to build" regardless of whether Americans wanted to buy it.

Shockingly, few besides the president have wanted a $40,000 electric car that sometimes catches on fire, in spite of the fact that each new Volt comes with a $7,500 tax credit. (Who benefits from the credit? Rich liberals, mainly. The average annual income of America's Volt owners is $170,000.) Of course, Chevy doubled down on the Volt because the eco-crazy, energy-prices-must-skyrocket Obama administration all but dictated that GM continue to build an electric car in exchange for receiving taxpayer money in the auto bailout, the same bailout that ended up being little more than a temporary payoff to the unions whose contracts helped bankrupt GM in the first place.

Naturally, as Volt workers were being laid off, the president announced that he wants to raise the electric car tax credit to $10,000, earmark $1 billion for cities to build infrastructure for electric cars, and spend another $650 million for electric car research. Nothing like throwing good money after bad, especially when it's everybody else's money.

If only some crack engineer could just develop a car that runs on government failure and union arrogance, maybe things in Hamtramck—and the rest of the country—would finally start to look up. ♦

Ho, Ho, Ho, and a Bottle of Seltzer

The Scrapbook has not been one to complain about the wussification of the armed forces, especially since the evidence in Iraq and Afghanistan and Kuwait, and other hotspots around the world, is as good an argument as any against it. But The Scrapbook was just a little discouraged the other day to learn that the Navy intends to install breath-test machines on all ships and submarines and on Marine Corps bases.

This is not because The Scrapbook believes in drinking while on duty, or denies that the abuse of alcohol has been, and can be, a social problem afflicting soldiers, sailors, and airmen alike. But it does remind us that the instincts of the nanny state are incessantly intrusive, and

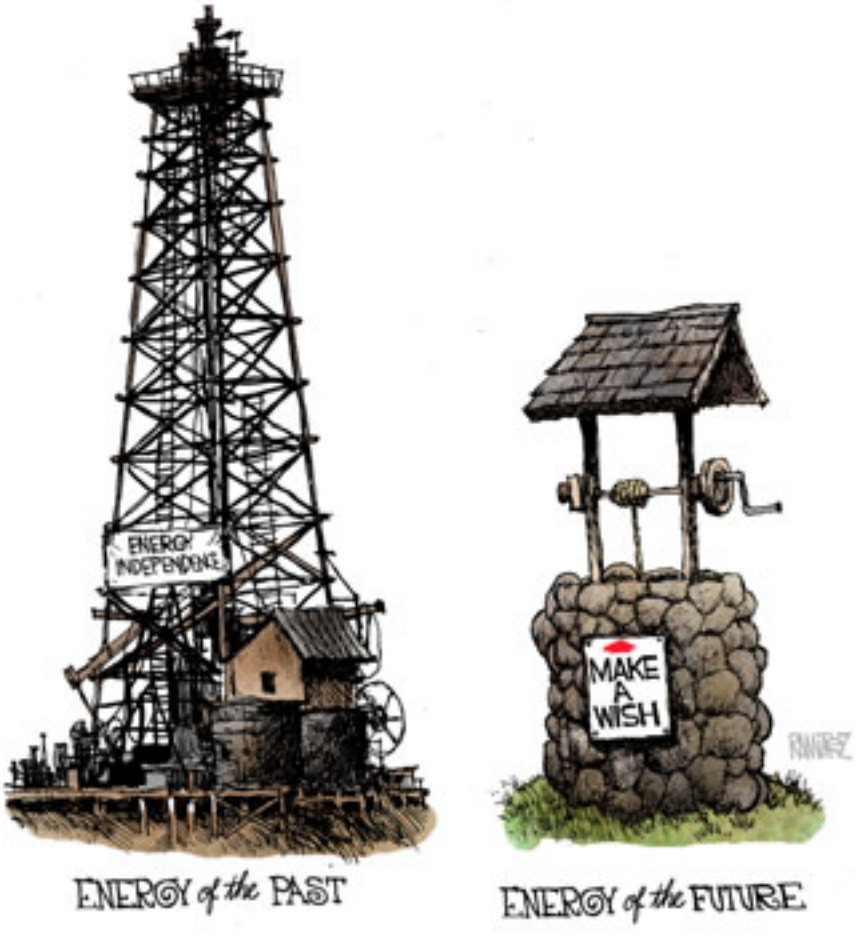
that the United States Navy, which has successfully defended these shores since 1775, is not exempt from such intrusions.

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus explains that the installation of the breathalyzers is not in response to any specific problem—no reported epidemic of sloshed skippers, weaving chiefs, or drunken submariners—but "We are telling [them] that it is important to keep legal, responsible use of alcohol from turning into a problem." Secretary Mabus tells the *Washington Post* that "alcohol is surfacing as a factor in a host of social and professional ills that are increasingly of concern to the Navy brass."

This is another way of saying that because alcohol has the potential of being a problem for some people—which has been generally understood since the beginning of human history—it is necessary to signify official distrust of all people who serve in the Navy. This is, of course, the sort of thinking that led to the 18th Amendment to the Constitution (Prohibition), and we know how that turned out.

In fact, the prohibition of alcohol in the naval service is considerably younger than the Navy itself. From its very beginnings, the United States Navy, in accordance with tradition and an act of Congress (1794), offered its officers and men a daily ration of "one-half pint of distilled spirits . . . or in lieu thereof, one quart of beer," and in 1831, servicemen were permitted to relinquish their ration for cash (six cents a day). There were, of course, obvious restrictions on alcohol in certain circumstances; but as the prohibition movement gained strength in the latter half of the 19th century, the Navy was obliged to respond to political pressure.

Finally, in 1914, the man and the moment came together: Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, a militant prohibitionist and newspaper editor(!), issued his infamous General Order 99 banning "the use or introduction for drinking purposes of alcoholic liquors on board any naval vessel, or within any navy yard or station." The rations of grog, the casks of rum, the wine messes, were all tossed overboard. (Naval personnel are now entitled to a modest allotment of beer after periods at sea.)



The Scrapbook is not suggesting that Daniels's Folly be overturned, or that sobriety is not a weapon in the warrior's arsenal. But breathalyzer machines on shipboard, and installed at Marine bases, strikes us (to use a related metaphor) as a bridge too far. No less an authority than Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey Jr., of World War II renown, once remarked, "I don't trust a fighting man who doesn't drink and smoke," and he managed to live a long life and vanquish the Imperial Japanese Navy. ♦

Obama's Pledges: Trust, but Verify

Last October, the State Department assured Republican senator Jon Kyl that "any engagement with North Korea will not be used as a mechanism to funnel financial or other rewards to Pyongyang." And in another letter last month, Kyl was told "the [Obama] administration has no intention of rewarding North Korea for

actions it has already agreed to take." As a promise to forgo appeasement of the Hermit Kingdom's youthful new ruler, Kim Jong Eun, this appeared to be solid stuff.

Only it wasn't. On February 29, a new agreement was announced. North Korea would suspend uranium enrichment and other "nuclear activities" at its Yongbyon facility, permit some inspections, and halt long-range missile launchings. And what would North Korea get in return? Nothing at all, the State Department said.

Oh, yes, the United States will send 240,000 metric tons of food aid to North Korea. But that's for humanitarian reasons alone, the department said. It's not a quid pro quo.

Please. Should anyone accept that alibi? Even the mainstream media had trouble believing the timing of the deal and announcement of the food aid was a coincidence. The aid will supposedly be monitored to make sure it goes to starving North Koreans, not the military. But it's never worked before. "We are simply feeding young Kim's dictatorship," said former United Nations ambassador John Bolton.

The explanation about food aid being unrelated to the deal was bogus. And so was the notion that North Korea wouldn't be credited with pledges it had made before, then violated. It was.

All this raises a question. If the promises about North Korea are so cavalierly cast aside, what about President Obama's insistence he has "Israel's back" against Iran and its nuclear weapons program? The Scrapbook has a pretty good idea what Ronald Reagan would advise: Trust, but verify. ♦

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The Ghosts of Washington

Living in Los Angeles many years ago, I used occasionally to wonder about the people I would see on the sidewalk, at the art museum, in a restaurant. You got accustomed to seeing recognizable faces at random—Vincent Price in a frame shop, Mary Astor at the Motion Picture Home. But what about the chorus girls in Busby Berkeley musicals, or the endless supply of fedora-hatted cops in noir films? All those episodes of *Gunsmoke* and *Perry Mason* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*; surely the matronly woman ordering a martini was Keenan Wynn's love interest in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*?

I was accustomed to thinking this way, I suppose, because growing up in the Washington area—a smaller, infinitely more concentrated community than L.A.—I had seen my share of historic figures, or even bit players in the drama of state, as they lived out the balance of their lives in the neighborhood. In many cases they were survivors of epochs that, to my childish mind, seemed very distant in time and space; the world in which they had participated seemed dead, but they lived on, in the purgatory of the grocery line.

Speaking of which, I once saw General of the Army Omar Bradley—or I should say my mother pointed him out to me—in a small supermarket near where we lived, and I remember gazing at this bespectacled elderly man as he contemplated the vegetable bin. Not long before he had commanded armies—hundreds of thousands of men—in brutal combat, and now he was nodding gently in conversation, just a few feet away from me. His physical presence was fascinating, but so was the fact that General Bradley of World War II fame was here and now in need of groceries like everyone else.

Max Beerbohm once wrote an essay entitled "A Small Boy Seeing Giants" (1936) about being a London schoolboy in close proximity to the statesmen of the 1880s; a half-century later, he was himself (as he ruefully noted) "an interesting link with the past." I am very nearly the same age now as Max was then, and can report that the interesting links with the past I saw in my early youth were from a very distant past indeed.

MARK ANDERSON

A man who had been a private secretary to President McKinley lived on a neighboring street. Theodore Roosevelt's oldest daughter, Alice Longworth, could frequently be spotted entering and leaving her elegant, poison ivy-covered brownstone on Massachusetts Avenue. Woodrow Wilson's widow was still a staple of local society—I saw her shortly before she died in 1961—and veterans of the Roosevelt and Truman years were then in the prime of life. That creature of habit J. Edgar Hoover used to lunch in a window seat at Harvey's Restaurant in the Mayflower Hotel—the Mayflower still exists, but Harvey's does not—and I always laughed at the sight of George Meany of the AFL-CIO because he sat (as a labor leader should) in the front seat of his limousine, beside the chauffeur. While she was not a Washington resident, I did once see Eleanor Roosevelt—at a Senior Citizens for Kennedy-Johnson rally in a suburban shopping mall, where the first thing that struck my eye, as she emerged from a long black Cadillac, was the dead fox around her neck.

As I grew older, I was emboldened to speak to the occasional giant, and learned an important lesson. Most were cordial, even flattered to be recognized, but not all. Walking toward Dean Acheson one brisk afternoon in Lafayette Square, I introduced myself, and proffered my paw, and would have explained how great an admirer I was except that he visibly glared as he shook my hand with icy impatience. I was so mortified that I waited two years to write him a fan letter about his memoir—and got a warm, lengthy response to soothe my mortification. As a young journalist I specialized in chatting about the old days with elderly Southern senators—John McClellan, Sam Ervin, John Stennis, Jennings Randolph—who often sat, alone and half-forgotten, at receptions.

Sometimes, of course, the figures were spectral: Robert McNamara used to be seen walking in the vicinity of my office, wearing a raincoat year round, looking suitably burdened by history. I spoke to him a few times—always breaking the ice with the fact that his son had once (accidentally) broken my arm in a soccer match—and noticed that he beamed with pleasure at the brief connection, but, on his way again, resumed the haunted expression. What a contrast with the spinster daughters of the Civil War general Philip Sheridan—Mary, Louise, and Irene—who would take the air on the balcony overlooking their father's equestrian statue at Sheridan Circle. The first time I saw them I felt as if, in an instant, the entire century since Fort Sumter had melted away.

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Politician-in-Chief

Judging from his comments over the past two weeks, very little frustrates Barack Obama as much as criticism of the difficult decisions he is facing as president on matters of war and peace. So he's lashing out.

At his press conference on March 6, the president blasted his would-be successors for politicizing the threat from Iran and the U.S. alliance with Israel. He criticized "the casualness with which some of these folks talk about war" and dismissed their concerns as "bluster" and "big talk." The president said: "This is not a game. There's nothing casual about it."

NEWSCOM

In his speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference in Washington, Obama complained that "partisan politics" in this "political season" have led to a distorted understanding of his views on Israel and Iran.

In an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of the *Atlantic*, Obama said Republican critiques are part of "the usual politics" in an election year and condescendingly added, "These aren't video games that we're playing here."

Tough accusations. Senator John McCain thinks they cross a line. "I have never seen a president deal in personal character attacks the way that this president does," he told me last week. "That can only mean that he's insecure about his position. He does not have the experience or knowledge on these issues so he resorts to these personal comments or attacks."

To swallow his claim that Republicans are politicizing the debate on Iran and Israel, the president needs voters, and, more important, reporters, to make a crucial assumption about his own behavior: that Barack Obama would never engage in such irresponsible electioneering.

Why would the president claim his critics are just playing politics? Is it partisan to be concerned about the prospect of the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism obtaining nuclear weapons? To take seriously Iran's supreme leader when he calls Israel a "cancer" that needs to be eliminated?

No. There's a simple reason Obama sees politics in everything his rivals say: projection. Barack Obama owes his rise to partisan, antiwar rhetoric. It started early, with the speech Obama gave against the Iraq war in 2002, as he began his run for the Senate. Bettylu Saltzman, a Chicago socialite who was enthralled with Obama, was organizing an antiwar rally in Federal Plaza and she wanted Obama to speak. Obama opposed the war but he was concerned about the political implications of appearing at the event. Dan Shomon, at the time his top adviser, told Obama that he needed to keep Saltzman happy to ensure her continued support for his candidacy. Saltzman was important not only because she was a well-heeled and well-connected Chicago liberal; she was also helping Obama convince David Axelrod that he should take a chance on a relatively unknown state senator.

David Mendell, author of *Obama: From Promise to Power*, perhaps the best account of Obama's rise, wrote that Obama understood "it would not be wise to disappoint Saltzman if he wanted her to continue lobbying Axelrod on his behalf." So he went ahead with the speech. Mendell argues that the significance of this decision to address the rally cannot be overstated. "It is particularly important when considering this: Obama made the decision to protest the impending war in part as a political calculation that he hoped would benefit him among Democrats."

Whatever doubts Obama had about the wisdom of his appearance, they did little to temper his harsh critique of his predecessor as commander in chief, George W. Bush, whose goal in those days after the worst terrorist attack on American soil was to prevent another one, with perhaps more devastating consequences. "What I am opposed to is the attempt by political hacks like Karl

Rove to distract us from a rise in the poverty rate, a drop in the median income—to distract us from corporate scandals and a stock market that has just gone through the worst month since the Great Depression," Obama exclaimed. He told the protesters he opposed "a dumb war, a rash war—a war based not on reason but passion, not on principle but on politics."

Obama wasn't making these arguments because he had access to intelligence unavailable to anyone else. Indeed, the day before these remarks Bush received the National Intelligence Estimate that would later be at the center of the arguments about the Iraq war but which declared, in language that George Tenet would famously call a "slam dunk," that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. (Indeed, Obama's political role model, Edward Kennedy, warned against invading Iraq because he feared Saddam Hussein would use his WMDs.)

This was a case Obama would make consistently through his election in 2008. On September 12, 2007, one day after Obama told General David Petraeus that the surge in Iraq was destined to fail, he returned to the campaign trail and touted his consistency: "I opposed the war in 2002. I opposed it in 2003. I opposed it in 2004. I opposed it in 2005. I opposed it in 2006."

Three weeks later, he gave a speech in Chicago marking the anniversary of his 2002 speech opposing the war. As politicians often do, he recast the narrative of the events leading up to that speech, suggesting that his advisers had urged him to keep quiet, but that in a triumph of courage over expediency, he had overruled them. (Later in the speech, Obama claimed: "Some seek to rewrite history." The jibe was directed at his opponents, but accurately described what he was doing at the podium.)

Those claiming the surge was working, he said, were "divorced from reality"—an accusation that included Petraeus, now Obama's CIA director. Obama congratulated himself for predicting that the war would be more difficult than its architects had suggested and insisted, once again, that those who disagreed with him, Republicans and Democrats alike, were motivated by politics. "The conventional thinking in Washington has a way of buying into stories that make political sense even if they don't make practical sense," he averred. "We were counseled by some of the most experienced voices in Washington that the only way for Democrats to look tough was to talk, act, and vote like a Republican."

The restraint he's now seeking from his Republican rivals was nowhere in evidence as he rode his opposition to the Iraq war from the Illinois State Senate to the White House.

The *Atlantic*'s Goldberg, whose interview with Obama covered the weightiest of weighty subjects—a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, the possible annihilation of Israel, among other topics—later noted that the president was at his most passionate when he spoke about . . . domestic politics. "One of the most interesting things in this interview I did with the president last week, he got most exercised when talking about his record on Israel and the way that Republicans, especially Republican candidates for president, are talking about it."

Is it any wonder?

—Stephen F. Hayes

On Syria, Follow McCain

Here's to John McCain, leading from the front. Last week, the Arizona senator cut through all the White House doubletalk on the Syrian uprising and demanded a more active U.S. policy, including provision of arms to the Free Syrian Army as well as airpower to slow the assaults of Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime.

McCain grilled senior administration officials and military officers, and set the record straight regarding the disposition of the Syrian rebels. Over the past several weeks, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have both claimed, without evidence, that al Qaeda had infiltrated the opposition. Last week McCain countered: The Syrian rebels are "not fighting and dying because they are Muslim extremists." The administration then started to walk back its charges. What the White House really meant, said Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, is that al Qaeda is looking to "exploit" the situation.

As well they might. The Syrian uprising is now a year old. There is no official toll, but the dead may number 10,000 or more. It's gone on long enough, says McCain. With his Senate colleagues Joe Lieberman and Lindsey Graham, McCain released a statement calling for "relief from Assad's tank and artillery sieges. . . . Providing military assistance to the Free Syrian Army and other opposition groups is necessary, but as Assad continues to intensify his assault, that alone will not be sufficient to stop the slaughter and save innocent lives. The only realistic way to do so is with foreign airpower." The three senators realize that this "will first require the United States and our partners to suppress the Syrian regime's air defenses in at least part of the country."

As usual, the administration had excuses for inaction. "That air defense system," Panetta told the Senate, "is pretty sophisticated." According to the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, it is "approximately five times more sophisticated . . . than existed in Libya."

McCain bristled. "We spend almost $1 trillion a year

Two Syrian rebels evacuate an injured fellow rebel in Idlib, February 8, 2012.

AP IMAGES

on the military," he told CNN's Anderson Cooper. "And we can't take out air defenses of Syria? That is an horrific waste of the taxpayers' dollars."

McCain's right. We're not talking about NORAD here. In 2007 the Israelis had no trouble disabling Syrian air defenses before their air raid on the Al Kibar nuclear reactor in the Syrian desert. And that was hardly the first time the Israeli Air Force ran roughshod over the Syrians. Damascus's Russian-supplied air capabilities, defensive and offensive, are a running joke in the region.

In the June 1982 air battle over Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, it took the Israelis only half a day to destroy almost all of Syria's Soviet-made surface-to-air-missile batteries as well as 29 Soviet-supplied aircraft. Within three days the rout was complete; the IAF downed 82 Syrian planes without a single loss of its own.

That was a victory for Jerusalem and for Washington. The confrontation showed that Soviet arms were far inferior to American weapons—even making allowance for the fact that it was Syrians at the controls. The Bekaa Valley turkey shoot, as some still refer to the 1982 debacle, was facilitated by the Syrians keeping their mobile missile systems in one place for several months because they didn't like digging latrines.

Perhaps that example—and the memory that bad things can happen when Moscow ties its vital interests to a Syrian military whose chief capability seems to be murdering unarmed civilians—is not lost on Vladimir Putin. The recently reelected Russian president is standing by Assad, but admits he doesn't know how much longer the regime can last.

Nonetheless, the Obama administration is putting way too much emphasis on Russia's calculations. It's waiting on a Putin change of heart because it fears that U.S. material support of the Free Syrian Army will convince the Russians that the conflict is a proxy war. But the Russians already perceive it as a proxy war. So do the Iranians, which is why both are pouring in as much support as they can to keep Assad afloat. The administration's response to Russian intransigence was to hold a Friends of Syria conference in Tunisia that was so incommensurate with the bloody reality it aimed to address that even the Saudi foreign minister stormed out in disgust.

For the United States, the key issue should be countering Iran. As General James Mattis, the head of CENTCOM, said, the fall of Assad would be "the biggest strategic setback for Iran in 25 years." During his Senate testimony the next day, Panetta agreed that it would hurt the Islamic Republic. The good news then is that the administration is starting to see how the pieces are arrayed on the game board. The bad news is that it's still wary about taking the other side's pieces.

The White House believes against all evidence that a diplomatic solution to the crisis can be found. Sure, it would be helpful if Putin told Assad that his time was up, but Putin's in no hurry to abandon his own throne in Moscow; why would he ever urge Assad to step down in Damascus? And why would Assad listen to him if he did?

Regional players are finally coming out strongly against Assad. Last week former Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri denounced the regime and its Lebanese partner, Hezbollah. That Hariri—who has frequently been

threatened by Assad and his allies, and whose father Rafik was allegedly killed under Assad's orders—has taken to the podium is yet more evidence that smart money in the region is betting on Assad's eventual collapse.

But if the White House wants to spur defections from the Assad regime and promote a swift collapse, it should stop waiting for the Russians and go around them, as well as the air defenses they sold to the Syrians. Take a few tanks or artillery pieces off the board and there will be plenty of defections from the Syrian military. Target the presidential palace in Damascus, headquarters of military intelligence, and the barracks of the notoriously vicious intelligence arm of the Syrian Air Force, and *then* there will be a surge of momentum for a diplomatic solution.

If the Obama administration insists on leading from behind, it should fall in behind John McCain, now running point on a Syria policy that would actually succeed.

—Lee Smith

It's Obamacare, Stupid

It's not easy to lose 63 seats in a House election. Before 2010, the last time it had been done was when Joe DiMaggio was still patrolling center field for the New York Yankees. It's even harder to pull off such a feat when exit polling shows that Americans were inclined to blame the prior president (a member of the other party) for the poor economy. This raises a question that Democrats and the media have been avoiding for the past 16 months: Just how did the Democrats do it?

A new academic study says the answer can likely be reduced to one word: *Obamacare*. The study, which was conducted by scholars from Dartmouth and elsewhere, finds that "supporters of health care reform paid a significant price." The authors looked at cap and trade, the economic "stimulus," and Obamacare, and concluded that the latter had by far the most adverse effect on Democrats' fortunes—voters were "approximately 5 points less likely to vote for an incumbent who supported health reform than one who opposed it."

Indeed, if "all Democrats in competitive districts [had] opposed health care reform," that likely would have swung about 25 seats from the Republican column into the Democratic column and would have given the Democrats "a 62 percent chance of winning enough races to maintain majority control of the House."

But that's not the only interesting finding. The authors ask, "How is it that . . . votes come to affect election outcomes?" They conclude that Democrats' support for Obamacare led voters "to perceive them as more liberal," "more ideologically distant," and "out of step." This was particularly true for independent voters. In other words, voters not only oppose Obamacare as policy but view it as a symbol of a commitment to big-government liberalism.

This strongly suggests that the more Obamacare becomes an issue in the fall, the more it will highlight President Obama's liberalism in the minds of voters—particularly independent voters. It correspondingly suggests that the more this election is focused simply on stewardship of the economy, the less Obama's big-government liberalism will be highlighted in voters' minds.

In other words, should Mitt Romney win the Republican presidential nomination, he could surely run (and has given every indication that he would run) as a centrist who's focused on the economy. But by choosing to de-emphasize Obamacare, he would allow Obama to come across as more of a centrist as well. This would effectively take the GOP's best issue off the table. What's more, no issue will more starkly highlight the differences between the parties than Obamacare. Voters know that if Obama is reelected, Obamacare is here to stay. If the Republican wins, there is at least a very good shot at repeal.

Rick Santorum clearly has no intention of de-emphasizing Obamacare. To the contrary, Obamacare is the issue on which he has staked his candidacy. The contrast between Romney's and Santorum's levels of emphasis on Obama's signature legislation could hardly have been clearer than during their speeches on the night of Super Tuesday. Santorum spent no less than seven minutes on Obamacare, while Romney devoted seven words to it.

Romney said, "He passed Obamacare. I will repeal Obamacare." This is pretty much how Romney has talked about Obamacare throughout this campaign. On the few occasions when he has talked about the subject at greater length, he has emphasized how Obamacare would loot money from Medicare and raise taxes. Both points are true. They're also well down the list of reasons why almost all Republicans, and the vast majority of independents, loathe Obamacare.

Santorum made the point well:

The reason that . . . I ultimately decided to get into this race was . . . one particular issue that to me breaks the camel's back with respect to liberty in this country—and that is the issue of Obamacare. . . . [A] little less than 50 percent of the people in this country [now] depend on some form of federal payment, some form of government benefit, to help provide for them. After Obamacare, it will not be less than 50 percent. It will be 100 percent.

Now every single American will be looking to the federal government, not to their neighbor, not to their church, not . . . to the community . . . [but] to those in charge, to those who now say to you that they are the allocator and creator of rights in America.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the beginning of the end of freedom in America.

Santorum also took direct aim at Romney:

It's one thing to defend a mandated, top-down, government-run health care program that you imposed on the people of your state. It's another thing to recommend and encourage the president of the United States to impose the same thing on the American people. And it's another thing yet to go out and tell the American public that you didn't do it.

In response to what has become Santorum's principal line of attack, Romney effectively has two choices: He can tell the 60 percent of Republicans who haven't been supporting him in primary voting to date that they effectively have no choice but to support him—and, in any event, that he is the only one who can beat Obama. Or he can make the effort to convince Republicans that he genuinely shares their desire to repeal Obamacare—and that he understands why it's such an affront to them, and to the nation.

If Romney wants to convince Republicans that he's with them—rather than convince them that they have no choice but to be with *him*—he would do well to pledge repeatedly that he would use every tool at his disposal to repeal Obamacare, instead of saying simply that he'll sign repeal legislation if it happens to cross his desk. He would also do well to explain to voters *why* he's so committed to repeal. Why is it so much worse to have a government-run health care system and an individual mandate at the federal level than at the state level? Why is the federal version more of an affront to liberty? (It is, but Romney needs to explain why.)

The electability argument is ultimately about issues. Obamacare is Obama's greatest weakness. He is more likely to be defeated by a candidate who is willing to run against Obamacare as the epitome of big-government liberalism—emphasizing its singular threat to Americans' liberty and their way of life.

—Jeffrey H. Anderson & William Kristol

Declaring War on Newborns

The disgrace of medical ethics.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

On the list of the world's most unnecessary occupations—aromatherapist, golf pro, journalism professor, vice president of the United States—that of medical ethicist ranks very high. They are happily employed by pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, and other outposts of the vast medical-industrial combine, where their job is to advise the boss to go ahead and do what he was going to do anyway ("Put it on the market!" "Pull the plug on the geezer!"). They also attend conferences where they take turns sitting on panels talking with one another and then sitting in the audience watching panels of other medical ethicists talking with one another. Their professional specialty is the "thought experiment," which is the best kind of experiment because you don't have to buy test tubes or leave the office. And sometimes they get jobs at universities, teaching other people to become ethicists. It is a cozy, happy world they live in.

But it was painfully roiled last month, when a pair of medical ethicists took to their profession's bible, the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, and published an essay with a misleadingly inconclusive title: "After-birth Abortion: Why should the baby live?" It was a misleading title because the authors believe the answer to the question is: "Beats me."

Right at the top, the ethicists summarized the point of their article. "What we call 'after-birth abortion' (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled."

The argument made by the authors —Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, both of them affliliated with prestigious universities in Australia and ethicists of pristine reputation—runs as follows. Let's suppose a woman gets pregnant. She decides to go ahead and have the baby on the assumption that her personal circumstances, and her views on such things as baby-raising, will remain the same through the day she gives birth and beyond.

Then she gives birth. Perhaps the baby is disabled or suffers a disease. Perhaps her boyfriend or (if she's old-fashioned) her husband abandons her, leaving her in financial peril. Or perhaps she's decided that she's just not the mothering kind, for, as the authors write, "having a child can itself be an unbearable burden for the psychological health of the woman or for her already existing children, regardless of the condition of the fetus."

The authors point out that each of these conditions—the baby is sick or suffering, the baby will be a financial hardship, the baby will be personally troublesome—is now "largely accepted" as a good reason for a mother to abort her baby before he's born. So why not after?

"When circumstances occur *after birth* such that they would have justified abortion, what we call *after-birth abortion* should be permissible." (Their italics.) Western societies approve abortion because they have reached a consensus that a fetus is not a person; they should acknowledge that by the same definition a newborn isn't a person either. Neither fetus nor baby has developed a sufficient sense of his own life to know what it would be like to be deprived of it. The kid will never know the difference, in other words. A newborn baby is just a fetus who's hung around a bit too long.

As the authors acknowledge, this makes an "after-birth abortion" a tricky business. You have to get to the infant before he develops "those properties that justify the attribution of a right to life to an individual." It's a race against time.

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The article doesn't go on for more than 1,500 words, but for non-ethicists it has a high surprise-per-word ratio. The information that newborn babies aren't people is just the beginning. A reader learns that "many non-human animals … are persons" and therefore enjoy a "right to life." (Such ruminative ruminants, unlike babies, are self-aware enough to know that getting killed will entail a "loss of value.") The authors don't tell us which species these "non-human persons" belong to, but it's safe to say that you don't want to take a medical ethicist to dinner at Outback.

But what about adoption, you ask. The authors ask that question too, noting that some people—you and me, for example—might think that adoption could buy enough time for the unwanted newborn to technically become a person and "possibly increase the happiness of the people involved." But this is not a viable option, if you'll forgive the expression. A mother who kills her newborn baby, the authors report, is forced to "accept the irreversibility of the loss." By contrast, a mother who gives her baby up for adoption "might suffer psychological distress." And for a very simple reason: These mothers "often dream that their child will return to them. This makes it difficult to accept the reality of the loss because they can never be quite sure whether or not it is irreversible." It's simpler for all concerned just to make sure the loss can't be reversed. It'll spare Mom a lot of heartbreak.

Now, it's at this point in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* that many readers will begin to suspect, as I did, that their legs are being not very subtly pulled. The inversion that the argument entails is Swiftian—a twenty-first-century Modest Proposal without the cannibalism (for now). Jonathan Swift's original Modest Proposal called for killing Irish children to prevent them "from being a burden to their parents." It was death by compassion, the killing of innocents based on a surfeit of fellow-feeling. The authors agree that compassion itself demands the death of newborns. Unlike Swift, though, they aren't kidding.

They get you coming and going, these guys. They assume—and they won't get much argument from their peers in the profession—that "mentally impaired" infants are eligible for elimination because they will never develop the properties necessary to be fully human. Then they discuss Treacher-Collins syndrome, which causes facial deformities and respiratory ailments but no mental impairment. Kids with TCS are "fully aware of their condition, of being different from other people and of all the problems their pathology entails," and are therefore, to spare them a life of such unpleasant awareness, eligible for elimination too—because they are *not* mentally impaired. The threshold to this "right to life" just gets higher and higher, the more you think about it.

It's what medical ethicists get paid to do: cogitate, cogitate, cogitate. As "After-birth Abortion" spread around the world and gained wide publicity, non-ethicists greeted it with derision or shock or worse.

And of course it is their business to think about it. It's what medical ethicists get paid to do: cogitate, cogitate, cogitate. As "After-birth Abortion" spread around the world and gained wide publicity—that damned Internet—non-ethicists greeted it with derision or shock or worse. The authors and the editor of the *Journal of Medical Ethics* were themselves shocked at the response. As their inboxes flooded with hate mail, the authors composed an apology of sorts that non-ethicists will find more revealing even than the original paper.

"We are really sorry that many people, who do not share the background of the intended audience for this article, felt offended, outraged, or even threatened," they wrote. "The article was supposed to be read by other fellow bioethicists who were already familiar with this topic and our arguments." It was a *thought experiment*. After all, among medical ethicists "this debate"—about when it's proper to kill babies—"has been going on for 40 years."

So *that's* what they've been talking about in all those panel discussions! The authors thought they were merely taking the next step in a train of logic that was set in motion, and has been widely accepted, since their profession was invented in the 1960s. And of course they were. The outrage directed at their article came from laymen—people unsophisticated in contemporary ethics. Medical ethicists in general expressed few objections, only a minor annoyance that the authors had let the cat out of the bag. A few days after it was posted the article was removed from the publicly accessible area of the *Journal*'s website, sending it back to that happy, cozy world.

You'd have to be very, very well trained in ethics to see the authors' argument as a morally acceptable extension of their premises, but you can't deny the logic of it. The rest of us will see in the argument an extension of its premises into self-evident absurdity. Pro-lifers should take note. For years, in public argument, pro-choicers have mocked them for not following their belief in a fetus's humanity to its logical end. *Shouldn't you execute doctors who perform abortions? Why don't you have funerals for miscarriages?*

As one pro-choice wag, writing about the Republicans' pro-life platform, put it in the *Washington Post* a few years ago: "The official position of the Republican Party is that women who have abortions should be executed."

And now we know the pro-choice position is that children born with a facial deformity should be executed too, as long as you get to them quick enough. Unwittingly the insouciant authors of "After-birth Abortion" have shown where pro-choicers wind up if they follow *their* belief about fetuses to its logical end. They've performed a public service. Could it be that medical ethicists really are more useful than aromatherapists? ♦

They'll Have His Back

What congressional Republicans will do for the GOP nominee. BY FRED BARNES

Everybody fall in line, now.

Jack Kemp, the Republican congressman from Buffalo, met with Ronald Reagan at the Airport Marriott in Los Angeles in early January 1980. Kemp, an enthusiastic supporter of supply-side economics, had authored the Kemp-Roth tax cut to reduce income tax rates by 30 percent across the board. He was eager to persuade Reagan, who had expressed sympathy for the tax proposal in radio broadcasts.

Kemp succeeded, and their alliance proved to be enormously fruitful. Reagan adopted the Kemp tax cut and economic growth as the centerpieces of his presidential bid. It led, after he won the nomination, to a united campaign with congressional Republicans—and to enactment of a 23 percent tax cut once Reagan was elected.

Now Republicans would like to revive party unity and repeat the Reagan-Kemp success story. House speaker John Boehner and Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell are planning to confer with the Republican nominee, once one emerges. Their aim: agreement on a joint agenda.

McConnell has specific ideas about what the presidential candidate and Republicans in both houses of Congress should promote. "Obamacare should be the number one issue in the campaign," he says. "I think it's the gift that keeps on giving."

Next are the deficit and national debt. These, in turn, would make entitlement and tax reform important issues against Obama. "We're not interested in small ball," McConnell says.

And there's another Republican initiative on Capitol Hill aimed at thwarting President Obama and Democrats. Republicans plan to keep up a steady stream of bills and proposals, mostly coming from the House, to foil the charge that Obama's policies have been undercut by a "do-nothing Congress"—that is, a Republican Congress.

"There isn't a do-nothing Congress," a Republican consultant says. "There's a do-nothing Senate." Democrats control the Senate. Majority Leader Harry Reid has said he hopes to call a minimal number of votes this year. The Senate hasn't passed a budget in three years.

A third strategy reflecting Republican unity would aid the victorious presidential candidate after the primaries end in late June and before the GOP convention in late August. This is a period in which the nominee, assuming there is one, is likely to be out of money, having exhausted his resources in winning the nomination.

At least one independent political action committee, American Crossroads, is committed to taking up the slack and countering attacks by the Obama campaign on the Republican candidate. Other so-called super-PACs may join the effort with heavy buys of TV ads.

The White House has already implemented its do-nothing tactic by hiding instances of Republican cooperation. In August, Obama delivered a Rose Garden speech urging the reauthorization of funding for the Federal Aviation Administration. He was joined by AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka, who called it a jobs bill.

Last month, Republicans and Democrats negotiated a long-term extension of FAA funding. After it passed the House and Senate with strong bipartisan majorities, one might have expected a signing ceremony at the White House for a bill whose importance had been touted in a Rose Garden speech. Instead, the press secretary merely issued a statement saying the measure had been signed privately.

When the payroll tax holiday was continued through the end of this year, it too passed by overwhelming bipartisan majorities. Again, no ceremony at the White House. The same for the highway bill extension. When the president signed three trade treaties in October, he did so with little fanfare. Two House Republicans were invited, but McConnell, a leader in the years-long struggle for ratification, was not.

NEWSCOM

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The president and Reid now face another awkward situation. A jobs bill to help small business, endorsed by Obama, was approved by the House last week, 390-23. Rather than adopt the House bill, Reid said he prefers something "similar," perhaps to give it a Democratic flavor. When Reid will schedule a Senate vote is unclear.

Despite Reid's desire for the Senate to be a graveyard for legislation in 2012, it's bound to be a battleground in the presidential race. Last week, Senate Republicans sought to amend a transportation bill to force Obama to approve construction of the Keystone oil pipeline from Canada to the Texas Gulf Coast.

It came close to passage. The amendment got 56 votes, 4 short of the 60 required. But the pipeline actually had 59 supporters. Two Republicans (John Thune, Mark Kirk) were absent for personal reasons, and one Democrat (Mark Warner) who favors the pipeline voted no, presumably at the president's request. Obama, fearing embarrassment, lobbied to kill the bill.

Where does all this lead us? Republicans should be encouraged. That Obama will glide to reelection is widely believed in Washington and popular with the mainstream media. The never-ending GOP presidential race has spurred a wave of optimism among Democrats and inside the Obama campaign.

They're dreaming. Obama's poll numbers are weak, and his economic baggage has been lightened very little by the gradual decline in unemployment. He's in trouble, all the more because Republicans of all stripes agree his defeat is their most important objective.

In Congress and the political community, Republicans aren't waiting for the presidential contest to end. Though it's difficult to imagine now, Republicans in the congressional wing of the party will have the nominee's back whenever he is crowned. Just like Jack Kemp in 1980, who gave the likely nominee an agenda even before the primaries had begun. ♦

Academic Paragon

Thinking about James Q. Wilson.

BY JEREMY RABKIN

When James Q. Wilson published *Bureaucracy* in 1989, Daniel Patrick Moynihan toasted it as Wilson's "summa" and Wilson himself as "our Weber." Like many pronouncements of Moynihan's, that tribute was grand, right for the moment—but not quite right. What James Q. Wilson had in common with the German sociologist Max Weber was scholarly industry, an interest in bureaucracy—and not much else. The differences were all to our benefit.

Wilson certainly received wide recognition as a scholar. Within a decade of completing his Ph.D. in political science at the University of Chicago, he had attained an endowed chair in the Harvard government department. He was elected president of the American Political Science Association in 1991, after receiving its James Madison Award for distinguished scholarship the year before. Further honors continued to be awarded him by the APSA and other academic organizations over the next two decades. A succession of presidents, from Nixon to Bush, recruited him to high-level advisory commissions. And he gained notice as a participant in policy debates through op-ed columns and magazine articles.

After his death on March 2, at age 80, Wilson's status as a "public intellectual" was confirmed by the many tributes published in newspapers, magazines, and websites. But Wilson never slackened the pace of his scholarly work. His books were written in the same straightforward style as his topical offerings. They were free of arcane jargon, abstruse equations, academic cant. They were aimed at a general audience of thoughtful readers.

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Throughout his career, Wilson stayed close to the ground of political life, as ordinary Americans experience it. His scholarship aimed to make the baffling or exasperating aspects of our public life more comprehensible. Any one of his books could be read with profit by a college sophomore, perhaps even a motivated high school sophomore (my children read *Varieties of Police Behavior* at a young age—because we happened to have it in the house—and were citing it years later in their debates about how the Army should be patrolling in Iraq). His textbook on American government was—deservedly—the most widely sold textbook in political science.

Wilson did not waste much time on debates about methodology. I still recall the advice he gave me as a graduate student, when he sent me out with a small grant to investigate a federal regulatory program: If you quote someone, make sure you spell the name correctly and don't throw away any document they give you. Perhaps the specific advice is less relevant when researchers can fall back on Google, but the underlying point remains: You want to learn about a government program? Pay attention!

Wilson's method was, in the first place—and often the second and third place—to ask and listen and observe. Most of his work is about why people in various situations behave as they do. He emphasized incentives, but also the climate of opinion and some aspects of personal character. And then he moved on to investigate a different but related topic.

His first book was *Negro Politics* (1960). The title dates it, but it is still entirely readable and in some ways dismayingly familiar. It offers some statistics and analysis of political structure—principally the advantages of the Chicago political machine in rewarding

followers, compared with what black civic organizations could provide, leaving to the latter the more dubious rewards of militant rhetoric. The book rests mostly on what Wilson learned from spending time in black neighborhoods of Chicago conducting interviews as a graduate student (the book was built on his dissertation). A lot of academics would have followed up with another book about race and then spent a career pontificating on the subject from the comfort of an academic perch.

James Q. Wilson

Wilson was too disciplined and too serious for that sort of career. He moved from writing about the political style of black leaders in poor neighborhoods to the problems of civic reformers in affluent areas. Yet his book on the latter, *The Amateur Democrat* (1962), highlights many of the same problems, when political leaders can't provide direct rewards to their followers in the same way as party machines. *City Politics* (1963, coauthored with his Chicago adviser and by then Harvard colleague, Edward C. Banfield) shows how the pattern of politics in different cities varies with the governing structures that facilitate or frustrate centralized parties or strong executives. On the whole, these works reflect an underlying respect for traditional political parties, even "party machines," grounded in skepticism that more participation would achieve more genuine democracy.

A decade later, Wilson offered a more general analysis of these problems in *Political Organizations* (1973), which emphasizes all the dysfunctions that follow from the differing incentive structures of those who want to lead political organizations and those they try to corral into heeding or contributing to them. The book helped launch the "rational choice" school of political science, seeking to explain political outcomes by the personal incentives of decision-makers. But Wilson himself later cautioned against the "rat choice" tendency to reduce everything to one variable. And his own subsequent work was an implicit rebuke to the tendency of modelers to focus most of their attention on congressional voting—which is easy to tabulate and work over for statistical correlations but too readily assumes that congressional intentions determine government outcomes.

Meanwhile, Wilson had moved from writing about urban politics to inquiring about one of the central issues in that arena—policing. By the late 1960s, calls to "stop police misconduct" had become a rallying cry for both black leaders and liberal reformers. Harvey Mansfield once described the ensuing study, *Varieties of Police Behavior* (1968), as "the most understated title in political science." It is an analysis of how policing differs in American cities, owing to different challenges and expectations. Cities where police are more accommodating also rely on the police to make disputable judgments about which crimes are most serious. By then, Wilson sent grad students to do much of the fieldwork. But he seems to have done most of the interviews for *The Investigators*, a 1978 study of the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Both books emphasize the difficulty of monitoring good performance by relying on easily counted indicators, like arrests or convictions. To explain what urban police or their federal counterparts do on a day to day basis, Wilson offered analysis but also a lot of sheer reporting, much of it face to face.

By the time he wrote *Bureaucracy*, Wilson had spent decades gathering examples of how ordinary people in government offices cope with contrary pressures and job incentives. *Bureaucracy* is a wonderful book, partly because it refuses to treat its subject at Weberian levels of abstraction. What we call "bureaucracy" encompasses many different aims, settings, constraints. The book starts by disclaiming any "simple, elegant, comprehensive theory of bureaucratic behavior" because such theories have always proven "so abstract or general as to explain rather little." It then emphasizes distinctive constraints facing federal administrative programs in the United States. The book ends with "A Few Modest Suggestions That May Make a Small Difference." Its lesson for would-be reformers, from the left or the right: Don't expect too much. It is good advice for anyone thinking to launch a new program, but Wilson did not despise efforts to "make a small difference."

If George Orwell was right—that all great writers have one title that captures the theme of all their works—that title for Wilson was *Thinking About Crime*, which first appeared in 1975, then in a much expanded edition in 1985. The crucial word is "thinking." The book became famous for its relentless criticism of criminologists, who urged efforts to alleviate the "root causes" of crime—in poverty and social neglect—rather than focusing on catching, confining, or countering actual criminals. But Wilson was also impatient with politicians and commentators demanding that we "get tough on crime" without much heed to what that would mean or what it would cost.

In a book that is filled with statistics and reviews of empirical studies, Wilson tried to capture what was reasonably well known and what was not known. The concluding chapter, for example, expressed skepticism about whether capital punishment deters crime, while acknowledging that the death penalty might well be defended on moral grounds. In the preface to the second edition, he summed up his "central message . . . namely, that we can make more progress thinking analytically and experimentally about crime and its control than we can by exchanging slogans, rehearsing our ideology or exaggerating the extent to which human nature or government institutions can be changed according to plan."

Wilson was impressed by the power of institutions. His last book was a collection, *Understanding America* (2008, coedited with former student Peter

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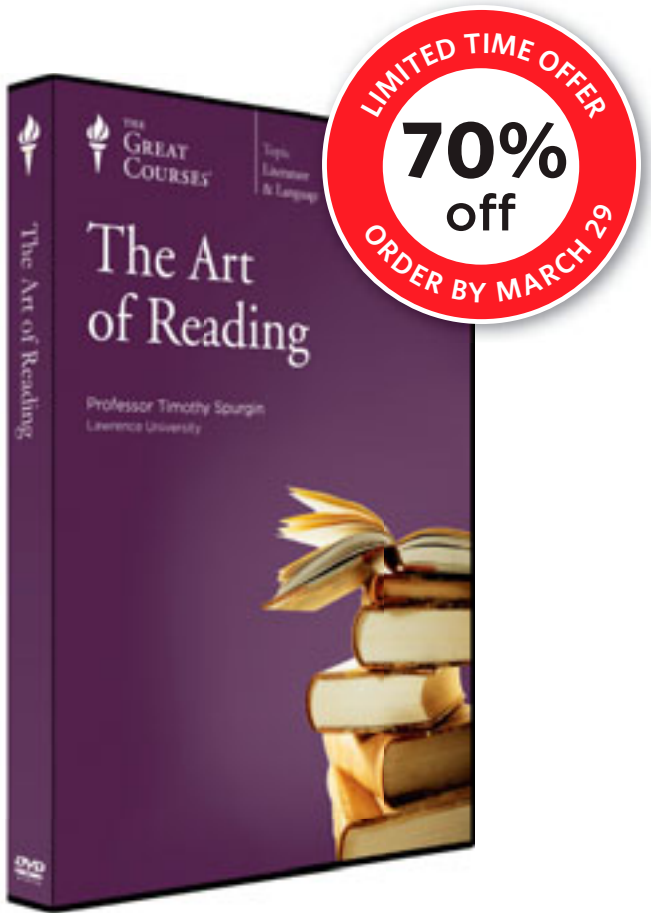

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Schuck), which might also be one of his signature titles. It is not an exercise in chest-thumping or flag-waving, but it is forthright in its claim that America displays enduring differences from most other Western democracies across a whole range of policies and political patterns. Its subtitle is "The Anatomy of an Exceptional Nation."

Wilson appreciated what America has achieved, particularly the opportunities it has offered to ordinary people. In *The Moral Sense* (1993)—which draws on a wide range of social science literature (and some evolutionary biology) to demonstrate the natural basis for fellow-feeling and self-restraint—he refers in passing to Los Angeles as "the city that I love." It was the place where he grew up. He left Harvard to return there in 1987, when he still had two decades of active teaching ahead of him at UCLA and then Pepperdine. I think part of what he liked about L.A. was its vitality and sheer human variety. It did not seem to bother him at all that Los Angeles lacked monuments of premodern culture.

In contemporary terms, Wilson's writings always reflected a kind of conservatism—he emphasized incentives, trade-offs, the limits of our understanding. But he was in no way gloomy or fatalistic. The last chapter in *Thinking About Crime* sums up his presumptions: "If we are to make the best and sanest use of our laws and liberties, we must first adopt a sober view of man and his institutions that would permit reasonable things to be accomplished, foolish things abandoned and utopian things forgotten. A sober view of man requires a modest definition of progress."

For all that, Wilson was surely an optimist in his underlying assumption that patient inquiry and patient argument could change people's views and, at least at the margin, improve the ways we govern ourselves. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2003. Probably no academic has done more to earn this recognition for "especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States." I don't think it occurred to Wilson to scorn that award because it was given by a politician. ♦

Russia's Once and Future President

A depressing victory for Putin.

BY CATHY YOUNG

In the end, the outcome of the Russian presidential election was as predictable as it was depressing. Vladimir Putin won, with an official tally of nearly 64 percent of the vote—more than enough to spare him the dreaded runoff—amid charges of widespread fraud at the ballot box. The question remains whether this is a lasting defeat for freedom in Russia or a last and ephemeral victory for Putinism.

Vlad the Permanent

Given the lack of a credible opposition candidate who could unify even a sizable minority of the electorate, Putin's victory was always assured. (It might have been a different story if the discontent that followed last December's parliamentary vote had come a year or even six months before the presidential election—enough time, perhaps, for such a candidate to arise and mount a strong effort to get on the ballot.) Nonetheless, the Kremlin was clearly nervous about the prospect of Putin's falling short of the 50-percent mark—something that would have been perceived, regardless of the final outcome, as a stunning vote of no confidence. Indeed, the tenor of Putin's campaign for reelection was sometimes positively apocalyptic.

In a televised debate on February 13, pro-Putin filmmaker Nikita Mikhalkov earnestly warned that "anyone voting against Putin today is voting against Russia's statehood, against her future." Putin himself struck a similarly dramatic note when he addressed a throng of supporters at Moscow's Luzhniki sports arena later that month. Quoting from the classic 19th-century poem "Borodino" by Mikhail Lermontov, a tale of the decisive battle between Napoleon's army and Russian forces, he declared that "the battle for Russia continues" and hailed the attendees as "defenders of the Motherland."

For all the strident rhetoric, genuine popular enthusiasm was largely lacking. The pro-Putin rallies were heavily packed with public employees as well as hired extras (some of whom apparently got stiffed: YouTube videos showed "demonstrators" upset because their contact had not shown up with the promised cash). Meanwhile, in a minor scandal, hacked emails from a leader of Nashi, the pro-Kremlin youth movement, showed that the group had been paying people to attend rallies and post on political forums and blogs.

In a particularly tacky Putin campaign commercial that became an Internet hit, a pretty girl told a fortune-teller that she wanted to "do it for love" because "this is my first time," and then gasped with joy when the cards revealed Putin as her man. "It will be for love, and without deception," the fortuneteller assured Miss First Time. The reality was quite different. Putin love seemed in short supply (in October, even before the winter of Russia's

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Cathy Young is a contributing editor to Reason *magazine and a columnist for* RealClearPolitics.

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discontent, only 3 percent of Russians polled by the Levada Center said they "admired" Putin, while 24 percent "liked" him) —and deception, by all accounts, was rampant.

A record number of voters in this election received slips permitting them to vote in a district other than their residence. In practice, this often allows multiple votes if the poll worker does not collect the slip—or if the voter is given more than one. This form of vote-rigging is colloquially known as "the carousel," and many observers say that it was spinning at full force, with busloads of nonresident voters making the rounds of precincts. There were also cases— reported in the media, confirmed by election monitors, and in some instances caught on video—of ballot boxes being stuffed with sheaves of ballots premarked for Putin.

But did Putin steal the election, or just pad his victory margin? Probably the latter, most Putin critics reluctantly agree. An independent analysis by the League of Voters, a civic group formed in January which includes leading opposition figures and anti-election-fraud activists, concluded that Putin's actual share of the vote nationwide was around 53 percent—well short of the official landslide, but a comfortable win.

The opposition for the moment is licking its wounds. On March 5, an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 protesters gathered on Pushkin Square to repeat the call for fair elections. While such a turnout would have been a huge success six months ago, it was far short of the 150,000 attending rallies in the past three months, a dramatic drop that was, to many, dispiriting.

Opposition leader and anticorruption blogger Alexei Navalny tried to sound upbeat as he addressed the crowd: "We are the power! We'll teach them to respect the law! We will come out into the streets and the squares and we will not leave!" But his promises struck a hollow note. At the end of the permitted rally, people began to disperse and the riot police arrived. Demonstrators who would not leave were forcibly ejected from the square; many, including journalists, were shoved and clubbed, and one female activist suffered a fractured arm. About 250 people, including Navalny, were briefly detained (in St. Petersburg, arrests numbered 300 to 450). Elsewhere in Moscow, an attempt to form a human ring of protest around the Kremlin, as activists had done on two occasions during the winter, fizzled early.

"One or two more pointless and hysterical events like the Pushkin Square rally, and the opposition will squander all of its gains," liberal commentator Nikolai Svanidze wrote in the Internet magazine *Ej.ru*. The editors of the Internet daily *Gazeta.ru*, strongly critical of the Kremlin, concluded that the movement for fair elections had lost momentum as a result of the widespread acknowledgment that the ballot box fraud, however extensive, had not altered the election result. "The carnival of protest is over," they wrote, urging the opposition to channel its energy instead into the prosaic day-to-day tasks of reforming laws that hobble political activity in Russia.

And yet the 2012 election cannot be regarded as a total loss for the opposition. Putin suffered at least one defeat—one without practical consequences, but major symbolic or psychological weight: Even by the official count, he received only 47 percent of the vote in Moscow. Perhaps this accounts for the startling humility in the pro-government press, whose commentary often sounded no more optimistic than the opposition's.

Thus, *Izvestia* columnist Maksim Sokolov noted that most Putin voters were choosing "the devil they know" and giving the regime one last chance; if it did not justify this grudging trust, Sokolov warned, it would fall. In the same paper, Andrei Ilnitsky, a top functionary of the ruling United Russia party, wrote that the pre-2012 system of governance could not continue and that without more open and competitive politics, Russia might join Belarus in its authoritarian mire and international isolation. Ilnitsky welcomed the growth of pro-democracy, pro-market parties and urged United Russia to modernize.

Of course, this could amount to mere talk. It remains to be seen whether Dmitry Medvedev's lame-duck initiative to remove barriers (created during the first Putin presidency) to the registration of independent parties will translate into genuine reform or more Potemkin politics. Today, at least, the opposition has leaders with real influence. Navalny is one; another intriguing figure is tycoon Mikhail Prokhorov, the election's only liberal candidate, who came in third (after Putin and Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov) with over 8 percent of the vote—up from early polls that gave him 1 percent. The unofficial analysis by the League of Voters has Prokhorov placing second, with 16 percent. While many Russian liberals were disappointed by Prokhorov's willingness to concede the election and meet with Putin the next day, he also appeared at the opposition rally, where he promised to "fight for a free country where our citizens will vote based on dignity rather than fear."

As for the once and future president himself, many are wondering how his third term will differ from the first two and whether his weakened support will make him more flexible or more aggressive, both toward the opposition and toward the West. Putin's language, so far, suggests the latter: He and his cronies have repeatedly fallen back on portraying dissenters as tools of the West, with particularly strident attacks on U.S. ambassador Michael McFaul, a serious scholar of Russia and the Soviet Union. Nor did Putin tone down his rhetoric after the vote. At his victory rally, he denounced "political provocations that had only one goal: to cause the collapse of the Russian state and usurp power."

At the moment, Putin is biding his time. Whether the opposition manages to stay unified and focused will no doubt influence his course. So will the Western response. A strong message that a new wave of repression would cost Russia its ego-stroking and profitable foreign friendships will go a long way toward ensuring that Russia's newly awakened civil society is not crushed as it takes its first steps. ♦

Deadly Diversity

Nigeria's Islamist war on Christianity.

BY PAUL MARSHALL

In Nigeria, thousands of people have been killed in recent months, and tens of thousands in the last decade. It is a fissiparous country whose conflicts have been exacerbated by the increased influence of radical Islam—beginning with attempts to apply Islamic law, then the growth of militias, and now the depredations of the vicious al Qaeda-linked Boko Haram movement.

Nigeria has by far the largest population in Africa, some 150 million people, comprising hundreds of ethnic groups, which produces dangerous tensions even without the religious differences. The country is about equally divided between Muslims and Christians, with another 10 percent following indigenous practices. Christians are the majority throughout the South, and Muslims in the North, though with substantial Muslim and Christian minorities in each area, and the two are more mixed in the middle belt, the scene of frequent violence. These conflicts often involve disputes over resources and land use as well as ethnicity, but the religious dimension is increasing.

Olusegun Obasanjo was elected president in 1999, ending 16 years of military rule, but, as elsewhere, the transition to democracy has released animosities hitherto brutally repressed by dictators.

Nigeria remains intensely corrupt—it ranked 143rd out of 183 countries in Transparency International's 2011 corruption index—but federal politicians have usually tried to avoid exacerbating regional, ethnic, and religious tensions. Obasanjo was a Yoruba, but drew much support from non-Yorubas, and his bloated cabinet was carefully composed to include at least one minister from each of the country's 36 states. The parties usually choose their presidential candidates alternately from North and South, Muslim and Christian, and pair them with vice presidential candidates of a different religion and region.

Recently this system suffered a partial breakdown. In 2010, President Umaru Yar'Adua, a Muslim, died in office and was succeeded by his Christian vice president, the charmingly named Goodluck Jonathan. In the 2011 presidential election, Jonathan, paired with Muslim vice-presidential candidate Namadi Sambo, beat his Muslim opponent, Muhammadu Buhari, whose running mate was a Christian.

Despite Jonathan's convincing victory—and reports from international observers pronouncing the election the fairest in Nigeria for decades (admittedly not a high standard)—many Muslim northerners, especially the young, claimed they had been cheated. When the results were announced, there were riots throughout the North, with hundreds killed. Most victims were Christians, but Sambo's house was burned, and traditional Muslim leaders, especially those who counseled restraint, were threatened.

At the state level, politicians have been less careful. Zamfara State governor Ahmed Sani introduced a draconian version of *sharia* in 1999, and 11 of Nigeria's 36 states followed suit. Muslims, especially women, suffered, but much of the brunt was borne by Christians. Their taxes pay

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for Islamic preachers, while state governments have closed hundreds of churches. Conflicts over *sharia* have produced the largest death toll since the Biafra civil war in the 1960s.

The more inchoate mob violence has now been supplemented by Islamist militias. In 2004, a man calling himself Mullah Omar led an uprising in Yobe by a militia called al-Sunna Wal Jamma, nicknamed "the Taliban." While their names had a comic-opera quality, their actions were brutal. Demanding an Islamic state governed by *sharia* law, they stormed police stations and other government buildings, pulled down the Nigerian flag, raised the old Afghan flag, stole large quantities of weapons, and vowed to kill all non-Muslims. Tens of thousands of people were displaced.

This Taliban has spawned even more vicious offspring. One group is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (Association Advancing the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), usually known as Boko Haram, which translates roughly as "Western civilization/education is forbidden." The shorthand name is well chosen since it points to a source of Boko Haram's strength and Nigeria's weakness. Many Muslim children in the North receive no education that could give them work skills. If they go to school, they often attend Islamiyya schools, where they learn to recite the Koran, though in many instances without being able to read or understand it. No one should begrudge young Muslims the opportunity to learn their sacred texts, but many learn little else. Since they have few practical skills and live in an economically depressed area, millions end up unemployed and vagrant. In turn, these angry youths become the radicals' recruits. They attack schools and government offices, and so the cycle repeats.

Boko Haram attacks anyone, Christian or Muslim, who rejects its views. In July 2009, it attacked police stations, prisons, schools, churches, and homes, burning everything in its path. Its violence spread through Borno, Kano, and Yobe states, particularly targeting Christians. Many were forced, under threat of death, to renounce their faith; 700 people were killed in the town of Maiduguri alone.

In August 2011, Boko Haram bombed the U.N. headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, and killed 23 people. Christmas is a focal time for attacks by Islamic extremists. This past Christmas, churches were bombed in Jos, Kano, Damaturu, and Gadaka. A blast at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Abuja killed 35 and wounded many others. These coordinated attacks, in the Northeast, North, and center of the country, reveal an increased sophistication.

In January, Boko Haram warned the millions of Christians living in the North that they had three days to leave or would be attacked. Gun and bomb attacks in Kano killed at least 186 people and put thousands to flight. In 2011, Boko Haram killed about 500 people; in just the first month of 2012, it killed over half that many.

Nigeria's conflicts are complex, but Boko Haram's explicit targeting of Christians is undeniable. Leader Abubakar Shekau has declared: "Everyone knows that democracy and the constitution is paganism. . . . You Christians should know that Jesus . . . is not the Son of God. This religion of Christianity you are practicing is not a religion of God—it is paganism. . . . We are trying to coerce you to embrace Islam, because that is what God instructed us to do."

Boko Haram has many layers, from a disciplined core to a stable of alienated youth, but its center is now linked to other terrorists. On August 9, 2009, the group explicitly aligned itself with al Qaeda, and reportedly some of its personnel have trained in Mali with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In turn, AQIM says it will give Boko Haram "whatever support we can in men, arms, and munitions to enable you to defend our people in Nigeria." Boko Haram is now morphing into something like Somalia's al-Shebaab.

Still, for all its problems, Nigeria is not Somalia. Moreover, since the Persian Gulf is looking ever more precarious, and Nigeria lies near the center of one of the world's most significant hydrocarbon areas, it should draw the attention of even the most flinty-eyed realists.

Fortunately, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), especially its program of regional counterterrorism partnerships, was formed with such situations in mind. Nigeria's security forces need equipping to counter Boko Haram and its imitators, and training to do so without the brutality that would feed their recruitment. While it is facile to link international terrorism with poverty, Nigeria's millions of marginalized Muslim youth are easy recruits to violence. Supporters of both hard and soft power can find common cause in this effort—and together hope that a president named Goodluck will live up to his name. ♦

The 'Beijing Model' Bubble

Westerners fall in love with the part of China's economy that doesn't work. BY DAN BLUMENTHAL

The idea that China is practicing a new form of capitalism, and may even be "doing capitalism better than America," is reaching a fever pitch in policy and business circles. Two arguments buttress the claim of "Beijing Consensus-ers." The first is that there is a "Beijing Model" of authoritarian politics and state-led "capitalism" that is the new secret sauce for economic development. Just look at the numbers: almost double-digit economic growth for decades! Hundreds of millions pulled out of poverty! A stimulus that worked! More solar panels! Better rail systems and supercomputers—"that used to be us," says President Obama.

The second is that this "Beijing Model" is a threat to the supposedly discredited Washington Consensus of free markets and liberal democracy. Time to end "free market fundamentalism," exclaims Andy Stern, the former public-sector union boss, and adopt Chinese-style industrial policy. This year's World Economic Forum annual meeting at Davos included an early eulogy for "Western-style" capitalism. According to these arguments, the battle between free market and state capitalism is the ideological struggle of our time.

Most of this is sheer fantasy. For starters, there is nothing new about the "Beijing Model." The dominance of communism in the 20th century obscures the fact that non-Communist dictatorships welcomed some facets of market economics. After abandoning communism, China did not invent a new form of "state capitalism." Rather it is now simply a more prosperous autocracy. As were Italy and Germany in the 1930s, and Taiwan and South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s. But the fatal flaw of the Beijing Consensus view is that there is no consensus in Beijing. Entrepreneurs and free marketers are battling it out with statists inside China itself. China's sophisticated technocrats, economists, and entrepreneurs know that state-owned enterprises and industrial policy are a drag on the Chinese economy.

The *Economist* reported that despite the cheap credit to favored industries, private firms may be seeing an average return on equity more than 10 percentage points higher than their state-owned brethren. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, Chinese companies that are not majority-owned by the state account for two-thirds of industrial output. The World Bank recently weighed in with a report, together with an influential Chinese state-run think tank, that concluded that China will not keep growing at sustainable levels unless it becomes less statist:

> Besides being less profitable, state enterprises, overall, are also less dynamic than private firms. A recent study shows that between 1978 and 2007 total factor productivity growth (a measure of efficiency improvements) in the state sector was a third that of the private sector, which has proved to be the more powerful engine of growth and innovation.

That is a nice way of saying that much of China's capital goes to unproductive and maybe even growth-repressing endeavors.

While some of these studies are hard to verify, given the state of Chinese statistics, the fact is that Chinese economists themselves argue that statism is badly misallocating capital and repressing productivity. Some American-based scholars agree. The careful work of MIT scholar Yasheng Huang demonstrates that the most liberal period in Chinese politics and economics—from 1978 until the 1989 crackdown—coincided with the greatest improvements in Chinese welfare. And that period of growth was entrepreneur-driven rather than state-led. From 1978 to 1985 Chinese people in rural areas created up to 10.5 million privately owned firms. That, Huang says, really launched the Chinese growth miracle.

If China does not level the playing field to allow its entrepreneurs to compete, it will cease to grow at the rates that have left outside observers so enamored. If China does not innovate, it may even be heading for a crisis.

A real Chinese private sector is very much in U.S. interests. While one can quibble about cause and effect and timing, a private sector protected by the rule of law and the free flow of capital and labor will eventually mean more freedom in China. That is something Washington wants. A true private sector in China, moreover, could lead to less protectionism, reduced global trade imbalances, a free-floating currency, and an open capital account—all the things on our economic agenda with China.

Besides jawboning, there is not much the United States can do to encourage economic reform in China, but there is one thing we can try. We can endeavor to better understand and explain our own financial crisis. Our crisis was more one of crony capitalism than of free market capitalism. Crony capitalism has been on the march in the United States for over a decade. Indeed, some Americans advocate more crony capitalism of our own (see auto bailouts, Solyndra, Goldman Sachs, Fannie and Freddie) in order to "compete" with the Beijing Consensus. Nothing would do more harm to the free marketers in China. If Washington decides to compete with China on who can do crony capitalism better, we will lose. So too will China's reformers. ♦

Dan Blumenthal is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Let a Thousand Teachers Bloom

Improve the profession by opening it up.

BY MARCUS A. WINTERS

Teachers, more than any other feature of a school, determine how well students learn. Parents know it; research confirms it. So it might seem reasonable to expect that securing good teachers would be a well-honed art. Instead, the way we recruit, evaluate, retain, and compensate our more than 3 million public school teachers is almost entirely unrelated to teacher quality. It's actually worse than that: Modern research provides substantial evidence that the current system is not just bad at finding good teachers but actually incapable of doing so.

Consider the usual requirements for full-fledged admission to the profession—a master's degree from an education college, certification, and completion of three years' probationary teaching in a school. It turns out that none of these can be demonstrated to predict success in the classroom. While most teachers improve in their first three years (and then plateau), the evaluations during probation are seldom more than a rubber stamp. And once past that "screening," a teacher typically receives tenure—virtually, a job for life.

Of course, it is technically possible to fire teachers. But the process is so time-consuming and unlikely to succeed that few principals attempt it. In New York City, only 45 out of the district's nearly 72,000 teachers were fired for any reason during the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years. Over an 18-year period, 94 percent of school districts in Illinois did not try to fire a single tenured teacher. So teachers hired by criteria unreflective of quality stay on for good.

Nor is their compensation based on their performance. In the vast majority of school systems, public school teachers' pay reflects the number of advanced degrees they have earned and their years in the classroom, neither of which is a predictor of effective teaching. In fact, it has been found consistently that a stunning 97 percent of the variation in teacher quality is *not* explained by the characteristics prioritized by the current system.

The cure, then, is to turn the system on its head: Open the floodgates to the teaching profession. Any college graduate who can convince a principal to hire her should be eligible to teach in a public school. The success of alternative certification programs such as Teach for America provides clear evidence that great teachers (as well as bad teachers) can enter the classroom through a variety of doors.

Since effective teachers cannot be identified before they teach, what is needed is a meaningful measure of the teacher's independent contribution to students' learning after she is actually on the job. Development of a generally reliable evaluation system is the reform on which all other promising policies hinge. And it can be done—the statistical tools exist to measure the teacher's "value added." Since statistical measures of teacher quality are by their nature imperfect, however, they should not be used in isolation.

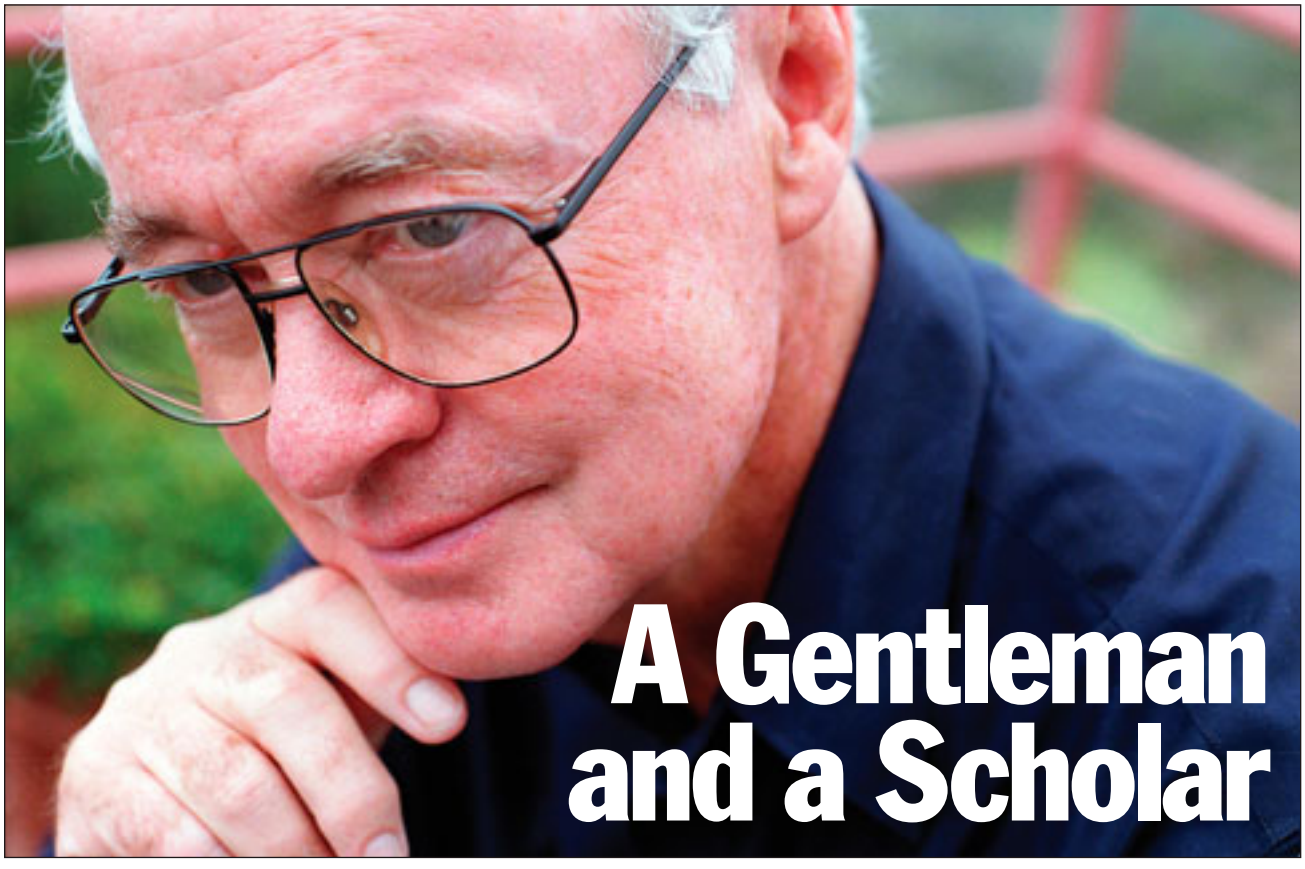
Also needed are observations of teachers' performance, though they should be far more rigorous than those currently used. Research shows that principals are capable of identifying ineffective teachers, but they don't do so now because giving bad ratings creates headaches without actually leading to the dismissal of inadequate teachers. If principals are held accountable for their schools' performance, they will have an incentive to assess their teachers accurately and to act on those assessments. Teachers who are not helping their students learn should be removed from the classroom. No student should have to suffer with a bad teacher simply because that teacher has been in the system for more than three years and thus cannot be fired.

Another necessary step is to pay successful teachers more than mediocre teachers. Performance pay would give teachers an incentive to put forth their best effort. But even more important, differentiating pay according to performance would improve retention of the best teachers. The problem with raising all teachers' salaries under the current system is that higher salaries are just as attractive to weak teachers as they are to strong teachers. Higher salaries should go to the teachers a principal most wants to keep.

Defenders of the current system sometimes argue that those who propose reforms such as these are looking for scapegoats or are actually anti-teacher. That is not true. It is the current system that fails to recognize and reward great teachers. A system that doesn't distinguish between skilled teachers and those who just get by is not a system that values teachers.

Improving education in America means improving the public schools, and it cannot be done without addressing teacher quality. Indeed, the wide variation in teacher quality means that there are substantial gains to be had from identifying, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and removing ineffective ones. It is an opportunity we now have the tools to seize. ♦

Marcus A. Winters is the author of Teachers Matter: Rethinking How Public Schools Identify, Reward, and Retain Great Educators.



A Gentleman and a Scholar

James Q. Wilson, 1931-2012

By Christopher DeMuth

I got up my nerve to introduce myself to James Q. Wilson when I was a Harvard junior casting around for a senior thesis topic. I approached his office in Harvard's Littauer Center daunted and therefore well prepared. Littauer was then (1967) home to a dazzling array of pathbreaking thinkers and celebrity scholars, including Henry Kissinger, John Kenneth Galbraith, Samuel Huntington, Thomas Schelling, and Edward C. Banfield, with the ed school's Daniel P. Moynihan a frequent visitor from just across the Cambridge Common. Wilson—at 36 the youngest full professor in the Department of Government—was already a standout in that company. He had been director of the MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies for several years, and was emerging as a leading light of the *Public Interest* circle of intellectual revolutionaries. He had recently published, with Banfield, *City Politics*, recognized as a landmark of political analysis the day it appeared.

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But I was interested in Wilson's earlier books, *Negro Politics* and *The Amateur Democrat*, written when he was a newly minted Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. I had had some involvement in black politics (and, I hereby confess, community organizing) in Chicago, and wanted to use my experience as a "participant-observer" as the basis for my thesis. I would employ Wilson's methods and typologies and extend his findings to a period when the trend he had identified in *Negro Politics*—the displacement of patronage politics by racial politics—had proceeded much further.

Jim was crisp and businesslike, hearing me out intently and responding with cordial criticism and several suggestions for further study. No, he could not be my thesis adviser—because he was already overcommitted, and anyway he wanted to be the faculty reader who would grade the thesis when it was done (gulp). As the interview was winding up, I managed to work in a few impressive analogies between his books and the works of earlier political scientists. "That's right," he concluded cheerfully as he ushered me to the door. "We don't know much in this business—but what we do know, we keep repeating."

That, I would come to learn, was quintessential James Q. Wilson. It was agreeable ("that's right" was

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one of his favorite openings), modest, plainspoken, and witty. But then one realized that he had said something important—in this case, crystallizing his realism about the capacities of social science and his conviction that the growth of knowledge is, at best, incremental and laborious. Even an undergraduate could play the J. K. Galbraith game—a sweeping, radical thesis, supported by a few clips from the *New York Times* and quips from Thorstein Veblen. The Wilson game was infinitely harder, demanding careful study and actual data from empirical measurement and field research, applied at just the right level of theoretical generalization for the problem at hand, to produce a small but confident improvement over what had been understood before. Wilson himself was engaged in numerous such games simultaneously, on subjects ranging from metropolitan development to party politics, from voting behavior to crime control, aiming to discover new knowledge that could help alleviate (he would never say solve) important social problems. He was a busy man and most of all a serious man. Younger men with serious aspirations wanted to figure out how to be like him, and knew it would not be easy.

Wilson worked on subjects ranging from party politics to crime control, aiming to discover new knowledge that could help alleviate (he would never say solve) important social problems.

That was the early phase of an intellectual career that would span 52 years (Jim's last essay, on taxation and income distribution, was written in the teeth of worsening health and ran in the *Washington Post* a month before his death). As his fame increased, he acquired a reputation as the most restrained, punctilious, empirically grounded of public intellectuals. And it is true that Jim cherished the norms of academic life, sometimes to the point of starchiness. In the late 1960s, he was finishing a lengthy study of how the organization of police departments affected the conduct and effectiveness of patrolmen on the front lines. His mentor and friend Edward Banfield, who had once been a journalist, had a terrific idea for a title: *The Bureaucrat on the Beat*. Jim was appalled, and titled his book *Varieties of Police Behavior*. Yet he was not at all the timid academic who sticks close to the literature and reports new data with a minimum of interpretation. His writings in magazines and newspapers were distinguished for their lucid summaries of research findings from political science, economics, psychology, ethnography, genetics, and other academic fields. But the key to his intellectual influence (actually one of two keys—I'll get to the other one later) lay elsewhere. It was his Tocqueville-like talent for creative observation and inspired interpretation and argument. As Wilson's sometime coauthor Karlyn Bowman puts it, he had "an eye for the piquant detail." He saw things that others did not see, whether he was reading a journal article, conducting a field interview, or following the news, sports, literature, the arts, or popular culture high and low (all of which he did avidly). And he made the most of what he saw.

Consider Jim's most celebrated policy article, "Broken Windows," written with George L. Kelling and published in 1982 in the *Atlantic*. The essay is conventionally treated as timely elaboration on an academic study which had found that, when an abandoned automobile had a single smashed window, it would soon be thoroughly vandalized. In fact, the article was based on a rejection of widely accepted findings, from careful empirical research, that putting police officers on foot patrols (rather than in patrol cars) had no effect on crime rates. That may be so, Wilson and Kelling wrote, in the short run in a neighborhood already wracked by violent crime. But it missed a larger and more important consideration: that the safety of a neighborhood is more than a matter of arrest rates, and depends ultimately on whether elementary norms of public conduct are being observed, so that residents feel secure in being out and about, which is good in itself and will in time lead to reduced violent crime as well. The broken windows study was introduced to illustrate the authors' contention that people's conduct is strongly influenced by their perception of the conduct of others in the immediate community. It was employed—along with other studies, discursive writings, history, illustrations from everyday life, appeals to logic and intuition, and persuasive rhetoric—to argue that the mission of policing ought to be expanded from crime-fighting to order-maintenance. The essay that launched a transformation in police practices (eventually cleaning up Times Square and other bellwether urban precincts) was not a popularization of research findings—the research findings pointed every which way. Rather it was an inspired, original proposition, constructed with fresh interpretations of selected research findings in tandem with other tools of understanding and exposition.

Here is another instance of Wilson's tremendous native perspicacity. In "A Guide to Reagan Country: The Political Culture of Southern California" (*Commentary*, May 1967), he set out to explain to his liberal Eastern

friends the disturbing recent political developments in California. Ronald Reagan had just been elected governor in a landslide, and Jim called the phenomenon "Reaganism" (he may have coined the term). The assertive conservatism that Reagan embodied was not, he explained, a product of rootlessness, social alienation, bigotry, Birchite paranoia, or lotus-land selfishness, as so many pundits and intellectuals supposed. To the contrary, it expressed a new, thoroughly democratic political ethos that had developed among internal migrants, mainly (like Reagan himself) from the American heartland. They had come to Southern California in pursuit of happiness, and they were the opposite of rootless malcontents: They were the homeowning, upwardly mobile, newly middle-class bourgeoisie. "They are," Jim wrote, "acquiring security, education, living space, and a life style that is based in its day-to-day routine on gentility, courtesy, hospitality, virtue."

Wilson in Boston, 1972

The essay's primary source was biography: Jim's own boyhood and adolescence in Long Beach in the 1930s and 1940s, which he drew upon with a novelist's flair for synecdoche. He elaborated with data on migration patterns and demographic trends and interpretations of recent political history. He did not cite a single academic study. He did, however, apply what he had learned in writing *The Amateur Democrat*, which had analyzed the rise of issues-oriented political activists in Los Angeles and other cities (this was the first of innumerable cases to come where he would use his own academic research to illuminate a new development in politics or policy).

"Reagan Country" identified three central characteristics of Reaganism. First, the new conservatives were democratic individualists. They saw themselves as self-reliant, law-abiding individuals; their attachments were to a place and a way of life rather than to a religious or ethnic group or any other social establishment; they conceived of politics as the aggregation of individual interests and values, not the mobilization of groups or the machinations of governing elites. Second, they were future-oriented, pro-growth, and pro-business. They had worked hard, tasted prosperity, and enjoyed personal freedom; they wanted more of all three, and understood that defenders of the status quo and proponents of "something for nothing," and the politicians and agencies that served their interests, were a threat to the continued advance of prosperity and freedom. Third, their deepest political concern was not with their own lot but with the lot of the nation. "The very virtues they have and practice are, in their eyes, conspicuously absent from society as a whole"—evidenced by rising crime, juvenile delinquency, and public lewdness, declining standards in schools and universities, and corrupt, manipulative politics.

There, right there on the printed page in 1967, was a precise, accurate prophecy of the coming transformation of American politics—down to the seemingly contradictory combination of pro-growth "economic conservatism" and pro-family "social conservatism," an amalgam that would come to define, and often vex, a newly populist Republican party. Wilson was not (yet) either an economic or social conservative, and was particularly worried about the introduction of "values" issues into politics and their definition in terms of personal morality. Personal morality was traditionally the dominion of religious institutions and the family; and, because moral issues resisted practical compromise, the political establishment (the parties, the labor unions, the Chamber of Commerce) worked assiduously to keep them out of politics. But all of those institutions were becoming weaker, and Southern California, where the political establishment was already relatively weak, was showing where that was leading. Surprisingly, it was turning out that, in politics, individualism and moralism go hand in hand (many liberals still haven't figured this out, and continue to believe that the Republican coalescence of social and economic conservatism is a cynical alliance of distinct, antithetical groups). Wilson concluded: "I fear for the time when politics is seized with the issue [of morality]. Our system of government cannot handle matters of that sort (can any democratic system?) and it may be torn apart by the effort."

Over the subsequent 45 years, Jim produced a dozen major books, at least another dozen edited volumes, and many hundreds of essays in scholarly journals and opinion magazines and on newspaper op-ed pages. No adequate bibliography of his publications yet exists, but Amazon features a reasonably complete

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listing of his books, the websites of his three favorite journals—*National Affairs* (incorporating the archives of the *Public Interest*), *Commentary*, and *City Journal*—have posted many of his most important essays, and the American Enterprise Institute has published two excellent essay collections, *On Character* (1995) and *American Politics, Then and Now* (2010).

The range of Wilson's output is as vast as its volume. His work may, however, be usefully organized into four categories (in homage to his own diligent typologizing):

• *American politics.* Here Wilson analyzes the changes foreshadowed in "Reagan Country" and many related developments: the disestablishment of traditional political hierarchies (parties, city machines, congressional committees); the growing importance of the media, polling, and "policy intellectuals"; the rise of issue-oriented (typically single-issue-oriented) membership organizations; the increasing openness of legislatures, bureaucracies, and even courts to outside influence; the transformation of career politicians into individual entrepreneurs; and polarization. A recurring theme is the diffusion and eventual triumph of the idea that the purpose of politics and government is to identify and solve problems rather than to forge tolerable compromises among conflicting interests. Much of this work is to be found in the websites and essay collections mentioned earlier. It all comes together in his superb college textbook, *American Government*, first published in 1981, now in its thirteenth and best edition, coauthored with John J. DiIulio Jr. and Meena Bose.

• *Public policy.* Wilson contributed significantly to virtually every important policy debate, including those over regulation, environmental protection, taxation, transportation, and entitlement policies. But he focused on the most difficult and contentious problems—crime first and foremost (where his two classics are *Thinking About Crime*, 1975, and *Crime and Human Nature*, with Richard J. Herrnstein, 1985), and also drugs, terrorism, welfare, schooling, and intelligence gathering. Throughout, he sought to introduce the best social science research and scholarly thinking into the conduct of policy (and to debunk mediocre research and mischievous nostrums). This he did with brilliance and unfailing good judgment, such that he was frequently called upon, formally and informally, to assist with the most momentous and difficult decisions at the highest levels of government.

Yet the strongest recurring theme of his policy work is the limits of expertise. Social science knowledge is always incomplete, and always limited in its practical application

by the simplifying assumptions of each specialized field. Such knowledge may help clarify questions of cause and effect, and thereby narrow political disagreements, but it can never eliminate those disagreements. Economists will probably never prove that the death penalty is, or is not, a cost-effective deterrent—but even if they do, that will not settle disagreements over the penalty as just retribution for heinous crimes. Wilson counsels precision in the definition of policy goals, modesty in claims of policy success, and continuous trial-and-error experimentation in the administration of government programs. This advice, he points out, runs directly counter to the expectations of modern politics and the incentives of political activists, elected officials, and government administrators.

• *Organization.* Wilson was concerned from the beginning of his career with the role of organization in politics and government. Politics is ultimately a question of mobilization: People involve themselves in politics from a variety of material and ideological motives, different motivations dictate different forms of organization, and the resulting forms may or not be effective in pursuing the sorts of policies that motivated the members in the first place. Jim developed this schematic, worked out its implications, and used it to explain observed patterns of political action, first in *Negro Politics* and *The Amateur Democrat* and then, comprehensively, in the fine *Political Organizations* (1973).

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In government itself, policy is profoundly affected by organization, and organization is politically constrained and problematic. These ideas were initially developed and applied in *Varieties of Police Behavior*, and then fully realized in *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (1989), which is one of Wilson's best books. Government bureaucracies are, of course, different from business corporations (no matter how big and bureaucratic) in that their output is not sold in a market; they lack the drive of economic competition and the objective performance measure of a financial bottom line. But, Wilson showed, bureaucratic performance is affected by many equally important factors intrinsic to the political world. Legislators may give agencies goals that are very broad or vague or inherently unachievable. Agencies may combine tasks that are in conflict, or that involve different sorts of knowledge and training, or that require different internal cultures. The incentives of political officials and senior managers may be disconnected from those of front-line workers. One can specify the conditions of improved bureaucratic performance, but political considerations may rule them out. Still, when the conditions are met, huge government bureaucracies can perform miracles. "One can stand on the deck of an aircraft carrier during night flight operations and watch two thousand nineteen-year-old boys faultlessly operate one of the most complex organizational systems ever created."

• *Conduct, culture, and character.* Although Wilson was, as we have seen, highly apprehensive about the entry of issues of private morality and conduct into the political sphere, he threw himself into the task of managing the fractious political divisions that he had foreseen would result. Moreover, beginning in the 1970s, there was a tremendous deterioration of objective circumstances in three traditional fields of government and politics—crime, primary and secondary education, and the provision of welfare to the poor. These problems were increasingly seen as problems of character formation and cultural norms (rather than simply economic incentives). Jim agreed. From the 1980s on, he was increasingly concerned with the dilemmas of individual character and family stability in modern America, and with what the government might plausibly do to improve matters or at least stop making them worse. His essays may be found on the websites and in the *On Character* collection mentioned earlier. His major books were *The Moral Sense* (1993) and *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families* (2002).

The Moral Sense towers tall and apart on the Wilson skyline. It seems not to be about politics or policy at all. Its subject is benevolence: how self-interested human beings come to consider and promote the welfare of others, even when doing so is costly to themselves. This he calls the moral *sense* to emphasize its weakness and vulnerability among human motivations—it is "a small candle flame . . . flickering and sputtering in the strong winds of power and passion, greed and ideology." He is dissatisfied with the neo-Darwinian explanations of "reciprocal altruism," because people often act on their moral sense when others cannot reciprocate and when no one is even aware of what has transpired. The moral sense, Wilson demonstrates, is genuinely altruistic, and it originates in the family. The human child is utterly helpless for a long period, and then must be instructed on how to behave cooperatively within the family. Children are weaned from their natural self-centeredness by being taught to share with siblings and to respect their elders. Family socialization nurtures

sympathy—the capacity to imagine oneself in the position of others and identify with their interests. That capacity is then progressively extended, partially and contingently, to relatives, neighbors, friends, group mates, colleagues, and even strangers.

The Moral Sense is a great work, certain to endure. It really does merit its frequent comparison to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It is the fullest realization of Wilson's inspired, capacious scholarship—here beginning with the philosophic accomplishments of Aristotle and Smith, then extending and modifying them with an astounding exegesis of hundreds of subsequent works of philosophy and history and of contemporary social and natural science. And, as Wilson's thesis takes shape, the reader begins to realize that it is, in fact, highly relevant to politics and policy. Politics is heavily dependent on action for the polity as a whole—from voting to statesmanship to the enormous personal sacrifices required to run for president, which dissuade many seemingly worthy prospects (one of Wilson's first scholarly publications was a paper with Edward C. Banfield titled "Public-Regardingness as a Value Premise in Voting Behavior"). More important, public policy is heavily dependent on the family. The breakdown of the family in contemporary America, it is increasingly clear, is a fundamental cause of social disorders, from drug addiction to declining educational attainment to welfare dependency, which government can affect only very imperfectly and at great cost. If the family is the source of moral sensibility and good character, then it is the sine qua non of effective politics and policy.

Wilson (right) with Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago, at a 1964 Harvard forum

A particularly striking policy application of *The Moral Sense* came a year after its publication, in Wilson's essay "On Abortion" (*Commentary*, January 1994). The abortion legalization movement had long rested its case on freedom of choice: Abortion is a matter of private morality and should therefore be left to individual discretion. Wilson took the moral choice approach and made it his own. Morality, he had argued in *The Moral Sense*, is grounded in sympathy, and sympathy originates in familial relations. One might not be able to pronounce with metaphysical certainty or public consensus when a fetus has acquired a "right to life," but one could determine when it had acquired the moral sympathy of its expectant mother, such that she would choose to give birth and raise it rather than proceed with an abortion. The difficulty was that the fetus was shrouded in darkness and insensible to its mother until long after it had developed human characteristics. But that was changing. It was now possible to produce high-quality photographs, and even movies, of the fetus at progressive stages of development. Visual familiarity would reveal, more fully than had previously been possible, the strength of the bonds of sympathy the mother feels with her nascent child, and thereby enable her to make a more fully informed moral choice. Wilson concluded: "Many women, perhaps most, already treat this matter as a morally grave issue, but many do not—it is for them a form of birth control—and even those who do may not always clearly see, and thus fully sense, what is at stake. Let them see it."

My summary of Jim Wilson's 50 years of scholarship and writing cannot possibly do them justice. *The Moral Sense* and *Bureaucracy*, in particular, one must read in full to appreciate their power and depth, and both repay the most careful study. But my summary does provide a basis for explaining the single most compelling feature of Jim's work and (as promised earlier) the second key to his intellectual influence. This is its thoroughly democratic character. It may be said that everything he did was of democracy, for democracy, and by a democrat.

It was of democracy in being concerned with the forms of political action that arise in a modern, affluent, educated, wired, fractious, continental democracy, and with the dilemmas that arise when the ethos of individual sovereignty has swept away many traditional

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restraints on government action and private conduct. It was for democracy in that Jim applied his immense erudition to helping democratic leaders and citizens understand the constraints on government and the realistic possibilities of improvement. One of the great problems of modern democracy is the growth and specialization of knowledge: The individual citizen comprehends an increasingly tiny sliver of the exploding sum total of knowledge, yet is asked to form opinions on a lengthening list of large, complex subjects, many of them remote from everyday experience. Jim knew that his special talents put him in a position to help with this problem, by telling his fellow citizens what the best academic research was discovering, and what practical use might be made of it. He offered abundant earnest policy advice, the sort of thing academic political scientists tend to look down upon. His every account and interpretation of scientific findings was written with an eye to its interest to the inquiring citizen and its usefulness to the democratic leader.

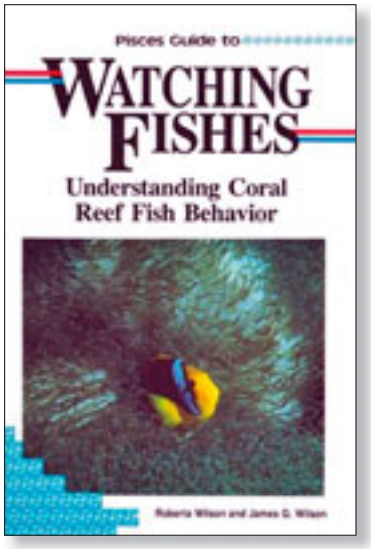
Wilson offered abundant earnest policy advice. His every account and interpretation of scientific findings was written with an eye to its interest to the inquiring citizen and its usefulness to the democratic leader.

And the man who rendered those services was himself a compleat democrat. Jim never once pulled rank on the reader. His writing was conversational—self-assured but never august, teachy but never preachy. He spoke person to person, appealing to his readers' intuitions, suggesting where social science fortified those intuitions and where it showed them to be mistaken. He knew that his readers might bring liberal or conservative predispositions to the conversation, and addressed them in turn. He had his own opinions, of course, often strong ones, and when circumstances warranted he was a fearsome intellectual pugilist. (His treatment of Ronald Dworkin in his abortion essay, and his widely noted reviews of David Stockman's and Edmund Morris's books on Ronald Reagan, were civil, judicious, and devastating.) But he respected his readers' opinions, always giving them sufficient information to make up their own minds.

The Moral Sense and "On Abortion" are particularly notable in these respects. *The Moral Sense* democratized morality. Man's moral nature may be a matter of divine dispensation and may entitle him to natural rights, but its secular provenance is homey and familiar, in the conventional rituals of family life. Drawing on that view, "On Abortion" suggested a pragmatic step forward in an area where other moral conceptions (one of them enforced by the Supreme Court) had stood in the way of compromise. Pro-life and pro-choice leaders and natural-law theorists roundly denounced "let them see it." But it was Wilson, not the political activists, much less the academic philosophers, who had his hand on the democratic pulse. In the years since "On Abortion," sonogram technology has progressed dramatically. It is now routine for expectant moms to get high-resolution pictures of their fetuses at various stages of development. Many of them now prepare a custom video, with a soundtrack of popular music synchronized with the fetus's movements, to share with friends by email or on Facebook; this will soon be as customary as a baby shower. Twenty states have enacted laws encouraging doctors, including abortionists, to provide pregnant women with sonograms. Preliminary research suggests that these practices are lowering the abortion rate. Wilson would be the first to note that the evidence is scattered and preliminary, but it is more than plausible. Technology and popular culture are expanding the range of the moral sense. In time it may extend to unmarried fathers as well.

Jim's democratic character led to his interest in politics and his devotion to the survival and success of American democracy. It also led him to a matter-of-fact understanding of democracy's hazards. If there is a single epitaph to his career, it is the final chapter in his final book publication, the thirteenth edition of *American Government*. In "Who Governs? To What Ends?" Jim and his coauthors are talking to, but not down to, college students. They want their young readers to consider a dilemma that had probably never occurred to them: that the expansion of American democracy was making democracy weaker in important respects. As politics has become more democratic, expectations of government have increased. Whereas government used to do a few things, it now does a great many things—all of them promoted by well-organized groups who conceive their interests in terms of rights. As a result, elected leaders must increasingly delegate political functions to large bureaucracies, which are inherently limited in their ability to perform satisfactorily. And the issues elected officials do retain are increasingly resistant to practical compromise. So the public becomes disenchanted with government and doubtful of the efficacy of its political system. Democracy, the authors seem to be saying, is, like other goods, not a matter of the more the better. Its goodness depends on judgment, restraint, and an understanding of its nature.

A professional career as crowded and productive as Jim Wilson's would have consumed the lives of most mortal men. It did not consume Jim: He led a robust, and indeed adventurous, life beyond the classroom and study. He was an exuberant husband, father, and grandfather for whom family life was the source of his highest pleasures and deepest satisfactions. He was an unabashed enthusiast for racy, powerful sports cars (at the height of the Harvard student protests of 1970, a demonstrator held a sign reading "James Q. Wilson Drives a Porsche"). He loved to drive very fast, preferably with his wife Roberta at his side to share the thrill, and although he was always courteous in traffic, he once remarked that other drivers seemed to have "the IQ of a turnip." He was also an expert western horseman, who would disappear every year for a few weeks of strenuous riding and ranching, including extended cattle drives. Which is to say: Jim was a thorough individualist, and a man who appreciated personal freedom not as an abstraction but palpably, as an essential source of fun and fulfillment.



Most impressively, he was a highly accomplished scuba diver. Jim and Roberta were both Divemasters—the highest rank in civilian diving, which qualified them to organize and lead diving expeditions. Which they did regularly, thereby exploring the most remote and exhilarating underwater sites on the planet on a professor's salary. On the reef as in the classroom, he was organized, expert, explicit in his instructions, and demanding in his expectations. But when free of the burdens of leadership, he was again the liberty-loving individualist. On diving vacations, he would listen intently as the local guide provided hard information on the local weather and underwater currents and terrain. But when the subject turned to rules and regulations designed for amateurs, he would cast a sly grin at his diving mates. He had internalized the norms of right diving conduct and thereby equipped himself for freedom. He would hit the water and be off on his own recognizance. In later years, he would carry sophisticated photography equipment, and return with videos (which he would skillfully edit himself) of enormous scowling wrasses, minuscule shy seahorses, and stunning tableaus of coral reefs and brilliant undulating ferns and grasses.

Jim's diving career showed once again that, for him, mastering and explaining a new field of knowledge was as natural and mandatory as breathing. In 1985, Roberta and Jim published the first edition of *Watching Fishes: Understanding Coral Reef Fish Behavior*. It has become a classic among diving cognoscenti; walk into a good dive shop in Sharm El Sheikh or the Solomon Islands today and you may still find it on the bookrack. *Watching Fishes* plumbs the mysteries of fish behavior just as his other books plumb the mysteries of human behavior. And in the same manner, with careful interpretations of the latest ichthyology research interlaced with insights from the authors' experiences. The book explains, to the extent it is known, why some fish are marauders and others territorial, why some are monogamous and others schooling, why some will compete and fight in the morning and cooperate and even clean each other in the afternoon. In the Wilsons' account, life on the coral reef looks a lot like life in Long Beach, except without the moral sense.

Jim Wilson's corpus of scholarship is now vouchsafed to the ages. But there is an aspect of his living career that should be noticed while the memory is still green. In an age where every form of authority was being eroded by the tide of democratic individualism, the man who documented that erosion became an authority himself. He was modern America's most authoritative intellectual figure. Walter Lippmann may have achieved a similar stature in his time, but that was when America still had a recognizable Establishment. There are, of course, many men and women today who are authorities within specific fields, and a few polymaths with interesting things to say about everything under the sun. What is singular about Wilson is that he was deeply conversant with essentially the entire range of public affairs, and marshaled his knowledge in every field with evident sound judgment and probity, with lucidity, and with democratic modesty and accessibility. He became a recognized authority on anything he chose to write about. Large numbers of his countrymen learned that, when they saw an article with his name on it, it would be worth their while to read it; they would be bound to learn something, and even if they disagreed with his conclusions, they would for the moment be in the company of a man who knew how to think seriously. Many of them were fortified in their convictions, changed their convictions, or simply took things on his say-so.

Although Jim's intellectual talents were surpassingly rare, his other virtues are widely accessible, and the uses he made of them should encourage emulation. But the most important lesson of his career is that it remains possible for a man of democratic temperament to become a self-made authority. ♦

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Mind the Gap

The rich get richer and the poor are broken. BY YUVAL LEVIN

Charles Murray's profound and important new book has, for the most part, been received as merely the latest volley in the inequality debates. Its champions have tended to praise it for shedding light on overlooked aspects of the gap between rich and poor, while its critics have faulted it for ignoring some elements crucial to any proper understanding of the causes of inequality in America—and especially for paying too little attention to working-class wage stagnation.

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Coming Apart
The State of White America, 1960-2010
by Charles Murray
Crown Forum, 416 pp., $27

Murray has made it easy to assume that his book should be understood as fundamentally an argument about inequality: It is, after all, a book about how America's elite and lower classes are increasingly becoming separate cultures. Page after page, chart after chart, it copiously documents a growing distance between the top and the bottom. But *Coming Apart* is far more than a study of inequality and, indeed, when carefully considered it renders our ongoing inequality debates a little ridiculous.

To be carefully considered, the book must first be understood as the culmination of Charles Murray's decades-long effort to define, describe, and protect America's exceptional character. As with all of Murray's books, every page of *Coming Apart* radiates an intense yet unpretentious love of country. And what makes America so loveable, in Murray's telling, is its unique national ethic: "The American project," he writes, "consists of the continuing effort, begun with the founding, to demonstrate that human beings can be left free as individuals and families to live their lives as they see fit, coming

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together voluntarily to solve their joint problems." Sustaining such a balance between freedom and self-government requires a thriving civic culture, and the existence of such a culture has always made America unique.

That culture has, in one way or another, been the subject of all of Murray's work—a fact powerfully evident in his most famous book (*The Bell Curve*, 1994, coauthored with Richard Herrnstein) and in his most influential book (*Losing Ground*, 1984), but most fully articulated in what, before *Coming Apart*, was his best book, *In Pursuit* (1988), a superb and underappreciated work of political philosophy.

But this virtuous culture—a highly cohesive, self-confident culture defined by strong families, faith in God, untiring industriousness, and an almost instinctive law-abidingness—is increasingly endangered today, and it is that danger that is the focus of *Coming Apart*. Through exhaustive empirical analysis—sifting through census statistics, decades of public opinion surveys, and mountains of other social science data—Murray systematically demonstrates that the commitment to each of those virtues has faded in American life, and that it has faded in very different ways for our upper class (which Murray defines as roughly those with college degrees and mid- to upper-level white-collar jobs) and our lower class (those without college degrees and blue-collar or low-level white-collar jobs, if any), who now have far less in common than they used to.

"America is coming apart at the seams," Murray writes, "not seams of race or ethnicity, but of class."

That evidence does not explain itself, of course, and Murray is careful to be modest about analyzing causes—"I focus on what happened, not why"—and although he describes a sharp divergence between Americans at the top and the bottom, he does not actually describe this transformation in terms of growth in inequality, but rather in terms of a decline in the broadly shared practice of crucial American virtues.

Indeed, his careful laying-out of the facts raises some serious questions about whether the process he describes is even properly understood in terms of differences between the top and bottom. It would seem, rather, to be above all a description of the collapse of cultural and moral norms at the bottom and of the growing cultural isolation of the top. Both may be worrisome trends, but surely not of comparable importance, and in Murray's description—just as in the arguments of those most concerned about *economic* inequality in our time—the precise connection between what is happening at the top and at the bottom is often far from clear.

Murray obscures this some by attempting a parallel structure in his laying-out of the trends. The book's first part is titled "The Formation of a New Upper Class," and the second part (of almost exactly equal length) is called "The Formation of a New Lower Class." But each part in fact describes very different kinds of changes.

The formation of a "new upper class" amounts to a kind of geographic sorting, by which people with extremely high levels of education and wealth increasingly live near one another. They are forming an isolated and cohesive subculture of high achievement and bourgeois virtues, and they have very little exposure to the everyday lives of people who are not similarly high achievers or earners. In the America that these elites inhabit, the virtues of marriage, religion, work, and lawfulness have declined some since the 1960s, though generally not precipitously—and in some respects they have begun to make a comeback. But our elites do not have the kind of cultural self-confidence that Americans once had. They live these virtues but are not inclined to preach them.

The formation of the "new lower class," meanwhile, amounts to nothing short of a cataclysmic cultural disintegration. Among this group, the family is falling apart—with marriage rates for people between ages 30 and 50 plummeting from 84 percent in 1960 to 48 percent today, and only 37 percent of children living with both of their biological parents. Religious practice and belief are sharply declining: About 4 percent of Americans in Murray's lower class reported having no religion in the early 1970s; today the proportion is greater than 20 percent. Industriousness is falling, especially among men: The share of lower-class households with a full-time worker dropped from 81 percent to 60 percent in the past half-century, while the number of men claiming to be disabled and unable to work has grown fivefold. Lawfulness has plummeted: Crime rates among this group exploded between 1960 and 1990, and although they have since declined some, much of that decline appears to have been caused by far higher incarceration rates, which hardly constitutes a sustainable solution.

The basic institutions of society in lower-class neighborhoods are increasingly falling apart, and a mounting intergenerational cultural breakdown is under way.

These two sets of changes in American life are hardly parallel or equivalent, and Murray's assertion that "the hollow elite is as dysfunctional in its way as the lower class is in its way" seems completely at odds with the data he presents. He appears at times to imply that it is the fact that Americans at the top and the bottom are living differently that poses the greatest problem, rather than that the lives of those at the bottom are increasingly disordered and broken. At the very least, he does not clearly show whether or how the trends at the top are driving those at the bottom.

In this sense, Murray's book suffers from a flaw that bears some similarity to the one that renders the liberal case regarding inequality largely incoherent. That case seeks to blame the wealthy for the growing gap between the top and bottom, and in the process, treats the gap itself as the core problem when, in fact, it is the stagnation and decline at the bottom that should worry us most—and the wealthy appear to have little directly to do with that worrisome trend. Thus, for instance, we routinely find Paul Krugman ranting about the "plutocrats" responsible for working-class wage stagnation but unable to articulate the mechanism by which these supposed villains actually work

their mischief. A similar confusion is at work behind President Obama's recent turn to populism.

For Krugman and Obama, this incoherence helps to mask the painful reality that a key factor behind the collapse of poor and working-class life in America has been precisely the liberal welfare state they hold up as a solution—a welfare state originally constructed on misguided moral premises, which has badly undermined the social institutions essential to human thriving in poor communities, and which now remains as a moldering relic growing increasingly bloated, inefficient, and regressive. The left's cynical (or else pitiful) disavowal of this fact explains a great deal of its present obsession with inequality.

Murray, of course, suffers from no such self-delusion. He plainly sees how much the welfare state has contributed to the ruin of lower-class life. And he also understands, unlike Krugman or Obama, that the key problems faced by the poor today are fundamentally cultural (and therefore also moral), not simply economic.

Knowing that poorly designed welfare state institutions contributed mightily to these cultural problems does not solve them, however, and while the reform (greatly aided by Murray's own work) of one especially counterproductive welfare program in the 1990s may have helped to slow the bleeding, it has hardly stopped it. Murray makes no claim to know just what could do so, but he does suggest that America's elites could help a lot by offering a moral argument for their own way of life: By preaching what they practice, and therefore helping to link the traditional American virtues to examples of lived success.

Their unwillingness to do this is the source of some of Murray's moral indignation toward the elite, and something like the mechanism by which he implies that the emergence of a new upper class has contributed to the emergence of a new lower class. Rather than isolate themselves in cocoons of cultural success, Murray suggests, today's elites have a moral obligation to offer example and instruction—to help lead working-class Americans out of the cultural wasteland into which an earlier generation of elites helped to lead them.

But surely, this is a highly implausible practical solution to the immense cultural ruin Murray describes. It is hard to see how the graduates of elite universities who live in their cultural islands of privilege could really speak with any moral authority to the problems of working-class life, even if they were inclined to preach the virtues they practice. Greater self-confidence would not help them get taken more seriously by people whose problems they can barely imagine, and having the elite live among the poor (as Murray seems at times to advise) is not a realistic prescription on any meaningful scale. It is simply not clear how the members of today's upper class are really doing anything wrong, given the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Murray appears at times to imply that it is the fact that Americans at the top and the bottom are living differently that poses the greatest problem, rather than that the lives of those at the bottom are increasingly disordered and broken.

Rather, the cultural disaster Murray describes seems to be a failing of America's moral (and therefore largely its religious) institutions. And although he does not put it this way, *Coming Apart* is a scathing indictment of American social conservatism.

Social conservatism serves two kinds of purposes in a liberal society: We might call them justice and order. In the cause of justice, it speaks up for the weak and the oppressed, defending them from abuse by the powerful, and vindicating basic human dignity. In the cause of order, it helps us combat our human failings and vices, and argues for self-discipline and responsibility. Think of abolition on the one hand and temperance on the other.

In our time, American social conservatism has much to be proud of as a movement for justice: Social conservatives devote themselves to the pro-life cause, to human rights, and to the plight of the poor abroad. But American social conservatism has almost entirely lost interest in the cause of order—in standing up for clean living, for self-discipline and restraint, for resisting temptation and meeting basic responsibilities. The institutions of American Christianity—some of which would actually stand a chance of being taken seriously by the emerging lower class—are falling down on the job, as their attention is directed to more exciting causes, in no small part because the welfare state has overtaken some of their key social functions.

The cultural revival essential to addressing the crisis Murray describes is barely imaginable as long as this remains the case. Indeed, whether such a revival is imaginable under any circumstances is by no means clear in Murray's telling. Surely an all-out return to the condition from which he says we have fallen seems far out of reach. But this may have as much to do with the particular cultural high-point against which Murray has chosen to measure our current state as with the potential for a moral revival in American life.

Murray opens his book with a description of America in November 1963, on the eve of John F. Kennedy's assassination—a date he plausibly posits as roughly the beginning of the transformations his book lays out. Almost every one of the dozens of charts here describes the trajectory of some cultural trend from the early 1960s to the present day, and in nearly every case, America rates more poorly in the present day than we did a half-century ago.

Although Murray is clear-eyed about the improvements achieved since that period (especially in terms of technological progress and cultural openness), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that

some of what is at work in his defining comparative device is precisely the sentiment behind much of today's liberal lament as well: nostalgia for the roughly two decades that followed World War II. There is much to mourn in the passing of that era, to be sure: The searing experiences of the Depression and the war had united Americans as perhaps nothing had done since the American Revolution, and the war and its aftermath (with all of our global competitors having burned each other's economies to the ground while ours alone stood strong) made possible a series of economic booms that launched into being a broad middle class unlike anything the world had ever seen. Social trust, and faith in government, reached unprecedented heights, while a liberal but generally capacious and tolerant political consensus kept the temperature of our politics unusually low (except when it came to the question of race).

The result was the America of the 1950s and early '60s: Marriage and childbearing rates were high, religious practice was strong, employment was generally plentiful and rewarding, and crime was low. It was a time of cultural cohesion, economic dynamism, and government activism all at once, and thus a time that both liberals and conservatives can look back to with approval. This is the golden age in the background of Obama's domestic policy speeches; it is the America lovingly recounted in the opening of Krugman's *The Conscience of a Liberal* (2007)—and in strikingly similar terms, in the opening words of *Coming Apart*.

All these descriptions of that era are a bit selective, of course, but they are not false. This was an America unlike any that had existed before the immediate postwar years, and unlike any we can expect to see again anytime soon. The left wants to re-create that America by re-creating the activist state and the powerful labor unions that characterized it, but this stands to make economic dynamism very difficult. The right wants to re-create it by re-creating the economic dynamism it achieved, but this stands to make social cohesion very difficult. Murray implicitly hopes to re-create it by recapturing its social cohesion, but acknowledges that this is no easy feat.

The fact is that the America of the immediate postwar years was made possible by an utterly unrepeatable set of circumstances, and setting out to re-create it is not a constructive objective for public policy. What we need to do, instead, is seek for ways to achieve broadly shared prosperity and cultural vitality today—to balance cohesion and dynamism in our own time, which is a time of great tension and change.

That this is hardly the first era of tension and change in our history should leave us more hopeful than Murray suggests, and should send us looking for guidance in eras prior to the postwar golden age. Murray implies that his description of America in 1963 applied to America prior to that time as well—from the era of the founding until half a century ago. But surely that is not the case. In other times—in periods of social tension, economic upheaval, mass immigration, and cultural transformation—America's founding virtues have been under immense strain. But time and again, we have found our way to national revival—cultural, moral, religious, social, political, and economic. We have experienced multiple golden ages, and they have not all looked alike.

Perhaps it is this extraordinary capacity for the renewal of our founding virtues, rather than the particular strength we possessed 50 years ago, that really makes America exceptional. If so, then Murray's project, which should be America's project, is in better stead than this ultimately pessimistic book suggests.

It is clear that we are badly in need of such a renewal of our commitment to the American ethic, and it is clear that such a renewal must direct itself especially to addressing the collapse of the institutions of family, society, work, and culture among the poor, rather than to the second-order problem of inequality. It is fairly clear, too, just what problems it would need to address in that arena, and just how bad things are. Although the work of such renewal will be a mighty challenge, it is a challenge of a type (and perhaps even a scale) that America has undertaken before. And beginning with such clarity about its purposes and aims would be no small advantage.

For that clarity we owe a great debt to Charles Murray: not only for this deeply impressive and important book, but for a long career of careful, honest, loving attention to the state of the American project. ♦

B&A

Road to Rome

The superhighway that connected, and consolidated, the Empire. **BY THOMAS SWICK**

The Appian Way
Ghost Road, Queen of Roads
by Robert A. Kaster
Chicago, 144 pp., $22.50

There are roads that are as storied as rivers, though the reasons for their notoriety are much more varied. The Silk Road (which was really a collection of roads) stands forever as a conduit, of goods and ideas, between East and West. The Tokaido lives on, in the prints of Hiroshige, as a pastoral passageway connecting Kyoto to Edo. South Asia's Grand Trunk Road—of which Kipling wrote, "such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world"—is famous today for being if anything even more manic. Route 66,

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though decades defunct, remains a symbol of Americans' love affair with the automobile, and our 20th-century movement toward the sun.

The road that probably resides deepest in our memories is the Appian Way. We learn about it in school—along with the Forum and the Colosseum—and so we see it as both a relic and a precursor, a history-laden exemplar of a modern-day necessity, a distant, glorious ancestor of I-95.

Famous roads begin by carrying people and end up carrying travel writers. Colin Thubron's *Shadow of the Silk Road* appeared in 2007, 10 years after Anthony Weller's *Days and Nights on the Grand Trunk Road*. Stories about following old Route 66 are a staple of Sunday travel sections. The Appian Way has now attracted the attention not of a travel writer but of a professor of classics: Robert A. Kaster of Princeton. It is fitting for a road that survives more vividly in the past than it does in the present.

In the opening pages Kaster enumerates the reasons for his fascination. It was, he writes, "the first great road of Europe . . . and it remained for centuries a model of the engineering that was among the Romans' greatest achievements." Because of its reach—stretching from Rome to Brundisium (Brindisi)—it aided in the unification of numerous and diverse regions. Kaster presents the astounding statistic that the Roman Empire's public roads ultimately covered a total of 75,000 miles—compared to the slightly over 46,000 miles of our Interstate Highway System!

Those are some of the more practical attractions. But Kaster was also drawn to the Appian Way because it was a "road of power," spreading and consolidating the empire's influence, and also a "road of death," as tombs of the elite and the lowly lined both sides. In a culture that didn't believe in an afterlife, Kaster explains, building a monument along the continent's most-traveled thoroughfare was a way to ensure that your name and memory didn't die with you. The greatest act of self-engendered remembrance was that of Appius Claudius Caecus, who ordered the construction of the road and promptly gave it his name. (Starting a practice that became the norm at the time.) Rome's first aqueduct was another of his eponymous achievements, both public works undertaken "allegedly without the senate's sanction and at a cost that depleted the treasury." (Kaster inserts a very funny bit of dialogue from Monty Python's *Life of Brian* in which a complaint about the Romans' voraciousness is met with a begrudging acknowledgment of their invaluable gifts: the aqueduct, the sanitation, and the roads. He then notes that two of the three were "initiated by Appius Claudius Caecus . . . in 312.")

The road was the more massive project. Pliny the Elder compared the Romans' roads to the Egyptians' pyramids, noting that the roads had the additional distinction of actually

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serving a purpose. In its 353-mile length, the Appian Way crossed mountains, marshes, and rivers. Kaster spends a page and a half on the roadbed and the paving, which were dug and laid by "slaves and criminals, who were not expected to survive the experience." Then there is a fascinating digression on Roman slaves, as Kaster explains the differences between those who worked in the fields and those who worked in the house. The latter, for one thing, had an extremely good chance of gaining their freedom, a gift that the Romans, unlike the Greeks, bestowed frequently.

Taking a stroll with his wife, their backs to the capital, Kaster recalls the impressions of others who have traveled the Appian Way, notably Charles Dickens (whose descriptions he finds a bit breathless) and Henry James. And of course, he includes his own: He delights in the rows of old stone pines, reads inscriptions (his Latin is considerably better than his Italian), and, near the ninth milestone, runs into prostitutes who remind him that some things haven't changed along the ancient highway. Though he doesn't meet up with any witches.

Midway through the book, the Kasters travel to Brindisi to follow the road as it leads, aphoristically, to Rome. Or, more precisely, led: There are scant traces of the paving stones that once stretched so triumphantly across the peninsula. A photograph of a field on page 61 carries the caption: "Via Appia, Aeclanum."

There were actually two Appian Ways. The second, built by Emperor Trajan, ran from Brindisi to Benevento on a slightly northern path that pretty much paralleled the original. It was named, predictably, Via Appia Traiana. Driving slowly toward Rome, Kaster and his wife stop in Taranto, "the most polluted city in western Europe," and find an impressive collection of Greek art in the archaeological museum. With his characteristically light touch, he lets drop that one of the city's sons, Archytas of Tarentum, was a friend of Plato.

The easy glide through historical periods helps make *The Appian Way* an edifying treat. In Gravina, Kaster visits Santa Maria del Suffragio and enlightens for several pages about "purgatory churches," a southern Italian/Sicilian specialty of the 16th and 17th centuries. Up the road in Melfi, he's back in the museum examining artifacts of "Italic and Etruscan and Greek influences" that tell of "the high level of material culture and affluence that the region enjoyed before the coming of Rome." The contemporary world intrudes occasionally into the journey, most jarringly near Lacedonia in the form of giant windmills. Though he finds them unsightly, Kaster wonders if people once thought the same of aqueducts.

There are very few interactions with locals, and those that do occur quickly conjure up the past, as when an elderly man in Benevento passionately tells the Americans of the "great battle." Only when he passes a sign for "Forche Caudine," an hour later, does Kaster realize that the man was referring to the humiliating defeat of the Roman Army in this place at the beginning of the Second Samnite War in 321 B.C. Later, Kaster asks the young receptionist at his hotel if she knows about the Caudine Forks, and she assures him that she does. "After all," she says with a pride that rattles the professor, "I am a *Sannita*."

Formia, 82 miles from Rome, introduces Cicero into the story, for it is the site of his so-called tomb. Kaster presents a deft, succinct portrait of the man, showing his two sides, and concludes that he "wrote some of the best prose ever composed in any language, with the same impact on the future of Latin that Shakespeare and the King James Version of the Bible have had on English." Not for the first time in *The Appian Way* you're glad you're traveling with a professor of classics. ♦

B&A

Realignment Myths

A lively dissection of confident predictions in politics.

BY MICHAEL M. ROSEN

The battlefield of political prognostication is littered with the remains of once-bold, but quickly forgotten, theories of partisan realignment. No sooner is a "permanent Republican majority" proposed than the predicted majority is overtaken by events, thereby laying the foundation for an "emerging Democratic majority." The impregnable majority grows bloated and finds itself unable to reconcile its competing internal forces, thus providing the opposition party the means, motive, and opportunity to swipe one or more of the majority's constituencies and cobble together its own governing coalition.

The Lost Majority
Why the Future of Government Is Up For Grabs—and Who Will Take It
by Sean Trende
Palgrave Macmillan, 272 pp., $27

In *The Lost Majority*, Sean Trende lays waste the realignment myth through a convincing, methodical assessment of historical coalition-building and its impact on contemporary politics. Trende characterizes the current situation—where three consecutive "swing" elections portend a

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staggering uncertainty this year—as "the most difficult political landscape to try to make sense of in decades," mainly because this represents "a time of near parity between the parties, when either party can enjoy a win, only to see it slip away quickly." Nevertheless, he advances three interrelated arguments: First, President Obama and the Democrats badly misread the "mandate" that vaulted them into office in 2008, resulting in a dramatic defeat in 2010; second, we shouldn't expect any enduring Republican or Democratic majorities to emerge anytime soon; and third, the entire concept of realignment should be jettisoned.

As Trende observes, few who witnessed Obama's triumphant victory speech three and a half years ago could sense that his ambitious agenda would "end up in critical condition less than a year later. Except, perhaps, someone who studied the fragile forces that set Obama's path toward that stage, decades before the president was ever born." Indeed, Obama and his team squandered the hard-earned gains that Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and the Democratic Leadership Council had made in peeling off Reagan (or as Trende prefers, Eisenhower) Democrats during the 1990s; i.e., suburbanites, working-class whites, and Southerners. While Obama's champions heralded his election as ringing in a permanent progressive majority, they ignored the fact that (as Trende puts it) "in the midst of probably the most favorable election year environment for a party since 1952—if not 1932," Obama won by a smaller margin than George H.W. Bush in 1988 and Bill Clinton in 1996.

Little wonder, then, that the Democrats in 2010, after governing for two years from the left, sustained the worst midterm losses of any party since 1938, losing the most seats precisely among those suburban, working-class white, and Southern districts Clinton and company had so assiduously pried from Republican hands two decades earlier. Trende more generally eviscerates the "critical elections" theory propounded midcentury by V.O. Key and Walter Dean Burnham and later swallowed whole by John Judis and Ruy Teixeira in *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (2002). Judis and Teixeira adapt the theory—which holds that parties tend to dominate for 32- or 36-year spans, a claim Trende colorfully derides as "far too subjective to be useful," possessed of "about as much analytical support as numerology"—to the modern era by asserting, *inter alia*, that the growth in the Latino voting population will cement Democratic gains for decades.

Latino electoral participation has increased only haltingly in recent elections, and even if Latinos vote in higher numbers, any gains Democrats may make by catering to their issue preferences, such as immigration reform, will be offset by losses among other groups, such as working-class whites.

But Trende dismantles this argument plank by plank, demonstrating that Latino electoral participation has increased only haltingly in recent elections, and even if Latinos vote in higher numbers, any gains Democrats may make by catering to their issue preferences, such as immigration reform, will be offset by losses among other groups, such as working-class whites. (Trende also explains away, in like fashion, similar Judis/Teixeira claims about young voters.) And this marks the harsh mathematical reality of realignment theory: Addition signifies subtraction. Growing your majority too precipitously risks shrinking it rapidly, and there's no silver bullet to be found. "Each election cycle presents parties with choices," Trende concludes, "both in how they approach the election and, if they win, how they govern"—choices that can make or break majorities.

Trende displays a discerning eye for detail here and a welcome gift for straightforward, data-driven analysis. And at times, such as in showcasing his encyclopedic knowledge of 19th-century voting trends in Kentucky's Floyd and Knott counties, or in differentiating between the Scots-Irish Jacksonians of the Upland South and the Lowland Jeffersonians of the cotton-rich "black belt," he suggests a younger version of Michael Barone, whom Trende quotes repeatedly and reverently, tirelessly plumbing the depths of our rich politico-geographic history.

Trende also reflects a growing trend toward what we might call the numerification of political analysis, as signified by center-left number-crunchers such as Nate Silver of the *New York Times FiveThirtyEight* blog, center-right data junkies such as the remarkable Jay Cost (who appears in these pages), and perhaps most significantly, the emergence of his employer RealClearPolitics as the ultimate clearinghouse for the numerical exploration of political developments. Charts, graphs, and regressions abound in today's discourse, with popular political commentary at times becoming as infused with numbers as your average quantitative textbook.

While this trend has its definite downsides—the decline of quality prose; the disappearance of an inchoate appreciation for a partisan gestalt; an overreliance on county data and maps undifferentiated by population—its finest practitioners, including Sean Trende in this impressive debut, marry the best of a rigorous mathematical investigation to succinct, persuasive writing in a successful attempt to defy the conventional wisdom. ♦

B&A

Class Distinction

Why 'Downton Abbey' resonates with me—and everyone else. **BY WENDY BURDEN**

Lady Mary Crawley (Michelle Dockery) in repose

I'm not much of a TV watcher. Other than *Top Gear* episodes that feature Porsches, I tend towards *Iron Chef* or reruns of *Two Fat Ladies*. I lack the commitment ethos required (and invariably tested) by a multi-narrative television series.

That being said, I confess I have spent this winter happily overinvested in *Downton Abbey*, absorbed in its lovely, bygone excess, and deeply concerned with the sluggish romance of Mary and Matthew—not to mention the war-torn state of the latter's reproductive organs. And even though the second season of this PBS blockbuster has reached the end of its run, it is still being gushed about *ad nauseam*.

Justifiably so, for it satisfies on every level. The visuals are particularly toothsome; the production design would thrill the chambers of any OCD heart; and the costumes are equally fulfilling. The acting is first rate as well, Maggie Smith notwithstanding—she is genius. (And as a comrade-in-arms who shares a similar ocular physiognomy, not to mention marital status, Ms. Smith, as the Dowager Countess, has made mature widowhood, with all of its hard-earned intolerance, rather more appealing.) All of the predominant characters seem to inspire unusually strong feelings in viewers. Take Carson, the butler. He may look like a Maybelline mascaraed penguin in drag—even in his PJs. But I for one want to nest under his authoritative chins. That Carson knows precisely where he himself nests in his English God's plan is the bulk of his enormous appeal.

The mania for *Downton* is such that there are even a slew of online questionnaires you can take to see which character you are. Most of these are predeterminately fixed, just like all those "How Good in Bed Are You?" quizzes I used to take back when I was a virgin in high school. (According to *Cosmo*, I possessed the skills of a hooker, though no one has told me so since.) The quiz on the PBS website is not dissimilar, in that it is geared towards allowing anybody with the IQ of a tea bag to be deigned the character they most admire, be it the icky chauffeur Branson or the fabulously svelte and arch Lady Mary. This is a likely explanation for why everyone who has completed it is smugly self-satisfied: A sweet-natured friend protested she didn't want to take the test because she just *knew* she would be O'Brien. But when a final click on the return key brought that villainous maid's sneering, snake-coiffed visage to the computer screen in affirmation, my friend was clearly thrilled.

For me, however, *Downton* is more than mere entertainment; it is a masterclass in comedy writing. I possess scant literary training beyond high school English. What I learned about writing I learned in art school, cooking school, and even restaurant management school—and that was to ape the great, be they Michelangelo, Escoffier, or Benihana. Ask writers to borrow their books and they may be reluctant. That is because most pages are marked up and underlined and labeled with references for future use.

Downton has become my secret stash of snappy dialogue and one-liners. I watch it with paper and pencil because it's a veritable candy bowl full of ideas for the taking. The wit, the placement, the delivery of lines, the clever vocabulary—I had forgotten what a potent word *vulgar* is—it's all there for the taking. So when the Dowager Countess philosophizes, "It always happens. When you give these little people power, it goes to their heads like strong drink," I think—hmmm, how can I use those showstoppers "little people" and "strong drink"? Same with "Of course it would happen to a foreigner; no Englishman would dream of dying in someone else's house." Or "Sometimes I feel as if I were living in an H.G. Wells novel." TWS

Wendy Burden is the author of Dead End Gene Pool.

Downton is dotted about with other small lessons in comedic writing, like Carson with that newfangled telephone. Or my favorite: When Cora is puking blood all over her deservedly guilt-stressed maid O'Brien, and O'Brien is, like, *there, there milady*. Didn't that bad puppy come to heel. Then there's the onscreen exercise of spelling out an accent. I hit the replay button (well, of course, I own the DVD set) and work on my phonetics: Anna to Mr. Bates, "Mista Beets . . . but Mista Beets!" All these tutorials are of paramount importance when a writer is focusing on embellishing a character, even though they might ultimately be cast aside by an editor in the way a mother scrubs makeup off her 8-year-old.

Double entendres abound. *Downton Abbey* is also a masterclass for those of us who miss the summer days of our now-depleted trust funds. Watching the Crawley family, you long to support the old class system. Really! As long as you are extra nice at Christmas, and let them have HDTV with the mega cable package, the servants (and it's okay to call them that when steeped in Edwardian period dramas) will respect, if not adore, you.

That I ever got a book published, I freely admit I owe to the class system. Seriously. Nobody would have read the manuscript for my family memoir if it had been about poor people behaving badly. Yea, I am a product of the American blueblood class—specifically, a family that made a lot of money, and then spent and imbibed themselves into virtual extinction. During the time of the American Heiress Buccaneers, one of our clan married the Duke of Marlborough—quite famously, and with tepid results. She got stellar pearls, and he got her money, and my great-great-grandparents got to go hang out with royalty. The aristocracy of Edwardian England was then faithfully reconstructed in my family's very own costume drama stateside, and they orbited seasonally around several piles, the largest one a faithful replica of Hampton Court. Number of servants: 200-plus.

Cora may be excluded from her mother-in-law's sorority, but she's fared better in *Downton Abbey* than most of her ilk. Presumably she will not get a divorce in season five and hightail it back to Long Island, the way Cousin Consuelo did. She and Lord Grantham appear to love each other, and if Cora got a whiff of the servant maid on her man's fingers, she hasn't let on. Her children may occasionally berate her for being an American, but then Cora deserves it: Enough of those tight-lipped soupy stares, already.

Seeing Cora with her breakfast tray in bed is a scene from my own grandparents' home life. I can't recall them ever having theirs seated at a table. And though I'm not certain the *Wall Street Journal* got a once-over with the iron before it was presented in the side basket of the Porthault breakfast tray, I did have a cousin who insisted his *New York Times* be practically Botoxed. One of my grandfather's butlers even looked like Carson, though his name was Hector. Each one in the long line of them was prouder than the next, Hector's predecessor having been usurped from President Eisenhower.

These men served my grandfather as butler and valet, in the American tradition. Not only did they tend to the running of the staff, and the silver, and the wine cellar, but they brought my grandfather his breakfast tray in bed, dressed him, and served him at lunch—at the office, even, if he was there—and at cocktails and dinner, before undressing him and virtually putting him to bed. In the early 1980s, Juan, the Basque coda of my grandfather's history of butlerdom, expressed a desire to have the title of his position changed to "personal assistant." My grandfather, grudgingly succumbing to the new age, accepted, and was dead in a year.

So you see, it's in my DNA to wax nostalgic about the dissolving class system.

I've gotten my just rewards, though, living as I do now in my adopted city of Portland, Oregon. In spite of myself I remain, and beat on against the current of political correctness and *übergemütlich* social encounters, halfheartedly maintaining the mores of an East Coast trust fund baby who came of age in the seventies.

But there are glimmers, thanks to *Downton Abbey*. The other day I crossed the threshold of my local bank and was instantly, as is the norm, fired upon with joyous call-outs of *How is your day going so far?* Typically, I have my phone to my ear in a pretend conversation, but this time I thought: What would the Dowager Countess do? (Not that she would be there in the first place, since she's probably never handled currency in paper form.) So I try a Dowager *Horrified Reaction*: I roll my eyes so hard they practically fly out of my head—not that anyone notices (it's the Northwest)—and I think, *Let the tongue sharpening begin*. Waiting in line, I run through possible dialogue to be scribbled down back in my car. I even wonder if I will have to acknowledge the source: *Dialogue coaching provided by Julian Fellowes.*

I certainly hope not. Fellowes is arguably Britain's biggest snob, a man so class-obsessed he changed his surname to include that of his wife, and publicly mounted a campaign to rid Great Britain of its primogeniture laws so that she (they) could have inherited an earldom that went out of existence when the last, issueless Earl Kitchener died last year.

Arse or not, Fellowes is a screenwriter at the top of his form and has managed to create a brilliantly entertaining portrayal of Britain's elite during their most transitory era. That our uppity Mr. Fellowes is astigmatic in his depiction of aristo Edwardian society (something his countrymen have complained about), I don't care. I'm American. Let the British worry their hangnails off about the TV aerial spotted in episode two, or that the series was clearly not filmed in Yorkshire, where the Crawleys purportedly live. Personally, I love *Downton Abbey* the way it is. It's like a Georgette Heyer novel: You know you shouldn't be enjoying something so decidedly mainstream, a narrative where the answer is invariably "yes," but it feels so good.

Besides, it's only television. ♦

B&A

Back Stab

Sarah Palin as portrayed by her disloyal staff.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Game Change
Directed by Jay Roach

Nicolle Wallace was the one-time consultant to CBS News and media aide to George W. Bush who was assigned to work with Sarah Palin after the Alaska governor was chosen as John McCain's running mate. It was Wallace who assured the McCain campaign that her dear friend Katie Couric, a committed liberal with a history of interviewing Republicans and conservatives in a quietly nasty way, was the right journalist to conduct a major early interview with the extremely conservative vice-presidential nominee.

Palin has only herself to blame for how horribly she came off, but as she was the most hotly sought-after interview in the world at the time, the McCain campaign could have picked and chosen and been cleverly calculating about which journalist would win the prize. Wallace was responsible for one of the great blunders in political advance work of modern media history.

Now, imagine you're making a movie about the Palin story, one that demonstrates a modicum of sympathy for Sarah Palin's excoriation at the hands of the media. (I know, I'm talking crazy, but go with me here.) In such a movie, Nicolle Wallace's catastrophic guidance could have been portrayed in several ways. It could have been played as a simple goof, a wrongheaded political calculation. Or as an example of a kind of golly-gee naïveté, with Wallace being snowed by a seductive Couric. Or as a careerist move killing two birds with one stone, with Wallace seeking to stay in the good graces of her former colleague Couric despite several years of working for Republicans.

Needless to say, that is not how Nicolle Wallace is portrayed in *Game Change*, the new HBO movie based on the John Heilemann-Mark Halperin bestseller. No, indeed. Wallace is the movie's heroine. She is the voice of reason, the increasingly alarmed witness to the evil McCain has perpetrated by foisting Palin upon the world. It is through Wallace's interactions with the vice-presidential candidate that we see confirmed every bad thing anyone has ever said about Palin (save that she is not the mother of Trig—it steers clear of that Sullivanian filth). Wallace (played by Sarah Paulson) delivers screenwriter Danny Strong's inadvertently hilarious Blue State zinger when, dripping with righteous scorn during a confrontation with Palin, she says with disbelief, "Yeah, *you're* just like Hillary."

Ed Harris, Julianne Moore

Wallace's deeply principled revulsion is mirrored by that of Steve Schmidt (Woody Harrelson), the McCain campaign chief whose initial excitement at Palin's political skills and smarts is fast superseded by his awareness of her religious fanaticism (Schmidt gets a horrified look on his face when she says she sees the hand of God at work) and her ignorance.

Yes, if ever you wanted circumstantial evidence that the sources within the McCain campaign who spent October 2008 dumping on Palin anonymously might have included Wallace and Schmidt, you need look no further than HBO's *Game Change*. The movie presents a moral case for the disreputable conduct of aides who, we can presume, fearlessly drop dirty dimes anonymously to save their own standing in the liberal culture from which they desperately wish not to be excluded.

Like the book on which it is based, *Game Change* is a very entertaining conceit: It promises to tell you the truth about what goes on behind the closed doors of campaigns. The tome broke with campaign-book tradition by featuring interior monologues and conversations in which curse words were prominently featured every sentence, which gave *Game Change* a thrilling patina of you-are-there immediacy that, only two years after its publication, seems weirdly dated and prurient. The movie is in the same vein; we are supposed to be titillated by the fact that John McCain says the F-word and giggles while watching video clips of a primping John Edwards.

Whether you are titillated or not probably has to do with whether it shocks you that people who work in politics are in any way human. In this respect, *Game Change* handles Sarah Palin (Julianne Moore, blah) more charitably than you might expect. She is shown as a loving and caring mother with some kind of raw genius as a politician who is placed under almost unimaginable pressure at a moment's notice when she is clearly unprepared for it. But in doing so, Strong and director Jay Roach exhibit not understanding but rather an almost excruciating condescension.

Game Change is mostly liberal catnip, but it does have a wider value. Every politician from now until doomsday should view it as a cautionary tale about choosing your aides wisely. ◆

HBO

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

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Chinese VP Gives President 'Chinatown'

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RANDY ALLEN

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