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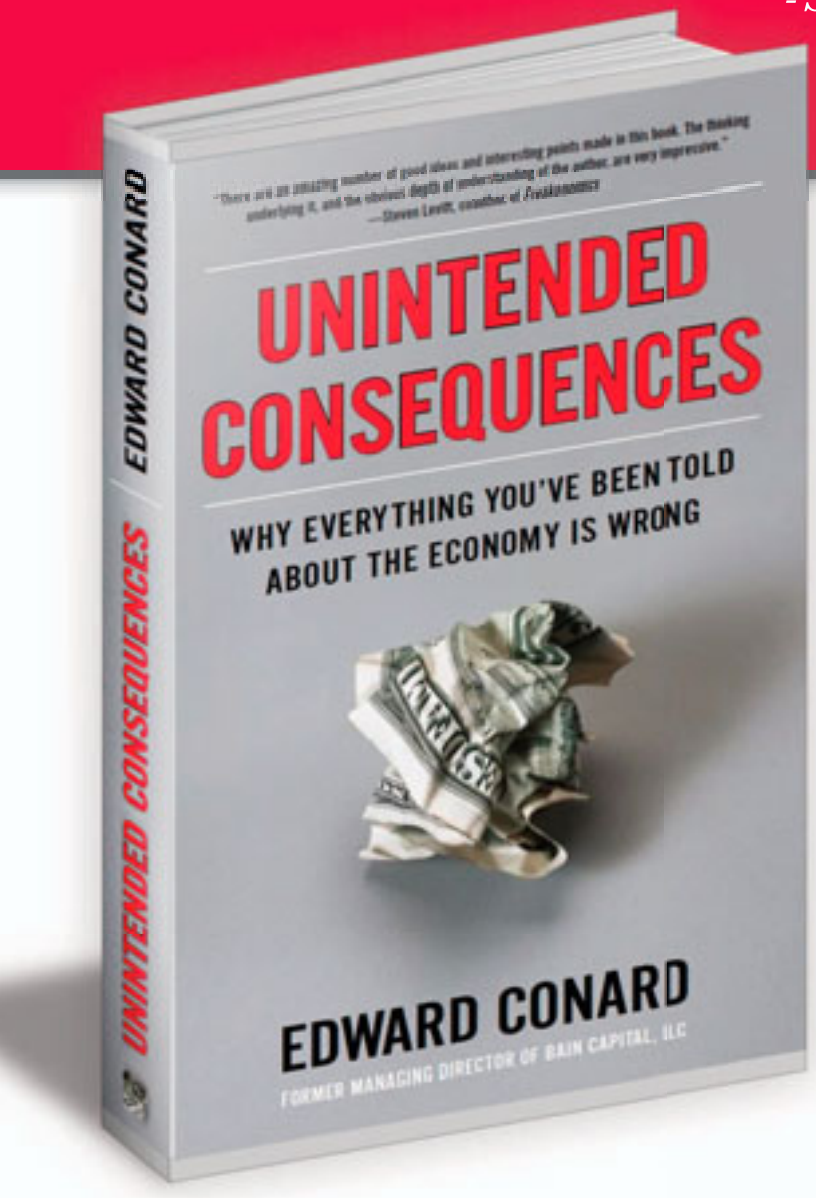

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COVER BY DAVID CLARK

Notes on Nanny Bloomberg

Mayor Michael Bloomberg made headlines last week with his plan to prohibit the sale of sugary drinks in New York City in any size larger than 16 ounces. "Public health officials," the mayor said, "are wringing their hands" over rising rates of obesity. But "New York City is not about wringing your hands; it's about doing something. I think that's what the public wants the mayor to do."

The Scrapbook, for its part, is all about the handwringing. And two things about this story have us wringing ours: (1) This is a preview of the future under Obamacare. Once you socialize health care costs, you license the Michael Bloombergs of the world, at every level of government, to busy themselves intruding on the minutiae of what we used to quaintly call our private lives. After all, your choice of what to eat and drink, and whether and how to exercise, may burden taxpayers with the bill for managing your adult-onset diabetes. When the government takes over the health care sector, the personal truly is the political.

(2) Government nannies are inept and malevolent. Excessive sugar intake is ill-advised. But note the details of Bloomberg's intervention. Plus-size soft drinks, *verboten*. Fruit juice, venti lattes, and cappuccinos loaded with caramel and whipped cream? Drink up! They're exempt from the mayor's edict. The Scrapbook defies anyone to distinguish the caloric effects of sugar delivered by 7-Eleven in a Big Gulp from that delivered by Starbucks in a white paper cup. Looks like Nanny Bloomberg is sternly superintending the beverages of the teeming masses while carving out an exemption for the sugary drinks favored by his own upper-crust cheering section.

Prominent among the latter would normally be the editors at the *New York Times*, who, besides being ideologically sympathetic to the mayor, are not-so-secretly hoping he'll rescue their perks and pensions by buying the paper from the struggling Sulzberger dynasty. However, even the *Times* worried in an editorial about "too much nannying" in this case. On the other hand, alongside the *Times*'s story on the mayor's anti-soda jihad was this sidebar: "What Else Should the Mayor Ban? With supersize soft drinks facing prohibition, we seek your suggestions for other vices the Bloomberg Administration should outlaw." We think this is meant to be lighthearted, but we're not laughing. ♦

Misunderestimating Herbert Hoover

The Scrapbook will go to great lengths to avoid being pedantic, but sometimes we are so astonished by the ignorance—the sheer bricks-for-brains philistinism—of certain journalistic celebrities that we feel constrained to set the historical record straight.

We are thinking, among other instances, of the *Washington Post*'s resident boy genius Ezra Klein, who once explained that many Americans misunderstand the U.S. Constitution since "the text is confusing because it was written more than a hundred years ago." (That is, before 1912!) And of a similarly eye-popping observation we ran across last week by Margaret Carlson, who these days writes for Bloomberg.com.

Carlson customarily tends to substitute a certain snarkiness of tone for actual knowledge—which, we suppose, entertains her readers. But in a tortured attempt to make the case that Mitt Romney, as a onetime businessman, is disqualified by experience for the presidency, she said the following:

> The only successful candidate to run as a businessman—it was all he had—was Herbert Hoover. Look where that got us.

Now, The Scrapbook does not wish to enter into an extended discussion of the qualities and defects of the Hoover administration, or the virtues of Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corp. versus New Deal pump-priming, and so on. And of course, as a loyal Democrat, Carlson is entitled to express her opinion—"Look where that got us"—about Herbert Hoover's place in history. But to suggest that Hoover ran "as a businessman" for the White House in 1928, and that his (spectacularly successful) commercial background "was all he had," is not only unfair but profoundly and self-evidently wrong.

Herbert Hoover was, indeed, a businessman: He parlayed his training as a mining engineer (and member of Stanford's first graduating class) into a storied career as a geologist, miner, and investor in the American West, in Australia, in China—where he was a hero of the resistance to the Boxer Rebellion—

THOMAS FLUHARTY

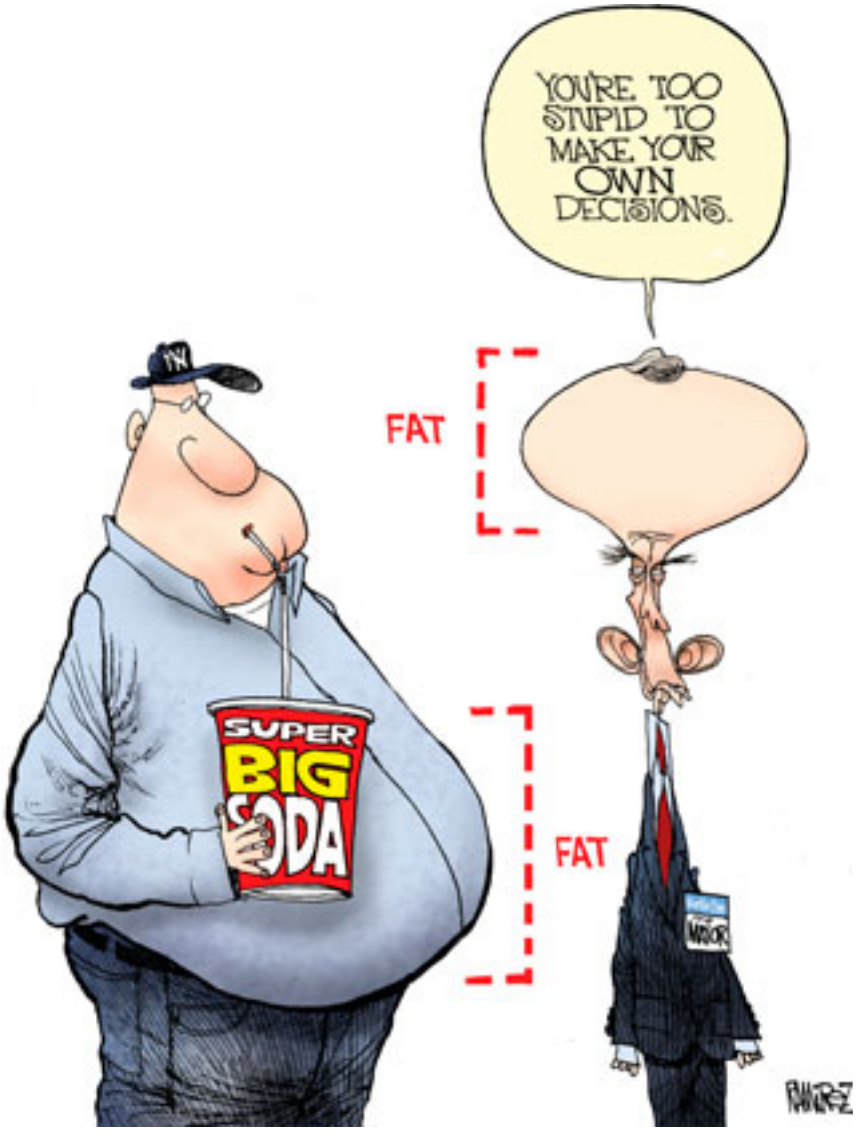
and in Europe before the outbreak of World War I.

As a wealthy American resident in London at the time, Hoover organized the (private, voluntary) Commission for Relief in Belgium, which successfully tackled the monumental problem of feeding and caring for the millions of refugees displaced by fighting across the continent; and after American entry into the war in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Hoover to the newly created U.S. Food Administration.

Hoover continued his work after the Armistice, founding the American Relief Commission to assist in the recovery and reconstruction of war-ravaged nations from Poland to Armenia, and as a consequence became (with the possible exception of Wilson) the most famous and beloved American in Europe.

So famous and beloved, indeed, that many of his friends and admirers (including his future rival Franklin D. Roosevelt) urged "the Great Humanitarian" to run for president in 1920. Instead, Hoover opted to serve as secretary of commerce in the Harding and Coolidge administrations, where he influenced economic policy, reorganized domestic agencies, deployed the resources of the federal government to encourage growing industries (such as radio), and became the federal government's point man for disaster relief, most notably in the devastating Mississippi River floods of 1927.

Which, of course, is only a partial description of Hoover's private and public career before his election to the White House. So did he "run as a businessman" for president? Well, only in the sense that Jimmy Carter ran as a peanut farmer, and Barack Obama as a community organizer. ♦



The War on Girls

One of the most interesting things about the abortion debate is the barely disguised moral unease of even the most ardent defenders of abortion-on-demand. Last week, for instance, a pro-life group released an undercover video of a woman purporting to seek an abortion at a Planned Parenthood clinic simply because she doesn't want to give birth to a girl. A Planned Parenthood worker is glad to help out. Planned Parenthood's sputtering response to the tape was revealing. One, they insisted the video was misleadingly edited. Two, they announced that they had fired the worker in the video. Three, they asserted they were nonjudgmental with regard to sex-selective abortions.

But why claim the video was misleading and fire the employee? Alas, being tacitly forced to concede that sex-selective abortion is morally revolting kicks a hole in the "war on women" theme Planned Parenthood and its Democratic allies are so invested in.

As it happens, Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.) put forth a bill last week—the Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act—that would ban sex-selective abortions. In response to the legislation, the *Washington Post*'s Dana Milbank more or less called Franks racist. "Sex-selection abortion is a huge tragedy in parts of Asia, but to the extent it's happening in this country, it's mostly among Asian immigrants. . . . [Franks's bill] was the latest

attempt to protect racial minorities from themselves." Moreover, Milbank warns that by alienating another minority group, Franks's bill is fraught with electoral peril: "According to primary exit polls, 90 percent of GOP voters this year have been white. It's difficult in 2012 to win with such a statistic."

Milbank's abuse wasn't even the worst of it. "I think the next act will be dragging women out of patient rooms into the streets and screaming over their bodies as they get dragged out of getting access to women's health care," said Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Insufferable). Well, Milbank and Jackson Lee can rest easy. Franks's bill failed to get the necessary two-thirds vote in Congress. The right to kill a child because you want a son and not a daughter is safe for now.

Perhaps the Obama campaign should update its "Life of Julia" cartoon strip and add a panel for the gestational period: Good luck kid, for the next few months you're on your own.♦

Secular Trends

The Scrapbook is getting a headache trying to keep up with all the developments relating to church and state. The other day a Washington think tank unveiled its plan to foster a religious liberty caucus in every state legislature, to educate lawmakers on issues like conscience protections for professionals (with or without Obamacare, may a pharmacist decline to sell abortifacients?) and the freedom of religious organizations to choose leaders who share their faith (must a Christian student group allow a gay activist to run for leadership?). The new American Religious Freedom program of the Ethics and Public Policy Center will provide networking, model legislation, successful strategies from other states, and encouragement to tackle issues of concern to various faiths and both parties.

Barely a week later, the atheists shot back: The Secular Coalition for America aims to have a chapter of its own up and running in every state by the end of this year, with a similar purpose of developing awareness, expertise, and readiness to lobby legislators. Both groups are backed by powerful advisory boards: Big guns behind American Religious Freedom include Harvard jurist Mary Ann Glendon, Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention, and theologian and rabbi David Novak, while the dream team advising the Secular Coalition for America includes evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, and novelist Salman Rushdie. Each board has a celebrity member *in memoriam*—prison evangelist Chuck Colson for the former, journalist and crusading atheist Christopher Hitchens for the latter.

The deliberate focus on state legislation is interesting in a presidential year. At the national level, the choice is relatively clear. Few would argue with the Secular Coalition's presidential scorecard, which gives Obama an average grade of B+ on its top issues, to Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney's C. But meanwhile, up and down the land, seemingly small controversies over hitherto settled liberties are simmering (may an adoption agency prefer husband-and-wife couples to same-sex couples?), as the effects of changes with national implications begin to be felt—like President Obama's and some appeals courts' rejection of DOMA, the federal law enshrining the until-recently unquestioned definition of marriage. State legislatures have work to do as citizens start to grasp the implications for them of the creeping establishment of secularism. One way of putting the question coming into focus is: Can American pluralism continue to make room for the free exercise of orthodox Bible-based religion, including its teaching about marriage and sex? Can we live and let live in this area, or must government-imposed neutrality sweep the field? The Scrapbook's headache just got considerably worse. ♦

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The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except the first week in January, third week in April, second week in July, and fourth week in August) at 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington D.C. 20036. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-850-682-7644 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $4.95. Back issues, $4.95 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington, D.C. 20036.

James Abdnor, 1923-2012

When he died on May 16, the *New York Times* miscaptioned the photograph it ran with his obituary. And then misspelled his name in the correction it ran three days later.

Jim Abdnor would have smiled, I think, or mumbled something shy. And sly. He had a strangely private sense of humor that didn't seem to mind if no one else got the joke—which he may well have needed, looking back on his political career in South Dakota: a conservative whose single term in the U.S. Senate was bracketed by the 18 years of George McGovern that came before and the 18 years of Tom Daschle that came after. He was the thin layer of grit that managed to halt for a moment the turning of those big, slick wheels.

I was visiting in Rapid City on Election Night 1980, sitting up late with my Uncle Joe to watch the returns. Joe had held that Senate seat once, losing it to McGovern in 1962, and he had been invited out to the Republicans' victory party. In the end, he didn't go, deciding not to intrude on Abdnor's moment. But there was a satisfaction Joe couldn't help but radiate as McGovern finally went down to defeat.

A man named Ronald Reagan was also elected that night, up at the top of the Republican ticket. Which was cause for additional satisfaction in Rapid City. But the mostly forgotten Abdnor deserves some recognition now for his overwhelming victory over the man who only eight years before had been the Democrats' nominee for president: Fifty-eight percent of the vote, Abdnor took, to McGovern's 39 percent, despite being outspent two to one.

The election of 1980 was a Republican landslide, of course, with prominent Democratic senators getting buried across the nation, from Birch Bayh and Frank Church to John Culver and Warren Magnuson. Twelve Senate seats the Republicans picked up on Election Night, and there were several figures among the new senators from whom we would hear—for good or for ill—in the coming years: Dan Quayle, for instance. Chuck Grassley, Warren Rudman, and Al D'Amato. Arlen Specter.

"Reagan's coattails," the newspapers called it then, and "Reagan's coattails" is what they're calling it still: Nearly every obituary for Jim Abdnor casually noted that Reagan had pulled him to victory in 1980. And yet, that isn't exactly the way things happened. We slip into a kind of historical blindness when we suppose that 1980 was the year Reagan invented modern conservatism. Even out on those Dakota plains today, many seem to have forgotten what people like Jim Abdnor knew and demonstrated: Reagan helped create the conservative coalition, but the conservative coalition helped create Reagan, as well.

Abdnor on Election Night, November 1980

RAPID CITY JOURNAL

Oh, Jimmy Carter also pitched in, doing his best to advance the Republican cause, and the nation was ready for some change from the long-ruling Democrats. Remember the property-tax rebellion of Proposition 13 in California? The Sagebrush Rebellion, trying to wrench away federal control of public lands in the West? The Republican victories of 1980 didn't spring, like Minerva, full-grown from the head of Jupiter Reagan. They were nurtured to maturity by conservatives who had worked for years, on the ground, to make their politics capable of winning elections.

Conservatives such as Jim Abdnor. Such a quiet, unassuming man, a lifelong bachelor whose farm in Kennebec (population 280) really was his home—although he sometimes taught and coached at the high school down the road in Presho (population 497). Maybe, in the end, he was too quiet and unassuming. Even though he'd served as lieutenant governor and congressman, the party heavyweights had trouble accepting a farmer with a speech impediment as one of the state's U.S. senators.

They'd let him run in 1980 assuming he would be merely a token candidate against an unbeatable McGovern. And when his reelection rolled around in 1986, Governor Bill Janklow ran a brutal campaign against him in the Republican primary—weakening Abdnor enough that, even though he managed to scrape by in the primary, the Democrat Tom Daschle slipped past him in the general election. Apart from working to promote the careers of former staffers, including the current South Dakota senator John Thune, Abdnor never reentered politics. He slipped away at a nursing home in Sioux Falls, at age 89.

James Abdnor was never a nationally important political figure. He was universally acknowledged to be nice, but he practiced a profession where niceness is seldom a practical virtue. Even in South Dakota, his political contemporaries didn't take him seriously. Not as seriously, anyway, as he deserved. He was who he was: a principled conservative, in season and out. What would the Reagan Revolution have been without him, and all the people like him, who finally found their voice on that Election Day in 1980?

Joseph Bottum

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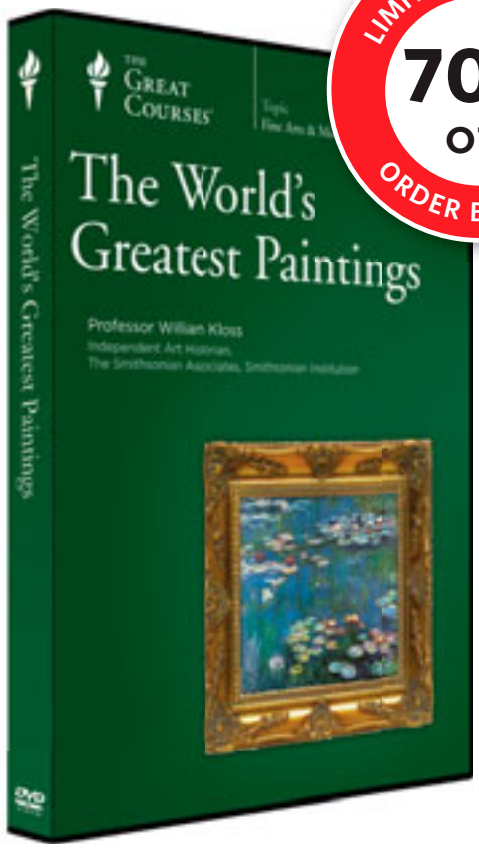

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the weekly Standard

Trust the People

Put not your trust in judges—nor in other berobed or bejeweled personages. To the degree you trust anyone: Trust the people.

Meaning?

Conservatives shouldn't count on the Supreme Court to do our work for us on Obamacare. The Court may rule as it should, and strike down the mandate. But it may not. And even if it does, the future of health care in America—and for that matter, the future of limited government—depends ultimately on the verdict of the American people.

More concretely: While a defeat for Obamacare in the Court would be nice, the defeat of President Obama at the polls on November 6 is crucial. If electoral victory is achieved, Obamacare can and will be repealed—and more judges of a constitutionalist persuasion will be appointed by the next president. Indeed, one could almost say that a bad Court decision later this month would be a salutary reminder that here the people rule, and that persuading the people is the key task. As Lincoln put it in his first debate with Stephen Douglas, "In this and like communities, public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently he who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions."

Solyndra's just a symptom.

AP IMAGES / MARY ALTAFFER

Which brings us to Mitt Romney. He's had a good beginning to his general election campaign. But he could do more, it seems to us, to help mold public sentiment—to explain, to quote Lincoln again, "where we are, and whither we are tending," so as to help us "better judge what to do, and how to do it." He could do more to put his particular criticisms of the Obama administration in a broader context, and to frame his own proposals in a more comprehensive narrative. After all, Romney has to convince the American public that they need to do something they're not usually inclined to do—replace a sitting president with a challenger. And unlike in 1980 and 1992, when the public was persuaded to do just that, the incumbent president has not been weakened by a primary opponent.

The burden for making this argument can't be all Romney's. It's up to the entire conservative movement to make this case, and many are doing their part. But the presidential candidate can help. Why him? Why now? The answer has to be more than "gotcha" critiques of individual parts of the Obama record.

Conservatives were pleased by the tactical agility and rhetorical toughness of the Romney campaign last week, when he appeared before the shuttered Solyndra plant and called attention to that waste of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars. But Democrats spent much of 1983 and 1984 chortling about the fraud, waste, and abuse that allegedly marked Ronald Reagan's defense buildup (remember $600 toilet seats in military airplanes?). The citizens were willing to tolerate the waste because they judged Reagan's defense buildup, and his foreign policy in general, a good idea. The task for Romney is to tie the particular abuses and errors of the Obama administration to its governing bad ideas. And then, and just as important, to lay out his better path forward.

Republican strategist David Winston asked an interesting question in a recent survey of 1,000 registered voters: "In thinking more specifically about how the economy is doing, which comes closer to your view?" Twenty-six percent chose "The economy is getting better, and the rate of progress is acceptable." Thirty-two percent agreed with "The economy is not getting better at all." A plurality, 40 percent, chose "The economy is getting better, but the rate of progress is still unacceptable."

The result is at once heartening and chastening. This is a winnable election for Mitt Romney. But he can't win simply by asserting that things are worse than they've ever been. He needs to win most of the 40 percent of the public who think things are getting better, if at an unacceptably slow rate. If Romney fails to present a compelling alternative, most of those 40 percent could say this: Well, we're not happy about the pace of progress under Obama, but that rich Republican guy who's sniping at the president doesn't seem to have any better proposals or a clear vision—so perhaps we'd better stick with the guy we've got.

Sticking with the guy we've got would be a disaster—and not just because he'll waste some more money on foolish solar energy projects. If Romney explains why where we are with Obama is unacceptable, why whither we are tending is even worse—*and* why his own alternative path forward is superior—then we trust the American people to make the right choice in November.

—William Kristol

The Party of Lincoln

Here's where the presidential debate stands. Mitt Romney seems comfortable arguing for a Bain Capital-style turnaround of the economy, and the many opponents of the stimulus, Obamacare, and Dodd-Frank are happy to help him. They have a strong case: The nation would benefit from less federal intervention and welfare and more private initiative and risk-taking. Romney and his supporters have become advocates for efficiency of production, which they contrast with the equality of condition that is the goal of President Obama and other liberals.

But there is a danger in ceding the ground of equality to the president. This deprives Republicans and conservatives of a powerful chord in the American political vocabulary.

Abraham Lincoln

Mitt Romney

In many ways, champions of markets are champions of failure. Firms regularly go bust and disappear in a well-functioning and productive economy. They've failed to provide goods and services that the market desires, and so they are beaten by more productive enterprises. (Indeed, one could say that America continues to have far too many institutions on government-sustained life support, from AIG to GM to Ally Financial.)

When you are free to choose, you are also free to lose. The entrepreneur is going to flop just as much as he succeeds, if not more. The laborer in a market system is going to switch jobs often. He will be part of the great "job churn" by which outmoded positions are destroyed and replaced by new ones. There will be times when he may feel anxious about the future. He may look to statesmen for words of reassurance.

If those statesmen respond by saying, "Well, bub, that's just part of the great process of creative destruction," our laborer may turn to demagogues and flatterers who promise stability and a helping hand in exchange for greater control over the economy and society.

And if those statesmen respond by saying, "We want to help the job creators, not the tax-dollar takers," he may listen instead to President Obama, who said recently that his job is not to maximize profits (no danger of that happening), but to "set up an equitable tax system so that everybody is paying their fair share." Egalitarianism will trump efficiency if the public sees the market and its supporters as heartless and unjust.

That is why it may not be the wisest idea to say that the 2012 election is a referendum on "capitalism." "Creative destruction" is an uncertain flag to rally behind. One might discover that a majority of the people are willing to trade liberty for security—especially if the argument for a free economy is based solely on econometric studies and actuarial projections.

A better option: Cast the graphs aside, and reject the distinction between efficiency and equality. To support markets is not to reject fairness but to embrace it. One supports free enterprise not only because it improves the bottom line, but also because it is the only economic arrangement compatible with the equal rights of citizens. A government that tries to correct inequalities of result inevitably will interfere with our rights to life, liberty, and property. It will, for instance, unfairly favor some businesses over others—usually the powerful and politically well-connected.

Consider the laborer. He is endowed with the natural rights to use his skills as he likes and to dispose of his earnings as he sees fit. The duty of government is to protect his rights of safety and conscience and the property he creates through his labor. By exercising these rights, he improves his condition. Or as Lincoln put it in his 1859 speech to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, "The prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him."

Why not frame the Republican agenda in Lincoln's rhetoric of natural equal rights? Such an approach seems entirely compatible with Romney's policies. A Romney administration would lower the cost of labor through repealing Obamacare and other onerous regulations. It would shrink the tax wedge that increases costs and reduces individual earnings by cutting payroll and income and corporate taxes. It would promote mobility through right to work and education initiatives. It would end favoritism and cronyism in energy policy. It would treat all Americans equally by winding down race-based affirmative action. It would lessen workingmen's future tax burden—and the tax burden of their children and grandchildren—by signing into law the Ryan plan to bring discretionary spending into balance and restructure Medicare and Medicaid to save them for the long term.

Not only will the economy become more efficient, the equal rights of every American will be secured. Romney would be speaking in the language of the American Founders, of Abraham Lincoln, of Ronald Reagan. Both the economy and civil society would be renewed. And the great American turnaround would begin.

—Matthew Continetti

Impotence Abroad

Hillary Clinton says that the Obama administration can't do anything about Bashar al-Assad. They can't make him step down, and they can't stop him from massacring women and children, as he did last week in Houla. "The Syrians are not going to listen to us," Clinton said last week. "They may listen, maybe, to the Russians, so we have to keep pushing them."

The secretary of state's hedging is instructive. *Maybe* Assad will listen to Russia. *Maybe* Russia will force out Assad. Clarity is the outward expression of resolve, but Clinton's uncertainty is the rhetoric of impotence, a condition the White House has imposed on itself. It signals to both adversaries and allies that they are free to act on their own because the White House is unable to shape outcomes.

If the Syrian conflict turns into a full-scale civil war, says Clinton, it's Russia's fault. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, fears the crisis may spread to the rest of the region and that the international community therefore "had better do something" about it. Obama's secretary of defense, meanwhile, can't imagine how the United States could take military action in Syria without U.N. authorization. "My greatest responsibility," said Leon Panetta, "is to make sure when we deploy our men and women in uniform and put them at risk, we not only know what the mission is, but we have the kind of support we need to accomplish that mission."

In other words, the administration believes America is incapable of acting on its own to defend and advance its own interests. The White House has come to see the U.S. role in the region much as the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran did. To paraphrase the late Ayatollah Khomeini, the Obama administration can't do a damn thing.

In reality, the administration chose the course of passivity. It's not Russia's fault that the White House handed off its Syria policy to Moscow. And you can't blame Russian president Vladimir Putin for not wanting to end a crisis that has boosted Russia's standing. Moscow is now the destination for any regional or international power that wants to do something about Syria. Moscow is understandably basking in the attention. Prestige is a key part of any political and diplomatic arsenal, and serious statesmen try to acquire it.

Maybe Obama will one day decide to be a serious statesman himself, but in the meantime, the White House's concessions to Russia have opened a door for the Iranians. Last week, the deputy commander of Iran's Quds Force acknowledged that members of the external operations units were active in Syria fighting alongside Assad loyalists. The purpose was to force yet more Iranian demands down the administration's throat. If Russia gets to stake a claim to Syria, why wouldn't Iran, which after all has a deep investment in ensuring the survival of its chief regional ally? Unlike the Russians, the Iranians aren't in it just for the fun of it; they are rolling out a genuine strategy.

In Baghdad last week, Iranian negotiator Saeed Jalili made it clear that if the White House wants to bargain over nuclear issues, then the Iranians have other items they want to discuss, like Syria. For the Iranians, the longer they can keep the U.S. negotiators at the table, the more time they have to affect facts on the ground—with their nuclear weapons program, and also in Syria. If the administration refuses to back the opposition force in Syria to fight on behalf of U.S. interests and against an Iranian ally, that only makes Tehran, which has made clear it does have a dog in the fight, stronger.

The White House has justified its unwillingness to back the Free Syrian Army by explaining that to do so would only result in more carnage. By not acting, though, the administration is perhaps inviting the bloodshed it hopes to avoid.

Both allies and adversaries can sense this administration's weakness. Because the Obama team has refused to play America's traditional role as regional power, the Israelis are led to believe that stopping Iran is up to them alone. The world's failure to intervene in Syria, Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak recently observed, shows that "it is not clear" that "the world will indeed act" to come to Israel's defense. This was a message meant for the White House.

Obama says he doesn't bluff, and that all options are on the table to stop the Iranian nuclear program, including the use of military force. However, the administration's decisions on Syria suggest something else—that the White House will do anything it can to avoid military conflict. Instead of putting forth a credible military plan to show Assad, as well as others, that the United States is serious about stopping him, administration officials continue to intimate that the Syrian military is a formidable opponent—with 600,000 men under arms and a Russian air defense system. The reality is that Assad's army, at this point a whittled-down sectarian militia, is not even capable of beating back the Free Syrian Army. Otherwise, Assad would not need Iranian reinforcements. If Assad's ragtag army presents this big a challenge to the White House, then what about the Iranians, with terrorist assets around the world and speedboats harassing the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf?

Since the White House's handling of Syria has given evidence only of impotence, the Israelis, as well as the Iranians, cannot help but conclude that Obama will play the same hand with Iran that he has with Syria. He isn't even bluffing. He has simply folded.

—Lee Smith

Barack Pinocchio Obama

Facts are stubborn things.

BY FRED BARNES

Are the media beginning to catch on to President Obama? The answer is a tentative yes. This doesn't mean the press is softening its hostility to Mitt Romney. Heaven forbid! But at least for now Obama is getting razzed by the very people who used to uphold and defend him.

It's about time. Obama and his team have been playing the media for fools. Think of the stories the White House has foisted on them (and some have bought). Obama secretly favors the Bowles-Simpson deficit reduction plan. The Republican landslide in 2010 was consistent with Obama's election in 2008—both pleas for change. His endorsement of same-sex marriage was courageous. And besides "gutsy call," there was "nobody messes with Joe."

A turnaround was perceptible last month after the president claimed "federal spending since I took office has risen at the slowest pace of any president in almost 60 years." This went too far. It clashed with the reality of a presidency in which hefty spending increases and soaring deficits are hallmarks.

Media fact checkers waded in, not from the right but from the *Washington Post* and the Associated Press. "Obama claim of thrifty spending falls short of reality," AP concluded. Glenn Kessler of the *Post* said the president's data "are flawed." It was a full debunking, but Obama aides didn't give up. They continued to argue Obama had slowed spending.

That's another mark of the Obama presidency with potential for media attention: repeating a claim after it's been exposed as false, misleading, or flimflam. Obama did this early in his presidency when he zapped House Republicans for rejecting his request to work with him on the economic stimulus. In truth, the stimulus bill was already a done deal—crafted entirely by Democrats—when the president spoke to the House GOP conference.

The practice popped up this spring in the Obama reelection video. The narrator, Tom Hanks, raises the story of Obama's mother and suggests her health insurer curtailed her medical coverage as she was battling her terminal cancer. It "drained all her resources," Obama adds in the video. But according to a biography of his mother published in May 2011, only disability coverage to compensate for lost wages was in dispute, not medical coverage.

Obama also plays fast and loose with numbers, a blinking target for the press. He said in Dearborn, Michigan, in April that the "most sluggish job growth that we've seen" occurred during the Bush presidency, "2000 to 2008." The *Washington Post*'s fact checker, however, found that the "worst numbers on record occurred under [Obama's] watch." Nonetheless, Obama repeated the claim about Bush a few days later.

Like many Democrats, the president has insisted the health care policy endorsed by Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney "ends Medicare as we know it." That policy was adjusted earlier this year to retain traditional Medicare—Medicare as we know it—as an option. But Obama didn't change his tune. He told Associated Press editors in April that the Romney policy "will ultimately end Medicare as we know it."

Obama is slippery when assigning responsibility for failures and successes. "Under my administration, America is producing more oil today than at any time in the last eight years," he said in February. The

GARY LOCKE

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implication was his energy policies were the cause. Though *National Journal*, among others, pointed out the oil surge was a result of his predecessor's policies, the president has persisted in acting as if the credit should go to him.

After Solyndra, the solar energy company, went bust last year, Obama noted that the program under which it was subsidized "predates me." That is, it was George W. Bush's program. But the loan guarantee to Solyndra was approved by the Obama administration. Again, months later, Obama was still insinuating the Bush administration was at fault.

Obama's boldest effort to mislead was the notion that since President Reagan once said millionaires should pay more in taxes than average Joes, today he'd back the Obama-endorsed Buffett Rule to force those earning a million or more a year to pay a minimum tax rate of 30 percent on their individual income. "We could call it the Reagan Rule instead of the Buffett Rule," he said in April.

No, we couldn't. Obama was quickly exposed for having quoted Reagan out of context. In context, Reagan was calling for lower tax rates, not higher rates as Obama is. Still, the Reagan biography on the White House website has been updated to say Obama was "calling for the same" as Reagan in promoting the Buffett Rule.

Skirting the truth eventually gets a politician in trouble with the press. And Obama has the additional problem of having run in 2008 as a leader above the corner-cutting often associated with office seekers. So there's hypocrisy here, the idealist now employing the tricks of the cynic.

Reporters, indeed most journalists, hate hypocrisy. When they spot it, they generally pounce. True, they often exaggerate it, but that wasn't the case when they jumped on Obama for raising money from rich private equity investors at the same time he was denouncing Romney for his work as head of Bain Capital, a private equity firm.

One more thing: arrogance. The press gets its back up at the sight of political operators who see themselves as masters of the universe. Yet that's the impression of the Obama campaign strategists left by John Heilemann in a highly revealing essay in *New York*. They're cocky, profane, and convinced they play the political game as well as anyone ever has.

A dangerous tendency of politicians is to think so highly of themselves that the media become less important to them. I think Obama has gotten to that point. By denying the press what it craves the most—respect—Obama is asking for trouble. And, finally, he's beginning to get it. ♦

Victory at Sea

The Battle of Midway at 70.

BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

In the six months after its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Navy sailed from one victory to another, across the Pacific and into the Indian Ocean, until it seemed as though it was not merely unbeaten, but unbeatable. The Japanese conquered everything they attempted to conquer—including the Philippines and Singapore—and they defeated every fleet they encountered. Perhaps the most heavily symbolic of those early victories was the Battle of the Java Sea, in which a force of cruisers and destroyers fighting as part of something known as American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) Command, was routed and its commander, Rear Admiral Karel Doorman, killed when his flagship, the Dutch cruiser *De Ruyter*, was hit by a Japanese torpedo that blew up one of the ship's magazines.

That victory, and others, were so conclusive—even easy—that the Japanese Navy began to think of itself as invincible and became infected with what some of its officers would call, ruefully, "the victory disease." But that was later. After Midway.

Despite its astounding run of victories, Japan had still not fully settled accounts with the Americans. Faced with the decision of "what next?" the Japanese high command designed an operation to force America's aircraft carriers into a decisive battle and sink them. The U.S. Navy would be left without carriers, with its battleships mostly resting on the mud in Pearl Harbor, and with its submarines shooting torpedoes that routinely malfunctioned. In this state of helplessness, the Americans might be persuaded to negotiate. If not, Japan could defend its empire from behind a barrier of island fortresses that ran from the Aleutians to New Guinea, with its invincible navy sailing out to meet and engage any threat.

One more decisive battle might do it. This, anyway, was the thinking of many in the Japanese high command. They did not believe the Americans had the will to fight the kind of war it would take to reclaim the Pacific. One conspicuous exception was Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who had spent time in America—even studied at Harvard—and believed he knew the American character. He was opposed to war, believing that Japan would be overwhelmed by American industry.

He had that right. Even before the opening of hostilities, America was building new vessels. Carriers, especially, which Pearl Harbor had conclusively established as the new capital ship for the world's navies. But in June 1942, America's new *Essex*-class

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carriers were still in the yards, in construction, or undergoing sea trials, and the U.S. Navy was limping by on what it had left after Pearl Harbor.

Which wasn't much. The nucleus consisted of three carriers—*Enterprise*, *Hornet*, and *Yorktown*. The Japanese believed they had sunk the *Yorktown* in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May. And they nearly had. But the ship made it back to Pearl Harbor, badly damaged and trailing oil. First estimates were that repairs would take three months and that they would need to be made in one of the West Coast yards, not in Hawaii.

A Japanese cruiser, demolished by bombs from U.S. Navy planes, in the Battle of Midway

After the wounded ship had arrived in Pearl and the water had been pumped out of the dry dock, Admiral Chester Nimitz, who commanded the Navy in the Pacific, pulled on a pair of hip boots and sloshed around beneath her hull with the repair crew inspecting the damage.

"We must have this ship back in three days," he said.

"Wilco," someone must have said. Or, in modern parlance, "Can do, Admiral."

With the urgency of a NASCAR pit crew changing all four tires and gassing up its car in a matter of seconds, the yard crew went to work, pulling so much power for their floodlights and welding torches that parts of Honolulu lost electricity. The repairs were made, in large part, without the benefit of blueprints and schematics. Things were done by eyeball, and the American art of jury-rigging and improvisation may never have been more historically decisive. The ship was ready to make steam and to launch and recover aircraft in just over 48 hours. It was one of many turning points in a battle not yet fought and in which *Yorktown* would play a critical role. And, sadly, be sunk.

Nimitz had set his deadline for the return of the *Yorktown* on the basis of something between intuition and scientific certainty. His code-breakers had been intercepting and analyzing Japanese radio traffic that they believed indicated the objective of the enemy's next major offensive was Midway. The code-breakers were not able to read every word of every message, as the Bletchley Park team did with the German radio traffic that had been coded by the famous Enigma machines. The people working for Nimitz were able only to tease out bits and pieces from which they made very informed estimates. In one celebrated episode, they used a ruse to trick the Japanese into identifying the target of a large operation that went by the code letters "AF" and turned out, indeed, to be Midway, a cluster of forlorn little islands 1,300 miles west of Hawaii; close enough to be strategic.

As expert and clever as they were, the code-breakers' work was treated with skepticism by some of their superiors. And some of Nimitz's superiors, as well, including his boss, Admiral Ernest King, the highest ranking officer in the Navy, and Henry Stimson, the secretary of war, who believed the approaching great sea battle would be fought just off the coast of California.

This may seem preposterous to generations of Americans who have assumed that their country always has the military upper hand and decisively so. But in June 1942, it was absolutely not the case. As Stimson wrote in his diary, "It is a serious situation for [the Japanese] greatly outclass us in the strength of carrier vessels. . . . [N]evertheless, if the Navy uses good judgment and doesn't run the risk of getting out from under the air umbrella, we may entice them into a position where we may get a chance to do something—some hit and run blows which may even up the situation navally and make it a little more possible."

Nimitz had other—and considerably more aggressive—ideas. Trusting his code-breakers had correctly teased out Japanese intentions and plans, Nimitz doubled down and decided to send his three carriers to meet the attack on Midway. The Japanese carrier fleet normally included six carriers. For the Midway operation, it would consist of four. The two left behind had been in the Coral Sea fight and had lost flight crews. One had been damaged and required repairs. But the Japanese command did not see the urgency that Nimitz had impressed on the yard personnel repairing *Yorktown*.

So it would be four carriers to three. *Yorktown*, like the two missing Japanese carriers, had suffered serious losses among its air group's pilots. But, again, instead of taking the time to bring in replacements and reorganize, Nimitz simply cannibalized from squadrons that had been orphaned after the loss of other carriers. The *Yorktown* was a jury-rigged

man-of-war, with a patched-together air group. Still, it was in the fight.

But the odds favored the Japanese, in numbers, experience, and weaponry. The Japanese Zero was one of the finest fighter planes in the world, and the F4F Wildcat was not in its class. The U.S. dive-bomber, the SBD Dauntless, was dependable. But the torpedo plane, the TBD Devastator, was obsolete even before the war. It was slow in the attack and pitifully vulnerable to fighters. Against the Zero it had no chance.

But as events were to prove, the aviators flying the TBDs were as aggressive as the admiral who commanded them. The pilots made up for what their planes lacked in speed with what still seems incredible boldness. And they were as resourceful—especially one of their leaders—as the people at Pearl who had patched up the *Yorktown*.

The battle eventually turned on just these qualities: aggressiveness and the ability to improvise. It was a battle of many "what ifs," and when viewed that way, the American victory can be seen as lucky. What if the Japanese float plane from the cruiser *Tone* had launched on time and searched its sector according to plan? Perhaps it would have alerted the Japanese admiral to the presence of the American fleet in time for him to strike first.

Maybe.

And what if the American submarine *Nautilus* had not played an aggressive cat-and-mouse game with a Japanese destroyer that, as a result, was racing to catch up with the rest of the fleet and leaving a wake that pointed, like an arrow, to the position of the Japanese carriers?

And what if Wade McClusky, leading American dive bombers off the *Enterprise*, had not seen that destroyer's wake and followed it to the Japanese fleet, which he attacked?

And what if McClusky had not arrived at precisely that moment, when the Zeros were all at low altitude, having nearly wiped out three squadrons of American carrier-based torpedo planes and leaving the sky above undefended against dive bombers?

And what if the commander of one of those American squadrons—Torpedo 8, off the USS *Hornet*—had not been an aggressive junior officer willing to disobey a direct order and risk court-martial in order to fly a course he knew would take him to the Japanese fleet while the rest of his ship's air group spent the day over empty ocean with none of its planes engaging the enemy and many of them splashing into the Pacific, out of gas?

The story of the last flight of Torpedo 8, the bravery of the attack and the death of all but one pilot and every radio gunner—15 planes down, 29 of 30 men dead—has been told many times. But in Craig L. Symonds's *The Battle of Midway*, the most recent and, by far, most satisfying account of the battle yet, readers learn just how badly handled the Hornet's air group was that day and how insubordinate John Waldron, Torpedo 8's commander, had been when he broke off formation to fly his own course, which he believed (correctly it turned out) would take him to the Japanese fleet.

When his commander ordered him not to break formation and go out on his own, Waldron replied, "Well, the hell with you. I know where they are, and I'm going to them."

Had he lived, Waldron would have been court-martialed. He was, instead, awarded the Navy Cross, posthumously.

His squadron flew directly to the Japanese fleet and attacked without scoring a hit. But the raid of the torpedo planes brought the Zeros down low, leaving the sky above open to McClusky and the dive-bombers. In five minutes, three of the Japanese carriers were in flames, so badly damaged that they eventually sank. The fourth, now heavily outnumbered by the Americans, was attacked and sunk later that afternoon.

The Japanese aircraft carrier Hiryu *aflame, with a collapsed flight deck*

The Japanese lost the initiative in the Pacific in five minutes. And, of course, eventually lost the war. Which, from this distance, seems inevitable.

Not so, however, early on June 4, 1942, when the loss of Midway seemed likely, the loss of Hawaii seemed probable, and attacks on the West Coast of the United States or the Panama Canal seemed all too possible.

One can read the accounts and conclude that the fortunes of war (read: luck) went the Americans' way. Or one can read more closely and see that while the Americans may have gotten some breaks, they made the most of them. What John Keegan has called "the most stunning and decisive blow in the history of naval warfare" was, above all, a victory of spirit. ♦

The New Jews

They're Asian Americans.

BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

Like many colleges and universities, Princeton professes its devotion to "institutional equity and diversity." The university's website claims that the school "actively seek[s] students, faculty, and staff of exceptional ability and promise who . . . will bring a diversity of viewpoints and cultures," before explaining that "examples of personal characteristics that confer diversity of viewpoint and culture include but are not limited to gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, national origin," etc.

The U.S. Department of Education may beg to differ. Since 2008, according to a spokesman, its Office for Civil Rights has been investigating whether the school "discriminates against Asians, on the basis of race or national origin, in its admissions process"—that is, whether students of Asian descent are being penalized for their background when applying to the school. Princeton, for its part, said through a spokesman, "We treat each application individually and we don't discriminate on the basis of race or national origin. . . . We evaluate applications in a holistic manner, and no particular factor in the admission process is assigned a fixed weight. There is no formula for weighing the various aspects of the application." One could be forgiven for wondering how the claim that the school "does not discriminate on the basis of race or national origin" does not contradict its mission to "actively seek students" who "bring a diversity of viewpoints and cultures," though. After all, doesn't trying to foster a diverse student body necessitate some form of race-based decision making?

This isn't to single out the Tigers. Indeed, Princeton is far from alone in being accused of anti-Asian bias in admissions. In August of last year, an Indian-American student filed a complaint with the Department of Education against Harvard alleging anti-Asian discrimination in its admissions department. (The student ultimately withdrew the complaint in February 2012.) Michele Hernández, author of *A Is for Admissions* and former admissions staffer at Dartmouth, recently said that "after 10 years of [counseling] and 4 years in Dartmouth admissions, I don't think it's intentional, but I think there is discrimination. If you look at the numbers, you can basically see that [if you are applying to many selective colleges] you have to have higher-than-average scores if you are an Asian."

Don't set your sights on Princeton.

Asian Americans routinely outperform all other groups, including Caucasians, in academic achievement, a pattern that has been observed since at least the mid-1980s. By eighth grade, "the percentage of Asian American students scoring in the upper echelons on math exams was 17 points higher than the percentage of white students," reports the *Washington Post*. When it's time to apply for college, the gap continues: In 2010, the last year for which data were available, the average SAT score for Asian Americans was 1636, versus 1580 for Caucasian students, 1369 for Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and 1277 for African Americans.

But as Asian Americans have risen through the academic ranks, some claim that they've become the "new Jews"—a group considered to be "overrepresented" in elite academia.

Data bear this out. A Center for Equal Opportunity study, cited on the Manhattan Institute's website in the wake of the Harvard complaint, found that Asian applicants to the University of Michigan in 2005 had a median SAT score that was "50 points higher than the median score of white students who were accepted, 140 points higher than that of Hispanics and 240 points higher than that of blacks." The center also found that "among applicants with a 1240 SAT score and 3.2 grade point average in 2005, the university admitted 10 percent of Asian Americans, 14 percent of whites, 88 percent of Hispanics and 92 percent of blacks." As further evidence, consider that "after the state of California abolished racial preferences, the percentage of Asian Americans accepted at Berkeley increased from 34.6 percent in 1997, the last year of legal affirmative action, to 42 percent entering in fall 2006," clear evidence that the group had been unfairly penalized under the previous regime.

Ironically enough, one of the most revealing studies of this phenomenon was conducted by one of Princeton's own. In 2009, Thomas Espenshade, a Princeton professor of sociology, coauthored a report that revealed students of Asian descent did indeed face discrimination at colleges and universities beyond the Ivy League. According to Espenshade's analysis, an Asian student needs to score 140 points higher than whites on the math and reading portions of the SAT, 270 points higher than Hispanics, and 450 points higher than blacks to have the same chances of admission at the nation's top schools. "[A]ll other things equal," Espenshade told *Inside Higher Ed*, "Asian-American students are at a disadvantage relative to white students, and at an even

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Ethan Epstein is an editorial assistant at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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H5

bigger disadvantage relative to black and Latino students."

To supporters of affirmative action, the practice has two major benefits—one positive and one punitive. For one, they say that it's a necessary corrective to grave historical injustices. Two—and this they don't often say out loud—affirmative action *punishes* those who are perceived to have benefited from (or even personally perpetrated) the politics of racial supremacy.

But in both cases—even if one accepts those justifications—discriminating against Asians is indefensible. Indeed, it can be reasonably argued that Asian Americans have endured *more* discrimination than American Hispanics, who benefit from affirmative action as it is currently executed. And Asian Americans can hardly be accused of oppressing other racial groups en masse. As S.B. Woo, former lieutenant governor of Delaware and current director of the Asian-American advocacy organization the 80-20 Initiative, says, "there is no historical rationale that justifies forcing Asian Americans to bear the burden of preference, more than other Americans." Indeed, given the historical injustices suffered by Americans of Asian descent—Japanese internment, the Chinese Exclusion Act—in an honest affirmative action regime, they would stand to *benefit*.

The times may be a changin', though. This fall, the Supreme Court will hear a case brought by a white student who says she was denied admission to the University of Texas on account of her Caucasian background. Consequently, racial preferences in college admissions could be banned altogether—a real possibility, given the Court's relatively conservative bent.

But until then, Asian applicants may continue to have to leap a higher bar than others. Unsurprisingly, the Associated Press reported late last year that increasing numbers of Asian applicants are neglecting to identify themselves as such—students of mixed descent, for example, fail to mention their Asian heritage at all, checking the box for "Caucasian" and leaving "Asian" blank.

Maybe they should check "Native American" instead. ♦

Europe's Political Contagion

From financial failure to institutional collapse.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

GARY LOCKE

That the eurozone has been reduced to a financial and economic shambles was predictable. How little that has changed the continent's politics was not. To be sure, there have been massive protests in Greece and elsewhere, but the widespread disorder feared by many (including me) in the wake of the 2008/09 financial collapse—arguably the iceberg to the euro's *Titanic*—hasn't materialized, yet. If there is a revolt in the making, it is burning with a slow fuse. Yes, government after government has fallen, but to what effect? Spain has witnessed the rise of the *Indignados*, a mass Occupy-ish movement, but when the Socialists lost last year's election, they were replaced by a conservative administration even more determined to trudge to Merkozy than its predecessor.

Why so many Europeans have accepted so much misery so quietly so far is a mystery. Welfare narcosis? The calming effect of what's left of boom-time wealth? It is no coincidence that the most dramatic political upheaval in Europe has been in Greece, the country where the social security net has frayed the most and living standards have collapsed the furthest. The continent's increasingly post-democratic political structures have also operated as a brake on radical change. The defeat of one party by another has generally made little difference. The eurozone's dominant political class, center-left, center-right, Tweedledum, Tweedledee, has signed up for muddy approximations of the social market economy and a concrete version of

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

the "ever closer" European integration for which austerity has been the agreed-upon price.

Shortly before the December meeting that launched the fiscal pact designed to enforce better budgetary discipline within most of the EU (the Czechs and Brits kept their distance), a German journalist reminded me that a large majority in his country's parliament favored plunging even deeper into the European swamp (not his word). When I replied that many German voters did not, his response was a shrug of the shoulders. Yet this mismatch—visible across the eurozone—between the opinions of those who sit in Europe's parliaments and those that they purport to represent could prove dangerous in times as fraught as these. Elite consensus is forcing voters searching for alternatives to today's destructive euro-federalism into some very strange places. They may not resort to riot, but their choices at the ballot box could amount to much the same, or, indeed, to something even worse.

Greece's May elections saw the arrival in parliament of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn and the dramatic rise of Syriza, a far-left anti-austerity coalition led by Alexis Tsipras, a wannabe Aegean Hugo Chávez. Come the next elections (June 17), Golden Dawn may run into a spot of dusk, but Syriza is likely to end up either in the catbird seat, or close to it. That may mean a hot summer, even by Athenian standards.

Fiercer political discontent is not confined to Greece. In Ireland, another eurozone casualty, voters approved the fiscal pact in a referendum on May 31, but Syriza's surge has been echoed in gains by the leftist, nationalist Sinn Fein (traditionally the political wing of the IRA) on the back of a platform with distinctly Tsipras touches: opposition to austerity and rejection of a discredited political elite. Such sentiments are not confined to the currency union's mendicant fringe. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders's populist-right PVV maintains that too much austerity is being asked too soon of the tolerably prudent Dutch (and can we have our guilder back?), while the ascendant leftists of the Socialist party just don't like the idea of austerity, *dank u wel.*

In April, the first round of their presidential elections saw over 11 percent of the French opt for a leftist hardliner calling for a "citizens' insurrection" against a sadly imaginary "ultra [classical] liberal" Europe. The far-right National Front grabbed third place and nearly a fifth of the votes. Its promise to junk austerity, and with it the euro, did it no harm.

Italy being Italy, there have been troubling terrorist stirrings, but its mutineer-in-chief is a comedian. Beppe Grillo's Five Star movement emerged from hugely popular "V-Day" protests in September 2007 opposed to Italy's rancid status quo (the V stood for *vaffanculo*, a phrase untranslatable in a respectable magazine but useful enough as an expression of inchoate rage). These demonstrations predated the eurozone's meltdown (if not the euro's steadily corrosive effect on the Italian economy), but have since been reinforced by it. After impressive local election victories in May, Grillo's movement stands at almost 20 percent in the polls on a program that includes greenery, anticorruption, disdain for austerity, and hostility to the euro.

François Hollande's ultimately successful campaign for the French presidency played skillfully into some of these themes. He harnessed the social resentment that has been sharpened across large swaths of Europe by economic slowdown, prolonged financial crisis, and the drive, however meandering, for austerity, and he rode it all the way into the Élysée Palace. The eurozone's straitjacket could, he promised, be loosened to accommodate "growth." Doubtless Mrs. Merkel will offer some cosmetic alterations, but that will then be that, and there will be little that Hollande can do about it. Instead he will have to face the bleak reality foretold by the flawed, darkly brilliant British politician Enoch Powell in a debate on European monetary union more than three decades ago:

> Surrender the right to control the exchange rate . . . and one has, directly or indirectly, surrendered the controls of all the economic levers of government.

As the eurozone economy twists in the wind, that's something that President Hollande will find tricky to explain to his voters. Even if Angela Merkel, the person closest to those levers (with solvency comes power), wanted to help him out (and in some respects she might)—the chancellor appears torn between German frugality and loyalty to European "solidarity"—her ability to do so may be constrained by the way that the euro's woes are continuing to rile up a domestic electorate already deeply skeptical of the eurozone's bailouts, particularly when headed in Athens's direction. It's not easy to work out exactly what the upstart Internet freebooters of Germany's Pirate party (in another sign of Europe's increasingly febrile politics, they have now swept into four state legislatures) stand for. But it seems not to include bailouts.

As for the once again fashionable miracle cure, "eurobonds" issued by the eurozone as a whole, that's finding few fans in the country that would effectively be underwriting this paper. According to a ZDF poll in late May, 79 percent of Germans rejected the idea, and even its proponents in Merkel's principal opposition, the left of center, more-euro-than-thou Social Democrats, were showing some signs of backing away.

Merkel finds herself stuck. Her support has, until recently, held up well at the national level, but that's been bolstered by the hard line she has been taking on the eurozone. Austerity may be enraging many beyond Germany's borders, and it may be the wrong medicine for what ails the single currency in which Merkel evidently still believes. Too bad it's the only approach that her voters (who are, after all, paying the bill) seem prepared to accept. If she backs down now. . .

So many rocks. So many hard places. ♦

Bride of Stuxnet

Webcraft as spycraft.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

Last April, the Iranian Oil Ministry and the National Iranian Oil Company noticed a problem with some of their computers: A small number of machines were spontaneously erasing themselves. Spooked by the recent Stuxnet attack, which had wrecked centrifuges in their nuclear labs, the Iranians suspected a piece of computer malware was to blame. They went to the United Nations' International Telecommunications Union and asked for help. After an initial investigation, it was determined that the Iranians had been hit with a new piece of malicious software; it was temporarily labeled Wiper. Or Viper. After translating the moniker into different languages, no one is quite sure what the original nickname was.

The experts from Turtle Bay quickly realized they were out of their depth with Wiper/Viper and contracted a Russian computer security firm, Kaspersky Lab, to help. As the techs at Kaspersky investigated, they began to find bits and pieces of a much bigger program. What they eventually uncovered forced them to put aside Wiper/Viper and send out an all-hands call to the tech community: a cyber-weapon that made Stuxnet look primitive. They called it Flame.

Stuxnet was like a guided missile with a targeted payload. It was created to spread rapidly, but always to be seeking a particular set of computers—machines made by Siemens and used to control centrifuge operations at a uranium enrichment plant. Once Stuxnet reached its destination, it had very precise instructions: It altered the speed of the centrifuges in such a manner as to slowly degrade the equipment and destroy the uranium they contained—all while sending false readings back to the operating console so that neither the computer nor the human supervisors would notice the damage being done.

If Stuxnet was like a missile, then Flame is more like a surveillance satellite.

Once a computer is infected by Flame, the program begins a process of taking over the entire machine. Flame records every keystroke by the user, creating a perfect log of all activity. It takes pictures of the screen every 60 seconds—and every 15 seconds when instant message or email programs are in use. It records all administrative action on the computer—taking note of network passwords, for instance. And it rummages through the computer's hard drive copying documents and files.

But that's not all. Flame also takes control of the machine's Bluetooth capability and turns it into a hub for a small wireless network, bonding with other Bluetooth-enabled devices in the vicinity, such as cell phones. It then uses the Bluetooth connection to case whatever information is on the remote device—say, an address book, calendar, or email list. Most spectacularly, Flame is able to turn on the computer's built-in microphone and record the user, or anyone else who happens to be chatting in the vicinity.

Flame then compiles all of this information—the passwords, the documents, the keystroke logs, the screenshots, and the audio recordings—encrypts it, and secretly uploads it to a command-and-control server (C&C), where someone is waiting to analyze it.

The first thing the white hats noticed about Flame was its size. Most malware is designed to be tiny—the smaller the package of code, the harder it is for your computer's constantly updating security protocols to intercept it. It took half a megabyte of code to build Stuxnet, which was a remarkably large footprint by the standards of malware. When completely deployed, Flame takes up 20 megabytes. Which is positively gargantuan.

But Flame is deployed in stages. When it works its way onto a new machine, Flame comes in an initial package of six megabytes. After the worm takes control of the box, it inventories the machine and the surrounding networks, and then begins communicating with a remote C&C server. On the other end of the line, a team takes in the data being sent by Flame, makes a determination of the new host's value, and then returns instructions to the waiting worm. Depending on what the C&C team see, they might instruct Flame to install any of 14 additional modules—mini add-on programs which, for instance, would give Flame the ability to take over the computer's microphone, or Bluetooth functionality. One module, named "browse32," is a kill module. When activated by the C&C, browse32 systematically moves through the computer, deleting every trace of Flame's existence. Its wipe is so thorough that once it's been triggered, no one—not even computer security techs—can tell if Flame was ever there in the first place.

No one is sure how long Flame has been operational. There is evidence of its existence in the wild dating to March 2010, but Flame may be older than that. (Stuxnet was discovered in June 2010 and is believed to have been released 12 months before then.) It's difficult to date Flame because its makers went to some trouble to disguise its age. Computer code typically has meta-data describing its "compilation date"—that is, the time and date it was assembled in final form. Flame's 20 modules all have compilation dates set in 1994 and 1995. Which is impossible,

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because they're written in a language that was released just a few years ago.

Neither are analysts certain exactly how Flame spreads. It has the ability to move from one computer to another by piggybacking onto a USB flash drive (just like Stuxnet). Alternately, it can migrate across a local network by exploiting a shared printer (again, like Stuxnet). But Flame is also able to spread across a network without a printer if it finds itself on a computer that has administrative privileges. When that happens, the worm is smart enough to create backdoor accounts for all the other computers on the network and copy itself into those machines.

As for the question of security—how does Flame talk its way past the computer's antivirus protections? No one knows. The techs at Kaspersky Lab watched Flame attack a PC running the fully updated Windows 7 security suite. The worm took over the computer effortlessly. This suggests that the worm's designers have access to one or more vulnerabilities in the operating system that even the people who designed the OS don't know about. (Stuxnet utilized four of these so-called zero-day exploits.)

Engineers are only two weeks into the teardown, but they already believe that Flame and Stuxnet were created by different development teams. The code and workings are dissimilar. And besides, the timelines on the two projects are too close. It is estimated that coding Stuxnet required 10,000 man-hours. For a team of 30 to 50 programmers, that's a year or two of work. The same squad simply would not have had the time to build both Stuxnet and the much larger Flame.

That said, Kaspersky Lab notes that the worms do share two interesting similarities: They use the same rootkit-based exploit to hijack USB drives and the same print-spooler vulnerability to spread over a network's shared printer. There are three possible explanations for this: (1) The teams that developed Flame and Stuxnet discovered these identical mechanisms independently; (2) the team which developed Flame learned about them from analyzing an early version of Stuxnet; (3) the teams that developed the two worms were working in parallel, for the same organization(s), and thus were able to share information about these mechanisms.

What? Now they've infected my teleprompters!

Yet the most interesting aspect of Flame is the strategic ways it differs from Stuxnet. As a weapon, Stuxnet was a tool conceived in urgency. Every piece of malware has to balance virulence with stealth. The more aggressively a worm propagates, the more likely it is to be caught. Stuxnet was designed to spread at a fairly robust rate. Its creators wanted it to get on lots of different computers and they were willing to risk quicker discovery on the chance that the worm would find its way to the very specific system it was meant for and deliver its payload. In the end, Stuxnet's engineers made a good trade. Because it eventually spread to 100,000 computers, Stuxnet was caught reasonably quickly. Yet this aggressive approach got it to its target—Iran's Natanz refinery—where it wrecked at least a year's worth of work.

Flame, on the other hand, is a study in stealth and patience. Unlike Stuxnet, with its single-minded search for a specific computer system, Flame seems to have wandered in many directions: onto computers used by governments, universities, and private companies. It moved slowly, and the overall number of infected systems seems to be quite low. Current estimates put it at 1,000 computers, nearly all of them located in Iran, the Palestinian territories, Sudan, Syria, and Lebanon. Flame kept the number of infections low because it never moved from one computer to another without explicit instructions from its C&C. According to Kaspersky Lab, the method went something like this:

> [T]hey infect several dozen [machines], then conduct analysis of the data of the victim, [and] uninstall Flame from the systems that aren't interesting, leaving the most important ones in place. After which they start a new series of infections.

It was a detailed, deliberate process of identifying and exploiting targets that must have required significant manpower and intelligence capability on the C&C side. In other words, the design and deployment of Flame was only half of the job. Another team, with a different skill set, was needed to run the operation once it was in the field.

But once Flame was running, it was like something out of science fiction. Flame could watch a target even when he was completely alone. It could listen to every word he said on the telephone, or through Skype, or to a colleague walking past his desk. It could rifle through his computer files and find any document. Or peek into a cell phone sitting in someone's pocket in the next room. It never had to worry about getting caught in the act. And on a moment's notice, it could erase any sign that it was ever there. It kept up constant communication with its handlers, even when they were thousands of miles away, and it always followed orders.

Whoever engineered Flame didn't just build the most spectacular computer worm ever made. They created the perfect spy. ♦

NEWSCOM

Learning from Failure

An education agenda for Mitt Romney.

BY FREDERICK M. HESS & ANDREW P. KELLY

Romney at a charter school in West Philadelphia

The Republican presidential candidates have spent the past year saying little about education. When they have addressed the issue, it has often been in terse calls to "turn off the lights" at the U.S. Department of Education. After a decade of runaway spending and regulations on education by both the Bush and Obama administrations—with little to show for it—it's easy to see why conservatives have little patience for talk of anything that seems to invite federal activity. But the reality is federal engagement isn't going away.

Last week, presumptive GOP nominee Mitt Romney unveiled an agenda for education reform centered on promising themes such as school choice, innovation, transparency, and return on investment. Most important, Romney's plans turn the page on the decade-long romance with expansive No Child Left Behind-style federal intervention.

But the work should not stop there. A coherent agenda should not only move us away from policies that have proven unsuccessful; it should also use the lessons from those missteps to draft a new approach. Instead of settling for vague paeans to choice and innovation, Romney should chart a course for federal involvement that capitalizes on areas where government is well-positioned to play a productive role and avoids the pitfalls unearthed by previous administrations.

The last decade has identified those pitfalls quite clearly. The Obama administration has spent $3.5 billion mandating school turnaround policies that dictate how states should fix failing schools. The $4.5 billion Race to the Top program told states how to gather data about schools and students, how to evaluate teachers, and how to reform schools. President Bush's NCLB accountability system—which relied exclusively on tracking passing rates in reading and math for student subgroups defined by race, gender, special needs, and economic status—pushed principals and superintendents to prioritize boosting minimum performance on assessments at the expense of nearly everything else. For those schools that fail to get over the bar, NCLB prescribes a rigid cascade of remedies, all of which require faithful implementation that is simply impossible to guarantee from Washington.

These approaches to federal education policy ignore what we have learned from years of experience: The structures of American government make it difficult for the feds to make such progress at the school level. Improving education depends so much on the smart execution of ideas that it is nearly impossible to mandate our way to better schooling. Thus, initiatives like Race to the Top and NCLB, which may be promising if pursued at the local level, will likely disappoint if enacted at the federal level.

In light of these lessons, how could Romney leverage federal power to improve schooling?

First, Uncle Sam can use the bully pulpit to highlight educational challenges and make them national priorities. Presidential pronouncements and commissions have elevated issues of equity and student achievement, shifting political lines and setting school systems onto a new course. This happened with the Reagan commission's *A Nation at Risk*, with the NCLB-era emphasis on testing, and with the Obama administration's advocacy for

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Frederick M. Hess is the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, where Andrew P. Kelly is a research fellow in education. They are the coeditors of Carrots, Sticks, and the Bully Pulpit: Lessons from a Half-Century of Federal Efforts to Improve America's Schools *(Harvard Education Press, 2012).*

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school turnarounds and better teacher training. Federal policies and rhetoric can provide cover to state and local leaders, making it easier for them to pursue goals that would otherwise foster fierce backlash.

Second, the federal government can provide the public with the basic information and research necessary for accountability and informed consumer choice—a role that Romney highlighted in his speech. Even the most ardent conservatives would agree that well-functioning markets and elections require accurate, unbiased data on the quality of public service providers. Because states have little incentive to release potentially embarrassing honest numbers, the feds are better positioned to serve as a reliable source of information on the performance and cost of schools across states and localities.

Third, research that uncovers promising new practices is a public good that localities and private firms have little interest in producing. Without federal support, the market will fail to generate new knowledge about innovations. While the history of federal research has often disappointed, with education faculty dressing personal agendas in scholarly garb, the answer is to ardently champion rigorous inquiry at the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the Department of Education.

The bottom line: There is a principled alternative to the mantra that we need to "get the feds out of education" and, conversely, the Bush-Obama notion that the feds can fix our schools. Republicans have been right to criticize federal efforts to influence what goes on in classrooms, but it would be a mistake to ignore the fruitful, supporting role that the federal government can play in education reform.

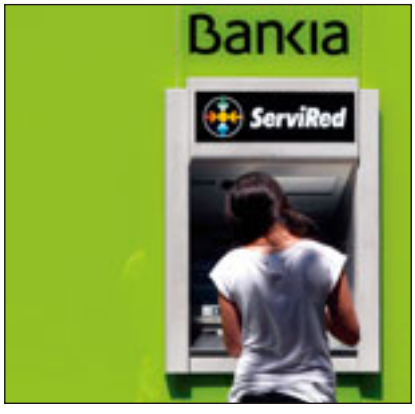
Ultimately, there's a viable, coherent conservative stance that Governor Romney should take, one that fits comfortably with both our educational heritage and public sentiment: Washington can't and shouldn't try to fix schools, but it can help create the conditions that enable educators and local reformers to do so. ♦

Bankia? No Thankia.

Political hacks capture Spanish finance.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

In a beautiful poem called "The Capital," W.H. Auden talks about rich people "waiting expensively for miracles to happen." That is what is happening in all the capitals of Europe now, nowhere more so than in Madrid. Spain's economy carries two impossible burdens. It has the most overregulated labor market in Europe, a legacy of the Franco era that the long-ruling Socialist party (PSOE) fought to defend. This generates spectacular levels of unemployment: 24 percent for all workers, 51 percent for young people. Second, Spain's resources have been misallocated on Europe's biggest housing bubble. Precious little of the capital that flowed into Spain over the past two or three decades can now be redeployed to make anything anyone would conceivably want to buy.



I think I'll switch to my mattress, thanks.

So only good news from somewhere else will get Spain out of its present economic mess, and there was not much of it last week. A lackluster Italian bond auction was followed by the worst U.S. employment report in more than a year, and those bracketed the announcement by the Bank of Spain that investors had taken $121 billion (about 10 percent of GDP!) out of the country in the first three months of this year. That raised the specter of a bank run. Spain's bond yields have risen to 6.6 percent, on the eve of a big bond sale.

What has got Spain into so much trouble? All along, the country has had trouble meeting its budget targets. It ran a deficit of 8.5 percent of GDP under the spendthrift PSOE prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The new Popular (conservative) leader Mariano Rajoy, who replaced Zapatero in December, announced he would not be able to bring debts down to 5.3 percent as promised. Historically, countries can collapse when public borrowing and spending on this scale persists. As a point of comparison, the U.S. budget deficit was 8.7 percent last year.

That is the gradual way Spain fell into crisis. The sudden way is that the International Monetary Fund revealed several weeks ago that a large banking group called Bankia had been manipulating its books, overstating the market value of its loans. The sins were not quite as bad as those of Greece, but the Spanish economy is larger and the hour is later. Spain has said it will inject about $24 billion into the bank, but European banking authorities have warned that the government will only jeopardize its own finances by doing that.

Bankia is not as distant from the government as it looks. It is the legacy of the system of *cajas*, provincial banks

NEWSCOM

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Silver Dollar Millionaire Surrenders His Fortune

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started in the 19th century, that came to make up more than half the country's finance system. They were traditionally community-oriented, like savings and loans, and many were even linked to the church. But the particular way they went bad has more in common with the story of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac than with our S&Ls. Because of their mission for community improvement, the *cajas* wound up immensely useful to the national political parties, which stacked their boards with political hacks who know nothing about economics.

Vicente Cuñat and Luis Garicano, two distinguished economists at the best Spanish economics blog, *Nada es gratis* (roughly, "No such thing as a free lunch"), wrote a fascinating essay two years ago correlating the performance of banks with the provenance of their chairmen. Their conclusion: "*Cajas* whose chairman was previously a political appointee have had significantly worse loan performance." The *cajas* of both parties were dangerously overextended even before the world financial crisis began in 2008.

Bankia, as it happens, is a problem of Rajoy's ruling Popular party. It grew out of the merger of Caja Madrid with six other small savings banks in late 2010. Madrid is a fief of the Populares. Bankia's director was, until recently, the former Popular economics minister and IMF managing director Rodrigo Rato. There is a perception that Bankia's brass has been stonewalling investigations into the bank's finances.

Yet it is not certain that Rajoy's government is in jeopardy. The scandal is more bipartisan than one might think. This is partly because the prominent Socialist Miguel Ángel Fernández Ordóñez, the departing governor of the Bank of Spain, endorsed a plan a few weeks ago to recapitalize Bankia by drawing on a hitherto untapped source: the pensions and savings of half a million private citizens. Those investments have lost 70 percent of their value in the meantime. The Bankia scandal thus manages to combine the crony capitalism of the banks linked to Ireland's longtime ruling party Fianna Fail and the malevolent hocus-pocus of Enron.

Believe it or not, the directors of the European Union have a solution to the Spanish banking crisis. It involves handing over to the directors of the European Union the authority to run the Spanish banking system. Last week, José Manuel Durão Barroso, the (Portuguese) president of the European Commission, called for a "banking union" with a bailout fund. Mario Draghi, the (Italian) head of the European Central Bank, backed Europe-wide banking oversight. Both of them seemed to be talking about establishing a Brussels-based equivalent of the FDIC—which would involve giving European bureaucrats more access to all Europe's national treasuries—but they left the details vague.

The vaguer the better. Since the bank-and-government-debt crisis began in Greece two years ago, Europe has set up a number of structures to provide liquidity to troubled banks: First there was the European Financial Stability Facility. Now there is the planned European Stability Mechanism. It's one-for-all-and-all-for-one. Should a country get into trouble, the rest of Europe will back it up.

Unfortunately, most bailout plans envisioned Spain among the bailers, not the bailees. It is becoming apparent that the list of countries that will not under any circumstances need a bailout has fallen to just a handful: Germany, Finland, Austria, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. For Brussels, the debts of Europe's mismanaged countries must now be "integrated." This is a euphemistic way of saying that Europe's well-managed countries must pay them. ♦

Tussle in Tucson

A tight race for the Giffords seat.

BY KATE HAVARD

The special election to fill the last six months of Gabrielle Giffords's term in the Eighth Congressional District of Arizona is rapidly approaching. Although the race looks close, no one can say that the candidates are neck and neck. At 6'8", Republican Jesse Kelly stands head and shoulders above most people—not just his opponent, former Giffords staffer Ron Barber.

In the 2010 midterm elections, Kelly, a local businessman and Marine veteran and father of two, came within 5,000 votes of unseating Giffords, a remarkable feat, since the incumbent had outspent the then-unknown Kelly by more than $2 million.

After winning reelection, Giffords was on her way up. Many predicted that she would soon outgrow the House and make a play for Senator Jon Kyl's seat in 2012. But then tragedy struck.

On January 8, 2011, Giffords and 18 others (including Barber), were attacked by a gunman at a Tucson-area "Congress on Your Corner" event. Giffords survived a bullet through the skull and made a remarkable recovery; still, she resigned from Congress on January 25, 2012.

Barber, Giffords's district director, promptly announced that he would run for her seat in the special election on June 12. Barber told the *New York Times* that although he had promised his wife he would never run for office, he had changed his mind because "Gabby asked me to . . . and I really hadn't ever said no to Gabby."

The painful circumstances of this election have forced both candidates to tread carefully. Barber must work hard not to seem to be capitalizing on Giffords's disaster—or letting her inspiring story overshadow his own, more muted personality. Apart from making campaign contributions and appearing in a Democratic party mailer asking voters to join her in electing Barber, Giffords herself has stayed out of the race.

As Rodd McLeod, a campaign consultant for Barber, told reporters,

Kelly, left, chats with a fellow Republican.

"We've never said, 'Vote for Ron Barber because he worked for Gabby Giffords.'" But the shadow of the shooting, which took six lives, still looms so large over Tucson that Barber may not have to invoke Giffords's name to benefit from her image. She is, after all, the reason he is running.

Barber was unopposed in the Democratic primary, after reportedly telling potential rivals that he would not seek a full term in November, a decision he has since reversed. And while Barber does not invoke his former boss, he has made the occasional slanted reference to the shooting. When asked about the Second Amendment, Barber replied that he supported it, but added, "I had an experience with a gun," trusting his audience to catch his meaning.

Barber's opponent, similarly, must run a tough campaign without seeming to attack Giffords, a nationally beloved figure—and he is doing just that. Kelly insists that the Tucson shooting is not driving electoral politics.

"This election has just been about the issues," Kelly says. "It's about who can create jobs, who can lower gas prices. The people's support has been overwhelming. They tell me, 'This is a chance to vote against the agenda of Barack Obama.' The people see it as a referendum on the president—and the Democratic party knows that that's what this is, too."

In the past few months the Obama campaign has made at least a nominal effort to put Arizona, along with its 11 electoral votes, into play in November. Although the state has gone blue only once since the Truman administration, some Democratic strategists cite rising numbers of Latino voters and large student populations as evidence that the demographics are changing in their favor. Some Democrats may also believe that Barber, and even the president, can eke out a win in Arizona on the basis of Giffords's enormous popularity.

The first lady, Michelle Obama, made a campaign stop in Tucson in late April, telling the crowd, "I know we're going to do it here because of people like you," and later, "I also want to recognize Ron Barber. He is going to do a fantastic job in Washington. We will be happy to have him out there."

Whether Barber is happy with so much attention from inside the Beltway is less clear. During a May 23 debate with Kelly, Barber caused a stir when he refused to state whether or not he would vote for Obama in November, insisting, "My vote is my vote. . . . And I will not keep talking about other elections."

Kelly pounced. "I was stunned that he would not admit who he was supporting," said Kelly, "but I wasn't

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surprised. In this district, he's got to hide what he believes."

The next day, Barber released a statement saying that "of course" he would support the president in November. Yet Barber hardly seems reconciled to his party's establishment. The following Sunday, he told the press that, if elected, he might not support Nancy Pelosi for speaker of the House.

Back in February, Pelosi and other prominent Democrats threw Barber a fundraiser in Washington, selling tickets for as much as $1,000 a plate. With Pelosi's help, Barber has raised twice as much money as Kelly. He has little to show for it. The most recent poll, reported in *Roll Call* in mid-April, put Kelly ahead 49-45 percent.

Given this, and the Republicans' registration edge of over 25,000 voters in the district (up 6,000 since 2010), Barber could be looking at defeat. And, if so, it is doubtful that the Democratic party will spend time and money in November on a failed congressional candidate who publicly embarrassed the president and the party leadership in May.

If Barber does not run again this fall, state representative Matt Heinz is waiting in the wings to take his place. Heinz doesn't seem to think that Barber will be back—he is already quietly raising money to "take on Jesse Kelly, the Republican front-runner and Tea Party poster-boy."

For now, Kelly is focused on defeating Barber. He is also thinking past campaign mode, to Day One in Congress, where he plans "to immediately attempt to stop the EPA's job-killing agenda." He also insists that this race is not about him.

"This race is about jobs. This race is about the economy. This is a swing district, and it's the last election before the presidential race. There's a lot at stake here," says Kelly.

The excitement is even reaching into his family. "My kids are . . . vaguely aware of what's going on," he says, "but it's hard to say what they think about it. All I know is, now when I walk in the door, instead of 'Dada,' my three-year-old goes, 'Hey, that's Jesse Kelly!'" ♦

Tractors for Votes

Democracy in Armenia.

BY ALEC MOUHIBIAN

Okay, I voted—where do I get my money?

Yerevan, Armenia

Every election in Armenia for the last 21 years has been praised by the West as a step in Armenia's democratic progress. That this tiny Christian nation has held elections at all strikes the outside world as worthy of applause. After centuries of Ottoman oppression, culminating in a genocide that wiped out two-thirds (1.5 million) of its people and robbed the rest of their homes, followed by 70 years of Soviet rule, the emergence in 1991 of an independent state with the name "Republic of Armenia" was something of a miracle. The smallest post-Soviet republic is landlocked and largely mosque-locked: Armenia enjoys Turkey, Iran, Georgia, and Azerbaijan around its borders. The latter threatens war at any moment to reoccupy the ancient Armenian territory of Mountainous Karabakh—the Stalin-carved region Armenians fought to liberate in 1993—and spends millions hosting diplomats and journalists to inform them of the evil "Armenian enemies" who control the world's media and banks.

Corruption seems like small potatoes in a climate like this. Which is one reason so few in the outside world have bothered to notice how Armenia's political culture is reversing the triumph of its independence, guiding the nation steadily deeper into the lap of Grandmother Russia.

On May 6, Armenia elected its fifth National Assembly. Of the 131 seats in parliament—90 decided by party percentage, the rest by individual regional races—an absolute majority of 69 were won by President Serzh Sargsyan's ruling Republican party, whose real popularity can be gleaned from its marvelous campaign slogan: "Believe in us, so we change." Another 37 seats were taken by the Prosperous Armenia party, led by oligarch Gagik Tsarukyan, a former arm-wrestling champion who campaigned with a gun in his hip pocket and whose arms look like a pair of overfed farm boys.

NEWSCOM

Alec Mouhibian is a writer in Los Angeles.

Just 17 seats were split by three other opposition forces. Each barely—and conveniently, to quell unified protests—passed the minimum threshold to enter parliament.

American ambassador John Heffern and EU leaders gave the election a thumbs-up. Considering the fairer media coverage and less blood this time around, it might have been justified. Only one independent candidate withdrew from the race, after being beaten nearly to death by the thugs of an oligarch who opposed him on the Republican ticket. In terms of actual voting, however, the truth was hinted at by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's report of "widespread interference" in the process. That was the notoriously namby-pamby OSCE's way of describing the most fraudulent and publicly dispiriting election in the country's history.

Since Armenia's last parliamentary election in 2007, roughly 300,000 people have left the country. Yet voter turnout this year somehow increased by 200,000. Armenian citizens are not allowed to vote from outside the country. But their names and passport information—plus those of many corpses—are in the possession of the police and appeared Election Day on freshly printed passports that droves of government hands, some clearly under 18, took from precinct to precinct. Passports were stamped with vanishing ink that further enabled multiple voting. Thus did the president's party manage to forge at least half a million of the 1.5 million total votes counted, while refusing to publicize the eligible voter list against which the ballots could be verified.

Fraud wasn't the only electoral problem. Every public institution is controlled by the ruling party. Every public employee—in schools, hospitals, the army—is scared into voting accordingly, at threat of their jobs. Some even stand as candidates against their will. I know of two distinguished members of the Republican parliamentary ticket who secretly voted for the opposition. And of those neither impersonated nor pressured at the polls, a disheartening percentage were bought. Bribes were distributed en masse throughout the monthlong campaign season by ruling-coalition parties, through their offices and the charities their leaders control.

"You're not giving money?" I was asked, by people young and old, while on the campaign trail with the opposition Heritage party. Mostly the bribes took the form of 5,000 or 10,000 dram notes ($12 and $24). The arm-wrestler's party—blatantly enough to be noticed by the OSCE—also distributed tractors.

Some conscientious objectors ripped up the cash they were given and stuffed it into their ballot envelopes. But they were too few, and their votes were disqualified. With its record numbers of vote-rigging and vote-buying, May 6 "delivered a nationwide abyss deeper and more ominous than ever before," in the words of opposition leader Raffi K. Hovannisian, whose Heritage party retained its minimal presence in parliament, and who will likely contest the presidency in February 2013.

Hovannisian knows this abyss as well as anyone. In 1991, he left a lucrative legal career in his hometown of Los Angeles to return to Armenia. Soon after raising the Armenian flag at the U.N. as the country's first foreign minister, Hovannisian resigned in disgust at the machinations of Armenia's first president and has spent the years since as a dissident in reverse exile. Last March he staked his life on the belief that democracy in name only has led to an independent Armenia in name only, holding a 15-day hunger strike on a public bench in freezing weather.

There's plenty of evidence for that belief. The oligarchs who run Armenia owe their monopolies—on gas, on sugar and flour, on every basic resource—to tycoons around the Kremlin, to whom they have sold Armenia's gold mines and power plants. And more. In August 2010, Russia signed a 24-year extension on control of a crucial military base in Armenia, funded and sustained entirely by the Armenian state. As for human resources, over the last 20 years, at increasing speed, up to 1.5 million citizens have fled the country, a number whose symbolism is not lost on those who remain.

The exodus shows no sign of slowing. And none of this helps Armenia's ability to handle its far wealthier Islamic foes. Given the retreating direction of political progress, it is not farfetched to think that the presidential election in February presents the last chance for an Armenian Spring.

Fighting for that spring will be a few hundred thousand citizens who continue to vote their convictions against every temptation of bribery and despair. Many of them are the same freedom fighters who spearheaded the democratic revolt within the Soviet Union in 1988. Their ancestors, in the brief window between genocide and communism, managed to establish a constitutional republic from 1918 to 1920 that even included women's suffrage; it failed to survive largely because isolationists in the U.S. Senate rejected Woodrow Wilson's Mandate for Armenia. Will the current republic finally become a home for that spirit, or a cemetery? The answer might depend on whether the West helps out for once in a serious way—or opts instead for a diplomacy that wins friends and influences no one.

Aiding Armenia now would not take much courage or controversy. Words could do the trick. Set on joining the EU and influenced by its diaspora, Armenia's rulers are exceedingly sensitive to European and American pressure. The president's Republican party is an "observing" member of the European People's party. The leader of that coalition could shame the Armenian government into a few basic yet game-changing reforms—publicizing voter lists, for one.

Instead, the president of the European People's party, Belgium's Wilfried Martens, praised the May 6 travesty as "mainly free and fair" and congratulated the victorious Republicans on an "excellent success." ♦

Un-conventional

The Libertarian party does Las Vegas

By Mark Hemingway

Las Vegas

The Libertarian party probably rejected any claim to normalcy from the get-go by holding its convention in a casino. The Republicans and Democrats hold their conventions in Tampa and Charlotte in a few months, but America's third largest political party held its nominating convention from May 2-6 at the Red Rock Resort on the edge of Las Vegas. Delegates selected former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson as their presidential candidate. News of Johnson's nomination garnered a few obligatory headlines but was mostly met with a collective shrug by the political media. The lack of interest in the Libertarian party is a bit mystifying, given that voters routinely express dissatisfaction with both major parties. Well, that and the fact that the Libertarian convention was something of a freak show that descended into near anarchy.

After traversing acres of slot machines to get to the convention's registration desk, I found myself gawking at a woman in a skintight white dress whose preposterous top story and precarious heels made her stand out even in Las Vegas. It turned out to be Kristin Davis, the Manhattan Madam who ran the escort service that ensnared former New York governor Eliot Spitzer. Davis ran for governor of New York in 2010, though she failed to get the Libertarian nomination and ran instead as the candidate of the Anti-Prohibition party. Also in attendance was Norma Jean Almodovar, who quickly used up her 15 minutes of fame in the 1980s when she went public with her story about leaving the LAPD to become a high-priced Beverly Hills call girl, a career she declared was "far more honest." After a short jail sentence related to her new line of work, Almodovar ran for lieutenant governor of California on the Libertarian ticket, hoping to pardon herself if elected, and garnered 100,000 votes. Waiting in line at the obligatory casino buffet, I saw a man walk by in a white wig, stockings, miniskirt, and bustier. After arching an eyebrow at the sight, Mike Riggs, an associate editor at *Reason*, the libertarian political magazine, simply looked at me and said, "You don't know who that is? That's Starchild." Starchild, it turns out, is a well-known San Francisco sex worker. If whoring in politics is inevitable, libertarians are at least admirably transparent about it.

True, among the hundreds gathered for the convention, these are just difficult to ignore outliers. But many of the attendees wear their nonconformity like a uniform, as befits a party devoted to personal freedom. There probably hasn't been such an assemblage of gray-haired men in ponytails since the Grateful Dead stopped touring. And even the outwardly staid tend to be firebrands on the inside. Brendan Kelly, who's running for Congress on the Libertarian ticket in New Hampshire, has been married for over 50 years and is a grandfather of six. He's amiable and clearly has the respect of his local community because he's been elected a selectman twice. At a hotel bar, he insists on telling me that when people hear he's a candidate, the first thing they ask him is, "Are you going to bring articles of impeachment against people in Washington for not upholding the Constitution?" a question he's delighted to answer in the affirmative. In an era where Congress's approval rating dips into single digits, this impeach-'em-all-and-let-God-sort-'em-out attitude isn't necessarily a radical proposition among voters, but the candidates themselves are seldom this bracing.

The patina of extremism is why many libertarians in Washington are quick to volunteer they are "small-l" libertarians. Even if they're ultimately on the same page philosophically, they don't want to be lumped in with a political party that has historically emphasized legalizing sex work and marijuana, and generally razing Washington, D.C., over putting forward a message of social liberalism and fiscal conservatism that might attract new voters in

DAVID CLARK

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large numbers. Even the most abstract and serious libertarian policy stances are often a hair's breadth from weirdness. Libertarians were prescient to have spent the last few decades trying to draw attention to the perils of American finance, as well as urging reforms at the Federal Reserve. But when you start inquiring about the economy, the talk escalates quickly from paper currency to conspiracy. On a Libertarian message board, you're often just one click away from a frightfully earnest conversation about the Bilderbergers and the Rothschilds.

Though Ron Paul is nominally a Republican these days, his obsession with monetary policy is much more representative of his longstanding allegiance to the Libertarian party. *Time* magazine recently ran an article about the reaction to their GOP primary coverage by his famously devoted fan base. Some of the more choice comments: "[*Time* reporter] Alex Altman is another perfect example of an employee of a firm paid by The Fed to make sure that dangerous Ron Paul doesn't get elected. . . . Most everyone knows that *Time* magazine is in bed with the CIA. Ron Paul as President means that Global Banking Elite will lose money, so he's being Blacked-out by the MIC [military-industrial complex] Media."

Party activists at the convention concede they have an image problem. When I told an attendee that one of the vendors outside the hotel ballroom where the convention was being held was selling solid copper "Barter or Trade" coins with marijuana leaves imprinted on them, he audibly groaned.

Of course, libertarians can take solace in the fact that there is almost always tension in political parties between the establishment bosses who have to be pushed into doing anything bold and grassroots activists who can skew a little crazy—see the Republicans in Name Only vs. Tea Party disputes currently roiling the GOP. However, after 150 years, the Republican party has proven durable enough to weather factional infighting. The Libertarian party was founded in 1971, and garnered just over half a million votes in the 2008 presidential election. Its own struggle between the grassroots activists and respectable establishment is being brought to the fore by a palpable sense that if ever there were a moment for libertarianism to break through as an organized political concern, that moment is now.

Economic issues, where libertarians are at their most persuasive, are at the forefront of the political debate. The established parties are both implicated hip-deep in the financial crisis besetting Western economies. Libertarians also have an impressive and growing political infrastructure to push their ideas from inside the political establishment. The Cato Institute is one of the most influential think tanks in Washington, D.C. Similarly, the libertarian Mercatus Center at George Mason University has two affiliated Nobel Prize-winning economists and has a major impact on regulatory policy on Capitol Hill. The Institute for Humane Studies has programs drilling free market economics and other libertarian ideals into thousands of college-age kids every year. *Reason* is one of the most consistently engaging political magazines in the country, and helped turn the problems of public-sector unions into a major national issue.

At the opposite end of the institutional spectrum, there's an incredibly energetic, Internet-savvy, radicalized strain of grassroots libertarian activism that has been quite successful at recruiting younger and disaffected voters to the cause. The activists tend toward a degree of ideological purity that makes them frequently dismissive of libertarian organizations and other attempts to fix Washington from the inside. Among the most hardcore, *Reason* and Cato are derided as *Treason* and Stato, the latter referring to that favorite libertarian epithet, "statist." The Libertarian party has the unenviable task of trying to forge an electoral coalition by getting these two factions to work together.

Libertarians can take solace in the fact that there is almost always tension in political parties between the establishment and grassroots activists.

How's that working out? It's telling that perhaps the two most influential libertarians in America—both formerly on Libertarian party presidential tickets—are devoting most of their time and money trying to mainstream the libertarian message within the GOP. The aforementioned Ron Paul was the 1988 Libertarian presidential candidate, but this election he's racked up too many delegates in the GOP primary to be ignored at the upcoming Republican convention. Ron Paul T-shirts were all over the Libertarian convention, and it's fair to say his candidacy has sapped a lot of energy that might otherwise have benefited the party. And then there's David Koch, the energy magnate and philanthropist who, along with his brother Charles, is an oft-demonized moneyman behind many GOP causes, though it's often forgotten that they are longtime libertarians. As the Libertarian party vice presidential nominee in 1980, David Koch ran on a platform of, among other things, abolishing the CIA and legalizing suicide. In light of the dozens of recent Obama fundraising appeals caricaturing the Koch brothers as coldhearted right-wing billionaires, it took admirable restraint for David Koch not to issue a press release congratulating the president for coming around to his long-held position favoring same-sex marriage.

Given the minefield of political oddities that is the Libertarian party, consider the plight of Gary Johnson. The former governor of New Mexico is easily the most qualified and mainstream presidential candidate the Libertarian party has ever had. He founded one of New Mexico's largest construction companies before being elected to two terms as a Republican in a state that is by no means a GOP stronghold. In 1995, Johnson slowed the 10 percent annual growth of New Mexico's budget by vetoing 200 bills his first six months in office, and that was just a warmup. During his eight years in office, "Governor Veto" nixed more bills than the other 49 governors combined and boasts of once vetoing a bill for no other reason than "it was too long and I didn't have time to read it." Though he was elected as a Republican, Johnson has always considered himself a libertarian and been sympathetic to libertarian issues that fall outside the mainstream of the GOP. He pursued marijuana decriminalization as governor, and the fitness buff has admitted to lighting up as recently as 2008 to help recover from a paragliding accident.

Lee Wrights

Yet despite his reputation for setting legislative bonfires and a campaign centered around the promise of eliminating $1.4 trillion in federal spending in the first year, the word that came up repeatedly in describing Johnson at the convention is "incrementalist." This was not meant as a compliment. Because of his unparalleled political experience and the measure of favorable publicity he received from the national press during his brief appearance in the GOP primaries, I was under the impression that Johnson was all but a lock for the Libertarian nomination. But the moment he wandered on stage at the convention to debate his sole challenger, R. Lee Wrights, I began to wonder if Gary Johnson was, in fact, radical enough for the party faithful.

The debate was a near-perfect microcosm of the tensions between the respectable establishment and the radical activists. Johnson's considerable business and political experience suggested a mismatch. Reading between the lines of Wrights's campaign biography, near as I can tell he has primarily been a writer of libertarian newsletters. Officially, "Lee works as the secretary and communications director for Sativa Science, a pharmaceutical start-up company." Recall that *cannabis sativa* is the scientific name for marijuana.

Thin résumé or not, as a guy who hawks opinions to libertarian activists, Wrights clearly has his finger on the pulse of party activists in a way that Johnson does not. A Texan by way of North Carolina, Wrights also has a booming drawl and a natural gift for oratory that serve him well in a debate. He's a fiery ball of aphorisms: "I believe in gun control, that's why I use both hands. . . . It's easier [for illegal immigrants] to swim the Rio Grande than climb Mt. Bureaucracy. . . . I believe in abolishing the Department of Education, because I don't believe in child abuse. . . . We have global warming every year; it's called summer." These may be trite takes on complicated issues, but they appear to be winning over the ballroom full of Libertarian party state delegates who are voting to select a candidate the following morning. They holler and yawp with delight at each of his pronouncements.

The other key way that Wrights seems to be connecting with the crowd is by making antiwar sentiment the primary theme of his campaign. In fact, Wrights's campaign slogan, to be found on all his signs and one that he repeats at key moments during the debate, is "I am not at war." If the Libertarian convention has delegates from Eastasia they're probably relieved, but as a political *cri de coeur* it borders on Dada. Wrights's slogan does highlight that foreign policy is the biggest wedge separating libertarians from the GOP. If libertarians had traditionally found some room inside the GOP's big tent, the post-9/11 landscape threatened the uneasy alliance. George W. Bush's antiterror surveillance policies and embrace of preemptive war in Iraq pushed many libertarians over the edge. By the end of Bush's presidency there was a crusade for a left-libertarian alliance by Cato Institute scholars Brink Lindsey and Will Wilkinson. Just ahead of the 2008 election, *Reason* conducted a presidential poll of 42 prominent libertarians ranging from Craigslist founder Craig Newmark to comedian Drew Carey. Fifteen said they were voting for Obama; only four backed McCain. (The rest were voting for Libertarian candidate Bob Barr, declined to say, or explained their opposition to voting.)

Though Bush's $4.9 trillion in new debt didn't make libertarians feel warm and fuzzy about the GOP, it's hard to imagine they were so naïve as to believe that an election result that put Democrats in charge of all three branches of government was a vote for fiscal sanity, as opposed to registering their foreign policy and civil liberties concerns. But Obama's presidency has turned into a libertarian nightmare on those fronts, too: the extension and/or expansion of nearly all of Bush's antiterror policies, the invasion of Libya, executive orders monitoring gun sales, Government Motors, a newly unionized TSA empowered to take nude photos of air travelers, a federal mandate forcing you to purchase health insurance, not to mention over $5 trillion in new debt in less than one term.

CAMPAIGN PHOTO

The idea of a left-libertarian alliance now seems farcical—Lindsey and Wilkinson were eventually pushed out of Cato for their heresy—and libertarians are largely back on the same fiscal page as a Tea Party-chastened GOP. But the antiwar sentiment remains, and it's a much broader concern for libertarians than just the protracted conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. As tempting as it is to believe that the Federal Reserve and CIA have teamed up to sabotage Ron Paul's presidential candidacy, the libertarian appeal to GOP primary voters was probably limited by Paul's contention that American foreign policy is to blame for 9/11. And speaking of libertarians and terrorism, one of Ron Paul's biggest supporters, Adam Kokesh, caught the attention of the Secret Service by musing on his YouTube talk show about an unorthodox plan to secure the GOP nomination for Paul by assassinating Mitt Romney. Kokesh spent much of the Bush era in the hard-left antiwar movement as a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War. (The Marine Corps revoked his honorable discharge for appearing at a political event in uniform and showing disrespect toward a senior officer.) If the libertarian movement is eager to draw energy from the antiwar movement, attracting Kokesh and his ilk might prove to be a decidedly mixed blessing.

Gary Johnson announces his bid for the Libertarian party nomination, December 28, 2011.

AP / ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL / EDDIE MOORE

As for Johnson's approach in the debate, it was almost the exact opposite of Wrights's. He spent much of his time telling the delegates things they didn't want to hear. For one, the End-the-Fed crowd did not want to hear this: "Abolishing the Federal Reserve is not the end-all. The end-all is to stop printing money, and if the Federal Reserve were abolished, Treasury could still print money." Wrights, on the other hand, not only wants Congress to abolish the Fed, he wants to repeal all legal tender laws and introduce competing private currencies.

Johnson had a few zingers of his own in the debate—on the recent financial meltdown, he remarked, to much cheering, that Wall Street wanted "capitalism on the way up, and communism on the way down." But he was doomed from the start by the impossibility of topping Wrights in his antigovernment pronouncements. When Johnson spoke of abolishing the IRS and replacing it with the Fair Tax, a national sales tax proposal that's gained some traction among the GOP grassroots, Wrights's response was dumbfounding. "I agree we need to abolish the IRS; do away with the income tax and replace it with *nothing*." The crowd went wild. For the briefest of moments, the normally implacable Johnson looked annoyed.

In his hotel suite the next morning, Johnson is back to his eerily calm self. Regarding the intraparty tensions at the convention, he speaks quite freely about the challenges of being perceived as not radical enough. "Philosophy is one thing, party politics is another. So I think the party politics that goes on here is 'no compromise' in getting from A to Z. Well, I don't view it as compromise to go from A to D to E to F to get to Z. I don't see that as a compromise, I see that as movement in the right direction," he says.

Johnson is also adamant that he's not going to pander by adopting unrealistic approaches. He notes that it's not just Wrights who wants to eliminate federal income taxes. "Ron Paul says we're going to do away with the income tax and we'll replace it with nothing. Well, when people hear that, and we're running a $1.4 trillion deficit, I think for the majority of Americans that's a collective eyeball roll. You can't go from A to Z."

So if Johnson is going to run a campaign that's in key respects more mainstream than the second-place finisher in the GOP primary, why not remain a Republican rather than suffer the slings and arrows of radical libertarians? Well, libertarians may fight over how to get from A to Z, but "I don't think that Democrats understand where their Z is. I don't think Republicans understand where their Z is." And when Johnson says he's "one of those believers where we're really offering up the solutions to the problems that the country has," his conviction is admirable.

Johnson's confidence in libertarian policy solutions is characteristic of the movement, though slightly misplaced. Which brings us to the other wedge between libertarians and conservatives: For a party that takes much pride in its ideological constancy, libertarians don't necessarily hold predictable positions on social issues. Gary Johnson is pro-choice, but Ron Paul, an OB-GYN, is staunchly pro-life, and there are deep libertarian arguments on both sides of the issue. As a matter of practical politics, Paul's social conservative bona fides may be a major reason why his GOP primary bid lasted through May, while Johnson's quickly stalled.

But Johnson's loss in the Republican primaries proves to be the Libertarian party's gain. Wrights may have won over some delegates at the debate, but a few hours after our interview Johnson accepted the party's nomination. He won

support from 70 percent of the delegates on the first ballot. He spent most of his short acceptance speech thanking his fiancée and his family. He also said that his brother called him after watching the debates on C-SPAN to let him know he got his butt kicked by Wrights, an admission that was a bit too well-received for comfort. Nonetheless, the party appeared to be united under the banner of Gary Johnson, and delegates were beaming with optimism about his chances to at least affect the national political debate. All the print reporters at the convention packed up and left, except for myself and *Reason*'s two diligent reporters, Mike Riggs and Garrett Quinn.

And that's when the convention turned into a total goat rodeo.

To explain how ugly things subsequently got would be to punish readers with a tedious blow-by-blow featuring arcane parliamentary procedure. So here's the condensed version: On the first ballot to vote for who would be the chairman of the Libertarian party, "none of the above" won the support of more than 50 percent of the delegates. For a political party that exists largely because its members are convinced the major parties constitute the evil of two lessers, the ensuing uproar was so ironic as to suggest the convention was an elaborate bit of performance art.

Starchild with a fellow libertarian at a 2010 conference

According to party rules, if "none of the above" won more votes than the two candidates on the first ballot, those names would be dropped and nominations would be taken from the party floor. It took two days and countless votes to resolve the party leadership question. Organizers had to go to the casino and ask to extend their stay in the ballroom long enough to resolve the matter. Near as anyone can tell, the "none of the above" vote was a coup staged by the radical grassroots—it was an organized campaign, replete with preprinted signs reading "Re-Elect No One." From that point on, there was much infighting and contesting of every bit of procedure, as relayed by the increasing and comic frustration of Bill Redpath, the Libertarian party's able and respected treasurer and the hapless fellow stuck with trying to apply the party's rulebook. At various points his only recourse for maintaining order was hectoring delegates from the dais: "Quit being a pain in the ass. . . . It's not a motion to revote, for Pete's sake. . . . It may not be appropriate, but it's legal. . . . I'm going to self-combust."

The pivotal moment came when Lee Wrights addressed the tensions among "my family" and assumed the role of peacemaker. "I have said, over and over again, I am not at war. I'll tell you something else, folks: We cannot even start thinking about stopping the wars outside this convention hall until we stop the wars inside these walls." After six rounds of contentious balloting with different names being added and dropped, a candidate from the "purist wing of the party, Geoff Neale, won out, defeating two candidates from the more electorally focused wing of the party," as *Reason* diplomatically summarized the result. The party delegates then replaced every sitting member of the national committee. Starchild was elected to an at-large position. And notably, Wrights, who is close to Neale and is thought to have played a significant role in instigating the insurrection, was elected vice-chair of the party. For a guy who's not at war, he's a pretty good Clausewitz.

So, yes, the Libertarian party turned into a freak show. No doubt many libertarians might balk at such a description, but this is more or less what prominent members of the party themselves were saying by the end of the convention. Mark Rutherford, the vice-chair of the party coming into the convention, bemoaned the result. "I think the whole NOTA [none of the above] thing that happened in the chair's race, and Starchild being elected, still shows that there are sizable elements of people that are not mature enough to make tough decisions and sometimes accept that things aren't going to be the way they ought to be," he fumed to *Reason*'s Quinn.

And on some level, to call it a freak show shouldn't be passing judgment on libertarians. Electoral coalitions inevitably include those on the fringe, and the closer you get to a genuine grassroots movement the more fringy it becomes. We boast of our rugged individualism as Americans, but when confronted with manifestations of this virtue in a political context, the so-called establishment is quick to claim it's discrediting. In one of the more noxious bits of Beltway wisdom to circulate in recent years—and that's saying something—*Politico* editor John F. Harris and *Time*'s Mark Halperin wrote a book popularizing the term "freak show" to describe "a political culture that provides incentives for candidates, activists, interest groups, and the news media to emphasize ideological extremism." Of course, it's awfully convenient that what gets labeled "extremism" is largely determined by a political elite that includes the likes of John F. Harris and Mark Halperin. That elite also includes many entrenched interests who would be horrified to wake up one day and find Americans have elected the kind of freaks who

MICHAEL MUNGER / KIDS PREFER CHEESE

take extreme measures to deal with $15 trillion in national debt and rein in a federal bureaucracy that seems to think it's constitutionally empowered to force us all to eat broccoli.

Considering the alternative, the disorganized nature of the Libertarian party isn't the worst thing imaginable. Following the machinations of the two major parties is increasingly a bread-and-circuses beat. Maybe the crowd gets rowdy and even expresses disapproval, but in the end there's little doubt that there's a group of party bosses and moneyed interests in the colosseum skybox whose Siskel-and-Ebert routine determines the fate of the combatants in the political arena. Most of the tensions at the Libertarian party were because the Libertarian party is at its core still concerned with being "small-d" democratic. They were going to vote and vote until the outcome was agreed upon by their delegates according to their rules. Compare that with how the Democratic party recently declared ahead of its Arkansas primary that any delegates won by John Wolfe—a grassroots candidate running against Obama who won over 40 percent of the vote—would not be counted.

If D.C.'s lords of conventional wisdom would dismiss the Libertarian party as extremist and irrelevant, Republicans and Democrats do so at their peril. Libertarians are unlikely to win a presidential election anytime soon, but they may decide it: According to Public Policy Polling, Gary Johnson is polling at 7 percent and 15 percent in the crucial swing states of New Hampshire and New Mexico, respectively. Now that Ron Paul is finally done with his GOP campaign, Johnson could conceivably rise in the polls if he can convince Paul's supporters he's the next-best thing.

Still, Johnson no doubt wishes party activists were more concerned with organizing to get his name on the ballot in all 50 states—a hurdle libertarian candidates often fail to clear—than, say, sitting around in a casino discussing the technical challenges of getting gas stations to offer variable price points that take into account the real-time fluctuations in commodity values used to back private currencies. If Johnson is serious about expanding the electoral appeal of the Libertarian party, at some point he's going to have to contend with the purists in his own party. That may prove exasperating to Johnson and all of the "small-l" libertarians fretting that infighting is squandering their chance to be taken as a serious alternative at the ballot box.

Until that's sorted out, you have to give the Libertarian party this—they don't just believe in freedom, they live it. Maybe cross-dressing prostitutes and arguments over competing currencies should take a backseat for now, but it's their party and they'll do what they want to. ♦

Schulterscherzel (shoulder cut of boiled beef) from the Viennese restaurant Österreicher im MAK

Where's the Beef?

In Vienna, and boiled the old-fashioned way. BY VICTORINO MATUS

Vienna

In March I flew 4,464 miles to eat boiled beef. I admit this sounds absurd. After all, couldn't I boil the meat at home? And why even bother boiling when I can braise, roast, or grill? Who would do such a thing to beef?

The Austrians, that's who—and they've been doing it for a long time.

At the turn of the last century, during the height of the Habsburg Empire, the Austrians (and in particular the Viennese) transformed boiled beef into a staple of the imperial kitchen, a meal fit for a kaiser. Indeed, Emperor Franz Joseph ate it almost every day of his life. It's called *Tafelspitz*: a narrow cut from the rump section of a cow boiled in a rich broth with vegetables. The broth is served first, followed by the *Tafelspitz*, cooked tender with an array of accompaniments such as spinach, roasted potatoes, and, most important, horseradish (freshly grated or blended with applesauce or in a breaded cream sauce called *Semmelkren*).

The manner in which the boiled beef was served evolved into an elaborate process. In the February 1953 issue of *Gourmet*, Joseph Wechsberg detailed the experience in his essay later titled "*Tafelspitz* for the Hofrat" and, by Wechsberg's estimate, *Tafelspitz* was but one of 24 different kinds of cuts that could be ordered. The others had names less easily pronounced, such as *Hieferschwanzl*, *Zwerchried*, *Mittleres Kügerl*, *Ausgelöstes*, and *Schwarzes Scherzl*.

At the most famous *Tafelspitz* restaurant in Vienna, Meissl & Schadn, a hulking figure named Heinrich supervised the dining room. "The depth of Heinrich's bow," writes Wechsberg, "depended upon the guest's social standing, his taste for, and his knowledge of, boiled beef, and his seniority. It took a man from twenty-five to thirty years to earn the full deep-bow."

As for the service:

> Now the waiter would step forward, lift the cover off the silver plate, and perform the "presentation" of the meat. . . . The waiter would serve the meat on a hot plate, place it on the table in front of the guest, make a step back, and glance at Heinrich. Then the guest, in turn, would glance at Heinrich.
>
> There followed a minute heavy with suspense. From his command post, Heinrich would review the table with a short, sweeping glance, taking

VICTORINO MATUS

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> in the meat, the garniture, the accessories, the setting, the position of the chair and table. He would give a slight nod of approval to the waiter, and to the guest. Only then would a genuine habitué start to eat.

Of course, Wechsberg had been writing about the *Tafelspitz* scene long before World War II. By 1953, it was fading fast, leaving Wechsberg to lament that

> today, most Viennese restaurants serve *Rindfleisch* or *Beinfleisch*, without any specification. . . . It is often tough and dry, and served by ignorant waiters who recommend to their customers expensive "outside" dishes, such as Styrian pullet or imported lobster. The waiters are more interested in the size of their tips than in the contentment of the guest's palate.

A few Viennese establishments serve *Tafelspitz* to this day. But could the meal and the service be anywhere near as lavish as Wechsberg described it some 60 years ago? Thanks to the auspices of the Vienna Tourist Board and the Hotel Sacher, I was able to return to the imperial city for a few days to find out.

During 1993-94, I studied at the University of Vienna—although I probably spent more time hanging out at cafés and the wineries on the outskirts of town called *Heurigers*. (I'd always found it easy to zone out during lectures in English; in German it was easier, so much so that I didn't realize my theology class was broken into two segments with a bathroom break in-between. For a half-semester, I was skipping out during the intermission and returning the next week completely lost. I dropped that class.)

But my impression from that year abroad was that the Viennese are by nature resistant to change. The only American fast food franchise I had seen was McDonald's (and I knew all the different locations). On Sundays the city shut down. Not just liquor stores, mind you, but almost every store—even supermarkets and pharmacies. During a floor meeting in my dormitory, the students voted down the suggestion of purchasing a microwave oven because, as one Austrian girl put it, "microwaves are for the lazy."

This trait was evident even in the late 19th century. "Oceans of light already poured forth from other capitals," writes Frederic Morton in *A Nervous Splendor: Vienna 1888/1889*, "but within [Vienna] one still relied on gas lanterns." The telephone, meanwhile, "could not seem to become a democratic utility. Austrians treated it like a rococo bauble." One Austrian diplomat told me that well into the 1970s, phones were still rotary and came in only two colors, black and white.

So, how much has changed since my year in Vienna? The schilling has been supplanted by the euro. Germans, in search of better jobs, now comprise the largest foreign group in the country. The Turkish population is less secular because of an influx of immigrants from Anatolia. The kids are as addicted to their smartphones as they are in America. Sushi shops have sprouted up throughout the city (the restaurant Unkai at the Grand Hotel is highly regarded). For the last decade, Starbucks has been operating several locations within the city, mostly teeming with tourists and twentysomethings.

And though American coffeehouses have adopted the European attitude of lingering, some of the Viennese cafés have taken on the American impulse to turn over tables faster to boost revenue. While I was having a late breakfast at Café Central (the same place once frequented by Theodore Herzl and Leon Trotsky), the waiter was quick to bring my order, followed by the check. There were plenty of customers filing in, and they needed to be seated.

All that said, there are some things that never change. You'll find that movie theater tickets are still for specific seats: The cheapest are toward the front, the more expensive in the back. At the drugstore you still have to tell the employee what product you are looking for. "Wait here," she says before heading downstairs. A few minutes later she returns, asking, "Is this the dental floss you wanted?" And the answer had better be yes.

Riding public transportation remains easy. The transit officers rarely check for tickets. In my entire year abroad this happened to me only twice. Of course, each time I broke into a nervous sweat fumbling for my pass: There's something terrifying about being asked (in German), "Your papers, please."

Sunday is still a ghost town, with the exception of a few cafés and the American chains, which now include Burger King, Champions, and T.G.I. Friday's. (Luckily, most Austrians have a good handle on English. Otherwise, the latter would have to be called *Gottseidank, es ist Freitag!*) And yes, you can still find *Tafelspitz*.

To be precise, I did not have a *Tafelspitz* cut at the Österreicher im MAK, a posh cafeteria at the Museum for Applied Arts. I had the *Schulterscherzel* (shoulder cut) with a side of roasted potatoes, kohlrabi, and *Apfelkren* (applesauce-horseradish). It was a beautiful, flavorful piece of meat that could have been sliced with a spoon.

For dinner, I hit the Café Sacher, known primarily for its chocolate *Sachertorte*, although some will argue that its *Tafelspitz* is the best in the city. "For it indeed represents, in its cut and preparation, whether with apple horseradish or with cold chive sauce, an absolute peak of culinary art," proclaimed Friedrich Torberg in 1961. "It is more delicious than anything that in former days was listed under 'Beef Dishes' on the menu at Meissl & Schadn, which, as might be recalled, was quite a lot."

The dish came to my table neatly arranged. I savored both the rich broth (with its semolina dumpling) and the *Tafelspitz* itself—albeit a leaner cut than the *Schulterscherzel*. And though I will never know how it measures up against Meissl & Schadn's, I was at least able to compare the dish with one from the king of *Tafelspitz*, Mario Plachutta.

Now, Plachutta did not actually boil the beef himself; he's a highly successful restaurateur who was born into the business and whose father, Ewald, is a critically acclaimed chef. In addition, we met the following night not at his restaurant Plachutta, home of

the *Tafelspitz*, but at his newest eatery, Plachutta's Gasthaus zur Oper, where the main attraction is the breaded veal cutlet known (even to Anglophones!) as *Wiener Schnitzel*.

Plachutta, by the way, was fed up that another restaurant down the street had, for years, claimed to be the home of the *Wiener Schnitzel* when all it served was "this very flat pork *Schnitzel*." As he not so subtly put it: "This is like if you sell a Mercedes and in reality it's an Opel. And I found it's a shame that millions of tourists go away with the impression of having original *Wiener Schnitzel*, and it was not." The other restaurant—Plachutta refused to utter its name—is Figlmüllers, and when the Gasthaus opened nine months ago, the rival owner allegedly told his staff, "This is war."

Such is how, in my search for *Tafelspitz*, I stumbled upon the Great *Schnitzel* War of 2012.

Tafelspitz as served at Plachutta

Thankfully, *Tafelspitz* is on the menu at the Gasthaus; Plachutta recommended I try it along with a slice of *Schnitzel*. How could I say no? "The monarchy was not very rich," he reminded me, which is why "you tried to use as much of the meat as possible. Boiling was a good way to use the parts." And despite the caveat that eating *Tafelspitz* here is not quite the same as at Plachutta, the dish is nonetheless perfect: plenty of juice and not overly salted. The dish is also a hit with tourists from Asia, so much so that Plachutta is planning an outpost somewhere in the Far East. "This food that we do here, the soup and the boiled beef," he told me, "it's very popular in China, very popular in Korea." But why not America? Plachutta speculated that the term "boiled beef" was a turnoff.

Wolfgang Puck agrees. "I just don't think that boiled beef is an American thing," said the celebrity chef and restaurateur who, besides Arnold Schwarzenegger, is perhaps the most famous Austrian living in America. Calling from the kitchen at Spago's in Beverly Hills, the chef joked that "maybe if we have it with some barbecue sauce on the side," it might work.

Puck once had *Tafelspitz* on his menu at Spago but, as he recalled, "it is very hard to sell it to the customers. I remember, when you cook it, you can't just cook two orders or five orders, you cook 15 orders. So what I liked to do with the leftovers then is slice it when it gets cold, slice it really thin, and put onions and vinegar and pumpkinseed oil and salt and pepper on it and have it like a salad. That's how I had to eat my *Tafelspitz*—as leftovers!"

This isn't to say that *Tafelspitz* doesn't exist in America. The problem is finding an Austrian restaurant that serves it. One called Seäsonal in midtown Manhattan offers *Tafelspitz* on its dinner menu for $28. Yes, a German restaurant might offer it, too—but don't tell the Austrians, who doubt a German can distinguish one cut of beef from another. "You know what the Germans say?" asked Plachutta. "The Germans say, 'I want to eat *Tafelspitz*, please bring me the shoulder!'"

When it comes to their cooking culture, the Austrians are fiercely protective. Heinz Reitbauer, regarded as one of the country's top chefs, said that his job is "trying to bring Austrian cuisine one step further. . . . We never forget where we came from, our culture, our tradition." At his Steirereck restaurant, which boasts two Michelin stars, he explained, "What we have to do is look at the healthier side of this cuisine." One of the seven courses he served me was char cooked in beeswax. (While still a molten syrup, the wax is poured over the fish. After 10 minutes, the char is broken out of the hardened wax mold, gently cooked and tasting of honey.)

Reitbauer described Austrian cuisine as "a good mixture of a lot of different cultures." To wit, Frederic Morton notes that at the height of the Habsburg Empire, "Thirteen million [subjects] spoke German. . . . Ten million spoke Hungarian. Five million spoke Czech. Three million spoke Slovak, and millions more spoke diverse Slavic or Arabic languages." Morton also lists the equally diverse titles claimed by the kaiser, including emperor of Austria, apostolic king of Hungary, king of Jerusalem, king of Bohemia, king of Dalmatia, king of Transylvania, king of Galicia and Illyria, grand duke of Tuscany and Cracow, margrave of Moravia, and duke of Auschwitz.

Morton goes on to describe the monarchy as "a dynastic fiction, venerable, fragile, superb." Fragile, indeed, as the empire plunged into a war from which it would never recover, its possessions carved up like a cow destined to be someone's *Tafelspitz*, *Schulterscherzel*, and *Hieferschwanzl*.

Luckily, the actual *Tafelspitz* has survived—albeit served in a less aristocratic fashion. Indeed, the only thing that could have made my trip to Vienna better would have been to eat boiled beef in the regal manner described by Joseph Wechsberg. Alas, that wasn't possible. Meissl & Schadn closed its doors shortly after the murder of the Austrian chancellor Karl von Stürgkh in 1916. Stürgkh was shot to death by Friedrich Adler, the son of the Social Democratic party founder Victor Adler.

It happened at the restaurant, and Stürgkh was killed while eating his *Tafelspitz*. ◆

PLACHUTTA RESTAURANTS

B&A

Elephantiasis

Everything, apparently, can be blamed on Republicans. **BY JAY COST**

If there is one thing that Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein want you to take away from their new book, it's that the Republican party is entirely to blame.

Indeed, the authors pummel the reader over the head with this thesis for over 200 pages. In a typical formulation, they argue that the GOP "has become an insurgent outlier—ideologically extreme; contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime; scornful of compromise; unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence, and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition." Worse: "The culture and ideological center of the Republican party itself, at the congressional, presidential, and, in many cases, state and local levels, must change if U.S. democracy is to regain its health."

To support this charge, they present a relentlessly one-sided and pro-Democratic narrative of recent events, misrepresent or outright misuse quantitative data, systematically forget the bareknuckled partisan brawling of Democrats, and ignore the greater shift in the political and economic realities of 21st-century America. Liberals will love this book because it reinforces every one of their shared nostrums about the GOP. Otherwise, it is totally unpersuasive, yet accidentally illustrative of the myopia that has gripped the liberal Beltway Establishment over the last few years.

Jay Cost, a staff writer at The Weekly Standard, *is the author of* Spoiled Rotten: How the Politics of Patronage Corrupted the Once Noble Democratic Party and Now Threatens the American Republic.

It's Even Worse Than It Looks
How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism
by Thomas E. Mann
and Norman J. Ornstein
Basic Books, 240 pp., $26

Animating Mann and Ornstein is the debt ceiling battle of mid-2011. Appalled by the seeming recklessness of the GOP, the authors are at pains through the first third to note that the fiasco was due to a combination of ideological extremism, disregard for tradition, and an indifference to the health of the economy that prompted the congressional Republicans to push for spending cuts in exchange for an expansion of the debt ceiling.

Yet Mann/Ornstein fail entirely to note that, though the debt ceiling battle is unprecedented, so also is the crushing burden of federal debt. Never before in peacetime has the country had an annual budget deficit that has hit almost 10 percent of gross domestic product. In a fair account of the debt ceiling battle, this might have merited some attention, as it helps explain what was moving the GOP; but the Republican party's motivations are simply chalked up to extremism.

Mann/Ornstein also give short shrift to the fact that, in the final stages of the negotiation with Speaker Boehner, President Obama demanded $400 billion extra in new tax increases—or, in the parlance of the Democratic National Committee as well as the authors, "revenues." This fact is mentioned but there is no pause to consider whether and to what extent Obama was being pulled to the left by his own allies, or whether he was playing political games of his own.

According to Mann/Ornstein, there are hard data to back up their claims. They make much of a graph of ideological polarization derived from the analysis of political scientists Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal, which supposedly demonstrates that the Republicans have moved farther away from the middle than the Democrats. But what they fail to mention is that the "middle" in this data set has no fixed meaning over time. Instead, it is relative only to congressional voting in any given session, thus undercutting the thesis that Congress has been gripped by "asymmetric polarization."

Similarly, they offer data on the increased use of the filibuster without noting that the employment of such dilatory tactics is a common one in any legislative body—the House had a filibuster of sorts until Speaker Thomas Reed destroyed it 100 years ago—and that it was the Democrats who made the filibuster easier to use in the Senate. The late Robert Byrd of West Virginia, long celebrated as the "constitutionalist" of the Senate, introduced a "dual track" system that allowed the Senate to carry on other business while a filibuster was ongoing. This substantially lowered the time costs to the minority to delay legislation, and so, unsurprisingly, the use of the filibuster has skyrocketed since.

Mann/Ornstein are also at pains to expose the GOP as bareknuckled partisan brawlers who will even disrupt regular government business to impose their ideological agenda. To that end, they make much of the party's seemingly uncalled-for blocking or holding of executive appointments. Without defending the Republicans on the issue, it is worth pointing out that Democrats are at least as responsible for upping the ante on delays through the Senate's role as an advising and consenting institution. It was, after all, the Democrats who blocked the nominations of judges Clement Haynsworth, G. Harrold Carswell, and Robert Bork to the Supreme Court, and also threatened the use of the filibuster to block appellate court nominees by George W. Bush.

Indeed, emphasizing only Republican infractions on this issue seems especially partial, as there has long been a one-upsmanship about delaying tactics in the Senate, with each side learning from the other how far the needle can be pushed and using opportunities to extract vengeance for previous slights. Not coincidentally, the Democratic blocking of Haynsworth and Carswell followed close on the heels of the GOP stopping Abe Fortas from becoming chief justice.

But the problem is that none of this comports with Mann/Ornstein's core thesis of Republican radicalism. So it is either glossed over, forgiven—or ignored altogether. There is a case to be made that changes in the Republican coalition over the years have brought about a shift in the way business works in Washington, but it is not to be found in the pages of this book. *It's Even Worse Than It Looks* is overwrought with hyperbole and too filled with Democratic talking points to offer much guidance.

Nevertheless, the work is interesting from a sociological perspective. Mann and Ornstein, after all, are the deans of the Beltway Establishment, at least its intellectual wing. For them to argue so tendentiously that the GOP is to blame for the ills of Washington offers compelling proof of how insiders view the Tea Party and modern conservatism, as well as the tactics they employ to get across these opinions. Put simply, it's all in the definitions, and conservatives need to take note of just how *politicized* the use of innocuous words like "moderate," "mainstream," and "sensible" have become. Increasingly, liberals are defining these words in such a way as to exclude all views but their own (or the views of former conservatives who have seen the light) while recasting conservative Republicanism (an electoral force that, since 1980, has routinely garnered a majority of the popular vote) as "extreme."

This is a relatively new development in the political discourse, and conservative message mavens need to understand the extent to which the language itself has been politicized by the left.

This is also a valuable reminder that the Beltway elite still do not understand what is happening to the country. Consider, for instance, the following thought experiment: You jump off a boat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Is this an "extreme" act? Well, it depends. Is the boat sailing along just fine with no problems? Then what you did was extreme and insane. But what if the boat is sinking, and you're bailing? In that case, you probably made the correct decision, or at least a defensible one. In other words, context matters. And it is that greater political-economic context that is missing from *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*.

Mann/Ornstein are, at their core, most offended by the GOP's violation of protocol in the debt ceiling battle, but the problem they fail to note is that this protocol has contributed to the mess that is the nation's public finances. To wit: The country's vast obligations on entitlement programs are now substantially greater than its ability to pay, and reforms must be made before the bondholders catch wind of the structural problems. This was what animated the GOP's efforts on the debt ceiling—their rejection of the one-for-one ratio on tax hikes to spending reforms—and why they were prepared to use a previously perfunctory act like the debt ceiling increase to raise awareness.

The media analysis of the debt ceiling battle overlooked this context, as do Mann/Ornstein. Perhaps this is simply standard media bias at work, but it is just as likely the efforts of the Beltway Establishment to defend a political order that is crumbling around them. No longer do the old ways of Washington work; the math simply does not add up. Mann/Ornstein and the rest can blame the Tea Party all they want, but it does not change the reality that the Establishment's outmoded methods of doing business have created the current crisis that the Tea Party is trying to fix.♦

B&A

The Back Beat

Pop music settles comfortably into Oldies idolatry.

BY ALEC SOLOMITA

The pop music critic Simon Reynolds marches to the beat of his own synthesizer. This literate, romantic, clever writer has devoted his career to analyzing post-punk, techno-rave, and ambient electronic music. He deftly deploys a scholar's tactics (including the occasional dip into affable pedantry and references to Derrida and Walter Benjamin) in order to understand more profoundly musical groups called Throbbing Gristle, the Cramps, and Echo & the Bunnymen.

Retromania
Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past
by Simon Reynolds
Faber & Faber, 496 pp., $18

We've had four decades to get used to the tools of literary analysis mobilized to explicate cultural artifacts from pornography to landfills. But it's still amusing to see in an index "Barnes, Julian" and "Barthes, Roland" sitting comfortably across the binding from "Checker, Chubby."

Despite his learning and expansive curiosity, Reynolds is not fundamentally a cultural critic, scrutinizing phenomena to illuminate larger societal truths. He is not the anthropologist who resolves cultural hierarchies through the study of lunch menus. He is a critic of music, primarily engaged with the music itself: what it sounds like, what it's made of, where it comes from, and, especially here, where it's

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going (or not going). He and, in fact, millions of others take Echo & the Bunnymen very seriously.

I, too, take seriously the power and glory of popular music, including the stylings of Checker, Chubby; Pickett, Wilson; Slick, Grace; Nelson, Willie; and Ramone, Joey. But when Reynolds laments what he sees as the present aridity of pop music, his preoccupation is almost always with style and almost never with content. He recognizes aesthetic torpor but is blind to moral turpitude. He speaks of decline without seeming to have noticed the saddest change in pop music over the past decades: It's not for kids anymore. It's for gangstas and intellectuals and hipster virtuosi like the 48-year-old Reynolds. *Here* is the decline Reynolds has missed entirely: 1963—"I Want to Hold Your Hand"; 1996—"Put It in Your Mouth."

In *Retromania*, Reynolds's main thesis (and complaint) is that, in the past decade, pop music has become moribund. "Once upon a time, pop's metabolism buzzed with dynamic energy, creating the surging-into-the-future feel of periods like the psychedelic sixties, the post-punk seventies, the hip-hop eighties, and the rave nineties. The 2000s felt different." What alarms Reynolds is not that music went nowhere in the 2000s; it's that it went backwards. "Instead of being the threshold to the future, the first ten years of the twenty-first century turned out to be the 'Re' Decade." Remakes, revivals, reissues, reenactments.

Reynolds acknowledges that these backward-looking phenomena are not new; there have always been crazes for past periods. This time it's different, though, because this time, as Peggy Lee might say, that's all there is. Elderly rock bands are not just regrouping, but staging concerts in which they reenact, song by song, their most famous albums. Tribute and cover albums are not so much homages as painstakingly literal reproductions. But even more curious and (for Reynolds) distressing is the contraction of the time between "then" and "now."

Nostalgia is at least as old as Adam and Eve, who had more reason than most to yearn for the good old days. Reynolds takes great pains to distinguish between nostalgia and retromania. Nostalgia, he explains, "as both word and concept was invented in the seventeenth century by the physician Johannes Hofer to describe a condition afflicting Swiss mercenaries on long tours of military duty." This "ache of displacement" soon began to refer to temporal rather than physical distance, the result of technologies (trains, planes, automobiles, telephones) that compress physical distance while simultaneously making the past quaint or even alien.

Retromania differs from nostalgia—and is unique to our current age—in that our society is the first in human history "so obsessed with the cultural artifacts of *its own immediate past*." Retromaniacs long not for the good old days but for yesterday—indeed, for this morning: "As the 2000s proceeded, the interval between something happening and its being *re*visited seemed to shrink insidiously."

The shrinking of this interval is largely a result, Reynolds argues, of recent, fiercely rapid advances in media technology. The primacy of the Internet with all its roads leading to instant gratification—Facebook, YouTube, Skype, Amazon, iTunes—combined with the development of compressed MP3 files (which allow a tiny iPod to hoard thousands of songs) has transformed the consumer into a glutton. At his fingertips is a promiscuous feast of a half-century of pop culture, especially music.

The ability to "access the immediate past so easily and so copiously" resulted in an aesthetic logjam for a whole generation. For Reynolds, the easy availability of the past is stealing the present and future. Young musicians saturated in the work of their predecessors can hardly plunk out an original melody. And worse, they don't want to. They are happy to hit rewind instead of fast forward: "Too often with new young bands, beneath their taut skin and rosy cheeks you could detect the sagging grey flesh of old ideas." Young performers mix and match, splice and sample, borrow and steal, even imitating the ambient noises associated with old sound studios, vinyl, cassettes, even eight-track tapes. Past is not just prologue; it is prologue, epilogue, and everything in between.

Reynolds is especially eloquent about the omnipresent iPod, which he dislikes and dubs "an emblem of the poverty of abundance." Moreover, "Even as it abolishes record collecting in the traditional sense, the iPod represents the ultimate extension of its mindset: the compulsion to hunt, stockpile and endlessly reorganise." The iPod, which you can program yourself, eliminates surprise and discovery. The ancient joy of sitting on a beach with your transistor radio and hearing "Palisades Park" for the first time has vanished, along with the innocence of the teenage years themselves.

Reynolds is almost childlike in his excitement about music, and this fervor is attractive. But our pleasure in his zeal and insights can distract us from the often troubling content of his discussion. And it is the content that gives us the key to the central dilemma. I fear for the soul of the nation when I read phrases and sentences he tosses off with ease. His nostalgia for the sixties is unwittingly droll: Citing J.G. Ballard, he writes longingly of "assassinations, Vietnam, LSD." And how he misses the nineties, the ecstasy decade! "The nineties felt like this long, sustained ascent, what with the Internet and the info-tech boom, techno rave and its associated drugs. But the 2000s turned out to be a plateau." To describe the mind-numbing, night-rallying, frantically technological nineties as an *ascent* suggests that more than his altimeter is a little off.

Some of Reynolds's cavalier utterances betray an almost comical benightedness:

> The absurdist mysticism that runs through this scene reminds me of the movie *Slacker* . . . and specifically of the character played by Butthole Surfers drummer Teresa Nervosa, who accosts people in the street and tries to sell them what she claims is Madonna's pap smear (complete with actual Ciccone pube).

There is more to recoil from in this one sentence than in the entire oeuvre of Bret Easton Ellis.

The real problem, as Reynolds's nonchalance creepily illustrates, is

decadence. He misses this essential point, approaching it only occasionally and glancingly. Pop culture has reached the very bottom of the slippery slope, where most of the country capers in the muck. Retromania is not a looking *back* but a looking *up* from whence we have descended. It's not only the autopsies on TV, *The View*, sex toy demonstrations in college classrooms, hit songs called "N*****s in Paris." It's not only albums like *Joyless Pleasure* by the Horrorist, one of Reynolds's "best albums of 2011," a droning, humorless, compulsively repetitive succession of dirges. Reynolds sees that it is the astonishing ascendancy of the Internet that has accelerated and disseminated pop culture trends. What he stops short of seeing—or saying—is that these trends are too often ugly and destructive, and that the web has, in a decade, toppled us head over heels into ordure.

Marshall McLuhan predicted the global village that the Internet has brought into being. But who could have foreseen the profusion of village idiots? The debasing of our discourse has been as irreversible as a tidal wave. Opinions that used to be pronounced in barbershops and hair salons, whispered in the dark daytime bar on the corner, chuckled over at the water cooler, or kept hidden in the twisted hearts of silent men and women have become our daily bread. The Internet has, before we even knew it, robbed us of innocence, privacy, intimacy, mystery, dignity, and civility.

Every ignorant, illiterate rant by every resentful, rageful misanthrope is practically unavoidable on the web. On almost every page are grotesqueries of misshapen faces, bodies digitally contorted to catch our attention to this or that product or service, images that cheapen the human condition. And on YouTube, amidst the cloying, staged "spontaneous" hymns to the phony resilience of the disappearing human spirit, are teenagers grinding, animals defecating, people spitting, screaming, spewing strange hates and perverse loves.

As bad as they often were, the old days were better. Is it any wonder that so many of us look back in longing? ♦

B&A

Unselfish Basketball

Why Jeremy Lin's progress strikes a chord.

BY FRED BARNES

There's a big hole in the National Basketball Association playoffs. A riveting storyline went AWOL. A level of excitement that might have gripped the final playoff series this week is sadly absent. What's missing is a single player, Jeremy Lin, the most unlikely NBA star ever. If you've not heard of him, you're worse off for having let the most thrilling weeks in sports in 2012 pass you by.

Jeremy Lin
The Reason for the Linsanity
by Timothy Dalrymple
Center Street, 176 pp., $14.99

Here's a short version of the Lin phenomenon. A high school standout in Palo Alto, California, Lin failed to get a basketball scholarship to Stanford, his first choice for college. He settled for Harvard and became an Ivy League star, but wasn't picked in the 2010 NBA draft. Signed as a free agent, Lin was a benchwarmer for the Godlen State Warriors and played for the minor league Erie BayHawks before resurrecting the forlorn New York Knicks in February. As an unexpectedly brilliant point guard, he turned the Knicks into a contender for the championship. The sports world went berserk.

Then, in March, he injured his knee, had surgery, and was lost for the remainder of the season. Lin-less, the Knicks were crushed in the opening round of the playoffs by the powerful Miami Heat. Would they have won with Lin? Maybe not. But they'd have put the Heat to a stiffer test—and extended the mania known as Linsanity for a few more weeks.

Sports crazes are not new. Last fall, there was Tim Tebow, who led the Denver Broncos to the pro football playoffs. Baseball fans were enraptured in 2004 with the Boston Red Sox as they won the World Series after an 86-year drought.

But Linsanity was different. The currents that ran through it were not limited to basketball. Lin is a second-generation Asian American, his parents having met in Virginia after emigrating from Taiwan. He's an evangelical Christian whose faith has played a big part in his basketball success. Even the basketball angle has a twist. It's not the conventional one of a talented young athlete's emergence as a superstar.

Timothy Dalrymple has woven these strands into a highly readable book, which he wrote in a few weeks. He had the advantage of having interviewed Lin at Harvard, focusing particularly on his Christianity. Dalrymple was an elite athlete himself, a gymnast with Olympic aspirations, until a neck injury ended his career. He's now managing editor at Patheos.com, the religion website.

When the 2011-12 season began, ESPN ranked Lin 467th out of 500 NBA players. It took an extraordinary set of circumstances for him to start for the Knicks: a desperate coach, a string of losses, injured players, unhappy fans. With Lin as point

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LARRY W. SMITH / EPA / NEWSCOM

guard, the Knicks won seven straight. Those were the unforgettable "Seven Games of Linsanity."

His numbers set records. "After his first eight starts, Jeremy had garnered 200 points and 76 assists," Dalrymple writes, "compared with Isiah Thomas's 184 points and 51 assists, Magic Johnson's 147 points and 57 assists, and John Stockton's 80 points and 82 assists." Just as impressive was his skillful leadership.

To many fans, that Lin is an Asian American was noteworthy. To Asian Americans, it was a breakthrough. "What's unique about Jeremy is the way he explodes the negative images of the weak and timid Asian American, even as he embodies what is best in Asian-American culture and brings that with him into his success," Dalrymple says.

It took more than talent for Lin to reach the NBA. He struggled, unlike the greatest players in the game. "Michael Jordan never had to beg the coaches to give him a chance," Dalrymple writes. "Kobe Bryant has never asked a chaplain and friends to pray that he would not be cut from the team. Lebron James had the size of Goliath and the strength of Samson by the time he was sixteen." While theirs are "stories of transcendent talent and superhuman abilities, Jeremy's is a parable of perseverance, a story of a mere mortal who suffered and sacrificed and strove every day to improve."

The role of Lin's faith can be difficult to understand—until you see him play. Lin became a serious Christian in high school and was active in Christian groups at Harvard. His faith translates into this kind of basketball: "Play the game in the way it should be played, play in a manner that reflects his deepest moral and religious commitments, and trust that God will take care of the outcome."

It's unselfish basketball. You don't see an overabundance of it in the NBA. But when you do, it's as beautiful as a team sport can get. It requires humility and discipline and teamwork. Of those, Lin has plenty. The good news is he's only 23 and, assuming his knee heals, he'll be back next season. ♦

B&A

Fools for Lava

The timeless beauty, and obvious danger, of Mount Vesuvius. **BY AMY HENDERSON**

Two million people live in the shadows of Mount Vesuvius, serenely confident that mainland Europe's most active volcano will not choose any time soon to blow its lid. Their proximity is an astonishing act of faith. They must spend their evenings singing "On Top of Old Smokey" and "You're the Top." Are their libraries filled with stories about Mt. Kilimanjaro, Magic Mountains, and Shangri-Las?

Vesuvius
by Gillian Darley
Harvard, 256 pp., $22.95

Vesuvius is the latest in Harvard University Press's Wonders of the World series. Focusing on sites that have achieved iconic stature "and are loaded with a fair amount of mythological baggage," the series includes studies of *Stonehenge*, *The Colosseum*, and *The Roman Forum.* Gillian Darley, a broadcaster and architectural journalist, has a combination of interests that make her a natural for this work on Vesuvius.

To begin, she describes herself as curious about the interaction between past and present with people, buildings, and places. She is also familiar with chronicling a life history, having previously published biographies of Octavia Hill (1990), John Soane (2000), and John Evelyn (2006). With *Vesuvius*, Darley has deployed her skills to write a lively biography of the mountain best known for swallowing Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 A.D.—a catastrophe emblazoned in history by Pliny the Younger's famous account of the death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, who, as commander of a fleet of warships, was lost as he attempted to rescue people desperately fleeing the 100-mile-an-hour volcanic cloud that engulfed all in its path.

Vesuvius has had eight major eruptions; dormant for 600 years after 1037, it reawakened with a bang in 1631, killing 4,000 people with its smoke and ash. The volcano was last heard from in 1944, when it forced Allied troops to evacuate an airbase as ash and rocks rained down and destroyed fighter planes.

This mountain and its effluvia attracted vivid attention even before Pliny's time, and *Vesuvius* is an entertaining guide to the volcano's impact on European culture, ranging over its influence on religion, science, philosophy, art, literature, and music. Darley's cultural archaeology has unearthed written records about Vesuvius beginning with Vitruvius (circa 15 B.C.), who described the volcano's "kind of powder" which, when mixed with lime and rubble, became so impregnable that "neither the waves nor the force of water can dissolve them." Plutarch describes how Spartacus and his small slave army of 100 gladiators hid in its crater before cascading down its slopes to surprise 3,000 enemy soldiers below. Early Christians pondered the religious implications of the mountain's eruptions: To what extent were the fires of the earth linked to the fires of hell? Later, in an age devoted to rationalism and natural philosophy, the mountain was seen as a natural wonder worthy of careful observation and description.

The mountain's 17th-century eruption catalyzed a fascination by that century's philosophers and natural

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'Outbreak of Vesuvius' (1826) by Johan Christian Dahl

scientists, many of whom flocked to the volcano's rim to experience its wonder for themselves. The Fellows of the Royal Society, including Robert Boyle, Joseph Addison, and George (later, Bishop) Berkeley, filled the society's *Transactions* with fervent, bodice-ripping descriptions. An enraptured Berkeley teetered on the very edge of the crater to see "a vast aperture full of smoke. . . . I heard within that horrid gulf certain odd sounds, which seemed to proceed from the belly of the mountain: a sort of murmuring, sighing, throbbing, churning . . . and between whiles a noise like that of thunder or cannon."

Darley's discussion of the Romantic response to Vesuvius is perhaps her most engaging. If natural philosophers had used the volcano to extrapolate a "handy manual to the mysteries of the earth," the mountain was embraced by the Romantics as "a key to the complexities of the psyche." The volcano's suppressed violence became "a metaphor for the conflicted soul as much as for revolution and radical political thought."

Eighteenth-century notions of the sublime had focused on Vesuvius as a phenomenon of nature's terror; for example, Edmund Burke (1757) described Vesuvius as fulfilling the Sublime's extremes of both Fire and Ice. For the Romantics of the 19th century, however, Darley relates how Vesuvius exhibited the intensity of experience. Shelley wrote that Vesuvius offered "the most impressive exhibition of the energies of nature I ever saw," its beauty residing in its "character of tremendous and irresistible strength." Walking to the rim, he described the sight as "the most horrible chaos that can be imagined." Darley calls the volcanic landscape "a fittingly cathartic auditorium in which the author of *Prometheus Unbound* could watch the theater of Nature." It was Nature as supreme melodrama.

Other Romantic artists were similarly affected. Darley gives such examples as J.M.W. Turner, whose first view of Vesuvius in 1819 transformed his earlier imagined ideas about erupting volcanoes. Vesuvius also proved perfect dramatic fodder for opera, as exemplified by the set design for an 1815 production of *The Magic Flute*, which featured a glowering Vesuvius as the backdrop for Act One. Most popular of all was Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, which in the mid-1830s created an enormous groundswell for Vesuvius and the notion of "doomed glamour."

Darley's chronicle showcases how Vesuvius has been viewed, over time, as a site potentially holding the secrets of the universe. It is a perspective compatible with the hypothesis expressed in the 20th century by the late anthropologist Stephen Jay Gould, who posited that, from Pliny onward, the idea had taken root that the earth was "ruled by sudden cataclysms that rupture episodes of quiescence and mark the dawn of a new order."

In the 20th century, Vesuvius was embraced by the new order of popular culture. A 1908 movie drew crowds to watch the dramatic doom of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, while Thomas Cook & Sons sold tickets for funicular rides to the crater and built a convenient hotel nearby so that visitors could experience "the wonderful air, both transparent and pure." The Italian song "Funiculi, Funicula" resonated in parlors and concert halls around the world and remains a popular operatic encore to this day.

Of course, the question remains: Why do people live on the mountain? Darley muses how, since the 1944 eruption, "a demonic game of grandmother's footsteps has been going on, in which the population creeps ever higher and nearer to the old lava fields, seeming to tempt Vesuvius not to turn without warning and devour everything in its path." Urbanization has swamped the mountainside, and the lower slopes are now "matted by a dense web of illegal buildings—commercial and retail, residential and even public amenities." There is an oil refinery and a hospital.

At least on paper, a "National Disaster Plan" outlines a cascading system of emergency command for the next eruption—a catastrophe in which between 650,000 and 3.1 million people will be put at risk. Meanwhile, Vesuvius sends up gentle little wisps of steam, and the band plays on. ♦

Grimm Tidings

This is funny, but it's not supposed to be.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Kristen Stewart

Snow White and the Huntsman
Directed by Rupert Sanders

Snow White and the Huntsman is the second revisionist retelling of the fairy tale this year. *Mirror Mirror*, the one with Julia Roberts as the evil queen, was supposed to be funny, though it wasn't. *Snow White and the Huntsman* isn't supposed to be funny, but it is. It's funny because this $100 million epic has long sequences in which it is literally impossible to understand a single word anybody on screen is saying. The only performer whose dialogue is comprehensible at all times is Charlize Theron, and that's because she drags… out… every… line… like… this: "You—will—kill her—for me—HUNTSMANNN!!!!!!"

The Huntsman in question is played by an Australian actor named Chris Hemsworth, who also played Thor in *The Avengers* (and in *Thor*, too, but let's draw a veil over that monstrosity). Here, he essays a Scottish accent. Also, he's drunk much of the time. So he rolls his "r"s while he slurs his words and, as a result, he might as well be speaking Swahili throughout. I think he says "Aye" a lot, like Mike Myers does when he plays a Scotsman, but I can't be sure.

The Huntsman is the character in the original Grimm tale whom the queen sends to slay Snow White in the Dark Forest and return with her heart as proof, but he cannot bring himself to do it. In *Snow White and the Huntsman*, he's a sorrowful widower tricked into going after Snow White by the queen, called Ravenna, who promises to use her magical powers to bring his wife back to life.

Though Ravenna has a talking mirror—well, *she* calls it a mirror, but it's actually a giant golden plate—she isn't really the wicked queen from Grimm or Disney. She's more Elisabeth Bathory, the psychotic 17th-century Hungarian countess who supposedly bathed in virgins' blood to keep herself young, and who has been the subject of countless cheap horror movies.

Ravenna wants Snow White's heart not simply to be sure the girl is dead, but because if she eats it, apparently, she won't have to suck the life force out of all the young girls she kidnaps and turns into old ladies.

Are we having fun yet? I haven't even gotten to the dwarves. They make an appearance, too, and here's where the movie's dialogue track really goes haywire. They are played by a group of full-size actors shrunk down by special effects. The group includes Bob Hoskins, Eddie Marsan, and Ray Winstone—all wonderful British performers best known for their working-class accents.

They turn on those accents full-blast here, and we end up with exchanges like this:

Dwarf 1: Ehhh, mezzzur the hrrrzzzz.

Dwarf 2: Oi denna groilll.

Dwarf 3: Tha girll is the chooosen wan.

Huntsman: Aye. [I think.]

Advance word is that this movie is going to be a blockbuster, and maybe it will be. It borrows so many elements from other recent hits that it might seem like comfort food to teenage audiences. The dwarves look like hobbits from *The Lord of the Rings*. The completely indecipherable battle scenes with shaky camera work and no sense of who's fighting whom are pure Michael Bay.

Mostly, though, we get *Twilight*. The Huntsman has a rival for Snow's affections in her childhood friend William—thus creating a love triangle shamelessly ripped off from that series of vampire movies. Only here we have Team William vs. Team Huntsman (no, not the four people who voted for the former Utah governor in the GOP primaries). The parallel is made even more explicit by the fact that the star of the *Twilight* movies also plays Snow White.

Her name is Kristen Stewart, and I'm sorry to report that she doesn't demonstrate a lot of range. When Snow is (SPOILER ALERT if you've never been a child) poisoned by that infamous apple, Stewart performs *exactly* the same writhing-on-the-ground bit she did when she was poisoned by vampire venom in the first *Twilight* movie. And I put the word "exactly" in italics because I meant *exactly*.

Yes, maybe it will be a hit. Many really bad movies are these days. But seriously, would it have killed director Rupert Sanders to bring the actors back into the studio for some "looping"? That's when they rerecord lines. Of course, he would have had to rerecord almost every word.

Except for Charlize Theron's. Because when I left the theater, she was *still* saying, "Mirrrorrr mirrrrorr onnnnn the walllllllll . . ." ♦

UNIVERSAL PICTURES

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

"Early Thursday morning, astronauts unbolted the world's first commercial supply ship, the SpaceX Dragon, from the orbiting outpost. Then they used a robot arm to move it away. Next up will come its actual release."
—Associated Press, May 31, 2012

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Clinton welcomes ship home amid confusion

HOPING TO MAKE A PERSONAL CONNECTION

'You mean there's no space sex in SpaceX?'

BY EMI KOLAWOLE

SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk was thrilled to learn former President Bill Clinton wanted to personally welcome back the return of his company's Dragon supply ship after its historic mission to the International Space Station. "The president," recalled Musk, "said he was deeply moved by all this talk of a SpaceX rendezvous with the station and wanted to get in on the action."

From California, President Clinton boarded a private transport that arrived yesterday in the splash zone in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, some 550 miles away. Wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a lei and with more leis to give, Clinton told the crew he was excited to greet the vessel and proceeded to unravel a large banner that read, "Three Cheers for Space Sex."

JAKE WELLINGTON

Former President Bill Clinton learns that SpaceX isn't 'Space Sex.'

At which point the captain explained to the president he had mistaken the name, leaving Clinton angry and confused. "You're telling me the suborbital probes, the hookup between Dragon and the station, the insertion of the module, and its successful release are all one giant misunderstanding?"

Clinton said he was far less interested in the ins and outs of SpaceX following the clarification, although he still hoped the next mission "would be manned" and contemplated the possibility of being the first president to take part in a SpaceX mission. Clinton then turned to a female crew member and asked, "Have you ever seen the ending of 'Moonraker'?"

The misunderstanding took Musk by surprise. "But I guess that explains why he wanted to see so many SpaceX diagrams," said the CEO, who also fielded in-depth questions from former House speaker

REENTRY CONTINUED ON A6

Edwards jury reaches consensus

...l unanimous: Still not guilty, still sleazy

the weekly Standard
JUNE 11, 2012