the weekly standard

JUNE 18, 2012 • $4.95

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SELF-MADE MAN

ANDREW FERGUSON on Barack Obama's autobiographical fictions

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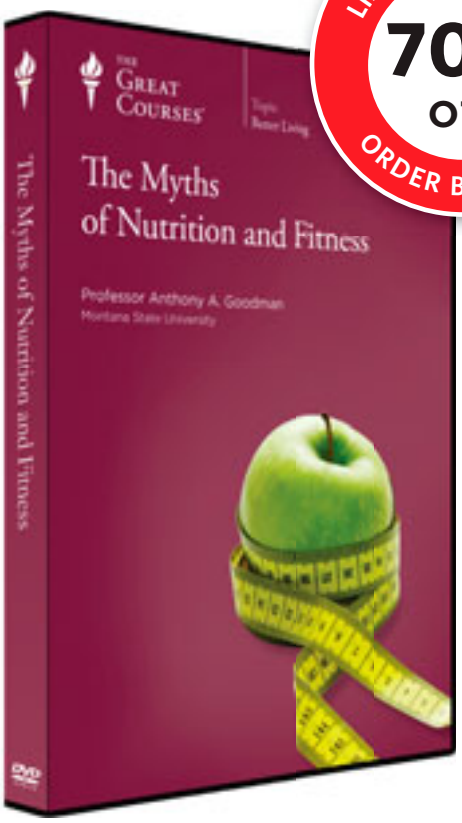

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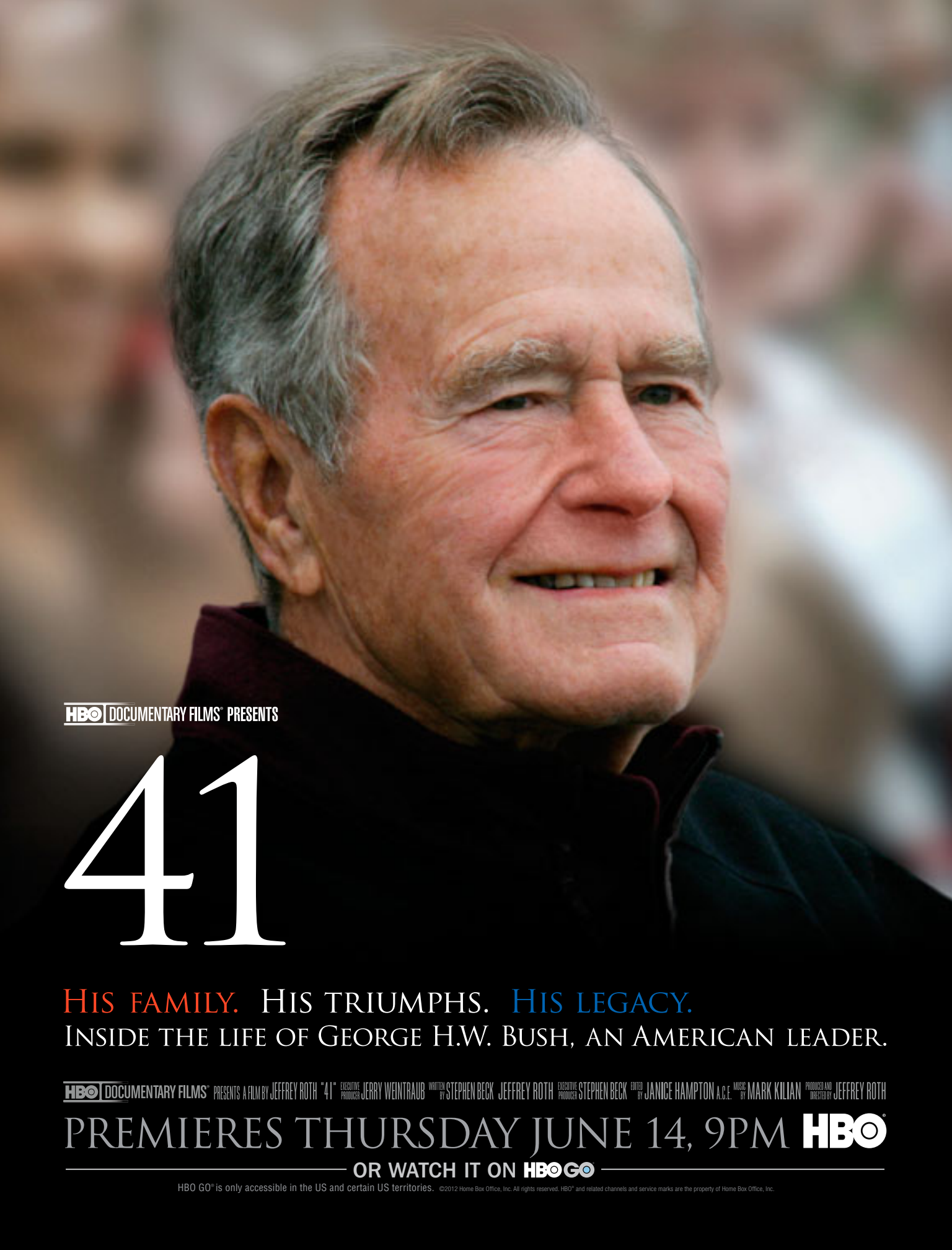
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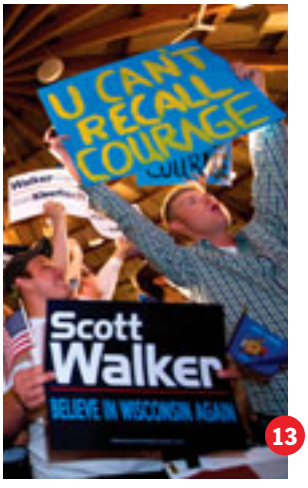

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COVER BY GARY LOCKE

Krugman vs. Estonia

John Maynard Keynes famously summarized his recipe for spurring growth as having the government pay people to "dig holes in the ground and then fill them up." It's only fitting that Keynes's most famous contemporary disciple, the *New York Times*'s Paul Krugman, is adept at digging holes. Krugman has never met a criticism of Keynesian stimulus spending that he didn't try to shout down, even at the price of torturing data.

Last week, Krugman was in rare form. With most of Europe on the edge of a fiscal cliff, a recent article in the *Global Post* pointed out that one country in the eurozone, Estonia, has a "fiscal surplus, low debt, and soaring growth." Not only that, Estonia's success might be because "the country, led by President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, has cut government budgets, slashed civil servants' salaries, and raised the pension age." This not only flies in the face of Keynesian economics, but jars every liberal bone in Krugman's body. So the Princeton professor produced a chart on his *New York Times* blog showing that since 2007 Estonia has endured "a terrible—Depression-level—slump, followed by a significant but still incomplete recovery." Speaking of incomplete, if you look at Estonia's economic performance over the last decade, GDP has tripled. And it had nearly quadrupled at the peak of the bubble in 2007, a suspiciously convenient point in time for Krugman to begin evaluating the country's economy. Estonia's economic growth is still moving at a healthy clip if you look at any trend line longer than the five years chosen by Krugman.

One person who helpfully pointed this out was Estonia's American-educated president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who took to Twitter and began rather amusingly lambasting Krugman: "Let's write about something we know nothing about & be smug, overbearing & patronizing. . . . Guess a Nobel in trade means you can pontificate on fiscal matters & declare my country a 'wasteland.'" Krugman responded on his blog, "I'm hearing from various sources that my rather mild-mannered post on Estonia has generated a vitriolic response from the nation's president. I'm not going to try to track the thing down."

That last line is a hoot. A *New York Times* columnist has no shortage of paid help to track down a few tweets. And tellingly, Krugman pretends the dispute is about manners (not that he's a winner on that score, either) rather than about his own tendentious use of the data. What's more, this is not some random critic he brushes off but a man who might know a bit more about Estonia's economy than Krugman does.

David Case of the *Global Post*—who's no conservative, by the way—followed up on the Twitter dustup, asking "why did Professor Krugman peg his chart to the peak of Estonia's bubble? Doesn't that simply demonstrate that Estonia has yet to re-capture the frothy, debt-driven bubble of 2007?" Case noted that since Estonia is a small country with no debt, it may not be a model for handling fiscal crises in Greece or Spain. Nonetheless, "its recovery, after implementing austerity, is intriguing. . . . Lord knows, Europe could benefit from any insights."

Indeed, European leaders need all the insight they can get. The Scrapbook's advice to them: Don't try to track it down in Krugman's column. ♦

The Obama Vogue

The moment last week at which The Scrapbook felt a twinge, just a twinge but a piercing twinge, of mortification on behalf of President Obama was not the crushing defeat at the polls of public employee unions—and in Wisconsin, of all places, where they were born. No, it came as we watched a video of *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour as she advertised a raffle to attend an Obama fundraiser in New York City.

Readers are probably aware of the gory details. The villainess of *The Devil Wears Prada*, wearing her signature severe pageboy hairdo and sitting in her Mussolini-style office, invites the great unwashed to enter a lottery to win two seats ("the two best seats in the house") at a $40,000-per-person Obama fundraiser at the fabulous New York home of *Sex and the City* star Sarah Jessica Parker.

Everything imaginable designed not to appeal to the average American voter is in evidence: The chic Manhattan venue, Wintour's plummy British accent ("Mee-chelle Obama") and condescending manner, the noblesse oblige of a place at the table for two people who can't afford one. Indeed, it is difficult to decide which is worse: the spectacle of rich Democrats dining with two doyennes of High Fashion on behalf of the 99 percent, or the calculated insult to the poor slobs who would demean themselves for a seat at their table. ("After dinner, you and your guest are invited to join us at a private concert with Mariah Carey," reads an email from the first lady.)

The Scrapbook can put this down to a certain tone deafness on the part of the notoriously imperious Anna Wintour—who, we assume, is now an American citizen and welcome to participate in the politics of her host country. But was it only four years ago that candidate Barack Obama was the quintessence of cool, attracting the allegiance of just about every celeb-

rity known to the pages of *US Weekly*? There was will.i.am's "Yes We Can" video, Little Stevie Wonder's "Barack Obama" anthem, Oprah ("He is The One") Winfrey, Madonna, General Colin ("He is a Transformational Figure") Powell, Julia Roberts. It was as if a member of the Rat Pack had flown down from Vegas in his private jet to run for president.

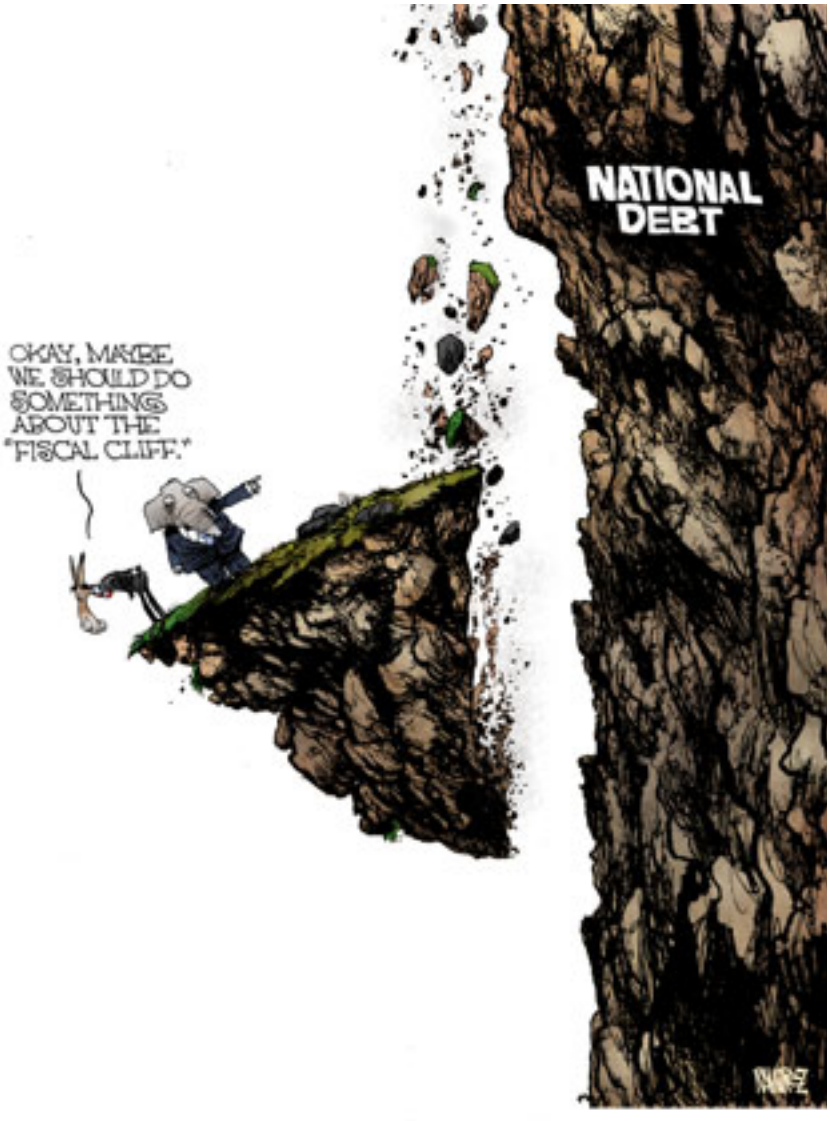
And now this: a frankly frightening fashionista from Swinging London extending the hand of charity to some humble Democrat, a lottery for the privilege of watching her pick at her food. The Scrapbook seldom extrapolates big conclusions from little specimens, but if the Obama campaign thinks the Anna Wintour Lottery Video paves the road to victory, it's in worse peril than we suspect. ♦

California Taxpayers Revolt Again

Lost in the hubbub surrounding the war for Wisconsin was the news that San Diego and San Jose—the second and third largest cities in California, respectively—both voted in major public employee pension reforms last Tuesday. And even though the cities are Democratic bastions, the referenda passed with overwhelming majorities.

In sunny San Diego, where the city government is suffering from a $2.2 billion pension shortfall, 66 percent of voters approved a plan to replace guaranteed pensions for new hires with 401(k) plans (i.e., the standard retirement plan these days for private sector workers). The shift should save $950 million over the next 30 years.

In Silicon Valley's San Jose, voters approved an even more drastic reform—and with even greater support. Seventy-one percent of voters came out in favor of a plan to move new hires to 401(k) plans, and to require current workers "to pay up to 16 percent of their salaries to keep their retirement plan or accept more modest benefits," in the words of the Associated Press. The city will also now be able to temporarily suspend cost-of-living pension increases in the event of dire fiscal conditions.



"This is really important to our taxpayers," said San Jose mayor Chuck Reed, a Democrat (a Democrat!), who backed the initiative. He's not kidding. The *San Jose Mercury News* notes that the city expects a shortfall of more than $20 million in 2013 and that "a key deficit driver has been the yearly pension bill that has more than tripled from $73 million to $245 million in a decade, far outpacing the 20 percent revenue growth and gobbling more than a fifth of the city's general fund."

The results in mostly blue Wisconsin and on the Left Coast show that even Democrats are waking up to the urgent need to curb public sector benefits. San Diego County voted 54 percent for Obama in 2008; Santa Clara County, home to San Jose, went 70 percent for the president. Yet voters in both liberal redoubts have now overwhelmingly approved significant structural changes to public sector benefits.

Has California suddenly turned right? That's doubtful, alas. But perhaps the left now realizes that doing something to rein in public sector benefits is essential if we are to maintain even rudimentary public services. Oh, and Golden State vot-

ers rejected a $1-per-pack tax hike on cigarettes. On, California! ♦

Ray Bradbury, 1920-2012

Ray Bradbury, who died last week at 91, was "the writer most responsible for bringing modern science fiction into the literary mainstream," in the words of the *New York Times*. Which is certainly true: When he began writing stories in the late 1930s, Bradbury's fiction appeared in pulp magazines, very much at the periphery of polite literary society. Just a week before his death he published an essay about his writing life in the *New Yorker*. Bradbury's fanciful stories and novels—about the world beyond our world, the shape of things to come—struck a resonant, and enduring, chord with readers.

The Scrapbook's appreciation of Ray Bradbury takes a different form, however. Coming of age during the Depression, the young, bookish Bradbury couldn't afford to attend college. Instead, he wrote later, "libraries raised me." In the public libraries of Los Angeles, he immersed himself in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. And at UCLA's Powell Library, where students could rent typewriters for $.20 per hour, Bradbury spent $9.80 to pound out a story about the systematic destruction of books in a dystopian future, which was later expanded into his best-known novel, *Fahrenheit 451*.

He never forgot, and never stopped extolling, the value of libraries in a free society. For Ray Bradbury, books and reading and libraries were intrinsic to life itself, nurturing a talent that enthralled the world. ♦

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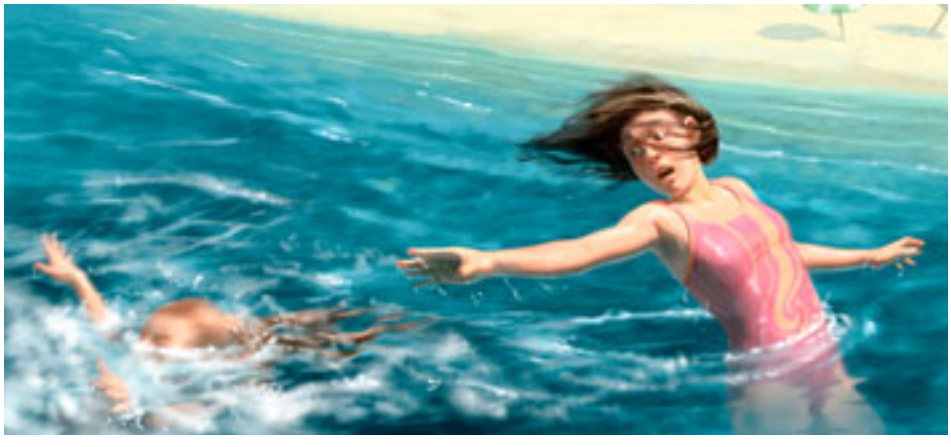
The Rescuer

When I was 12, I read a book that changed my life. Full of adventure and wisdom, it had me enthralled from the start. It was not a volume to be devoured in one sitting, but one to be savored, even kept for a lifetime and returned to often for reference.

No, it wasn't the Bible, though its entry into my life was nothing short of providential. It appeared mysteriously inside my desk one day at school, and from then on I used it as an escape from the endless drone of grammar and algebra lessons. *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook* was its title, and to this day, I value the lessons I learned from it more than anything else I learned that year. It taught me how to fight an alligator, escape from a submerged vehicle, build a primitive shelter, and survive jumping off a bridge, among other useful and impressive feats.



CHRIS BEATTRICE

The more I learned, the more I longed to put my newfound skills to use. My ego had been stoked by the feats of that ultimate boy-hero, Harry Potter, and I believed my youth to be no inhibition. I saw myself gracefully springing into action after a scream rang out or a crash, saving some terrified person from a ghastly fate. I began secretly wishing for a small-scale yet life-threatening disaster to occur just so that I could save the day.

If I went for a hike with my family, I insisted on walking toward the front of the group so that I might be the first to face a wild animal. If we drove over a bridge, I cracked open my window to make for an easier escape should we plunge into the water below.

If we went out to dinner, I'd closely observe our fellow diners for signs of choking, in the hope of demonstrating a superior Heimlich Maneuver. Or better still, an emergency tracheotomy!

I thrilled at the shock value of having to perform this simple procedure by actually slitting open someone's throat. The scene, I imagined, would take place in a hibachi-style restaurant well stocked with large, sharp knives that could easily be appropriated for the purpose. A drinking straw would do for a breathing tube, and after a few puffs . . . life saved! The paramedics would be so impressed they would hang a plaque with my name on it in the fire hall. It seemed quite straightforward. All I had to do was wait for the right moment.

Little did I know, my moment would come sooner than I'd imagined. Not long after I discovered the survival handbook, I was at the beach with my cousins. As the others played in the sand, 6-year-old Jordan and I decided to venture into the ocean. We were in an unguarded section of beach, so I promised our parents that we wouldn't go out past where we could easily stand.

We were splashing in the surf in water no higher than our waists when something strange happened. Two waves suddenly loomed out of nowhere and came crashing in from opposite angles. When the tide went out, so did Jordan. The force knocked her off her feet, and the current sucked her in.

In a split second, I saw what was happening. I was up against a textbook rip current, and I knew what to do—swim parallel to the shore to escape the pull. But Jordan didn't know that. My knowledge was useless.

Falling back on instinct, I launched myself into the receding water, grasping for any part of her I could reach. As I watched her disappear feet-first into a rush of foam, I managed to catch something—her hair. Hanging on for dear life, I yanked her toward shore. The force of my effort propelled us backward, and she and I landed in a heaving pile on the sand.

"Are you okay?" asked a middle-aged man who had been wading nearby. "You're lucky you caught her!"

Vaguely, it dawned on me, my heart still pounding, that he had been the sole witness of my heroic act. Though the beach was littered with people, only he seemed to have noticed what had happened. No admiring multitude was materializing to praise my aplomb under pressure. There would be no plaque.

But as I turned to see dripping, frightened Jordan finally cough and sputter and catch her breath, I realized that I didn't care.

Julianne Dudley

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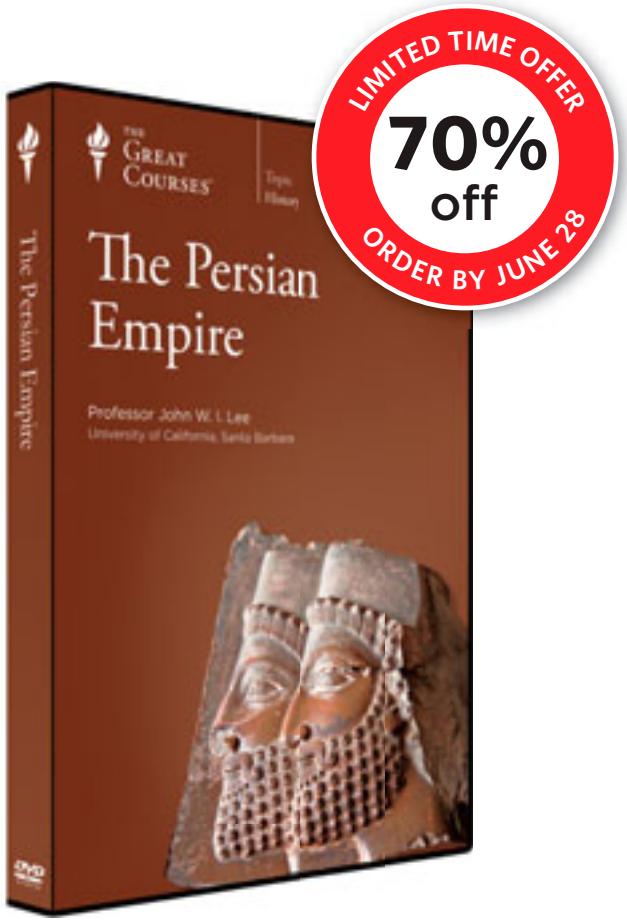

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the weekly Standard

Leaker-in-Chief

The Justice Department has launched an investigation into the White House's handling of classified information. The spur seems to have been the June 1 *New York Times* article by David Sanger, sourced to current and former U.S. officials, revealing sensitive details about the Stuxnet and Flame computer worms and other parts of the Obama administration's cyber campaign to disrupt and spy on Iran's nuclear weapons program. By the way, none of the officials, according to Sanger, "would allow their names to be used because the effort remains highly classified, and parts of it continue to this day."

Last week, legislators on both sides of the aisle deplored the administration's inability, or unwillingness, to keep national security secrets. Leaders of the Senate and House intelligence committees—Senators Saxby Chambliss and Dianne Feinstein and Representatives Mike Rogers and C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger—released a statement noting, "We have become increasingly concerned at the continued leaks regarding sensitive intelligence programs and activities, including specific details of sources and methods."

GETTY IMAGES / CHARLES OMMANNEY

In his June 8 press conference Obama tried to push back against the gathering storm. "The notion that my White House would purposely release classified national security information is offensive," he said. "It's wrong."

The president and the *New York Times* can't both be right. If the president is correct, then the paper of record, which has so far seemed to be a willing receptacle for the administration's leaks, must be printing fabrications. Last month the same newspaper detailed how the president directs U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan and Yemen based on a classified "kill list" of terror suspects, a story based on information from "three dozen" of the president's "current and former advisers." So the latest *Times* article on Iran, revealing what the administration has now tacitly acknowledged as a joint U.S.-Israeli program, looks to be merely the most recent installment in a campaign of intentional leaks damaging to our national security.

The administration, needless to say, sees things differently. From the perspective of Obama's handlers, and perhaps of their friends in the press, these leaks are spellbinding episodes in a Hollywood-worthy narrative of the president as ever-vigilant superhero, with his finger on the button, ready at a moment's notice to bring the full weight of American power to bear on our adversaries, so that we may all sleep safely at night. It's epic, all right. But it's spin.

All White Houses engage in political stagecraft, but this is something else. The Obama administration can rightly claim the crown of laurels for killing Osama bin Laden—even if the program and personnel that brought down the al Qaeda chief were in place long before Obama came to office. But due credit was not enough for the Obama team. To craft a story about a heroic president and his leading part in American history, the administration rolled out the red carpet for moviemakers like *Hurt Locker* director Kathryn Bigelow, and gorged the working press with details. It was this information that disclosed the role of a local doctor whose efforts on behalf of an American clandestine operation earned him a 33-year sentence in a Pakistani prison.

That physician is not the only casualty of the White House's vanity. The administration boasted of a mole who had infiltrated Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and helped thwart an attack against the United States. The man was working for British and Saudi intelligence and details of his role not only damaged the ongoing operations of allied intelligence services, but also put the lives of the agent and others at risk.

Who knows how the information disclosed in the *Times*'s recent Stuxnet story may come back to harm our citizens and interests, or our ally Israel's? But the message broadcast to friends, and potential friends, is clear enough. If you fail in your dangerous mission, you may die. If you succeed, you may earn a supporting role in the Obama reelection campaign.

"Why else would they want to do this, except to enhance

the image of the president six months before the election?" Sen. John McCain said in an interview with The Weekly Standard last week. "Why else reveal the name of this Pakistani doctor? You can only draw one conclusion. The purpose of all these leaks is to tell a story about a brave, lonely warrior with all this awesome responsibility."

McCain, who has called for a special prosecutor, has been the administration's most vocal critic. The White House, says McCain, "got mad when I said these leaks were all meant to make the president look good." But that's the simplest explanation for the leaks: The White House has run an information operation that has put us and our allies at risk with no obvious benefit except to the prospects of Obama's reelection.

McCain says he is cheered by the "widespread bipartisan anger at the leaks," but Feinstein and other Democrats, such as John Kerry, say that the leaks are just a function of lax discipline and the administration's poor housekeeping. However, there is evidence that the White House knows quite well what it's doing.

In an excerpt from his just published book, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power*, from which the cyber war story was adapted for the *Times*, Sanger recounts how Pentagon officials "fumed" when White House counterterrorism czar John Brennan apparently gave away "operational secrets never shared outside the tribe." Defense Secretary Robert Gates confronted the senior administration official he perhaps believed in the best position to enact, or at least forward, his recommendation for a "new strategic communications approach." And what was that strategic approach? asked White House national security adviser Thomas Donilon. "Shut the f—up," said Gates.

In other words, Defense Secretary Robert Gates thought President Obama's national security adviser was responsible, directly or indirectly, for the leaks. And if Donilon is responsible, the buck stops with President Obama.

To paraphrase the president, that his White House would purposely release classified national security information *is* offensive. And it's wrong.

—Lee Smith

Beyond Wisconsin

Last Tuesday night, shortly after conceding defeat in the election to recall Wisconsin's Republican governor, Scott Walker, Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett was confronted by a supporter. According to *Politico*, the woman asked Barrett if she could slap him. Barrett responded, "I'd rather you hug me." The television footage reveals that Barrett was understandably startled when the woman went ahead and slapped him. You'd be hard-pressed to come up with a better metaphor for how the relationship between public sector unions and Democrats is unraveling.

A slap to the face for Tom Barrett

For all the talk of a polarized America, it turns out opposition to public sector unions is broad, deep, and bipartisan. After staking his governorship on union reforms, Walker won his recall election by a convincing 7 points—a wider margin than when he won the office in 2010, and this time amidst heavy turnout and against fierce national opposition. The takeaway is that Wisconsin voters approve of Walker's curbing the power of public employee unions. Liberal pundits have tied themselves in knots to avoid this obvious conclusion—the popular narrative on the left is to cite exit polling data that shows Wisconsin's polite electorate simply found the idea of recall elections distasteful.

This alibi conveniently ignores other telling results from last Tuesday's voting. While all eyes were on Wisconsin, San Jose and San Diego voters overwhelmingly reined in the exorbitant retirement packages of their unionized city workers. The California pension measures passed by 71 and 68 percent, respectively. There is no way to spin that result: A substantial number of California Democrats voted against public sector unions, and the pension curbs were backed by key Democratic politicians in those cities. Two days after the measures in San Jose and San Diego passed, Los Angeles mayor and Obama campaign co-chair Antonio Villaraigosa asked officials to fast track sweeping public pension reforms in his city as well.

The other revelation is that the union political agenda isn't supported by . . . union members. According to exit polls, 38 percent of Walker's votes came from households that include union members. (Given that the exit polls underestimated Walker's margin of victory, the percentage of union workers supporting Walker may be even higher.)

MSNBC's Ed Schultz demanded that union supporters of Walker "explain to your country and your union why the hell you did that." There are a number of obvious explanations. One is that collective bargaining in the private sector is very different than in the public sector. As late as 1955, George Meany, the former head of the AFL-CIO, argued it's "impossible to bargain collectively with the government" and Franklin D. Roosevelt opposed public sector unions on principle. Government workers have always been relatively well compensated, and unlike blue-collar union workers, they are guarded against exploitation by civil service protections. Private sector unions don't elect their bosses; public workers vote for the officials with whom they will be bargaining. And private laborers are paid out of business earnings. Public sector workers are paid by increasingly hard-pressed taxpayers—upwards of $3 trillion in public pension liabilities threaten to bankrupt governments across the country these days.

Walker's union reforms have also conclusively demonstrated that many public sector union members don't want to be in unions. Coercive dues have always been key to the American labor movement, even as unions have self-righteously insisted workers want unions. In 2010, one of organized labor's most prominent thinkers, Chicago lawyer Thomas Geoghegan, broke ranks with the labor movement by suggesting in an article in the *Nation* that it should be a civil right *not* to be forced to pay union dues. Geoghegan speculated that the number of free riders would be comparable to the German workforce, where only about 20 percent don't pay dues.

That estimate seems to be low. Since Walker's reforms made union dues for public employees voluntary, Wisconsin membership in the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) "fell to 28,745 in February [2012] from 62,818 in March 2011," according to the *Wall Street Journal*. That's a 54 percent drop in membership in just over a year, and other public sector unions in Wisconsin have seen precipitous declines as well. In an election cycle where Democrats are whining about the pernicious influence of money in politics, the GOP can point to Walker's reforms and note that Democrats have spent decades spending campaign donations extracted against the will of public employees and the taxpayers who pay their salaries. AFSCME was the single-

largest donor in the 2010 election cycle, spending $87.5 million. If Wisconsin's union reform contagion spreads across the country, one of the Democratic party's biggest sources of campaign cash will dry up, and our state and local governments would be in much better fiscal health.

—Mark Hemingway

Slow Learner

President Obama has been touted by friends and family as the smartest man ever to sit in the White House. Perhaps. Yet he surely is the slowest learner to gain the presidency and probably the most intellectually inflexible. Obama is not only presiding over the most sluggish economic recovery in 80 years, but the economic future looks even worse. In May, a woefully small number of jobs were created, the unemployment rate rose to 8.2 percent, and the rate of growth in the first quarter of 2012 was shaved from 2.2 percent to 1.9 percent. Meanwhile, the Congressional Budget Office warned that if Obama leaves his economic program in place, a recession in 2013 is all but certain.

His response? Let's do more of the same. This means a tidal wave of tax increases would hit the economy. The Bush era tax cuts for incomes over $200,000 ($250,000 for couples) would expire, boosting the top rate to 42 percent, when deduction phaseouts are included. And two Obamacare increases would take effect, a 0.9 percent hike in the Medicare tax and a 2.9 percent surcharge on investment income.

That's not all. Obama is bristling with plans for "some things we do better together," his euphemism for jacking up spending on anything he can think of except defense. Government programs, he suggested last week in Chicago, are "what has made this country great." His 10-year budget would increase the national debt by $6 trillion.

True, the president routinely feigns love for free markets. "We believe in the marketplace," he declared at a fundraiser with Bill Clinton last week. "We believe in entrepreneurship and rewarding risk-taking." This was followed, as always, by a "but" and the claim that government is at the core of what made America "an economic superpower."

No doubt Obama believes that. Having never been an entrepreneur or risk-taker, he hasn't a clue about what prompts them to invest their time and money in ways that produce growth and jobs. And he's too ideologically committed to government programs to find out how the private economy works.

Which leads us to President Reagan, the record of economic recoveries around the world, and suggested reading over the summer to broaden Obama's economic understanding.

As Obama must know, the Reagan recovery was a stunning success. And it wasn't spurred by government spending. It was based on a 25 percent cut in individual income tax rates, phased in over three years, and initial spending cuts followed by efforts to curb spending growth.

Five months before Reagan was reelected, the jobless rate had fallen from a high of 10.8 percent and was heading to 7.2 percent on Election Day. Reagan was talking about "morning in America." Five months before the 2012 election, Obama is reduced to concocting misleading economic claims to justify his reelection—or changing the subject.

Reagan's economic record is not unique. Harvard economists Alberto Alesina and Silvia Ardagna studied policies aimed at stimulating the economy in 21 countries between 1970 and 2007. Their conclusions were unequivocal. "Fiscal stimuli based upon tax cuts are more likely to increase growth than those based on spending increases," they wrote. "We would argue that the current stimulus package in the United States is too much tilted in the direction of [federal] spending rather than tax cuts." They added that spending cuts are "much more effective than tax increases in stabilizing debt and avoiding economic downturns."

The Alesina-Ardagna study is hardly a secret. It may not have come to the president's attention, but his economic advisers are bound to know of it. In any event, it hasn't had an iota of influence in the Obama White House.

But there's still a chance Obama could learn the error of his economic ways. Every summer, he puts together a list of serious books he intends to read while on vacation. Last year, the list included books on civility, migrations, and a novel by Geraldine Brooks.

This summer, the president would benefit from including *Job Creation: How It Really Works and Why Government Doesn't Understand It*. The authors are David Newton, a finance professor at Westmont College in California, and Andrew Puzder, CEO of CKE Restaurants.

They make two main points. One is that "private enterprise, unencumbered by excessive government intervention, will create jobs. Period!" The other: "If job creation and economic prosperity were the result of government action and stimulus, currently we should be experiencing one of the greatest economic booms in our history."

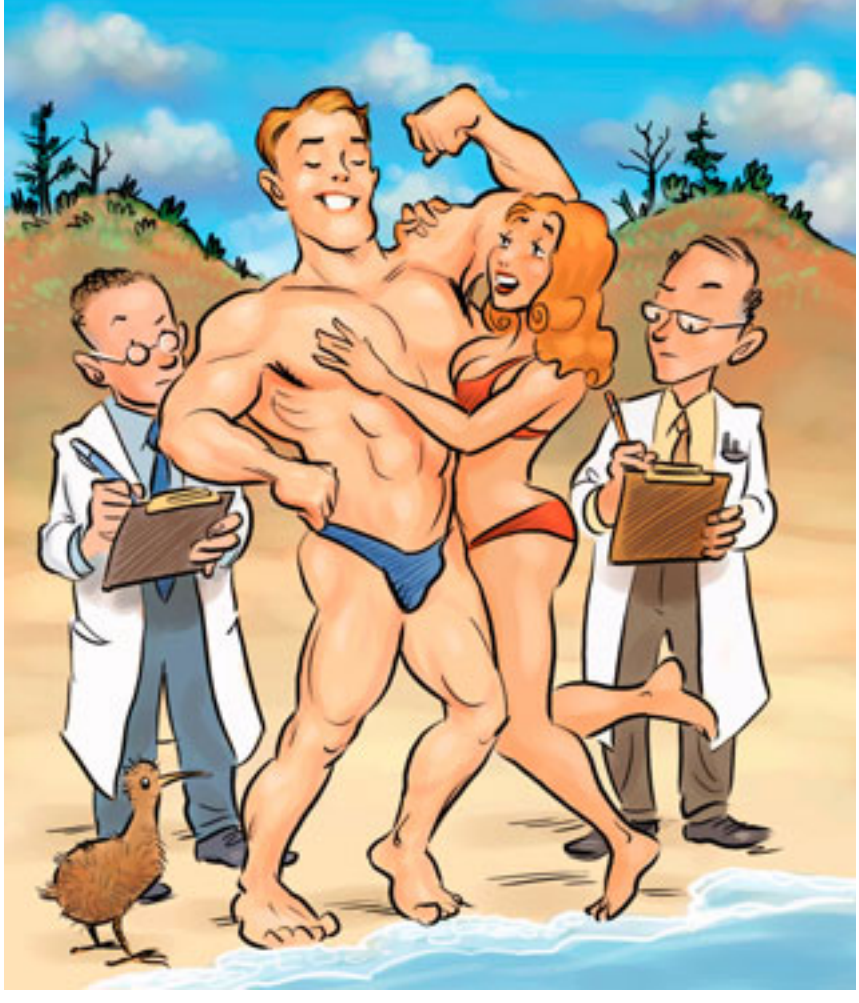
When the freshman class of House Republicans elected in 2010 arrived in Washington, Representative Paul Ryan gave a copy of *Economics in One Lesson* by Henry Hazlitt to each of them. Hazlitt's overriding lesson: There is a "persistent tendency of men to see only the immediate effects of a given policy . . . and to neglect to inquire what the long-run effects of that policy will be." If Obama is as smart as he's supposed to be, he'll ask Ryan for a copy.

—Fred Barnes

BS in New Zealand

Social science run amok.

BY HARVEY MANSFIELD



Actually BS here stands for "benevolent sexism." An article by two New Zealand psychologists has come my way that deserves to become a classic of social science. The title "Why are Benevolent Sexists Happier?" promised to warm my conservative heart, and it did—but not so much with approbation as with wonder at the whole enterprise of social science.

The two psychologists are Matthew Hammond and Chris Sibley, the latter being the professor and senior author. Together they bear witness to the fact that science is a collective enterprise, not about individual glory. Still, they have made an important discovery. They have found that precisely in the "egalitarian nation" of New Zealand, men and women who hold to benevolent sexism are happier than the nonsexist egalitarians who do not. Benevolent sexism is the belief that women are weaker than men but also warmer and more nurturing, and that men are stronger and more protective. This belief is opposed to hostile sexism (dubbed HS), which is aggressive blaming by men of women who are not so warm and who, forsaking their subordinate gender role, try to compete with men.

To prove this point, or even to state it, the article deals with perceptions. It's not about whether women are or are not weaker than men but whether they are *perceived* to be. The article says nothing about whether women are in truth weaker than men, or what "weaker" means: less bodily strength or the ability to live longer, for example. Natural science would address the matter by asking whether the perception is true. After all, an untrue "perception" is not a perception but an illusion. But social science deals with perceptions whose truth is disputed, such as whether women are weaker than men in any relevant way. Its solution is to draw a distinction between fact and value, fact being subject to agreement, value not. Yet to be scientific, social science must claim to be truth. Since it defines truth to be what scientists agree upon, it has to find agreement where there is disagreement. We can agree that sexist men and women "perceive" that women are weaker and that this matters. The trouble is that "perceive" as used in social science really means "believe," whether true or not.

Thus in the article the evidence cited is from a survey of what New Zealanders believe, and the fancy analysis using regression models never goes beyond what people there believe, or say they believe. Sexism is a belief in gender inequality, true or not. Happiness is what people say they have, truly or not. The paradox presented is that those who believe in gender equality can believe they are happy if, perhaps temporarily, they abandon the belief in equality and

TIM FOLEY

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become benevolent to the weaker or stronger sex. To generalize from this article: Since every interesting "fact" is merely belief, every term or concept in social science is so fragile that it crumbles into dust once you try to grasp it.

At one point the authors' mask of senseless objectivity slips off, and instead of calling New Zealand "egalitarian," they call it "supposedly egalitarian." But is this a reproach, assuming that a consistently egalitarian society is possible, or is it resignation to the fact that it is not? The authors mustn't say. They are social scientists; they confine themselves to reporting beliefs. But no! They don't even know whether the beliefs are beliefs rather than facts. The fact-value distinction leads to the disappearance of fact as well as value.

Common sense would suppose that some questions of fact and of value are difficult to decide, and these are disputed; others are not difficult and ought not to be disputed. But it's a fact that human beings are disputatious and sometimes resist the obvious. On these occasions they have to be recalled to "common sense." An example would be the common-sense fact that men and women are different, much in dispute today. For science, however, common sense is the chief enemy. This is true for natural science, which effortlessly replaces the world we see with the naked eye by constructing a conceived world abstracted from human bias (or "common sense") through reliance on the microscope and the telescope.

This abstraction is not so easy for social science, which is forced to rely on the naked eye. Social science is often unjustly disdained by natural scientists for its clumsy inexactness, yet in fact it performs a necessary and valuable function. Social science guards natural science from the resistance and possible retaliation of human prejudice, which goes by the name of common sense. To do this social science cannot dismiss common sense but has to struggle with it. Its challenge is to replace disputable fact with indisputable concepts applicable to human life.

Our article on benevolent sexism illustrates the comedy of the struggle, as terms chosen to be indisputable turn out to be disputable. Benevolent sexists are "happier," says the title—a common-sense word. But "happy" turns out to be "life satisfaction," not a term you hear on the street. Life satisfaction is desired by both sexes, our authors say, but under sexism men get status and wealth, women get protection and "resources" (i.e., the wealth of men). More simply, men get access to power, women get security. Both goals are forms of "power"; so power is the universal goal of both sexes, providing life satisfaction and discerned by science. Yet the point of the article is that under BS men are satisfied to be strong, women to be weak. So our authors contrive a scientific "mechanism" or "Differential Process Model," which shows that men benefit directly from sexism as individuals, while women get life satisfaction from a "system justification" telling them that they benefit as part of the system, despite the "cognitive dissonance" they must suffer as individuals who are weaker. Men don't need to justify themselves because as the dominant group they get the subordinate group to internalize their "ideology." (But what is an ideology if not a system justification?)

At the end of the article the authors bare their fangs and assert the 'malevolent nature' of BS. Women should beware of the 'tempting qualities' of BS that make them willing servants and victims of men. There's no such thing as Benevolent Sexism. After all, our authors do mean to say that BS in social science is BS as said in the street.

Research shows—"Glick et al. (2000)"—that women in 19 unequal nations endorse BS to protect themselves against HS. Then why on earth would women cheat themselves, in an egalitarian society where they can do better, with the belief that their weakness is "fair and equitable"? Is it because women are weak of mind or, on the contrary, because they are sensible? The trouble is that, for our authors, life satisfaction for human beings is defined by what men desire—power—just as it is for feminists today. Since men always desire power, they are ready with HS (remember, hostile sexism) should BS not do the trick. At the end of the article the authors bare their fangs and assert the "malevolent nature" of BS. Women should beware of the "tempting qualities" of BS that make them willing servants and victims of men. There's no such thing as Benevolent Sexism. After all, our authors do mean to say that BS in social science is BS as said in the street. Women are wrong to cheat themselves by succumbing to it, and when doing so they are deluded to believe they are happy.

Social science does its best to explain, which means explain away, what common sense would call evil. That is its main purpose, because common sense, its chief enemy, has for its main purpose the task of distinguishing good from evil. But here we see social science cannot quite succeed in value-neutral description, and our authors—for all their scientific caution and with some relish—conclude by calling a spade a spade.

Our article declares itself to be a part of Ambivalent Sexism Theory, "extending the innovative work of Napier et al. (2010)." To answer the survey on which it is based, 6,100 New Zealanders—the real authors of the article—gave their time anonymously but with the incentive of a "$500 grocery voucher prize draw." Just one piddling prize for the whole crowd? For deciding the question of sex differences that the "innovative work" of all the poets and philosophers in human civilization has addressed? ♦

Walker Wins Again

. . . and has some advice for Mitt Romney.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES & JOHN MCCORMACK

Scott Walker supporters cheer early returns.

Waukesha, Wisc.

Forty-nine minutes after the polls closed in Wisconsin on June 5, Scott Walker heard the news: He was the first governor to have been elected twice in one term. Exit polls broadcast by the media had suggested a dead heat with challenger Tom Barrett. "In your mind, you get yourself psyched up for a long night," Walker recalled in an interview with THE WEEKLY STANDARD. But less than an hour later, R.J. Johnson, Walker's top strategist, gave him a hug and told Walker and his wife that NBC had called the race. "I looked at Tonette and said, 'Thank God it's over.'"

Walker's wife wasn't relieved—yet. "That can't be," she said repeatedly in disbelief before being convinced when someone switched the channel to confirm the news.

Walker's victory brought to an end a rancorous struggle over the power of public employee unions that had consumed the state for 16 months and made him a leading spokesman of conservative reformers. In his victory speech, Walker hailed the results as a vindication of courageous political leadership. He then urged Wisconsinites to heed the better angels of their nature, as he announced a bipartisan bratwurst and beer summit with the state legislature at the governor's mansion.

But so raw were emotions that even in victory the mere mention of Barrett drew loud boos from some in the crowd. "No, no, no, no," Walker said, chastening them. "The election is over. It's time to move Wisconsin forward." Barrett, the mayor of Milwaukee, encountered even stronger emotions at his Election Night party, where he was slapped in the face by one of his supporters for conceding too quickly.

When all the votes were finally counted, Walker had beaten Barrett 53 percent to 46 percent—a one-point improvement on his margin of victory over Barrett during the historic Republican wave in 2010. If Walker had received the same number of votes that he did in 2010, he would have lost the recall. Barrett increased his 2010 haul by 158,000 votes, but Walker gained an additional 206,000. He couldn't have hoped for a more decisive victory.

"It's still pretty surreal," he said the day after the election. "I'm glad I can get back to work."

The recall ended up being largely a referendum on Walker's policy of balancing the budget by curbing the power of government unions, despite Barrett's best efforts to change the subject. To the extent that Barrett's campaign had a focus, it was an ongoing investigation of former Walker aides accused of engaging in political activities on public time. Nine out of 10 voters who favored the law limiting collective bargaining for public employees voted for Walker, 9 out of 10 who opposed the changes voted for Barrett, according to exit polling.

The result was far from inevitable. A year ago Barrett probably would have won a referendum on Walker's reforms. In March 2011, only two months into Walker's term, public opinion had turned sharply against the governor and his policies. Walker's approval rating dropped to the 40s, and polls showed Barrett beating Walker in a rematch. Even as Democratic Wisconsin state senators entered their third week of hiding in Illinois to block a vote on Walker's budget bill, with protesters occupying the capitol building, a Rasmussen poll showed voters supported Democrats over Walker 52 to 44 percent. Walker's policy was even more unpopular: Voters opposed the attempt to "weaken the collective bargaining rights of state employees" 57 percent to 39 percent, according to Rasmussen.

Fast-forward to late May 2012, and the numbers had flipped. Voters favored "limiting collective bargaining for most public employees" 55 percent to 41 percent, according to a Marquette University law school poll, which accurately predicted Walker would win by 7 points.

What accounts for this dramatic shift in public opinion? According to

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Democrats and many in the press, it all came down to Walker's fundraising advantage—as if voters in the state hadn't given the issues much thought until they saw TV ads this spring. But this claim doesn't withstand scrutiny. Both sides spent tens of millions of dollars over the past year in a series of campaigns—first in a race for a state supreme court judge in April (which conservatives narrowly won) and then in a round of state senate recalls in August (in which Republicans hung on to their majority despite being outspent $23 million to $20 million).

Moreover, the central issues at stake in the recall—spending, taxes, public education, unemployment, and the "rights" of government unions—had been widely debated in the press and among voters. The final Marquette poll found a highly informed electorate: Eighty-four percent said they regularly discuss politics with family and friends, and more than 8 out of 10 had watched the local news in the past week.

If Walker's budget had harmed public schools, as union activists and Democrats warned last spring, voters would have known, and there's little doubt that Walker would have lost. But the opposite happened. Before the 2011 school year began, story after story popped up in the Wisconsin press about how schools used Walker's reforms to balance their budgets without laying off teachers or making painful program cuts.

"Everything we changed didn't touch the children," the finance director of the Brown Deer school district in the Milwaukee suburbs told The Weekly Standard last July. Under a collective bargaining agreement, she said, "We could never have negotiated that—never ever." A few days before the election, the president of Brown Deer's teachers' union told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: "Overall morale is not bad because of [Walker's collective bargaining law]. We didn't lose any jobs and class sizes are the same."

In Neenah, the school district saved $1.8 million by adopting a new health insurance plan—savings that allowed the school board to avoid layoffs and to raise the base teacher pay by 18 percent.

After a full schoolyear with Walker's reforms in effect, his opponents couldn't explain why they were bad. Six days out from the election, Tom Barrett couldn't name a single school hurt by Walker's reforms. After two attempts to dodge the question, he finally gave up. "We can do an analysis and get back to you on that," Barrett told The Weekly Standard. The mayor also refused to say how he would have balanced the budget and couldn't name a single initiative he'd pursue to spur job creation as governor.

Walker's reforms achieved enough savings that when property tax bills went out around Christmas, many taxpayers saw their taxes significantly drop for the first time in over a decade. Though Walker's opponents claimed his policies were an assault on democracy, in a very real sense they expanded democracy—something many in the national media failed to understand. With the restrictions to collective bargaining, unions had lost the power to veto changes to their benefits. That power now resided with elected school boards. Before Walker, the state's property tax cap essentially allowed automatic tax increases. Under Walker, tax increases became subject to local referenda.

Ultimately, Walker won for a simple reason: He proposed policies, implemented them, and they worked.

Walker agrees with those who believe the results last week make Wisconsin a potential Republican pickup in November. But in order to win the state, Mitt Romney will have to campaign in a way that's consistent with what Wisconsin voters approved with their retention of Walker. He wants Romney to run as a reformer, to campaign on bold policy proposals, and to resist the temptation to run safe. "It's not enough to just be the other guy," says Walker. "He has to offer a plan, he has to show a willingness to take on the big challenges facing the country. I think he can win here if he does that."

Walker says he hopes Romney will propose deeper tax cuts than he has laid out thus far. "I'd like to see him slash marginal tax rates so that we could see the kind of growth that we saw under Ronald Reagan after the recession in 1981 and 1982," Walker says.

Walker rejects the advice Romney is getting from many Republican strategists to make the election a simple referendum on Obama and the economy. "The consultants will tell you that—hands down. But I think he's got to run on a bold plan and on big ideas." Romney needs to win "on a mandate, if you will, to govern. Romney has that background. He's capable of doing big, bold things. . . . He can't say I'm a *Republican* like Scott Walker and hope to win. He has to say that I'm a *reformer* like Scott Walker. The 'R' after his name has to stand for 'reformer,' not just 'Republican.'"

Romney might want to listen. There is no doubt Walker is in a much stronger position having survived the recall than he would have been without it. Even before the election he was a huge draw for Republican and conservative groups. When he headlined a Heritage Foundation dinner in Des Moines last October, the organization raised more money than it had at any event outside of Washington, D.C.

And now? "I can assure you that his stock as a fundraiser and speaker will skyrocket," says Cameron Sutton, a top Iowa Republican fundraiser who was part of the group that tried to recruit New Jersey governor Chris Christie to run for president. "What we like the most about him is that when he took office he was unwilling to compromise with the liberals and trade unions, and he stuck with his conservative roots. This was key to his victory in 2010 and again in the recall."

Walker says he's eager to campaign for Mitt Romney but won't be part of the Republican ticket. "My wife would kill me! I just had more than half the state vote for me—we made four million voter contacts. People put their lives on hold to help us win. I couldn't walk away from them and from my responsibilities here." ♦

Beware the Union Label

Especially in the public sector.

BY JAY COST

What does Wisconsin governor Scott Walker's smashing victory in the recall election mean for November? Republicans, naturally, are triumphant, seeing proof that conservative enthusiasm is maintaining its 2010 levels as well as a successful trial run for their get-out-the-vote operations in the Badger State. Liberal Democrats, predictably, are skeptical that the Wisconsin race has any lessons for November and point to exit poll data suggesting recall voters preferred Obama to Mitt Romney. MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell went so far as to call President Obama the "big winner" in the Wisconsin race.

A losing message: Mayor Tom Barrett

The Democrats' argument is weaker. To begin with, the exit poll question they cite was poorly worded and does not provide an apples-to-apples comparison with other measures of the horse race. Public opinion polling shows a tight contest in the Badger State, with the president under 50 percent in the RealClearPolitics average of the most recent polls.

What's more, the Walker victory in Wisconsin points to a possible rout in November on a much deeper level—deeper than the fickle horse race polls and closer to what the 2012 contest is actually about.

To appreciate this, consider what Governor Walker accomplished. He did not simply cut spending by requiring government workers to chip in more for their health care and pensions; he also instituted structural reforms of labor relations to keep spending down in the future and then fought back three attempts from the left to undo his good work. The liberals tried to take over the state legislature via recall elections; they turned the reelection campaign of Justice David Prosser into a proxy war against the union reforms; and they went after Scott Walker this week. In all three instances, they failed.

Public sector unions on the state and local levels have enjoyed enormous privileges for their 50 years of existence. Like their private sector counterparts, they have used collective bargaining to maximize their pay and benefits. Yet unlike trade and industrial unions, public sector unions essentially bargain with themselves. They are such an integral part of the Democratic coalition—delivering to Democratic candidates and causes not just money but massive numbers of voters and volunteers—that the party dare not defy them. Thus, "negotiations" between Democratic-led governments and public sector unions are really anything but.

The result has been duly perverse. For one thing, the Democratic party has found a way to pump money out of the public treasury to finance its campaigns; for another, state and local budgets are continually expanded beyond all reason. In the days of the 19th-century urban machines, this would have been called graft. Today, liberals and labor leaders call it "union rights."

That phrase points to the great rhetorical scam of the modern Democratic party. While consistently couching its vision in communitarian language, the party nevertheless raids the public treasury and bends the vast governmental regulatory machinery to deliver billions of dollars worth of payoffs every year for the benefit not of everybody, but of fellow Democrats.

Walker has cut to the heart of this political Frankenstein's monster. More important, he fought back the Democrats' claims that he was trampling on "workers' rights." He convinced Wisconsinites that he was the protector of the public interest, while the unions were looking out for themselves. This is a feat no Republican has managed since the Great Depression. The Democratic machine has been so powerful that Republican leaders usually cave without taking on the powers that be (as Ronald Reagan did when he signed the 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act). Or, worse, they take them on and lose (as the Republican congressional majority did in 1948 after passing the union-curbing Taft-Hartley Act).

This makes Scott Walker the anti-Obama. Whereas Walker defied powerful Democratic party interests for the sake of the public good, Obama has done the opposite. On one issue after another—from the stimulus, to health care, to financial reform—the president and his allies in Congress

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larded up their legislation with goodies for their core voters, with little or no regard for whether the final product would benefit Americans generally. Worse, after his rebuke in the 2010 midterm elections, the president was unbowed, sending to Congress the American Jobs Act, essentially a stimulus-lite that would again reward Democratic interests such as the unions.

If Walker can run against this type of narrow interest-group politics and win—in progressive Wisconsin, of all places—then so can Mitt Romney. More than anything else, the Walker victory demonstrates that conservatives can convince the country that unions are not laboring on behalf of "working families." And if conservatives can do that, they can also persuade voters that environmentalists are interested in something other than "clean air," and hustlers like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton aren't merely promoting "civil rights." The old empty communitarian rhetoric can be shown for what it is.

Of course, there is no real reason for the GOP nominee to make public sector unions a national issue; after all, federal employee unions do not enjoy anywhere near the same rights as their counterparts in the states. But Walker's victory suggests a line of attack Romney can use against Obama's major legislative initiatives.

On the stimulus, under the guise of reviving the economy, the president merely paid off his supporters in the labor unions, the environmental movement, the feminist movement, and the Congressional Black Caucus. The failed solar-panel maker Solyndra, repicient of half a billion dollars in federal loan guarantees, is the most striking illustration of how a Democratic interest won and the public lost. But there is a broader case to be made—that the stimulus failed to jumpstart the economy as the president promised because it was weighed down with patronage. Dollar for dollar, the stimulus was the single largest gift to Democratic interest groups in American history. Romney needs to make that point.

On health care, the story is similar. The president promised to make health insurance more affordable and secure. Indeed, the prime justification for pursuing the legislation so early in his tenure was that affordable health care was an essential ingredient of a sustainable recovery. But Obamacare fails to deliver; it will make insurance more expensive and less secure for millions of Americans. Time and again, the president chose not to follow through on his promises for the sake of a bevy of interest groups—traditional Democratic clients like labor, but also drug companies, hospitals, doctors, and so on. Romney has to convince Americans that, in giving special carve-outs to these well-heeled groups, Obama turned his back on the public good.

As for the financial reform bill, it offers Romney the best opportunity to rebut the president's charge that the former Massachusetts governor is a "vulture capitalist," in hock to Wall Street. The president and his allies in Congress promised to clean up the mess left behind by the 2008 implosion of the markets, but their final product actually enshrines the much-despised "too big to fail." One reason why is that Obama accepted millions from the megabanks during the 2008 campaign, much more than John McCain, and those big financial institutions sent an army of lobbyists to Capitol Hill to make sure any "reform" was amenable to them. It worked for the president's favored clients, and the public got the short end of the stick.

On all three of these issues, Romney has an opportunity to pin down Obama much as Walker stymied the public sector unions. The Wisconsin unions talked about how they were in it for the public good, but Walker made a compelling case that they were not. Similarly, Romney can point out that, Obama's communitarian rhetoric notwithstanding, his tenure has been a kind of Tammany-on-the-Potomac; under the Obama machine, it is great to be a client of this patron/president, but terrible for everybody else.

Walker has shown that this kind of argument can win. Romney can follow his lead. ♦

A Weakness for Royalty

The vindication of John Adams.

BY MEIR Y. SOLOVEICHIK

Had our Founding Fathers been suddenly transported last week to modern America and forced to watch the morning television shows, they would have been shocked to see breathless American anchors all agog, celebrating the enduring reign of a British monarch live from London. They would have wondered why their countrymen were so enchanted by the glory of a direct descendant of George III the same week that, centuries ago, Richard Henry Lee first submitted his fateful resolution to the Continental Congress: "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." The man who seconded Lee's resolution, however, would not have been surprised. John

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Adams dedicated his life to the cause of liberty, yet continued to insist that the allure of royalty among men could never be abolished.

If the American Revolution came to embody not only a rebellion against England, but against the very institution of monarchy, a great deal of the credit goes to Thomas Paine, who devoted the central section of his *Common Sense* to a theological attack on kingship of any kind. "Government by kings," he informed his many thousands of American readers, "was first introduced into the world by the Heathens, from whom the children of Israel copied the custom. It was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry." As Harvard's Eric Nelson notes in his fascinating book *The Hebrew Republic*, Paine was drawing on an idea of recent intellectual vintage. Modernity is often seen as an embrace of secularism, Nelson remarks, but with the triumph of republicanism in modern political thought the opposite actually occurred. "Renaissance humanism, structured as it was by the pagan inheritance of Greek and Roman antiquity, generated an approach to politics that was remarkably secular in character," Nelson writes of the previous political order. Meanwhile, in the fervor of the Reformation in the 17th century, "Christians began to regard the Hebrew Bible as a political constitution, designed by God himself for the children of Israel."

Some of these theologians founded their arguments for republicanism on the Book of Samuel, wherein God responds with anger to the Israelites' request for a king. Perhaps the most eloquent English version of this idea can be found in both the poetry and prose of Milton, a great opponent of the Restoration. Noting that "God in much displeasure gave a king to Israelites, and imputed it a sin to them that they sought one," Milton further argued that all monarchy is idolatrous, as "a king must be adored like a Demigod, with a dissolute and haughtie court about him, of vast expence and luxurie." Had Milton seen the parade of a thousand boats on the Thames last week, he might have repeated his contention that a monarch does little except "pageant himself up and down in progress among the perpetual bowings and cringings of an abject people, on either side deifying and adoring him." Paine, while himself utterly irreligious, knew his biblically literate American audience, and argued similarly: "As exalting one man so greatly above the rest cannot be justified on the equal rights of nature, so neither can it be defended on the authority of scripture; for the will of the Almighty as declared by Gideon, and the prophet Samuel, expressly disapproves of government by kings."

'His Most Benign Highness': John Adams

Adams, in contrast, believed that while the rise of the American republic would change the world, it could never change human nature. People, he was certain, would always be attracted to the trappings of majesty, and it was better to channel it than to ignore it. Upon meeting Paine, Adams reported in his autobiography, "I told him further, that his reasoning from the Old Testament was ridiculous, and I could hardly think him sincere. At this he laughed, and said he had taken his ideas in that part from Milton; and then expressed a contempt of the Old Testament, and indeed of the Bible at large, which surprised me." When he became vice president, Adams argued that royal titles, such as "His Most Benign Highness," should be given to the leaders of the new government. If the grandeur akin to royalty were not accorded public servants, Adams insisted, Americans would focus their enraptured attention on others.

His proposal failed spectacularly, and fed false charges that Adams was himself a monarchist. Mocked by his enemies as "His Rotundity, the Duke of Braintree," Adams suffered for eight years in a position that he called "the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived." For the rest of his life, Adams continued to express envy at the credit accorded to Paine for the changes wrought by the Revolution. "What a poor, ignorant, malicious, short-sighted, crapulous mass is Tom Paine's 'Common Sense,'" he wrote to Jefferson. "And yet history is to ascribe the Revolution to Thomas Paine!"

Perhaps, though, Adams spoke too soon. Vindicating his prediction, millions of Americans tuned in to the royal wedding and the Diamond Jubilee. None of the enraptured anchors saw fit to cite Paine's contention that "when a man seriously reflects on the idolatrous homage which is paid to the persons of kings, he need not wonder that the Almighty, ever jealous of his honour, should disapprove a form of government which so impiously invades the prerogative of Heaven." Paine himself died alone and penniless. Meanwhile, David McCullough's bestselling, Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of our second president has been made into an HBO miniseries, celebrating Adams's contributions to the American cause. Somewhere, John Adams is—well, not smiling, certainly, but perhaps harrumphing in quiet satisfaction. ♦

What a Difference Four Years Makes

By the numbers.

BY JEFF BERGNER

Barack Obama has said on many occasions that he inherited a very bad economy from George W. Bush. He has blamed the Bush economy for every shortcoming and disappointment of the past four years. If inheritance is a fair standard, let's ask the obvious question: What will Barack Obama leave to *his* successor?

President Obama contends that he has put in place the building blocks for a new, sustainable economy. It is unclear who inhabits this mythological new economy and what are the economic principles that govern it. But here in the real world, employment is down, debt is up, poverty is up, commodity prices are up, home ownership is down, fewer Americans are covered by health insurance, and education scores are flat (or down slightly). The picture is poor (see table below) whether you take as the point of comparison June 2008, the equivalent point in the presidential campaign four years ago (before the financial crisis); or the situation facing the voters as they made their choice in November 2008 (with the financial crisis full-blown); or January 20, 2009, when Barack Obama took office.

Amazingly, all this has been accomplished with the federal government growing by only 77,000 employees and with just 1,719 more pages of regulations being added to the Federal Register than were added in 2008.

What have we bought for the enormous new debt with which we have saddled future taxpayers? What new energy sources have we developed for the billions of dollars of "investments" in renewables? What health benefits have emerged from Obamacare, whose massive costs have just begun to take hold? What educational improvements do we enjoy for the enormous sums expended on education?

The Obama reelection campaign calls on Americans to join the president in moving "forward." If what we have seen in the last four years is moving forward, what would moving backward be?

Ironically, a second-term President Obama would be better off inheriting George W. Bush's economy than his own. So would Mitt Romney. Whichever man wins, I wonder if he will be as inclined to blame as our current president has been. ♦

Jeff Bergner has served in the legislative and executive branches of the federal government. He recently coauthored a book on the 2008 presidential election entitled Branding the Candidate *(Praeger).*

Are Americans better off than we were four years ago?

	NOVEMBER 2008	NOW
Unemployment rate	**6.8 percent**	**8.2 percent**
Labor participation rate	**65.8 percent**	**63.8 percent**
Total nonfarm employment	**135 million**	**133 million**
Federal deficit (FY 2008, 2012)	**$459 billion**	**$1.32 trillion**
Federal debt	**$10.57 trillion**	**$15.69 trillion**
Federal debt as share of GDP	**69.7 percent**	**104.8 percent**
Median household income	**$50,203**	**$49,445**
Poverty rate	**13.2 percent**	**15.1 percent**
Food stamp recipients	**30.9 million**	**44.7 million**
Gasoline price per gallon	**$2.40**	**$3.60**
Gold price per ounce	**$754**	**$1,636**
Corn price per bushel	**$4.37**	**$5.80**
Home ownership rate	**67.8 percent**	**65.4 percent**
Americans without health insurance	**16 percent**	**17.7 percent**
SAT scores (reading / math)	**502 / 515**	**497 / 514**
New pages in Federal Register	**80,700**	**82,419**
Federal civilian employees	**2,672,000**	**2,749,000**

SOURCE: VARIOUS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SOURCES AND COMMODITY PRICE INDICES.

Boasting Without Explaining

Not a good national security approach—even in cyberspace.

BY JEREMY RABKIN & ARIEL RABKIN

There's a place for covert action, when we need to keep adversaries guessing about our capacities or our plans. There are even times when a president may feel justified in disregarding legal limitations or accepted international standards, as many presidents have done in special circumstances. At such times, it may seem proper to cover American actions beneath a cloak of secrecy—or at least a veil of deniability—so we don't affirm an exceptional action as a formal precedent, apt to be invoked against us by others. There are always risks in such dodgy practices, and reasonable people may have reasonable disagreements about when and where they apply.

What a president really shouldn't do is leak details of a secret operation that seems unlawful—if judged by standards that have been previously embraced in public by American officials—and then say nothing more. But officials in the Obama White House leaked a great deal of detail about a secret plan to disable the Iranian nuclear program through targeted cyber attacks. The White House did not deny the account published in the *New York Times* on June 1. It did not even say that the leaks were unauthorized and that there would be an investigation to punish the officials involved. It said nothing to explain or clarify the policy revealed in this way.

The White House seems to have regarded the story about the cyber program as a mere follow-on to previous reports in the same newspaper about the president's immersion in decisions on proper targeting for drone strikes. But the cyber story is in a quite different category. It says much about the administration's indifference to actual security policy that it has let all these policies be folded into the edifying narrative of the president's personal focus on facing down our enemies.

One obvious difference is that there has never been any doubt that the United States was launching drone attacks on terrorists in Pakistan and Yemen. And because the policy was openly avowed, it has been subject to a fair amount of public debate. Questions about the legality of drone strikes have been raised by many critics, including legal analyst Philip Alston, former United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions.

But representatives of the administration, including State Department legal adviser Harold Koh, have defended the drone policy as proper under international law. They have characterized the drone strikes as acts of self-defense against ongoing terrorist plots, which carefully target actual jihadist combatants while seeking to minimize harm to civilians. Koh and others also claim the drone strikes are proper under U.S. law, in accord with Congress's authorization after 9/11 to deploy force against the terror networks responsible for such attacks. There is controversy about whether these legal analyses are fully compelling. They do at least mark some legal lines to indicate when, where, and how the United States thinks it is justified to launch drone strikes.

We don't know what the Obama administration thinks it can or can't do in launching cyber attacks. And the questions aren't mere brain teasers for legal scholars. In May 2011, the White House issued a formal paper on U.S. cyber strategy, which acknowledged —almost in passing—that the United States reserved the right to use "military force" to stop severe cyber attacks on American computer networks. Whether "military force" included cyber attacks—even in retaliation for such attacks—was left entirely unclear.

A few months later, Stewart Baker, former assistant secretary for policy in the Department of Homeland Security, warned that government lawyers have been "tying themselves in knots of legalese . . . to prevent the Pentagon from launching cyber attacks," so the Defense Department has "adopted a cyberwar strategy that simply omitted any plan for conducting offensive operations." Last fall, the Republican majority in the House of Representatives added a provision to the 2012 Defense Authorization bill stipulating that the Defense Department did have authority to conduct "offensive operations in cyberspace"—a provision the Obama administration had not sought. The Senate agreed only after inserting a qualifying proviso that such "operations" must be "subject to the policy principles and legal regimes" applicable to other activities of the Defense Department, "including the law of armed conflict."

We don't know whether the Obama administration regards this proviso as applicable to its cyber attacks on the Iranian nuclear program. Perhaps it thinks the restriction does not cover the National Security Agency because it is arguably distinct from the Defense Department, though it has all sorts of very close operational ties to the Pentagon. Perhaps it thinks such restrictions can't bind the commander in chief when he decides that national security requires him to disregard "the law of armed conflict"—though that is not a position articulated by Obama officials in public.

If the administration does accept the notion that "the law of armed conflict"

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applies to its cyber attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities, however, a lot of new questions arise. Most analysts assume that "the law of armed conflict" includes the *jus ad bellum*—the law governing resort to force. And most analysts view that law as governed by the U.N. Charter, limiting resort to force to actions authorized by the Security Council or in self-defense "if an armed attack occurs." Do these categories apply here?

The Security Council has passed several resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran for failing to cooperate with international inspections (required under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty). Does the Obama administration think those resolutions justify resort to armed force to stop the Iranian nuclear program? Most analysts acknowledge that "self-defense" may justify a preemptive action when an "armed attack" is imminent. Does the Obama administration think the Iranian nuclear program is so inherently threatening that an attack on the program is justified as a preemptive measure, to forestall an impending Iranian nuclear strike?

These are questions the Obama administration might prefer not to answer for various reasons, some better than others. But it's one thing to maintain a posture of ambiguity about measures not yet taken. It is something else entirely to acknowledge cyber attacks and refuse to say what they mean or why they were (in the American view) justified. Silence invites the view that the administration regards cyber attacks as quite different from "armed attack." That might be a defensible view, even if Congress seems to have said otherwise. But that view has its own complications. The silence of the administration invites all sorts of awkward inferences—not least by other governments assessing their own options for cyber attacks.

One thing the *New York Times* report made clear was that President Obama was very concerned to avoid collateral damage to civilian objects when he approved cyber attacks on the Iranian nuclear program. That might comport with the president's personal idea of what is required by *jus in bello*—that part of the law of armed conflict dealing with permissible tactics. But the Iranians claim that their entire nuclear program is dedicated to civilian purposes and is not, therefore, a military target. How does Obama think lines should be drawn between permissible and unlawful targets?

The reason this may matter a lot—and sooner than the White House seems to think—is that Iran has been developing its own capacity to launch cyber attacks. Suppose Iran retaliates by hitting nonmilitary targets in the United States. Do we say they can't disable an electric power plant because it's "civilian"—even if it also supplies power to a nearby military base or a defense contractor? Are we prepared to retaliate with force—actual bombing, with inevitable civilian casualties—for a cyber attack that imposes much economic dislocation here but does not actually cause direct loss of life?

It may be more prudent to retaliate for an Iranian cyber attack with a reprisal in kind by, for example, shutting down the Iranian power grid for a time, imposing considerable pain on civilian infrastructure but not causing direct loss of life. It might actually be more dangerous to launch cyber attacks on Iranian military infrastructure, threatening loss of command and control functions and emboldening some isolated Revolutionary Guards commander to think he should launch missiles before he loses even that degree of operational control. The administration has no public doctrine about what it thinks it can or can't do in a crisis provoked by cyber attacks.

One risk from this policy void is that the Iranians will be emboldened to take more aggressive action, interpreting our silence as indecision or policy paralysis. It is hard to deter when you don't make serious threats. The Iranians or their friends elsewhere may be further emboldened because, unlike cruise missile strikes or conventional bombing, a cyber attack may be hard to identify and trace to its source. Other governments might demand that we withhold retaliation until we had demonstrated the ground on which we attributed particular cyber attacks to the Iranian government. We might not want to share such intelligence or expose it to outside scrutiny. Enemies might count on ensuing hesitations, since we have not made clear how or when or on what grounds we would feel entitled to act.

Another risk is that, if U.S. policy seems reckless or impulsive, otherwise-friendly allies may lose confidence in U.S. policy and be less likely to cooperate in the future. The Stuxnet virus, supposed to be precisely targeted on the Iranian nuclear program, did cause collateral damage, requiring companies in Europe and elsewhere to invest in remedial measures. The Flame virus was insinuated into Iranian nuclear sites with a forged certificate identifying it as a Microsoft product. This damages the credibility of Microsoft and other firms that depend on users trusting their certification. If the U.S. government cannot reassure potential partners in its cyber intrigues, it may find it harder to recruit assistance in the future, even from American computer firms.

There was one other thing the leakers in the Obama White House wanted *New York Times* readers to know: Bush started it—with an earlier program to disable uranium enrichment operations in Iran. Obama officials might consider that the Bush administration, by neglecting to get full congressional approval for many aspects of its anti-terror program, made it easier for critics to pounce when things turned sour later. One consequence was that critics then mobilized political opposition, resulting in new restraints the White House did not favor.

If the Obama team is going to boast about the president's cyber prowess, it really should try to do more to warn our enemies and reassure our friends—and perhaps inform Congress—what rules it thinks will apply to this new weapon. There are serious and still quite contentious policy issues in the emerging field of cyber strategy. A president preoccupied with personal preening makes it much harder to mobilize support for reasonable policies. ♦

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Knishes and Taxes

A cautionary tale.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

This is a tale of knishes, taxes, and conservatives' hopes to replace income and capital gains taxes with a national sales tax on consumption. Like all those who preside over national treasuries, Britain's chancellor of the exchequer, George Osborne, has a deficit that needs closing. Unlike other financial-men-in-charge, he would wisely rather not tax work and risk-taking, and so in his latest budget he cut the highest marginal tax rate from 50 percent to 45 percent.

To fill part of the revenue hole, he decided to extend the VAT, or Value Added Tax, essentially a national sales tax beloved of Europe's politicians, to a favorite of Britain's moderate-income consumers, the hot pasty (pronounced pass-tea). Think knish—some sort of stuffing wrapped in dough. The chancellor reckoned that the tax, at a rate of 20 percent, would produce about $160 million. Unfortunately, the leadership of the coalition government, dominated by the Tory party, includes many with inherited wealth, educated in private schools and not among leading consumers of pasties. Their political vulnerability to a Labour party round of class warfare somehow escaped the proponents of this new levy.

In response to the uproar, a new set of regulations was crafted. In effect, the government changed the definition of "hot." Pasties in warming units in supermarkets will still be taxed at a 20 percent rate, but hot pasties left out to cool—"to return to ambient temperatures," as revenue-gatherers put it—will remain exempt from the tax. Note that the pasty need not be at any specified ambient temperature, merely in the process of approaching an unspecified ambient temperature. Sheryll Murray, Conservative MP for South East Cornwall, told the government, "I didn't want to see an army of thermometer-wielding tax inspectors poking our pasties."

If you think this idea emerged from the brain of some bureaucrat, no K Street-style lobbying needed, think again. Greggs, the U.K.'s largest bakery chain, gathered more than 300,000 signatures on a petition to change the definition of "hot," and enlisted the National Association of Master Bakers and Cornish Pasty Association in its lobbying effort. Greggs's CEO, Ken McMeikan, met with Treasury officials to suggest "a very sensible way forward for the government." The Treasury's adoption of the "sensible way forward" produced a 9 percent jump in Greggs's shares.

Taxes? Not so much.

This is only one example of many that attest to the complexity of consumption taxes and the lobbying efforts such taxes attract. Conservatives might have many good reasons for favoring such taxes—taxing spending, not earnings from work, being the most cited—but simplicity and the creation of a glut of abandoned offices on K Street should not be among them. Because consumption taxes are regressive—they claim a larger portion of the incomes of lower- than of higher-income consumers—all sorts of exemptions get built in to exempt some purchases from tax.

Food should be the most obvious candidate for exemption. But what is food? The British taxmen have a detailed answer, the result of which is that crackers made from tapioca starch carry no tax; prawn crackers made from cereals do. Frozen yogurt that needs to be thawed before eating is not taxed, while frozen yogurt ready to eat is. Dog food creates more complications: Food intended for working sheep dogs or racing greyhounds is not taxed, but food for "sheepdog breeds" and greyhounds not used for racing is taxed.

Clothing is also a source of such complexities as to bring a gleam to the eye of special pleaders. Children's clothing is exempt, which the book of regulations defines as bras up to and including size 34B, body stockings that measure no more than 27-and-a-half inches shoulder to crotch, and babies' shawls but not "mother-and-baby shawls intended to wrap around both mother and child." One can imagine an interested company pointing out to the grey men of Her Majesty's Treasury that today's children mature earlier than those when the reg was written, and that therefore the size warranting exemption should be increased.

This would be good fun were it not a warning to conservatives. At some point in the near future there will have to be a serious negotiation to address our nation's headlong dash to insolvency. In a laudable effort to keep marginal income tax rates as low as possible, many conservatives are thinking about consumption taxes. In the end, that might prove to be a necessary part of any effort to bring our deficit down to manageable levels. But it would have a cost, a cost not very different in type and amount from that now produced by the complexities of the income tax code. Law and accounting firms with offices in Britain, already experts at the game of exemption-writing, will be among the winners. ♦

MICK LOBB

Irwin M. Stelzer is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard*, director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute, and a columnist for the* Sunday Times *(London).*

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Self-Made Man

Barack Obama's autobiographical fictions

By Andrew Ferguson

There's a DVD that's been sitting in its jewel box on my desk for a few years (I've been busy—no time to tidy up), and the other day, after reading through two brand-new books about Barack Obama, one admiring, the other ferociously disapproving, I snapped the cellophane at last and slid the disk into my computer drive.

I bought the video on a visit to Occidental College in Los Angeles, not long after Obama took office. He attended Oxy from 1979 to 1981, then lit out after his sophomore year and never returned. It must be a tricky business for a college publicist, marketing your school as the place that one of the world's most famous men couldn't wait to get away from, but these are highly competitive times in the liberal arts college racket, and a flack will work with what he's got. During my visit the campus was transforming itself into a three-dimensional tribute to its most famous dropout.

It must be a tricky business for a college publicist, marketing your school as the place that one of the world's most famous men couldn't wait to get away from, but these are highly competitive times in the liberal arts racket, and a flack will work with what he's got.

In the common room of the library a shrine of sorts had been set up in a glass display case, under the famous Shepard Fairey Hope poster. The display promised to document "Barack Obama's Occidental College Days," but the pickings were slim. Every item on display was derivative and indirect in its relation to the man being honored. There were photos of three of his professors, a copy each of his two memoirs, an invitation that someone had received to his inauguration, and an issue of *Time* magazine showing a recently discovered cache of posed pictures taken of Obama by a classmate in 1980. Obama's Occidental years have the same waterbug quality that so many periods of his life seem to have in retrospect: You see a figure traveling lightly and swiftly over the surface of things, darting away before he could leave an impression that might last. Archivists have combed college records and come up empty, mostly. Barry Obama, as he then was known, published two poems in the campus literary magazine his sophomore year. The testimony of the handful of professors who remembered him, four by my count, is hazy. He was never mentioned in the student newspaper, never wrote a letter to the editor or appeared in a photo; he failed to have his picture taken for the yearbook, so his likeness isn't there either. A photo from 1981 celebrating Oxy's 94th anniversary was in the display case, labeled, with eager insouciance: "An all-campus photo . . . included students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Perhaps Obama is included?" We can hope.

I found my DVD, called "Barack Obama's Occidental College Days," in the student bookstore, where shelves groaned under stacks of Obama merchandise—paperweights, caps, pennants, T-shirts, pencils, shot glasses—in which the "O" from Obama was graphically entwined with the "O" from Occidental. (You work with what you've got.) The film, with a cover showing a rare photo of Obama on campus, lasts no more than 15 minutes and seems padded even so. Our host is a large and enthusiastic man named Huell Howser. He sports a Hawaiian shirt and a crewcut. With an Oxy flack as guide and a cameraman in tow, he strides the sun-drenched campus and pauses here and there as if simply overwhelmed.

"This place is full of history," he says.

"There's a lot of history to be marked here," the flack agrees.

On the steps of the school administration building they are almost struck dumb. Almost.

"On this spot," our host says, Obama may have given his first political speech—a two-minute blast at the college for investing in South Africa's apartheid regime. But we can't be sure.

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard. *A graduate of Occidental College, he reviewed* Dreams from My Father *and* The Audacity of Hope *in our February 12, 2007, issue.*

"There are no photographs," says Howser, "but then there are very few photographs of Barack Obama at Occidental."

"That's right," the flack says glumly.

Howser's passion burns undiminished. His every glance, this way and that, says, *Isn't this something?* He finds a professor who taught Obama political science. The professor says he remembers Obama, but only because of his Afro hairstyle and his improbable name. A chinwag with

GARY LOCKE

a former dorm-mate from freshman year—Obama moved to an apartment several miles off campus his second year, removing himself even further from the school's day-to-day life—isn't much help either. Howser's imperturbable smile shows no sign of desperation even when he collars the head of alumni affairs, who boasts that his alumni association is one of only 25 in the world that could claim attachment to a U.S. president.

The host is beside himself.

"Is that right? How involved has he been in the alumni association?"

"Well, I have to admit he hasn't been to any alumni events . . . "

"Has he been a big contributor?"

The man gives one of those nods that are more headshake than nod. "He—he is on our mailing list."

"Uh huh!"

"We have big plans to ask Mr. Obama back to campus to speak."

Howser beams. History has that effect on people.

And there we are. You can't help but sympathize with our host, with the flack, with the curators at the college library. They faced a challenge known to anyone who tries to account for Barack Obama: How do you turn him into a man as interesting and significant as the world-historical figure that so many people, admirers and detractors alike, presume him to be? There's not a lot of material here. Obama had an unusual though hardly Dickensian childhood complicated by divorce, and at age 33 he wrote an extremely good book about it, the memoir *Dreams from My Father*. He followed it with an uneventful and weirdly passive career in politics, and he wrote an extremely not-very-good book about it, *The Audacity of Hope*. Then, lacking any original ideas or platform to speak of, he ran as the first half-black, half-white candidate for president and, miraculously, won. It's a boffo finish without any wind-up—teeth-shattering climax, but no foreplay.

There are two ways to aggrandize Obama, to inflate the reality so that it meets the expectation: through derogation or reverence. The facts warrant neither approach, but they don't deter the Obama fabulists, two of whom have just published those brand-new books I mentioned.

The Amateur, by a former *New York Times* magazine editor named Edward Klein, takes the first approach. Pure Obama-hatred was enough to shoot the book to the top of the *Times* bestseller list for the first three weeks after its release. Klein is best known as a Kennedy-watcher, author of such panting chronicles as *All Too Human: The Love Story of Jack and Jackie Kennedy* and *Farewell, Jackie: A Portrait of Her Final Days*; among the many info-bits he has tossed onto the sprawling slagheap of Kennedy lore is the news that Jackie lost her virginity in an elevator (the elevator was in Paris, where else). More recently

Klein has honed his hatchet with books on Hillary Clinton and Katie Couric. Now *The Amateur* proves that he has mastered the techniques of such anti-Obama pioneers as Dinesh (*The Roots of Obama's Rage*) D'Souza and David (*The Great Destroyer*) Limbaugh. He knows how to swing the sledgehammer prose, combine a leap of logic with a baseless inference, pad the paragraphs with secondary material plucked from magazine articles you've already read, and render the most mundane details in the most scandalized tones.

Sure, "Michelle now likes to pretend that she plays no part in personnel decisions or in formulating policy." We've all heard that. And you believe it? "The facts tell quite a different story." Facts are stubborn things! In truth, "Michelle's aides meet regularly with the president's senior communications team and select public events that will maximize and reinforce the Obamas' joint message." Wait. It gets worse. Klein has made a source of "one of Barack's closest confidants." And here's what this confidant reveals: "Barack has always listened to what she has to say." A direct quote, from source's mouth to author's ear. I wonder if they met in a darkened garage.

Klein has a problem with his sources—or rather, the reader should have a problem with Klein's use of his sources, whoever they are. Blind quotes appear on nearly every page; there are blind quotes within blind quotes. The book cost him a year to research and write, he says proudly—"an exhilarating experience that took me to more than a half-dozen cities, either in person or by telephone or email." (I visited several cities by email just this morning.) And it's clear that all this dialing, emailing, dialing, emailing, bore little fruit. "I was at a dinner where Valerie [Jarrett] sat at our table for nearly 10 minutes," another anonymous source divulges. "And I wasn't particularly impressed." Now it can be told. The book's big revelation comes from the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. He claims, in an on-the-record interview with Klein, that in 2008 an unnamed friend of an unnamed friend of Obama sent Wright an email offering him $150,000 "not to preach at all until the November presidential election." Republicans may seethe, but it's odd that they would suddenly take the word of Jeremiah Wright, a publicity-seeking narcissist who says AIDS was invented by the government.

With such thin material, the only way to keep a book like *The Amateur* chugging along is with gallons of high-octane contempt. Yet because Klein provides so little to provoke fresh outrage—or to support the theme that Obama is "something new in American politics," a historically unprecedented threat to the Republic—readers will have to come to the book well-stocked with outrage of their own. They will be satisfied with sentences that begin with an appeal to phony-baloney authority ("According to those who know him best") and continue with assertions that no Obama intimate would make to Edward Klein, on or off the record: "inept in the arts of management . . . make[s] our economy less robust and our nation less safe . . ." and so on. And they'll admire his ability to fit his theme of Obama's villainy to any set of facts. After his election, for example, Obama didn't take a wise man's advice to disregard his old Chicago friends—a sign of Obama's weakness and amateurism, Klein says. A few pages later Obama and Valerie Jarrett are accused of ignoring their old Chicago friends—a sign of coldness and amateurism. Klein gets him coming and going.

In *Dreams*, Obama treats the drug use as another symptom of his singular youthful confusion. Maraniss's explanation is less complicated: Obama really, really liked to get high.

If Klein makes Obama something he's not by hating him more than he should, David Maraniss, a reporter for the *Washington Post* and a biographer of Bill Clinton and Vince Lombardi, takes the opposite approach. Klein is an Obama despiser, Maraniss is a big fan—*big* fan. Klein assumes the worst of his subject at every turn, Maraniss gives Obama every benefit of the doubt, sometimes with heroic effort. Klein writes hastily and crudely, Maraniss writes with great care, veering now and then into those pastures of purple prose that Obama frequently trod in his own memoir. Klein's book aims for a limited but sizable audience of readers who already despise Obama as much as he does, and therefore don't require footnotes or any other apparatus of verification; Maraniss, with 30 pages of notes, has grander ambitions to satisfy anyone curious about Obama's upbringing and family life. Klein's book is a squalid little thing, Maraniss's is not.

It is not, however, the book that Obama lovers will hope for—maybe not the book that Maraniss thinks it is. Prepublication, his splashiest piece of news has been the extent of the future president's love for, and consumption of, marijuana. Through high school—he apparently lost the taste for pot sometime in college—Obama's ardor reached Cheech and Chong levels. His circle of dopers called themselves the "Choom Gang," after a Hawaiian word for inhaling pot, and the phrase is already threatening to enter the common language, ironically or otherwise. (I Googled it today and got 560,000 hits, pardon the expression.)

Obama politically indemnified himself against charges of youthful drug use by admitting them in his memoir, though he was smart enough to avoid the words "Choom Gang." Even at 33, when he wrote his book, he had his eye on a political landscape that would require acknowledgment if not full disclosure of youthful "experimentation," as the charming euphemism went. In *Dreams*, he treats the drug use as another symptom of his singular youthful confusion. Maraniss's explanation is less complicated: Obama really, really liked to get high. Maraniss offers similarly unblinkered portraits of Obama's appalling father, a vain, wife-beating bigamist and drunk, and of Obama's maternal grandfather, who comes off in *Dreams* as a latter-day Micawber, innocent and luckless. Maraniss hints at a darker, even slightly menacing figure. And he discovers some sharp edges beneath the flowing muumuu of Obama's mother, more often depicted as an idealistic flower-child-turned-scholar (or, in the Klein-reading camp, a Communist agitator).

Maraniss's book is most interesting for the light it casts on Obama's self-invention, which is of course the theme of *Dreams from My Father*: a sensitive and self-aware young man's zig-zagging search for a personal identity in a world barely held together by fraying family ties, without a cultural inheritance, confused and tormented by the subject of race. *Dreams* is a cascade of epiphanies, touched off one by one in high school, at Oxy, in New York and Chicago, and, at book's end, before his father's grave in Africa. Years before Obama haters could inflate him into an America-destroying devil or Obama worshippers spied those rolling swells of greatness that have yet to surface, Barack Obama was carefully fashioning from his own life something grander than what was there. He was the first Obama fabulist.

Obama himself drops hints of this in *Dreams*. He writes in his introduction that the dialogue in the book is only an "approximation" of real conversations. Some of the characters, "for the sake of compression," are "composites"; the names of others have been changed. All of this is offered to the reader as acceptable literary license, and it is, certainly by the standards of the early 1990s, back in the day when publishers flooded bookstores with memoirs of angst-ridden youth and there were still bookstores to flood. Yet the epiphany-per-page ratio in Obama's memoir is very high. The book derives its power from the reader's understanding that the events described were factual at least in the essentials. Maraniss demonstrates something else: The writer who would later use the power of his life story to become a plausible public man was making it up, to an alarming extent.

At least it should be alarming to admirers of *Dreams*. Early on Obama signals that his book will be more self-aware, more detached and ironical, than most youthful memoirs, especially those involving the humid subject of race. Thus we meet Ray, a classmate at Punahou School in Hawaii. Ray is black and radicalized, and given to racially charged rants about "white folks," a term the narrator comes to despise.

President of the Harvard Law Review*, soon-to-be author of* Dreams from My Father

"Sometimes, after one of his performances," Obama writes, "I would question his judgment, if not his sincerity. We weren't living in the Jim Crow South, I would remind him. We weren't consigned to some heatless housing project in Harlem or the Bronx. We were in goddamned Hawaii."

Still Ray's rants continue, and Obama continues to listen. Ray complains the football coach won't start him, despite his superior skill, because he's black; Obama is clearly being passed up by the basketball coach on account of his race, too. The white girls refuse to go out with them —for the same reason.

STEVE LISS / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

"Tell me we wouldn't be treated different if we was white. Or Japanese."

Racial resentment is the key to Ray. In Maraniss's words, he's "a symbol of young blackness, a mix of hot anger and cool detachment," racially authentic in a way none of Obama's other friends were. He provides a crucial example of the resentment that Obama is tempted by but at last outgrows.

But Ray wasn't really there—didn't exist, in fact. Ray is a "reinvention" of one of Obama's friends, Maraniss tells us. His mother was half-black and half-American Indian; his father was . . . Japanese. His name was Keith Kakugawa, and he had no trouble dating white girls; his girlfriend at the time was the base admiral's daughter. Maraniss discovered that Obama's luck with girls, whatever their melanin count, was just as robust as Keith's. With a Japanese name, Kakugawa would have trouble—more trouble than half-black Barry Obama—identifying himself as an African American and speaking as one. If Kakugawa was Ray, then the rants and the attitudes they represent are in this instance made up, and the story line of *Dreams*—the story of Obama's life as we have learned it—loses an essential foil.

"Somewhere between pseudonymous and fictitious," Maraniss writes, gently as always, "Ray was the first of several distorted or composite characters employed in *Dreams* for similar purposes." But it's the purposes themselves that are worrisome. Maraniss cuts Obama much more slack than he would, say, if he were an editor at the *Washington Post* magazine fact-checking a memoir he hoped to publish. He's right to accept some invention from a memoirist who insists on telling his story through precise rendering of scenes and dialogue. But a memoir is just realist fiction unless the "composite" says and does things that were done and said by *someone*. In *Dreams* many of the crucial epiphanies, the moments that advance the narrator's life and understanding to its closing semi-resolution, didn't happen.

That first year at Oxy, Obama writes, he was "living one long lie," crippled by self-consciousness and insecurity. (Many freshmen have known the feeling.) But then Barry Obama meets Regina.

"Regina . . . made me feel like I didn't have to lie," he writes. The two are introduced by a mutual friend, Marcus, in the campus coffee shop. She asks him about the name Barry—and becomes, in a liberating moment, one of the first to call him by his given name, Barack. More important, "she told me about her childhood in Chicago." It was an authentic black American experience, he learns: "the absent father and struggling mother," the rundown six-flat on the South Side, along with the compensations of an extended family—"uncles and cousins and grandparents, the stew of voices bubbling up in laughter."

"Her voice evoked a vision of black life in all its possibility, a vision that filled me with longing—a longing for place, and a fixed and definite history."

The afternoon with Regina transforms Barack. "Strange how a single conversation can change you," he writes, setting up the ol' epiphany.

"I had felt my voice returning to me that afternoon with Regina . . . [and] entering sophomore year I could feel it growing stronger, sturdier, that constant, honest portion of myself, a bridge between my future and my past."

And the rest is history.

What's dispiriting is that throughout *Dreams*, the moments that Obama has invented are precisely the occasions of his epiphanies—precisely those periodic *aha!* moments that carry the book and bring its author closer to self-discovery.

Except . . . there is layer upon layer of confusion here. When Maraniss inquired, Obama's closest black friend at Occidental couldn't recognize any real-life counterparts to the characters of Regina and Marcus, and in fact neither of them existed. Regina, Maraniss thinks, was the combination of a wealthy white girl (there were lots of them at Oxy, then and now, none overly familiar with the authentic black American experience) and a female black upperclassman who grew up middle class. Which part of Regina belonged to which real person isn't mentioned and probably not discoverable. But that crucial background that Regina recounts to the narrator—the upbringing that inspired Obama to discover his voice and set in motion a train of events that led him to leave Occidental and the West for New York City and Columbia University—belonged to neither of Obama's friends. The background, Maraniss says, may have been drawn from Michelle Robinson (later Obama), whom Obama would not meet for another 10 years. It's like an epiphany in a time warp. And even then the facts are obscured: Michelle's father never left his family, as Regina's did.

Going back to *Dreams* after several years, and after reading Maraniss's impressive book, you can get a bad case of the jumps. Take this spat between Regina and Barry, occurring the evening after his big antiapartheid speech, given on those steps that years later would wow Huell Howser:

Regina came up to me and offered her congratulations. I asked her what for.

"For that wonderful speech you gave."

. . . "It was short anyway."

Regina continues:

"That's what made it so effective. . . . You spoke from the heart, Barack. It made people want to hear more. . . ."

"Listen, Regina," I said, cutting her off, "you are a very sweet lady. And I'm happy you enjoyed my little performance today. But that's the last time you will ever hear another speech out of me. . . . I'm going to leave the preaching to you." . . .

"And why is that?"

I sipped my beer, my eyes wandering over the dancers in front of us.

"Because I've got nothing to say, Regina . . ."

Knowing what we know now—that this intelligent, socially aware, fatherless girl from the South Side didn't exist, by whatever name—we can only hope that there was *some* "very sweet lady" at Occidental who actually *did* flatter Barack Obama in this way, at that moment. If it's pure invention it reads like a testy exchange between Norman Bates and his mother.

What's dispiriting is that throughout *Dreams*, the moments that Obama has invented are precisely the occasions of his epiphanies—precisely those periodic *aha!* moments that carry the book and bring its author closer to self-discovery. Without them not much is left: a lot of lovely writing, some unoriginal social observations, a handful of precocious literary turns. Obama wasn't just inventing himself; he was inventing himself inventing himself. It made for a story, anyway.

We can see the dilemma he faced. Obama signed a contract to write a racial memoir. They were all the rage in those days, but in fact their moment had passed. Even with the distant father and absent mother, the schooling in Indonesia and the remote stepfather, Obama lived a life of relative ease. He moved, however uncomfortably, into one elite institution after another, protected by civil rights laws, surrounded by a popular culture in which the African-American experience has embedded itself ineradicably. As Obama's best biographer, David Remnick, observed, this wasn't the stuff of *Manchild in the Promised Land*; you couldn't use it to make the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* or the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. So Obama moved the drama inside himself, and said he'd found there an experience both singular and universal, and he brought nonexistent friends like Regina and Ray to goose the story along.

He did in effect what so many of us have done with him. He created a fable about an Obama far bigger and more consequential than the unremarkable man at its center. He joins us, haters and idolaters, as we join Huell Howser, looking this way and that, desperately trying to see what isn't there. *Isn't that something?* ♦

Senators Barack Obama and Harry Reid, Representative Nancy Pelosi, 2006

Give Us Liberty

The economic consequences of government.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

Will Smith was about to be surprised.

It was mid-May, and the actor was appearing on French television to promote his latest blockbuster. The host wanted to hear the Fresh Prince's thoughts not only on *Men in Black III* but also on American tax rates. "I have no issue with paying taxes and whatever needs to be done for my country to grow," Smith said. "So I will pay anything that I need to pay to keep my country growing."

Even the 75 percent top rate proposed by the newly elected French president François Hollande, the host asked? Smith's movie-star grin contorted in disgust: "Seventy-five?" he said. "Yeah, that's different." He looked from side to side, perhaps wondering if President Obama was lurking off-camera to punish him for such apostasy.

Matthew Continetti is editor in chief of the Washington Free Beacon.

The Road to Freedom
How to Win the Fight for Free Enterprise
by Arthur C. Brooks
Basic Books, 224 pp., $25.99

"That's different. Yeah, 75. Well, you know, God bless America."

Will Smith reacted viscerally because a top tax rate of 75 percent offended his sense of justice. It might be right, in his view, for the government to take 30 or 40 percent of a rich person's earnings, but taking 75 percent would not be right at all. It would be wrong. Unjust.

One of the virtues of Arthur Brooks's new book on the morality of free enterprise is that it supplies empirical support for Smith's intuitive reaction. *The Road to Freedom* is personal and idiosyncratic, filled with autobiographical asides, references to the author's wife and children, corny jokes, and the occasional pop culture allusion. But it also has a serious intent. Brooks attempts to prove, scientifically, the "moral legitimacy of free enterprise" by testing whether the system "enables people to flourish," whether it is fair, and how it "treats the least fortunate in society." He argues that free enterprise passes all three tests, and he makes a good case.

Consider human flourishing. Expanding on arguments he made in *The Battle* (2010), Brooks says that high tax rates are wrong not only because they damage the economy, but also because they violate the principle of earned success. You are more likely to be happy, he observes, when you create "value with your life or in the lives of others," and the happiness of the people ought to be the goal of any society that aspires to morality. Brooks cites social science research to conclude that money might not make us happy, but it does serve an important purpose: Dollars and cents are an "index of success—an imperfect

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one at that—not success itself." We require such an index because it is the only way to "keep score," to know how we are doing at the game of life, to measure the link between effort and reward.

There is of course the danger of assigning too much value to money—the danger of materialism—but at the end of the day the incomes we earn suffice as one measure of the value we create in our lives and in the lives of others. When government takes too large a chunk of those incomes, it interferes in the scorekeeping process, breaks the link between effort and reward, and undermines earned success. An unlimited government inculcates the very opposite of earned success, what Brooks calls "learned helplessness" or dependence. This is "a state in which, if rewards and punishments are not tied to merit, people simply give up and stop trying to succeed." When we cease to be self-reliant and rely instead on unearned rewards from others, we develop an entitlement mentality that erodes our character and bankrupts our polity.

Why does government obstruct earned success? Brooks's answer is that too many of us misunderstand fairness. Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama, for example, think in terms of "redistributive fairness." They are offended by the fact that some individuals have larger pieces of cherry pie than others. They want to divide the pie equally so that every individual receives an equal slice. They are champions of the bureaucratic or administrative state, which serves as the pie-cutter, redistributing income across society so that everyone receives his fair share.

But Pelosi and Obama do not have a monopoly on fairness. Brooks proposes a second definition: "Meritocratic fairness," in which "fairness means matching reward to merit" and "forced equality is inherently unfair." A Tea Party activist earned his income or property fair and square, without breaking any laws or infringing on another's rights, and therefore has a right to use it as he sees fit. That might mean he wants to invest his surplus income in the stock market, or save it in a bank account, or buy bars of gold. Whatever he does, Nancy Pelosi cannot claim that income is the government's by right. The activist earned it. It is his.

Brooks is not an anarchist; he does not want to vanquish redistribution altogether: "Most serious economists also believe that a social safety net in a civilized country is appropriate to prevent the worst predations of poverty." He is not arguing for corporate cronyism or the "unjust allocation of rewards to anyone, rich or poor." He seeks a society that respects meritocratic fairness by interfering as little as possible with the inner workings of the economy and shrinking the wedge that government extracts from a citizen's earnings. A society that satisfied Brooks's first two conditions—human flourishing and meritocratic fairness—would almost certainly fulfill his third condition of improving the lives of the poor. The link between market economics and the alleviation of poverty is well established: One can see it happening, in real time, throughout Asia, where hundreds of millions of people have seen their standard of living rise over the last several decades.

Having made his argument for free enterprise, Brooks moves on to applying market principles to the major issues of the day, such as America's profligate public spending, exploding national debt, trash heap of a tax code, and smothering Federal Register of regulations. The attentive reader cannot help noticing, however, that Brooks's moral case for capitalism depends rather heavily on the material consequences of capitalism. "To fulfill the moral promises of the pursuit of happiness, basic fairness, and help for the less fortunate, America's economy must continue to grow," he writes. Presumably, free enterprise results in economic growth, which, in turn, satisfies Brooks's criteria for justice.

But what if the economy stops growing? What if free enterprise fails on its "moral promises"? Are we then justified in shucking economic liberty to the side in favor of more state control or communal ownership of the means of production, or some heretofore unimagined, post-material economic system? Economic growth can be a fragile reed on which to hang an entire worldview—or a political party. Growth slows. Economies crash.

And what precisely *is* free enterprise? Brooks says it's "the system our Founders left us to maximize liberty, create individual opportunity, and reward entrepreneurship." But this describes the system's ends without explaining its means. This definition also verges on anachronism, since "free enterprise" is a phrase the Founders would not have recognized. (The coinage derives from the late 19th century and was deployed by the partisans of a lightly regulated industrial capitalism.) The Founders may have been more familiar with the system of "natural liberty" that Adam Smith extolled in *The Wealth of Nations*, as well as with the largely agricultural and small-scale manufacturing economy of their own day. Even then, the Founders, many of whom supported tariffs, did not always follow Smith's lead. Turning to the Founders does not necessarily get us closer to what Brooks means when he says "free enterprise."

Neither does looking at our country today. America is typically considered the paragon of free enterprise, or "cowboy capitalism," but this reputation, as Brooks admirably points out, is largely false: "Despite all the claims that America is organized on free market principles, over the decades it has become arguably just as socially democratic as Europe." Total spending at all levels of government was 8 percent of the economy in 1913. It was 36 percent in 2010. Our corporate tax rate is the highest in the world. Our per capita debt burden is higher than Greece's. Our economy, like that of other social democracies, has stalled as the state has expanded.

One takes "free enterprise" to mean an economy with low rates of personal and corporate taxation, minimal welfare spending, free trade, low barriers to business formation, and as few rules and mandates as possible. And one finds it hard to name a locale other than perhaps Hong Kong or Singapore where these policies are currently enforced simultaneously. Certainly they were not all in force in the United States during the postwar

boom, or even during the Reagan or Clinton booms. Federal spending has floated around 20 percent of the economy pretty consistently for decades, with tax revenues slightly lower at 18 percent of the economy. Our debt as a percentage of the economy has waxed and waned over the centuries, and skyrocketed after Richard Nixon severed the dollar from gold in 1971. Yet the American economy grew at a brisk pace nonetheless, before it seemingly hit a wall at the turn of the millennium.

Did America reach the social-democratic tipping point around the time George W. Bush was elected president? Doubtful. That is why "free enterprise" seems like either a normative ideal that is close to impossible to realize in a democracy—or a category so expansive as to be practically meaningless. What the Founders left us was not a specific economic system but a constitutional republic that relies on a specific set of institutional arrangements to limit the ability of one faction of the population to infringe on the equal natural rights of another.

Some of those rights have economic components, but *The Road to Freedom* is less about rights than it is about fiscal and regulatory policy. That is a missed opportunity since, as Brooks suggests, the moral case for limited government and economic freedom can be found in the political principles of the American Founding. The Founders believed that every human being is born with certain inalienable rights that exist prior to the establishment of civil society and government. They are rights attached to our bodily natures and therefore literally cannot be taken from us unless we die. Our very existence gives us the right to life and therefore the right to self-defense. Our capacity for reason and conscience and worship give us the rights to civil and religious liberty. Our capacity for work gives us the right to property that results from our labor.

Government, in the Founders' understanding, is instituted to protect equally these natural rights to life, liberty, and property—for investors and laborers alike. As Thomas Jefferson said in his first Inaugural Address, America needs

> a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.

Abraham Lincoln thought government should secure "*free* labor—the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all—gives hope to all, and energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all." And in his 1984 address to the Republican National Convention, Ronald Reagan noted that inflation's victims were not only the wealthy but also "working men and women."

Work is what takes us from learned helplessness or dependence to earned success and independence. Through public policy, governments and societies affect how much we work, and for what reason, and for whose benefit. Government can pay us *not* to work, or it can tax our labor and incomes and investments to such an extent that we do not work harder on the margin. Not only do we make less money; we lose some of our sense of self-worth. We lose our right to labor, and to the benefits of our labor. Jefferson, Lincoln, and Reagan understood: Governments that assert a claim to a citizen's property will have no trouble asserting a claim to his conscience as well. It cannot be a coincidence that the Obama administration, which wants to "spread the wealth around," also coerces religious institutions to provide contraceptives and abortifacients to employees. In both cases, Barack Obama believes his vision of the good trumps the equal rights of others.

Read *The Road to Freedom* for its explication of earned success, its definition of meritocratic fairness, and its moral commitment to using free exchange to improve the lives of the destitute. But don't forget that the moral truths that animate this admirable book, and others, cannot be found in economics or statistics or social science. They are found in the individual dignity of every human being, and in the natural equality of man. Will Smith's ability to pursue happiness does not depend on our 35 percent top tax rate. It depends on the depth of our commitment to the vision of the Founders. ♦

B&A

Master of the House

At Mount Vernon, James Rees will be a hard act to follow. BY RYAN L. COLE

In 2010, the *New York Daily News* printed a slightly scandalous scoop: George Washington had racked up over $300,000 in late fees on a copy of the Swiss philosopher Emer da Vattel's *The Law of Nations*, borrowed from, but never returned to, the New York Society Library in 1789. When James Rees, Mount Vernon's president and CEO, learned of this delinquency, he promptly returned a copy of the book and apologized on the president's behalf in a small ceremony. Then, true to form, he used the occasion to remind those gathered that Mount Vernon was planning the creation of its *own* library.

For nearly 30 years, Rees, who retired at the beginning of this month due to illness, rarely missed an opportunity to promote George Washington. His management of Mount Vernon coincided, not coincidentally, with a sizeable expansion of the home's profitability and visitor traffic. And equally significant, a series of innovative additions to the site, largely the result of his efforts,

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have increased Americans' access to and understanding of their first president.

His efforts made and kept Mount Vernon, which lures over a million guests annually, America's most frequented historic estate—a remarkable trend, given that it is arguably the most remote and least easily reached of the national landmarks clustered around our capital city. His prodigious fundraising—the endowment of the site, which takes no federal funds, increased from $4 million in 1983 to $125 million today—supported a transformation in the way it interprets its subject.

In the past, visitors came to the estate, wandered through the beautifully restored house, took in its scenic view of the Potomac River, snapped photos or bought postcards, and then hit the road. Today, they leave with a much clearer idea of who George Washington was and why his importance endures. They see a farmer, a businessman, a general, and a president, not just a historic home and its grounds.

"His goal has always been to help Americans discover the real George Washington," says Susan Magill, Mount Vernon's vice president of advancement and a longtime associate of Rees. "Because of Jim's vision, people leave here inspired."

The fruition of that vision came most visibly in the form of several additions to Mount Vernon's landscape that enriched the experience of those who make the pilgrimage. These include the reconstruction of the plantation's long-gone whiskey distillery and its neighboring gristmill in 2007 (see "Spirits of '76" by Kevin R. Kosar, The Weekly Standard, June 4, 2012). In addition to allowing lucky visitors a chance to sip Washington's white lightning, or sample flour and grits ground by his mill, the buildings, located three miles from his home, offer a glimpse of America's father as a savvy and strategic entrepreneur.

The Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, a 65,000-square-foot facility opened in 2006, offers a less quaint image of Washington. Filled not only with a museum's worth of Mount Vernon's own collection of relics, but also countless splashy interactive displays, a theater screening something akin to an action-adventure film, and even state-of-the-art life-sized reproductions of the man himself, the expansive facility is accurately described as an "immersive" experience.

Some of this is, perhaps, closer in spirit to Hollywood than to the Founding Fathers. Observers may, justifiably, lament the need to package and sell the most consequential of all Americans in such a manner. But our popular culture, with its stunted attention span and fascination with worthless celebrity, necessitates fighting fire with fire. Rees recognized this, and those who have stood in the long lines that lead into Mount Vernon, jostled for space in its education center, or enjoyed its multitude of attention-grabbing displays will recognize the value of translating Washington for a generation that might otherwise be oblivious to his importance or might never pick up a biography. And the resulting mixture of entertainment and history is far more graceful and effective than similar efforts, such as the cartoonish Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois.

Rees's departure comes in advance of the completion of his final triumph as Mount Vernon's steward. Construction is underway on the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington. When the $100 million enterprise for which Rees, in a depressed economy, raised $82 million, opens in the summer of 2013, it will not only reproduce Washington's own book collection (a useful window into the man's often-unrecognized intellect), but also establish a scholarship center and think tank—unique among historic sites.

In addition, Rees has, in tandem with the site's governing board, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, kept Washington and his home out of the murk of political correctness. While the interpretation of so many historic sites is unavoidably strained through a modern filter of race, class, and gender, Mount Vernon has never presented Washington as a sinner-in-chief, or slaveholder first and hero second; but neither has it ignored the story of the enslaved men and women who lived there. This is in sharp contrast to sites such as Monticello, where an obsession with the flawed nature of former residents often threatens to cloud their importance.

"Everything [Rees] did here during his tenure, every single thing, was always about George Washington and never about Jim Rees," says Magill. Indeed, those who visit Mount Vernon after his departure will not likely notice a difference: Rees, whose long tenure at the site is itself noteworthy (though president since 1994, he has been with Mount Vernon in various positions since 1983), focused on promoting his "client," not himself. But the occasion of his retirement warrants a note of gratitude. "Jim Rees made Mount Vernon beautiful, affordable, and visitor-friendly," says writer and historian Richard Brookhiser. "It does whatever a man's home, performance space, and last resting place can do to draw our attention to him. We should all thank Jim for a job well done." ♦

James Rees

THE WASHINGTON POST / GETTY IMAGES

B&A

Inside Philip Roth

There's a crime writer waiting to be identified.

BY JON L. BREEN

Consider this dialogue exchange:

"You're a very attractive woman nonetheless."

"I've never been told that before by a man with a gun."

Straight out of crime fiction, right? Maybe a hardboiled private-eye novel, or a 1940s film noir. But it's from *The Humbling* (2009) by Philip Roth, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner, arguably the greatest American novelist of the last half-century, and not generally considered a mystery, crime, or thriller writer. That same short novel includes a murder, and at one point the protagonist, actor Simon Axler, is asked by a fellow mental patient to kill her pederast husband. Except by a very broad definition, though, this is not a mystery or even crime fiction. But other recent Roth novels not only include genre elements and devices but cross the line into real, albeit offbeat, examples of the mystery writer's art.

The alternate history *The Plot Against America* (2004), in which Charles Lindbergh is elected president on the Republican ticket in 1940, denying Franklin D. Roosevelt a third term and putting the country on a gradual road to fascism, turns mysterious late in the story: Lindbergh, who has spent almost as much of his term in the air as he did in his barnstorming or mail-delivering days, suddenly vanishes while on a flight. The mystery of his disappearance is never solved definitively, but the most fully elaborated possibility (neither rejected out of hand nor presented as the final truth) entails a delightfully ornate conspiracy theory any thriller writer would be proud of.

The American Trilogy
American Pastoral
I Married a Communist
The Human Stain
by Philip Roth
Library of America, 1,094 pp., $40

The three novels that make up *The American Trilogy*, newly published in this single volume by Library of America, establish Roth's mystery credentials most persuasively. All three broadly detailed meditations on late-20th-century American life have at their center the ultimate crime of murder. In each book, novelist Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's alter ego, acts as detective in exploring the complex and tragic life of an enigmatic acquaintance. According to Roth himself (quoted in Ross Miller's useful section of notes), all three of these otherwise quite different protagonists want to change history, whether society's or their own, and are ultimately destroyed by the attitudes and the pressures of their times.

American Pastoral (1997) may not be *the* Great American Novel, but it is at the least *a* great American novel. Seymour Irving (Swede) Levov, who owed his nickname to fair Nordic features incongruous in the Jewish community of Newark, was a three-sport high school star, then a Marine volunteer in the last days of World War II, idolized by younger boys like Nathan, who, when the novel begins, is a ping pong-playing contemporary of Swede's misfit genius brother Jerry. Swede subsequently enters his father's glovemaking business, marries Miss New Jersey, and has a seemingly perfect professional and family life. In 1995, Nathan receives a letter with a dinner invitation from Swede, who wants to talk about his efforts to write a tribute to his late father, who died the previous year.

"Not everyone knew how much he suffered because of the shocks that befell his loved ones," Swede writes. Nathan has no idea what he means but speculates, "It wasn't the father's life, it was his own that he wanted revealed." The dinner, when it happens, reveals nothing: Swede, wearing his amiable, impassive mask, is cordial and voluble, but guarded. Nathan is left to wonder what the inner life of this paragon of virtue and good luck could possibly be like.

At his 45th high school reunion, Nathan learns from Jerry Levov that his brother has died and is told of the dark spot in Swede's seemingly impeccable existence: His daughter Meredith was the notorious Rimrock Bomber, a high school student who in 1968 blew up the small town's general store and post office, killing a beloved local doctor. Nathan decides that he will write about Swede's life, based on the facts he could discover—speculating, elaborating, and imagining events where necessary—while changing the names and fictionalizing the details prior to publication.

On page 85 of the Library of America omnibus, something remarkable happens. Nathan, dancing at the reunion with an old girlfriend, abruptly departs from the story: "To the honeysweet strains of 'Dream,' I pulled away from myself, pulled away from the reunion, and I dreamed. . . . I dreamed a realistic chronicle." In mid-paragraph, the scene changes to a conversation between Swede and his 11-year-old daughter at their summer seaside cottage, and for the remaining 310 pages, Nathan never reappears as anything other than an omniscient third-person narrator.

Wherever you pigeonhole it generically, *American Pastoral* is a remarkable novel in style, ambition, scope, and theme, a towering work by a great writer. Though Roth sticks to an East Coast Jewish milieu, the story delineates a broader American canvas in the 20th century's second half: the clashes of generations, the erosion of Ameri-

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can manufacturing, the conflict of religions, the civil rights movement, 1960s counterculture and war protest, shifting values and attitudes. The gritty details of institutions and work lives are important to the narrative: The reader learns much about cattle breeding and the Miss America pageant, plus enough details of the glovemaking process to fill a textbook. No one could call Roth a minimalist.

In the early pages, Nathan tries to make sense of the events of his subject's life. In the balance of the book (almost all from Swede's point of view), the subject himself is trying to figure out the same thing, along with the truth of his daughter's crime. Did she really do it? If she did, what was her motive? What in her family life brought her to that point? What could her father have done to prevent it? How did she escape the law? Who helped her? The latter question could have provided a whodunit, but as Roth/Zuckerman chooses to tell it, the reader already knows the answer before all the suspects appear as characters.

In a sense, Roth has given us an American *Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Charles Dickens, of course, died before he could finish that novel, leading many subsequent writers and theorists to finish it for him. Roth finished his. But everything from page 85 on is a postmodernist fiction-within-a-fiction that may or may not be accurate in its assumptions and speculations. Do we know for certain at that point that Meredith is guilty of the bombing she is assumed to have committed? Do we know who (or who else) was really involved? Do we know exactly what trauma had been visited on the Levov father?

In years to come, a writer willing to take on the challenge could note everything Zuckerman tells the reader about Levov up to page 85 and create an entirely different version of the story. It could be a tragedy (in common with Roth/Zuckerman's), a comedy, a pure suspense story, an espionage thriller, a fair-play whodunit, or something else entirely.

I Married a Communist (1998) is the shortest and least of the trilogy, but it has its merits. Less explicitly a mystery than its predecessor, it is set in the blacklist period of the early 1950s. Again, the present-day Nathan is searching for the truth about a figure from his youth, a person much more important to him than Swede Levov. Ira Ringgold had been a successful radio actor under the unlikely professional name Iron Rinn, the fourth husband of former silent film star Eve Frame, who has also achieved great success in radio and would eventually sign her name to the supposed nonfiction memoir that gives Roth's novel its title.

ERIC THAYER / REUTERS / NEWSCOM

Ringgold is an outspoken supporter of left-wing causes and a strong mentoring influence on Nathan, who met him through his high school English teacher, Ringgold's brother Murray. The young Nathan had struggled to choose between political ideals and apolitical art. Years later, Nathan questions the nonagenarian Murray for the truth about Ira's tragic life, and a large percentage of the book is Murray's monologue. As Murray finishes his account, Nathan comes to learn what role he really played in his onetime hero's life.

In this novel, as in *American Pastoral*, the characters and their motivations are the puzzle, a puzzle that is, at least provisionally, solved in a concluding scene quite unlike the summations of classical detective novels (though everything is foreshadowed, the reader can't glean the full story from the clues provided) but providing some of the same kind of satisfaction. And the final pages, told secondhand by Murray, with the reader knowing what event is coming but not knowing exactly what form it is going to take, bring suspense as powerful as any created by Alfred Hitchcock or Cornell Woolrich.

In *The Human Stain* (2000), Coleman Silk is a 71-year-old retired classics professor. During the 1995-96 school year at Athena College, he had been teaching a course in ancient Greek literature to 14 students, two of whom had never shown up to class. One day, while calling roll, he asked his other students, "Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?" Unknown to him, both students were African American; his casual reference was taken not as a sarcastic allusion to ghosts but a racial slur, and a scandal erupted that resulted in Silk's resignation from the faculty.

The misunderstanding that gets Silk branded a racist may be absurd, but it's also sadly believable in the climate of political correctness and administrative timidity that exists on university campuses. Silk had made enemies in his previous job as dean of faculty, and he blames his wife's death on the stress of the controversy. When neighbor Nathan Zuckerman declines to write his story, Silk determines to do the job himself. An affair with 34-year-old cleaning woman Faunia Farley improves Silk's mood, and he puts aside his overwrought manuscript. But new scandal erupts when the affair becomes known, and he receives a poison-pen letter in the handwriting of Delphine Roux, his former department chair and a French-born intellectual feminist. (Contemporary novelists are often accused of disdaining plot, a charge that can't be leveled at Philip Roth.)

As in the two previous novels, Zuckerman tries to figure out his friend's

odd history, sometimes imagining scenes and events to fill in the gaps and explain the main, often tragic, events. This time, the detective-story framework is even more striking.

A major secret about Silk that is revealed fairly early has often been tipped in reviews, this not being a mystery novel (at least officially) and literary reviewers not worrying much about spoilers. But it's a shame because it's such a well-managed and subtly clued surprise. Another plot reversal comes by way of one of the most timeworn mystery devices, the overheard conversation. Accusations of murder occur throughout: Silk believes that his enemies had, in effect, murdered his wife, and Farley's Vietnam-veteran husband accuses her of murdering their children, who had died in a fire.

Nathan's status as sleuth is underlined most explicitly when he quizzes a policeman about the details of an accident and even likens himself to an amateur detective. One character asks Nathan if he writes whodunits, and another tells him that she hasn't read his novels, sticking mainly to English mysteries. The final scene is a suspenseful, frightening, and generally astonishing variation on standard detective-novel denouement.

The title is explained as a reference to wild animals brought up by people and rejected by their fellows in the wild, a metaphor that applies in different ways to several of the characters. Again, specialized backgrounds (including academia, dairy farming, boxing, orchestral rehearsal, social rehabilitation of traumatized veterans, bird culture, ice fishing) are limned in detail.

No one should approach these three novels expecting a conventional mystery or detective story. But it would be foolish to deny that the techniques and strategies of suspense fiction can strengthen structural underpinning, and enhance emotional resonance, in service of serious literary themes and insights. Many celebrated writers have recognized this, from Dickens and Mark Twain to Joyce Carol Oates and John Updike, but none has approached the job quite like Philip Roth. ♦

B&A

No Excuses

Life's lessons from the other side of the rainbow.

BY JOE QUEENAN

People who have grown up poor hate to admit that poverty gives them a few decisive advantages over everybody else. Such an admission, they feel, gives aid and comfort to the enemy, to Social Darwinists who view poverty as bracing, character-building stuff, something everyone should dabble in, junior-year-abroad style, before going to work for Morgan Stanley.

Rolling Pennies in the Dark
A Memoir with a Message
by Douglas MacKinnon
Howard, 240 pp., $24

Douglas MacKinnon, a successful politico who grew up breathtakingly poor in and around Boston, understands all this. He knows that every poor kid who makes it in this society strengthens the case of those who believe that poverty is neither catastrophic nor especially unpleasant; that anyone can succeed, provided they put their shoulder to the grindstone and their nose to their bootstraps. Or something. Yet at the end of his raucous, uncompromising memoir, MacKinnon cannot resist saying:

> Abject poverty provided me with an unbeatable ace in the hole. I was not afraid to fail. *I was not afraid to try*. I was not afraid to be embarrassed. And I was not afraid to start over if I fell on my face—which was often.

Other than that, MacKinnon has little good to say about poverty. Having survived a dire, violent childhood in a bunch of crummy neighborhoods, including one he refers to as "Rat-Hole, Connecticut," he grew up to be a respected, successful communications specialist in Washington, writing for both Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, and serving as communications director for Bob Dole during his presidential campaign. The poverty went away. The rage did not. For *Rolling Pennies in the Dark* is not really a memoir; it is a bill of indictment, a jeremiad. Written in a conversational, almost brutish style, the book is filled with terms like "lowlifes," "creeps," "vermin," and "Rodent-man." And this is not just when he is talking about politicians.

The first half bristles with accounts of knife fights, stabbings, and drive-by shootings. A particularly memorable shooting involved his mother, who once emptied a clip of .45 bullets into the bedroom where he, his brother, and his infant sister were trying to get some shuteye.

"All three of us felt the same thing," he writes, noting that he himself fired off a few rounds at age 9. "At our tender ages, we had experienced more pain than most adults endure in a lifetime and had become numb to the horrors that kept assaulting us. We were resigned to our fate."

No, they weren't. Or at least he wasn't.

The second half of *Rolling Pennies* is devoted to MacKinnon's adult life, where he achieved tremendous professional success. But that didn't take the edge off. This section is filled with attacks on politicians, both on the left and right, who do nothing to alleviate the misery of the poor. MacKinnon has more than a few axes to grind. He hates people on the right who say that poor people are lazy, self-destructive scum who actually enjoy being poor. He hates parents who mistreat their kids, as his alcoholic parents did. He

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hates rich kids. He hates middle-class people who take their own good fortune for granted while begrudging the poor the few comforts they possess: a new TV, for example.

He doesn't have much time for the cloying, silver-spoon-in-his-mouth Al Gore. But he also despises people who absolve the poor of responsibility for their misdeeds, constantly returning to his personal Manichean credo that some people are just plain evil. His father being a perfect example: a person born into a solid middle-class family who threw away every advantage to become a violent, despicable alkie. Who, like a lot of alkies, really got off on tormenting his kids.

"The earth is full of real-life monsters," MacKinnon writes. "Monsters who had mommies and daddies, played with toys as toddlers, wore cute little outfits, and then grew up to perpetrate some of the most heinous crimes known to humanity. While my dad was far removed from that type of Monster, he was still, at least in my opinion, a monster with a small *m*."

Rolling Pennies in the Dark is not the most intellectually coherent book to appear this year. MacKinnon is a conservative, yet he greatly admires John F. Kennedy, *père et fils*. He believes that the poor get screwed left, right, and center, yet he loathes affirmative action. He denies that growing up poor automatically propels one toward a life of crime, yet he admits to committing numerous crimes as a teenager. He hates his mother for the way she treated him—the target-practice incident is especially unforgivable—but is devastated when she dies of cirrhosis of the liver. The book is a bit like poverty itself: It's picaresque, it's anything but dull, but there are loose ends.

Books celebrating one's triumph over poverty share certain themes. Education is invariably singled out as the only way out of the wilderness. The author must acknowledge the intercession of others—a grandparent, an employer, a teacher, a mysterious benefactor—and never, ever claim that he made it all on his own. But all good books about poverty, whether *Jane Eyre* or *Great Expectations* or *Black Boy* or *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*—no matter how harrowing, no matter how sad—contain a message of hope. Otherwise, no one would read them.

Rolling Pennies in the Dark contains a beautiful passage where the author's grandfather points to the radiant sky and explains that if you can follow the leprechauns to the end of the rainbow, a pot of gold coins will await you there. If you grow up poor in America, and you do not believe that a pot of gold is waiting for you at the end of the rainbow, you will not survive. This is the most powerful fairy tale the world has ever known. And like all powerful fairy tales, it sometimes comes true. ♦

B&A

Screen Test

What can you say about an art exhibition that isn't sure it's art? BY SONNY BUNCH

There's a weirdly apologetic tone to this exhibit. Upon entering, one is confronted by a mission statement from curator Chris Melissinos:

> Using the cultural lens of an art museum, viewers can determine whether the games on display are indeed worthy of the title "art." Some visitors will encounter a game that transports them back to their childhood, or gain insight into how games are made. My hope is that people will leave the exhibition with an understanding that video games are so much more than what they first thought. They may even be art.

The Art of Video Games
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Through September 30

It's hard to imagine another exhibit at the Smithsonian American Art Museum being forced to argue whether the subject in question is "art." Just down the hall is a series of landscapes and bedrooms shot by Annie Leibovitz; on the same floor resides an exhibit dedicated to patent models; if you go down a floor, there's one entitled "Decorative Arts from the White House." No one really questions if these exhibits constitute art.

Sonny Bunch is managing editor of the Washington Free Beacon.

Melissinos's caution—pleading, really—is representative of the uneasy and evolving place video games occupy in popular culture. Even as games earn respect in cultural circles, and considerate treatments in books such as *Extra Lives* and *Reality Is Broken*, the pushback has been intense. Perhaps most famously, Roger Ebert declared in 2010 that "video games can never be art," dismissively snorting: "Why aren't gamers content to play their games and simply enjoy themselves? They have my blessing, not that they care."

It's unlikely that this exhibit is going to change Ebert's mind. Part half-hearted attempt to justify the inclusion of video games in an art museum, part incomplete history lesson on gaming's journey, it's something of a mess.

At the entrance, one encounters a trio of video screens focused solely on the faces of video gamers; their contorted visages are meant to show us that video games elicit an emotional response, and an emotional response is one of the keys to art, yes? Well, sort of: Stepping on somebody's foot while riding the subway elicits an emotional response, too—but it's not necessarily art.

More convincing, if more pedestrian, are samples of developmental artwork and box art, as well as a discussion of the technique that goes into creating video games. These technical accomplishments, on their own, might not render video games art; but when combined with the medium's emphasis on storytelling, there's a case to be made that modern video games exist within the same tradition as, say, filmmaking.

Flower for PlayStation 3

As the exhibit progresses, visitors pass into a room with five playable games—Pac-Man, Super Mario Bros., Flower, The Secret of Monkey Island, and Myst—so people can experience the delight of video game playing. Given the popularity here of Pac-Man and Super Mario Bros.—arguably the least "artistic" of these games—it seems that people are more interested in transporting themselves back to childhood than partaking in a non-traditional experience like Flower, in which players control the wind and explore a beautiful grassy plain for the purpose of, well, exploring the beautiful grassy plain.

After the pseudo-arcade we embark on a history lesson, and here's where things really go off the rails. The room that follows is, in essence, a chronological examination of home video gaming systems from the late 1970s to the present day. Clips and explanatory narration of 4 games from each of 20 systems are shown to demonstrate how they moved the medium forward.

The exhibit deftly shows the evolution of video gaming at home: From Atari and ColecoVision to the Nintendo Entertainment System and Sega Genesis, and on to PlayStations 1, 2, and 3, we are presented a clear progression of video gaming as a technological medium. So what? As a history lesson, this is moderately interesting but woefully incomplete. Video arcades are almost totally ignored; it's as if video gaming began as entertainment for the home and evolved from there. Furthermore, entire genres and their impact on the medium are ignored: Sports games, such as the Madden football series, might as well not exist given the paucity of attention they receive. The same goes for fighting games like Street Fighter.

The exhibit also shies away from "controversial" genre-busting series like Mortal Kombat and Grand Theft Auto, which warrant nary a mention despite the undeniable effect they had on both the industry as a business and the medium as an art form. Granted, this is the Smithsonian Institution, and family-friendliness is a must, but it's a glaring omission.

The narration that accompanies the game clips we are shown is frequently banal and inadequate. PlayStation's Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty is described as the first "postmodern" game, but little consideration is given to what that actually means. Postmodern in what sense? As someone who has read about the game but not played it, I have an idea of what they're getting at—but only a slight one. The uninitiated would be lost.

Elsewhere, obvious opportunities to describe the artistic nature of video games are simply missed. Consider BioShock. Influenced by (and deftly critiquing) the work of Ayn Rand, and modeled on Art Deco, the underwater world of BioShock is fascinating and beautiful. The game toys with expectations of storytelling and, more intriguingly, with well-defined notions of player perspective and point of view. The old debate between fate and free will is, against all odds, addressed in a novel (though rudimentary) way. If video games are art, then BioShock is at the bleeding edge of this movement.

Yet you wouldn't have any idea that's the case from the game's treatment here. Instead, we're given little more than an advertisement that the production company might have shown on television. There is no depth or exploration. It's all skin-deep.

Finally, there's the question of misclassification. A fair number of the subjects in this exhibit are Japanese; yet this is, after all, the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Would it make sense to show *Rashomon* in an exhibition of postwar American cinema? Of course not. Then why are the Metal Gear Solid series, Pikmin 2, the Zelda games, the Mario games, and so on, included here? I am nitpicking, but it's emblematic of a larger problem, namely the lack of thought that went into this venture. There's a case to be made for video games as an art form, but this exhibit simply doesn't make it. ♦

THATGAMECOMPANY

A Civic Sitcom

Laughing out loud about 'democratic governance.'

BY ELI LEHRER

Parks and Recreation (NBC, Thursdays, 8:30 ET) offers every ingredient of a good television sitcom: It's smart, laugh-out-loud funny, well acted, and nicely photographed. Despite good reviews, and a bevy of award nominations, the show, unlike its NBC Thursday night mates *The Office* and *30 Rock*, still hasn't gained a wide-enough following (it rarely cracks the top 50) or produced enough episodes (only 68) to make it into syndication or become a topic of water-cooler chatter.

Which is a shame, because *Parks and Rec* also may be the most politically perceptive comedy in history. Look past the delightfully broad comic strokes of intentionally silly characters, and the viewer is left with a probing, questioning, and ultimately affirming exploration of democratic governance.

Parks and Recreation is a mockumentary in the style of *The Office*, and takes place in and around the Parks and Recreation Department of the fictional, midsized Pawnee, Indiana. The show's heroine, Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler), is earnest, ambitious, hardworking, public-spirited, and willing to stand up for her subordinates. She appeared almost dangerously naïve (shades of *The Office*'s Michael Scott) at the show's beginning, but has become savvy—even a bit scheming—over time. Her main foils are her über-libertarian, meat-loving boss Ron Swanson (Nick Offerman), who wants the department abolished but nonetheless gets along well with Leslie, and the failed "boy mayor"-turned-urban-management-consultant-turned-boyfriend Ben Wyatt (Adam Scott).

The rest of the supporting cast includes Leslie's friend Ann Perkins (Rashida Jones), ambitious metrosexual Tom Haverford (Aziz Ansari), manic, zero-percent-body-fat city manager Chris Traeger (Rob Lowe), as well as the Gen-Y slackers/married couple April Ludgate (Aubrey Plaza) and Andy Dwyer (Chris Pratt).

To date, the show has had several major through-plots. The whole of the first six-episode "season," and part of the second, involved the shaggy dog story of Leslie working with Ann and others to fill in a giant pit and build a park. Later seasons have explored various romantic entanglements, Tom's effort to start an entertainment events company in sleepy Pawnee (it fails spectacularly), and, in the season that ended last month, Leslie's successful run for Pawnee City Council.

While some critics and even some of the show's creative talents have compared *Parks and Rec* to HBO's slow-moving, overrated *The Wire* (both are set around local government), the series is actually an antidote to *The Wire*'s cynical, nihilistic vision of corrupt, pointless politics. The emotional and political heart of the show involves the relationship between Ron, who seeks to make the Parks Department *inefficient* (he wants it privatized and thinks Chuck E. Cheese would be a good model), and Leslie, who commits herself to making government work.

Given the standard liberal politics of Hollywood, and the fact that executive producer Michael Schur makes political donations to Democrats, it would be easy to assume that the show always takes Leslie's side. It does not. While Leslie does sometimes pull things off—the pit gets filled, a successful Harvest Festival takes place—much of what the Parks Department does ends up being petty and self-serving. The generally ethical Leslie intentionally plots to extend a "world's smallest park" planning process to keep a relationship with Ben going; the entire cast mourns (as seriously as comic characters can) the death of a mini-horse named Li'l Sebastian with far more fervor than Li'l Sebastian deserves.

Ultimately, the show presents the tension at the heart of public policy: the widespread desire to have the government "do something" about a wide variety of problems (even those as insignificant as recreational opportunities in a midsized town), and an equal desire to get government out of the way and let people pursue their affairs as they see fit.

The result is that the show speaks to just about everyone concerned with public policy. Because *Parks and Rec* depicts Knope herself as hardworking and public-spirited, the office staff of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) has held "rallies" in support of the show and produced YouTube videos about it. And because Ron gets equal time to express his hardcore libertarian philosophy—to the point that he convinces an elementary school student to change her ways—clips get circulated around libertarian think tanks. Most viewers, even those with strong convictions, will find sympathy for both sides. And the producers keep it that way on purpose: Partisan politics stay out of the show. Even after Leslie wins her election, nobody mentions her party affiliation. And the "issues" of *Parks and Rec*—wheelchair ramps, for example—aren't exactly polarizing.

The end result doesn't affirm any particular set of political beliefs, but underscores the value of allowing a wide range of views to have equal shots at convincing people of their respective merits. And through its comic skepticism, *Parks and Recreation* affirms the value, validity, and tensions at the heart of democratic governance. ♦

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"In the final hours before the Wisconsin recall, President Barack Obama reiterated his support for Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, Democratic challenger to Republican Gov. Scott Walker, over Twitter."

—Huffington Post, *June 4, 2012*

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 6/6/12
James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

(cont'd)

as well as an e-card.

Q: What kind of e-card?

MR. CARNEY: Those Hallmark ones with those cute little characters, Hoops and YoYo. The president wanted to send his sympathies to the mayor, but he also wanted to add a lighter touch since it's only a recall election and not the presidential election.

Q: There are some Democrats and union officials who are saying the president avoided Wisconsin on purpose because he knew Barrett was going to lose.

MR. CARNEY: Let me stop you right there. As I've mentioned on numerous occasions, the president's schedule has been extremely hectic. There was the NATO summit in Chicago, the meeting with France's new president, the awarding of the medals of freedom, the NHL playoffs.

Q: You mentioned the president was in Chicago for the NATO summit. Couldn't he have hopped over to Wisconsin to stump for Barrett?

MR. CARNEY: All you Beltway types think those cities out there are all next to each other, don't you? Well, they're not. Going over to Wisconsin from Chicago is like traveling to Baltimore from D.C. It's very far away.

Q: No, it's not. Both places are reachable in under an hour.

MR. CARNEY: Not if you're "hopping," as you explicitly stated.

Q: Wasn't President Obama's use of Twitter to support Mayor Barrett a bit thin?

MR. CARNEY: As far as tweets go, it was a lengthy endorsement—something like 95 characters, which is more than 50 percent of a tweet's maximum capacity.

Q: Had the president considered other means of endorsing Barrett?

MR. CARNEY: You obviously missed the president's video message on MySpace. He also posted thoughtful notes on classmates.com, friendster, and even at an AOL chat-

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