the weekly Standard

LEADING FROM BEHIND (CONT.)
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JUNE 25, 2012

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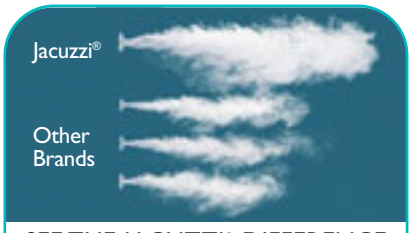

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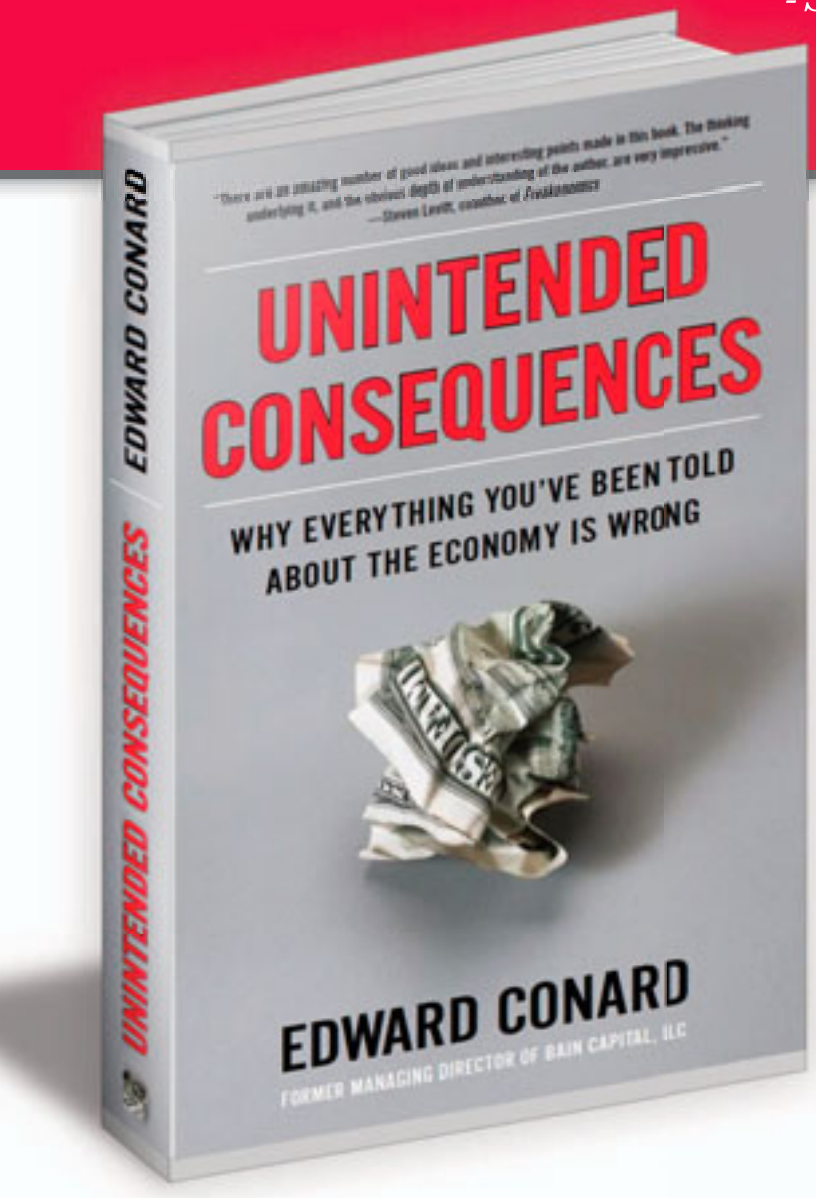

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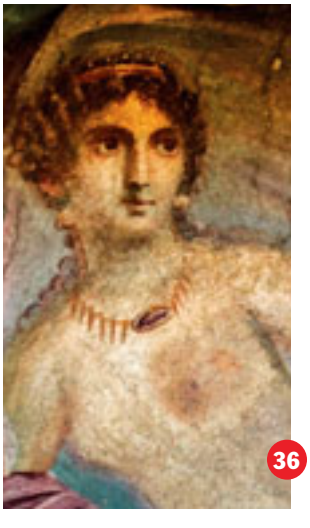

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Ambassador Wintour?

The Scrapbook has taken a certain perverse delight in the sudden prominence of *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour among President Obama's more fervent admirers (see "The Obama Vogue," June 18). If the Republican National Committee were searching for an unappealing image for the president's reelection campaign—icy demeanor, vulgar wealth, condescending British accent, even villain status in the popular culture (*The Devil Wears Prada*)—it could not do better than Ms. Wintour.

So readers may imagine The Scrapbook's delight when the *Guardian*, which could hardly be described as unsympathetic either to Anna Wintour or Barack Obama, ran a breathless piece last week speculating that the appropriate reward for all her well-publicized labor on the president's behalf might be appointment as the next United States Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

Of course, at first glance, it's a preposterous idea. Anna Wintour might be a big deal in the world of haute couture, but no one has suggested that *Project Runway*'s Tim Gunn should succeed Hillary Clinton at the State Department. Wintour knows all about buzzworthy *Vogue* covers, and who's hot and who's not on the island of Manhattan. But Great Britain is an important ally of the United States, and if Anna Wintour knows anything about foreign policy, or transatlantic relations, she has kept it well hidden under her famous pageboy hairdo.

On the other hand, the idea is not unprecedented. Professional diplomats—and the nation's editorial

pages—have long complained that presidents tend to award important ambassadorships to friends, campaign contributors, and politicians in search of a job, instead of to eligible members of the Foreign Service. But—surprise!—when Democratic presidents are in office, the editorial complaints are strikingly muted. In fact, in recent history, the Clinton administration was by far the worst offender, in terms of elbowing professional diplomats aside in favor of deep-pocketed friends; and the Obama administration has sent innumerable bundlers to plum embassies. Ambassador Wintour would be exceptional only in the sense that she's a high school dropout, and her professional background (fashion editor) stands out among the usual business types and Wall Street financiers who become political diplomats.

And from President Obama's point of view, it would no doubt make a certain sense as well. The Scrapbook doesn't want to stick its toes into the conspiracy fever swamps, but there is some evidence that the president, for whatever reason, seems less than fond of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

One of his first acts, upon settling into the Oval Office, was to remove a bust of Sir Winston Churchill from the premises and ship it back to the British embassy in Washington. (The bust, from the collection of the British government, had been loaned to the White House after 9/11.) And when Obama met privately with Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace—an extraordinary honor for a visiting dignitary—he presented the eightysomething monarch with an iPod stocked with audio recordings of his own speeches.

Sending the formidable, but somewhat frightening, Anna Wintour to London might be just the kind of subtle gesture Obama would savor. ♦

Losing One's Marbles

Events shape attitudes, and ideas fall in and out of favor in response to facts and figures and contingencies. The Scrapbook, for example, has always believed that the movement for statehood for the District of Columbia—which Congress endorsed in the 1970s and which was strongly supported by the Carter administration—has never really recovered from the four-term mayoralty of Marion Barry.

We were reminded of this the other day when our eye fell on a front-page story in the *New York Times*: "Greek Antiquities, Long Fragile, Are Endangered by Austerity" (June 12). The story, reported from Athens, explained how the Greek financial crisis has devastated museum security and archaeological budgets throughout the country, and could have adverse long-term consequences for endangered classical specimens. Already there are examples of artifacts being stolen from museums—there was an armed robbery in February in Olympia—and remote historic sites are suddenly vulnerable to development.

Which, in turn, reminded The Scrapbook of the movement that has gathered considerable steam in recent years to return the Elgin Marbles to the Parthenon from

the British Museum in London.

The Elgin Marbles are a priceless collection of 5th-century B.C. sculptures, inscriptions, and architectural details from the Parthenon, and other structures on the Acropolis in Athens, which were purchased at the beginning of the 19th century by the 7th Earl of Elgin, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Lord Elgin was worried, and with good reason, that the artifacts might not survive into posterity.

The Turks had no cultural affinity for classical Greek antiquities, and the Parthenon had been used as an ammunition dump where, during a 17th-century bombardment by Venetians, an explosion caused considerable damage to the marbles. At huge personal expense, Lord Elgin purchased them from the Ottoman authorities, shipped them by sea to England, and sold them to the British Museum at less than the cost of their purchase and transport. You can see them today in a wing specially built to display them.

It is, of course, understandable that Greeks lament the fact that the Elgin Marbles survive in London, not in Athens—just as, no doubt, some Englishmen must regret the fact that the world's largest collection of Shakespeare First Folios is in Washington, D.C. But Lord Elgin, so far as The Scrapbook is concerned, acquired the marbles with scrupulous legality from the government of the day, and his concerns about their long-term survival were not misplaced. Greece has suffered its share of political turmoil and violence since the early 19th century—not to mention a Nazi invasion and occupation during World War II—and Athens' legendary pollution has taken a toll on other antiquities on the Acropolis.

Indeed, The Scrapbook has always believed that the Elgin Marbles survive to this day—and on permanent exhibit, in one of the world's great museums, for all to enjoy—precisely because, for the past 200 years, they have been in London, not Athens. And if Greece's financial crisis deepens much further, as it seems likely to do, they will probably stay put for at least another two centuries. ♦

Psychoanalyze Thyself

The mainstream media clearly have difficulty understanding conservatives. *Time* has even gone so far as to hire a psychoanalyst—Justin Frank, M.D., of George Washington University—to write a column entitled "Republicans on the Couch." After reading Frank's latest, we're convinced that someone needs a long session on the couch to get to the root of their mental anguish—and it's not the GOP.

The headline, "The Root of Mitt Romney's Comfort with Lying," tells you all you need to know, but we read on anyway. "[Romney's] pattern of lying and not acknowledging it, even when confronted directly, has persisted and led me to look for other sources of Romney's behavior and of his clear comfort with continuing it," writes Frank. This keen scientific analysis is based on two observations: (a) that Mitt Romney dismissed some handwringing over an Obama quote in one of his campaign ads being taken out of context and (b) that Romney has accused Obama of deliberately slowing down the economy to pursue the passage of Obamacare.

The first claim of "lying" is absurd—it's not as if Romney wrote and edited the campaign ad in question. Perhaps it's regrettable that a political ad is not as rigorously fair as it should be, but this is a complaint that should be taken up with every political campaign ever, including that of Romney's opponent. Frank's second claim is that Romney's citation of a new book by the *New Republic*'s Noam Scheiber as evidence that Obama slowed down the economy to pursue health care legislation has been refuted by Scheiber himself. It's true Scheiber doesn't like the way that Romney reads his book, but if you follow the link Scheiber provides, he also writes, "I can't give Romney the full 'you know nothing of my work' treatment. While he's definitely misrepresenting . . . the administration, there's a kernel of truth to his interpretation of my book." Indeed, just last week Scheiber wrote a blog post entitled. "*Of Course* Doing Health Care Slowed the Recovery."

But don't worry, Frank has an explanation for this rash of alleged mendacity. "I think much of this comfort [with lying] stems from his Mormon faith. . . . There is a long tradition in the Mormon belief system in which evidence takes second place to faith. . . . [I]n the Mormon Church, there was a decision to accept authority as true—whether or not evidence supported it."

To say that this is a woeful misrepresentation of what Mormons believe would be an understatement. The assertion that their belief system makes them uniquely prone to lying is nothing more than knee-jerk religious bigotry.

It's also rich that Justin Frank, M.D., cites a conflict between the authority recognized by Romney and empirical truths. After all, isn't Dr. Frank's entire column predicated on an appeal to his authority as a psychoanalyst? Is Frank really that much more perceptive than other political commentators? If this column is any indication, the answer is a resounding no. ♦

Required Reading

Fresh on the heels of a terrific volume of highlights from its first decade of publishing (noted in The Scrapbook last month, and available wherever books are physically or virtually sold), the *Claremont Review of Books* has dispatched its Spring 2012 issue, which arrived last week on our desk, livelier and better than ever (that's the magazine that's livelier and better than ever, not our desk).

The latest issue features one interesting and thought-provoking article after another, from politics—William Voegeli on democratic capitalism and James Ceaser on the Constitution—to literature—Algis Valiunas on Charles Dickens and Matthew Continetti on *Game of Thrones*—to philosophy—Mark Blitz on Hobbes and Tao Wang on Leo Strauss's reception in China. Take a look at the complete table of contents at www.claremont.org/publications/crb/, then subscribe posthaste, and make sure they start your subscription with the Spring issue. You really don't want to miss it. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"The game, however, is up. The clock is ticking toward internal and external collapse. Even our corporate overlords no longer believe the words they utter. They rely instead on the security and surveillance state for control. The rumble of dissent that rises from the Occupy movements terrifies them. It creates a new narrative. It exposes their exploitation and cruelty. And it shatters the . . . " (from the introduction to *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* by Chris Hedges, Nation Books). ♦

Help Wanted

Weekly Standard contributing editor Charles Krauthammer seeks a full-time research assistant for a one- or two-year tenure. Send résumé to job@charleskrauthammer.com. ♦

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

Dressed Down

I was walking with my dog last week in woods near our house. As we crossed a grassy clearing where the trail passes a road, a car slowed and a voice boomed from it: "*Put! That! Dog! On a leash, sir!*"

"All right," I said. My parents always insisted I obey policemen and other figures of authority. Doing what school crossing guards told you could keep you from getting hit by a truck. The lesson had enduring practical relevance, too. Saying "*Yes, officer*" to a state trooper might subject you to a $20 speeding ticket and the annoyance of being lectured when you were in the right. Saying "*You crazy? No way I was doing 70 back there!*" would not change the ticket, and it could subject you to something worse.

My parents were not simply telling me to submit to force. There was a constitutional undertone to their lectures. An encounter with police is a special kind of encounter, as I would understand when I came to read Ernst Kantorowicz and Pierre Manent. Citizens submit not to the policeman but to the law. The policeman, too, submits when he dons his uniform. He is not, at least in constitutional theory, exercising his will. He is carrying out tasks assigned him by the state—which, in a democracy, means you. The deference you owe is to Officer Joe Blow, not Citizen Joe Blow. This distinction may be a subtle one, but it marks the difference between duly constituted authority and random bullying. One has not just the right but the duty to resist bullying, even at the risk of getting a few teeth knocked out.

I had a troubling thought, though, as I watched the car speed off. It was not a police car. It was a plain old gray car with bumper stickers on the back. And for what conceivable reason would a park policeman enforce the law in plainclothes? I doubt he was posing as a camper in order to break up a ring of rutting deer. In short, *had* it been a cop? Or was he just one of those scolds with too little self-esteem and too much time on their hands? One meets them on neighborhood listservs, tattling about people who put their garbage bins out too early on the eve of collection or drink beer on the front porch.

DAVID GOTHARD

On the other hand, he didn't *sound* like those people. "Simpering" was a word you might use to describe the neighborhood goody-goodies. Not him! Then there was the word "sir." He hadn't used it politely. In fact, he'd used it as a synonym for "idiot." But, apart from foreigners, people who work in hierarchical organizations are the only ones who still use the word "sir" at all. Assuming the guy hadn't just been discharged from the military with a galloping case of post-traumatic stress disorder, there was a good chance he was a cop. On the other hand, I shouldn't need a degree in management to figure out whom the government has authorized to boss me around and whom not.

I was mulling these distinctions when a car squealed to a stop behind me. "*Did! You! Hear! What I said!*" boomed a familiar voice in a decidedly noninterrogatory tone. Now I got a good look at the young man who had yelled at me. He was striding across the pavement towards me with a look of purposeful anger. He was not wearing any semblance of a police uniform. His clothing did reveal one thing about him: He had spent much of his adult life in weight rooms. It seemed I was about to live the teeth-knocked-out part of my little constitutional lesson. "Who are you?" I hollered at him.

"I'm a policeman," he said, stopping in the middle of the street. "Park police."

"All right," I said. I went over and leashed the dog. I walked off. He got in the car.

The guy could have identified himself as a cop without forcing me to challenge him. But that would have spoiled for him the thrill of aggression that was the whole point of our encounter and (I rather suspect) of his choice of career.

We think of going without uniforms as a mark of our easygoingness. It is not. It can be the mark of a republic collapsing into authoritarianism. A uniform permits a citizen, without running the risk of getting beat up, to figure out his duties under the law. Without uniforms, you get some version of what seems to have happened in the deadly Trayvon Martin-George Zimmerman encounter in Florida this winter. A guy in civilian clothes claims (and may even have) the authority to threaten violence in the name of the state, while those he confronts see no evidence that he is anything other than a bully or a sociopath. Our country is a little too on edge to tolerate that kind of ambiguity, and a little too heavily armed.

Christopher Caldwell

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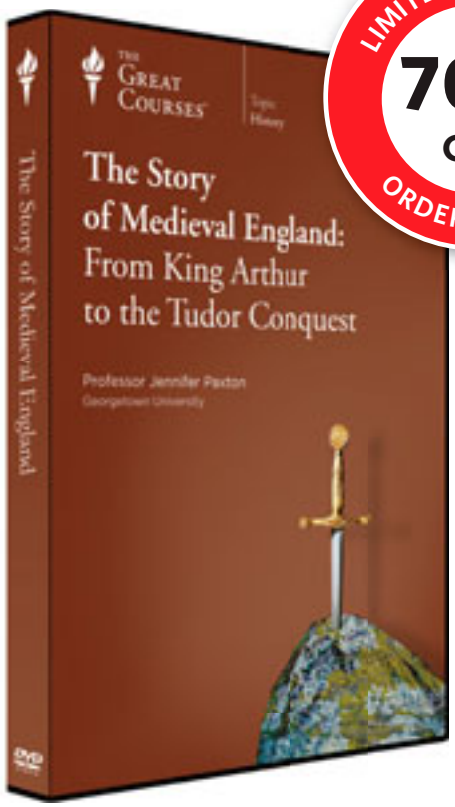

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No Iranian Nukes

Two years ago, we wrote in these pages that we were entering with respect to Iran what Winston Churchill called in 1936 a "period of consequences," in which "the era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays is coming to its close."

And so it finally is. The Obama administration has remained committed to procrastination and half-measures, to soothing and baffling expedients. But even friends of the administration now acknowledge the obvious: After all the diplomatic efforts and attempts at various forms of economic pressure, Iran is closer than ever to a nuclear weapons capability, with a new enrichment facility, thousands more centrifuges spinning, and enough enriched uranium to produce five nuclear weapons.

JASON SEILER

The last year has also witnessed a foiled Iranian plot to assassinate U.S. diplomats and their families in Azerbaijan, attempts to kill Israeli diplomats in the Republic of Georgia, Thailand, and India, and a plot to kill the Saudi ambassador (and American bystanders) at a Washington, D.C., restaurant. As we have shamefully dithered for more than a year, Iran has sent weapons, troops, and money to support its brutal ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria. All of this is, of course, in addition to years of Iranian complicity in the killing of U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This record of Iranian murder and mayhem is the reality of our failed Iran policy—a policy, to be fair, that began under the Bush administration. President Obama sometimes seems committed to ending the era of procrastination. He said in March that U.S. policy "is not going to be one of containment. . . . My policy is prevention of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons." Since that tough talk, however, he and his top advisers have temporized—claiming that Iran is increasingly isolated and on the ropes, insisting that there is time for negotiations and sanctions to work because Iranian leaders have not yet made the decision to weaponize, arguing that "loose talk of war" only serves to strengthen Iran's hand, and his administration hints that covert activities against Iran can effectively substitute for real action.

But Iran's nuclear progress marches on. That fact trumps all the administration's hopes and wishes and theories. Facts are stubborn things, and so is the Iranian nuclear program. No one seriously believes the talks set to resume shortly in Moscow will stop Iranian nuclear progress. Indeed, the talks look increasingly like the farcical diplomatic process pursued by the Bush and Obama administrations with respect to Iran's friend, North Korea, a "process" that has resulted in a growing nuclear stockpile in that country and a series of unanswered North Korean provocations.

But Iran is much more dangerous than North Korea. And while it may serve President Obama's short-term political interests to avoid taking action against Tehran this year, it doesn't serve the nation's.

President Obama says a nuclear Iran is unacceptable. The real and credible threat of force is probably the last hope of persuading the Iranian regime to back down. So: Isn't it time for the president to ask Congress for an Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iran's nuclear program?

Instead of running away from it, administration officials could be putting the military option front and center and ensuring it is seen as viable. And if the administration flinches, Congress could consider passing such an authorization anyway. While any commander in chief has the constitutional authority to take urgent action to protect Americans and their interests, such legislation would give weight to the president's commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It would strengthen the president's hand. It would show Tehran that America's policy of preventing an Iranian nuclear weapon is a credible one. Bipartisan support for such an authorization

would remove the issue as much as possible from the turmoil of election year politics. And the authorization could also make clear that the United States would come to Israel's aid in the event that it decides it needs to take action.

We don't expect the Obama administration to request an Authorization for Use of Military Force. But Congress can act without such a request. By doing so, it would serve the nation's interest, and, indeed, the administration's, if the administration means what it says.

At the end of his "period of consequences" remarks in the House of Commons in November 1936, Churchill said:

> Two things, I confess, have staggered me, after a long Parliamentary experience, in these Debates. The first has been the dangers that have so swiftly come upon us in a few years, and have been transforming our position and the whole outlook of the world. Secondly, I have been staggered by the failure of the House of Commons to react effectively against those dangers. That, I am bound to say, I never expected. I never would have believed that we should have been allowed to go on getting into this plight, month by month and year by year, and that even the Government's own confessions of error would have produced no concentration of Parliamentary opinion and force capable of lifting our efforts to the level of emergency.

Surely it is time for a concentration of congressional opinion and force capable of lifting our efforts to the level of emergency. The Obama administration may be committed to leading from behind, but Congress can choose to lead from the front.

—William Kristol & Jamie Fly

The AWOL Commander

When it comes to the conflict in Afghanistan, Americans are war-weary. A *Washington Post*/ABC poll this spring found that two-thirds of those surveyed now believe that "the war in Afghanistan has not been worth fighting." Nearly the same percentage in an April Pew poll wanted to "remove troops as soon as possible." And this followed on the heels of a March CNN/ORC International survey that had 72 percent of its respondents saying they "oppose the U.S. war in Afghanistan."

On one level this is hardly a surprise. For more than a decade American and allied militaries have been fighting and dying in Afghanistan, and, for multiple and complex reasons, progress has been slow. Nevertheless, it is striking that in the same polls mentioned above, a majority of Americans held different views at the end of the Bush years and at the start of Obama's tenure as president. In December 2008, the CNN survey had 52 percent of those polled in "favor" of the war, while the Pew poll in September 2008 found 61 percent of its respondents agreeing that we should "keep troops there until the situation has stabilized." And the *Washington Post*/ABC poll of December 2008 had 55 percent still saying the war had been "worth fighting."

While it's true that support for the war had been slipping, it's also the case that this support has collapsed over the past year and half. These two sets of numbers can't help but raise the question of the role played by President Obama in sustaining (or not) support for the war. Some insight into this question comes from looking at the graph below of a *Washington Post*/ABC poll question taken over time.

The first thing to notice is that support for the war had been declining prior to the 2008 presidential race but began to tick back up once the campaign went into full swing over the summer. Why? The most obvious answer is that both the candidates, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama, backed the Afghan effort. Indeed, candidate Obama in 2008 criticized President Bush for "taking his eye off the ball in Afghanistan" and said, if elected, he would focus on "finishing the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban." This, in his words, was "the right war."

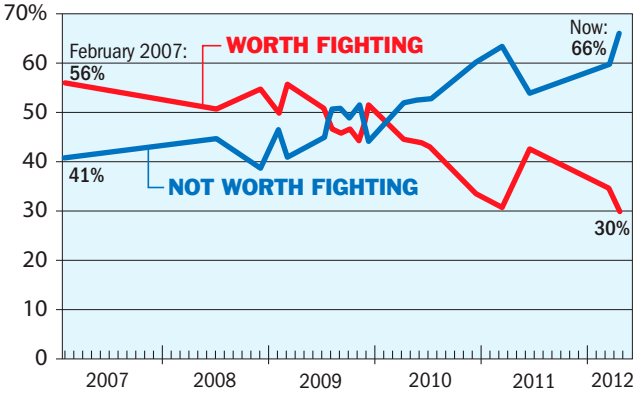
With the election over, the focus on Obama's domestic agenda, and reports from Afghanistan that the Taliban were increasing control of various parts of the country, support for the war dipped again. However, it spiked back up in early 2009 when the president announced that 20,000 more troops would be sent to the theater, with Obama saying Afghanistan had "not received the strategic attention, direction, and resources it urgently requires" and that nothing less than "the safety of people around the world is at stake."

But then the president went into radio silence about the war, and by August 2009, the number of those who thought the Afghan conflict was "not worth fighting" had crossed over to being a majority for the first time. As the graph shows, there then was a brief period in which opinion seemed to bounce around in a very small range, probably reflecting the president's own statement that this was a "war of necessity," but also news accounts of the administration's own internal debate over whether to adopt then-American commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal's new plan for the war requiring more troops and resources or begin to pull the plug on the counterinsurgency effort altogether.

The president resolved the debate in favor of a "low-end" version of the McChrystal plan. On December 1, 2009, at West Point, Obama announced his decision to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan in his version of the "surge." While noting that elements of the surge

would come home in July 2011, the president punctuated his speech with lines such as "our cause is just, our resolve unwavering" and "let me be clear: none of this will be easy" and "the struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly." And, as the graph below shows, there was a quick reversal in the number now saying the war was "worth fighting," climbing back above the 50 percent mark.

Considering the costs versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, or not?



SOURCE: Washington Post

But, as the graph also shows, it has been largely downhill ever since, with the exception of a not insignificant uptick in favor of the war following Osama bin Laden's killing in May 2011. However, instead of building on that success, the White House used it as the opening to begin shifting the principal goal of the war from stabilizing Afghanistan to defeating al Qaeda. And with al Qaeda increasingly on its heels, the United States could begin to wind down its combat role in the conflict. Accordingly, in June 2011, the president announced the unexpectedly rapid drawdown of all the surge forces, putting up the straw man that we were not in the business of trying "to make Afghanistan a perfect place" but to ensure it was no longer a safe haven for terrorists. This was to be "the beginning . . . of our effort to wind down this war."

This shift is explained by the fact that, as David Sanger of the *New York Times* has reported, Obama was never actually on board with McChrystal's design of an enhanced counterinsurgency. For the troops and their commanders, the surge was part of a larger strategic game plan; for the president, it was a tactical maneuver, allowing him space and time to begin the drawdown and incentivize the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. (In this respect, Obama's thinking appears eerily similar to President Nixon's in the Christmas bombing of North Vietnam in 1972.)

Sanger's reporting also helps explain why, outside of his first year in office, the president has not made much of an effort to defend the war in Afghanistan or talk about the surge's successes. Instead, the president's rhetoric has focused on "our troops coming home," with the codicil that, of course, we'll make the transition "responsibly." (Again, one can't help but hear echoes of "Vietnamization" and "peace with honor.")

But, as with Vietnam, the American public knows in its bones that the president has, in the run up to November's election, decided to pull the plug on the Afghan war, cutting short the progress that was being made on the ground and leaving America's returning troops with an uncertain result as their legacy. This, perhaps as much as anything else, explains why some two-thirds now believe the Afghan war has not been worth fighting.

No doubt Americans are war-weary today. But only a year ago, a majority of Americans in a CBS/*New York Times* poll believed the war was going well or, at least, somewhat well, a poll result very similar to that of a Princeton/Pew survey taken the same month. Moreover, unlike Vietnam, this is not a war with hundreds of thousands of draftees fighting and tens of thousands of troop fatalities.

It's certainly true that success in putting down an insurgency takes time and patience. But it's not true that Americans are simply too impatient a people to sustain the effort needed. Americans have engaged in prolonged wars, cold and hot, in the past. What's key is a sense that success is possible and, in turn, a president willing to make the case that success is not only possible but necessary. Unfortunately, this is not the president we have.

—Gary Schmitt

Conservatism, North Dakota Style

North Dakota is a rich state, relatively speaking. Good Midwesterners of mostly Scandinavian descent, those Dakotans always tried to live within their means, with the result that the state never ran up much debt, even in the lean years. And recent times have been far from lean: The boom in oil development—and consequent tax revenues—throughout the Bakken

formation has produced an easily balanced budget of $4.1 billion for the state in 2012, despite $500 million in property and income tax reductions.

Meanwhile, North Dakota is also a pretty conservative place. In 2008, John McCain took the state with 53 percent of the vote. In 2010, former Republican governor John Hoeven carried every county in his race for the U.S. Senate. When the state's other senator, the blue dog Democrat Kent Conrad, announced his retirement this year, most political analysts counted the seat an easy Republican pickup. And that still seems the likely outcome: Former attorney general Heidi Heitkamp has polled surprisingly well for the Democrats, but with his 66–34 primary victory on Tuesday, Republican nominee Rick Berg is finally in a good position to begin his general campaign and should be able to turn Heitkamp back.

The curious thing is that on this same Election Day—Tuesday, June 12—those conservative North Dakotans also voted on four ballot measures. The first would prohibit state legislators from being appointed to state jobs at higher salaries. The second would eliminate all property taxes, repaying lost community revenues with state oil money. The third would add a line about religious liberty to the preamble of the state constitution. And the fourth would force the University of North Dakota to keep the politically incorrect "Fighting Sioux" as the name of its sports teams.

Leaving aside the mostly apolitical first ballot measure (a sure bet almost anywhere), the other three look like winners in a deeply conservative state, don't they? Which leaves political commentators the unenviable task of explaining how all three went down to defeat on Tuesday—and not just defeat, but slaughter: 77–23 percent against eliminating the property tax, 64–36 percent against constitutionalizing religious liberty, and 67–33 percent against the Fighting Sioux. Either North Dakota is the anti-Wisconsin, a conservative place turning liberal, or we have misunderstood what conservatism actually means in a place like North Dakota.

Given that President Obama and the national Democrats have next to no chance of winning the state this November, the answer seems to be that conservatism is not what it has been painted by the national press. The voters in North Dakota manifest little of the deep mistrust of government that has supposedly characterized conservative movements—from the Values Voters of 2004 to the Tea Partiers of 2010—over recent election cycles. They like their government in Bismarck, because they think on the whole it is has been serious and fiscally responsible. They dislike their government in Washington, because they think on the whole it has *not* been serious and fiscally responsible.

Each of the North Dakota ballot measures has some local twist that makes it difficult to read as a sign for anything greater. State voters came to believe, for example, that the anti-property-tax measure would not actually lower taxes; all it would have done is diminish the power of local communities and centralize authority in the state government. The referendum on the land-grant university's nickname was cast, in a large majority of voters' minds, as an attempt to override the school's power to decide things for itself, and again the North Dakotans voted to retain authority at the lower level of local government.

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As far as the religious-freedom amendment goes, this was an even trickier thing. When President Obama and HHS secretary Kathleen Sebelius singled out Catholic institutions as a particular focus of their attempts to force universal insurance coverage of birth control and abortifacients, they made the Catholic church the face of the new fight for religious liberty.

That had its advantages, putting the largest religious group in the nation at the forefront of the battle. But it also had its disadvantages. In highly Protestant states with a history of suspicion about Catholicism, the fight can seem less than urgent: an unnecessary and Catholic-motivated change to an already sufficient state constitution. In a ranking of states by the Catholic percentage of population, North Dakota comes in below the median—and would rank near last if the Catholic population of the Indian reservations were discounted. Add in worries about the spreading influence of Islam across the border in Minnesota, and the measure was doomed.

The local flavor of the debates, however, cannot obscure the generally pro-government slant of Tuesday's results. If that's liberal, then rural North Dakota is a liberal place. Except that we know it isn't. Not by a long country mile. The state's voters believe in their ability to govern themselves. If anything, in North Dakota they seem consistently to vote for a straightforward theory of subsidiarity—authority kept in the hands of those closest to the voters: the state instead of the federal government and, where possible, the local community instead of the state.

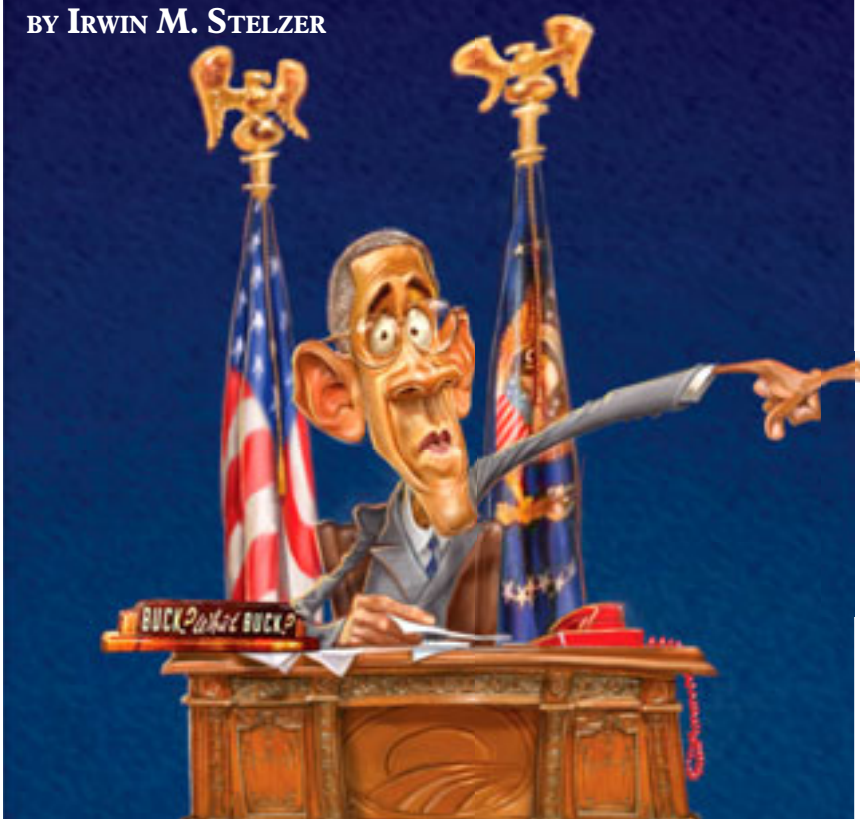
That isn't hatred of government. It's a wise realism about the uses and misuses of government. And with such realism, North Dakota proves just how conservative a state it really is.

—Joseph Bottum

The Buck Stops Over There

Blaming Europe for the U.S. economy.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER



Barack Obama doesn't have George W. Bush to kick around anymore. At least not credibly. Sure, he will continue to argue that he inherited such a mess that his own policies can only be regarded as a smashing success. But it's been four years since the patient was turned over to the new president for treatment, and the economy's stubborn failure to recover its robustness tells us something about the efficacy of the Obama medicine. Which makes it increasingly difficult for him to continue to play the blame-GWB game. So Obama has found a new cause of falling growth and stubbornly high unemployment: Europe.

Now, no one can argue that our European friends are paragons. They have fiddled while Athens burned; done too little too late to save Spain's financial system; forced an exodus of talent such as Ireland hasn't seen since the potato famine (I exaggerate); replaced democratically elected governments in Greece and Italy with "technocrats"; issued a plethora of communiqués that amused but did not calm the markets; and adopted policies that have driven deficits up by stifling growth. Plenty of stuff to warrant a presidential *j'accuse*. Except for two things: The American pot is ill-placed to call the European kettle black, and the president's lack of personal support from his colleagues at the G7, G20, and other meetings makes him a less-than-ideal policy salesman. More important, the president's attempt to set Europe up as the new fall guy for his failed policies—besides Bush, other alibis have included supply chain interruptions due to Japan's tsunami—seems, shall we say, lacking in empirical support.

Europeans are disinclined to accept American advice for two reasons. First, our deficit exceeds that of the eurozone as a whole, and according to the latest studies by the Congressional Budget Office, we are in danger of incurring so much debt that economic growth will be well-nigh impossible. Hardly a model to which Europe should aspire.

GARY LOCKE

When Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner tried to advise Europeans to step up borrow-and-spend, he was met with scorn. "It's always much easier to give advice to others than to decide for yourself," German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble announced to the press, a thought usually expressed in the privacy of a conference room. Second, our political gridlock makes the slow-moving decision process of the eurocracy seem speedy, and our partisan feuding the acrimonious Germany-versus-everyone-else circus in Europe a lovefest. Obama's pleas to the Europeans to speed up decision-making are, to put it mildly, lacking in credibility.

On a more personal level, Obama has trouble getting a hearing from his European counterparts, I am told by attendees at various G7, G8, G20, and G-whatever meetings. He stands aloof from them, a man apart in gatherings of politicians who are by instinct flesh-pressers. Reliable informants tell me that his colleagues at these meetings

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would at times do George W. Bush a favor when he needed one for domestic political purposes—they liked him even if they found some of his policies insufficiently pacific.

Obama enjoys no such advantage. This is the man who couldn't get the Olympics for his hometown of Chicago, and who was treated with contempt by China, and ignored by other nations at a meeting in Denmark when he sought some progress on global warming to advertise to his green constituents. This is also the man whose partner in a diplomatic reset, Vladimir Putin, said he was too busy to attend the G8 and NATO meetings at which President Obama served as host, and then found time between harassing dissidents to hop over to Beijing for a round of meetings.

The president's lack of standing with his European counterparts is unfortunate. With Germany so far sticking to its austerity *über alles* policy, an American voice calling for more emphasis on pro-growth policies would be an important counterweight. Never mind: The Europeans will have to work that out with German chancellor Angela Merkel, and persuade her that hardworking Germans should transfer more of their income and wealth to the rest of Europe—a task made more difficult by French president François Hollande's decision to roll back one of Nicolas Sarkozy's reforms and lower the retirement age for many workers from 62 to 60 years, while Germans are expected to remain in the traces until 65-67 years of age.

So much for where we are. Now for where we are going. Economists are uncertain, but the consensus seems to be that such growth as our economy will chalk up between now and the election will be insufficient to create enough jobs to make his stimulus program a talking point for the president and his supporters, especially if the recent slowdown in consumer buying persists. No surprise, says the White House: The European contagion has hit our shores. Why, just look at the devastating effect of Europe's unfolding recession on our exports. Well, let's look.

While exports have been contributing to our recovery, we remain a nation not highly dependent on peddling stuff to foreigners. To the extent that we do, our leading customers are Canada and Mexico, not widely considered European countries. Last year, total exports accounted for a bit less than 14 percent of our GDP, 22 percent of which went to the EU—or 3.1 percent of GDP. Last month, the month of the miserable jobs report that the president wants to pin on the EU, our exports to that troubled area dropped by some 11 percent, or 0.3 percent of our GDP. If anyone outside of the White House believes that such a trivial drop in shipments to Europe caused job creation here to slow, he has yet to emerge.

Indeed, the mechanism by which Europe's troubles will reach our shores is, to put it mildly, unclear. Our mutual funds have greatly reduced their exposure to Europe's banks, and our own banks are in far better shape and less linked to their European counterparts than ever. In fact, it can be argued that Europe's difficulties have made America more of a safe haven for flight capital, thereby helping to keep both interest rates and inflation here low as the strong dollar puts downward pressure on commodity prices.

There is one contagion mechanism that might, only might, fit the president's narrative as he attempts to divert attention from his failed policies by pinning blame on Europe—and most especially on Frau Merkel, who continues to link aid to her less fortunate eurozone colleagues to their willingness to rein in their trade unions, reform their labor markets, and take an ax to their public sector payrolls. Wall Streeters, or some of them, contend that a worsening of the situation in Europe, especially a Grexit—Greek exit from the eurozone—will rattle stock markets here, cause a flight from shares, and hit investors in their pocketbooks, with knock-on effects on consumer spending and business investments. But as the estimable Bret Stephens pointed out last week in the *Wall Street Journal*, previous overseas financial upheavals have had no such effects on the U.S. economy. Do not confuse the instantaneous response of the stock market with a fundamental change in the economy. After the 1997 collapse of Asian currencies, the Dow plunged, but the economy did not, growing at better than 4 percent, a feat it repeated after the Russian ruble crisis. "Bear this not-so-ancient history in mind," writes Stephens, "as the Excuse-Maker-in-Chief cites another imploding region to explain 1.9 percent growth and 8.2 percent unemployment."

None of this is to deny that some U.S. companies will find life a bit less pleasant should the European recession deepen and lengthen. They will: Starbucks is already seeing a slight drop in sales in Europe. Nor should we be as confident that we will escape any fallout from a European financial upset and its ripple effects as the president is that we will be hit hard by such an event. If we learned anything from the aftermath of the demise of Lehman Brothers it is that we should not be overly confident in our ability to understand all of the interconnections in global financial markets. So it is not inappropriate to worry. But neither is it appropriate to excuse the president's inability to cope with our economy's weakness by a serial hunt for some outside force on which to place the blame. Or the Republicans' willingness to make it easy for the president to avoid a grand compromise on fiscal policy by elevating a desire for lower taxes on high earners to the sole, or at least the primary goal of economic policy.

In the end the course of the American economy will be determined not in Berlin, but in the voting booths of America, where voters face a choice, not an echo—a choice between a candidate who believes, really believes, that America's future prosperity depends on an expansion of the public sector, and one who seems more likely to see our salvation in unleashing the private sector by reducing regulations and reforming the tax system. So far, Europe's voters have been denied a voice in their economic future by a eurocracy skilled at avoiding the ballot box. We are luckier here in America. ♦

Arrivederci, Cicilline

Mayoral malpractice comes back to haunt a congressman. BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

It might be surprising to some that Representative David Cicilline, a Democrat from Rhode Island, finds himself on the list of endangered incumbents as he heads into election season. For one, he's just that: a Democrat from Rhode Island. But facing a fierce primary challenge and, even more gravely, trailing his presumptive Republican opponent by double digits, Cicilline finds himself in the fight of his political life.

Should Cicilline, who was elected to his first House term in 2010, be defeated this fall, it won't have much to do with his job performance as a congressman. His standard down-the-line Democratic voting record—scant as it is—offers little to offend his district. Rather, Cicilline now faces retroactive judgment on his eight-year tenure as mayor of Providence, which left the city of 180,000 in a fiscal catastrophe.

Not that voters would have known that when Cicilline mounted his first congressional campaign. He served as mayor of Providence (Rhode Island's capital and largest city) from 2003 to 2011 and ran for his House seat mostly on the supposed strength of his record. In the course of the campaign, he described the city's fiscal condition as "excellent." When attacked by opponents for Providence's heavy borrowing, he blamed state cuts. Only when Cicilline was safely ensconced in Washington did the extent of his mismanagement—and his mendacity—become apparent.

Immediately after taking office, Cicilline's successor, Angel Tavares, commissioned a review of Providence's finances. The results belied Cicilline's claims of rude fiscal health, finding that the city faced a $70 million structural deficit, and a projected $110 million deficit in 2012—this on a city budget of less than $700 million. Mayor Tavares called the news a "Category 5 hurricane," and warned that Providence was headed for bankruptcy. In a particularly grim turn of events, last year the city sent termination letters to every single one of its 1,926 teachers. (Most were ultimately hired back.) Only after Tavares instituted major reforms and extracted concessions from city unions did Providence manage to avoid Chapter 9.

Rep. David Cicilline

An internal audit commissioned by the city laid much of the blame at Cicilline's feet. It found that he had not provided financial information on a timely basis to the independent auditor, the city council, or the internal auditor, and that he had not provided the city council with monthly financial statements or with projections of year-end surpluses or deficits. Even more damning, it found that Cicilline had papered over huge deficits by depleting the city's reserve funds—this without the approval of the city council. John Igliozzi, then-finance chairman of the Providence city council, accused Cicilline of "hiding the scope of the city's fiscal woes through illusory revenues, borrowing, and other tricks."

The first openly gay mayor of a state capital, Cicilline governed Providence as a liberal's liberal. He did nothing to reform the city's public pensions, the main culprit in its yawning deficits. He proposed taxing college students. He pushed light rail. He fretted about the city's environmental impact. Before being elected mayor, he served as a state representative from 1995 to 2003. There, he was a "fierce champion of political reform and gun safety," according to his website. In a bid for racial harmony, he spearheaded an unsuccessful effort to remove "Providence Plantations" from the state's official name. Few realize it, but the smallest state has the longest official name: "The State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations." (Obsessing over the state name was political correctness run amok, by the way; the plantations in question were Roger Williams's colony, having nothing to do with slavery.) The son of a famous mob lawyer, Cicilline worked as a defense attorney himself before entering politics. When he ran for mayor, Brown University's alumni magazine noted that he owned a Porsche, a Jaguar, and a Rolls-Royce.

He now faces a belated verdict on his time as mayor. Cicilline suffers from an approval rating of 14.8 percent, according to a recent Brown University poll, and it's unlikely that has much to do with his congressional record. He trails his Republican

AP / CHARLES KRUPA

Ethan Epstein is an editorial assistant at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

opponent, former police colonel Brendan Doherty, by some 15 points. And he faces a primary challenge as well, from Anthony Gemma, a local businessman whose claim that he would win the seat, while Cicilline would lose to Doherty, is the centerpiece of his bid for the nomination. Nonetheless, Gemma is still several points behind Cicilline in polling for the September primary.

And so Cicilline is now attempting frantic damage control. In an interview with a local news channel in April, Cicilline apologized for his claim that Providence's finances were "excellent." "I should not have used that word," he said. "It obviously doesn't describe the condition the city is in [and] it was never my intention to mislead people intentionally." He's also trumpeting his support for the Paycheck Fairness Act and gay marriage, and his opposition to the Defense of Marriage Act.

But the congressman's cultural liberalism looks unlikely to save him. Cicilline's district, which includes blue-collar bastions like North Providence and Pawtucket, is no Berkeley or Portland. In fact, it's something of a category mistake to refer to Rhode Island as liberal; it's more machine-Democrat. Consider, for example, that Rhode Island and Maine are the only New England states that haven't legalized gay marriage. (And even Maine looks set to enact it in November.)

The state is clearly willing to elect Republicans—it hasn't voted in a Democratic governor since 1990. Catholic, "ethnic," and economically depressed, Rhode Island is not a natural fit for a self-styled "progressive" like Cicilline. When he was elected to his first House term in 2010, replacing Patrick Kennedy, Teddy's son, who had served eight terms, Cicilline beat his Republican opponent by a mere 10,000 votes (6 percent)—this before his mayoral shenanigans had come to light. That raised eyebrows, given the Democratic makeup of his district. But electorally, that may have been his finest hour. ♦

What's the Matter with Alabama?

How to squander a Republican majority.

BY QUIN HILLYER

Wise old hands know that almost no political victory is permanent. Unfortunately, reformers in Alabama are relearning that lesson.

State election results in Alabama in 2010 and Louisiana in 2011 were remarkably alike: Republicans gained almost all statewide offices and strong control of both legislative chambers. Yet whereas Louisiana's Bobby Jindal pushed through some of the nation's boldest educational choice measures and other major school reforms, Alabama failed again this spring to pass legislation allowing even a single charter school in the state. Most observers were stunned; the Alabama Education Association (AEA), one of the most destructive unions in the country, started taking bows for a rapid comeback from what briefly seemed like political oblivion.

A powerful union won't stay down long unless a strong governor keeps a reformist agenda front and center. Lack of gubernatorial leadership, as in Alabama, can lead to a major fiasco—especially when the union finds unlikely allies to carry its water.

A powerful union won't stay down long unless a strong governor, like Jindal, keeps a reformist agenda front and center. Lack of gubernatorial leadership, as in Alabama, can lead to a major fiasco. This is especially true when the union finds unlikely allies to carry its water.

Most of the state's county school superintendents, usually at odds with the union, and most local school boards, sometimes at odds with the AEA, along with the statewide school superintendent, appointed by a non-union-friendly state board, all came out vociferously against charters. So did the state's Christian Coalition, which bizarrely said it feared a secret homosexual agenda and a secret Muslim agenda. The local superintendents, many of them elected countywide in districts far larger than the average state house district, carried especially strong political weight with Republican lawmakers.

Finally, Governor Robert Bentley, elected with the indirect help of the AEA (which spent some $3 million attacking his Republican primary opponent), provided only the most tepid of support for charters.

But that's getting ahead of the story.

Until the administration of Governor Bob Riley (2003-2011), which made numerous strides on school reforms, Alabama had a well-earned reputation as an education backwater. The AEA long was the state's biggest power, so misguided and so strong that it even opposed—and for two years successfully blocked—criminal background checks for school personnel. Lavishly funded through automatic withholding from school-employee paychecks, the AEA in turn lavishly financed the campaigns of not just the usually dominant

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Democratic party but of some elected Republicans as well.

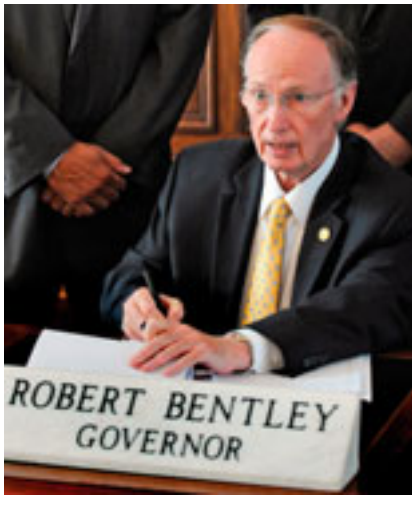
In 2010, though, term-limited Riley and state Rep. Mike Hubbard, the state Republican chairman, masterminded a hugely successful electoral effort that resulted in victories (or party-switches to the GOP) in 66 of 105 House districts (up from 43) and 22 of 35 Senate seats (up from just 15). They then took advantage of an anomaly in Alabama law providing for newly elected legislators to take office immediately, even while statewide officials await a January inauguration. Riley called a special "ethics" session in which the new legislature, with Hubbard as the new speaker, set far lower limits on meals and other freebies from lobbyists like AEA's, closed campaign-finance loopholes exploited by the AEA, and, most important, made union dues payments voluntary rather than through automatic withholding from paychecks.

"The AEA fought tooth-and-toenail against these bills," said Gary Palmer, president of the conservative Alabama Policy Institute think tank, but the union was powerless to slow down the train. When, in the regular spring session under the new governor, the legislature also dramatically reformed the state-employee pension program, the rout of AEA seemed complete.

Perhaps that led to overconfidence. With 41 other states already boasting charter schools, and with the AEA now seen as relatively toothless, charters seemed a cinch to pass. Legislative leaders sponsored meetings with charter experts from around the country, traveled to Memphis to view successful charters firsthand, and worked with legal counsel to develop easily digestible legislation allowing charters only in underperforming school districts. What they didn't do, apparently, was lay the political groundwork with the public or with any part of the education establishment.

"I really was shocked at the enormous amount of pushback and opposition from the school superintendents, even those who didn't have underperforming schools in their districts," Hubbard told me in a recent interview. "They had always asked us to help them escape red tape, and we offered some real help with that as part of our package, yet they were willing to kill that in order to kill charter schools."

One problem, Senate education committee chairman Dick Brewbaker explained, was that the legislation created an appointed state board that could override local officials and force the allowance of charters where perceived necessary—which he said made the superintendents and local school boards "incredibly suspicious . . . especially where a lot of money was on the table."



Charter schools, no. Big nameplates, sure.

With a spate of anti-charter TV ads run statewide by a shadowy group widely suspected to be an AEA front, and with very little public politicking in favor of charters, nervous House members felt far more pressure from charter opponents than from supporters. As the legislative session wore on, they repeatedly tweaked their bill in ways ever more restrictive of real school choice. By the time the bill passed committee, it limited charters to no more than 20 statewide before 2017—and time in the legislative session was growing short. With the Senate thought to be a tougher road anyway, Brewbaker's committee then took up the challenge without waiting for full House action—and once opponents sliced and diced the bill there and on the Senate floor, it became utterly toothless. Under its provisions, charters in any locality could be created only if every member of the county's legislative delegation approved. As Republican state senator Trip Pittman loudly complained about this single-member veto provision (before voting for the bill anyway), "There ain't no way you'll ever have a charter school in this bill."

For most of these proceedings, Governor Bentley was nowhere to be found.

"The governor didn't expend a lot of political capital," Brewbaker said. "He *did* act in good faith; toward the end of the debate he did try to call some of the senators in and ask them to invoke cloture. But there wasn't a lot of public drumbeating from the governor's office in favor of charter schools. . . . One thing about Bobby Jindal in Louisiana, he had made school choice one of the things he campaigned on, talked about, and really planted his flag over. But Bentley had his plate full with a real budget crunch and with disaster relief from the tornadoes" of 2011.

House charter supporters were disgusted with the Senate effort, and Brewbaker, the nominal author of the Senate bill and a strong voucher proponent, told the House committee his feelings certainly wouldn't be hurt if the significantly weakened version didn't pass. "It wasn't worth our time to send the governor a meaningless bill," Hubbard later explained—and the House refused even to vote on it, thus killing the whole effort for this year's session, which ended in May.

Brewbaker and Hubbard vow to use the rest of this year to do the political groundwork left undone last year, reassuring superintendents and school boards, in hopes of passing a strong charter law in next year's session. "We've got a plan we're working on to get some minds changed," Hubbard said.

The AEA, however, is now emboldened, and it surely will work just as hard to scotch those efforts, through ever more ingenious means. Unless Governor Bentley makes school choice a priority, the AEA's teeth and toenails might prove to be depressingly effective weapons. ♦

AP / MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER / MICKEY WELSH

George Allen's Second Act

Can he put a political disaster behind him?

BY MICHAEL WARREN

Richmond, Va.

At the Westin hotel, George Allen and his family bounded onto the stage on the night of the June 12 Republican primary to country legend George Jones's "The Race Is On." The tune's tempo and title seemed appropriate. Allen had just won 65 percent of the Republican vote, yet there was no time for resting on laurels. Democrat Tim Kaine had run unopposed in his own primary, and polls over the last year and a half all told the same story: The Senate faceoff between the two former governors is likely to be close and hard-fought.

Well, the race is on / and here comes pride up the backstretch / heartaches a-going to the inside, Jones's voice blasted out of the loudspeakers as Allen waved to supporters. *The race is on and it looks like heartaches / and the winner loses all.* The song is about a man who pursues love even though he always seems to get his heart broken. The lyrics are oddly maudlin for a victory party, though apt enough for the turns in the political career of George Allen.

Now 60 years old, Allen is applying for a job from which Virginians fired him just six years ago. In early 2006, the first-term senator led Democratic challenger Jim Webb by double digits in the polls. Allen had a reputation as a popular former governor and a faithful executor of Bush-era Republicanism in the Senate. There was even talk of an Allen presidential run. But a series of unfortunate events made his reelection bid one of the closest races of the year. Most memorably, at a campaign stop, Allen pointed to a young Webb staffer of South Asian heritage who was videotaping the event and called him "Macaca," a French slur on dark-skinned Africans—and the staffer put the exchange on YouTube. Allen's campaign never recovered from the fallout, and despite outspending Webb two to one, he lost the election. The margin was fewer than 10,000 votes.

And thank you for forgetting 2006.

"I obviously don't like losing," Allen tells me in his campaign office in Alexandria. "It's a humbling experience, and in many respects, you're starting over again."

Maybe so, but Allen had a fairly soft landing. After leaving the Senate, he was named the Young America's Foundation's Reagan Ranch Presidential Scholar (listed speaking fee: $20,000 plus). Allen also started his own consulting firm, founded an energy policy-focused think tank, and wrote a book titled *What Washington Can Learn From the World of Sports* ("Great book, important lessons, and sound advice from a guy who gets it," blurbs Ted Nugent). After briefly flirting with running for governor again in 2009—he'd been governor from 1994-98, but Virginia law bars a second consecutive term—Allen spent the next two years stumping for Republican candidates, all the while testing the waters for another go at the Senate.

Soon after announcing he was entering the race in January 2011, Allen released an extensive policy platform, which he calls the "Blueprint for America's Comeback." The phrase pops up frequently in his campaign. "Virginians are fired up, and they're ready for America's comeback," he said in the victory speech in Richmond. Allen often asks the crowds at campaign events if they are "ready for America's comeback." The answer is always, "Yes."

Whether or not Virginians are ready for George Allen's comeback remains unanswered, and even his prominent supporters seem tepid about his chances in November. Governor Bob McDonnell, campaigning for Allen near Dulles International Airport the day before the primary, said he was "bullish" about Allen's campaign. At the victory party in Richmond, U.S. House majority leader Eric Cantor offered similarly faint praise: "Allen's candidacy is the candidacy for the time."

The truth is that Allen's 2006 campaign disaster is on everyone's mind, including Allen's. So he says he tries to think back to what his father, George Allen Sr., the late, great coach for the Washington Redskins, often said: "Don't brood over reverses; learn from them."

Allen learned a lot about cam-

AP / STEVE HELBER

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paigning. He had lost focus on organizing at the grassroots, he says, and had taken some voters for granted. He had failed to bring in longtime loyal aide Mike Thomas, his campaign manager in his successful races for governor and senator, until the last few weeks of the 2006 contest, when it was too late. This year, Thomas is back at the helm.

But Allen also learned about self-discipline, staying on message, and not going off-script for a cheap laugh. "I like to make sure that as much as I like to have a sense of humor, to keep it under—" His voice trails off, but I can see what example is on his mind.

"Wasn't that the lesson of the Macaca incident?" I ask.

He purses his lips, breathes in, and answers deliberately. "It was a mistake. I never should have drawn that young man into it." Suddenly, Allen smiles, his eyes brightening, as if he's just thought of something.

"Once in a while I'll drag someone into it," he says, as if it's a good thing. "There are times I will call audibles." He had done so just a few days before, when giving a speech. He spotted in the crowd a Chinese immigrant and business owner he had met a few weeks earlier. Allen cajoled the man, Kai Zhang, into joining him on stage.

At their first meeting, Zhang had explained to Allen that corporate taxes were now lower in China than in the United States. "Tell them what you told me," Allen said, pushing the clip-on microphone in front of Zhang's face.

"I want the United States to do better than China," Zhang said in slightly accented English.

"That's just great," Allen said, slapping him on the back. "I just love that."

But Allen usually stays on script. His stump speech emphasizes his interest in energy policy and always includes a dig at Obamacare—which Allen describes as a "government takeover of health care." There are plenty of nods to America's "entrepreneurial spirit" and the need to reduce federal regulations. And he quotes the typical Virgianian as pleading, "Get the government off my back and out of my pocket."

Allen often reminds voters of the successful reforms he pushed through as governor in the 1990s: elimination of parole, welfare reform, truth in sentencing. It's a laundry list of policies from what seems like a political lifetime ago, but the campaign says if the election turns on a comparison of his tenure as governor with Tim Kaine's (2006-10), Allen will win.

There's another young, South Asian-American Democratic staffer with a video camera following around the Allen campaign these days. At a senior center in Prince William County, I tell him he has some big shoes to fill. He laughs, but agrees. The more disciplined and focused George Allen of 2012 just isn't as exciting as he was six years ago. Until he decides to call an audible. ♦

Obama Fiddles . . .

While Russia arms Assad.

BY THOMAS DONNELLY

The prominence of Russian-made helicopters in Bashar al-Assad's brutal and desperate efforts to hang on to power puts the Syrian war in a new light. It's getting difficult to categorize the conflict simply as a humanitarian crisis or a "teacup war" of secondary significance. Rather, Syria's civil war is increasingly fought under a great-power cloud that hasn't been seen in the Middle East for decades.

Most of Washington would rather ignore the darkening forecast. In one of his periodic *Washington Post* op-eds, Henry Kissinger warned that a "Syrian intervention risks upsetting [the] global order." While Kissinger went on to acknowledge that the fall of Assad's regime would suit the national interests of the United States in both humanitarian and strategic terms, he concluded that an armed intervention would fail to meet his two tests for U.S. involvement. First, there was no consensus on what kind of regime would replace Assad's. Second, there was no assurance that the "political objective"—call it "victory"—could be achieved "in a domestically sustainable time period."

In short, Kissinger spoke in the voice of regretful realism. From this perspective, the Syrian civil war is an unfortunate event, a human catastrophe, a strategic opportunity to remove a regime that's been a longtime pest, but, if it requires a serious and enduring American commitment, not a reason to upset the international order.

This appears to reflect the thinking of the Obama administration. The president said last August that the time had come for Assad "to step aside," but has yet to do anything to force the issue.

The problem with this sort of realism is that it isn't really realistic, insofar as it fails to appreciate the balance of power. If Assad stays, the global order will be very much affected, and one of the most significant features of the post-Cold War order will be threatened. In particular, the United States' ability to push for fundamental political change in the greater Middle East with a free hand will be severely curtailed. The Syrian crisis then is a big deal, not only in the region, but also in global terms.

An anti-Assad fighter aims at a helicopter.

Once upon a time, the Middle East was thought to be a square on the Cold War chessboard, part of the larger "game of thrones" with the Soviet Union. The United States had to curry favor with a host of regional autocrats, lest the Russians accumulate a larger roster of thugs. Washington had the Shah's Iran and Saudi Arabia, Moscow had a natural rapport with Baath party bosses in Syria and Iraq, and the Egyptians teased both sides until they satisfied their honor in the 1973 war with Israel—itself a conflict that sparked a nerve-racking U.S.-Soviet faceoff. The Carter Doctrine, formulated in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, held that the United States would resist the efforts of any outside power to dominate the region.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the great game in the Middle East changed profoundly, even though American security interests did not. Saddam Hussein thought that the end of the Cold War gave him a green light to invade Kuwait, but he discovered that the Carter Doctrine had been expanded to apply to bids for hegemony that came from inside the region as well.

Still, during the decade following Operation Desert Storm, the United States opted to contain Iraq rather than depose Saddam. A safe haven was established for Kurds in the north, and "no-fly" zones were maintained in the north and the south, with a "no-drive" zone in the south to protect Kuwait. Substantial U.S. air and land forces remained in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, with naval forces elsewhere in the Gulf. Keeping Saddam "in his box" meant staying in his face. Thus by the time Operation Iraqi Freedom started in 2003, Iraq's air defenses had already been suppressed, making the decisive march to Baghdad a three-week sprint. Likewise, in Afghanistan, the need for "regime change" had supplanted past predilections for containment.

Although George W. Bush did little to push the "friendly" autocrats in Egypt or the Persian Gulf states to reform, he was willing to back his "forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East" with American military power to see through the regime-change commitments already made. Barack Obama, on the other hand, has sought to shelter himself and the United States from the winds of change in the Middle East. This is the theme that runs from his "New Beginnings" address at Cairo University in June 2009, to his response to Iranian protests, through his Iraq and

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Afghanistan policies, to his standoffish approach to the uprisings of the Arab Spring, to "leading from behind" in Libya, and now to the Syria crisis.

As he explained in Cairo, Obama believes this is a "time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world" that is "rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate." Obama's prime directive was to reestablish "mutual interest" and "mutual respect" between the United States and Muslim peoples, and to assert that "no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other." He promised also to be "respectful of the sovereignty of nations" and to engage in negotiations with Iran "without preconditions and on the basis of mutual respect."

Ironically, as Obama yearned for the "engagement" and realpolitik of a bygone era, the Muslims of the greater Middle East yearned for political change. Less than 10 days after the Cairo address, Iranians took to the streets to protest what they believed was a stolen election. The White House went silent. Iranian protesters responded by chanting, "Obama! Obama! Either you are with us or with them!" Hoping for a deal to slow Iran's nuclear program, the administration kept its open hand extended to the mullahs even during Tehran's crackdown.

Obama's response to the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 was equally uncertain, even regarding the revolt in Libya, which the White House now counts as one of its foreign policy successes. In February 2011, protesters in Benghazi and elsewhere surged into the streets, and by early March, the administration declared that Qaddafi had "lost his legitimacy to lead, and must go." But just as a no-fly zone was established, the administration announced that the United States would fall back into a supporting role once NATO assumed command. The president welcomed getting rid of Qaddafi but added that "broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake." The administration would countenance regime change, but didn't want too many American fingerprints on it, and certainly no responsibility for what might come after.

The Syria conflict—now officially designated as a "civil war" by the U.N.'s peacekeeping chief—has similarly paralyzed Obama, and with far greater consequences. After the uprising began in March 2011, it became apparent that Russia and China would prevent any repeat of the Libya resolution at the U.N. They permitted a nonbinding peace plan drafted by former secretary general Kofi Annan, which has had no effect whatsoever,

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and a condemnation of the regime's indiscriminate use of heavy weaponry. In short, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, U.S. Middle East policy is once again subject to larger great power issues, and in this case, what amounts to a de facto veto by Moscow, backed by Beijing.

This week's contretemps over the Syrian use of Russian-made attack helicopters underscores both the emerging proxy war character of the conflict and the Obama administration's unwillingness to consider effective measures. Specifically, the White House has refused to back the Syrian opposition against an Iranian ally in a war that is ongoing, is certain to continue, is likely to expand, and whose outcome will matter.

"We have confronted the Russians about stopping their continued arms shipments to Syria," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said last week. The attack choppers would "escalate the conflict quite dramatically," she contended, rightly. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov countered that it was only sending weapons for "self-defense." No regrets. In fact, the Russians are extremely pleased with themselves—they're being courted just as in the Soviet days.

The Chinese have tried to remain in Moscow's shadow, but they are equally opposed to taking actions that would put the Assad regime in jeopardy. This is not just the usual Chinese whinging over "sovereignty." This week French foreign minister Laurent Fabius proposed escalating economic sanctions on Syria, but in Beijing, spokesman Liu Weimin responded that "China disapproves of one-sided sanctions and pressuring."

The Syria standoff has already become a full-blown balance of power tussle, sucking in regional and global powers on both sides. China, Russia, and Iran back Assad, while the Syrian opposition is funded and armed by a variety of Gulf states. Turkey and Iraq are both inundated with Syrian refugees, and Ankara is increasingly angry that the Assad regime hosts Kurdish terrorists. In sum, Syria is becoming exactly the kind of nightmare that the region and the world have come to expect the United States to prevent, and which, indeed, until now, American administrations of both parties have taken great pains to preclude.

Until now. Obama has insisted that the "tide of war" across the Middle East is "receding." It's not just that American troops have been withdrawn from Iraq, are being more rapidly withdrawn from Afghanistan, or were not employed on the ground in Libya. It is the president's belief that they need not—*should* not—be used again. This is an unrealistic belief, one that ignores balance-of-power politics. The survival of the Assad regime, saved by its Russian, Chinese, and Iranian sponsors, would upset the international order far beyond the troubles created by the regime's demise. ♦

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The Real Reagan

In his own words

By Fred Barnes

When I interviewed President Reagan in the Oval Office in 1987, I took with me a photograph of him with two dozen women at the Presidio of Monterey in California 50 years earlier. My mother, the presidio commander's daughter, was one of the women. I wanted Reagan to autograph the photograph, and he graciously obliged, but not before telling me in extraordinary detail how he happened to be at the presidio, a cavalry post, and everything about the movie he was making there.

He was starring in a B movie called *Sergeant Murphy*, the third film in his long career as an actor. Sergeant Murphy was a horse, and Reagan played a young cavalry private. This was surely one of the least memorable of Reagan's 53 films. B movies were the second film in a double feature, and this one, lasting a mere 57 minutes, was half the length of movies today. Yet Reagan remembered everything: the characters, the tangled plot, the temperament of the horse, the scene at the presidio. Reagan was said to have had a photographic memory. It's true.

Delivering a radio address in the mid-1970s

Another noteworthy thing occurred during the interview, which lasted less than 40 minutes. At the time, the Iran-contra scandal that had engulfed the Reagan presidency was fading. To quell the furor, Reagan had addressed the nation, acknowledging that arms for hostages had been at the heart of the scandal, contrary to what he had said earlier. But it was with great reluctance and at the strong urging of his advisers that he had made this admission. In the interview, with White House press aides Marlin Fitzwater and Tommy Griscom standing nearby, Reagan reversed himself and said it wasn't arms for hostages at all. And he insisted he'd never believed it was.

I met with Reagan one other time during his second term as president. I sat next to him at a lunch in the room adjacent to the Oval Office. The lunch had been arranged by Pat Buchanan, then the White House communications director, and we were joined by my *McLaughlin Group* colleague Mort Kondracke, radio broadcaster Paul Harvey, and Reagan's chief of staff, Don Regan. The session was off the record, but I figured I could elicit tidbits of information from Reagan that could later be leveraged into stories. This practice may sound sleazy, but was (and still is) considered journalistically ethical. I'd been warned by Robert Novak, the great reporter and columnist, that it would be tough to get anything out of Reagan. He was right. Novak had spent hours one-on-one with Reagan aboard a private plane in the late 1970s and come up empty. My experience was the same. Reagan was genial and talkative. He told Hollywood stories. But he avoided any comment that might become public, one way or another. He was friendly but disciplined.

These anecdotes may not appear to be terribly significant. But they're more revealing than I thought at the time, for they undermine the profile of Reagan created by the media, the permanent Washington establishment, political insiders, many Democrats, some Republicans, and even a few members of Reagan's White House staff. Their idea of Reagan—a bumbling, likable lightweight blessed with good luck and clever aides—wasn't the Reagan that I encountered. It wasn't the real Reagan.

It turns out there's a far more convincing rebuttal of the fashionable characterization of Reagan than my limited personal experience. It comes from Reagan himself, in his own words—that is, in his writings and private statements. Except for an autobiography published in 1965, these didn't become public until after he left the White House in January 1989.

The Reagan collection consists of seven books. Two are

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This article is adapted from "Reagan in His Own Words," delivered at Regent University's seventh annual Ronald Reagan Symposium.

autobiographies: *Where's the Rest of Me? The Autobiography of Ronald Reagan* (1965) and *Ronald Reagan: An American Life* (1990). Scripts he wrote in longhand for radio broadcasts between 1975 and 1979 are anthologized in *Reagan, In His Own Hand* (2001). *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (2001) brings together 1,000 letters he wrote between 1922 and 1994. *Reagan's Path to Victory* (2004) collects more radio broadcasts. *The Reagan Diaries* (2007) consists of almost daily entries during the eight years of his presidency. *Reagan's Secret War: The Untold Story of His Fight to Save the World from Nuclear Disaster* (2009) focuses on Reagan's passion for eliminating nuclear weapons and his summit meetings with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Former Reagan aides Martin and Annelise Anderson made the selections for the anthologies. Historian Douglas Brinkley edited the diaries.

Taken together, these books torpedo the four elements of the conventional profile of Reagan. One, he had scant knowledge of many of the issues that came before him. Two, he was a "detached" president—that was *Newsweek*'s description—aloof from the day-to-day business in the White House. Three, he was overly reliant on the advice of his advisers and was often their puppet. Four, he was lazy. When I covered the Reagan presidency, I agreed to some degree with three of these. I was wrong. All four are false.

Reagan's own writings and private statements torpedo the four elements of his conventional profile—that he was uninformed, detached, dependent on advisers, and lazy.

Three of the Reagan books are conclusive. The radio broadcasts knock down the idea that Reagan was clueless on complex issues. The book on nuclear weapons provides a picture of Reagan in command of his advisers and willing to override their views and those of his foreign allies. And the diaries, which are fun to read, reveal how hard he worked, especially on weeknights in the living quarters of the White House and on weekends at Camp David.

The subject matter of Reagan's broadcasts alone reflects a familiarity with a broad range of issues. His topics included: Namibia, ocean mining, Cambodia, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, treaties, the B-1 bomber, missile defense, national security strategy, intelligence, Chile, visas, Vladimir Bukovsky, human rights, the Helsinki Accords, Cuba, Rhodesia, the Panama Canal, Guantánamo, Leonid Brezhnev, foreign aid, Palestine, Jamaica, and the United Nations.

The broadcasts were detailed, succinct, well argued, intellectually rigorous, and studded with humor. Reagan was opposed to giving the Panama Canal to the Panamanian government, and he devoted many broadcasts to that issue. "You know giving up the canal itself might be a better deal if we could throw in the State Department," he said at the end of a broadcast in 1979. That same year, he actually gave two radio commentaries on Namibia. Many broadcasts were dense with facts and details. Reagan frequently comes off as a well-informed wonk.

Another demonstration of Reagan's grasp of issues (but not in the books) was an exchange with Republican congressman Jack Kemp in 1979. To promote urban enterprise zones, Kemp delivered a speech emphasizing their political, economic, and social value. David Smick, his chief of staff, got House approval to send the speech, under the congressional frank, to a long list of policy experts. "Unbeknownst to us, one recipient turned out to be Ronald Reagan," Smick said. A month later, Kemp received a reply.

"Can you believe this?" Kemp said as he read a Xerox of the speech that Reagan had sent back by mail. "Crammed into the margins of the speech were detailed comments from Governor Reagan," Smick told me. "There were many arrows pointing to circled and underlined sections of the speech. What was striking was that this was not an attempt to flatter Kemp with congratulatory praise using words such as 'good point.' Reagan, on point after point, instead offered a variety of suggestions and insights about his experiences as governor in crafting urban policy."

It was all handwritten, with Reagan continuing some of his detailed critique on the back of pages. "I remember that on a number of relatively technical points in the [enterprise zone] legislation, he suggested there might be a better way of implementing the proposal based on his experience in state government," Smick said. "Reagan reveled in the wonkdom of urban policy in a way that might have even made a young Bill Clinton envious. The more I read the comments in the margins of Kemp's speech, the more obvious it became that Reagan had a passion for policy details."

In their introduction to *Reagan's Secret War*, Martin and Annelise Anderson write that Reagan "accomplished so much with such apparent ease that the casual observer often assumes he had nothing to do with it. . . . Perhaps he had advisers whose lines he read with such skill. Perhaps it was Gorbachev or Thatcher or the Pope. Or maybe it was just plain luck."

Then, on page 21, comes the refutation. It quotes a document, declassified in 2005, containing minutes of the first meeting of Reagan's National Security Council on February 6, 1981. In attendance were the vice president, secretaries of state, defense, treasury, and justice, the director of central intelligence, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the White House chief of staff, the national security adviser, and numerous presidential aides.

Reagan was undaunted and blunt. He left no doubt he would be actively in charge. "During the campaign, I pledged to implement a new foreign policy and restore the margin of safety," he said. "I look to this group to help me. . . . I will use the NSC structure to obtain your guidance, but I will make the decisions. . . . Although the decisions will be mine, you are the obvious source for good ideas. I want good advice."

His diaries show how engaged Reagan was. He held so many press conferences that, in comparison, President Obama appears to be in hibernation. He gave hundreds of interviews, even to magazines like *Runner's World* and *Sports Afield* with no connection with national policy or politics.

I opened his diaries at random—trust me on this—to see what Reagan had done on a single day. It was November 12, 1987, perhaps not a typical day, but not a wildly abnormal one either. He met with his education secretary, Bill Bennett. "Then Jim Baker & Jim Miller along with Howard B. & Ken D. This was about negotiations re the deficit. They wanted instructions from me as to what they could do to get an agreement. I want them to hold out for more spending cuts." He "OKd" a schedule for a three-day meeting with Gorbachev. He sent flowers to an aide who'd had a sinus operation. After Colin Powell briefed him on the Middle East, Reagan met with an Afghan delegation and later with Republican members of Congress to discuss Romania. Added, in italics, were activities Reagan hadn't mentioned: a session with Senators Joe Biden and Strom Thurmond, another with officers of the American Legion, the launching of the Christmas Seals campaign, and an appearance at a farewell party for a staffer.

What misled reporters was that Reagan often sounded hazy. He did seem detached. In truth, he never was, unless one believes he routinely lied to his diary. The book was published 18 years after the end of his presidency and 3 years after his death. Everything we know about Reagan tells us he wasn't the sort of man who would think of deceiving those who would pick up his diaries years later.

That Reagan was like a child fortunate enough to have hired adults as his chief handlers—that myth has dogged him since he ran for governor of California in 1966. And it remains embedded in the conventional wisdom of the political community. Not only have his managers and strategists been credited with running efficient campaigns on his behalf—while he was limited to speechmaking—they've also been credited with guiding him through a successful governorship and presidency. Reagan's contribution in this scenario was simply to have been an excellent speaker willing to echo the words of his handlers.

This is nonsensical: No politician has ever had advisers with skills so unfailing. Besides, the big ideas of the Reagan era came from Reagan himself. The biggest was his obsession with eliminating nuclear weapons entirely, a goal he pursued despite the opposition of many of his advisers and his closest foreign ally, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher. It was Reagan, not his aides, who came to the conclusion that mutual assured destruction, the theory that fear of massive nuclear retaliation would deter a first strike by the United States or the Soviet Union, was immoral. "What's so good about a peace kept by the threat of destroying each other?" Reagan asked "many times," according to Secretary of State George P. Shultz. "The public was hesitant to embrace" Reagan's idea, Shultz writes in the foreword to *Reagan's Secret War*, and "advisers Reagan trusted and who were experts in this area didn't support it. But none of that diminished Reagan's conviction."

And it was Reagan who thought it possible to win the cooperation of the Soviets. All they needed was assurance of America's good intentions. Shultz agreed and became his closest adviser. Reagan rebuffed efforts by hardliners in his administration to have Shultz fired, explaining in his diary on November 14, 1984, "George is carrying out my policy."

Nor did Reagan allow subordinates to make major policy decisions. He instructed Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis, he noted in his diary on June 21, 1981, to tell the head of the air traffic controllers' union he "would not countenance an illegal strike nor would I permit negotiations while such a strike was in process." When the controllers struck, Reagan fired them, to the shock of nearly everyone in Washington. He gladly accepted the resignation of his first secretary of state, Al Haig. "The only disagreement was over whether I made policy or the sec. of state did," Reagan wrote on June 25, 1982.

Another idea that was almost exclusive to Reagan was the belief the Soviet Union was hurtling toward the "dustbin of history." He used that phrase in a speech in 1972, then again as president 10 years later. Reagan believed the Communist system would eventually collapse, and he wanted to hurry the process. He imposed curbs on the export of technology the Soviets needed but couldn't produce on their own. Not coincidentally, Saudi Arabia decided to pump more oil, reducing the world price and devastating a Soviet economy that depended on high oil prices. Reagan accelerated the arms race by pushing development of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), knowing the Soviet Union couldn't match the United States on a space-based missile defense and would bankrupt their country if they tried. Rather than a puppet, Reagan was a puppeteer.

As strongly as Reagan felt about eliminating nuclear weapons, he believed it was impractical and dangerous to do so without the deployment of SDI. Otherwise, a nation that cheated—the Soviet Union, he assumed—would have the upper hand. He and Gorbachev clashed on this very issue in their negotiations in Iceland in October 1986.

Reagan was a tough and experienced negotiator from his years as head of the Screen Actors Guild in Hollywood, a fact lost on the media, which saw Gorbachev as the smarter and more unyielding of the two. But in Iceland, Reagan out-negotiated Gorbachev.

The Soviet strategy was designed to exploit Reagan's eagerness to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Gorbachev offered a deal: We'll both destroy our nuclear arsenals and you'll abandon SDI. "I couldn't believe it and I blew my top," Reagan noted in *An American Life*. He said that deal would give Soviets the advantage, since they already had several anti-missile installations and were likely to build more. In the end, Reagan was unshakable, the Soviets shaken. They soon softened on arms control and accepted U.S. terms to reduce missiles in Western Europe. Reagan stuck by SDI.

A lazy leader could never have gone eyeball-to-eyeball with Gorbachev and forced the Soviet leader to blink. Yet Reagan seemed to encourage people to believe he was passive and inattentive. He specialized in self-deprecatory humor. "It's true hard work never killed anybody, but I figure, why take the chance?" he said. And this: "I have left orders to be awakened at any time in case of a national emergency—even if I'm in a cabinet meeting."

Writing his Inaugural Address, 1981

DIRCK HALSTEAD / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

His diaries, however, reveal a man who labored long and hard. His wife Nancy regarded him as a workaholic. His TV watching was limited to news shows. He spent hours editing speech drafts, occasionally rewriting them. He took paperwork home in the evening. He didn't have the heart to decline meetings with people with disabilities or leaders of groups representing them. He wrote thousands of letters. In the foreword to *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, Shultz recalls weekends at Camp David. "I stopped by the president's cabin at Aspen [Lodge] several times and saw him seated at a table writing," Shultz says. "He'd nod as I came in and say, 'Please wait for me while I finish this,' and he'd continue writing." In his diaries, Reagan commented, "Presidents don't have vacations, they just have a change of scenery."

His reputation for laziness contributed to what Shultz calls "the mystery of Reagan that has baffled so many for so long." Shultz has his own explanation for how "a man of supposedly limited knowledge and limited intelligence [could] accomplish so much," get elected and reelected president, and preside over prosperity and the winning of the Cold War. "Well, maybe he was a lot smarter than people thought."

He was, but Reagan nurtured an image of himself as a common man, neither smarter nor more capable than anyone else. One aide theorizes that during his grade school days Reagan discovered that the smartest kid in the class was not the most popular, the one looked up to. Reagan acted accordingly and became a leader in high school, college, Hollywood, California, and the nation. Ed Meese, his longtime friend and adviser, believes Reagan preferred to be underestimated. And he usually was, as Pat Brown and Jimmy Carter discovered to their regret. Bill Clark, a friend for decades, told me Reagan masked his brainpower. "When your guard was down," Clark said, "he would come through" and get others to agree with him. "That was his approach to running anything. It wasn't to trick anybody."

Reagan even declined to reveal his reading habits. "Late in his presidency, press aide Marlin Fitzwater noticed Reagan reading several current books, as opposed to the Louis L'Amour novels Reagan often admitted to reading," Reagan biographer Steven F. Hayward wrote in *Greatness: Reagan, Churchill, and the Making of Extraordinary Leaders*. "Fitzwater asked Reagan if the press office could put out a media advisory about his current reading—Clinton [would] do this routinely—as a way of combating the widespread criticism that Reagan was out of touch and incurious about the world." Reagan responded, "'No, Marlin, I don't think we need to do that.'"

Reagan was rarely outsmarted, but I thought I had him when I was a panelist in his first campaign debate with Walter Mondale in October 1984. With the help of Tom DeFrank, then of *Newsweek*, I came up with a question I figured would surprise Reagan. (For what it's worth, this is what journalists strive to do at press conferences.) I asked Reagan why, as a Christian, he didn't attend church regularly. He said his presence in church could prompt a terrorist attack and "pose a threat to several hundred people. . . . I miss going to church, but I think the Lord understands."

I was sure I'd succeeded in raising a subject he'd never suspected would crop up in a nationally televised debate. Then last year, I read *The Reagan Diaries* and discovered he had repeatedly struggled with the matter of going to church. He had skipped going until he figured out a way to go without risking the safety of the congregation. "Went to church," he noted in his diary on May 1, 1983. "We kept it a secret until the very last minute. It felt good." Once again, from his own words, the real Reagan emerged. ♦

The Case of the Shaky Ally

The U.S.-Australia Cold War of 1972-73

By Ross Terrill

A Washington tortured by Vietnam was flummoxed in 1972 when Australian voters made the Labor party's antiwar Gough Whitlam prime minister after 23 years of conservative rule. Entering Henry Kissinger's office at the White House on December 23 for a conversation about China relating to President Nixon's new opening there, I found the national security adviser (and my former professor, to whom I acted as an informal adviser) waving Whitlam's December 21 cable protesting the "Christmas bombing" of Hanoi. Angrily Kissinger said, "It's unforgivable for this new Australian government to put Hanoi and Washington on the same footing. How can an ally behave like this?" I meekly replied that Whitlam considered the mutual security treaty ANZUS (New Zealand is the third signatory) "unshakable." He riposted, "*Can* it be unshakable? You can't apply ANZUS on some points and not on others."

The Nixon White House had run into a storm not expected from pliant Australia. They did not grasp the significance of Whitlam's recent triumph within the Labor party—in which I (then an Australian citizen) had played a small role. The struggles between a liberal democratic right wing and a Marxist left wing within the Labor party had been as wrenching as the Truman-Henry Wallace feud in the Democratic party in the 1940s. For his part, Whitlam was unaware of how much Washington knew of Moscow's spying in Australia in the 1940s and 1950s and the huge Communist influence in Australian unions over the years.

Kissinger went on grimly: "We're going to pretend this cable from Whitlam never came. I'm not even going to show it to the State Department." C.L. Sulzberger, however, got wind of it and wrote in the *New York Times* that the cable was ignored. In fact, Whitlam was sent an "unofficial" reply. "I have never seen such language," Australian foreign ministry chief Keith Waller later told me in Canberra, "in a cable from one government to another." All this made 1973 a lousy year for the Canberra-Washington relationship, hitherto one of the closest alliances in the world.

Unruly shouting by the left wing of the victorious Labor party did not help matters. The trade minister jumped into foreign policy with insults to Nixon. Other ministers, who had partnered with Communists in "Stop Work to Stop the War" anti-Vietnam war events, referred to American "maniacs" and "mass murderers." Australian maritime unions refused to service U.S. ships.

All this vexed Whitlam, as his memoir *The Whitlam Government, 1972-1975* indicates. He was not on the left of his party on many policies (though, like Jimmy Carter, he veered ever leftward after leaving office). He retained the vital U.S. defense facilities in Australia, but he did please the left with a quick withdrawal from Vietnam. Like many left of center leaders during wars, then and since, he was looking for the exit.

Whitlam often said he backed ANZUS but disdained SEATO (the South East Asia Treaty Organization), which included France and the United Kingdom but no major Asian country. Yet information possessed by Nixon and Kissinger about Moscow's meddling in Australia suggested they were dealing with a Janus-faced party with a "Truman wing" and a "Henry Wallace wing," and they rejected the ANZUS-SEATO dichotomy. Kissinger said to me, "No government, perhaps other than the British, has been given the intelligence information that Australia has received under [conservative prime minister William] McMahon and his predecessors. Whether that can continue under Whitlam remains to be seen."

A week after visiting Kissinger I was in Australia and related his words to Whitlam at Kirribilli House, a prime ministerial residence overlooking Sydney Harbor. A U.S. warship sat in the blue waters beyond the sweeping gardens. "It cruised up yesterday," the prime minister said sardonically, "and has been anchored there ever since." He said of the White House reply to his Vietnam cable, "We're going to pretend Kissinger's cable never came."

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Heady with his electoral victory, Whitlam minimized the known facts about Soviet spying in Australia and the problems this had caused Washington. A 2010 book, *The Family File*, by Mark Aarons—son of Laurie Aarons, a Communist Party of Australia (CPA) leader equivalent to Earl Browder or Gus Hall—contains a taped confession of the chief local Soviet agent within the CPA. "I had some very high-level information," the agent told Laurie Aarons in 1993 not long before he died (post-spying he became a fisherman). "I gave it to [Moscow]. What was I to do?"

The book shows several senior Labor figures in cahoots with the CPA on foreign policy and union issues in the 1970s. Whitlam, like Martin Luther King Jr. in the '50s and '60s, probably knew about Communists in his movement but looked beyond them. He effectively addressed the public with soaring rhetoric and turned a blind eye to compromising details, expecting surrogates to handle them.

After reading *The Family File*, the current Australian foreign minister, Bob Carr, a former Labor premier of the country's most populous state, said (before taking office in the Labor cabinet of Prime Minister Julia Gillard), "This forces us to reassess the Labor left."

Gough Whitlam in 1972

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

Comintern chief Georgi Dimitrov said in 1935, "It cannot be expected that Social Democrats under the influence of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie . . . will break with this ideology of their own accord. . . . No. It is our business as Communists to help them free themselves from reformist ideology." In France, Spain, and other countries where the Communist party was strong, it sought an open alliance (popular front) with Labor parties, but in the United States and Australia, where the Communist party was smaller, it adopted an underground approach. This unfolded for decades in Australia. Amidst the eucalyptus trees of Canberra, Moscow's fiats were passed to Aarons; near Sydney's beaches, the TASS correspondent handed over tens of thousands of dollars in cash. By 1945 the CPA had 20,000 members and held sway over almost half the delegates to the congress of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the key pillar of Labor's support. Between 1945 and 1948 Moscow obtained crucial secret American and British documents from the hands of Australian Communists working in the foreign ministry at Canberra.

Whitlam knew of "unity tickets" in trade union elections that gave Communists a role in Labor conferences as delegates of affiliated unions, and the practice of "dual membership" in the Labor party and the CPA. John Curtin, Labor prime minister during World War II, had belonged both to Labor and the Victorian Socialist party, which stood for revolution and believed World War I had been a sordid feud among capitalists in which workers were mere fodder.

Whitlam complained to me soon after becoming prime minister, "Even my own staff have to be cleared by ASIO [the Australian Security Intelligence Organization]." Certainly with Labor out of power since 1949, ASIO had grown cozy with the conservative side of politics, but Whitlam might have recalled that after Soviet diplomat Vladimir Petrov defected to Australia in 1954 in one of the key espionage cases of the Cold War, Soviet agents were found on the staff of Whitlam's 1950s predecessor as Labor leader, Herbert Evatt (who was, incidentally, Labor foreign minister during the egregious 1945-48 security lapses).

As ASIO sequestered Petrov, the Soviet embassy put his wife on a plane for Moscow. But during a stopover at Darwin airport, ASIO snatched her back, and the Petrovs gave Canberra mildly valuable information and settled in Australia. Conservative prime minister Robert Menzies exploited the drama for political advantage, but Evatt rubbed salt in his own wounds by writing to Soviet foreign minister Molotov to ask whether or not Petrov had spied!

I was a Trojan horse union delegate to the 1965 Victorian State Labor party conference in Melbourne, one of a band of young pro-Whitlam Labor members combating Communists who used "unity tickets" to influence Labor. From a podium under heavy CPA influence, the chairman said all wars were "a result of the free enterprise system." Moderate unions affiliated with the Labor party had little voice in deliberations; 100 of the 400 union delegates at the conference had Communist secretaries. "Let's get on with attacking capitalism," one speaker cried. "That's what we are here for." Appalled, I wrote an article for Rupert Murdoch's recently established *Australian* newspaper and sent it first to Whitlam, then deputy leader of Labor, to check the wisdom of publishing my direct attack on the left. He phoned: "Publish and be damned!" but advised a pseudonym. Murdoch ran the piece under the title "Class-War Crusaders in the Affluent Age," by a Special Correspondent. "Is Labor politics only about the interests of the unionist," I wrote, "not at all about the interests of the housewife and the teenager?"

"The 'general line' was always set in Moscow,"

Theodore Draper said of the U.S. Communist party, and the same occurred Down Under. True, the CPA did struggle for Aboriginal rights, help the unemployed, and later push East Timor independence. But Moscow was an albatross never far from its neck. Laurie Aarons and his flock were wounded by the Stalin-Hitler pact, blindsided by Petrov's defection, given pause by the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, made fools of by the split between China and the Soviet Union, and appalled by the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968. Ultimately, Soviet spying in Australia and Communist undercover efforts within Labor were two sides of a coin. Moscow's brain and purse were inseparable. The Soviets paid the bills even as they stymied the CPA's political prospects.

In 1958 Aarons visited China (which also bankrolled the CPA), and later, in Moscow under Nikita Khrushchev, he waxed eloquent to his hosts about Mao's Great Leap Forward. "It was very tactless, when I think about it," he later mused, "and went down like a lead balloon." He "suddenly understood" that Beijing-Moscow relations "weren't too flash." In Melbourne the head of the pro-Beijing faction of the CPA, Ted Hill, prepared to found his own Communist party and acquire weapons and train workers in the jungles of northern Australia for "armed struggle" in the coming "class war." (I later interviewed Hill, a successful lawyer neat in suit and tie, for my biography *Mao*; although his organization in Melbourne was pitiably small, he was often received by Mao in Beijing. Mao didn't talk to Hill about guns and Molotov cocktails, leaving that enthusiasm to Paris intellectuals and the *New York Review of Books*.)

As the crisis in Prague built in 1968, Aarons was "invited" to visit the Soviet ambassador in Canberra and hear a letter from Moscow on Czechoslovakian reformer Alexander Dubcek. "They wouldn't give you the letter, so you had to write it down. It was six or seven foolscap pages. . . . That was the worst political experience I've ever had. . . . We had some lunch and some vodkas and I came back [to Sydney]. On the plane I read the thing, and my heart was sinking." It dawned on Aarons that Australia, as a small country like Czechoslovakia, could also one day face Soviet intrusion. He belatedly began a search for "an Australian socialist model." Most of Aarons's doings were observed by ASIO, whose hit-and-miss, amusing reports make it virtually a coauthor of *The Family File*.

Thanks to Soviet string-pulling and the good sense of the Australian electorate, the CPA never made it into parliament and the cabinet, as Togliatti's Communists did in Italy and Thorez's Communists in France. To its credit, right-wing Labor, exemplified by Bob Carr and Kim Beazley—the current ambassador in Washington—kept its distance from the Moscow-Beijing-subsidized cabal that was Australian communism.

To be sure, some blame for the 1972-73 crisis belongs on the American side. Kissinger at first referred to Prime Minister Whitlam in our December 23 talk as "Mr. Whitelaw." Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green said to me of Gough Whitlam and his deputy, Lance Barnard, three weeks after their election: "I know and like them both, Mr. Gough and Mr. Whitlam." Secretary of State William Rogers was unaware that a Labor prime minister did not (then) choose his cabinet members; Walter Rice, the American ambassador in Canberra, had not told him. The Nixon administration was ill prepared for a changed Australia and paid the price.

In late April 1973, the Australian embassy in Washington had zero assurance that Nixon would receive Whitlam on a planned July trip to the United States. No newly elected Australian prime minister had ever been in such a pickle. "Snub!" cried the press. Whitlam's top aide, Peter Wilenski, phoned me at Harvard on April 14 from Canberra. "The PM agrees with you," he said, "that the [Washington] embassy's access to the White House is not very good. He wants you to arrange a meeting for me with Kissinger." The prime minister feared that requests to Nixon through the embassy, if refused, would get into the press and besmirch his government.

Whitlam told Wilenski, "If you get this meeting with Kissinger and my meeting with Nixon is set for July, you can take a week off on the way back to Australia!" Kissinger quickly agreed to see Wilenski on May 2. Wilenski swore me to secrecy before that talk, and he told the Australian ambassador about it only one hour beforehand. Kissinger assured Wilenski that Nixon would receive Whitlam. Wilenski got a few days on the beaches of Hawaii.

Marshall Green, Rice's successor as ambassador, took effective steps during the first half of 1973 to ease tensions. At a dinner the Australian ambassador in Washington gave for him on April 18 before he left for Canberra, I told Green a certain operative at the U.S. embassy there was objectionable to Whitlam. "I'm getting rid of him, he's going to Tokyo," said Green. He also remarked to the dinner table, "If we can't get on with Australia we can't get on with anyone." Green and Whitlam came to respect each other, and the atmosphere improved by 1974.

At the White House, when Kissinger calmed down over Whitlam's cable, he reminisced about Zhou Enlai, whom we had both met, and made a prescient remark: "For American policy [in East Asia] there are two phases. In the first, Thailand has to be linchpin. But that will give way to a second phase, when détente with China will be the best guarantee of security in Asia." I knew this would appeal to Whitlam, who had switched Australia's embassy from Taipei to Beijing immediately on taking office. In Sydney the prime minister asked me, "What am I going

to say at my press conference about the Hanoi bombing?" I explained Kissinger's "two phases," which pleased him. If phase two came soon, it was clear, Australian-American relations would stabilize. This eventually occurred.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 quickly brought the collapse of the CPA. What Ronald Reagan called (in advance) the "sad, bizarre chapter in human history" of Soviet communism reached its final page. Robbed of hope for revolution, 400-500 amiable political orphans gathered in a hall in Sydney to disband the CPA, close its bank accounts, then stroll into the Australian sunshine to plan their personal futures. As Aarons's son concluded, "There were no models to inspire new generations." Some joined the Labor party to pursue mere political "evolution." A Stalinist remnant obtained explosives for terrorist acts against police, greedy businesses, Rupert Murdoch, and other oppressors.

Laurie Aarons, 1971

The Communist problem for the Australian democratic left evaporated not only because of world events, but also because the pro-market economic policies of the Labor government of Bob Hawke (1983-91) and later the conservative one of John Howard (1996-2007) made Australia prosperous and rendered "class struggle" an anachronism. Hawke's changes were not all permanent, however (just as Clinton's changes to the Democratic party did not preclude Obama's leftism). One of Hawke's successors as Labor leader declared the U.S. alliance "the last bastion of the white Australia mentality" and called George W. Bush "the most incompetent and dangerous American president in decades." But Howard thrashed him at the 2004 election; thus did the electorate speak.

Democracy solves many problems among democratic allies. Nixon and Kissinger were agitated over Australia in 1972-73, but the Australian people spoke, the democratic process worked, and it would work again three years later to toss Whitlam out. He lost in 1975 despite his achievements in foreign policy because he was a poor economic thinker and a social engineer beyond the taste of individualistic Australians (he wanted to start a government newspaper!).

Later, in turn, Prime Minister Hawke was agitated over the coming of Ronald Reagan. "The United States hasn't had a decent president since Truman," he complained to me in 1986. Yet Reagan influenced Hawke's rule just as Hawke's economic deregulation eventually helped Howard. The electorate is generally correct, and Labor leaders must follow it to win. (Alas, this corrective lacks with allies that are not democracies.) In a democracy each side learns from the other, though loath to admit it. Whenever Labor has teetered toward the far left, the Australian people have rejected it.

Kissinger as secretary of state (1973-77) never visited Australia and was ribbed for the omission. "It was because you never gave me any trouble," he beamed. Indirectly, surmounting "trouble" in Australia-U.S. relations in 1972-73 benefited Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975-83) and subsequent prime ministers. The conservative Fraser accepted Whitlam's foreign policy departures in Asia and stronger voice within ANZUS. Likewise, without Reagan there could not have been a Clinton. Without Thatcher there could not have been a Blair.

In Australia today, the old Communist impulse flickers on as anti-Americanism, disgust at capitalism for the fresh sin of destroying nature, and a preference for China over the United States as the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific region. The Labor party dabbles in the fancy middle-class enthusiasms of climate change, environmentalism, and gay marriage, but its base remains the trade union machine.

Current Labor party prime minister Julia Gillard's chief skill seems to be clawing for power. A product of the semi-Marxist left establishment as a lawyer for Melbourne unions, she came to power in a 2010 coup when intraparty maneuver knifed Kevin Rudd (a sitting prime minister!), who'd defeated Howard in 2007. To her credit, Gillard has held at bay the Beijing-appeasers, but her domestic policy line swings almost by the month, and she pushes a crippling tax on the mining industry and expensive carbon tax goals.

As prime minister, Tony Blair made a remarkable speech in 1997 in which he implied the British Labour party had made a mistake by setting up a separate workers' party. They should have stayed in Lloyd George's Liberal party, which they assisted with its dramatic establishment of the welfare state after a big Liberal victory in 1906; they could have formed its vigorous left wing. Blair pointed out that the Labour party instead spent decades in the wilderness between the end of Lloyd George's government in 1922 and its first real stretch of power under Attlee from 1945 to 1951. This speech gave the rationale for Blair's turning his party into New Labour, weaning it from the unions and nationalization—and giving it a record 13 years in power.

Today the Australian Labor party, its past ideology gone, yet not having sought renewal in the mold of New Labour, has little to guide it beyond opportunism. Only when an occasional leader lifts his eyes to the electorate—then wins—does this trade union party of factions escape the smoke-filled room. Gillard is not a soaring principled leader, and victory seems likely soon for Tony Abbott's conservatives. ♦

Philip Larkin and his 'muse and mistress,' Monica Jones, at the memorial service for Sir John Betjeman, Westminster Abbey, 1984

Philip the Great

A distinguished poet gets the full treatment. BY WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

In a talk given to university librarians, Philip Larkin, the poet and onetime librarian at the University of Hull, said about the preservation of literary manuscripts, "Unpublished work, unfinished work, even notes towards unwritten work all contribute to our knowledge of a writer's intentions."

Since Larkin's death in 1985, there has appeared more than one edition of his poems: In the first, editor Anthony Thwaite chose to print published and unpublished poems in chronological order rather than by published volumes. Then, after receiving some criticism for his procedure, Thwaite produced a second edition of the poems, this time in the order they appeared in Larkin's four published books: *The North Ship* (1945), *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974).

The Complete Poems
by Philip Larkin
Edited by Archie Burnett
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 768 pp., $40

Now, Archie Burnett, editor most recently of A.E. Housman's poems and letters, has given us the four volumes, plus all the poems that were published in Larkin's lifetime but uncollected by him, as well as ones not published in his lifetime. Clearly, Burnett believes that, in pursuit of what Larkin termed "knowledge of a writer's intentions," nothing of possible relevance should be omitted. The result is 700 and some pages of poems and editorial commentary. More than one reviewer has warned us that the casual reader will have trouble gaining an appreciation of Larkin's work from the volume. But they need not worry, as no casual reader is likely to be caught within a mile of Larkin's poems, since they demand something a good deal more focused and serious than casual reading.

Larkin came into his own as a poet in his late twenties, after he had served an apprenticeship to Auden and Yeats. Their presiding over the many poems he wrote during his years at Oxford, and the ones that appeared in *The North Ship*, was not completely satisfying. Larkin was aware of the dangers; as he annotated next to a poem from 1940, clearly indebted to Auden, "Lay off Auden, my son!" Yeats was an even more oppressive presence, especially in

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the *North Ship* poems, where the diction is reminiscent of "heroic." Larkin uses words such as "stone," "grave," "flame," "wave," "dust," "grief," "rock," and so forth, with almost none of the colloquial charm he would command in his mature voice.

When *The North Ship* was republished in 1965, Larkin tells us in the introduction that he had discovered Thomas Hardy in 1946, and that the poet would, throughout the rest of Larkin's life, command his total respect and chasten his style. In the prefatory final sentence Larkin mentions the last poem of the volume, written somewhat later than the others, which "though not noticeably better than the rest, shows the Celtic fever abated and the patient sleeping soundly."

But though the Celtic fever had abated, there is no way one could have expected the beauty and strength of an untitled poem he wrote two years later but never published:

An April Sunday brings the snow,
Making the blossom on the plum tree
green,
Not white. An hour or two, and it will
go.
Strange that I spend that hour moving
between
Cupboard and cupboard, shifting the
store
Of jam you made of fruit from these
same trees:
Five loads—a hundred pounds or
more—
More than enough for all next summer's
teas,
Which now you will not sit and eat.
Behind the glass, under the cellophane,
Remains your final summer—sweet
And meaningless, and not to come
again.

In my male-gendered way I had assumed the reference was to Larkin's mother, who had died, but the specialist who has kept up with his published letters and the proceedings of the Philip Larkin Society will know (or be reminded by Burnett's commentary) that there were plum trees in the back garden of the Larkin parental home, and that the poem is about the death of his father, Sydney.

He writes to his lover, Monica Jones, that he and his mother have been "rather helplessly looking at the stock in the house—this morning I shifted 100 lbs of jam. . . . I don't know what will happen to it all—I don't like sweet things, you remember." The editor also adduces a line from A. E. Housman—*The plum broke forth in green*—as an instance of Housman's "botanical precision" that may have gotten passed on to Larkin. Good to know these things, but of course they don't determine the fine rhythmic and syntactical movement of the stanzas, each ending with an incomplete sentence to be resolved in the following stanza. Rather than declamation, as in earlier Larkin poems, we hear a voice speaking in a rueful, almost disbelieving tone, as it treats of things mutable and the final thing—*sweet / And meaningless, and not to come again*.

More than one reviewer has warned that the casual reader will have trouble gaining an appreciation of Larkin's work from the volume. But no casual reader is likely to be caught within a mile of Larkin's poems, since they demand something a good deal more focused and serious than casual reading.

Although biographical facts won't help us to register more clearly the poem's technique and tone, they do aid us in "our knowledge of the writer's intentions" as Larkin carried them out.

The commentary Burnett provides on the longer and more ambitious poems Larkin wrote over the next decades is, naturally, more substantial and multidirected. For what this reader judges to be his finest poems—"Church Going," "The Whitsun Weddings," "Dockery and Son," "The Old Fools," and "Aubade"—the notes run to as much as five or six pages. Time and again we are pointed toward one of Larkin's utterances in letters or conversation that we were unaware of or had forgotten.

For example, "The Old Fools," his coruscating but eventually sympathetic portrayal of old age, begins shockingly:

What do they think has happened,
the old fools,
To make them like this? Do they
somehow suppose
It's more grown-up when your mouth
hangs open and drools,
And you keep on pissing yourself, and
can't remember
Who called this morning?

In a letter, Larkin spoke about the brutality of the poem, especially its opening:

> We are angry at the humiliation of age, but we are also angry at old people—angry with them for making us feel guilty and responsible, and of course . . . for reminding us of our own mortality. This is the anger in the poem that others than you have found distasteful. . . . But there it is.

Since the letter containing this is to be found in the Hull History Centre, few readers would be in the know, and the comment enriches the poem, however slightly.

There is also much pleasure to be had, especially for the Larkin fan, in his own, often slighting, remarks about the line or poem under consideration. Of an early poem, he notes, "I have just read the three ships in print and think it should be called the three shits. Don't pay much attention to it, it's bloody terrible." When someone quoted to him the pronouncement near the end of "Dockery and Son"—*Life is first boredom, then fear*—he responded with, "Oh no no no, there's no boredom left for me I'm afraid, it's fear all the way." (Here, an editorial slipup dates the response 2003, which is of course impossible, since that would have been after his death.)

About "Mr Bleaney," a bleak look at life in a bed-sitter, he was positive, referring to its closing lines "every word a bullseye. . . . O a splendid

poem!" Towards the yearly memorial service at the Cenotaph for the war dead—which the despicable speaker of "Naturally the Foundation will Bear Your Expenses" calls a *solemn-sinister / Wreath-rubbish in Whitehall*—Larkin had very different feelings, saying that watching the ceremony on television, as the band played something from Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, "harrows me to my foundations. These things seem to grow in power as one gets older." Such and many more instances of Larkin on his own poems show the range and variety of his critical eye and ear.

Reviewing this collection in the *New York Times Book Review*, the poet Paul Muldoon was severe about its section of "Poems Not Published During the Poet's Lifetime," which consists of ones Muldoon claimed were "hardly worth even a first look." But along with a few genuinely moving poems, such as "An April Sunday…" mentioned above, the section includes parodies, squibs, and half-formed utterances this reader is pleased to have, and for the first time, to hand. There is a short tribute, by way of echoing Browning on Shelley, to the great jazz clarinetist Pee Wee Russell: *And did you once see Russell plain?* There is a parody of Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" that begins *O what ails thee, bloody sod, / Alone and palely loitering* (the "sod" is an Oxford undergraduate who may just be the young Larkin).

But better than the poem itself is Larkin's description of it: "This is the latest work of the brilliant new Post-Masturbationist poet, Shaggerybox McPhallus. His new book of verse, 'The Escaped Cock,' deals almost exclusively with problems of intense spiritual value." And although *Walt Whitman / Was certainly no titman* provoked Muldoon's special disapproval, no one has previously saluted the Good Grey Poet in such original terms.

The fact that, along with being the great poet of things lost and never to be recovered—of transience, mutability, the evanescence of life—Larkin was an irrepressible, sometimes savage, joker about others, as well as himself, is more than demonstrated by this superb edition of his work. ♦

B&A

Toddlin' Town

How Chicago moved from city to metropolis.

BY JOHN WILWOL

LYDIA WHITCOMB

The nature of fact in nonfiction has been a hot topic of late in literary circles. Late February, for example, saw the arrival of *The Lifespan of a Fact*, a slim volume that claimed to chronicle a seven-year argument between author John D'Agata and fact-checker Jim Fingal over just how much D'Agata could alter the facts in his story about the 2002 suicide of a Las Vegas teen (see "The True Facts" by Zack Munson, THE WEEKLY STANDARD, April 30, 2012). A few weeks later, monologist Mike Daisey confessed that allegations he made against Apple in his wildly popular one-man show, *The Agony and Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*, were not based on reportage gathered at factories in China (as he claimed) but were invented wholesale by him out of a desire to "make people care."

City of Scoundrels
The 12 Days of Disaster That Gave Birth to Modern Chicago
by Gary Krist
Crown, 368 pp., $26

How refreshing, then, to be greeted by the author's note in Gary Krist's thoroughly researched, vividly written new book in which he proclaims, "*City of Scoundrels* is a work of nonfiction, adhering strictly to the historical record and incorporating no invented dialogue or other undocumented re-creations. Unless otherwise attributed, anything between quotation marks is either actual dialogue (as reported by a witness or in a newspaper) or else a citation from a diary, memoir, book, letter, telegram, court transcript, or other document, as cited in the notes."

Krist goes on in that vein for a while, and a quick flip to the back

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reveals just how delightfully extensive those notes are: Over 40 pages worth, in addition to a full bibliography and index. *City of Scoundrels* reminds us how rich and enthralling reality can be in the hands of a great storyteller. Krist employs an easy, enthusiastic hand to unpack all that research into a raucous, briskly paced, thoroughly American tale that provides moments of great comedy and tragedy, along with a steady diet of spectacular calamity.

The story opens in Chicago on July 21, 1919, with the "first major aviation disaster in the nation's history," the crash of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company's Wingfoot Express. Shortly after takeoff around five in the afternoon, as thousands left their offices for the day, an engine on the Wingfoot, one of Goodyear's "already fabled blimps," caught fire. As flames licked the "giant silver lozenge" above, people "all around Chicago's central district watched in awed disbelief as the silver blimp in the sky crumpled and began to fall." More than a dozen were killed in the disaster, Krist tells us, and dozens more were injured. But that was just the beginning.

Over the next two weeks, the Windy City would endure a series of crippling blows that threatened to ruin it, including a transit strike that brought life to a grinding halt, an explosive race riot that tore the South Side to pieces, and a chilling child disappearance that left Chicagoans so on edge that the police were ordered to "arrest and institutionalize all suspected 'morons' (1919 parlance for 'mentally deficient deviants')."

The man at the center of this civic maelstrom was Mayor William Hale "Big Bill" Thompson, Chicago's "blustering, flamboyant, unscrupulous, but always entertaining political phenomenon." Big Bill, who had wanted to be a cowboy as a child, stood over six feet tall and weighed over 200 pounds. "These Chicagoans recognized Big Bill as one of their own," Krist writes. "He spoke their language—'slangy, vulgar, and alive'—and seemed to understand their concerns better than an institute full of good-government reformers."

Although he won his first mayoral election in 1915 by the largest margin in Chicago history, it wasn't long before Thompson created enemies among what he called the "lying, crooked, thieving, rotten newspaper editors," particularly the *Chicago Daily News*'s Victor F. Lawson and Col. Robert R. McCormick of the *Tribune*. He also despised Gov. Frank Lowden, who eliminated many of the "no-show jobs" with which Thompson and other Illinois politicians repaid their supporters: "In machine politics, after all, ingratitude and disloyalty were the greatest sins a man could commit," Krist writes. "Lowden was guilty of both." Despite all this enmity, Big Bill Thompson managed to wobble into a second mayoral term in the spring of 1919, and it would fall to him to see Chicago through the greatest moment of upheaval it had ever known.

Krist nimbly reveals the inner workings of the Chicago machine of the early 20th century, and political aficionados will delight in the lively accounts of backroom deals and horse trades. He draws an illuminating portrait of the Republican National Convention in June. Combating Edna Ferber's "apocryphal" account of the "smoke-filled room" that ushered in Warren G. Harding, Krist explains that the selection of Harding "may have had more to do with luck and group psychology than with any sinister conspiracy." Krist also provides an engaging and concise description of the Illinois constitution, the root cause of Chicago's corruption:

> For technical reasons having to do with the state's antiquated constitution, major cities in Illinois had to be run by a number of independent "governments," each responsible for a different part of the city's operations. Chicago alone had twenty-seven of these entities—including several park districts, the Chicago Board of Education, the library board, the courts, and so forth—each acting independently to raise and spend money to accomplish its various mandates. What this created (aside from administrative chaos) was a plethora of boards, commissions, and bureaus, each of which had to be filled by appointment or election. With so many choice, well-paid positions to dispense, Illinois officials could—and did—use them as a kind of political currency, trading a commissionership here for a bit of election support there, promising a veto of a bill today for control of a parks board tomorrow. This was politics as usual in the Land of Lincoln in 1916, and—albeit to a lesser extent . . . —it's the way the game is still played today.

City of Scoundrels often reads like a novel, due in large part to Krist's choice to flesh out individual citizens. Some of these are familiar—Ida Wells-Barnett and Carl Sandburg—but others are not, such as Sterling Morton, scion of the Morton Salt family who was denied the opportunity to serve in World War I on medical grounds. (Morton instead joined a militia unit that was eventually deployed to control the race riots.) And Emily Frankenstein, a young woman from whose diary Krist quotes liberally, provides us with sober, intimate accounts of the chaos. Krist's greatest strength, however, is his ability to reconstruct a scene. Here he is describing a gunfight that erupted one evening in the midst of the race riots near Wabash and State streets:

> The standoff grew increasingly antagonistic until, shortly after eight, a brick flew from somewhere in the crowd and hit a policeman. The badly outnumbered officers closed ranks and suddenly began shooting back with their revolvers. Chaos resulted as panicky rioters scrambled to get out of the intersection. The gunfire went on for almost ten minutes. Two men were shot and killed as they tried to escape into the entrance of the Angelus. More shots killed one man and wounded several others who tried to take shelter behind a trestle of the L tracks. Then gunfire erupted down the block at State Street. Rioters began shooting at a mounted policeman, who returned fire. Fleeing crowds left behind more wounded and a fourth man dead.

Two days after the Wingfoot disaster, with the police on a wild hunt for pedophiles, and a transit strike in the making, Mayor Thompson boarded a train bound for Cheyenne, Wyoming, where he would be the guest of honor at the annual Frontier Days Roundup. At the mayor's request, city comptroller George Harding and police chief John Garrity went as well, along with "more than one hundred of his closest friends and supporters."

In a book full of astounding moments, that's certainly one of its most memorable, and Krist reminds us throughout just how ripe for the picking Chicago politics were for the satirists of the era. So the last word is given to the greatest of them all, H.L. Mencken: "Democracy," he wrote, "is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard." ♦

B&A

Framers of Mind

A constitutional scholar asks: What were they thinking? **BY ILAN WURMAN**

The battle between originalism and living constitutionalism has been waged in law schools and the public at large since the 1970s, and many liberal constitutional scholars have since hoped to strike the death knell of originalism as a viable constitutional theory.

Living Originalism
by Jack M. Balkin
Harvard, 480 pp., $35

First, they claimed that it is impossible to know the Framers' intent when the Constitution is properly seen as a bundle of compromises, leading to a move from "original intent originalism" toward original public understanding or meaning. Then they claimed that originalism still could not account for why originalist judges decide to adopt certain precedents—like the New Deal, the national security presidency, or the civil rights movement—which are arguably inconsistent with originalism, but which judges cannot unravel in today's political reality. Yet very few scholars have attempted to strike the fatal blow as Jack M. Balkin attempts to do here: He argues that if one properly understands the Framers' intent, and also the language and structure of the Constitution, then an originalist understanding of the Constitution leads to living constitutionalism. To Balkin, a living constitutionalist is the true originalist.

Balkin's theory is deeply thought-out and *Living Originalism* is well-written and engaging. And because it argues on originalists' own terms, it must be taken seriously. Its fundamental argument is that the Constitution is written in three separate kinds of clauses—rules, standards, and principles—and that, while the constitutional rules are fixed (such as the requirement that the president be at least 35 years old), the Framers left the text's standards, and especially its principles, to be fleshed out by future generations. Balkin argues that the Framers intended the Constitution to "enable" politics; that is, to enable future generations to put their own glosses on the Constitution, rather than to constrain them to avoid (as Justice Scalia has said) the possible rotting of American society and politics.

Before we can evaluate which originalist theory is more correct—Balkin's or the original-meaning/intent originalism—one needs to understand why any kind of originalism is the correct mode of constitutional interpretation. The answer is deceptively simple, and Balkin seems to understand it: No alternative creates a strong claim to obey or venerate the Constitution. What follows from this proposition is that a non-originalist reading of the Constitution leaves no persuasive reason for us to obey it—and therefore encourages, even if unconsciously, ignoring constitutional limits on government.

There are a few possible theories as to why we ought to have a constitution, and, thus, why we ought to obey the Constitution. Each loses force when judges stop giving effect to the Constitution's words through interpretations other than originalism. The first theory is that a constitution might reflect a period of heightened democratic awareness which, in turn, would lead to "higher lawmaking," the content of which should, because of its wisdom, be beyond the reach of normal legislative processes. Balkin believes that the Constitution does serve as "higher law," but what he means by the term is that the document serves as a statement of higher principles to be redeemed over the course of American history.

A second theory is that perhaps a constitution represents a "precommitment" to a particular system by which we must abide simply because some initial commitment is necessary to establish the "rules of the game." Balkin recognizes this as the "basic law" function of the Constitution.

Third, though Balkin does not consider this theory, perhaps obedience to the Constitution can be best justified on the first principles of natural rights. The argument might go as follows: We must abide by the Constitution because otherwise its very structure—which attempts to reconcile the tension between enabling a democratic government and protecting against its evils—necessarily collapses in favor of pure democracy. And once it collapses, the entire natural rights edifice on which the Constitution was created loses effect. So it is the principles of natural rights that demand adherence to our particular Constitution, which in turn gives expression to those principles.

This is not a theory that renders the

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Constitution self-evidently binding; rather, we the people must understand that if we are to attain a just form of government, we can only do so by willingly obeying the limitations on ourselves as dictated by natural rights theory. In short, we must choose to obey the Constitution because doing so is just.

Whichever theoretical justification one chooses to adopt, each accepts the premise that the Constitution, for it to be a constitution at all, must demand our obedience and our observation of its limits. And each requires an originalist interpretation of the constitutional text. As soon as the text is interpreted to mean different things at different times, there is no reason for that text to be binding for any given generation. An ever-changing text nullifies the idea of higher lawmaking, for it is precisely the wisdom of the Framers of the constitutional provisions which justifies obedience to them. A fluid text renders the precommitment theory hollow, because the rules of the game would change as judges chose to interpret those rules in new ways.

Furthermore, a fluid text admits of no natural rights justification for obedience to the Constitution, because natural rights principles require fixed limits on government that cannot change at the whim of those in power. What follows is that in order to be a constitutional government at all, the meaning of the words of the Constitution cannot change as our society evolves.

While Balkin recognizes that the Constitution functions as both "basic law" and "higher law," these two functions do not give the Constitution (in his view) its most fundamental legitimacy. Rather, he believes that the Constitution must also serve as "our law," and for it to be democratically legitimate, succeeding generations must put their own constructions on the constitutional text where the Framers have enabled them to do so through standards and principles.

Balkin argues that the Constitution "is premised on popular sovereignty," and thus "the delegation of constitutional construction to later generations is crucial to the Constitution's democratic legitimacy." Balkin's theory focuses so much on enabling future generations because for him, the Constitution cannot be legitimate unless it is democratically approved through successive acts of popular sovereignty—loosely to include the New Deal, the national security state, the civil rights movement, and the sexual revolution.

The Framers did indeed recognize the legitimacy of at least an initial act of popular sovereignty. But that does not mean that every generation must somehow re-ratify the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson famously suggested that there ought to be a constitutional convention every 19 years, a suggestion rejected vigorously by other Founders, such as James Madison and John Adams. They recognized the importance of a precommitment—or stability—in the Constitution, as well as a constraining higher law or natural rights function. Once we move away from the need to justify obedience to the Constitution through successive acts of popular sovereignty, it becomes far more important to interpret the Constitution as a constraining rather than an enabling document.

James Madison

Balkin's theory of enabling also flows from his optimistic view of history. He criticizes Scalia's argument that the Constitution was meant to restrict democracy to prevent "rotting." Balkin believes that the Constitution can be redeemed over time, that society can progress morally: "The very notion of aspiration presumes the opposite of [Scalia's] narrative of decline. It presupposes that each generation should build on the past, and strive to do better than the previous ones did." Thus, the Framers, who expected constitutional principles to be redeemed in the course of history, must have intended the Constitution to enable rather than constrain the future.

Balkin is right, in a sense: The Framers did expect that the Constitution would need to be amended, that it could be perfected in future generations. Two big moral developments which Balkin mentions are the end of slavery and the granting of women's suffrage. Both of these developments, however, were cemented through the Article V amendment process. It is far less clear why we should consider the New Deal, the growth of the administrative state, or the movement to restrict states from contending with the sexual revolution in their own ways as progress. Certainly from a progressive's perspective, such developments are desirable and a constitutional theory should be able to account for them. But if we take the Framers seriously, they may not have seen these developments as progress, and they may not be.

The truth is that the Framers intended the Constitution to be both enabling and constraining, and the Americans who ratified the Constitution understood it in those terms. They expected that society would be able to progress, and that if a supermajority of the states and the people's representatives came to be more enlightened, they would enshrine these developments in the constitutional text itself.

While Balkin's understanding of the role of standards and principles is sound, recognizing a more realistic view of history and the particular importance of the Constitution's constraining function may lead to a far different America than the one Balkin approves of and aspires to. The Constitution will be no less legitimate as a result, because it is precisely for its constraining effect that we respect and admire it, and must choose to obey it. ♦

B&A

Under the Volcano

Sun-drenched in the shadow of Vesuvius.

BY SARA LODGE

Amalfi

Behind the suburbs, a black giant throws its ominous shadow—its damaged lip, its raised shoulder—against an azure sky. This is Naples: a city where you never need to look far for trouble. I am headed south, to a destination that has always been difficult to access by land. You can't go over Vesuvius, so you must go around the volcano. The purple slopes are netted with grapevines. Oranges hang like Christmas baubles on the trees.

In summer, the narrow road that winds hair-raisingly in and out of the Neopolitan coast, as if negotiating the teeth of a comb, is thronged with beach-goers. But in late fall, it is easier to enjoy the sheer views as the local bus sweeps perilously around a bend, narrowly avoiding a stand of garish ceramics, tooting its horn like the foreign legion. Because there is so little horizontal space to build on, villages rise vertically through whitewashed passages and stairs to grooved throats of limestone clad in cypress and umbrella pines, hundreds of feet above the shimmering expanse of sea. This is the scenery of gothic romance, of monasteries and bandits.

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In and out the bus threads. Then you see it: Amalfi—a jewel stuffed into a crack in the rock like a hoard of pirate treasure. Barbarossa tried to capture it in 1544 but was (so local legend goes) driven back by the bones of the town's patron, Saint Andrew, who made the sea boil and the ships capsize. Amalfi was once part of the Byzantine Empire. In the 11th century, it was a powerful city-state controlling some 70,000 citizens, its fabled wealth derived from maritime adventures and trade with Sicily and the Middle East. Now its size is that of a small seaside town. But the splendor of the cathedral which dominates the central piazza betrays its rich history. Checkerboard black-and-white arches ascend to a Byzantine jeweled façade decorated with stars and fabulous beasts, dazzling golden mosaics of Saint Andrew, and a bell tower dramatically festooned with turquoise and ochre tiles.

Terrace garden in Ravello

I stayed in an inexpensive and well-appointed guesthouse, Residenza del Duca, up a flight of 80 stairs in the middle of town. Waking and looking down from a height, like Rapunzel, at the bustle of a small piazza was a pleasure: There were piles of bulbous tomatoes, artichokes, dogs, children, glaziers, workmen making much noise and little progress. Even in low season, Amalfi is lively. It's a cash economy (a broad hint that no one is paying taxes), and the prices on the outside and inside of the restaurants are not always identical. Then again, this is a seismic region, and it would be unnatural if anything were precisely level. As Tobias Jones comments in *The Dark Heart of Italy*:

> Linguistically, as in so much else, the country is based upon aesthetics rather than ethics. The judgment words most used are not good and bad, but rather beautiful (*bello*) or ugly (*brutto*). *Bello* is an adjective trotted out with such regularity that it entirely obscures a concept like "good." . . . Thus immorality is less frowned upon than inelegance.

When a country is this beautiful, it's easy to forgive. In autumn, tiny pink cyclamen carpet the woodland, blue mists settle on the lemon trees, and pomegranates blush on ancient terraces. It is still warm enough to sit out in Amalfi's piazza, enjoying a glass of prosecco or a sweet cannoli stuffed with ricotta, bought from a pastry shop whose interior of gold, glass, and old wood glows in the twilight with the warm memory of spun sugar.

The best food here is simple. Spaghetti alle vongole: garlicky, with tiny brown butterfly clams, each with its own striated pattern. Chicken or veal in a lemon sauce: delicate, sharp, and sweet with meat juices. Pasta with artichokes and candied orange peel: just a memory of citrus among the fat

Amalfi Coast near Naples

ribbons. Pizza as thin as a politician's excuse. And tomato salad, drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with salt and oregano.

After this repast you will likely be regaled with a free shot of limoncello, the local lemon liqueur. At the risk of having my passport revoked, I have to tell you that I think limoncello is revolting: syrupy, acidic, and 64 proof. I wouldn't clean my windows with it for fear of attracting the wrong kind of fly.

Amongst their lesser-known specialties, the translated menus in Amalfi offer a delicious hash of mistakes. I nearly ordered "pork with lemon coast," "pens with four cheese," and "broiled custard to the filberts." I was more wary of "beef with activated carbon" and "grilled stick." Other signs are equally surprising. "Dancing tearoom" offers one; "Middlenight to sunlight" promises another. The automatic candy machines at coastal railway stations are emblazoned "Self Bar." Perhaps at these founts of narcissism, you can obtain your just deserts.

To those who would rather walk off their desserts, a word of warning: *steps*. The Amalfitanis must have some of the strongest knees in Italy. This is not a holiday destination for anyone who likes to wear high heels. In these parts, ill-advisedly mowing the lawn in a cape could turn you into Icarus. It is worth, however, climbing up to the necropolis, a striking line of neoclassical arches on the hillside above the harbor.

Here, the former denizens of Amalfi are stored in tall marble filing cabinets, with all the leading families at the front. The ladders you need to reach the topmost cabinets and change the floral tributes are so steep that I wouldn't be surprised if some people met their end *in situ*. The flowers are astonishing in their profusion and variety. But the dead, smiling from their photographs on each tomb, are not. The names—the Pansas, the Franceses, the Cameras—are the same as those you will find on the shops in the piazza below.

The cemetery provides an interesting lesson about Italian society. People move on—but not far. Less than 15 percent of married Italian children live more than 30 miles from their mamma. And people move up—but not without help. Power is concentrated in old families. If you want something here, whether a job, a contract, land, or legal permission, the official route, like the coastal road, will be tortuous. You need to find the steps.

The gap between rich and poor in the *mezzogiorno* is stark. Arrive at Naples railway station and you might as well be in a third-world country. The ground is littered with makeshift stalls and piles of objects that call to mind the aftermath of a bombing: an old handbag, a broken toy, a single shoe. On the train, I was accosted by an itinerant sock vendor whose own feet were bare. By contrast, if you take the precipitous road from Amalfi up to the beautiful clifftop destination of Ravello, you find yourself on millionaires' row. During the off-season, I was able to wander around the empty terraces of palaces whose grand salons

were covered in dust sheets, wintering like frost-shy plants. One palazzo whose gardens are always open is the Villa Cimbrone, a whimsical mixture of English and Italian historical styles created by Ernest Beckett, a Yorkshire-born Victorian aristocrat who ran away from home but never quite escaped it. It has an Avenue of Immensity, a Terrace of Infinity, and a tearoom.

Fresco in Pompeii

The chief reason, however, to visit Ravello is to go on a dragon hunt. The town's plain-faced church conceals a marvel: a pulpit supported by snarling marble lions and decorated with elaborate mosaics in red, black, gold, lapis lazuli, and turquoise. Writhing and roaring in the color of their glorious scales is a coil, a conflagration of dragons representing the beginning and end of the world.

Twenty miles inland from Amalfi lies the ruined Roman city of Pompeii, and this is one destination you should visit at all costs. Pompeii has changed my understanding of antiquity more than any other historical site, because it is an immersive experience. Like plunging below the waves to view Atlantis, exploring Pompeii allows you to become lost in the totality of the past, to consider it not as a discrete monument but as an infinite, three-dimensional space.

The first thing to say about Pompeii is that it is huge. Think of a town with a population of about 20,000—you could not see more than a fraction of its houses in one day. You can amble about the site, imagining yourself into the world of 79 A.D. as you shop the bakery, admire the amphitheater and the public baths, raise an eyebrow at the brothel, and step inside the homes of vanished inhabitants such as the banker Lucius Jucundus or the fish-sauce magnate Aulus Scaurus.

The second thing to say is that it is vivid. After years of thinking of the Romans in terms of stone—square-jawed statues, die-straight roads, military installations—I was wholly unprepared for the delicacy and playfulness of the interior design in these Roman houses. The inferno red, butter yellow, and coal black paintwork make the mythological frescoes, the fantasy landscapes of exotic architecture, birds, and animals, sing. Cupids race chariots around the walls. In the garden of one house, a cheerful and busty Venus lounges on a shell, looking like a 1950s pinup.

It's easy to imagine the fun that was had in this town. In the House of Menander, there are slightly kitsch mosaics of pygmies sporting with ducks and water lilies, and a private bathroom with a mosaic of a grinning slave with an enormous penis. Phalluses are everywhere in Pompeii—as symbols of fertility, prosperity, and male power. They wink from kitchens and bars, where one once hung as a lamp, adorned with wings and bells.

Politics is also omnipresent. In a pre-paper world, campaign posters were simply painted onto the front of buildings. New ones were painted over the old, so we have a record of the men who competed for public office in Pompeii for decades before the fatal eruption. Interestingly, politicians in the Roman world did not stand on the basis of policy proposals—merely on wealth and character. And negative campaigning was rife; several of the painted signs were evidently put up by opponents trying to cast aspersions on their rivals' fanbase: "The late night drinkers are voting for Marcus Vatia; the pickpockets endorse Caius Julius Polybius."

Many of the houses and rooms in Pompeii are locked. But, typically, a banknote discreetly dropped into the pocket of an attendant will gain you admission. Tourist sandals troop over the 2,000-year-old mosaics and the obliging guard may even throw water on them to make the colors shine. It was ever thus. Italy has seen many rulers come and go; Italians therefore tend to regard rules as inherently flimsy.

On the last day of my visit, Silvio Berlusconi resigned. In Rome, critics of his scandal-ridden premiership sang a Hallelujah chorus. But in Amalfi, it was quite possible to not know that the government had changed. The televisions were silent, except for football. Nobody mentioned the news. You could see why: Southern Italy, as Lampedusa commemorated in *The Leopard*, knows all about *gattopardismo* ("leopardism"). The change of spots is illusory. Administrations alter, but the same concentration of power, the same abuses, remain.

Italy's economy, the eighth-largest in the world, is shuddering. The country owes $2.2 trillion, or 120 percent of its GDP. Since it is one of the world's largest markets for government bonds, the explosive potential of its debt mountain threatens all of Europe. But life goes on as usual. The tremors will pass. So said Lucius Jucundus in August 79 A.D., shaking a stone out of his sandal on the way to work out, have a sauna, and catch a comedy before bed, on just another late summer day with a hint of fall in the air. ♦

NEWSCOM

B&A

‘Girls’ Are All Right

Messy lives make a tasty serial.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

For once, the buzz got it right. HBO’s much-discussed new series *Girls* is just concluding its first season, and it’s extraordinary. *Girls* offers the most interesting and original televised portrait of upper-middle-class American angst since *thirtysomething* went off the air in 1991.

Like *thirtysomething*, it is simultaneously an infuriatingly self-referential thumbsucker and an extraordinarily intelligent dissection of infuriatingly self-referential thumbsucking. But it is, thankfully, far more the latter than the former. And it is one of the most prodigious media stunts since the heyday of the very young Orson Welles, given that it is largely the work of a 26-year-old who created it, wrote most of the episodes, directed a few of them, and stars in it to boot.

Her name is Lena Dunham, and two years ago she did the same triple duty on a do-it-yourself movie called *Tiny Furniture* that I actively disliked because it was purely a self-referential thumbsuck. Something good happened to Dunham in the interim between the movie and the TV series, because *Girls* takes the world of *Tiny Furniture*—post-collegiate types with no marketable skills wandering aimlessly around New York City—and gives it heft and shape and dimension.

It’s often very funny, and given that each episode runs a half-hour, I guess you’d call *Girls* a sitcom. But it really comes across more like a loosely linked collection of Ann Beattie stories updated from the post-1960s anomie of Beattie’s characters to the media-soaked seen-it-all world-weariness of Generation Zynga.

The girls of the title are Dunham’s Hannah, her roommate Marnie (Allison Williams), her high-school friend Jessa (Jemima Kirke), and Jessa’s cousin Shoshanna (Zosia Mamet). Shoshanna, a fast-talking naïf obsessed with the fact that she can’t seem to lose her virginity no matter how hard she tries, is still in college. The others are just out. The promiscuous Jessa takes a job as a nanny. When she isn’t making out with the dad, she is somehow losing the children in a city park.

Marnie, the “good girl” in the bunch, works in an art gallery. She pays all the bills for the apartment she shares with Hannah, who wants to be a writer but has no idea how to do it for a living. (She is consumed with envy for a college classmate whose boyfriend committed suicide, thereby providing an exciting topic for a publishable memoir.)

It’s hard to know where Lena Dunham ends and Hannah Horvath begins, save for the fact that Hannah is going nowhere while her creator may be the most successful and accomplished 26-year-old in America. That suggests the degree of art that has gone into the creation of Hannah, a genuinely great character who is by turns winsome and hateful, smart and stupid, loving and selfish.

Hannah is somewhat addicted to her own powerlessness, and is constantly walking into situations in which she knows she is going to be humiliated—and yet she possesses an admirable quality, a willingness to dust herself off and go forward no matter what happens. That’s true even though a lot of what happens to her is cringe-inducingly funny, as when she finds herself under withering assault from an old boyfriend who comes out of the closet during an evening she thinks is a date and decides to train his newly unleashed bitchiness on her.

Marnie is the only one who seems to have a solid head on her shoulders, but, just like the others, proves skilled primarily in making a hash of her life. She has a smart and funny long-term boyfriend who is perfect for her in every way except that she’s bored stiff by him. He gets the message and dumps her; she panics and gets him back, only to dump him immediately. When he partners up with a new love she tells him he’s a sociopath and spends her evenings morosely looking at photos of the new couple on Facebook.

The show is foulmouthed and, on occasion, startlingly dirty. And it plays quite brilliantly with one’s prurient HBO expectations. The show’s pinup girl, the surreally beautiful Allison Williams, remains discreetly clothed throughout; rather, it’s the very ordinary Dunham (“I’m 13 pounds overweight and it has been awful for me my whole life!” she shouts) who provides the lion’s share of the nudity. Those scenes are shared with Adam (Adam Driver), an uncompromisingly intelligent writer-actor who is, unfortunately, so lacking in the most elementary social graces that at times he barely seems human.

Whatever it is these girls and boys want with each other, they don’t have the foggiest idea how to get it. The bitter honesty about the failings of these articulate, interesting, amusing people is just one of the tough-minded qualities that sets *Girls* apart from the more winning but profoundly false we-are-women-hear-us-roar gender-solidarity fantasy that was *Sex and the City*. That show was largely the work of men writing for women: Maybe Dunham seems able to dispense with the fairy tale and show the rivalries and tensions among the four girls precisely because she is a woman.

There is no question that in the heralding of this spectacular young talent, *Girls* is a real sign of life for American culture—even if what *Girls* says about the condition of young Americans offers some cause for deep despair. ♦

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

"This month alone, former president [Bill Clinton] has taken heat for defending Bain Capital, testifying to Mitt Romney's 'sterling' business career, and suggesting he favored extending the Bush-era tax cuts."
—CBS News, June 14, 2012

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RIFT WORSENS BETWEEN OBAMA AND BILL CLINTON

Clinton: 'No one's ever questioned where I was born'

By MICHAEL D. SHEAR

DEFIANCE, Ohio — Standing on stage next to former President Bill Clinton, President Barack Obama was hoping to convey a message of Democratic unity to the media and the American people. But when Mr. Clinton spoke, it soon became apparent the divide between the two men was actually widening.

"Romney cannot relate to your average American. Barack Obama can," said Clinton to a round of applause. "Romney's not the sort of guy you want to have a beer with. Barack Obama is. Romney's the kind of guy who's better off handling your money, like a financial adviser. Looking for a job? He's your man. Looking for sympathy? Vote for Barack Obama!" The crowd seemed confused. Mr. Obama looked sickened.

The former president continued, "We are here today because I told the president I couldn't think of anything more American than this here Pepsi bottling plant. The president said he preferred Coke." The factory workers then started booing, just as Clinton officially introduced the commander in chief.

NEWSCOM

Pres. Obama clarifies Pres. Clinton's hypothetical endorsement of Mitt Romney.

For his part, the president thanked Mr. Clinton for coming out on the campaign trail "despite his old age and more than occasional senior moments." The president went on, "And the great thing about President Clinton is his sense of humor. He joked to me about going on one of his conference trips, no wives, just girlfriends. What a joker he is."

"Well, the president is funny, too," replied Clinton. "When I told him there better not be any more revelations about his past, he assured me he is no longer a Marxist."

The rally ended an hour earlier than expected, and while President Obama stopped into a Subway sandwich shop for lunch, President Clinton went to a Quiz-

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Spain lost money on Facebook, Pets.com

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