the weekly Standard

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THE OBAMA DELUSION, EXPLAINED
ANDREW FERGUSON

CAN THIS BE WHAT WOMEN WANT?

The Democrats' cynical election-year proposition

MEGHAN CLYNE
KELLY JANE TORRANCE

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

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COVER BY JASON SEILER

This Made Our Day

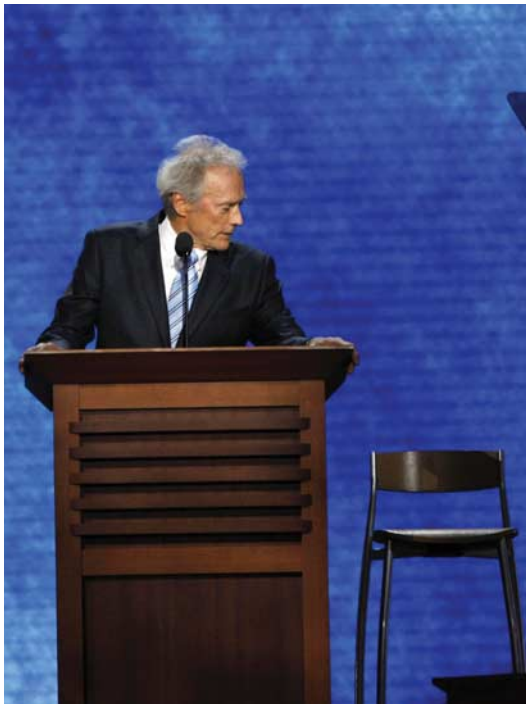
First, a disclaimer. The Scrapbook thought that the Republican National Convention was a success, and that Mitt Romney's acceptance speech was first-rate, as was Paul Ryan's address. Ann Romney, Clint Eastwood, Condi Rice, and all the Romney witnesses did their parts well, sometimes exceptionally well. The only sour note was Hurricane Isaac, or the threat of Hurricane Isaac, which in the end scarcely materialized in Florida.

That said, The Scrapbook must admit that the GOP convention made us feel—well, a little antiquated. The reason is that we are old enough to remember the national conventions of the 1950s and '60s; and any resemblance between those humid quadrennial funfests and the smooth, tightly scripted, closely choreographed production put on in Tampa (or Charlotte) is strictly coincidental.

We blame it on television. As recently as the 1970s the television networks actually covered the conventions, more or less from start to finish. In those days this was called "gavel-to-gavel coverage," and such comprehensive broadcasting in an election year was regarded as a public service, a Good Thing for the networks to do.

Now, of course, few viewers would associate gavels with conventions (whatever happened to those presiding chairmen?), and the irony is that, as conventions have adapted to the demands of TV coverage, network coverage has become virtually nonexistent. Of course, the conscientious viewer can tune in to C-SPAN—which really does provide gavel-to-gavel coverage—and the cable networks (Fox, CNN, MSNBC) and public broadcasting are conscientious. But the good old days of a full evening's coverage, and the big-name network anchormen hovering above the proceedings, have gone the way of the big-name network anchormen.

Which might explain why The Scrapbook enjoyed Clint Eastwood's appearance in Tampa so much. To be sure, Mr. Eastwood is a famous actor, and it is entirely possible, even probable, that what appeared to be a spontaneous riff, a series of off-the-cuff comments directed at an empty chair sitting in for Barack Obama, was as carefully planned and executed as any other prime-time address. But maybe not. In which case, for 11 glorious minutes, The Scrapbook felt sensations unfelt at party conventions in many a year: surprise, suspense, and uncertainty.



The chair recognizes . . . the chair?

Indeed, we had no more idea what Clint Eastwood might say or do next than we had when Mayor Richard Daley shouted an obscenity from the floor at Senator Abraham Ribicoff (Democrats 1968), and President Gerald Ford summoned Governor Ronald Reagan to the podium (Republicans 1976), and Senator Edward Kennedy pointedly ignored President Jimmy Carter (Democrats 1980), and a clutch of delegates booed Governor Nelson Rockefeller (Republicans 1964).

When Dwight D. Eisenhower accepted the Republican nomination in 1952, he shared a podium with dozens of people, all milling about and staring this way and that, and wiping their brows. Compare that with the Academy Award stage and light show that accompanied Mitt Romney. Does anybody remember the 1972 Democratic convention, when the wrangling and internal warfare over some long-forgotten platform plank prevented the nominee, Sen. George McGovern, from delivering his acceptance speech until two in the morning? Can anyone imagine anything like the 1952 GOP convention, when Sen. Everett Dirksen pointed from the podium at his party's two-time nominee (Thomas E. Dewey), and exclaimed, "You led us down the road to defeat!" One year the party nominee (Adlai Stevenson) decided to let the convention delegates choose his running mate (Democrats 1956), and four years later, backers of that same candidate tried to wrest the nomination from the favorite (John F. Kennedy) by staging a giant, prolonged demonstration (Democrats 1960).

The Scrapbook isn't especially nostalgic, but we confess to missing favorite sons, seating disputes, the roll call of the delegates, talk of "erosion" in support for the frontrunner, the occasional fistfight and/or shoving match on the floor, the pandering ("Colorado, the state that boycotts lettuce. . . "), boosterism ("Guam, where America's day begins. . . "), and unscripted sentiment ("Will the delegate from Wisconsin please shut up!").

It's slicker now, to be sure, and relentlessly focused and closely timed. But fun? Not so much. ♦

NEWSCOM

Sniffing Out Racism

While some people closely follow the polls to determine who's ahead in the presidential race, The Scrapbook is partial to another metric: media accusations of Republican racism. The more the GOP appears to be succeeding, the more baseless accusations of bigotry we start hearing.

When Yahoo! News's Washington bureau chief David Chalian was caught joking on a hot mike that Republicans were partying while black people drowned in Hurricane Isaac, the most surprising part of the story was that Chalian was fired for his comments. We expect he'll not be out of job for long, though. They can use talent like that at MSNBC, where discerning and denouncing GOP "racism" has been raised to an art form.

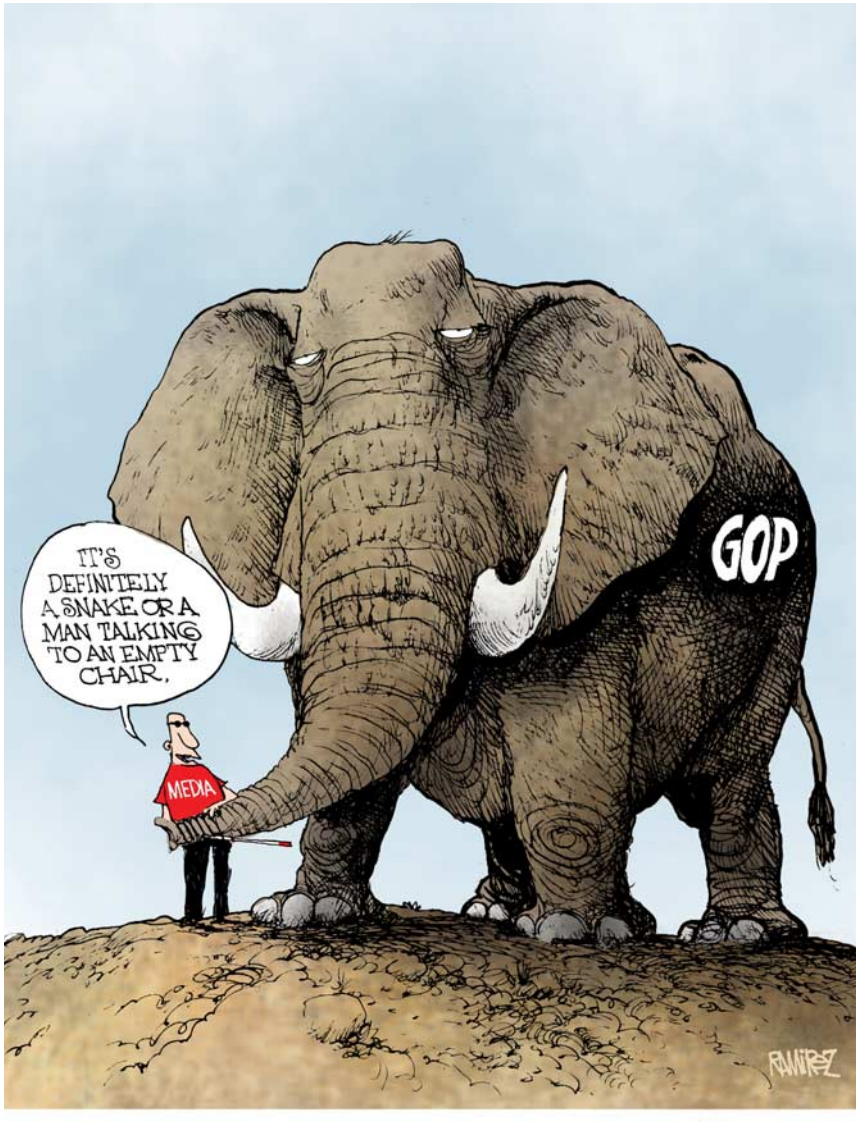
Not since the days of the Etruscan haruspex have so many attempted to divine so much from so little. MSNBC entrail inspector Lawrence O'Donnell, for instance, homed in on a joke by Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell about Barack Obama's well-known fondness for golf: "He hasn't been working to earn reelection. He's been working to earn a spot on the PGA tour." O'Donnell translated it for the rubes in Peoria: "Well, we know exactly what he's trying to do there. He is trying to align to Tiger Woods and surely, the—lifestyle of Tiger Woods with Barack Obama."

Near as we can tell, O'Donnell was engaging in a little friendly workplace competition with Chris Matthews, who complained that Republicans were racist for observing that the president hails from Chicago: "They keep saying Chicago. . . . That's another thing that sends that message—this guy's helping the poor people in the bad neighborhoods, screwing us in the 'burbs." Matthews's guest helpfully added, "There's a lot of black people in Chicago," just in case you didn't catch his drift.

Over at *Harper's*, Jack Hitt filed a report from Tampa, "A Troubling Chant on the Convention Floor." In Hitt's telling, nativist Republican delegates started chanting "USA! USA!" in response to a heavily accented speaker from Puerto Rico. As it turns out, the chant was really the result of some arcane parliamentary struggles among the Ron Paul delegates, having nothing to do with the speaker, and Hitt appended a rather weaselly note to his report clarifying what happened. The *Washington Examiner*'s Tim Carney commented that "[BuzzFeed reporter Zeke] Miller's reporting so thoroughly debunks what Hitt wrote that I would have expected Hitt to retract it. But when it comes to charging Republicans with racism, the standards are different, I guess."

(Yes, and the standards are different for Hitt. In 2006, with the help of a pro-abortion group, Hitt wrote a story for the *New York Times Magazine* claiming that a woman in El Salvador had been imprisoned for having an abortion at 18 weeks. Soon after publication, it was revealed the woman had killed her infant after it was born following a full-term pregnancy. The *New York Times* took a full eight months to append an editor's note to the story, and did so only after the *Times*'s public editor re-reported Hitt's piece and upbraided the paper for getting the story entirely wrong.)

At the *Atlantic*, Elspeth Reeve filed a wildly headlined report about House speaker John Boehner's remarks to reporters at the convention:



THE BLIND MAN AND THE ELEPHANT

"Boehner Says Out Loud He Hopes Blacks and Latinos 'Won't Show Up' This Election." Is that what Boehner said? Here's the full quote:

> This election is about economics. And they may not show up and vote for our candidate but I would suggest to you they won't show up and vote for the president either.

A handful of her journalistic peers took Reeve to task for her grossly dishonest headline, but rather than apologize, Reeve wrote a followup, "Why We Think John Boehner Is Hoping for Low Minority Voter Turnout." Except that Reeve didn't say she thought Boehner was hoping for low minority turnout, Reeve reported that's what he said. Which he clearly didn't. Other recent Reeve bylines include, "Romney's Birther Joke Explained in One Number: He Needs 61% of the White Vote" and "Race Takes Over the Race."

Feel free to look up that last story for an unconvincing, yet Zapruder-esque analysis of the supposed racial imagery in Romney ads critiquing the president for rolling back welfare-to-work requirements. We don't want to spoil it for you, but if you squint hard enough, you can actually see the goat entrails. ♦

May You See Your Children's Children

The Scrapbook will, as they say nowadays, go there. When the Romney and Ryan clans gathered together on stage in Tampa, there were almost more offspring than balloons.

The Romneys, of course, have five sons, all married; the Ryans have three young children. And the Romney grandchildren? Upon the arrival of his twins David Mitt and William Ryder earlier this year, Tagg Romney announced, "for those keeping score at home, these are grandchildren numbers 17 and 18 for my parents." So kits, cats, sacks, and wives, there are 35 Romneys and Ryans, counting candidates, spouses, children, grandchildren, and daughters-in-law.

The Scrapbook anticipates hysteria from the anti-natalist left, which was driven around the bend by the 12 children of the McCain-Palin ticket. Who says the demographic future is bleak for the Republicans? ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Mr. Romney's big speech, delivered in a treacly tone with a strange misty smile on his face suggesting he was always about to burst into tears, was of a piece with the rest of the convention. Republicans have offered precious little of substance but . . . " (*New York Times* editorial, August 31). ♦

Great Moments in 'Fact Checking'

Sometimes, facts are damnably stubborn things, untwistable even by President Obama's supporters in the media, whose default mode is to insist that dastardly Republicans are lying about the president's record. Here are two choice examples.

(1) From the August 22 *New York Times*, a story headlined "A Romney Attack Line Found Not So Clear-Cut":

> This week, Mitt Romney echoed an accusation made by various conservative bloggers against President Obama—that his administration has spent $90 billion on green energy.
>
> "Do you know how much money he invested in so-called green energy companies?" Mr. Romney asked during a campaign stop in Manchester, N.H., on Monday. "Ninety billion. Ninety billion!"
>
> But is it true?
>
> Roughly, yes. . . .

(2) In a similar vein, here's a poignant entry in the Associated Press's rapid-response "fact check" of Mitt Romney's speech to the Republican convention, August 30:

> Romney: President Obama promised to slow the rise of the oceans and to heal the planet.
>
> The Facts: Really?
>
> Yes, pretty much. . . .

Better luck next time, guys. ♦

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Their Town

If Washingtonians think they live in a Democratic-dominated city, they should come out here to the Rocky Mountain hotbed of liberalism that is Aspen. In Washington, each party recognizes that the other must exist. Otherwise, they would have no one to attack and would be forced instead to come up with positive solutions to the nation's problems. Here in Aspen, in the swing state of Colorado, the existence of conservatives—taken to be synonymous with Republicans, the political literacy rate not allowing for too many fine distinctions—is deemed an affront to the community.

This is a town where the buses are free, the city council is planning to ban construction of "free market" residential units, and new buildings have long been required to include subsidized housing units, thousands of which are already available to people employed locally, the idea being to create a "balanced community" where people at all income levels can afford to live.

Aspen is in Pitkin County, which found overwhelming merit in George McGovern and Mike Dukakis and went 70 percent for the Democratic Senate candidate in 2010, when much of the rest of the country was having second thoughts about the performance of the Democratic White House and Congress. Here, there are no major class divisions when it comes to politics: Rich and poor alike believe in an activist government doling out goodies of all sorts, funded in part by tourists, who are taxed without representation—nonvoters being traditionally a great source of revenue, and not only in Aspen.

All of this is unobjectionable. After all, Aspen voters have a perfect right to pick governments that are far to the left of the American mainstream. What is objectionable is the intolerance, the smug certainty that those opposing "progressive" politics are enemies of the people. That would be us, my wife and me, who are part-time residents of Aspen.

We have variously been accused of not wanting to see a black man in the White House (I would vote for the rascally Charlie Rangel given the chance, on the theory that what you see is what you get); of being homophobic (actually, we have no objection to gay marriage, since conservatives should, we feel, favor stable marriages and families); and wanting to toss old people over the cliff (when all we want to do is make President Obama give back the $716 billion he has stolen from the seniors' Medicare pot to fund the cost of caring for the young people who will be newly covered by Obamacare). When we protest that cutting reimbursements to doctors, as Obamacare does, will make it even less likely that doctors will take on Medicare patients, we are treated with the indifference generally reserved for people who are not au courant as to the latest in ski wax.

DAVID CLARK

The reasons for this uniformly left-leaning approach to politics probably have something to do with what attracts people to this paradise, which is home to enough arts festivals to keep everyone feeling superior to those Republican philistines in Vail. The Aspen Institute makes a pass at hosting speakers from all parts of the political spectrum, but the conservatives invited are generally the presentable faces of the center-right, the sort PBS features to prove it is fair and balanced. There are exceptions: Charles Murray was out here this summer, with his warning about the fragmentation of American society (a theme rather congenial to left-leaning critics of capitalism), and a contingent from the American Enterprise Institute was given a respectful hearing. But by and large, this is Jesse Jackson, Bill Clinton (his, er, progressive views on personal behavior generate forgiveness for welfare reform), Barack Obama country.

Yet not entirely. Miracle of miracles, the scattered band of reviled Republicans this year screwed up their courage and opened a campaign office—visible to all from the state highway as it enters town. This will undoubtedly upset whoever tried to tear the Bush-Cheney bumper sticker off my wife's SUV. Never mind. So great is the fear of forest fires out west this year that the Republican campaign volunteers at least need have no fear of being burned out.

None of this should deter you from coming to visit—but we suggest coming after the election, when the snow is flying (the merchants hope) and attention has turned from politics to the weightier question of when the slopes will open for business.

Irwin M. Stelzer

the weekly Standard

Desperate Democrats

A sea of signs proclaiming "We Built It" revealed the battle cry of last week's Republican National Convention. We don't need to wait for Los Angeles mayor and convention chair Antonio Villaraigosa to bring his gavel down in Charlotte on Tuesday to know the Democratic theme. It's been clear for months: Republicans are waging a "war on women" and only Democrats can end it.

Three days after Republican Senate candidate Todd Akin elaborated on his bizarre belief that women's bodies block conception from "legitimate rape," Democrats sent out a press release listing 10 additional convention speakers—all of them women, a number of them focusing solely on contraception and abortion. The list included NARAL Pro-Choice America president Nancy Keenan, Planned Parenthood Action Fund president Cecile Richards, and "Georgetown University Student" Sandra Fluke. Added to names already announced, pundits guess it will mark a record number of women speaking at a national convention.

JASON SEILER

Democrats have taken one Republican's (unanimously repudiated) remark and run with it. They quickly organized robocalls to tie other Republicans, including Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, to Akin. The day after Akin's interview, the Associated Press quoted NARAL's Keenan: "Make no mistake about it: Ryan is 100 percent behind the war on women agenda." Media allies helped spread the message. On the eve of the Tampa convention, Jay Leno took a break from being funny and talked about the Republicans' "war on women" and their lack of "compassion." Fluke, the law student who became famous complaining she couldn't afford her birth control co-payments, hinted at the theme of her speech in an email to supporters, writing, "There is a clear choice for women in this election."

In other words, if you're a woman, you must vote Democrat. Just as liberals have long portrayed conservative blacks as Uncle Toms, they now push the ludicrous notion that female Republicans are traitors to their sex.

Writing in the *Nation*, Katha Pollitt asked in print what many liberals have wondered in conversation: Why do so many females plan to vote Republican? "What's the matter with them? Do they have Stockholm syndrome?" She warned: "The Republican Party is not your friend! It does not respect you or even like you."

Democrats claim Republicans see women only as vessels of reproduction. But which party acts as though half the population votes based on its reproductive organs?

Liberals used to attempt to shut down serious debate with the question, "But what about the children?" Now their rejoinder to the case that Democratic rule has laid waste to the economy is, "But what about the women?"

It's really not that much of a shift, since the new rhetoric amounts to treating women like children. "We are not going back to the days when women could not have full access to birth control," Senator Bernie Sanders intones. In other words, if the government doesn't mandate free contraception, women will be at a loss to figure out how to obtain it.

Women aren't stupid. They can see through cynical and desperate ploys to secure their votes. One of the convention speakers announced during the Akin controversy was Eva Longoria. Her qualification seems to be her work as a Hollywood bundler for the Obama campaign. Perhaps Democrats think women will heed Longoria because she is the star of a female-oriented television series, *Desperate Housewives*. This summer, the Obama campaign produced fundraising videos featuring *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour and *Sex and the City* star Sarah Jessica Parker. They had nothing of substance to say; they simply represented products whose fans are mostly women.

The numbers show that females aren't fooled by the phony "war on women." In 2008, 57 percent of women voted for Barack Obama; 43 percent voted for McCain. The latest *Washington Post*-ABC News poll shows a substantial shift: Fewer than half of female registered voters now support Obama—he's at 49 against Romney's 43 percent. Polls of registered voters, rather than likely voters, tend to skew Democratic.

In his acceptance speech, Romney urged, "Now is the moment when we can stand up and say, 'I'm an American. I make my destiny.'" Women can say the same. Wasn't it Democrats who used to argue that biology isn't destiny?

—Kelly Jane Torrance

A Real War & a Phony War

AP PHOTO / SEBASTIANO TOMADA / SIPA USA

We're at war. More than 68,000 troops are deployed to Afghanistan. More than 2,000 Americans have died in over 10 years of fighting. The war has quiet bipartisan support. Too quiet.

President Obama, who—properly, we think—sent tens of thousands more troops to Afghanistan, rarely discusses the war, which is neither proper nor responsible. And in his speech accepting his party's nomination, his prospective replacement as commander in chief, Mitt Romney, said not a word about the war in Afghanistan. Nor did he utter a word of appreciation to the troops fighting there, or to those who have fought there.

This was an error by Romney, opening up political opportunities this week for President Obama and the Democrats. But it was also a failure of civic responsibility. Has it ever happened that we've been at war and a presidential nominee has ignored, in this kind of major and formal speech, the war and our warriors? I doubt it.

But the Romney campaign was preoccupied with responding to the Democratic charge that Republicans are engaged in a different kind of war, a "war on women." Republicans thought it prudent to spend considerable time in Tampa preempting that assault. Given the amazing willingness of the media to take this phony war seriously, indeed to trumpet it, perhaps the Republicans were right to go out of their way to reply—even if they did so at times in an almost cartoonish way.

So, Ann Romney exclaimed on Tuesday evening, "I love you women!" Her husband paraded his pro-woman bona fides Thursday evening:

> My mom and dad were true partners, a life lesson that shaped me by everyday example. When my mom ran for the Senate, my dad was there for her every step of the way. I can still hear her saying in her beautiful voice, "Why should women have any less say than men about the great decisions facing our nation?"
>
> I wish she could have been here at the convention and heard leaders like Governor Mary Fallin, Governor Nikki Haley, Governor Susana Martinez, Senator Kelly Ayotte, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.
>
> As governor of Massachusetts, I chose a woman lieutenant governor, a woman chief of staff, half of my cabinet and senior officials were women, and in business, I mentored and supported great women leaders who went on to run great companies.

Maybe, in today's political climate, this was useful. Still, it's worth saying that the whole thing is nonsense. There is no Republican war on women. As it happens, today's Republicans don't hold retrograde social and cultural views on gender issues—unless it's retrograde to have concern for unborn children, half of whom are girls, and for the traditional family, half of which is female.

It's true that American politics today features a gender gap—women vote a few points more Democratic than men. So what? Women are a bit more liberal than men. Men are a bit more conservative than women. This says nothing about which party's policies are better for the country, or about which gender is more often right. In any case, the gender gap is smaller than the marriage gap and much smaller than the churchgoing gap, to mention only a couple of other salient features of today's American electorate.

There is no war on women. There never was a war on women. The very claim traduces the memory of our fathers and forefathers—and our maternal ancestors as well. For if respect for a more traditional set of social arrangements is tantamount to a war on women, then most of American history has been a war on women. If you believe that, as much of the leadership of today's Democratic party apparently does, then you'll be more ashamed of American history than proud of it. If you really believe in the war on women, it's hard to see how you can really believe in America.

So Republicans could respond to the accusation that they are engaged in a war on women by charging that Democrats are in a war on America. But Republicans should rise above the temptation to fight arson with arson. There's a real war going on, thousands of miles away, in which real men—and women—are risking their lives. They deserve the thanks and support of our candidates for president.

—William Kristol

The Assault on Paul Ryan II

If you missed Paul Ryan's speech at the Republican National Convention last week and tried to play catch-up the next morning, you could be forgiven for concluding that nothing the Wisconsin congressman said was true.

Twelve hours after the speech, Josh Marshall, editor of the liberal Talking Points Memo, popular among journalists, asked: "Will the Paul Ryan Lying Thing Break Through in the Mainstream Press?"

Um, yes. It would.

The mainstream media "fact checked" Paul Ryan's speech with alacrity. At the *Washington Post*, for instance, four of the five most-read articles were, in effect, accusations that Ryan had lied. The *New York Times* published an article under the headline: "Ryan's Speech Contained a Litany of Falsehoods." The Associated Press accused Ryan of taking "factual shortcuts." The *Week* magazine published not only "The media coverage of Paul Ryan's speech: 15 Euphemisms for Lying," but also "Why Paul Ryan thought he could get away with lying: 6 theories."

AP PHOTO / MARY ALTAFFER

Here's the funny thing about most of these articles: They fail to cite a single fact that Ryan misstated or lie that he told. In most cases, the self-described fact-checks are little more than complaints that Ryan failed to provide context for his criticism of Barack Obama. For example, virtually every one of these articles included a complaint about Ryan's comments on Obama and entitlement reform. In accusing Obama of failing to lead on entitlements, Ryan noted that Obama had ignored the findings of the Simpson-Bowles Commission that the president himself had empaneled. The complaint: Ryan did not mention that he had served on the commission and voted against its findings.

Could Paul Ryan have gone out of his way to disclose his role? Of course. Does his failure to do so constitute a "lie"? Hardly. There's an additional irony here. None of those accusing Ryan of omitting important context noted in their reports that Ryan, both before and after voting against Simpson-Bowles, authored comprehensive and detailed plans to address entitlements and debt—something that might be considered important context for their critiques of Ryan.

Most of the fact checking focused on a passage about a GM plant in Janesville, Wisconsin, Ryan's hometown. This, allegedly, is the big lie:

> My home state voted for President Obama. When he talked about change, many people liked the sound of it—especially in Janesville, where we were about to lose a major factory. A lot of guys I went to high school with worked at that G.M. plant. Right there at that plant, candidate Obama said, "I believe that if our government is there to support you, this plant will be here for another 100 years."
>
> That's what he said in 2008. Well, as it turned out, that plant didn't last another year. It is locked up and empty to this day. And that's how it is in so many towns where the recovery that was promised is nowhere in sight.

Glenn Kessler, the *Washington Post*'s fact-checker, accused Ryan of lying.

"In his acceptance speech, GOP vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan appeared to suggest that President Obama was responsible for the closing of a GM plant in Ryan's hometown of Janesville, Wisconsin," Kessler wrote. "That's not true. The plant was closed in December 2008, before Obama was sworn in."

There are two things wrong with this. Ryan didn't claim that Obama was responsible for the closing of the GM plant, he faulted Obama for failing to do what he'd suggested he'd do: Save it. It's an important distinction. If Ryan's intent had been to deceive, he wouldn't have introduced his critique noting that "we were about to lose a major factory" when Obama told workers, "this plant will be here for another 100 years." Second, Kessler was simply wrong to claim "the plant was closed in December 2008, before Obama was sworn in." The plant was producing trucks as late as April 2009, several months after Obama was sworn in. On February 19, a month after Obama's inauguration, the *Janesville Gazette* reported on the imminent closure: "General Motors will end medium-duty truck production in Janesville on April 23, four months to the day after the plant stopped building full-size sport utility vehicles. About 100 employees associated with the line learned of the layoffs Wednesday."

It's true that GM, in the summer of 2008, had announced its intention to put the plant on standby. But if announcing something accomplished it, I would have long ago announced that I'd lost 30 pounds. The plant was not, in fact, "closed in December 2008."

But the narrative was set. How did this happen? Immediately after Ryan finished delivering the passage on the GM plant in his speech, top Obama adviser Stephanie Cutter sent this tweet: "Ryan blaming the President for a GM auto plant that closed under Pres Bush—thought he was smarter than that." With one click after another, Cutter's false claim became accepted wisdom.

So we are left with this irony: Paul Ryan was accused of lying because journalists and self-described "fact checkers" relied, at least in part, on a misstatement of fact that came directly from the Obama campaign.

There's a bigger problem. The same media outlets so energetically fact-checking every claim made by Republicans are missing extraordinary contradictions and inconsistencies from the Obama campaign. (Note to fact-checkers: The words "every claim" are deliberate hyperbole, not meant literally.)

Think about this: In an election in which voters cite the economy as their top concern, the centerpiece of Barack Obama's reelection campaign is a policy proposal that he has twice insisted would damage the economy. It might be considered the most audacious and important contradiction of the 2012 campaign. Most journalists haven't noticed.

Obama wants to raise taxes on the rich. He has vigorously opposed Republican efforts to maintain the current tax rates for all taxpayers, including the wealthy, and he's mentioned his desire for tax "fairness" in recent campaign speeches in Virginia, Colorado, and Iowa. An ad the Obama administration ran in August urges higher taxes on "millionaires" and concludes: "I'm Barack Obama, and I approve this message because to cut the deficit we need everyone to pay their fair share."

In the summer of 2009, Obama said in an interview with NBC's Chuck Todd that raising taxes in a recession "would just suck up—take more demand out of the economy and put business in a further hole." Raising taxes in such a downturn, the president said, is "the last thing you want to do." Obama can point out, correctly, that we're not in a recession. The obvious question to ask him, however, is why it'd be foolish to raise taxes in a recession but wise to do so in a sputtering recovery.

The second time he made this argument presents more problems—or might if journalists actually asked him about it. On January 29, 2010, with an economy he described as "somewhat fragile," Obama said that the "consensus among people who know the economy best" was that raising taxes was one of two ways to damage the economy. At a House Republican retreat in Baltimore, Obama rejected a Republican proposal to freeze spending at pre-stimulus levels and warned against the "destimulative effect" of tax hikes.

> I am just listening to the consensus among people who know the economy best. And what they will say is that if you either increased taxes or significantly lowered spending when the economy remains somewhat fragile, that that would have a destimulative effect and potentially you'd see a lot of folks losing business, more folks potentially losing jobs. That would be a mistake when the economy has not fully taken off.

Raising taxes, the president said without qualification, would be a "mistake" that could lead to "a lot of folks losing business, more folks potentially losing jobs." Here's the kicker: The economy today is not doing nearly as well as it was when Obama made those comments. Then, the "somewhat fragile" U.S. economy was coming off a fourth quarter in 2009 that had seen economic growth at a robust 5.6 percent—a pace that the *New York Times* described as a "roaring growth rate," while noting that it was expected to slow. (The first quarter of 2010 would show growth at 3.2 percent.) Growth today is considerably slower—a mere 1.7 percent in the last quarter, down from 2 percent in the first quarter.

Why would the president run for reelection on a policy that he believes will damage the economy, hurt business, and lead to higher unemployment?

It's a good question. Perhaps when journalists are done fact-checking the Republicans, they'll ask him.

—Stephen F. Hayes

No Red Lines in Syria

Last week, Iran reportedly dispatched more of its Revolutionary Guard shock troops to Syria to prop up its ally. And with that the Obama administration lost another of its justifications for sitting by idly as Syrian president Bashar al-Assad runs his countrymen through a meat grinder. The death toll is approaching 25,000. The White House has feared arming the Syrian opposition would only make the conflict bloodier and give the Iranians cause to commit to force. Well, the civil war has grown bloodier, and the Iranians have joined in—not because of what Obama did but because of what he didn't do.

For Tehran, Assad's survival is a vital national interest. That in itself should be reason enough for the White House to seize an opportunity to weaken Iran by helping remove Assad. With the Assad regime's troops steadily depleted by defections, the White House might have moved in for the kill. Instead, the Iranians are stepping in to protect Assad. And from Tehran's perspective, the American president virtually held the door open for them.

When Obama announced last month that Assad's move-

ment or use of chemical weapons was a red line that "would change my calculations significantly," he gave the regime in Damascus and its allies carte blanche to do anything short of that to put down the uprising. Assad no doubt already understood that if he used chemical weapons against any of Syria's neighbors, including Israel, he'd be finished. All Obama did in drawing his so-called red line was to confirm that, short of such a suicidal attack, Assad would have nothing to worry about from this administration.

Perhaps it is not surprising that a president who places such a high premium on rhetoric, who often mistakes speech for action, does not seem to have understood the effect his words would have outside of the White House briefing room, especially in places where power politics is a matter of life and death.

Just days after the president articulated his red line, Assad's forces committed a massacre in Daraya, a Damascus suburb—killing 400. Cause and effect? Some in the Syrian opposition say so. Others are more cautious—Assad was already a killer even before the administration's intentions were clear. But no one doubts that the White House's unwillingness to commit to a course of action against the Syrian regime has given Assad the luxury to proceed at will.

"Even when the administration talks about a no-fly zone, or a buffer zone, it sends mixed messages," says Louay Sakka, one of the founders of the Syrian Support Group, an exile opposition organization. "Secretary of State Clinton says they're studying the possibility of a no-fly zone, and then Secretary of Defense Panetta says a few days later it's 'not on the front burner.'" Sakka argues that only when the White House shows a determination to act will the regime's inner circle abandon Assad. The Syrian dictator made clear in a speech last week he is confident that America and its allies won't do a thing.

Accordingly, Assad has escalated. In addition to fresh Iranian reinforcements, his war now features regular aerial assaults on rebel positions. Tellingly, Secretary of State Clinton last year seemed to draw a red line of her own, in explaining why the administration had joined the coalition against Libya's Muammar Qaddafi but was leaving the Syrian president untouched. It was because the Libyan dictator was "calling out aircraft and indiscriminately strafing and bombing [his] own cities," said Clinton.

The fact that the Obama White House is today unmoved by the same sort of strafing and bombing of Syrian civilians suggests that in the end the administration has no red lines at all. And the Republican candidate and his surrogates, who decry the bloodshed and the massacres, have so far refrained from calling for notably stronger action. Will Assad have greater reason to fear a Romney administration than he does an Obama one?

—Lee Smith

The Obama Delusion, Explained

Making excuses for the president.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

Did you know that bitching about President Obama is now considered a "tradition" among liberals? It is. Things move so fast with those guys. One person has a gripe, another person chimes in, a third grouses about this or that, and the next thing you know—it's a "tradition." Very progressive.

"Your essay is in a tradition of trying to understand the reality of President Obama versus the promise of Candidate Obama," said a man named Ta-Nehisi Coates, interviewing the writer James Fallows. Both men work for the *Atlantic* magazine, which just last week published an e-book by Fallows called *The Obama Presidency, Explained*. The interview is packaged with the e-book, which is mostly a revised version of an *Atlantic* article Fallows wrote this spring. Fallows is the complete *Atlantic* magazine writer, containing within himself the character of his magazine in all its facets: lacking in humor and color, a bit gassy, unfailingly high-minded and earnest, liberal without overdoing it, intelligent, well-intentioned more often than not, and boring.

The Obama Presidency, Explained is in this same *Atlantic*, uh, tradition. But the book is worth a download for what it tells us about liberal disenchantment with President Obama—that is, how one of his sophisticated admirers perceives the president's failure to reconcile his uninspiring presidency with the dizzying expectations he goosed them all into way back in 2008.

Fallows nicely illustrates this liberal consternation with a joke that the comedian Seth Meyers addressed to the president at a Washington ballroom dinner. This was in 2011, when even his most ardent admirers were beginning to wonder where the hell all that hope and change had got to.

"I'll tell you who could definitely beat you," Meyers said to Obama, referring to the upcoming election. "2008 Barack Obama. You would have loved him."

Conservatives who consider Obama a thinly disguised Leninist will be surprised that liberals have grown disenchanted with their onetime hero. But you can't underestimate the naïveté and ignorance that inflated the bubble of the Obama Delusion—how fragile it was, how vulnerable to the first pinprick of reality. It turns out they really did expect a "transformative" presidency that would move us beyond left and right. They meant it! And in this childish belief they were encouraged by their candidate, who might have meant it too, for the same reasons. Obama's admiration for Barack Obama, after all, was even greater than theirs, and his ignorance of the messy practical realities of self-government almost as complete.

By now, Fallows writes, "there is plenty of evidence about the things Obama and his team cannot do." These include managing the various crises in the Middle East, overcoming the culture wars, and restoring the economy to the full bloom of health. The author might have added several more items: writing a budget for the federal government, let's say, or containing health care costs, or reducing, rather than enlarging, the federal debt. . . . I'm sure you can come up with a few items of your

DAVE MALAN

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own. Even balanced with what Fallows insists are Obama's successes—installing Obamacare, withdrawing troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, "encouraging the Arab Spring" (?), managing relations with China—the executive tasks that were beyond Obama's competence should be enough to declare a mostly failed presidency.

Yet it is this conclusion that the president's supporters, no matter how disenchanted, cannot permit themselves. It's an election year, and unspeakable horrors await the world if Obama loses. So Fallows comes up with an ingenious premise for his book: History's verdict on Obama's presidency will be largely determined by whether he wins reelection in November. "Our judgment about 'really good' and 'mediocre' presidents is colored by how long they serve," he writes. "A failure to win reelection places a 'one-term loser' asterisk on even genuine accomplishments."

This is the kind of insight you often find in highbrow journalism: sweepingly explanatory and grandly historical and, upon reflection, not really true. It's easy to argue that the reputation of George W. Bush would be higher if he'd been pushed out after his first term, thus escaping responsibility for all the mistakes in the second term and leaving only the memory of his post-9/11 resolve. His one-termer dad, meanwhile, is commonly praised for his truncated prosecution of the Iraq war and his violation of his no-tax pledge, widely understood nowadays as an act of political courage (suicidal, but gutsy). Even the administration of Jimmy Carter, for whom Fallows once wrote speeches, is remembered fondly by an increasing number of political types for its deregulation of industry and its insistence on human rights as an element of American foreign policy.

Fallows needs to believe that presidential reputation is shaped in large part by reelection because it helps him get Obama off the hook. On the matter of Obamacare, for example, he quotes Lawrence Summers, who says that if Obama is reelected his health care scheme will stand as an achievement as grand and uncontroversial as Medicare seems today. If he loses and Obamacare is dismantled, Summers says, his efforts will be a sign of the president's "hubris" and "overreach."

But this is a chicken-hearted way to look at Obama's record. Obamacare is either a good idea or a bad one, with merits or deficiencies that are easy enough to grasp and argue about right now; there's plenty of evidence to decide whether it was an act of hubris. And the president's economic stimulus, to cite another example, has been a failure even by the criteria he himself set ("If I don't have this done in three years, then there's going to be a one-term proposition"). Pretending that the merits of the Obama presidency are somehow undefined forestalls the debate—how can you defend a record that's inconclusive?

Even so, Fallows acknowledges that Obama was "unsuited [to the presidency] in many ways"; his lack of executive experience and his personal chilliness worked to his disadvantage. This was to be expected, Fallows writes, because "every president is ill-suited to office, each in a different way." The point is true but trite. There's no such thing as a perfect husband or wife, either, but that tells you nothing about whether this husband or that wife is a good match. But again it nicely shifts our attention away from a judgment about Obama's manifest failure as a president onto secondary questions—telling us *how* he's failed without admitting that he has.

Fallows's main complaint is that Obama has been too nice. He decided "not to fight" a stubborn and underhanded Republican opposition. In the massive catalogue of the partisan kibitzer's complaints, *He didn't fight hard enough* is the easiest to make and most difficult to refute, second only to *He didn't get his message out* as an explanation for failure or incompetence. ("Let's you and him fight!") *Our guy didn't fight hard enough* simply means *Our guy lost, the wussy.* Victory alone satisfies political followers and persuades them that their leader has been properly vicious in support of their cause. Until then they warm themselves, as Fallows does, with dreams of Harry Truman, the patron saint of struggling incumbents. Losers from Gerald Ford to Jimmy Carter, from George H.W. Bush to Bob Dole, have invoked the sacred name. Having overcome long odds with shameless demagoguery in 1948, Truman represents the idea that a cause is lost only from insufficient belligerence.

Fallows is vague about what would have happened had Obama "chosen to fight." Would the health care bill suddenly have become popular? Would cap and trade legislation suddenly have squirted out of Congress and become law over a united and bipartisan opposition? Would Khalid Sheikh Mohammed have been tried in downtown Manhattan and the Illinois cow country now swarm with imprisoned terrorists imported from a shuttered Guantánamo? It never occurs to the partisan mind that his causes often fail simply because most people think they're terrible ideas.

As for the personal chilliness that disappoints Fallows, we should be surprised that he's surprised. The self-love that freed Obama to portray himself during the campaign in laughably grandiose (but inspirational!) terms accounts for his "inability to connect with people" in smaller settings. Now that his workplace has moved from the center of college sports arenas where he was surrounded by hysterical youngsters to offices and hallways and conference tables where men of guile and cunning gather, the power of his ego has failed him.

For all his apparent dispassion and clinical detachment, Fallows remains an Obama Delusionist at heart. He still insists on the president's eloquence, "his ability to inspire and motivate people en masse." In support of this increasingly implausible view, he mentions only two speeches, as Delusionists always do: Obama's speech in 2008 about his crazy pastor, and his touching address after the Tucson shootings last year. He ignores, meanwhile, the hundreds of phlegmatic utterances Obama has delivered routinely since, including big production numbers like his State of the Union addresses and his nationally televised pep talks. His

wandering responses in press conferences also go unmentioned. Still Fallows insists: "As an explainer of ideas through rhetoric, Obama has few recent peers." This is true, in a way. Obama gave more than a hundred speeches to promote his health care bill and watched its popularity steadily fall; the more he talked the less persuasive he became. Not many inspirational orators could make such a claim.

Democrats will be pleased to find notes of hope in *The Obama Presidency, Explained*. Lately, Fallows writes, "after three years of seeming to shy from 'partisan' rhetoric," Obama has shown reassuring signs of Truman-like shamelessness. "Give 'Em Hell Barry" has made recess appointments, changed government policy through the kind of executive order that horrified Democrats during the Bush administration, and linked Republicans to the Tea Party as it "spins the Republican party off to the extreme." (Like so many commentators, Fallows has seen the Republican party spinning off to the extreme since the Nixon administration.) If Obama can maintain this newfound persona into November, Fallows believes, he can win. The rising-above-partisanship thing is no longer operative.

In his interview with Coates, at the book's end, having offered what I'm sure he believes is an unblinkered view of the president and his failings, Fallows makes clear that all the arguments in the foregoing pages are, finally, not particularly germane to the question at hand: Should Obama be reelected?

"I'm going to vote for him," Fallows says, "because: One, I prefer Democratic to Republican economic policy. . . . Two, I prefer Democratic foreign policy to Republican foreign policy. . . . Three, I prefer Democratic to Republican judicial/social policy."

Notice that the particulars of the Obama presidency have vanished altogether. It's a bit of a letdown for a reader who's been patient enough to slog through his e-book. James Fallows will vote for President Obama because Obama is a Democrat and so is he.

Well, why didn't he just say so in the first place? Why do Democrats always make things so *complicated*? ♦

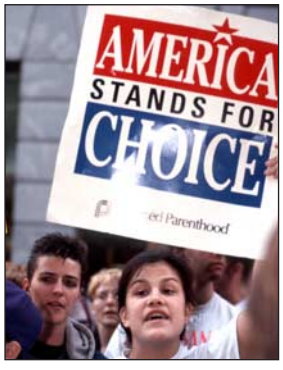
Reactionary Democrats

Why they can't stop talking about abortion.

BY FRED BARNES

For Democrats, the issue of abortion is a hardy perennial. They turn to it in hope of persuading voters that Republicans, in their opposition to abortion, are extremists and antiwoman.

At this week's Democratic National Convention, this effort is a centerpiece of the strategy to discredit Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, his running mate Paul Ryan, and GOP candidates in general. But there's a problem: This line of attack has never worked. And the likelihood it might in 2012 is more remote than ever.



Actually, less than you'd think

Democrats call themselves progressives. But on abortion, they are reactionaries. They hark back to a moment two decades ago when it seemed they might defeat their pro-life, antiabortion antagonists once and for all. Republicans were on the defensive, but only briefly. The pro-abortion moment was fleeting, a false spring.

Since the early 1990s, the trend has been against an unrestricted right to abortion—better known as abortion on demand—which is the goal of leading Democrats, including President Obama, and pro-abortion organizations like Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America that have become pampered interest groups of the Democratic party.

Grassroots Democrats, in contrast, have much in common with Republicans on abortion. As Kristen Day of Democrats for Life of America points out, one-third of Democrats are pro-life. "That means almost 21 million Democrats share this label," she says. And support among all Democrats for limitations on abortion is strong.

Evidence of this comes from a Gallup poll in 2011. Among self-identified Democrats, 61 percent favor parental consent for underage females seeking an abortion, 60 percent back a 24-hour waiting period, 84 percent back informed consent prior to an abortion about the risks involved, and 49 percent support an ultrasound requirement.

Given these numbers, one might conclude that Democrats for Life of America would play a prominent role at the convention. It won't. Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards and NARAL president Nancy Keenan have been invited to address the convention in Charlotte. Democrats for Life is relegated to holding a "town hall meeting" outside the convention hall at a nearby Crowne Plaza hotel.

The decision of Democratic officials to highlight abortion is revealing. In a recent Gallup poll, less than 1 percent of Americans listed abortion as a top concern. Yet it's the focus of attacks on Republicans and the link to the "war on women" that the GOP is supposedly waging.

What's striking is the lack of anxiety among Republicans about this onslaught. On the contrary,

NEWSCOM

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Republicans should be thrilled that Democrats are raising social issues, says GOP consultant Jeffrey Bell. For decades now, polls have indicated that Republican candidates, at the presidential level and below, are the beneficiaries.

The emphasis on abortion is a reflection of Democratic weakness in the 2012 campaign. It's a distraction—an intentional one—from the overriding economic issues Democrats would rather not discuss. And it underscores the need to arouse the enthusiasm of their base by invoking an issue that is part of the ideological DNA of many Democratic activists—but is otherwise marginal in the politics of 2012.

Most women aren't Democratic militants. Female voters believe the election "is about a different type of women's issue—providing for their families in an ongoing stagnant economy," a Romney adviser told me. "Democrats risk looking oddly out of kilter with their messaging if the voters are laser focused on one issue while they're talking about something else."

But give Democrats credit for ingenuity. They've come up with a variety of specious grounds for labeling Republicans extremists on abortion. One is that the pro-life position of Republicans causes women more than men to vote for Democrats, thus creating the gender gap. This is untrue. That gap is based on other issues—Social Security, the role of government, domestic spending, financial security. The proof: It occurs in races where the Republican candidates are pro-choice, not just where they're pro-life.

Another reason is that the Republican platform is allegedly more extreme in opposing abortion than ever. True, the language was altered a bit this year, though not in substantive ways. For instance, the platform notes for the first time that "abortion endangers the health and well-being of women and we stand firmly against it." And the boilerplate about acknowledging "differing views on this question," as the 1980 platform put it, was dropped.

On abortion, as on other social issues, Democrats have a reliable ally. Whenever they attack Republicans on the issue, the media reflexively rise in horror at the GOP's audacity and intolerance. When Brian Williams, the anchor of *NBC Nightly News*, interviewed Ryan the day after his speech accepting the vice presidential nomination, the exchange went like this:

> Williams: A lot of your speech was devoted to leadership. But that could be construed as ownership. Are you prepared to leave this gathering and own the fact that the platform of this party allows a woman who's been raped no exception but to carry that child to term?
>
> Ryan: Well, I think the platform is silent on that particular issue. . . . Mitt Romney's position is that there are exceptions for rape, incest, and the life of the mother.

The media have their own abortion exception. They usually treat party platforms as irrelevant documents of no news value—except when Democrats accuse Republicans of going off the tracks on abortion (or other social issues). Suddenly we have a big story. But when Republicans flay Democrats for refusing to condemn sex-selection or partial-birth abortion, you guessed it. No news there.

The alliance between the media and Democrats went into high gear when Republican Senate candidate Todd Akin of Missouri talked about "legitimate rape." This was national news that every Republican candidate in the country had to answer for. Sadly for Democrats, Republicans instantly repudiated Akin and urged him to drop out of the race. The Akin flap now lives only as a staple of Democrats' speeches.

However much Democrats zing Republicans at their convention on abortion, two facts prevent them from making political headway. The pro-life movement is on the march, the pro-choice side is losing altitude. It shows in the biggest poll number of all. In May, Gallup found that 50 percent of Americans consider themselves pro-life, only 41 percent pro-abortion. That's a new high for one side, a new low for the other. ♦

The Anachronistic Candidate

Mitt Romney, throwback.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

There was an interesting moment at the Republican National Convention last week: just a moment, and scarcely noticed, but it seemed to sum up a Mitt Romney problem which, in a rational world, would not be a problem.

The first time Governor Chris Christie mentioned Romney in his keynote speech, the delegates rose as one to their feet and applauded Romney, who was sitting in a box beside his wife. The applause was prolonged, and Mrs. Romney stood and clapped as well. But Governor Romney, half-smiling and looking slightly embarrassed, remained seated, occasionally nodding his head in recognition.

Now, if Mitt Romney had been a baseball player, he would have stood and doffed his cap to the audience. And if he were almost any other politician, he might have stood and waved in every direction, perhaps with both hands, and most certainly would have given Chris Christie a thumbs-up. But because he is Mitt Romney, he acknowledged the ovation by merely smiling and nodding. One could sense his reasoning: This was Christie's moment, not his, and it would have been a selfish distraction to interrupt it by drawing attention away from the speaker.

It also revealed what the press believes is Romney's primal weakness: a certain personal reticence, even awkwardness, which prevents him from connecting on a visceral level with voters who might be tempted to embrace him. After years of presidential candidates (and presidents) who like to talk publicly in confessional mode—about their marriages, religion, family tragedies, and existential crises—the press finds Romney's reserve disconcerting, and has concluded it's a liability.

But is it? It is an article of faith among the chattering classes that Americans want to feel affectionate toward their presidents, and want to feel sufficiently comfortable with them to invite them to enjoy a beer together. Part of this has to do with the nature of the American presidency, which combines in one person the head of government with the head of state, and accords a politician the same personal veneration usually reserved for royalty.

But if voters are determined to elect ordinary mortals with whom they feel "comfortable" and would like to share a beer, they have made an abundance of peculiar choices over time. Consider our most popular presidents. It is difficult to imagine the average voter, in 1952, wanting to slap General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower on the back and invite him over for barbecue. Ronald Reagan, charming and affable, was a virtual stranger to his children and had few close friends. The only president to be elected four times, Franklin D. Roosevelt, lived on a spacious family estate in the Hudson Valley, wore a naval cape and pince-nez, and smoked cigarettes with a holder. And FDR much preferred a dry martini to beer.

The truth of the matter is that the great majority of our presidents, certainly in modern times, have tended to be rigorously self-contained and self-disciplined individuals, governed by a superhuman ambition that can be nearly obsessive. Because they are politicians, they have perfected the art of projecting a cheerful, empathetic demeanor in public; but can anyone doubt that they are driven individuals, their eyes resolutely focused on the main chance? Indeed, Barack Obama seems to be almost a caricature of the species: adept at posing as a regular guy, dropping his Gs in speeches, and shooting baskets in shirtsleeves—but even his admirers complain about his personal coldness and tendency to sacrifice principle for self-protection.

What separates Mitt Romney from the herd, and seems to frustrate the press, is that added to this standard presidential makeup is a strong sense of personal dignity as well, a genuine anachronism in the age of Oprah. Romney seems like an anomaly; but he is, in truth, much closer to the historical model than not. It was, after all, only two decades ago when candidate Bill Clinton blew his saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show*, beginning a trend that has yet to play out. Indeed, there was a time, not so long ago, when presidents refrained from granting one-on-one interviews to the press, would never have discussed their religious opinions or personal problems with journalists, and were not expected to make themselves available to the producers of *Late Night with David Letterman* or *The View*. From George Washington onward, presidents sought to maintain a certain statesmanlike distance—mystery, if you will—around their exalted office.

Under Obama, in particular, this has all been stood on its head. The White House is now a routine port of call for visiting celebrities, and the president of the United States will reliably "slow jam the news" with Jimmy Fallon on his late-night TV show. But is this how Americans envision the presidency? The fact that Mitt Romney tends to shrink from such spectacles, and relies on others to talk about himself, may yet prove more, not less, appealing to voters. ♦

Philip Terzian, literary editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *is the author of* Architects of Power: Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and the American Century.

The Graying of the Proletariat

Boomer protest marches aren't what they used to be. BY JONATHAN V. LAST

Not like the old days: protester and sheriff's deputy arm in arm

Tampa

They had me at "street theater." Last week at the GOP convention, the AFL-CIO sponsored a "Mitt Romney's America" protest. It wasn't just an ordinary march, though. It was billed as a "parade." In addition to consciousness raising and "making their voices heard," the union press release promised there would be "street theater."

About 250 marchers assembled on Wednesday evening four blocks outside the convention's secured perimeter. There were members of the National Association of Letter Carriers, the Florida AFL-CIO, and AFSCME, among other assorted labor types. As a group, the protesters gathered at the staging area looked remarkably like the Republican delegates inside the Tampa Bay Times Forum a few hundred yards away.

Fake Mitt

Sure, there was a weird guy wearing a sandwich board and a black beret, and a pair of women cradling djembe drums—standard-issue fare for this sort of hootenanny. But the crowd was overwhelmingly white, middle-aged, and middle class, well spoken and friendly. I chatted with a retired air-traffic controller, John Carr, about his 9-year-old triplets. Most of the people around us were similarly engaged in conversations about kids and grandkids. One paunchy, middle-aged protester stood amiably talking with one of the paunchy, middle-aged sheriff's deputies working security about his children, too. After a few minutes, the two men began flipping through pictures together on a smartphone, occasionally clapping each other on the back in bonhomie. Revolutionary dissent isn't what it used to be.

What's interesting about this protest is that the marchers are grownup and bourgeois; and while they have real political disagreements with Mitt Romney and the Republican party, they're not structural. Yet because they came of age in the 1970s, the only protest vernacular they know is radical. Hence the street theater. The result is cognitive dissonance: theatrical protest against incremental change. Will there be means-testing for Social Security? Will the post office deliver mail on Saturdays? These are the big fights for the marchers.

As soon as the parade begins, the two ladies thump on their drums and the throng starts shouting, lurching from one slogan to another. They try yelling, "We built it!" as a proletarian response to the Romney campaign's entrepreneurial slogan. That doesn't quite work so they change gears and chant, "We're going to take our country back!" That doesn't make much sense either—after all, their party controls the government these days—so they switch to "Stand up, fight back." As a rallying cry, it has the benefit of being nonfalsifiable.

The parade snakes its way around the short official parade route which has been sanctioned by the convention's security forces with a phalanx of bicycle-mounted police fore and aft. Every 10 minutes the proceedings halt so that protesters can put on a little skit portraying what life would be like in a dystopic world where Mitt Romney was president.

The first performance is titled "Full Employment and a Living Wage." In it, a man dressed in a Romney mask appears carrying a black suitcase overflowing with $100 bills. Fake Mitt is besieged by people wearing sashes and asking for money. One

IMAGES: JONATHAN LAST / THE WEEKLY STANDARD

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woman, whose sash reads "Unemployed," is denied Romney's money, as is a man whose sash says "Blue Collar." Instead Fake Romney gives his cash to a blonde woman in a black dress who's wearing a sticker that says "1 percent." He also doles out money to a woman whose sash reads "Belize." Go figure.

The next stop features a parable about Romney's voter suppression. A pretty young black woman is turned away from a polling place. So is a Hispanic man. And so is a white retiree. Finally, a clean-cut, well-dressed, white twentysomething strides up and he—to everyone's horror—is ushered quickly into the voting booth. The players don't seem burdened by the demographics of the Democratic coalition—older white voters are going to vote overwhelming for Romney and young, affluent, college-educated voters will go hard for Obama. The syntax of street theater isn't readily adaptable to such realities.

The third skit concerns union rights. In it, a man in a Darth Vader mask asks the assembled crowd if any of them would like a job. When a fellow steps forward and says yes, Lord Vader puts tape over his mouth in order to, as he explains, "silence your voice." Even by the standards of street theater, this is a little clichéd.

And on it goes. After the fifth performance, the protest finishes with a reading and signing of a "Second Bill of Rights" (sample: "The right to a quality education"). With the drumming and chanting complete, the marchers revert to their bourgeois selves and mill around taking group photos and making dinner plans.

By that point a handful of young radicals had found their way over to the assembly. Twelve of them, dressed in black and sporting the tattoos and piercings of their class, gawked at the grownups for a while before plopping down and sitting sullenly on a curb, hunched over their iPhones. After a few minutes one of them, a fat, pimply fellow wearing a pin proclaiming "Marx Was Right," muttered that they ought to go find a real protest. ♦

Bob Kerrey's Worst Nightmare

Deb Fischer is running away with the Senate race in Nebraska. BY MICHAEL WARREN

North Platte, Neb.

Deb Fischer will very likely be the next U.S. senator from Nebraska. The latest survey of the race to replace retiring Democrat Ben Nelson shows Fischer 20 points ahead of her Democratic opponent, Bob Kerrey. In fact, the Republican has led Kerrey by double digits in every poll taken since March. To end the reign of Harry Reid, Republicans need a net gain of at least four Senate seats this November, and Fischer is the GOP's best opportunity to flip a Democratic seat.

Deb Fischer will likely stick to her successful primary strategy in the general election: positive ads, retail politics, and a steady focus.

That's probably no surprise to Fischer—she's used to getting her way.

A 61-year-old state legislator and rancher from Valentine, Fischer had been running last in a three-way race just weeks before the May Republican primary. State attorney general Jon Bruning was the establishment favorite and the frontrunner, while the Tea Party rallied around state treasurer and Nebraska GOP mainstay Don Stenberg. Fischer was cast as an also-ran, beginning the campaign with little name recognition outside rural Nebraska. It's true that Fischer received a high-profile, eleventh-hour endorsement from Sarah Palin. And Nebraska businessman Joe Ricketts's $250,000 anti-Bruning TV ad buy came just as she was gaining momentum. But in the end, it may have been Fischer's straightforward, no-nonsense approach that made the difference.

"I think people admire me for my honesty," Fischer says in an interview.

Pat Dorwart, a former GOP committeewoman who has mentored the state's female Republican candidates for decades, says Fischer reminds her of Virginia Smith, the only Nebraska woman ever elected to Congress.

"She's traveled all of Nebraska," says Dorwart. "She told me she was going to work harder than anyone else in the race."

"She really surprised me on the campaign trail," says Craig Safranek, a Republican activist from Broken Bow. "She was very thoughtful, very knowledgeable."

Republican lieutenant governor Rick Sheehy says he realized Fischer would win the primary long before the polls showed her gaining ground on Bruning. "I had a lot of people tell me, 'Jon's going to win it, but I'm voting for Deb,'" Sheehy says.

While easterners Bruning and Stenberg wasted time and precious resources traveling to campaign in distant rural communities in the west, Fischer, having consolidated her rural base, spent the final months of the primary crisscrossing the more urbanized eastern third of the state. She ran positive advertisements, too, improving her standing with voters exhausted by the negative ad war between her Republican opponents. Fischer calls her strategy "slow and steady," and it worked. She trounced Stenberg and beat Bruning, who outspent Fischer eight to one, by 10,000 votes.

Michael Warren is a reporter at The Weekly Standard.

"People who underestimate Deb Fischer do so at their own peril," says Carlos Castillo, a GOP operative in Omaha. "She's one tough cookie."

Nebraska Republicans say Fischer will likely stick to the same strategy in the general election: positive ads, retail politics, and a steady focus. She's been bolstered by a relatively lackluster campaign from Kerrey, a Nebraska political legend who received the Congressional Medal of Honor before becoming a popular governor and senator. But after Kerrey left the Senate in 2001, he moved to New York City to serve as president of the New School, a progressive university in Greenwich Village. Persuaded by national Democrats to run for his old Senate seat, Kerrey has returned to a Nebraska that's more Republican than it was when he left. It didn't help when Kerrey reaffirmed his support for Obamacare, the unpopular law that doomed Ben Nelson's reelection. Kerrey has most recently taken to calling Fischer a "welfare rancher," since her family leases federal grazing land. That attack hasn't stuck, and while Fischer says she expects the race to tighten before November, she doesn't seem too worried about a surge in support for Kerrey.

"People are angry he's back" from New York, Fischer says. Her campaign ads make the not-so-subtle counterpoint: "Deb Fischer, a *Nebraska* senator," says the voiceover.

But it's also clear Fischer's earning her high poll numbers. On the trail, she's modest and unassuming. She looks more comfortable talking with folks in the back of a crowd than speechifying in front of one. At a factory groundbreaking in Lexington, Fischer stood out in the hot sun and strong winds, shaking hands and telling jokes, until nearly every person had left. Nebraska's a large state, but Fischer does at least three or four events daily, driving several hours and hundreds of miles. On the interstate en route to a building dedication in North Platte, her blue Ford SUV zooms near. Spotting me in the right lane, she smiles and waves from the passenger seat before popping a French fry in her mouth.

"I like the fact that she's real," says Linette Butler, a supporter from Kearney. "Down to earth," say others.

Pat Dorwart gets to the heart of Fischer's Cornhusker State appeal. "She just thinks like Nebraskans," she says.

Fischer campaigning at a Fourth of July parade in Omaha

AP / NATI HARNIK

Debra Strobel was born in Lincoln to a civil engineer father and a schoolteacher mother. She's 100 percent German and was raised Lutheran, though she attends a Presbyterian church now. She met Bruce Fischer, a third-generation cattle rancher from rural Cherry County, at the University of Nebraska. In 1972, she dropped out to marry him and moved to Valentine to become a rancher.

"You're young, you're in love, and it's a wonderful place to live," Fischer says. "It's been a wonderful place to raise a family." The Fischers have three grown sons, all of whom work on the ranch.

Fischer says she's wanted to be involved in public policymaking since junior high school. Her political career began in 1979 when she was elected to the local school board. Over the course of 20 years, she was a member of a few school boards and eventually president of the state's school board association. In 2004, Fischer ran successfully for Nebraska's nonpartisan, unicameral legislature, and she was reelected in 2008.

Fischer calls herself a pro-life, limited government conservative. She's for repealing Obamacare, opposes No Child Left Behind, and says she's "happy" that Mitt Romney appears serious about addressing entitlement spending—though she quickly adds she doesn't support cutting benefits to current retirees. When asked why she's a conservative, she pauses, as if she had never considered the question before.

"It's who I am," she finally says, matter-of-factly.

In Lincoln, Fischer has earned a reputation as an effective legislator. Craig Sefranek calls Fischer a "negotiator" and says she's succeeded in the legislature because she works well with Democrats. "She talks soft but carries a big stick," Sefranek says.

When Fischer hears this, she laughs. "I'm surprised someone thinks I talk softly!"

Mike Flood, the speaker of the legislature and a close friend, recalls Fischer's proposal last year to move money from the general fund to shore up the state's budget for much-needed highway improvement. The bill faced significant pushback from several Democrats, and the debate looked to be heading toward a stalemate. "Deb talked to everyone," Flood says, and soon enough, she had the votes. Today, orange cones line Interstate 80 for miles as construction crews work to widen the highway.

Fischer is characteristically blunt about her influence.

"Yeah, I get stuff done," she says. She takes pride in the fact that in her nearly eight years as a legislator, she hasn't held one press conference.

"I believe you have to develop relationships," Fischer says. "I don't believe you need to have a press conference to get something done." ♦

Only One Can Survive

Redistricting in Louisiana pits congressman against congressman. BY KATE HAVARD

Rep. Jeff Landry offers some advice during a presidential address to Congress.

Lafayette, La.

Deep in the swampland, a battle is brewing. It is less than two weeks from the start of alligator hunting season. The gators have dug their holes in the bankside, and their young have all hatched. The population is at its peak. Jogging paths near large bodies of water are closed off. Now is the time to keep a close watch on your pets and not let your children go wading. The reptiles are ornery and hungry, packed in and fiercely protecting their territory, preparing for the fight of their lives.

Louisiana's politics match its ecology. The state is overpopulated with congressmen. It lost a seat in the post-Katrina population decline and redistricting, and now two members, Charles Boustany and Jeff Landry, are vying for the same district.

When I went down to cover the race, I was told that the only way to know the area was to travel by water. So despite my better judgment, I took to the swamp, in an itty bitty boat. As we glided around beneath the shade of a hundred shaggy cypress trees, I asked my guide, "There's not going to be any, uh, swamp snakes falling out of the tree and into the boat, right?"

"Nah," he said. "Just don't knock us into any trees."

Perhaps detecting my unease, my guide, Eric, tells me a fable: "One time, I watched a little baby gator sneak up on this great big bird, who was way too big for him. He bit the bird on the tail and it squawked, turned around, and poked his eye out. The bird had a sore butt, the gator had one eye, and they were both pissed about it."

As it happens, this just about sums up the race in Louisiana's Third District: Rep. Jeff Landry is one tenacious little gator—perhaps not a mortal threat to Boustany, but daring enough to be a real pain.

The new district, in the southeastern portion of the state, includes Lafayette (the largest city), Chalmette, Lake Charles, and Thibodaux. This is Acadiana, Cajun country, where the boudin is abundant and introductions include the question, "You're Catholic, right?" Thanks to a thriving offshore drilling industry and high oil prices, the area is pretty much recession proof. In spite of hurricanes and Deepwater Horizon, it has bounced back and then some. Unemployment in Lafayette is only 5.3 percent. It's one of the most conservative districts in the country, and a Republican can expect to stay a while. In 2010, Boustany ran unopposed.

Unlike other member-versus-member races, this contest won't be settled in the next few days, or even weeks. Louisiana prefers to let the candidates slug it out until November 6 in what's known as a "Cajun Primary," where $600 or 1,000 signatures gets you on the ballot representing whatever party you choose. If no candidate gets more than 50 percent, there will be a runoff in December. After filing their official qualifying papers on August 15, both men are gearing up for open season—on each other.

Boustany's camp says Landry is an extremist obstructionist on a vanity quest. Last June, Landry was the only Republican House member to refuse the president's invitation to the White House to talk fiscal policy, and he was a firm "no" on raising the debt ceiling. In Boustany's view, Landry's intransigence will get him left out of the room when the real decisions are made. "It was a popular vote and a good sound bite," Boustany says. "But it didn't solve our budget problems. We had to take responsible steps."

Landry's campaign points out that Boustany's vote for a "grand bargain" didn't accomplish much either. They paint Boustany as a high-society city-slicker who's lost touch with the voters

NEWSCOM

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in South Louisiana—an auto-bailout-loving, debt-ceiling-raising lapdog to the party leadership.

Redistricting has given Boustany a huge advantage—the new district is mostly Boustany's old turf, with a sliver of Landry's parishes (St. Martin, St. Mary, and Iberia) tacked on. But Landry doesn't mind an uphill fight: "They've got more money than us, they're gonna make me out to be Satan's brother. That's just fine," he says. "I've been an underdog all my life. I came from nothing."

Indeed, this sugar farmer turned sheriff's deputy turned lawyer seems to flourish on the fighting side of politics. In the 2010 elections, expectations for Landry were low. Early polling numbers were abysmal. But with the help of the Tea Party, Landry ended up beating the establishment candidate, former speaker of the Louisiana house Hunt Downer, by 30 points.

In a typical Tea Party vs. establishment race, "Washington insider" is a ready insult. And Landry is quick to point out Boustany's close friendship with Speaker of the House John Boehner (Boustany's chief of staff is a former Boehner staffer). But as longtime Louisiana political writer John Maginnis notes, "Down here, people are more comfortable with the idea of having a 'Washington insider' as their congressman. They know that insiders get things done."

Although both congressmen are technically incumbents, Boustany is certainly more of an insider. He is a nephew by marriage to Edwin Edwards (who served four terms in the governor's mansion, then 10 years in federal prison). And Lafayette is home to a thriving Lebanese community—where the Boustany family is at the helm.

A family of notable and respected lawyers and doctors, the Boustanys are at the vanguard of the Lafayette elite. Boustany's father—like the congressman, a doctor—was the town's coroner for many years, and his mother led the Catholic bishop's charity ball, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. My hotel in Lafayette is on Kaliste Saloom Road, named after Boustany's great-uncle, a revered local judge.

Even if locals don't know about the congressional race, they probably know Boustany from his medical practice. A cardiac surgeon in the land of deep-fried-everything, he has operated on their fathers, their husbands, and their grandmas. Though his quiet, soporific speaking style doesn't quite fit retail politics, it makes for a reassuring bedside manner.

Boustany's deep roots in the community have forced Landry to get personal on the campaign trail: "I know you know Charles," he tells voters. "I know him too. It's uncomfortable to vote against him. He's your doctor, he's your neighbor, your kids went to school with him. But if you want your congressmen to make tough votes, then you've got to make a tough vote."

Though Landry would like to paint his opponent as a squish, their voting records are similar: Both have 100 percent ratings from the National Right to Life Committee, both support full repeal of Obamacare, and both are climbing all over each other to praise the Ryan budget. Except for the debt ceiling, Landry hadn't yet been in Congress for some of the big votes he criticizes Boustany for (like TARP), so it's hard to compare what Landry says he would have done with what Boustany did.

In fact, the policy difference that sticks out is Boustany's surprisingly weak stance on Israel—not typically a flashpoint for Louisiana voters.

Charles Boustany is one of only two Republicans to have ever been endorsed by J Street, the left-wing advocacy group that bills itself as "pro-Israel, pro-peace" (with far more emphasis on the latter than the former). In 2009, he attended J Street's first annual conference, even after Israeli ambassador Michael Oren boycotted it, citing policies within the organization "that may impair the interests of Israel." Boustany eventually severed all connections with the group, after discovering that "they were dishonest with me about where their funding came from," namely, from billionaire George Soros. J Street maintains that Boustany was "with them from the beginning," and that the party "forced" the resignation of this "very brave" congressman. The Arab American Institute rates Boustany at -1, indicating a "mixed" record, while Landry has a -4, indicating a more pro-Israel record.

Charles Boustany, left, and Jeff Landry

In 2009, the U.N. released the Goldstone Report, which accused Israel of intentionally targeting civilians in the Gaza conflict. The report was written with help from Hamas, but not from the Israeli government, which refused to cooperate. Richard Goldstone himself later wrote of his "regret that our fact-finding mission did not have . . . evidence" that later emerged showing that civilian deaths were unintentional. "It probably would have influenced our findings about intentionality and war crimes."

Congress voted overwhelmingly to condemn the Goldstone Report as biased. Charles Boustany was one of only 36 members of Congress who dissented. Why?

"It was a protest vote," Boustany says. "I was upset that no one in Congress had actually read the report." Had he read it? "No," he said. "We weren't given enough time to read it. That's why I voted against it." Boustany also helped write the dovish Carnahan-Boustany-Cohen letter in 2009 telling President Obama that they "support the course you are charting for American policy in the Middle East."

Landry, on the other hand, does not support the course Obama is charting in the Middle East. "I stand by Israel 100 percent," he told me. "And Louisianans do too. They just don't know where Charles is on this issue. I was speaking to a church group the other day and I said, 'Who here supports Israel?' Every single hand in that room went up. Christians stand by Israel."

If Landry is right, perhaps highlighting his differences with Boustany on Israel will help him make inroads in Lafayette, where (as of 2005) 54 percent of the population is Catholic.

Landry may also benefit from a last-minute addition to the race. Just hours before the qualifying deadline, Democrat Ron Richard, a lawyer from Lake Charles, filed his papers. If Richard pulls enough votes from the more moderate Boustany, then Landry has a much better shot, at least at forcing a runoff.

For the most part, though, Landry's and Boustany's attacks are full of cartoonish exaggeration: "Boustany wants to take a scalpel to the debt, when what we need is a hatchet," Landry told me.

"Landry thinks we need to tear the whole thing down," Boustany said of entitlement reform. "What we really need is a scalpel. I want to do open heart surgery on the budget."

No wonder political reporters have loved this state for generations. ♦

NEWSCOM

Can This Be What Women Want?

The Democrats condescend to half the electorate

By Meghan Clyne

In the sixth century B.C., the Chinese tactician Sun Tzu observed: "All warfare is based on deception." If only he could have seen the "war on women." This whopping deception—that Republicans are out to destroy women and everything they hold dear—looks increasingly like the Democrats' entire battle plan heading into November. For well over a year, party leaders, strategists, and elected officials have tried to rekindle hostilities at every opportunity—congressional votes on abortion, debates over the Obamacare contraceptive mandate, the selection of Paul Ryan as the Republican vice presidential nominee, and, most recently, Missouri congressman Todd Akin's bizarre comments on rape. Leaving nothing to doubt, the Democrats have orchestrated their convention agenda to press the same case: Speakers include Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America; Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood; and Sandra Fluke, who, as a 30-year-old Georgetown law student, became a household name by demanding free birth-control pills.

This is more than just stroking an important constituency: Democrats are making the "war on women" the centerpiece of their case for reelection. The motivations are as much tactical as ideological; young, unmarried women did not turn out for Democrats in the 2010 cycle, and if they stay home in 2012, it could spell doom for Obama's hopes of a second term.

In the meantime, a perceptive observer may notice a curious thing about this "war on women." It is based entirely on one set of policies: those pertaining to women's reproductive systems. By the Democrats' logic, to oppose abortion on demand and taxpayer-funded contraception is to be "anti-woman." Womanhood is thus defined by the desire for unrestricted abortion and free birth control; women themselves are reducible to ovaries.

It was once permissible in American politics to view women as incapable of concerns beyond childbearing—but not in this century. And in addition to insulting women's intelligence, this approach may well backfire. American women are active, thoughtful citizens; their political concerns are focused on the future of their nation, not the cheapest and easiest way to shut down their reproductive tracts.

There is thus good reason to believe that the party that takes women seriously—speaking to them about their true aspirations for themselves, their families, and their country—will do better in November. So it is worth dispensing with gender-war deceptions to ask a much more relevant question: What do women really want—and which governing vision will best help them achieve it?

THE WAR ON OPPORTUNITY

It's ironic that so-called feminists have caricatured women's voting priorities as the "girl issues." In truth, women's prime concerns in this election cycle are the same as men's, and can be summed up in two words: the economy.

In an August Gallup poll, voters were asked to identify the most important problem facing the country today. Men and women listed the same top two issues: the economy in general (32 percent men, 30 percent women), and unemployment/jobs (22 percent men, 25 percent women). ("Abortion issues" fell near the very bottom, failing to register even one half of one percent.)

Obama's record on the economy and jobs is nothing short of dismal. After nearly four years and trillions of dollars of spending and "stimulus," the unemployment rate in July was exactly the same as the rate in Obama's first full month in office: 8.3 percent. Flatlining job prospects are discouraging for everyone, but the numbers are particularly discouraging for women. In an economy in which underemployment is a staggering 17 percent, many women have had to settle for part-time work. The unemployment rate for people age 20 and older seeking full-time work is higher among women than men—8.4 percent versus 8.0 percent.

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For young, unmarried women supporting themselves—the demographic Obama is targeting with the "war on women"—unlimited free birth control is poor consolation for not having a full-time job.

Another perspective on job figures is even more dismaying. During Obama's first full month in office, according to Department of Labor statistics, the unemployment rate for men was 9.2 percent, and for women, 7.3 percent. Today, the unemployment rate for men is actually lower than it was in February 2009—8.4 percent. For women, however, unemployment is up—now at 8.1 percent. While men's unemployment spiked and has declined steadily since, women's rose and has remained basically level. This means that, heading into the election, men's recent experience with the Obama economy is slightly more hopeful: For them, hiring is picking up, while for women, it has stagnated. To the extent that there has been an Obama "recovery," it certainly hasn't done much for women.

It doesn't help that Obama's policies have harmed women's job prospects specifically. In his first few weeks in office, Obama signed into law the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, touted by the administration as one of its earliest achievements on behalf of women. The law makes it easier for women to sue their employers if they suspect unequal pay; the result, critics of the law note, will be to encourage employers to avoid the risk of such lawsuits up front by covertly discriminating against women in hiring decisions. The law also curtails women's options: Many women, after all, have their own reasons for taking jobs at lower pay. They might want to price themselves competitively when trying to reenter the job market after raising children; they might take a lower salary in exchange for more flexible hours or working conditions. Lilly Ledbetter restricts their ability to do so, making it harder for some women to find jobs that fit with the other demands of their lives.

Of course, women do not participate in the economy only as job-seekers. According to MRI's *Survey of the American Consumer*, around three-quarters of principal household shoppers are female. In a sluggish economy, the struggle to meet rising prices with limited income is a burden that falls disproportionately on women. Obama's (anti-)energy policies haven't helped: Under his presidency, the price for a gallon of gas has more than doubled—rising from $1.84 to $3.83. This is not making women's task of stretching tight household budgets any easier.

One service that women consume much more than men do is health care—"poor health care" ranks high on their list of the nation's problems—and the Obama record here barely needs explanation. Obamacare will force millions of families out of the insurance plans they have now, reduce the quality of care, and introduce delays, rationing, and inefficiencies throughout the system. In selling the law, Democrats often noted that women make most health care decisions in America; moreover, mothers are more likely to wait with sick children at pediatricians' offices, and daughters are more likely to care for aging parents. As seeking medical care becomes more difficult and time-consuming—all for worse health outcomes and lower patient satisfaction—the pain will be more intense for American women.

Obamacare's employer mandates also make life much more difficult for women who are starting and running their own businesses. Indeed, the Obama agenda in general is a disaster for entrepreneurs, men and women alike. The president has promised to raise taxes on "the rich"—anyone making more than $200,000 a year. But according to a study from earlier this year by the National Federation of Independent Business, about 75 percent of the nation's small businesses are structured as "pass-through" businesses that report income and losses on owners' personal income-tax returns. This means that business income is assessed at the owners' personal rates. As a result of Obama's pledge and taxes that will go into effect as part of Obamacare, the top marginal tax rate will climb from 35 percent to 44 percent at the beginning of next year. For small-business owners, it's that much less money to invest in capital purchases and new hires. And as a 2010 Department of Commerce report (prepared for Obama's own White House Council on Women and Girls) noted, businesses owned by women tend to be smaller and start smaller than male-owned businesses. Obama's tax policies will thus disproportionately harm women entrepreneurs.

And these are only the taxes Obama has openly promised to raise. There are also the tax hikes he won't talk about: the ones that will come if nothing is done to rein in federal spending and deficits. In less than four years, Obama has swelled the size of the federal debt by an astonishing $5 trillion, bringing the total to nearly $16 trillion. This means Obama has added some $64,000 in debt for every single federal taxpayer. Meanwhile, he and his party have offered no plausible solutions for curbing the out-of-control cost growth of Social Security and Medicare, the main causes of our impending fiscal catastrophe.

At some point, the bill for this spending and irresponsibility will come due. As a recent Congressional Budget Office report noted, in order to try to get deficits back under control, federal spending on everything else—defense, education, other domestic programs—would have to decline to the lowest percentage of GDP since before World War II. Taxes, meanwhile, would have to rise to the point that revenues would reach 24 percent of GDP—"much higher," the CBO notes, "than has typically been seen in recent decades." Gutted government services and confiscatory taxes: This is what the Democratic

agenda has to offer today's young Americans, including the same young women whose votes the party is now so aggressively trying to court.

Clearly, women are right to worry first and foremost about the economy and jobs. Over the past several decades, they've increased their share of the labor force, now accounting for 47 percent of workers. Glass ceilings have shattered; women are increasingly assuming leadership roles as presidents and chief executives. Since the early 1980s, women have outpaced men in higher education: According to the Department of Education, in the 2009-2010 school year, women earned 57.2 percent of bachelor's degrees, 60.3 percent of master's degrees, and 51.7 percent of doctoral degrees. Women are well-prepared, active participants in America's economy—as taxpayers and investors, job-seekers and consumers, employers and employees.

And what does the Obama agenda have to offer them? Nothing. To the woman trying to decide whether to get another degree, or to build a startup, today's anemic economy promises little return on her investment. It's small wonder the Democrats are trying to distract women from economic problems: After four years, they've shown themselves to be incapable of solving them.

THE WAR ON SELF-DETERMINATION

Women want jobs and economic opportunity, just as men do. Still, there are some policy issues that disproportionately affect women or are of special concern to them; in evaluating the Democrats' agenda, these merit consideration, too.

Consider, for instance, the administration's vast expansion of federal welfare programs. Enrollment for Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Women, Infants, and Children program have all increased dramatically under President Obama. Part of the increase understandably results from the dismal economy, but much of it can be attributed to stretched eligibility requirements and increased per-person benefits. These expansions have raised the effective marginal cost of finding a low-paying job (and thereby losing welfare benefits), giving beneficiaries greater incentive to remain on the dole. Indeed, in the case of food stamps, the administration has actively recruited participants—going so far as to use the White House faith-based office to pressure churches into using religious services and facilities to sign people up for SNAP.

A huge increase in welfare is a problem for the nation, but it's particularly damaging to women. These programs are designed to cover mostly women and their dependent children; as the programs have grown, so has the number of women reliant on them. When the 1996 welfare reform converted Aid to Families with Dependent Children to TANF—introducing work requirements and limiting welfare benefits to five years—it meant that millions of women, including many mothers, went back to work and took greater control over their own lives. This is real progress for women—progress that Obama's welfare-expanding policies would reverse.

And with long-lasting effects. Decades of experience have shown that welfare begets cycles of dependency that stretch across generations; daughters and granddaughters collect benefits from the same welfare offices as their mothers and grandmothers. No little girl in America should say, "I want to be a ward of the state when I grow up." Increasingly, however, it seems this is what President Obama envisions for them.

The starkest example came in the now-infamous "Life of Julia" slideshow published by the Obama campaign, meant to show how the president's policies would help a supposedly typical American female. What it illustrated was a woman dependent on the government from cradle to grave—for education, work, investment capital, health care, retirement income, and, of course, birth control. This is hardly an inspiring vision of women's empowerment.

As if to prove the point, Obama administration policies have undermined organizations that help lift women out of poverty without forcing them to become dependent on the state. The administration's assault on religious freedom has imperiled faith-based charities that serve women with a humanity and compassion that no government bureaucracy can match. For example, the archbishop of Chicago, Francis Cardinal George, has warned that the HHS contraceptive mandate might well force the city's Catholic social services to close down. In Barack Obama's own backyard, women may no longer have access to archdiocesan programs that support pregnant women and teens and provide counseling and case management for victims of domestic violence. Across the country, countless women being educated, healed, and supported by religious schools, hospitals, and charities may see these lifelines cut by Obama's policies.

The "war on women" narrative smears the Catholic church for being rigid about "women's issues." But it's the Obama administration insisting that, if religious institutions don't conform to the administration's orthodoxy on abortion and contraception, they can't continue providing other services that meet women's very real needs. Obama's assault on religious freedom may also make for bad politics: Historically, research has shown women to be more religious and involved in congregational life than men; a 2010 Gallup poll showed that 47 percent of women reported attending church "frequently"—"at least once a

week" or "almost every week"—compared to 39 percent of men. Undermining the work of churches, and forcing them into protracted legal battles, harms institutions that matter disproportionately to women.

This points to the common fallacy that on "culture war" issues—marriage, family, and sex—Democrats are on the side of women, while Republicans seek (to borrow a Bidenism) to put them back in chains. Painful experience shows this to be untrue. Family breakdown—climbing divorce rates, the rise of unwed parenting—disproportionately harms women, who head nearly 80 percent of single-parent families. Aside from the emotional strain of single parenting, and the demonstrably poorer outcomes for children, the economic harm is significant. Census data from 2010 found the percentage of married parents living below the poverty line to be just 8.8 percent; for single-parent households headed by men, the number was 24.2 percent. But for single-parent households headed by women, an astonishing 40.7 percent were living in poverty.

Those peddling the "war on women" might argue that this is precisely why women need more access to abortion and contraceptives—so that they can avoid being unmarried parents. But access to contraception and abortion has been treated by the law as a constitutional right since *Griswold* v. *Connecticut* in 1965 and *Roe* v. *Wade* in 1973. And strangely enough, it was right around that time that the out-of-wedlock birthrate began to climb dramatically. In 1970, the percentage of births to unmarried mothers was around 10 percent, compared with more than 40 percent today; making it easier for unmarried women to avoid babies seems to have had exactly the opposite effect. If the goal is to help women avoid the impoverishment of single motherhood, the Democrats' preferred approach—more contraception and abortion—hasn't worked so far. The Republicans' approach—traditional, married child-rearing—offers more promise.

Besides, for all the allegations that Republican opposition to abortion constitutes a "war on women," most women themselves don't even support the practice. A Gallup poll in May showed that slightly more women describe themselves as "pro-life" than "pro-choice"—46 percent to 44 percent. Overall, America is a pro-life nation; on the questions of late-term and taxpayer-funded abortions, other polls show public opposition becoming even more intense.

On this issue, President Obama is well out of the mainstream. A clarifying episode came this May, when legislation to ban sex-selective abortion failed to secure the necessary two-thirds support in the House of Representatives because of Democratic opposition. Obama's White House piled on, releasing a statement saying the president, too, opposed the ban.

Martial metaphors are vastly overused, and the "war on women" is no exception. But if any policy amounts to a "war on women," surely allowing sex-selective abortion, which overwhelmingly targets unborn girls for the sole offense of possessing XX chromosomes, must be it.

REAL EMPOWERMENT

Historically, Democrats have had a strong electoral advantage among women, and the polls going into November suggest similar trends. But for Mitt Romney, the challenge is not insurmountable: He and his running mate just need to convince enough female voters that the "war on women" is bogus, that President Obama has little to offer them, and that Republicans will do more to deliver on what American women really want.

There are signs that Romney and Ryan understand the task before them. During an interview at the Republican Convention, NBC's Brian Williams tried to bait Ryan into a "war on women" dialogue by asking how the party's positions on abortion would play among suburban women. Ryan redirected, responding: "You know, I think what suburban women are mostly worried about is jobs. I mean, look who got hit hardest in this economy. It's women. Poverty among women is at a 17-year high. . . . So, that's what most women are asking us about." And in his prime-time convention speech, the "women's issue" Romney highlighted was the threat of tax hikes faced by female entrepreneurs.

Romney and Ryan need to keep making this case, because it is a powerful one. Obama's record, after all, is clear. The president's vision of "women's empowerment" is economic stagnation and welfare-state dependency, papered over with platitudes about abortions that many women don't want and government-subsidized contraception many women don't need.

What women really need is jobs. They need opportunities to apply their education and their talents. They want to be rewarded justly for hard work, not to see the fruits of their labor confiscated by a government that refuses to deal with irresponsible deficits and debt. They want to choose their own doctors, and want access to good health care for themselves and their children. They want their marriages to be happy and stable, and their churches free and thriving. It's impossible to poll unborn girls, of course, but presumably they'd like to live. On the whole, women want to be taken seriously as voters. They want to be free and equal citizens—not wards of the state.

Between now and November, Romney and Ryan need to speak to these concerns and show how Republican policies will advance these aims. President Obama surely won't. After four years, he has nothing to show for himself—hence the great deception of the "war on women." ♦

Princeton's Iranian Agent of Influence

The cautionary tale of Seyed Hossein Mousavian

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

As the Islamic Revolution has devoured its own, many Iranians have sought refuge in the West. After the fraudulent 2009 presidential elections and the crackdown that followed, the United States and Europe were flooded with Iranian pro-democracy dissidents and even pro-regime types who fell afoul of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's shrinking definition of "loyal." In this latter category is the former ambassador and nuclear negotiator Seyed Hossein Mousavian, who left Iran in 2009 and has since resided at Princeton University.

Mousavian is a compelling character: He reveals how distant philosophically these Iranian exiles can be from their Western hosts, and how poorly many Americans have understood their guests. Mousavian's American and European admirers have been as naïve as he has been deceitful. And his sojourn here hints at a larger truth about the embrace of nonproliferation as a *cause célèbre* among many liberals, including, probably, Barack Obama. Stopping the spread of nuclear weapons is a driving passion for the American left—up until the point where it requires the use of force.

Mousavian would likely have languished in Ivy League obscurity if he'd not recently published a 600-page atomic apologia, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir*. He has the standing to write such a book. For years he has been the factotum of the fallen, incomparably avaricious clerical powerhouse Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani. Mousavian's jobs in the foreign ministry, his ambassadorship to Germany between 1990 and 1997, and most important his position on Iran's National Security Council from 1997 to 2005—all came from his ties to the beardless, white-turbaned Rafsanjani, who was the most powerful man in Iran when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died in 1989. Personal ties in Iran often mean a lot more than titles; offices are often created to match the personal and private wielding of power. Iran has always been defined by *partibazi*—the power that comes through connections. The Islamic Revolution greatly expanded the number of winners and losers in this never-ending contest, but did not alter *partibazi*'s firm hold upon politics, economics, and culture.

Mousavian comes from a wealthy carpet-dealing family from Kashan, one of Iran's industrial-scale carpet-manufacturing centers. The family was associated with the Motalefeh, the religiously conservative revolutionary movement founded in the early 1960s that united the bazaar and mosque behind Khomeini. Mousavian probably used his father's Motalefeh connections to gain access to the big personalities in and around the Islamic Republican party (IRP), which absorbed the Motalefeh movement. The founder of the IRP, Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti, also launched the *Tehran Times*, the Marxist-Islamist English-language newspaper of the revolution, and made Mousavian editor in chief in 1980. Rafsanjani, Khamenei, and virtually everyone else who mattered in Iran's fledging theocracy were tied to the IRP.

At the paper until 1990, Mousavian also had roles in government (the union of church, state, and the fourth estate being an ideal in the Islamic Republic). Mousavian worked directly with Rafsanjani in parliament in the mid-1980s, when Khomeini's go-to cleric was speaker of the Majlis, the Islamic Republic's controlled, but at times rambunctious, legislature. Mousavian's rapid rise in foreign affairs started then. When Rafsanjani became president in 1989, his key foreign policy was expanding trade relations with Western Europe, a step critical to the Islamic Republic's nuclear aspirations. European imports—especially dual-use items—allowed the then-clandestine atomic program to begin in earnest. Probably the most valuable country for this trade (as well as for less menacing industrial pursuits) was Germany, where Mousavian arrived as ambassador in 1990.

Mousavian doesn't say in his nuclear memoir who made him the man he is today; he doesn't discuss anything at all,

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really, before 1997, when he became the head of the foreign-relations committee of Iran's National Security Council. It's bad manners outside of the clerical class, where lineage and mentoring are constantly discussed, to talk openly about who is indebted to whom for success. Mousavian could have had helping hands from others—his Motalefeh roots suggest that he may never have been comfortable on the more radical, "leftist" side of the Islamic Revolution, which eventually evolved into the reformist wing of the ruling class. Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the primary opposition candidate in the convulsive presidential elections of 2009, is a good example of a radical-turned-reformer among the elite. So, too, with less guts and gusto but more reflection, is Mohammad Khatami, the former president whose election in 1997 never would have happened without Rafsanjani's initial backing. (Neither Khatami nor Rafsanjani had any idea of the level of popular disgust with the status quo, especially among women, that would roar forth in the 1997 presidential election.)

After the Islamic Republic's defeat in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), Rafsanjani—also from a prosperous family, this time pistachio growers—became the North Star for the less radical lovers of a revolutionary theocratic state. Though increasingly loathed by the poor and the struggling middle class (as the Rafsanjani clan acquired fabulous wealth in the 1990s), he was reluctantly admired by many Westernized Iranians who benefited from his greater openness to the world. A well-heeled, aspiring, Western-educated provincial boy like Mousavian would probably have found him highly attractive.

Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Tehran, 2004

NEWSCOM

Like many first-generation hard-core revolutionaries, Mousavian knew the enemy well: He'd studied at Sacramento City College and Sacramento State University and received a Ph.D. in international relations from the University of Kent in England. He was a good choice to serve as the spokesman for Khatami's nuclear-negotiating team headed by the Scottish-educated Hassan Rowhani, Rafsanjani's longtime second in foreign affairs. Better than most Westernized revolutionaries, who have lost traditional politesse and gained crude egalitarian directness, Mousavian knows how to speak politely to non-Muslims. He's not without charm towards Westerners and, even more difficult, Iranian expatriates who've fled the tyranny that Mousavian so assiduously helped to construct. To journalists and American officials, he has tried with conviction to make the case for Tehran's "peaceful" nuclear program. For him, the Iranian regime is "misunderstood," and the West, even under President Obama, has been too hostile and suspicious. Sufficient Western concessions and greater Western sensitivity are the keys to solving the nuclear contretemps.

Hailed by many in the United States and Europe as a guide to a possible resolution of the crisis, Mousavian writes and speaks to both American and Iranian audiences. His assertions that Khamenei's intent isn't threatening are followed by hints that a bomb might, nonetheless, be logical for the Islamic Republic to develop, especially given the threatening behavior of the United States and Israel.

Throughout *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis* and in his small-group gatherings at Washington's think tanks, Mousavian has remained respectful towards Supreme Leader Khamenei. Mousavian prefers to suggest that his own personal travails—a brief imprisonment in 2007 following charges of espionage on behalf of the British, leading to his flight to America—owe more to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's machinations than to Khamenei's determination to purge anyone too closely aligned with Rafsanjani, who refused to back Ahmadinejad's "triumph" in 2009. The president has reveled in going after Rafsanjani and his supporters, whom he sees as hopelessly corrupt and insufficiently loyal to Khomeini's teachings. It's likely that Khamenei too has enjoyed tormenting Rafsanjani, who had unlimited access to Khomeini (Khamenei did not) and who backed Khamenei's candidacy for supreme leader because Khamenei had been so dependent upon him before and after the revolution. Rafsanjani, who personally told Mousavian to catch the next plane out of Iran, has been utterly humbled.

Mousavian knows the truth: He underscores in his book that Iran's supreme leader—not its president—ultimately controls the nuclear program and the political landscape surrounding it. From his opening invocation (his book, published by the Carnegie Endowment, starts: "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful") to his chats with U.S. officials and think-tankers, Mousavian seems unwilling to foreclose the possibility that he will return to the Islamic Republic—that he can, somehow, be accepted back into the ruling elite. He wants to be seen as

a member of the loyal opposition even though the Islamic Republic has never really accepted the legitimacy of a bifurcated body politic. Iran's theocracy is allergic to potentially seditious division. It is historically ironic that Shiism is the product of Islam's longest-lasting schism and that the Islamic Republic—the world's only Shiite state—has aggressively orthodox standards of permissible faith, comparable to what one finds among hard-core Sunnis.

Mousavian's incongruities—his slipperiness—are a part of Rafsanjani's and Rowhani's approach to the nuclear program. In his unguarded moments, Rowhani used to brag that the primary purpose of nuclear diplomacy was to buy time so that the program could move forward. Rafsanjani, who guided the nuclear-weapons effort longer than anyone else, once attacked Ahmadinejad—that is, Khamenei—for his needless, in-your-face approach to the P5+1 talks, since it risked an American preemptive strike. In other words, Rafsanjani had been clever, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad manifestly not.

Mousavian at times claims to know a lot about Iran's nuclear program, and then, when accusations from the IAEA are too cutting, not much at all. Concerning the Fordow uranium-enrichment facility, buried beneath a mountain, Mousavian knew not a thing until President Obama's press conference about it. Concerning Iran's work on the advanced P-2 centrifuge, an unnecessary, expensive investment if the objective is uranium for medical isotopes, Mousavian conjectures: "I believe that even Khatami, the president at the time, Rowhani, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council responsible for the nuclear file, and Kharrazi, the foreign minister, heard about the P-2 centrifuge issue for the first time from the IAEA and the foreign media and had no previous information on the matter." Mousavian adds for his American audience, "This thick wall between the technical and political sides of nuclear programs exists in many nuclear countries, and this issue was naturally among the serious problems faced by Khatami's negotiating team."

The only response possible to all of this: Which countries pursuing peaceful nuclear programs might he have in mind?

Mousavian—unlike many Westerners, who've bent over backwards to give the Iranians the benefit of the doubt—is aware how surreal his position is if one accepts his story. "One may ask how, if Iran's nuclear negotiators were not fully informed about their country's nuclear activities, they could reject American and Israeli claims as not credible," Mousavian ponders self-critically. The answer: "We trusted the supreme leader's *fatwa* banning the use or production of nuclear weapons as ensuring this, and hence we could confidently reject foreign claims that Iran was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons."

In other words, Mousavian is putting his trust in the man who demolished his world, incarcerated him, and forced him and his family into exile. It would be easy to say that Mousavian is just lying—and he is. But what is more intriguing is how hard it is for him to reflect critically on the revolution. In his eyes still, Iran's faults are mostly American in origin—or tactical mistakes made by his archenemy, Ahmadinejad. Like battered Communists of old who just couldn't stop loving the Soviet Union, Mousavian remains a party apparatchik who still loves the cause. He doesn't see the "pathology of despotism" (to borrow from former president Khatami) that defines so much of the Islamic Republic. There isn't a word, even from the safety of Princeton, about the dark side of Khamenei and his Revolutionary Guards' having the bomb. Little men like Mousavian—ideologues whose identities were created by the revolution—just can't flip. And Mousavian is vastly more thoughtful, in his ability to associate with Westerners and to see their side, than the men who now dominate Iranian politics.

What is most distressing is that important voices within the Washington foreign-policy establishment welcomed Mousavian with insufficient skepticism. It's a microcosm of how the West has abetted the Islamic Republic's worst aspirations.

The Carnegie Endowment obviously thought it was publishing a book making the Iranian case for a peaceful nuclear program. George Perkovitch, the vice president for studies at Carnegie, who had the unenviable task of supplying clarifying and corrective notes to Mousavian's text, explained his institution's decision to publish "the other side" this way: "The answer is that the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a global think tank. We believe that the most serious international conflicts cannot be resolved—or mitigated—if the antagonists do not understand each other's perceptions." Ecumenically all very commendable—except that's not what Mousavian is doing in his book, his chats, and his interviews. What Mousavian is really saying (to his Iranian audience) is that the nuclear program—the development of the bomb—was handled so much more intelligently and nonconfrontationally under Rafsanjani and Rowhani and *him*. Our cause, he is saying, has gone to hell since the ugly dwarf Ahmadinejad got the better of the supreme leader (unconscionable idiot that he is) after 2005.

What is most distressing is that important voices within the Washington foreign-policy establishment welcomed Mousavian with insufficient skepticism. It's a microcosm of how the West has abetted the Islamic Republic's worst aspirations. Doubtless few people have actually read Mousavian's dull tome, which offers little insight and even less color about behind-the-scenes, all-Iranian discussions. The revolutionary from Kashan usually makes the Iranian elite sound like elderly Episcopalians meeting at Washington's Metropolitan Club to discuss bird watching. It is striking that no one on the left in Washington bothered to point out Mousavian's long-standing ties to Rafsanjani. Nor did they point out that he was the Iranian ambassador to Germany when Iranian agents machine-gunned Iranian-Kurdish dissidents at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin in 1992. In the early 1990s, Rafsanjani and Khamenei, then working in tandem, gave orders to Iranian intelligence to assassinate several annoying dissidents in Europe and Turkey.

We know that Iranian ambassadors, though most likely not players in the planning of these assassinations, were kept apprised of the operations and were instrumental in the post-kill whitewashing of the Islamic Republic. Mousavian was quite active on the German scene—he remained ambassador until 1997—denying Iranian culpability. In 1997 Tehran's guilt was proven beyond a shadow of a doubt in a German court, and an arrest warrant was issued for the intelligence minister, Ali Fallahian. Fallahian's men would not have moved without a green light from Khamenei and Rafsanjani.

We can assume that the Central Intelligence Agency thoroughly debriefed Mousavian in exchange for his refuge. That's fair game in power politics and espionage. (Why Princeton University—especially former ambassador Daniel Kurtzer, now at the Woodrow Wilson School, who strongly supported Mousavian's appointment—would want to give a fellowship to someone who has so much blood swirling around him is a different question.) We can hope U.S. intelligence officers got more out of him in private than he's revealed publicly. No question: There is something to be said for Mousavian serving as Rafsanjani's eyes and ears in America even though it would take a near-miracle for Rafsanjani to regain strength against Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards, who now appear to despise Mousavian's patron even more than the supreme leader does. But that so few intelligent American liberals have questioned Mousavian's past and character shows how disconnected the nuclear discussion usually is from real-life Iranian revolutionaries, even when they are drinking coffee right next to you.

We've almost reached the denouement of the liberal foreign-policy establishment's longstanding love affair with arms control. Doubtless some hard-core arms-control types in Washington are prepared to have the United States preemptively strike the Islamic Republic's nuclear sites. Most are not. Nuclear disarmament on the left was always mostly about us—about eliminating original sin. In a natural twist, the passion of this cause is now largely aimed at those who would contemplate military conflict to prevent virulently anti-American and anti-Semitic Islamists from getting a nuke. Better that nukes spread, even to the State Department's longest-standing state-sponsor of terror, than America risk a fight.

Those of the nonproliferation crowd who've become dovish advocates of sanctions will soon confront a perverse situation. They will have contributed to a global alliance against the Islamic Republic, only to see those efforts amplify enormously the regime's sense of victory when it finally crosses the atomic threshold. Sanctions against Khamenei's nuclear drive really only make sense if (1) they can collapse the economic means necessary to manufacture a weapon before the first nuke is made or (2) they are followed by preemptive raids when it becomes obvious that (1) is no longer possible. Given Iran's oil wealth, economic emasculation was always problematic, if not a dream.

Given how dangerous the regime is, how provocative its victory over the West will be (assuming it is not stopped from acquiring the bomb), a case can be made that it would have been shrewder for the United States and Europe not to mount any opposition to Tehran's nuclear plans but instead to be conciliatory and flood the Islamic Republic with goods and services. This, too, most likely would have failed to dissuade the regime from going for the nuke. Europe's energetic engagement policy in the 1990s collapsed before Western concerns about the nuclear program skyrocketed. Ideology trumps economics almost every time. The Islamic Republic's leadership just isn't like the Ottoman princes of old who could be neutralized with women and wine in the harem. But the frisson of victory over the infidels would have been less had we taken this route. With holy warriors—like Khamenei and his Revolutionary Guards, who survived the ghastly Iran-Iraq war and see themselves as being on a divine mission to cleanse the Middle East of Islam's enemies—that matters.

Mousavian is now an observer of all this. He may never go home again. He seems increasingly like a child adrift, abandoned by his parents, yearning for attention and affection. But one thing is certain: If the Islamic Republic crosses the nuclear threshold, a part of him—a big part—will be smiling. ♦

Richard Nixon awards Duke Ellington the Medal of Freedom at the White House, 1969.

The Hit Parade

Why these melodies linger on. BY WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Ted Gioia, who recently published an excellent *History of Jazz*, now turns his attention to classic instances of that art. As a pianist and teacher of jazz piano, Gioia often wished, he writes, for a "handbook to this body of music, a single volume that would guide me through the jazz repertoire and point me in the direction of the classic recordings." The result is this A-to-Z guide (only to Y, actually, since few tunes begin with Z) in which roughly 300 specimens are examined, mainly with admiration, always with serious care. It is the most useful and satisfactory book about the subject since Alec Wilder's *American Popular Song*, published some 40 years ago.

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The Jazz Standards
A Guide to the Repertoire
by Ted Gioia
Oxford, 544 pp., $39.93

Wilder studied the art of the popular song as it was most memorably practiced by the great innovators—Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, and others. Gioia acknowledges with respect Wilder's fine effort; his own is different, since he chooses his examples "based on their significance in the jazz repertoire of the current era." There's much overlap in the songs Wilder and Gioia choose, but Gioia has to deal with an additional 60 years' worth (Wilder stopped at 1950) and, even so, is troubled by how few recent ones made it into his guide.

As someone who grew up mainly on the songs of the late 1930s and '40s, and who plays them regularly on the piano as whim directs, I was less troubled, indeed more than pleased, to meet some old friends, a few of them hiding in the back of my mind, for a spell.

But I'm perhaps not the only reader who will, at first, be thrown off by the title. Why are "standards"—the songs that have most vividly survived—necessarily jazz ones, and what exactly is jazz anyway? Louis Armstrong's famous dictum—if you know what it is, you don't have to ask—is all well and good, and we know that "Tin Roof Blues," "St. James Infirmary," "Scrapple from the Apple," and "How High the Moon" qualify as jazz standards insofar as we associate them with jazz musicians such as, respectively, Jelly Roll Morton, Armstrong,

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Charlie Parker, and Stan Kenton.

But what about songs like "I'm in the Mood for Love," or "My Secret Love," or "Skylark," where, at least for this listener, Billy Eckstine or Doris Day or Helen Forrest (with Harry James) come to mind. Can it be that the lovely "Someday My Prince Will Come" (from *Snow White*) or "My Favorite Things" (Julie Andrews, *The Sound of Music*) belong in this guide? Gioia's answer is yes, inasmuch as the former was celebrated by John Coltrane and Dave Brubeck, the latter by Brubeck and Miles Davis. It all depends on whether the tune continues to be heard in live jazz performances and recordings.

One is amazed at the number of performances and recordings Gioia knows about and meticulously lists at the close of his discussion of each song. Consider, as an example, "It Could Happen to You" by Jimmy Van Heusen, who did the music for many songs recorded by Frank Sinatra. It was first heard in a 1944 movie, *And the Angels Sing*, and was recorded by many singers of the time, for me most beautifully by Jo Stafford. Gioia reveals the astonishing fact that over 500 recordings have been made of the tune, including ones by Errol Garner, Miles Davis, and Sonny Rollins.

In *The Art of Popular Song*, Wilder discusses "It Could Happen to You" in terms of chromatic lines and diminished chords, and quotes the first eight measures by way of making a point about its originality of tonal movement. *The Jazz Standards* is without musical quotations, which is a real loss, though an inevitable one if he's to include as many standards as he does. Instead, he notes the "upward movement of the melody" as it contrasts with lyrics that "discuss a metaphorical falling (in love) along with real stumblings and tumblings" (i.e., *Don't count stars or you might stumble, / Someone drops a star and down you tumble*).

Another great tune that one doesn't usually think of in terms of jazz performance is Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are," a song that has special resonance for me since, along with a forgotten, brief hit "Careless," it served as my introduction to popular music (the tunes occupied spots number one and two on the radio program "Your Hit Parade," which I began to listen to when I was 7 or 8 years old). Wilder, who rightly considers it one of Kern's greatest songs, quotes the first eight measures and admires their complex cadences and key changes. (Kern thought the song too complex to be a hit, but he was wrong.)

Gioia, who also prizes the tune, writes that in his twenties he would play it almost every day, and that he

Cole Porter, 1933

found "constant solace in constructing melodic variations over its chord changes." That he wasn't alone in sensing its improvisatory potential for jazz treatment is testified to by the fact that, as with "It Could Happen to You," hundreds of versions have been recorded, the only one I'm familiar with being the terrific Dizzy Gillespie/Charlie Parker version from bebop's early days. Like Wilder, Gioia notes the unusual modulations, and says that after 1940 the song never again showed up on pop charts. For him, "All the Things You Are" is a tune he loves "less for what it *is* than for the exciting possibilities it presents to jazz interpretations."

Gioia is an agreeable host throughout, never patronizing his readers, but unafraid to make discriminations about the song he's considering. (He hates the line in "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" about kissing the "pug-nosed dream.") He is right to include (which Wilder doesn't) Cole Porter's gorgeous "I Love You," as sung by Bing Crosby in 1944, and with later jazz treatments by Sarah Vaughan and Billy Eckstine, Coltrane, and Art Pepper among others. He judges the song to be not among Porter's best because its lyrics are weak—"familiar prattle about birds, daffodils, the dawn—and none of the clever turns of phrase that were his trademark." But what immediately floats into my mind are some of Porter's words from the song's bridge about how *It's spring again / And birds on the wing again / Start to sing again / The old melody*, and I think how clever of Porter to stay on that "again" without straining for rhyme words.

So I don't think the lyrics are weak (even though I agree with Gioia about its "sweet modulation in the bridge"), just the words for that downward melodic sequence.

Naturally, any listener will have favorites that are excluded, whether by reason of the infrequency with which they've been treated over the years, or just possibly because the compiler forgot about the song. Although I don't remember "I Remember Clifford" (about the trumpet player Clifford Brown), I do remember "I Remember You" and regret its absence. And where is "Where or When," which might have been included on the sole basis of Benny Goodman's clarinet introducing Peggy Lee? Or "They Didn't Believe Me," believed by this listener worthy of a place? But as Robert Frost once wrote, one poem implies another and each is best read in light of all the other poems ever written: "The thing is to get among the poems where they hold each other apart in their places as the stars do."

The great distinction of Ted Gioia's book is that it helps us remember what we've heard, and maybe why we were moved by what we heard: to get among the songs and hear how they hold each other apart in their places as the stars do. ♦

GETTY IMAGES

B&A

Napoleon's Nemesis

The British statesman who galvanized Europe against France. **BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.**

Mention the names of Wellington, Nelson, and Pitt to any informed person and you're likely to get a nod of recognition. But Castlereagh? A blank stare. Yet the case can be made, and John Bew makes it convincingly, that Viscount Castlereagh was the equal of those three men and many other contemporaries, surpassed only by Palmerston among 19th-century British foreign secretaries.

So why is he not better known and given his due?

The principal reason seems to be, as Bew demonstrates, that in his own time, Castlereagh was deeply controversial, the object of as much invective as honor, and that we've not successfully broken free of those ancient divisions of view. If Castlereagh was despised by the Romantic likes of Byron and Shelley but praised by conservative realists of his time, how is a biographer to make his way through this Sargasso of opinion? Bew has chosen to do so by taking into account the entire body of opinion, pro and con, that's piled up since Castlereagh's day—by examining and crediting, refining, or dispatching, as the case may be, the claims and charges that others have laid down since then.

Given the mass and diversity of these views, the result is at times overwhelming—a book clotted by arguments that might have been made elsewhere. Yet this exhaustive biography, covering every event and circumstance of Castlereagh's life and career, will leave readers in no doubt that he was a formidable figure whom we overlook to the distortion of historical understanding. Even if not definitive, the book will long remain one that everyone interested in late-18th-century British history and the Napoleonic era will have to confront.

Castlereagh
A Life
by John Bew
Oxford, 752 pp., $39.95

Portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1810

Robert Stewart (called Castlereagh, in the British manner, after the title of his ennoblement) rose to the pinnacles of responsibility in successive British governments as a son of Ireland. Nurtured by the "radical Presbyterian politics of Ulster," this member of the County Down gentry was forever marked by his Irish origins. In fact, Castlereagh's life was an Irish life carried into Britain. Thus, however much his fidelity to the land of his birth may have been discounted and ridiculed in his day, that life cannot be understood save as the biography of an Irish patriot. In fact, Bew's book is in many ways an Irish history, a chapter in the long history of the tortured relations between Britain and Ireland, whose realities have enriched, troubled, and sometimes perverted the history of the United Kingdom into our own time. Those influences, it should be kept in mind, have not been without effect (beyond the fact of Irish immigration) on American history.

"The crucible," in Bew's words, of Castlereagh's political thought, Ireland was also the seed ground of his lifelong political career. He cut his political teeth in the Irish Parliament between 1790 and 1801 while becoming the "architect of its abolition." He achieved this feat as a leader of the successful campaign to gain representation for Ireland in the British Parliament though the Act of Union of 1800. The act was an epochal change that ended the life of the independent Irish government while either (depending upon which antipodal opinion you held) forever staining Castlereagh's reputation, or elevating it to honor.

But this was not the only problem that Castlereagh created for himself, or that Ireland created for him. As a Protestant, he was a lifetime champion of the rights of his Roman Catholic countrymen, especially for their right to be represented—the right known as "Catholic emancipation." Castlereagh was in his grave before the goal was finally achieved in 1829, but not before, once again, he was buffeted by storms of controversy both in Ireland and Britain for maintaining what, for him, was a deeply held conviction.

It is evidence of the difficulty that this Irish native would henceforth face for having moved to create a single legislature from two and liberate Irish Catholics to participate fully in the union that some praised Castlereagh for being "so unlike an Irishman," while others excoriated him for having betrayed the land of his birth. Such were the complexities that Castlereagh had to navigate as he made his way

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out of Ireland into the highest ranks of British officialdom after 1801. He might achieve standing, however controversial, in the larger world of British politics, but, as Bew writes, "Ireland was never to leave him."

After 1803, as Castlereagh's star rose and war engulfed Europe, he moved from Whig to Tory, from liberal to conservative. Bew makes a good case, however, that while Castlereagh detested the romantic attachments to the French Revolution that characterized so many of his countrymen, he was no Burkean counterrevolutionary. Instead, he was an embodiment of realpolitik, a clear enough realist and protector of British interests to later win the praise of Henry Kissinger. As such, he became a protégé of the "new Tory" William Pitt the Younger, without whom his rise successively from head of the Board of Trade to war secretary and then to foreign secretary would probably not have been possible. It was Castlereagh who, in his various posts, had jurisdiction over India, presided over the return of British troops to the Continent after 1803, and sponsored his friend and fellow Irishman Wellington's command over British forces on the Iberian Peninsula and at Waterloo.

By 1812, after a rare hiatus from the government starting in 1809, he was foreign secretary and was his party's leader in the House of Commons—a formidably complex set of responsibilities. "His greatest skill after 1812," remarks Bew, was the one he now deployed: "the ability to combine successful diplomacy with the operation of vigorous warfare." Ever controversial, he nevertheless was the leading figure of the Liverpool government that dealt with the European powers of the alliance arrayed against Napoleon. Once again, we're likely to recognize the names of Castlereagh's equals on the Continent—Metternich and Talleyrand chief among them—without knowing that it was Castlereagh who, arguably, bore chief political responsibility, and thus credit, for the military victory over Bonaparte and the creation of the European Congress System after 1815.

A historian of the United States can plead a certain parochial interest in Castlereagh. It was he who was the British foreign secretary throughout the War of 1812—that misbegotten and often-forgotten conflict whose bicentennial we begin to mark this year, in which Britain and the United States found themselves during the closing years of the Napoleonic Wars. One gets a sense of the depth of interest in this war shown by British historians, and a Briton's sense of the war's significance in the large context of Castlereagh's era, in Bew's devotion of but a mere half-page to the war and its concluding treaty. Bew may be forgiven his inattention, though, since, given the challenges on the Continent, Castlereagh understandably left fighting the American war to others and, except for a possible nudge here and there at the end, left negotiations over its conclusion to diplomats in Ghent.

Yet, while American histories of the War of 1812 appropriately focus on the British military and naval commanders who prosecuted the war in its theaters of battle, it was Castlereagh who, more than anyone else, hovered over British participation. It was he who oversaw efforts in 1812 to gain parliamentary repeal of the orders in council so offensive to the Madison administration—but not in time to head off the American declaration of war. And before he died by his own hand in 1822, there were signs that, ever the realist, Castlereagh was preparing to settle the issue of the impressment of American seamen with the United States.

Bew's assessment of Castlereagh and his exceptional career seems just:

> He was not the most brilliant man of his generation and his qualities did not lend themselves to the transcendent or transformative impact which characterized the careers of the "great" statesmen in British history. Yet it is indisputable that he was one of the most influential and successful politicians of the age and played a central role in the greatest struggle that Britain had ever faced.

Castlereagh (left) meets George IV (center) in 'A Scene from Don Giovanni,' 1820

The balance embodied in such an assessment is characteristic of Bew's critical vindication of his subject. Toward the end of the book, borrowing the thought of another historian, Bew compares Castlereagh with his contemporary political opponent, George Canning, and then asks us to imagine our world if Lord Halifax or Neville Chamberlain had been prime minister after May 1940 instead of Winston Churchill. That counterfactual ought to cinch the case on Castlereagh's behalf: Europe's escape from Bonaparte's threat would be inconceivable without Castlereagh's contribution to it. ♦

B&A

The Long Goodbye

Do the memoirs of Reynolds Price overshadow his fiction?

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

When Reynolds Price died in January 2011, after a gallant battle of three decades with disabling spinal cancer and chronic pain, he left an uncompleted fourth volume of reminiscences. Its quality, notwithstanding its abrupt end, bears testimony to his gifts: His literary exit is almost as striking as his debut 60 years earlier.

That debut was heralded by a precocious novel, *A Long and Happy Life*, featuring the small-town people of his native northeastern North Carolina. As it happens, he and I lived parallel Carolina boyhoods, a year apart, in the old tobacco country of the upper and eastern Piedmont, with its complex castes and characters, black and white. Our lives followed similar arcs, although the neighboring universities under whose auspices we first met—his Duke, my Chapel Hill—could hardly differ more: the one new, Methodist, bustling, private; the other the nation's oldest state university, imbued with the 18th-century ease of its founders, who had been among the eastern gentry. Our teachers of writing had the pleasant custom of bringing their classes together for a joint picnic every spring, and it was at one such function in the spring of 1955 that Reynolds stood to read a story stamped with a budding literary modernism.

I mention this, in part, because I was there. And, in one comic passage of *Midstream*, Reynolds describes his collision, as a visiting teacher, with the leisurely ethos of Chapel Hill. He had begun to tongue-lash the young Laodiceans for their idleness, only to be reminded, in crisp terms, that this was not Duke!

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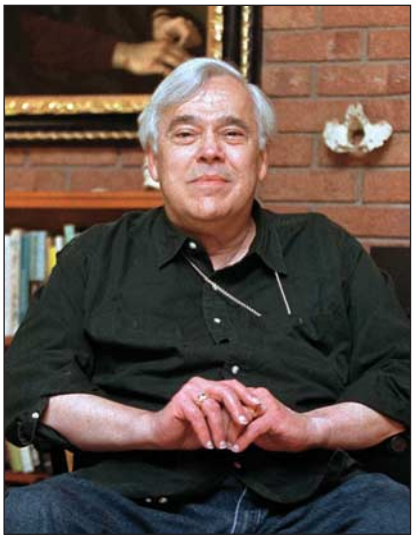
Midstream
An Unfinished Memoir
by Reynolds Price
Scribner, 192 pp., $25



Reynolds Price, 1998

The title of this fourth memoir speaks for itself, but one surmises that it stands for the plunge into adult life we make in our mid- to late-twenties, the period covered here, sink or swim. Reynolds was, to say the least, an adept swimmer: novelist and short story writer, poet, memoirist, operatic and musical impresario, Bible translator, spiritual meditator, and mentor to a grateful succession of students at his alma mater.

Midstream is set mainly at the University of Oxford, whither he returned in 1961 for a delayed fourth year of study on his Rhodes Scholarship. (His single, deplorable verbal slip is the use of the term "Rhodesters" for its holders.) Reynolds's gift for friendship is on display—and, as before, so is the collection of celebrities. In *Ardent Spirits*, the penultimate reminiscence, he wrote much of his friendship with the great W.H. Auden; here, he lavishes time and energy on the university's stars of that time, notably the Chaucer scholar and translator Nevill Coghill and the critic Lord David Cecil, for Price a beloved father figure.

Through the good offices of Stephen Spender, he passes a bedazzled afternoon in Rome with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, the Hollywood supernovae of the nonce, who are there filming *Cleopatra*. Both are welcoming, and drink flows such that Reynolds makes a depreciating remark about a portrait of Ms. Taylor which she had hung over the mantle of her temporary quarters. She pronounces it her favorite and slaps him playfully on his trick knee, which flies up and upsets a coffee table. Much laughter.

The long list of these glittering encounters, including ones with the composer Samuel Barber and the great diva Leontyne Price (an honorary "cousin"), might be taken as indicating what the English (with their old-world caste-consciousness) rudely call "tuft-hunting." On the evidence here, however, Reynolds can be acquitted of that snobbish offense because these encounters with the famous are invariably lightened by his wit and modesty: Indeed, he confesses to being a "cipher" among all these friendly celebrities.

After a sojourn of some months in England, where he is jilted by a former lover with whom he had hoped to resume intimate relations, he returns to America in the late summer. His first novel is on the verge of its spectacular debut. He continues to rub shoulders not only with friends and occasional lovers (sorry, no graphic details) but with yet more celebrities. In New York he evades a fleeting chance to shake hands with his idol, William Faulkner. In Hollywood he makes new friends, consults about a screenplay of his novel, and absorbs valuable lessons about the high ratio of action to words in movies. Then, *Midstream* tantalizingly ends at some two-thirds of its projected length.

As his brother Bill writes in a poignant afterword, Price finally became too ill to write. But what he finished brings to an end a rich set of

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reminiscences, anchored in his commitment to his Carolina roots, his ever-alert sense of the human comedy, and his abiding generosity of spirit. None of this is surprising in a teller of tales, true and invented, who earlier wrote in *A Palpable God* and repeats here:

> A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species Homo sapiens—second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives, from the small accounts of our days' events to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths.

Midstream is apt to raise two intriguing questions. One is whether, and if so, why, the Reynolds Price memoirs overshadow his fiction. The other is, as he asks himself: "If . . . your experience had left you with an overpowering need to deliver yourself of written stories, then why did you—a queer man—produce stories . . . about more conventional men and women—the kind who married and produced both you and your brother?"

Regarding the first question, Reynolds was a modernist technician of fiction from the outset, and, in consequence, one occasionally hears a faint but distracting knocking about in the control room. In simple terms, the nonfiction is more relaxed and less self-conscious. As for the second question, Reynolds had come to candid and comfortable terms with his sexuality as the dangers and cruelties of legal and social censure receded. But that censure, condemning as illicit and antisocial what seems to be an involuntary fact of nature, may generate preoccupation—and with it a yearning curiosity about conventional patterns of life and love. Who can say, really? Certainly there can be no doubt of his love and gratitude for his parents and their like.

Whatever the fact, Reynolds's farewell book released a formidable and catholic talent from all hindrances and left us pages that will last as long as candor, friendship, close and witty observation of our human nature, good humor, and eloquence endure. ♦

B&A

A Master's Voice

The Reformation as seen in the art of Lucas Cranach.

BY DAVID GELERNTER

The Serpent and the Lamb is not easy to pin down. Officially, it tells the story of Martin Luther's relations with the eminent painter Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553); Professor Ozment argues that the two men created the Protestant Reformation between them. Luther was the mastermind and Cranach, who became Luther's publicist, champion, and protector as well as his friend, was indispensable. And Luther and Cranach's collaboration is only one strand in this richly complex book.

The Serpent and the Lamb
Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation
by Steven E. Ozment
Yale, 344 pp., $35

Cranach is Ozment's main focus. He has been ill-served (Ozment believes) by art critics and historians, and misunderstood by art lovers. Ozment's narrative is almost as intricate as a map of Renaissance Germany; Cranach is the sun that makes this great solar system of a book cohere.

As a painter and creator of widely distributed woodcut engravings, Cranach made the images (including the portraits of Luther) that embodied the Protestant revolution in the public mind. Like other eminent artists over the ages, Cranach moved in the best circles: He was the friend and confidant of Frederick the Wise, ruler of the German state of electoral Saxony. (In the jigsaw puzzle of pre-Bismarck Germany, Saxony was split in two. Electoral Saxony—in Cranach's day the most powerful of the German states—had the right to cast a vote in the election of the Holy Roman emperor.) Cranach smoothed Luther's path and helped protect him from hostile Catholic powers, including German princes and prelates, the Holy Roman Emperor, and the pope himself. Cranach, the author argues, was Luther's "gifted partner in reform." Without him, the Reformation might have failed.

Accordingly, Ozment has composed a concerto grosso of a Cranach biography, with many interleaved themes. One of these is a commentary on Cranach's most important paintings and engravings. Another fends off the thrusts and sideswipes of Cranach scholars who have got the hero wrong, who see him as second banana to Albrecht Dürer, preeminent German artist of the age, or as a godless mercenary who, insofar as he accepted jobs from Catholics as well as Lutherans, had no real loyalty to anyone but himself. And some regard him as a master of soft porn. (Cranach's almost-nudes are famous: "Spare, lyrical" women, Ozment calls them, artfully outfitted in hats, necklaces, transparent veils, and other striptease accoutrements.)

While developing these themes, Ozment also compares the ambience of the Reformation in Germany to the Renaissance in Italy. And he defends the historical approach to painting against aesthetic absolutists who see the image as complete in itself, irrespective of historical context. The truth, Ozment insists, is that "civilization is the horse, and the artist only the temporary rider." (Had Cranach painted Ozment's portrait, these words would no doubt have appeared in black letters on a scroll unwinding gracefully around his head.) The author discharges all

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these duties without breaking a sweat.

Cranach was born in the small town of Kronach, where his father was a painter, "although he appears to have been rather more of a craftsman than an artist." Young Lucas spent several years in cosmopolitan Vienna, but on his way back home in 1504, he was summoned away to the Saxon capital of Wittenbach to be court painter to the ruling prince, Frederick the Wise. This summons, Ozment believes, was partly Dürer's idea. Dürer ("kind soul that he was") materializes like a good fairy at several crucial points in Cranach's life.

Just four years later, Cranach was already part of an important diplomatic mission from Frederick to the emperor. He was firmly established as a major artist and big wheel in Electoral Saxony by 1517, when Luther posted his famous Ninety-Five Theses on what passed for a widely read blog at the time. Cranach helped turn Frederick into Luther's supporter and protector: To reject the papacy and Roman Catholicism for a radically reformulated biblical religion was a risky career move in Catholic Europe.

Frederick was disposed to be helpful, but Luther had to do his part and make clear that he had no intention of challenging Frederick's rule in Saxony. Ozment reproduces a fascinating pair of Cranach engravings that underline the point: two portraits of Luther, both done in 1520. The same face appears in both, seen from almost the same angle. But the first presents Luther as the heroic, chisel-jawed supermonk, whose tonsure fits him like a Roman emperor's wreath. In the second, Luther has been toned down (with a change of outfit, accent lines, and surroundings) into a mild-mannered Clark Kent, cub theologian. Frederick preferred version two. Engravings at the time were widely distributed, history's first medium for large-scale propaganda.

Also in 1520, Cranach and Luther launched their collaboration with an engraved pamphlet bitterly attacking the pope and the papacy called *Christ and Anti-Christ*. Henceforth, the two worked together, and the Reformation upended Europe and changed history.

While he tells this story, Ozment pursues his other themes. It's true, he concedes, that Cranach often borrowed ideas from Dürer—but, says Ozment, he sometimes improved them in the process. In any case, Dürer, the senior artist, was Cranach's friend and supporter throughout his career. This subtheme widens the book by allowing Ozment to work in an occasional Dürer masterpiece, for example the darkly lustrous *Self-Portrait* of 1500, now in Munich, in which many critics see the apotheosis of

Portrait of Martin Luther, ca. 1540

the Renaissance artist boldly standing apart from the world at large. (This Yale University Press book is beautifully laid out, with paintings under discussion illustrated, almost always, close to the paragraphs that discuss them. Anyone who has ever read an art book will recognize this seemingly simple achievement as a miracle of bookmaking.)

Then, Ozment patiently answers a long series of Cranach scholars who have misunderstood this man. Ozment is especially indignant at the art historian Max Friedländer's attempt, during the 1930s, to boil down Cranach's long career to exactly 22 major paintings dating between 1501 and 1504: "One of the boldest misjudgments in the history of art criticism," Ozment writes, fuming. Cranach, he insists, finished important works until the *Wittenberg Altarpiece* of 1547, just six years before his death.

(Ozment's denouncing Friedländer brings to mind the destructive general tendency in art criticism to value a painter's earliest mature works higher than all the rest. Among major moderns, one thinks immediately of Matisse and de Kooning, who have both been given their own version of the Friedländer treatment. Matisse's cutouts from the end of his life are some of his boldest and most beautiful works, but in Matisse studies and shows, they are often a footnote. An absurdly large proportion remain in private hands—reflecting a gross failure among major museums. De Kooning's later paintings have increasingly fallen under a sort of ban—not his last paintings from the 1980s but virtually his whole output from the mid-1950s onward. Museums own a fair number of these; they simply refuse to hang them.)

Turning to Cranach's famous nudes, Ozment explains that they "were not modeled on Wittenberg courtesans." These were upstanding German females, "Saxon women Cranach knew, observed, conceptualized, and chose to portray." The reader may doubt whether such portrayals were necessarily taken as compliments. But Cranach was no porn prince.

It's true, Ozment notes, that Cranach was just as good at Catholic as at Protestant painting. But his friendship with Luther was real, and some say that Cranach converted on his deathbed to Lutheranism. At any rate he made it, at the last moment, into his son Lucas the Younger's *Weimar Altarpiece* (1555), wedged in between Luther himself and John the Baptist at the foot of the cross.

Ozment defends the excellence and appeal of Cranach's art throughout—which is hard work, because Cranach's paintings are so extremely unappealing. Ozment himself concedes that Cranach "is unreliable on anatomical details and proportionality." At the center of the important *Christ Blessing the Children* (1525), for example, Jesus appears to have no neck. Generally, Cranach's heads are several sizes too large: In *Charity with Four Children* (1534), the main female figure seems to have the face and head from some other painting cut out and pasted over.

Cranach's nudes are indeed lithe and willowy, as Ozment notes, and the idea

of painting attractive, barely dressed women is brilliant in principle. But in practice, Cranach's nudes posture as awkwardly as show-window mannequins jammed together by some amateur in a hurry. And they squint out of their paintings with hard, beady eyes. As a draftsman, Cranach is too much the engraver, working in small strokes that never coalesce. (Dürer, who was, like Cranach, a brilliant engraver, never seemed to have this problem.) But whether you like Cranach or not, Ozment has provided a careful and thorough guide to his life and times—a virtuoso performance.

The only problem is that he writes so fast and sloppily that the reader is sometimes at a loss to figure out what he means. Cranach's idealized woman "was then, as is her modern counterpart today, a true artistic evolution of womankind." Meaning? That women have evolved in a direction we all find artistically satisfying? But "evolve" implies change over time, and of course style oscillates. Ozment appreciates the lithe slimness of Cranach's nudes versus the dumpling look popular with many other German painters. But Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, and Leonardo, among others, painted slim, graceful women before Cranach, and innumerable artists painted dumplings afterward. Is that evolution? "The core message female nudity conveyed" in Cranach's paintings, Ozment writes, "was transparency, fidelity, and self-sacrifice to family and society." I'll bet.

The *Schleissheim Crucifixion* (1503) is one of Cranach's first masterpieces and Ozment impressively, effectively discusses the strange and striking viewpoint—at ground level, with the cross at the right edge nearly perpendicular to the picture plane, and only the Virgin and Saint John in attendance. So far so good. But then Ozment wants to explain that Cranach uses drapery the way Bernini did in the next century, as an emotionally expressive element in its own right. So he describes the billowing, elaborately knotted cloth around Jesus' waist as an "animated loincloth" that is "both the Savior's life support and his protection from the lethal thunderclouds that rush over and against him."

How can a man being crucified be on life support? And how can he possibly be protected from thunderclouds by a loincloth located between his waist and the ground? The Savior gazes from the cross towards the Virgin and Saint John, "leaving the eager viewer to watch from the edge of his chair." But how could any viewer of this painting be *eager*? Eager for the Savior's death? In suspense about how the Crucifixion turns out?

The Weimar altarpiece. Lucas the Elder second from right.

This is Ozment's usual way with paintings. In the next work he discusses, a husband and wife make the "perfect couple perfectly integrated into the perfect grassy knoll"—as if "grassy knoll" suggested bucolic scenery and not a presidential assassination and conspiracy theories. And the wife, Ozment informs us, is "every bit as introspective as her husband is transcendental." Elsewhere, Ozment describes Cranach "scooping an appealing woodcut," as if the close-grained wooden blank that is carved, chiseled, scraped, and smoothed by the engraver were a bowl of whipped cream.

One part of Ozment's mission is to compare the German-born Reformation and the Italian Renaissance. Part of the task, as he sees it, is to clean up the snow job known as "the Renaissance man." On the first page, he writes that Cranach "scoffed at the myth of the vaunted 'Renaissance man,'" and he returns to this idea at various intervals: Cranach demolished "the fictive 'Renaissance man,'" the "icon of the 'Renaissance man.'" But what does that mean? Usually the term refers to a man who has mastered more than one field, but Ozment doesn't question the existence of such men; Cranach, he writes, "came as close to exemplifying such a person as any other giant of the age," insofar as he was a painter, diplomat, and businessman.

It seems silly to put Cranach-the-all-arounder on a level with Brunelleschi, the great architect, structural engineer, technologist, and inventor of perspective drawing, or Leonardo or Michelangelo—or with Dürer himself, who is known as an author as well as a painter. But what did Cranach scoff at? Maybe "the fictive 'Renaissance man'" means an embodiment of the perfections discussed by Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier*: The ideal courtier must be a champion of many sports, and an excellent swordsman, horseman, Greek and Latin scholar, musician, conversationalist, and (naturally) dancer. Few men ever qualified. But, at the very start of modern Renaissance studies, Jacob Burckhardt wrote of Castiglione's perfect courtier that "all this is not to be taken too seriously, except what relates to the use of arms."

So why bother arguing that Cranach demolished this "fictive" ideal when it was always meant to be fictive? On this and other points, Ozment leaves the reader at a loss. And that is a shame, because so much learning went into this book. No one writes history with more clarity, learning, and authority than Steven Ozment. If he would only write it a little more slowly, a whole world of readers might benefit. ♦

B&A

Love in the Ruins

Death and rebirth in the shadow of genocide.

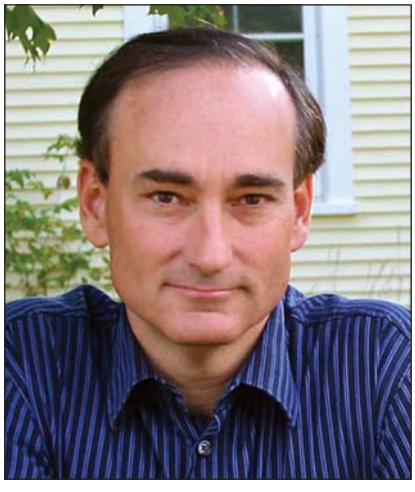
BY DIANE SCHARPER

As Chris Bohjalian tells it, the years between 1915 and 1923 were "the most nightmarish eight years of Armenian history." Yet the horrific events of that time are generally not included in history courses, and are not so well known outside the Armenian community. No longer. Bohjalian describes what happened to the Armenians in grisly detail in this compelling novel. Deftly mixing fact and fiction, he tells the story of the massacre of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians through a tale that spans generations and continents, its characters linked together by a series of photographs.

The plot concerns a family secret, and as the secret unravels, it sheds light on the genocide, which began in April 1915 when the Ottoman Turks decided to exterminate their Armenian neighbors. Writers, physicians, professors, businessmen, scientists, religious leaders—all were arrested, jailed, deported, or killed. Armenians (who have been Christians for nearly two millennia) were ordered to convert to Islam, and ordinary citizens, including women and children, were taken from their homes and marched—often naked—into the desert where they were raped, gathered in deportation camps, and starved. Some were tied to trees and shot; mothers watched as their sons and daughters were murdered, and vice versa.

Focusing on the years 1915-16, Bohjalian relates his story primarily through the eyes of Laura Petrosian and her grandparents, Armen and Elizabeth. Other characters offer perspectives as well, including a Turkish physician who tries to save wounded Armenians, a no-nonsense German nun who runs an orphanage for Armenian children, an Armenian woman whose physician husband has been murdered, and an 8-year-old girl who has witnessed the decapitation of her mother and sister. Two German soldiers, anxious to document the massacre, illegally photograph the carnage around them.

The Sandcastle Girls
by Chris Bohjalian
Doubleday, 320 pp., $25.95



Chris Bohjalian

But the death and destruction are balanced by the love between the two protagonists. Armen Petrosian is a displaced Armenian whose wife and infant daughter have been lost and are presumed dead. Elizabeth Endicott is a young American who, with her father, has come to Aleppo, Syria, where they will stay at the American consulate and help displaced survivors. A recent Mount Holyoke graduate, Elizabeth hails from an upper-middle-class Boston family and has led a sheltered life. She comes to Aleppo prepared only by a brief course in Armenian language and an equally brief course in nursing.

Armen and Elizabeth are attracted to one another early on, but are soon separated. He travels to Egypt, where he enlists in the fight against the Turks; she stays behind in Aleppo to volunteer in a hospital. They begin to correspond, and most of the story occurs as Armen and Elizabeth separately experience the horrors of the genocide.

Years later—after the two had gone to America, married, had children and grandchildren, and died—their granddaughter Laura, a novelist who specializes in light fiction, finds their letters and sees their photographs in a museum. Inspired by her forebears' courage, and believing that the story of the massacres needs to be told, she decides to write and publish the family saga. This is the novel Bohjalian has written. The fictional Laura provides context and unity to what could easily be an unwieldy story, but also serves as a stand-in for Bohjalian himself, a grandchild of Armenian immigrants who uses family memories as well as photographs and historical documents to tell the story.

Bohjalian's evocative language enhances the illusion of reality. In one passage, Armen remembers walking with Elizabeth to the bazaar: "[T]hey were so close that he had been able to inhale the rose-scented powder she had sprinkled on her skin beneath her clothes. Once, when she smiled, words had failed him completely." And while the reappearance of one minor character seems somewhat contrived, Bohjalian's exquisite prose more than makes up for any flaws. He weaves the story like threads in a rug, each thread adding color and shadow to a scene. Each scene builds into a larger picture, and each picture adds texture to the numerous story lines. Indeed, so filled is it with the suspense of life—and death—that *The Sandcastle Girls* is difficult to categorize. The story is fiction, but is true. It's history, but it's also art. ♦

VICTORIA BLEWER

Diane Scharper teaches English at Towson University and is the author, most recently, of Reading Lips and Other Ways to Overcome a Disability.

B&A

Bootleggers' Blues

More whiskey, and less poetry, might have worked.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Bootlegger movies have tended to be rather high-spirited affairs, with reckless and wild country boys outsmarting and outdriving the slow-witted lawmen in their counties as a mouth organ boings in the background and a Dobro is being a-picked. Moonshiners are among the original romanticized outlaws, just plain folks in the hardscrabble working class trying to get by as best they can, providing salubrious liquid refreshment to their neighbors—who want and deserve a bit of fermented pleasure to take the edge off a very tough life.

The truth is sadder, as the truth usually is. I once wrote a profile of the actor and politician Fred Thompson, and thought I would get some amusing color by asking him jauntily about the bootlegging cases he had prosecuted as a young lawyer in Tennessee just out of law school in the 1960s—cases that got a lot of local media play at the time precisely because they involved moonshine and stills. Thompson grew rueful. The memory was painful, he said. These were desperately poor, illiterate, rural people who had their lives ruined for no good reason, because outmoded laws remained on the books, and state and federal agencies needed to justify their continued existence.

The new melodrama *Lawless*—based on the real-life story of a Virginia family in a corrupt county during Prohibition—is determined to show us some of the sad truth. The three Bondurant brothers wear dirty clothing and look like they rarely bathe. They lost their parents during the 1918 flu epidemic, and the two oldest lived through hell in World War I. They own a gas station in Franklin County, Virginia, but sell hooch on the side. Life has treated them harshly, and they treat it harshly right back.

Lawless
Directed by John Hillcoat

Jason Clarke, Tom Hardy, Shia LaBeouf

The narrator is Jack (Shia LaBeouf), the youngest and softest Bondurant, who cries easily and can't bring himself to throw a punch. He is viewed with a certain measure of contempt by his brothers, Howard (Jason Clarke) and Forrest (Tom Hardy, the man behind the Bane mask in *The Dark Knight Rises*). When a vicious new lawman (Guy Pearce) comes to town to gouge them, these ornery men refuse to go along. And so a war erupts.

This is a fine outline for a movie, but it turns out that watching a few low-level crooks making and distributing alcohol in a pristine rural setting really isn't worth one's time unless it has at least one Jew's harp on the soundtrack.

The director, John Hillcoat, is far more interested in showing us pretty pictures of trees and vintage signs and fog rising from the surface of the morning lake than he is in constructing an interesting and involving plot. Chicago mobsters pop out of nowhere, turn out to be great guys, then vanish. Jessica Chastain turns up as a former stripper who seeks refuge in this very small town and falls for Forrest for no other reason than the movie needs a good topless scene. In the weirdest and most distracting trope, Hillcoat insists on photographing Mia Wasikowska, who plays Jack's Mennonite love interest, in a headpiece that is deliberately designed to evoke Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (except without the earring). Why? She's a girl in 1931 Virginia. It adds nothing to the movie besides annoying pretension, and it's very distracting.

Meanwhile, the screenwriter Nick Cave (yes, the musician) betrays the movie's effort to portray the bootlegging life honestly by ladling on some absurd mytho-poetry. We are told that the Bondurant brothers do not believe they can die because they have lived through wars and stabbings and shootings and throat-slittings and God knows what else. But then it turns out everyone else in the county thinks so, too.

This idea turns the theoretically brooding Forrest, who barely speaks except with a displeased grunt, into an intermittent existential philosopher. Out of nowhere, he will tell a guy on the street that time is a mystery and that life turns on a dime, before bopping him with some brass knuckles. And he gives Jack a completely incomprehensible speech about fear and death and how you must have fear in order not to die, or you must die if you are to fear, or something.

Half an hour in, I began to long for Burt Reynolds to drive up in a Trans-Am and announce he was Gator McKlusky, the character he played in the exuberant bootlegger movie *White Lightning*. He would have twinkled his eye, crinkled up his 'stache, and laughed that two syllable "ha-ha" the way he did in his prime.

It would have made no sense. But it would have been *fun*. Which is exactly what *Lawless* isn't. ♦

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

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

"Al Gore lives alone now, in a 10,000-square-foot colonial in Nashville, where magnolia trees shade the house and geothermal wells, buried beneath the driveway, cool and heat its 20 rooms. . . . [He] is mostly at peace these days with losing the presidency in 2000."
—New York Times, *August 25, 2012*

FADE IN:

EXT. NASHVILLE – FAINT DAWN – THE YEAR 2040

A window in the distance is illuminated against almost total darkness. As the camera slowly pushes forward, images come into view: A narrow concrete pathway, cracked and crumbling, leads to an enormous iron gate. The camera rises slowly up the gate, holding at the top, on a massive letter "G." Behind this lies a 10,000-square-foot mansion on a hill. The kingdom of Albert Arnold Gore Jr.

DISSOLVE TO:

LONG TRACKING SHOT OF THE SPRAWLING PROPERTY

Its grounds, once lush with foliage, are now a desert of cracked, red earth: the world has been eviscerated by catastrophic anthropogenic climate change. This arid plain is populated with the bleached bones of once-plentiful species, now extinct, their habitat laid waste by man's profligacy. We push forward: The driveway has caved in; beneath it we now see several defunct geothermal wells, which once cooled and heated the mansion without damaging the environment. We pan up to the window with the light on.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GORE'S BEDROOM – FAINT DAWN

The massive room is cluttered with junk, and as the camera pushes toward Gore's bed, flickering light from a large fireplace reveals a stunning collection: piles upon piles of George W. Bush bobblehead dolls; cardboard cutouts of Dick Cheney; everything Florida: maps, beach towels, jigsaw puzzles, oranges. OLD MAN GORE lies on the bed, his breathing slow and shallow. He clutches a glass snow globe. The camera pushes in close on the globe: snow swirling over verdant pine forests, the world as it should be, as Gore wanted it, as he could have kept it, were it not for...

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON GORE'S EYES

They are wide and bright, on fire as he gasps for air.

GORE
(an old, tired voice, quiet)
Broward...

The snow globe drops from his hand and rolls into the massive pile of University of Florida coffee mugs in the center of the room; it shatters. Gore takes one last breath, and