the weekly
Standard

BOMBS BURSTING IN HOSPITALS
JONATHAN SPYER reports from Syria

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THE REAL DEBATE

The 2012 election is about far more than our pocketbooks

YUVAL LEVIN

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

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The Vulgar Era

The Scrapbook is decidedly not in the habit of waxing nostalgic about the golden age of civility in politics. Our position is clear: There never was one. It is true that Congressman X (R) may have shared a highball with Senator Y (D) at the Monocle in 1965, but the Democratic majority in Congress was so prohibitive in those days that GOP members had little choice but to cultivate their masters in any way they knew.

Which brings us to two recent high-profile endorsements for the president. It is no shock to learn that the vast majority of politically active celebrities are crazy for Barack Obama: Show biz is dominated by the left as decisively as academia. But the nature of that craziness has changed over time—and not in a good way. Yes, Mort Sahl used to poke incessant fun at Ike, and David Frye made his name impersonating (some would say channeling) Richard Nixon. But it seems to us a considerable distance from all that to Bill Maher's obscene attacks on Sarah Palin (and conservative women in general) or Julia Roberts's observation that you find "Republican" in the dictionary between "reptile" and "repugnant."

Now comes Madonna, the 54-year-old bad girl of pop music, who interrupted a recent performance in Washington, D.C., to talk public policy with her audience: "You all better f—ing vote for Obama, okay?" she said. "We have a black Muslim in the White House, okay? Now that is the s—. And it's some amazing s—. And Obama is fighting for gay rights, okay? So, support the man, goddammit!"

This is not exactly the way Lloyd Bridges would have embraced John F. Kennedy in 1960. Even Tallulah Bankhead was more decorous when she rang doorbells for Harry Truman in 1948. But the point is, does it work? Apart from Madonna's self-selected fanbase in Washington's Verizon Center, is *f—ing vote for Obama, okay?* likely to persuade anyone else?

This question lies at the heart of The Scrapbook's reaction to an extended super-PAC video featuring the 63-year-old actor Samuel L. (*Pulp Fiction*, *Snakes on a Plane*) Jackson. Rendered in the style of a children's fable, with rhyming verses and picturesque scenery, it features a little girl seeking to shake her suburban family out of its indifference about the Obama-Romney race. When her winsome efforts fail, Jackson appears out of nowhere, dressed gangsta-style with matching beret, to deliver a series of menacing, motivational quatrains, all ending with "Wake the f— up!"

Of course, this plays on Jackson's recent appearance in another YouTube video, where "Go the f— to sleep!" is incessantly repeated. But The Scrapbook is struck by two paradoxical thoughts.

First, you don't have to be a prude to be discouraged by the spectacle of famous adults expressing themselves about Barack Obama, or any political candidate, in this way. In the final scene, as the aforementioned little girl throws open a window and shouts "Wake the f— up!" to the somnolent townsfolk, you have to wonder whether Democrats find this awe-inspiring, or cringe-inducing.

And second, The Scrapbook sees the glass half-full. For as distasteful as these episodes might be, the Samuel L. Jackson video suggests a certain nervousness in progressive ranks. It means the near-hysterical fervor for Obama of 2008 (for a good laugh check out Stevie Wonder singing "Barack Obama" on YouTube) has not just subsided but almost wholly disappeared from the landscape. Samuel L. Jackson's point is not that Barack Obama has been great but that he is preferable to the alternative.

For that matter, is a snarling character actor dressed in full criminal kit, who says he supports Barack Obama "because he is black," the very best image for Democrats to project? ♦

Fact Checking the Fact Checkers (cont.)

In these pages last week, The Scrapbook noted that a second academic survey had been done suggesting that PolitiFact—the largest of the major media "fact checking" organizations—is biased against Republicans. The survey, by the Center for Media and Public Affairs at George Mason University, examined 98 PolitiFact rulings from June 1 to September 11 and found that Democratic statements were rated true twice as often as Republican statements, and Republican statements were rated false or "Pants on Fire" twice as often as Democratic statements. This is actually a slight improvement over a University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs study published in January 2011 that looked at 500 PolitiFact rulings and found Republican statements rated false three times as often as Democrats'.

As it happens, the heads of all the major fact checking operations—from the *Washington Post*, the Associated Press, FactCheck.org, and, yes, PolitiFact—convened for a panel discussion at the National Press Club last week. The Weekly Standard's Mark Hemingway, who's been chronicling fact checking follies, was there and asked PolitiFact editor Bill Adair about this remarkable imbalance.

"I don't find the numerical count analysis to be particularly persuasive," Adair said. If he rejects the numerical count, what evidence does Adair have that suggests his organization is

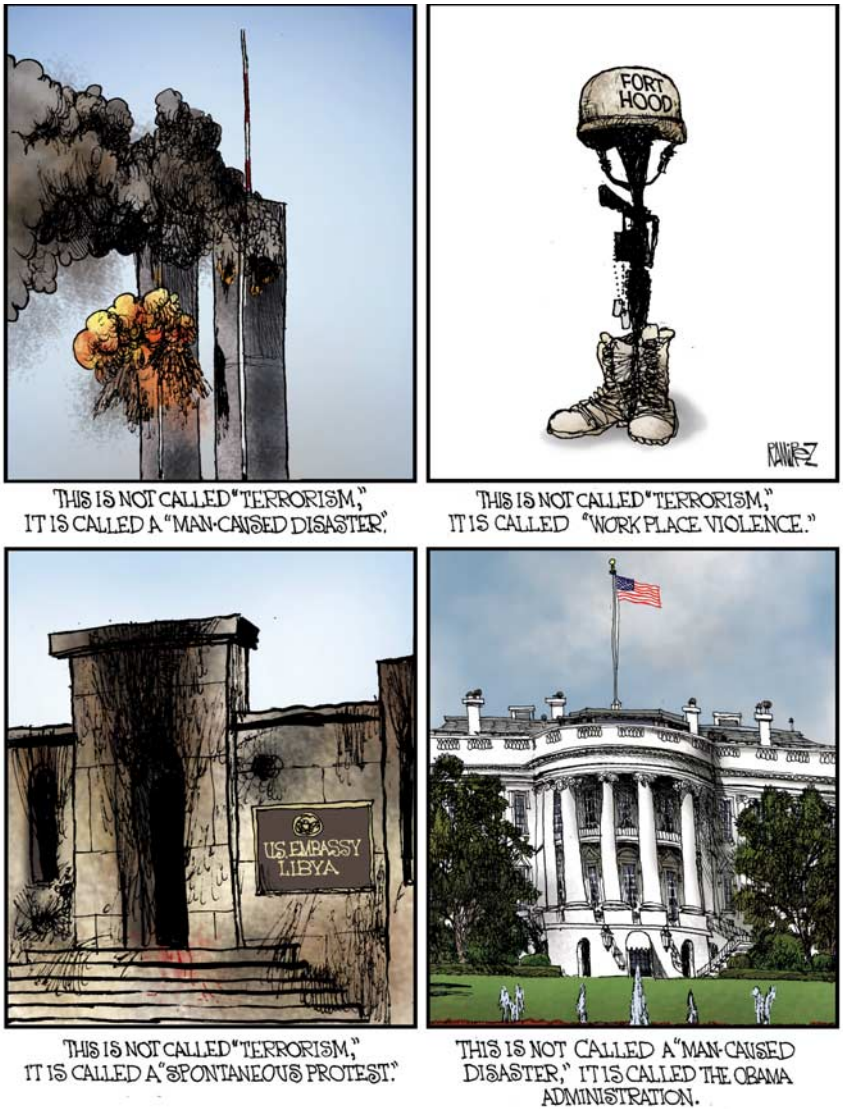
fair? "I hear it from both sides. I was at a party over the summer and a guy came up to me and said, 'Hey, I think that, I really think PolitiFact Virginia has been unfair, they've been very biased against Tim Kaine.'" Unsurprisingly, The Scrapbook does not find a secondhand report of One Guy at a Party to be persuasive.

Rather than discuss the breakdown of PolitiFact ratings, Adair said, "what I'd like to talk about are if you have substantive questions about something we've done we're happy to talk about it." Well, that's not really true either. In last week's issue, Hemingway wrote a detailed takedown of PolitiFact's unwarranted assault on the Romney campaign for accusing the president (correctly) of gutting work requirements in the 1996 welfare reform law. PolitiFact has yet to respond to Hemingway's and other critiques.

Associated Press fact check editor Jim Drinkard tried to defend PolitiFact, suggesting that the Republican primary skewed PolitiFact's numbers. "[There were] 21 or 22 debates. That is going to produce a certain number of fact checks, and they're all going to be about Republicans," he said. But of the two studies he was citing, one concluded well before the primary season and the other was done after Mitt Romney had defeated all his challengers.

FactCheck.org's Brooks Jackson arrived at a face-saving conclusion for PolitiFact. "It might reflect the fact that one party at that particular time is failing the same standards, the same journalistic standards, more than the other," he said. But when pressed about the specific numbers, Jackson felt the need to clarify that his organization, unlike PolitiFact, isn't fact checking Republicans as false over Democrats at indefensible rates. "It's certainly not three to one on our side," he said.

All of the fact checkers on the panel swore up and down they were not out to play favorites, but the first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem. PolitiFact's credibility has been compromised, and unless they do something about it, their lack of impartiality will be all they are known for. ♦



Simon Says

Roger Simon, the chief political columnist for *Politico*, began his column last week with an alarming report:

> "I hate to say this, but if [Paul] Ryan wants to run for national office again, he'll probably have to wash the stench of Romney off of him," Craig Robinson, a former political director of the Republican Party of Iowa, told the *New York Times* on Sunday.
>
> Coming from a resident of Iowa, a state where people are polite even to soybeans, this was a powerful condemnation of the Republican nominee.
>
> Though Ryan had already decided to distance himself from the floundering Romney campaign, he now feels totally uninhibited. Reportedly, he has been marching around his campaign bus, saying things like, "If Stench calls, take a message" and "Tell Stench I'm having finger sandwiches with Peggy Noonan and will text him later."

Roger Simon's "scoop" then raced across the information superhighway at record speed, with liberals exchanging quips about how the Romney campaign had finally crashed and burned. Ace *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman dryly noted, "You're supposed to wait until it's actually over before you do this kind of thing." *Mediaite*, MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell, *Gawker*, *Daily Kos*,

and Comedy Central all ran reports based on Simon's column.

As it turns out, all of these news outlets were duped. Simon's column was satire! This was not readily apparent because *Politico* is not ordinarily in the business of publishing satires, and Simon's column wasn't labeled as such. But above all, the reason it wasn't understood to be satire is that Simon's column was punishingly unfunny. The Scrapbook will not say this often so make a note of it: We don't blame Paul Krugman, Lawrence O'Donnell, and the *Daily Kos* for arriving at the wrong conclusion.

We do, however, find Roger Simon and his editors guilty of malpractice. *Politico*'s editors were forced to place a disclaimer at the top of the column: "Editor's note: Some readers were confused that this Roger Simon column was satire. Please see Roger's note at the end." Simon's note, for its part, seemed weirdly hostile to his readers:

> Author's note: Jonathan Swift did not really want Irish people to sell their children for food in 1729; George Orwell did not really want the clocks to strike thirteen in 1984; Paul Ryan, I am sure, calls Mitt Romney something more dignified than "Stench" and Microsoft did not invent PowerPoint as a means to euthanize cattle. At least I am pretty sure Microsoft didn't.

Ah yes, that explains it. He was casting his pearls before swine. Roger Simon's readers don't just fail to get his jokes, they're also too stupid to understand his predecessors—Swift and Orwell. Maybe this is just another misfired joke. Let's hope so. ♦

Parody This Week, Reality the Next

Two weeks ago, The Weekly Standard Parody took aim at President Obama and those who decried the foreign policy criticisms of Mitt Romney following the attacks in Libya and Egypt. "Obama slams Romney for 'politicizing terror'" read our fake *New York Times* headline. The article went on to explain the president would continue reminding us this is not a time for politics but rather a time for unity (behind him, of course) during his appearances on shows like *The View*. In fact, the Parody featured a photo of Obama holding forth on the set of that very show.

And as it turns out, our parodist was prescient. President Obama did end up going on *The View* last week to answer such questions as where and when he and First Lady Michelle Obama shared their first kiss—outside a Baskin Robbins in Chicago—prompting one of the cohosts to gush, "It's like Romeo and Juliet." Meanwhile, the president was unable to find the time to meet with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other world leaders who were in New York for the U.N. General Assembly.

"On Monday, President Barack Obama made his fourth pilgrimage to New York City for the opening of the United Nations General Assembly," wrote Jay Newton-Small of *Time*. "He arrived in Manhattan on a glorious autumn afternoon and rushed to his first—and only—public event of the day: a taping of ABC's *The View* with his wife, Michelle." Newton-Small cited her colleague Mark Knoller's statistic that Obama had 13 meetings with world leaders at last year's U.N. confab.

Not that the president's appearance on *The View* was uninformative. As Newton-Small noted,

> Who can provoke Obama the most? Michelle, he said, "by being thoroughly unreasonable." Who's funnier? "I am," said Michelle. What do they discuss at dinner? Their days. Dad goes last and the girls rarely want to hear more than five minutes from him. Who tucks whom in? Mom and/or Dad tuck in the girls every night, though with Malia turning into a night owl like her dad these days. Obama tucks Michelle in at 10 p.m. and then stays up till 1 a.m. "There's a lot of tucking in our family," laughed Michelle.

If reality continues to imitate our jokes, perhaps the next Parody should reveal how Obama plans to spend all his free time after losing the election. ♦

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BPA WORLDWIDE

There Goes the Neighborhood

Getting into a taxi at the end of a recent night on the town, I gave the driver my address. "Are you sure?" he asked nervously. I had to sigh in familiar exasperation—I'd been through this rigmarole many times before. And I only moved to Trinidad in May!

That's Trinidad the neighborhood, about two miles northeast of the U.S. Capitol. It's the kind of place that's often called "mixed" or "in transition." It was once a thriving part of the nation's capital—Washington's first Sears opened there in 1929—and as recently as 1968 it was still middle class. But then came the riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, and parts of H Street, the main commercial thoroughfare, were burned to the ground. This was the beginning of a long decline, and for decades much of the neighborhood stood in disrepair. Crime soared. The population fell. In the 1980s and '90s, crack addiction and the violence it brought took a terrible toll. The neighborhood's handsome housing stock, much of which dates from the late nineteenth century, fell into decrepitude.

But not, as it happened, forever. I'm told things were beginning to turn around by 2005, and today, the neighborhood boasts "up-and-coming" status. Lots of young professional types who can't afford more established communities are moving in. There's still some danger, mostly gang violence—hence the cabbies' trepidation (one driver even broke D.C. law by declining to drive me home, with the claim that he didn't know how to get there). But the danger is receding. The marketers are shrewd enough to court anyone still squeamish. A luxury condo complex going up across the street from me pitches itself to "urban pioneers."

I used to think that "mixed neighborhood" was simply code for "slum." But my new community really is remarkably heterogeneous. Bobo-oriented, wallet-busting restaurants (typical menu item: *Loch Duart Salmon*, *Scalloped Potato*, *Leek Fondu*, *Fiddlehead Ferns*, *Chervil Crème Fraîche*, *Salsa Verde*) abut liquor stores where the proprietor sells you your Taaka vodka from behind Plexiglas. Spiffy, polished rowhouses with new porches and shiny Priuses in the driveways sit next to bombed-out, abandoned homes with "KEEP OUT" signs tacked to boarded-up front doors. You don't have to go to Guatemala City or Beijing to see such extreme disparities so close to each other: It turns out our nation's capital has them in spades.

DAVID CLARK

My own apartment building is a study in contradictions. It's a solid brick structure, vintage 1941, not much to look at, but the interior was totally rebuilt two years ago. The apartments feature marble countertops, Jacuzzi-style bathtubs—the works. Yet just the other week, residents found someone squatting in the basement laundry room. Judging by the McDonald's wrappers, he'd been there for days.

All of the change afoot has spurred predictable handwringing. "Farewell to Chocolate City," read a lament in the *New York Times* this summer. A *Washington Post* story last month mourned the closure of an H Street establishment where the "pink polyester zoot suit" once was king. What these articles take care to specify is that most of Trinidad's longtime residents are black, whereas many (though not all) of the newcomers are not. And so the bogeyman "gentrification" is invoked to claim that, with rising incomes, increasing public safety, and slowly shifting demographics, the area is becoming less authentic, somehow less "real."

This way of talking about cities and neighborhoods implies that they ought to be static—such and such is and forever must remain a "Polish neighborhood." But this masks the reality that urban America is continually in flux. The East Side of Providence, Rhode Island, where I grew up, was once filled with WASPs. Today, it's heavily Jewish, with a large contingent of immigrants from the Azores. The St. Johns neighborhood of Portland, Oregon, which I left to move to Washington, was until recently dominated by white people, most of whom worked down at the port. It now has one of the city's highest concentrations of Mexicans. The District of Columbia itself just recently passed a milestone, with its black population falling below 50 percent for the first time in decades, down from over 70 percent some 30 years back.

It's foolish to think that any particular snapshot in time is more "real" than the next. The only constant in American cities is change. That—unlike grouchy taxi drivers—is one of the joys of urban life.

Ethan Epstein

the weekly Standard

Our Fearless Misleader

After more than two weeks of obfuscation and misdirection from the Obama administration, the American public is coming to understand what the U.S. intelligence community learned in the 48 hours immediately following the September 11 attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Among the important new details:

* Top Pentagon officials declared the assault a terrorist attack on "Day One." Doing so enabled them to expedite any response to the attack (*Yahoo! News*).

* U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism officials understood right away that the attacks were planned for the eleventh anniversary of 9/11 (The Weekly Standard).

* Within 24 hours of the attack, "U.S. intelligence agencies had strong indications al Qaeda-affiliated operatives were behind the attack and had even pinpointed the location of one of those attackers" (*Daily Beast*).

How do they keep a straight face? Susan Rice and Jay Carney.

AP IMAGES / CBS NEWS / CHRIS USHER; AP IMAGES / CAROLYN KASTER

* In telephone intercepts of phone calls involving members of Ansar al Sharia, an al Qaeda-linked group in Libya, members "bragged about their successful attack against the American consulate and the U.S. ambassador" (*Daily Beast*).

* U.S. counterterrorism officials had repeatedly warned about the growth of al Qaeda affiliate groups in Libya and noted in particular their relationship to al Qaeda's central leadership in Pakistan (The Weekly Standard).

The nature of intelligence collection after an operation like the one in Benghazi means that the narrative of the attack—in both classified and open sources—will change. As intelligence professionals gain access to more data, the picture they can paint becomes fuller and more detailed. And the early narrative of an attack can evolve.

For the most part, that's not what happened with the Obama administration's claims about Benghazi. While top administration officials often pointed out that more complete information would be available after an investigation, this did not prevent them from offering a detailed account of what had happened in Libya. And, as we've noted in these pages, that account was wrong in virtually every one of its particulars.

The attack was, in fact, planned. It did involve al Qaeda-linked terrorists. It was not a copycat of the protests in Cairo, Egypt. Indeed, there was no protest outside the consulate in Benghazi at all. The U.S. compound was not well secured. The two ex-Navy SEALs killed in the attack were not there to protect the ambassador, and they were not, obviously, joined by several colleagues also providing security. The date of the attack was not coincidental. And the anti-Islam YouTube video at the center of the administration's public relations effort had nothing to do with the assault that took the lives of four Americans.

This, more than anything, is the problem with the administration's response. It wasn't that they failed to provide enough information to the public, but that they provided incorrect information and did so long after it was clear to many in the intelligence community that the political narrative was false.

There are two possible explanations. Either the information widely available to intelligence professionals was not shared with those speaking on behalf of the president. Or those Obama administration officials had the accurate information and chose not to provide it.

If intelligence professionals had immediately concluded that the attack in Libya had nothing to do with the YouTube video, why did top administration figures point to it as the trigger?

If the Pentagon knew on "Day One" that the attacks were planned, why was U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice still denying this four days later?

If counterterrorism officials had determined that the killings were the result of a terrorist attack, why did State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland refuse to acknowledge that during her briefing on September 17?

If intelligence officials knew on September 11 that the attack took place that day for a reason, why did White House press secretary Jay Carney still pretend otherwise eight days later?

Some of the misleading information provided to the public could not possibly have been a result of incomplete or evolving intelligence. The information about security for the ambassador and the compound, for instance, would have been readily available to administration officials from the beginning. And yet when Susan Rice appeared on five political talk shows on September 16, she erroneously claimed that the two ex-Navy SEALs killed in the attack were, along with several colleagues, providing security. They were not. Why did she say this?

These questions, and many others, deserve answers. And soon.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Euthanasia for Obamacare

JASON SEILER

At a rally in Ohio last week, Mitt Romney said, "Obamacare is really Exhibit No. 1 of the president's political philosophy, and that is that government knows better than people how to run your lives." The GOP nominee added, "I don't believe in a bigger and bigger government. . . . I believe in free people pursuing their dreams. I believe in freedom."

This is a welcome and winning pitch from Romney. It puts the focus on Obama's centerpiece legislation, which he spearheaded and signed into law against the clear will of the American people. In so doing, it highlights Obama's big-government liberalism. And it sets up the key contrasts in this race—decentralized decision-making versus centralized power, prosperity versus profligacy, liberty versus coercion.

James Madison argued in *Federalist* 51 that our Constitution provides a "double security" to "the rights of the people." One half of that security is the separation of powers among the three branches of government. The other half is federalism, the separation of powers between the federal government and the states. Madison argued that both of these checks on the concentration of power were essential to securing our rights.

Obamacare lays waste to half of this "double security" by funneling almost unimaginable levels of power and money to Washington. What's more, in its startling delegation of de facto lawmaking power to the secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other unelected figures in the executive branch, it also severely undermines the separation of powers among the branches. For example, Obamacare is making it illegal for anyone in America (with the narrow exception of houses of worship) to freely sell or buy an insurance plan that fails to offer free birth control and sterilization. But this ban is nowhere to be found in the 2,700 pages of the law itself. Rather, it came as a decree from HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, exercising her newfound power. If Obamacare isn't repealed, examples of such rule by fiat will proliferate.

This brings us back to Romney, the only man who stands in the way of Obamacare's taking root from coast to coast. Over the next five weeks, Romney would do well to repeat at every turn what he said in Ohio. He should seize this golden opportunity to paint for voters the picture of their future under Obamacare. Here are just a few of the lowlights (courtesy of the Congressional Budget Office and/or the Medicare chief actuary) for voters to look forward to if Obamacare isn't repealed:

At a time when the country is more than $16 trillion in debt, Obamacare will increase federal spending by about $2 trillion over the next decade. To partly cover this spending binge, it will impose 20 new or higher taxes, fees, or fines, totaling about $1 trillion. It will raise annual health care premiums by thousands of dollars per family for policies purchased on the open market. It will siphon $716 billion out of Medicare. And it will cut Medicare reimbursement rates to the point where Medicare providers are paid less than Medicaid providers by the end of this decade, jeopardizing seniors' access to care.

It will establish the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB), empowered to cut payments to Medicare providers even further. The decrees of this unelected and

largely unaccountable board of 15 bureaucrats will not be reversible by a simple majority of the House and Senate—our Constitution's vesting of the legislative power in Congress notwithstanding.

It will cause millions of Americans with employer-provided health insurance to lose their insurance. It will cause millions of seniors to lose their Medicare Advantage plans. It will dump more than a third of the newly insured into the already subpar Medicaid system at taxpayer expense. It will incentivize employers to dump their employees into Obamacare's insurance "exchanges" at huge cost to taxpayers. It will force the young to help pay the health bills of those who are older and generally more affluent. It will force Americans of all ages to buy federally approved health insurance whether they want it or not.

Even beyond these requirements that the CBO and the Medicare chief actuary have highlighted, Obamacare will almost surely (depending on the decrees of the HHS secretary) make low-premium, high-deductible plans illegal. It will provide disincentives for businesses to hire additional workers. It will impose regulations so onerous that the IRS estimates it will take Americans 79 million man-hours a year to comply with them, with over half of that burden falling on small businesses. It will exacerbate a looming doctor shortage in several ways. It will load still more paperwork onto doctors, making the medical profession less attractive. It will add millions of people to the insurance rolls without adding doctors to see them, and put doctors under the yoke of the federal government. In its zeal to command and forbid, it bans new physician-owned hospitals. It promotes cronyism, as the well-connected get waivers from its mandates, while everyone else is compelled to comply (HHS has granted at least 1,200 waivers to date). And it inflames an already contentious issue by providing taxpayer funding of abortions.

Fifteen minutes of the first presidential debate are slated for health care. This gives Mitt Romney his big chance to remind the American people what life will be like under the president's signature law as its various provisions take effect. Obama will doubtless attempt to turn that 15 minutes into a discussion of Romney's proposals for Medicare, and moderator Jim Lehrer may try to oblige him. But Romney shouldn't take the bait. His first and essential task in that quarter-hour is to drive home what health care in this country will be like under reforms that are already the law of the land. For the most important question Americans face in this, the most crucial election in decades, is: Do we want to keep Obamacare—or repeal it?

—Jeffrey H. Anderson

The Natural Versus the Phony

Can a politically gifted Republican survive in Democratic Massachusetts?

BY MICHAEL WARREN

Boston

Elizabeth Warren is opening a new campaign office in the Boston neighborhood of Roxbury. The 63-year-old Harvard law professor is wearing a pink jacket, white blouse, and black pants. After shaking hands with everyone around the parking lot, she chooses a low spot in the pavement in front of the office door to speak to the crowd. Warren is noticeably shorter than the local community leaders who introduce her. She clutches the microphone in her right hand and gestures with her left as she works through her stump speech.

"I don't kid myself. I know it's going to be a fight," Warren says. Her voice is flat, her rhythm slow and deliberate. "I know it's going to be tough. I know they're going to throw everything they possibly can at me. I know this. I know this. But here's what I want to tell you. I am not afraid." Warren's voice gets louder. "I am not afraid." And more piercing. "I am not afraid!"

And why should she be? Warren is running for senator as a liberal Democrat in Massachusetts, in a year when the liberal Democratic president is up for reelection, and in a state where he's never been more popular. Her opponent is the 53-year-old incumbent, Scott Brown, the only Republican in the state's congressional delegation, and the only Republican statewide elected official. Brown won a low-turnout special election in 2010 by driving around the state in his pickup truck, wearing a brown Carhartt jacket. His image as a moderate Republican with blue-collar roots appealed to Democratic-leaning middle-class independents. In Massachusetts, though, Democrats outnumber Republicans by more than three to one. Warren ought to be running away with this race.

GARY LOCKE

But Warren's not running away with this race. The *Real Clear Politics* poll average shows Warren fewer than 2 points ahead of Brown, and a Rasmussen poll released last week shows the candidates tied. Most observers consider the race a toss-up. At the candidates' first debate on September 20, a whole cadre of national reporters traveled to Boston to watch. It turns out the year's most interesting Senate race isn't in a swing state like Virginia or Ohio but in deep-blue Massachusetts.

The fact is, Scott Brown is one of the most gifted natural politicians in the country, and Elizabeth Warren simply isn't.

Warren's campaign has had its fair share of stumbles. When the media first began asking questions about her claim of Cherokee heritage, especially whether she had used that claim to advance her career, Warren was unclear and contradictory in her answers. Her television advertisements, most of which feature a serious Warren speaking directly to the camera, have fallen flat. Her best ad is a testimonial from a well-known boxing trainer, Art Ramalho of Lowell, who praises the Harvard lawyer from Oklahoma in his thick New England accent. Warren herself doesn't appear in the ad until halfway through.

But it's on the trail that Warren really looks out of her league. At a rally in Roslindale, another Boston neighborhood, Warren is preceded at the podium by Mike Monahan, a leader from the local electrical workers' union, and Tom Menino, Boston's Democratic mayor for nearly two decades. Monahan delivers a stemwinder that cuts right at Scott Brown's blue-collar image.

"Pick-up truck? Carhartt?" Monahan says, pronouncing it *Cah-haht*. "Don't let him insult your intelligence. Where's the cutting oil stains on that Carhartt? Where's the chalk

Michael Warren is a reporter at The Weekly Standard.

stains on that Carhartt? Where's the rip from the rebar tie wire? There's none, because that jacket or truck has never seen a day's work."

Menino, who is officially endorsing Warren, is up next. After mentioning that he knows and likes Brown, he knocks the Republican for being an unprincipled moderate. "If you're going to represent the people of Massachusetts, you can't be middle-of-the-road when it comes to trade and jobs for our residents," Menino says. "You can't be wishy-washy on housing investment, protecting families from foreclosure. You can't be on the fence when it comes to federal research dollars that fuel our hospitals and our universities."

Then Menino delivers the Ted Kennedy endorsement from beyond the grave. "Elizabeth gets my appreciation every time she defends universal health care in a way that would make Teddy proud," he says.

When it's Warren's turn, the union-heavy crowd claps and cheers dutifully. But the speech is a dud. Warren reads from notes, like a professor lecturing her class. She awkwardly name-checks Boston neighborhoods in her slight Oklahoma twang: "From Roslindale to Dorchester, from East Boston to Roxbury. . ." She praises Menino for his multiculturalism and political paternalism: "Mayor Menino is beloved in every single community in Boston because he views every single person, regardless of color, race, gender, orientation, or anything else, as part of the family he has watched over during his time in office."

It's only near the end that Warren even mentions her own Senate race. "Scott Brown does not always vote the wrong way," she says ploddingly. "But too often, when it gets right down to it, Scott Brown isn't with you."

Once she's stepped off a stage, Warren looks lost. She tries to turn this into a political asset with self-deprecation. "Can you tell this is the first time I've run?" she'll ask during moments of confusion, like when she's unsure where to stand for a photo op or a gaggle with the press. In a crowd, Warren will gently shake a voter's hand between her two palms, like a comforting grandmother.

But Massachusetts voters, including the more than 2 million unaffiliated independents, seem to prefer elected officials who slap backs, talk sports, and go by affectionate nicknames like "Teddy." And nobody's calling her "Lizzy."

'Hey, Scotty!" a young woman calls out.

Scott Brown is visiting Sullivan's, a hot dog stand and a South Boston institution next to the state park on Castle Island. It's a brisk afternoon, and he's wearing a jacket from the 2009 Boston Marathon. Brown only had three hours' sleep before an early morning flight from Washington, where he had been up till two o'clock in the morning voting in the Senate. If he's tired, though, it doesn't show as the joggers and park-goers converge around him to get pictures and shake his hand.

Once she's stepped off a stage, Warren looks lost. She tries to turn this into a political asset with self-deprecation. 'Can you tell this is the first time I've run?' she'll ask during moments of confusion.

Joining Brown at this meet-and-greet is Ray Flynn, Tom Menino's predecessor at city hall, who left Boston to serve as Bill Clinton's ambassador to the Vatican. Flynn is a quintessential Boston Democrat, but more recently he's been supporting Republicans like Brown. Still, he has a lot of cachet with the working-class Irish Democrats of Southie, the only Boston neighborhood Brown won in 2010.

While Brown orders food for anyone who wants some, Flynn walks around the restaurant to glad-hand. But Brown doesn't have to seek anyone out; everyone at Sullivan's seems drawn to him, from the kids working behind the counter to the old folks craning their necks to get a look at the famous senator. He takes the boxes of hot dogs and fries outside to a picnic table, ignoring the cameras and reporters hovering around him.

A tall middle-aged man in a flat cap named Jackie Watts comes over to say hello. Watts, a retired police lieutenant, lives in Chatham now, but he grew up in South Boston and played basketball with a kid named Johnny White. When Watts tells him this, Brown immediately recognizes the name of his basketball coach at Tufts University.

"I used to play at the boys' club with Johnny," Watts says.

"With Billy Endicott and those guys? You know those guys?" Brown says. "All nice people."

"Good people," Watts agrees.

The next day, when we meet for breakfast at a diner in Brown's hometown of Wrentham, it's the same story. No fewer than six people stop by our table to say hello, including a busboy who chats briefly until Brown good-naturedly tells him to "get back to work." As we try to talk about Warren, an older man walks over and says, "I'm a Democrat, but I'm voting for you."

Brown says he feels "balanced" about himself and his campaign. He often reminds people, on the stump and in his ads, that he's one of the most bipartisan members of Congress. "I feel that people are very appreciative of my work ethic and the fact that I'm looking out for their pocketbooks and wallets," he says between bites of his French toast and bacon. Then Brown shrugs. "But I'm a Republican from Massachusetts."

A Republican, yes, but also from Massachusetts. "People recognize that I'm from this state," Brown says. "I grew up here. I married a local Waltham girl. Our kids were born here and go to school here, and I'm probably going to die here."

Our conversation is soon interrupted again when Brown spots a face he recognizes behind me. "Let me just say hi to this amazing friend of mine," he says. He bounds out of the booth, arm extended. ♦

Overcoming Obamaddiction

Craig Karpel's 12 steps to recovery.

BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

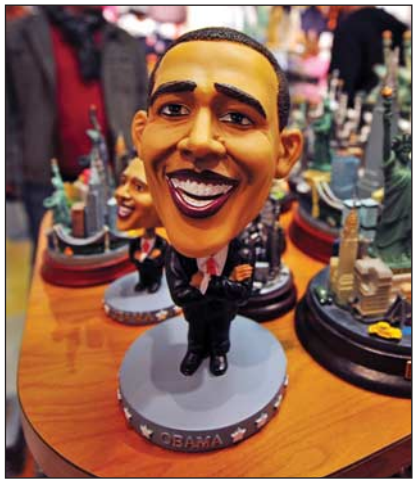
Five weeks to go until Election Day, and the Romney campaign says it is counting on the debates to change things. Leading one to wonder . . . what's to debate? Mitt Romney is the challenger against an incumbent whose record of failure is long and nearly unblemished.

Barack Obama promised that if his stimulus plan were adopted, unemployment would be held at under 8 percent. The plan was adopted, and unemployment has been over 8 percent ever since. He promised to cut the deficit in half. The deficit rose and now comes in routinely at over a trillion dollars a year. He promised a new and sunnier day in relations between the United States and the Muslim world. Our ambassador to one Muslim nation was murdered by terrorists, and an official of another Muslim nation has put a bounty on the head of an American resident for producing a video that offends Islam. The renewable energy projects that we were told would provide "green jobs" have gone bankrupt, costing billions, while the price of gasoline has doubled. And on and on.

Meanwhile the president is holding his own in the polls while Romney struggles. One suspects that this isn't a question of voters not understanding the candidates' positions on the issues, and that a couple of debates are unlikely to clear up the confusion. This looks more like a refusal by a big part of the electorate to recognize reality. The question is . . . *why*?

The answer, according to Craig Karpel, is the same one that accounts for a lot of our contemporary miseries: namely, addiction.

"My name is Craig K., and I'm an Obamaholic," he writes to open *The 12-Step Guide for the Recovering Obama Voter*. "Welcome to what Alcoholics Anonymous would call a 'meeting in print.' We're here to admit to each other and to ourselves that the Obama presidency isn't Obama's fault—it's ours. We should be impeached for having elected him."



One day at a time

Karpel is, of course, having fun here. He has the kind of satirical gifts that legions who blog on these matters earnestly try to attain but which remain, forever, beyond their reach. Here, for instance, is Karpel on Al Gore:

> . . . ever wandering from one five-star hotel to another, his humble mantle—mantle collection, actually—stitched together on self-effacing Savile Row, subsisting somehow on speaking fees of $175,000 per jeremiad, the extent of his renunciation of the pleasures of the flesh ascertainable from his continually expanding girth, warning evildoers (that would be you and me) that this earthly realm will soon be engulfed by "the-fire-next-time," updated to "global warming," re-updated to "climate change," formerly known as "weather."

Karpel did not, plainly, write just another campaign book, searching for weak points in the Obama record which he can attack. His target is the earnest and exalted expectations that many, many Americans have invested in the political process and the political class, to include the media. He comes to the job having gone through his own conversion experience. Karpel once made a home in the journals of the New Left but was never quite a fully paid-up member. He was too skeptical, too humane, too inclined to see through the cant and pomposity as, for instance, in the way the grubby world of American politics has tried to dress itself in the threads of intellectual respectability, and in the way it overuses and misuses certain high-falutin' words. Here, for example, is Karpel's Step 2 on the road to recovery from Obamaddiction: "We need to acknowledge that instead of valuing only character, we became addicted to charisma." An addiction that, he goes on to write,

> had its origin in the 1960 campaign, during which the pundits of the era couldn't quite define it but made it clear that, whatever it was, John Kennedy had it and Richard Nixon didn't.
>
> Charisma: noun, a quality that, though indescribable, is so marvelous that it can be referred to only in ancient Greek.

There are many such moments in this book. Karpel writes like a machine gunner, searching out enemy terrain with three- and five-round bursts, seeking targets of opportunity and, more often than not, finding them:

- Promoting a limp impression of civility is, after all, so much more important than defending civilization.
- Obama entered politics from academia, and like any academic, he wants tenure.
- Obama's election was the

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Geoffrey Norman, a writer in Vermont, is a frequent contributor to The Weekly Standard.

triumph of biography over achievement. We allowed ourselves to become Obama-new junkies, in the grip of lack-of-substance abuse.

There are many, many more where those came from. Their glitter almost distracts the reader from what Karpel is really engaged in here. Almost. But not quite.

What Karpel has identified is the reason why Obama is still buoyed up in the polls despite being so far behind the curve of his own promises, not to mention incompetent at the job he was elected to do. The reason is that American politics has been infected with a need by the media for "narrative" and by millions of voters for the kind of emotional hit they get from show business:

> In 2008 it became common for legacy media personnel covering the presidential campaign to try to convey the dazzling podium-presence that they attributed to Obama by calling him a rock star. Leaving aside the problem that real rock stars—I've known a few—tend to be insecure, vain, fickle, capricious, and, except when on stage, shy, the reality is that they earn their living by driving audiences into transports of ecstasy. It is not a good thing that American politics has degenerated to the point that calling a candidate for the most critical job on earth a rock star is considered a compliment.

It is important and urgent, Karpel writes, that those in the grip of Obam-addiction move past denial and stop blaming others, accept responsibility, and embrace alternatives. One suspects that he isn't holding his breath. And, of course, the AA modeling is just the scaffolding. The book isn't written so much to change behavior or minds—like the debates upon which the Romney campaign has now pinned its hopes. What Karpel has done—delightfully, given the gravity of the exercise—is explain how we arrived at a point where "we became hooked on a political cult that, blurring the distinction between government and religion, presented a politician as a messianic figure."

One Karpel has now memorably and conclusively made laughable. ♦

They're on a Losing Streak

But Washington state's Republicans might get some satisfaction this year. BY FRED BARNES

Bellevue, Wash.

The paradox of politics in Washington state drives Republicans crazy. They can describe it, even explain it, but they can't overcome it. The result is Washington Republicans have had the longest losing streak in gubernatorial elections of any state GOP (32 years) and haven't controlled the legislature since 1982.

Hey, I may actually win; Rob McKenna

Here's the paradox: Washington voters act like Republicans in overwhelmingly opposing tax increases, then turn around and elect the Democrats who have sought to raise their taxes. In one statewide referendum after another, voters have required a two-thirds majority in the legislature to increase taxes, while simultaneously voting for Democratic majorities that have repeatedly repealed the requirement.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard.

"It's frustrated us for 50 years," says former senator Slade Gorton, one of the few Republicans to win a top- tier race in recent decades. (He was last elected in 1994.) Why do so many tax-phobic voters fail to connect with Republicans? "I wish I knew," Gorton says.

This year may be different. True, President Obama will carry the state effortlessly. Neither the Romney campaign nor the Republican National Committee is active. To hand out Romney yard signs, a local group, Pivot Point, had to be created. Meanwhile, Democratic senator Maria Cantwell is expected to cruise to reelection.

But in the governor's race, Republican Rob McKenna has a 50-50 chance or better of being elected. Gorton says he's the best Republican candidate for governor since Dan Evans won in 1972. McKenna outpolled President Obama in 2008, when McKenna was reelected attorney general. Obama won 57.7 percent of the vote, McKenna 59.5 percent.

And GOP state chairman Kirby Wilbur, a popular figure on conservative talk radio for 16 years in Seattle, has energized the state party. His "12 in 12" plan aims to elect McKenna, plus 3 state senators and 8 house members to Democratic seats. That would give Republicans control of the statehouse for the first time in 30 years. Capturing the senate is a reach, but possible. Winning the house is a very long shot.

Wilbur was memorialized, though not by name, in Hillary Clinton's memoir, *Living History*. He organized a large demonstration in 1994 when her bus tour to stir support for the

AP / STEVEN LANE

Clinton health care plan showed up in Seattle. She wrote the protest consisted of "militia supporters, tax protesters, clinic blockaders." How could she know the makeup of the crowd? She couldn't. But she claimed to have feared for her safety.

In 2010, the political paradox was in full flower. Washington has no state income tax and doesn't want one. An initiative to impose a 5 percent income tax on those earning more than $200,000 was defeated, 64-36 percent, though it would have been offset by a 20 percent cut in property taxes and elimination of major taxes on small business.

That wasn't all. By 60-40 percent, voters repealed tax hikes on "certain processed foods, bottled water, candy, and carbonated beverages"—enacted, as usual, by the Democrat-controlled legislature. And the two-thirds-vote requirement for tax increases, which the legislature had suspended, was reinstated, 64-36 percent.

In 2012, the two-thirds issue, including a supermajority for passage of a tax increase by referendum, is back on the ballot and headed for approval. Another initiative would allow same-sex marriage. If it passes, it will make Washington the first state to sanction same-sex marriage by popular vote. A third initiative would legalize marijuana but regulate its production and sale.

A fourth initiative would permit "up to 40 publicly funded charter schools." It has spawned Democrats for Education Reform (DER) and is strongly backed by McKenna. His Democratic opponent, former congressman Jay Inslee, "has not seen the light on important reforms such as charter schools," according to DER's director, Lisa Macfarlane.

This brings us again to the paradox. Why do liberal Democrats—except for candidates such as Inslee—feel free to back initiatives that are the bane of the Washington teachers' union, the party's indispensable interest group, and are opposed by top Democratic elected officials?

Bruce Chapman, chairman of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank, says initiatives are not regarded by most voters as partisan. But elections of candidates are. Thus the disconnect.

Seattle's wealthy class is a microcosm of this phenomenon. "They're all liberals," Chapman says. "The billionaires are liberal." But Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer and Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos opposed the tax initiative in 2010. Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his father supported it, but now they favor charter schools. Bezos, by the way, has donated $2.5 million to the campaign to authorize same-sex marriage.

McKenna, 50, has seized the education reform issue as his own. There's general agreement that schools, K-through-college, in Washington are underfunded. McKenna points out that higher education got 16 percent of the state budget when he was student president at the University of Washington in the 1980s. More recently, when his daughter was student president, the share had shrunk to 8 percent. One result: The state's colleges don't produce enough skilled workers to meet the needs of Seattle's high-tech firms.

McKenna would cut spending for state government and its employees and shift that money to schools. A tax increase? Perish the thought. Inslee, 61, who resigned his House seat in March to focus on running for governor, says he would bring "lean management" to government and use the savings—theoretical savings—to fund education.

In televised debates, McKenna and Inslee offer a sharp contrast. McKenna knows more, explains his positions with clarity, is a bit nerdy, and occasionally insinuates he's the smarter of the two. No doubt he is.

But Inslee, a conventional liberal who talks up "light rail" and wants "a cumulative [environmental] impact assessment" before building a port to ship coal to China, is likable. "On a personality basis, he has the advantage," says Gorton, an active leader of Republicans at age 84.

McKenna cites two reasons why he should win, despite the long drought in Republican governors. One, he outpolled Obama four years ago. Two, he shares the Republican view that Dino Rossi actually won the governorship in 2004, only to have it stolen when Democrats discovered uncounted ballots in Seattle during a recount. So winning wouldn't be novel.

He didn't mention a more convincing reason: He's almost perfectly positioned as a Republican to win statewide. Except for joining GOP state attorneys general in challenging the constitutionality of Obamacare, he's not identified with the national party. Obamacare happens to be relatively popular in Washington. A new poll here found 42 percent in favor of repeal or "major changes," 51 percent against.

The conventional wisdom in Washington holds that Republicans can't win statewide if they take conservative stands on social issues, abortion especially. If those issues are prominent, they'll dominate the campaign. McKenna is pro-choice. He favors civil unions, already the law in Washington, and quietly opposes the same-sex marriage initiative on religious grounds. So far, so good.

Seattle and surrounding King County, the Democratic heartland, are a test for McKenna. A saying in Washington is that Democrats can see their entire electorate from the Space Needle, built in Seattle for the 1962 World's Fair. Democrats pay little attention to central and eastern Washington. McKenna cut deeply into the Seattle vote as attorney general, and he needs to again. The rule of thumb is a Republican must get at least 20 percent in Seattle and 39 or 40 percent in King County.

It won't be easy. Old-timers recall when half the state legislators from Seattle were Republicans. The last one disappeared as the city filled with immigrants from California and New York. Now Seattle is "just a slightly smaller version of San Francisco," Gorton says. The Rossi campaign died in Seattle in 2004.

But if any Republican can escape destruction in Seattle, it's McKenna. And if he does, history will be made. ♦

Where the 1970s Are Ancient History

Young Vietnamese line up for American coffee, not exhibits on American 'atrocities.' BY MAX BOOT

I recently visited Vietnam, primarily because of my interest in its history—and in particular the two Vietnam wars of the 20th century, the first one pitting the Viet Minh against the French and their local allies, the second pitting North Vietnam and the Viet Cong against the United States and South Vietnam. In the process of traveling across the country, from Hanoi in the north, to Hue in the center, and Ho Chi Minh City (née Saigon) in the south, I also learned something of its current achievements and challenges.

There are plentiful reminders of both the French and American epochs, ranging from the graceful colonial-era Metropole Hotel in Hanoi to the Cu Chi tunnels near Saigon, once used by the Viet Cong, now a tourist attraction. Despite economic reforms that began in the mid-1980s, Vietnam remains very much a Communist dictatorship, and the regime seeks to buttress its legitimacy by stressing its role in defeating the designs of America and France.

The American War Crimes Museum in Ho Chi Minh City may have been renamed the more-neutral-sounding War Remnants Museum in deference to the growing closeness between Hanoi and Washington, but it remains a stronghold of anti-American propaganda. The exhibits focus almost exclusively on supposed atrocities carried out by U.S. forces—some of them real (e.g., My Lai), others vastly exaggerated or concocted out of whole cloth. The walls are studded with quotations from the likes of the left-wing British philosopher Bertrand Russell condemning American conduct.

A 'tiger trap' at the Cu Chi tunnels

An entire wing is focused on the ravages of Agent Orange, the defoliant sprayed by U.S. forces in the 1960s, which the Vietnamese government now blames for seemingly every birth defect in the country. (The Obama administration has just agreed to help clean up the soil for chemical contamination near the former U.S. airbase at Da Nang without admitting any responsibility for maladies supposedly tied to Agent Orange.) Needless to say, not a single exhibit alludes to Communist atrocities, such as the murder of thousands of South Vietnamese civilians when Communist forces briefly captured the city of Hue during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

At the modernist presidential palace once occupied by South Vietnamese presidents, exhibits glorify the North Vietnamese soldiers who broke down the gates in 1975 in their Soviet-made tank. There is no mention of the millions of South Vietnamese who subsequently wound up in "reeducation camps" or on leaky rafts as "boat people."

While the War Remnants emphasizes Vietnamese-as-victims, the exhibits at the Cu Chi tunnels, where Viet Cong guerrillas took refuge underground after striking at South Vietnamese and American forces, tell of Vietnamese-as-fierce-fighters. A television set even plays an endless loop of a 1960s Communist propaganda film that glorifies the Viet Cong without, of course, mentioning their close ties to the North Vietnamese regime.

Meanwhile, at the grim Hoa Lo prison known to American POWs as the Hanoi Hilton, there is an absurd dichotomy: The prison accurately depicts the torments inflicted by French captors on Vietnamese political prisoners, while inaccurately sugar-coating the treatment of American military prisoners by their Vietnamese captors. A plaque informs visitors (not altogether grammatically): "During the war the national economy was difficult but Vietnamese government had created the best living conditions to US pilots for they had a stable life during the temporary detention period." Well, that's one way to describe the hellish tortures that John McCain, James Stockdale, and other POWs endured.

Yet it was striking to me that I saw no Vietnamese visitors at the War Remnants Museum, the Cu Chi tunnels, or Hoa Lo prison—everyone

MAX BOOT

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there was a foreigner like me. It was a different story at the imposing Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in Hanoi, where the bulk of the visitors were Vietnamese coming to gawk at Ho's embalmed corpse (or possibly a wax dummy). The mausoleum lies next to the modest house on stilts where Ho lived and worked as North Vietnam's president. Admittedly, many of the Vietnamese were school children on compulsory tours, but there is little doubt that there is a deep well of affection for "Uncle Ho," who was, by the standards of the world's dictators, uncommonly modest and self-effacing. (He would have hated the Lenin-style mausoleum built and maintained with Russian help—he had requested to have a simple cremation.)

By contrast, there appears to be relatively little interest among the population in the two Vietnam wars—hardly surprising since the median age in Vietnam is 28, meaning that the bulk of the population regards the conflicts as ancient history.

The same day that I visited the Cu Chi tunnels and the War Remnants Museum, I also stopped to get an iced coffee in Saigon, as many Vietnamese still refer to the country's biggest city. My coffee (and a good one it was) came from a place called NYDC, short for "New York Desert Café." It was decorated with pictures of the Statue of Liberty and other American icons. A TV showed *Ice Age* with Vietnamese subtitles, while hordes of trendy young people huddled around their iPads and cheesecakes. Next-door The Coffee Bean, an American franchise, was just as mobbed.

There is something symbolic about the fact that young, urban Vietnamese are drinking up American culture, while their government continues to adhere to the party line about the evils of American "imperialism" and "aggression." Even that line is softening as Hanoi realizes that it needs Washington's help against Vietnam's historic enemy and longtime occupier—China. What's not changing is one-party rule, which remains as stultifying as ever despite decades of economic liberalization. As Human Rights Watch notes:

> The Vietnamese government systematically suppresses freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. Independent writers, bloggers, and rights activists who question government policies, expose official corruption, or call for democratic alternatives to one-party rule are routinely subject to police harassment and intrusive surveillance, detained incommunicado for long periods of time without access to legal counsel, and sentenced to increasingly long terms in prison for violating vague national security laws.

A café in Ho Chi Minh City

Recently, with the country facing declining rates of growth, a credit crunch, and a housing bubble, the government has turned its wrath on rich businesspeople presiding over businesses that are heavily in debt and failing. They are being arrested and tried for a variety of offenses, real or not, that were tolerated during the boom years. It is hard to know what to make of such arrests since, as in China, there is absolutely no transparency and much corruption. The Communist party elite in Vietnam is closely involved in business affairs; the arrests could reflect shifting fortunes in the Politburo, with the business allies of some leaders suffering for their declining political fortunes. Or the arrests could simply be an attempt to palliate public anger about slowing growth.

Western expatriates I spoke with in Ho Chi Minh City said they were amazed by the off-the-charts corruption prevalent throughout Vietnam; just as in China, this is holding back the country's long-term development. The rule of law is nonexistent. Instead there is the rule of the well connected. It is impossible to operate a business of any size without cultivating government connections; otherwise you may find your enterprise mysteriously shut down or expropriated.

The current state of affairs has created confusion and fostered corner-cutting among people who know that the Communist propaganda they were reared on is false and that the country's leaders are looking out for themselves and their families first. But the Vietnamese have no alternative, non-Communist vision to believe in. Instead, much like the denizens of other post-Marxist states such as Russia and China, they assume that everything they hear is lies and that anything is permissible in pursuit of personal enrichment.

The Chinese leadership is solving its similar problem of legitimacy by increasing nationalist agitation over islands in the South China Sea and East China Sea that are claimed by neighboring nations—including Vietnam. Beijing and Hanoi, along with Taipei, are at loggerheads, in particular, over the Paracel Islands, which Vietnam controlled from 1932 until a South

AP / LE QUANG NHAT

Vietnamese garrison was ousted by Chinese troops in 1974. Some smaller nations might back down in the face of Chinese bullying. Not Vietnam, which defeated a Chinese invasion in 1979. Another Sino-Vietnamese war is quite conceivable in the future as the ruling oligarchies in both countries seek to buttress their nationalist credentials.

There is an obvious opportunity here for the United States to draw closer to Vietnam and further contain the rise of Chinese power with a series of alliances with the states that ring the rising dragon. Don't forget, however, that Vietnam is a fundamentally illiberal, oppressive, and illegitimate government. As we have recently seen in Egypt, such allies cannot necessarily be counted upon for the longer term. ♦

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I certify that all information furnished above is true and complete.
Terry Eastland, Publisher

Our 19th-Century Curriculum

It's time for more databases, fewer quadratic equations.

by Andy Kessler

Going off to college or, like me, sending your child? Suckers! Why? Because after paying average private college tuition and room and board of $28,500 a year (Harvard is now $54,500), over half of college graduates with bachelor degrees under the age of 25 don't have jobs or are underemployed. Half! And this despite the 3.8 million job openings in the economy as of June. A whopping 1.5 million recent graduates just aren't qualified for outstanding jobs—not a ringing endorsement of higher education.

What's the problem? Most blame outsourcing or technology or the financial crisis. Forget it. Look no further than the huge disconnect between what colleges are turning out and what employers want in new hires. And the gap is widening. Sorry, but good old reading, writing, and 'rithmetic ain't cutting it anymore.

Check out the adjoining test. It looks just like the math section of the SAT or ACT tests you sweated over for college admissions, right? Except this one is from the entrance exam for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—from 1869. What was so important back then? Simple, the Brooklyn Bridge started construction in January 1870 and every other city in America was itching to build a steel-wire suspension bridge. Designers and builders were the hot jobs and required understanding parabolas and quadratic equations.

But can anyone explain why, 140+ years later, high schools and universities are teaching this same curriculum? We are building a bridge to the 19th century! Math and science are now being used as a filter, a set of problems used to separate the smart kids from the mediocre ones. James Gentile, president of Research Corporation for Science Advancement, put it plainly: "Introductory science classes . . . are frequently used as a way of weeding out students instead of cultivating them." We're basically teaching puzzles. How dumb is that?

Every politician pays lip service to the need for more STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) students. President Obama noted in the last State of the Union address, "I also hear from many business leaders who want to hire in the United States but can't find workers with the right skills. Growing industries in science and technology have twice as many openings as we have workers who can do the job. Think about that—openings at a time when millions of Americans are looking for work. That's inexcusable. And we know how to fix it." Lots of talk, not much action. Most students already know that hot air rises.

Fixing it means looking into the future, not the past. In addition to history and literature and basic communications skills needed for critical thinking, we ought to be teaching a curriculum that has some vague connection with the reality of what employers want today and over the next several decades. It can be hard, in order to separate the high achievers from the rest, but let's make it useful.

Comp sci: Outside of teaching, I can't think of too many math jobs. But just about every 21st-century

Andy Kessler, a former hedge-fund manager, is the author most recently of Eat People *(Portfolio, 2011).*

job will revolve around software and databases and extracting information from large sets of data. Computer science is the new "plastics." Whatever the job—pharmaceuticals, financial instruments, gas exploration, retailing, advertising, automobile design—it's increasingly software-centric. Yet comp sci is barely taught in high school and only encouraged for engineers and other geeky college majors. Math can be condensed into many fewer classes and augmented with new courses on programming and databases and using networks.

Language: Man-centuries of class time are wasted learning romantic languages. We don't need more translators, and a career at the United Nations is no longer glamorous. In the '60s and '70s, students used to be encouraged to take German in order to read scientific journals. In the '80s, learning to speak Japanese was considered critical. Lately, it's Mandarin. All a waste. My son tried to get out of his college language requirement by correctly claiming the Internet is in English and Google Translate handles the rest. He was rejected. If you want to require a useful language, make it Java or Perl or Python or any object-oriented language rather than Spanish. And as with foreign languages, start young, even 7th grade. You'll be surprised at how many are good at it.

Sciences: Biology is important, but too many high school curricula revolve around designing waste management plants and the biodiversity of rain forests. Even Darwin has been marginalized to less than a week. We need to get back to basics and add more genomics and DNA sequencing. Chemistry and physics are important disciplines. I've been told that any science with an adjective attached to its name is probably not a real science, but we should add useful tools for the mass of graduates that end up in sales and marketing. Behavioral science, psychology, organization science, decision theory, and, of course, statistics. Everybody hates statistics, thinking it the language of dull actuaries. But statistics and data are the core ingredients to how Facebook pages are arranged and Google search results are displayed and every web page looks and operates. No one guesses anymore.

Economics: So many important decisions are based on flaky economics. We need to teach students about the effect of interest rates, money supply, profits, and productivity on the economy. Instead, they are indoctrinated by economics textbooks that start out with some gobbledygook about marginal utility and end up with a Keynesian message that you can spend your way out of a recession. This is too important to leave to teachers not very good at math.

Changes need to start at universities and then trickle down to K-12, which follow college admission requirements. To keep U.S. education the envy of the world, our curriculum needs to be modernized. French and trigonometry and astronomy are no longer critical. The same computer science used by Khan Academy and Coursera and Udacity to change how education is delivered needs to be added to the curriculum as a core pillar of education for all students rather than remain a geeky backwater. If not, the number of unemployed bridge builders will continue to swell. ♦

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY.

ENTRANCE EXAMINATION, 1869–70.

ALGEBRA.

1. If $e=8$, find the numerical value of the following expression:

$$e-\{\surd(e+1)+2\}+(e-\sqrt[3]{e})\surd(e-4).$$

2. Simplify the following expression by removing the brackets and collecting like terms:

$$3a-[b+(2a-b)-(a-b)].$$

3. Multiply $3a^2+ab-b^2$ by $a^2-2ab-3b^2$, and divide the product by $a+b$.

4. Reduce the following fraction to its lowest terms:

$$\frac{x^6+a^2x^3y}{x^6-a^4y^2}.$$

5. Simplify $\left\{\frac{a+b}{a-b}+\frac{a-b}{a+b}\right\}\div\left\{\frac{a+b}{a-b}-\frac{a-b}{a+b}\right\}$.

6. Solve $\frac{3x-4}{2}-\frac{6x-5}{8}=\frac{3x-1}{16}$.

7. Solve $7x-5y=24$, $\quad 4x-3y=11$.

JUNE 7, 1869.

The Real Debate

The 2012 election is about far more than our pocketbooks

By Yuval Levin

Everybody knows that this election is supposed to be all about the economy. Employment, income, growth, and America's credit rating are too low, while spending, borrowing, deficits, poverty, and gas prices are too high, and voters must decide whether President Obama is responsible for all of that or whether Mitt Romney could do better. Polls certainly suggest that these questions are highest on voters' minds.

And yet, even as both parties acknowledge the centrality of the economy, both seem also to be powerfully drawn toward another, deeper kind of debate. That debate has mostly been evident when each party's politicians have assumed they are talking to their supporters and friends—in the non-televised early hours of their conventions this summer, in off-the-cuff remarks after a long day of campaigning, or at a fundraiser they did not know was being recorded. In those kinds of moments, both Democrats and Republicans seem to want to have a debate about the individual, society, and government in American life.

Each party is pulled into this debate by what it sees as the deeply misguided views of the other. Democrats listen to Republicans and hear a simpleminded and selfish radical individualism—or, as President Obama has put it, "nothing but thinly veiled Social Darwinism." They hear people who think that being successful and rich means you're smarter than everyone else or work harder than everyone else, and who therefore have no regard for those in our society who are in no position to start a business or get a loan. They hear people who have benefited from the privileges of being lucky in America and imagine they did it all by themselves. And they seek to teach these people that there is no such thing as a self-made success. This was what President Obama was getting at when he went off his script in Roanoke, Virginia, in July and made "you didn't build that" an instant classic. He was accusing his opponents of idolizing individual achievement while ignoring the preconditions for success made possible by the larger society—which he identified more or less exclusively with the government. Numerous speakers at this summer's Democratic convention similarly equated society and government, arguing, for instance, that (in the words of the convention's opening video) "government is the one thing we all belong to," and that (in the words of Rep. Barney Frank) "there are things that a civilized society needs that we can only do when we do them together, and when we do them together that's called government." Republicans, they suggested, don't believe in government because they don't believe in doing things together.

Republicans listen to Democrats, meanwhile, and hear a simpleminded and dangerous radical collectivism—or, as Mitt Romney has put it, a vision of America as "a government-centered society." They hear people who think that no success is earned and no accomplishment can be attributed to those who took the risks to make it happen. They hear people who think there is no value in personal drive and initiative, and who would like to extend the web of federal benefits as far and wide as possible to shield Americans from the private economy and make them dependent on government beneficence and on the liberal politicians who bestow it. And they seek to teach these people that private initiative is how prosperity happens, how dignity develops, and how America was built, and that dependence is pernicious and enervating. That was what speaker after speaker at the Republican convention had to say, often drawing on personal experience of entrepreneurship and social mobility. And, in a more confused and hapless way, it was what Mitt Romney was getting at in the now-infamous remarks he made at a fundraiser in May about the growing numbers of Americans receiving federal benefits.

Republicans accuse Democrats of ignoring individual achievement and overvaluing government achievements; Democrats accuse Republicans of ignoring government achievements and overvaluing individual achievement. It is not a coincidence that this unusual debate should be happening as the public is asked to render its verdict on the Obama years, but because that is the context in which it is happening, the debate often misses a crucial point.

Simply put, to see our fundamental political divisions as a tug of war between the government and the individual is to accept the progressive premise that individuals and the state are all there is to society. The premise of conservatism

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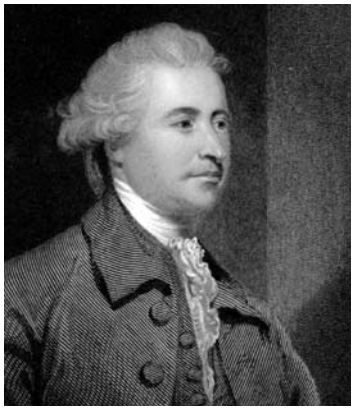
has always been, on the contrary, that what matters most about society happens in the space between those two, and that creating, sustaining, and protecting that space is a prime purpose of government. The real debate forced upon us by the Obama years—the underlying disagreement to which the two parties are drawn despite themselves—is in fact about the nature of that intermediate space, and of the mediating institutions that occupy it: the family, civil society, and the private economy.

Progressives in America have always viewed those institutions with suspicion, seeing them as instruments of division, prejudice, and selfishness and seeking to empower the government to rationalize the life of our society by clearing away those vestiges of backwardness and putting in their place public programs and policies motivated by a single, cohesive understanding of the public interest. Progressive social policy has sought to make the family less essential by providing for basic material needs, particularly for lower-income women with children. It has sought to make civil society less essential by assigning to the state many of the roles formerly played by religious congregations, civic associations, fraternal groups, and charities, especially in providing help to the poor. And progressive economic policy has sought to turn the private economy into an arm of government policy, consolidating key sectors and protecting from competition large corporations that are willing to act as public utilities or to advance policymakers' priorities.

The essence of Mitt Romney's proposals is to reform government in order to sustain our way of life—which has been the definition of conservatism since at least Edmund Burke.



In each case, the idea is to level the complex social topography of the space between individuals and the government, breaking up tightly knit clusters of citizens into individuals and then uniting all of those individuals under the national banner—allowing them to be free of the oppressive authority of family or community norms while building solidarity through the common experience of living as equal citizens of a great nation. Dependence on people you know is oppressive, the progressives imply, because it always comes with moral and social strings. But dependence on larger and more generic and distant systems of benefits and rules is liberating—it frees people from the undue moral sway of traditional social institutions even as it frees them from material want. A healthy dose of moral individualism combined with a healthy dose of economic collectivism make for a powerful mix of freedom and equality.

Conservatives have always resisted such a gross rationalization of society, however, and insisted that local knowledge channeled by evolving social institutions—from civic and fraternal groups to traditional religious establishments, to charitable enterprises and complex markets—will make for better material outcomes and a better common life. The life of a society consists of more than moving resources around, and what happens in that space between the individual and the government is vital—at least as much a matter of character formation as of material provision and wealth creation. Moral individualism mixed with economic collectivism only feels like freedom because it liberates people from responsibility in both arenas. But real freedom is only possible with real responsibility. And real responsibility is only possible when you depend upon, and are depended upon by, people you know. It is, in other words, only possible in precisely that space between the individual and the state that the left has long sought to collapse.

What happens in that space generally happens face to face—between parents and children, neighbors and friends, buyers and sellers. It therefore answers to immediately felt needs, and is tailored to the characters and sentiments of the people involved. This is both good and bad, to be sure. It means that what happens in that space can be moved by resentments and prejudices, by old hostilities and by greed and vanity. But it also can be, and often is, moved by warmer sentiments—by the love that binds families; by fraternity, friendship, and loyalty; by compassion for the poor and the weak; by a passion to see wrongs righted; by ambition and drive to excel and to be seen as excellent; by a desire to give your children more; by commitment to the place you are from and mutual support of neighbors; and by love of country. These sentiments, not systems of material provision, are what makes society tick, and what holds it together. And you could never replace them with government administration, however capable or rational it might be.

In that space, in other words, we do more than provide

for ourselves and others. We build our character and raise our children, we sustain and evolve our traditions and culture—we flourish and thrive. The various institutions and forces that act between the individual and the state do not all pull in the same direction, of course. There are disagreements and tensions, and different ideas of the common good and the individual good. Some of the most powerful cultural influences that operate there—like the ethic of the capitalist consumer and the ethic of the pious believer—can be in great tension with one another. But the diversity (indeed, at times the incoherence) of our public square is not proof of its backwardness or uselessness, as progressives have suggested. It is often a source of its strength, and of ours. It is what a free society looks like.

All of this, of course, forms citizens, too, and gives shape to our political life. That it lies between the individual and the state does not mean that this vital space stands apart from both, but that it necessarily shapes both, and our ideas of both—including our ideas of individual achievement and success.

This is one crucial point that today's progressives, who insist that no one builds anything alone, fail to grasp. The dense and layered network of social fibers that fills the space between the individual and the state makes it possible, among other things, to sustain an idea of earned success in America—an idea that is one of America's greatest achievements. It is built upon incentives and institutions—patterns of praise and blame and honor and duty—that yield the drive to work and innovate, and that alone make genuine self-reliance possible. The "you didn't build that" Democrats can see that none of this is truly achieved by any individual alone, but they are mistaken to jump to the conclusion that America's elevation of the individual achiever is therefore delusional. It is, rather, a function of an arrangement of society's circumstances, economic rules, cultural mores, and laws that make individual initiative and risk worthwhile and make hard work a plausible path to a better life. Success by this path is neither assured nor evenly distributed. We have not managed to make life fair, and we must help those who do not prosper or rise. But we have managed to make earned social mobility possible, and from that achievement we have derived an amazing trove of initiative, creativity, and gumption that has been an almost indescribably effective engine of both wealth and virtue for two centuries.

These circumstances, rules, and mores help us enable and reward success, and sustaining them sometimes involves a kind of celebration of success, which can easily be taken too far. But though the ideal of the lone risk-taking entrepreneur is certainly a creation of tradition and culture, it is not therefore a myth: It is a social achievement and is as real as America. And it is deeply tied to our other ideals—especially the ideal of social mobility.

To insist that anyone who celebrates these achievements of our society cannot at the same time bemoan the ballooning growth of government in recent years is to suggest that any common achievement—by proving the inadequacy of radical individualism as a theory of American life—is proof of the truth of progressivism. This is a theory of American life as confused as radical individualism itself, because it too sees nothing between the individual and the state and therefore it too is blind to the structure of American society and to the sources of its success.

There is no question that America's government is one of those sources, and a very important one. Government could never be a substitute for the mediating institutions of our society, but those institutions could not exist without the environment created and sustained by our system of government. While the progressive view of government has long involved the effort to shrink and clear the space between the individual and the state, the conservative view of government has long seen the purpose of the state as the creation, protection, and reinforcement of just that space. This involves, of course, defending the nation from its enemies, it involves creating and sustaining the infrastructure (both legal and material) for a thriving society, and it can involve taking actions or moving resources on a scale that only government could manage.

This means that government is crucially important, but it also means that limits on government are crucially important—and for the very same reason. Without those limits, the state can gravely threaten the space for private life that it is charged with protecting. It can do so by invading that space and attempting to fill it, and by collapsing that space under the weight of government's sheer size, scope, and cost. Both dangers have grown grave and alarming in our time—the first as an explicit goal of federal policymakers, the second as an unavoidable consequence of their actions—and the space between the individual and the state seems now to be in very real peril.

When our government carries out its proper task—building, sustaining, and protecting that space for private life—it plays its fitting part in the life of our free society, and earns the right to be elevated, even consecrated, with the adornments of patriotic piety: to be wrapped in the flag and identified with the larger society. But when it fails at its task and becomes a threat to the very way of life it is charged with protecting, it breeds only cynicism and resentment. It is no coincidence that our period of progressive government has been a period of declining faith in government.

The task of conservatives in politics today, therefore,

must be to restore an idea of government as a preserver and protector of the space in which our society thrives—of the social architecture of American life. And although they rarely speak in these terms, this is basically what today's conservatives propose in practice. They propose to reform the means of our government in order to preserve the shape of its relationship to the larger society as we have known it in the postwar era.

That relationship has involved a federal government that takes in and spends roughly a fifth of our economic output, protects the country, performs some basic services, offers support to the states in meeting some of their obligations, and provides income and health-insurance support to the elderly and the poor. Beyond that, it has involved an energetic and flourishing common life filled with countless civic, religious, fraternal, corporate, and charitable entities performing a mind-bogglingly immense array of functions—large and small, necessary or desired, wise or foolish—and constantly evolving in response to information and pressure moving from the individual and the family upward. That is where the other four-fifths of our economy lives, and how it grows and enables the American miracle to persist.

It has become increasingly apparent in recent decades that the trajectory of our welfare state is not consistent with the survival of this way of life. Left on its current course, the federal government will take up a greater and greater portion of our economic output (increasingly starving other social institutions and burdening future generations with debt) and will become less and less able to perform its own crucial tasks (as the costs of benefit payments to individuals overwhelm all other functions). Meanwhile, the character of some of those programs of benefit payment threatens to undermine the character of our citizens.

The latter problem, which conservatives often describe in terms of dependency, is better understood in terms of entitlement. People so poor they actually depend on government support surely deserve our help and a path to independence, which our public programs too often deny them. But it is people who are not dependent but who nonetheless feel entitled to benefits who really pose a challenge to republican citizenship. Because not only the poor but the great mass of citizens become recipients of benefits in our welfare state, too many people in the middle class come to approach their government as claimants, not as self-governing citizens.

The essence of Mitt Romney's policy proposals this year (and the essence of the House Republican budgets of the last few years) might be described as changing the structure of government programs for the sake of preserving the structure of American society. They propose to reform government in order to sustain our way of life—which has been the definition of conservatism since at least Edmund Burke.

Romney, for instance, proposes to keep the size of the federal government at roughly 20 percent of GDP (federal spending averaged 19.7 percent of GDP from 1950 to 2008, but has averaged 24.4 percent since 2009 and is slated to rise sharply in the coming decades), to maintain something like the balance we have known between the government's various functions (defense, domestic discretionary spending, and benefits to individuals), and to modernize some of our failing governing institutions—all of which he would make possible by reforming our tax system and our entitlement system, particularly the health care entitlements driving the ballooning of the welfare state. He proposes a set of ingenious ways to continue performing the functions of those programs—to continue providing health and income support to the poor and the old—without making everything else our society does increasingly untenable. This is hardly a radical agenda of austerity and retrogression. It is an agenda of modernization for the sake of preservation.

President Obama's agenda, on the other hand, is in essence an attempt to preserve the structure of our government programs at the cost of transforming American society. To avoid reforming our entitlement system and tax code, he would abide a far larger government than America has known, and would have that government increasingly invade and collapse the space between the citizen and the state—the space where our society does most of its living.

In effect, both parties are trying to preserve something of the postwar era, but they disagree about just what merits preserving. The Democrats think the design of key government programs was the essence of that era's success, while Republicans think it was a function of a particular relationship between society and government.

That suggests a very great deal is at stake in this election. It is no surprise that neither party seems quite satisfied with a debate about the narrow set of metrics we have come to call "the economy." But in the debate they are drawn to instead, conservatives must take a broader and deeper view of what they are defending and why. They stand not so much for the individual against the state, but for a vision of American life that consists of more than individuals and the state. They stand for American society—citizens, families, communities, civil society, a free-market economy, and a constitutional government. They stand for a way of life now increasingly endangered, and well worth preserving and modernizing—a way of life that is decidedly not better off than it was four years ago. ♦

Jesus' Ex-Wife

Another much-hyped Gnostic "gospel" fails to upend Christianity

By Charlotte Allen

Jesus had a wife! It's the Gospel of Judas all over again. An exotic Gnostic document claimed to date from the third century, written in Coptic, containing something startling about Jesus, and shrouded in secrecy until its sudden and dramatic unveiling. Next comes the *derecho* of media publicity, the carefully timed television documentary, the speculation that this means the end of Christianity as we know it, and then, with the finality of a soufflé collapsing as the oven door opens, the revelation that the document isn't, or may well not be, exactly what its promoters say it is.

In Judas' case the deflation took several months over 2006 and 2007, as it became clear that the "good Judas" (instead of the traitor Judas of the four Christian gospels) revealed in the Gnostic document was the product of hasty mistranscriptions and wishful thinking. In the case of "Jesus' Wife"—a tiny rectangle of tattered papyrus on which the words "Jesus said to them, 'my wife'" appear in Coptic, contradicting two thousand years of Christian belief that he was celibate—the deflation process has taken only a week. Amid the Niagara of press coverage and speculation, a number of Coptic scholars have concluded that the "Jesus' Wife" fragment is a fake. They deem it a collage of phrases cribbed nearly word for word from another fourth-century Gnostic text, the Gospel of Thomas, and inked by a modern forger onto a blank scrap of ancient papyrus.

At the center of both controversies is Karen L. King, a professor at Harvard Divinity School who announced the existence of the fragment and its contents at a Coptic conference in Rome on September 18. King is known for her writings about alternative early "Christianities" that seem more easygoing and congenial to moderns than the traditional version. King's writings have also promoted Mary Magdalene as a disciple of Jesus whose importance was suppressed by misogynistic church fathers—but not by the female-friendly Gnostics, who made her a key figure in many of their writings, including one text in which Jesus kisses her, possibly on the lips. King maintains that a "Mary" who may be the "wife" referred to by Jesus is Mary Magdalene. It's shades of *The Da Vinci Code*, where Mary is not only married to Jesus but the mother of his children—although King has repeatedly insisted that the text is not evidence that Jesus was actually married, but only that some early Christians, namely the Gnostics, thought that he was married. King believes that "Jesus' Wife," like many Gnostic manuscripts, is a fourth-century copy of a text probably written during the second century, when the Gnostics were most prolific and also most vigorously denounced by their orthodox Christian enemies.

The parallels in trajectory for the two Gnostic texts are inescapable. Both came from dubious sources, private dealers in antiquities who often sell manuscripts and other objects that have been stolen from archaeological sites or spirited illegally out of the countries where they were found. No one knows, for example, where the codex containing the Gospel of Judas came from, although it is widely agreed to be an authentic 1,700-year-old manuscript, probably buried for centuries in the Egyptian desert. The National Geographic Society bought the rights to translate and publish Judas for a reported $1 million, then assembled a team of scholars to transcribe the Coptic words and produce an English translation, all in utmost secrecy over a few months, so that the release would coincide with a *National Geographic* television special about it, all nicely timed for Palm Sunday 2006. The team included such biblical-studies celebrities as Elaine Pagels, author of a string of bestselling books about Gnosticism, and Bart Ehrman, author of the bestselling *Misquoting Jesus* (2005), which argues that the scribes who wrote down the New Testament deliberately mangled the narratives.

It was the lead translator, the recently deceased Marvin Meyer, a religious-studies professor at Chapman University, who, helped along by Ehrman, more or less invented the "good Judas." In Meyer's translation and subsequent statements by him and Ehrman, Judas is Jesus' closest friend and confidant, who betrays his master only because Jesus wants him to, so that Jesus can shed his material body at the crucifixion and ascend into the spiritual realm (in Gnostic theology Jesus didn't rise from the dead bodily as Christians believe). Newspapers around the world reported on the sudden transformation of Judas from villain to hero. There was

Charlotte Allen, author of The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus, *has a doctorate in medieval studies.*

speculation that Christianity would be similarly transformed —that the crucifixion story would have to be rewritten in order to accommodate the rehabilitated Judas. Meyer and others tried to make it clear, as Karen King has done with "Jesus' Wife," that the Gospel of Judas was more about second- and fourth-century Christian diversity than about the historical Jesus, but few people paid attention to that.

Problems with Meyer's translation came to light when April DeConick, a Coptologist and professor of biblical studies at Rice University who knew about the Judas manuscript's existence although she was not on the *National Geographic* team, downloaded the translation and realized that Judas wasn't selling out Jesus as a favor to his master but sacrificing him to a malevolent deity in the complex Gnostic cosmology. In short, Judas was an even worse figure in the Gospel of Judas than in the four traditional Gospels. DeConick faulted Meyer for, among other things, translating the Greek loanword "daimon," which in Christian literature always means "demon," as the more neutral word "spirit," so that Judas looked more appealing. In a subsequent essay for the *New York Times*, she wrote of the mistranslations: "Were they genuine errors or was something deliberate going on?" Meyer, for his part, in an interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, accused DeConick of sour grapes because she hadn't been on the *National Geographic* team. But she was only one of several Coptic scholars to criticize Meyer's translations, which he modified to some extent in a subsequent edition.

Five years later, and with Meyer now dead from cancer at age 64, DeConick faults the *National Geographic*'s secrecy rules more than Meyer himself for the mistranslations. "The *National Geographic* wouldn't release photos of the manuscript itself," she said in a telephone interview. "The translators were under a deadline for publishing, so they worked at it piecemeal. They would transcribe a page and then translate it into English, and what happens when you work like that is that you can't easily go back and see how your translation fits with what you've already translated. It was that process that probably led to the mistranslations. That and the nondisclosure agreements they all signed, which prevented them from passing around their work to other scholars for their comments, which is the usual practice." DeConick said that the translation team might have been unduly influenced by the second-century bishop Irenaeus, who wrote that the Gnostics had produced a gospel that put Judas in a good light. "They were looking for that, and they found what they were looking for," she said.

Karen King got involved with the Gospel of Judas when she and Pagels coauthored a bestselling book, *Reading Judas*, that came out about a year after the *National Geographic* documentary. King, who is skilled in Coptic, made her own translation, while Pagels added an interpretive essay exploring themes of early Christian diversity that she has championed in many of her other books. King's translation was less tendentious than Meyer's, but she and Pagels did insist that the Judas they saw in the Gospel of Judas was not the evil figure DeConick had seen, but a complex character who seemed to be a sounding-board for the gospel author's Gnostic speculations. King translated the word "daimon" as "god," another word that DeConick and others criticized as off-base (and Pagels later said she regretted having chosen).

King's handling of the "Jesus' Wife" manuscript has been far more circumspect and determinedly conscientious —although not without its own high drama and apparently orchestrated publicity. For example, the title of the paper she presented to the International Association of Coptic Studies on September 18 was simply "A New Coptic Gospel Fragment," as though she had not been eager to tip off her fellow scholars about the paper's explosive contents until she started reading. Nearly simultaneously, she released online a 52-page, heavily footnoted article that she had submitted to the *Harvard Theological Review* that included her transcription and translation of the fragment's text. King said the article would be published in January 2013, pending a testing of the fragment's ink to determine its authenticity.

Meanwhile, she wrote, Roger Bagnall, head of New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World and widely regarded as dean of the world's papyrologists, had examined the fragment and vouched for it, assigning to it a solid fourth-century date. King gave the 1.5″ x 3″ scrap, smaller than an ATM card and containing not a single complete sentence in its eight lines of crudely lettered script, the grandiose title Gospel of Jesus's Wife. She wrote, with equal grandiosity: "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife makes it possible to speak with certainty of the existence of a tradition affirming that Jesus was married (probably to Mary Magdalene), and it is highly probable that this tradition dates to the second half of the second century." That's an extravagant claim for eight incomplete sentences. It is, for example, impossible to determine from the scrap's fragmented text who exactly the "Mary" is, much less that she is Mary Magdalene.

Standing in for *National Geographic* this time around is the Smithsonian, which has scheduled a "Jesus' Wife" television documentary for September 30. As happened with the Gospel of Judas in 2006, the massive press coverage has focused more on the possibility that the historical Jesus actually said "I do" than on what some obscure group of Gnostics might have believed about his marital status a couple of centuries later. And as before, scholars knowledgeable about Coptic manuscripts wonder if King was rolled.

Among the first to weigh in, on the day after her presentation in Rome, was Christian Askeland, a research scholar in Münster who attended the conference and polled his confrères, two-thirds of whom appeared to be extremely

skeptical about the fragment's authenticity and one-third of whom concluded it was a forgery. Commenters on Askeland's blog who had access to a photograph of the fragment noted such oddities as the fact that the words "my wife" (*tahime*—three syllables in Coptic) appear on line 4, nearly in the middle of the scrap, screaming, "Look at me!" and that the cramped, inelegant letters on the papyrus looked as though they had been applied by a brush instead of the calamus, or reed-pen, that ancient scribes used. Other commenters noted grammatical irregularities in the Coptic, something that Ariel Shisha-Halevy, a Coptic linguist at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, had already pointed out to King, as she noted in her article. The fragment had a shadowy provenance. King stated in her article that it belonged to a "private collector" who preferred to remain anonymous, that the collector had correspondence in hand from the 1980s indicating the item once belonged to a professor in Germany, and that it appeared to have been cut from a larger, page-size piece of papyrus for the possible purpose of a sale.

The scrap then caught the attention of Francis Watson, a theology and religion professor at Durham University. Watson noticed that the enigmatic reference to "Mary"—"Mary is worthy of it" on line 3—was similar to a line in the Gospel of Thomas, "Mary is not worthy of it," spoken by the apostle Peter, who deems Mary's female sex a bar to her heavenly ascension. Watson reached for his printed edition of Thomas to see if there were any other correspondences. He discovered that the first half of the first line of "Jesus' Wife" was identical to the first half of the last line on page 49 of his printed edition of Thomas (including an identical word-break)—and that the second half of that first line of the "Jesus' Wife" fragment was nearly identical to the second half of the first line on page 50 of the printed edition. That suggested that a forger might have simply flipped the page to paste together a line of text out of two consecutive lines in his source. "That was an absolute red flag to me," said Watson in a telephone interview.

Watson worked through the Gospel of Thomas methodically, coming up with nearly five lines in the Gospel of Jesus' Wife that appeared to have been cobbled together out of bits and pieces of Thomas. On September 20, just two days after King made her presentation in Rome, Watson published a six-page online article, "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife: How a fake Gospel-Fragment was composed." Watson concluded that the alleged forger knew some Coptic and had to have been familiar with a printed edition of Thomas—and thus confected his text relatively recently (the Gospel of Thomas, part of a trove of manuscripts found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, wasn't published until the 1970s). Once Watson's article appeared, other Coptic scholars began chiming in, finding more word-for-word correspondences between "Jesus' Wife" and Thomas. It appears that "the whole thing is from Thomas," Watson said. He speculated that King might have gotten fooled because she was looking for something large—a Gnostic context in which to place the fragment. "I was looking for something small, the Gospel of Thomas," he said. There have been reports that the *Harvard Theological Review* has withdrawn King's article—although a spokesman for the *Review* insisted by email that the article will go forward if the fragment can be authenticated.

King did not respond to email requests for an interview. Roger Bagnall, also contacted by email, wrote back, "I'm sorry, but I'm fully occupied this week." Still, there is something to be said in King's defense. For one thing, many of those bits and pieces from Thomas really are bits and pieces, drawn, if they were indeed drawn, from some 18 separate lines in the printed Gnostic gospel. "It doesn't really demonstrate anything," said Michael Peppard, a theology professor and Coptic expert at Fordham University, in a telephone interview. "All it demonstrates is that this manuscript resembles things said in the Gospel of Thomas. In fact, maybe what we have here is a variant manuscript of Thomas." Peppard faulted Watson and the other online writers for ignoring the worn back side of the papyrus, which contains some nearly unintelligible words that haven't been accounted for in Thomas—and for drawing conclusions based only on photos of the manuscript rather than the papyrus itself. Finally, Peppard pointed out, there is one phrase in the fragment that doesn't appear in Thomas: those telling words "my wife." "Where would a forger have gotten that?" asked Peppard, pointing out that "hime" is an uncommon spelling of the Coptic word "s-hime" for "woman" or "wife."

One lesson to be learned from the Gospel of Jesus' Wife—and from the Gospel of Judas, for that matter—is that people really do find what they are looking for. Ever since Elaine Pagels published *The Gnostic Gospels* in 1979, bringing the Nag Hammadi texts to public attention and using them to argue for a diverse array of early Christian beliefs, people have turned to Gnosticism to carve out for themselves an alternative Christianity more suited to contemporary tastes: nonhierarchical, feminist-leaning, focused on inner spiritual development rather than sacrifice and suffering. Actually, the process began long before Nag Hammadi. Philip Jenkins, a professor at Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion and author of *The Hidden Gospels* (2001), notes that the first "lost" Gnostic text, *Pistis Sophia*, was discovered in 1773, and it inspired two centuries' worth of spiritual-but-not-religious questers before anyone had ever heard of Pagels. "It gave them a Jesus who's free of dogma and church rules, who's easily integrated into Hinduism and Buddhism and alternate routes to the sacred. But people still feel that they need scriptures to justify this. It's their Jewish and Christian heritage: Something is only justified if there are real scriptures behind it." ♦

The Battle for Aleppo

A report from the front lines of the Syrian civil war

By Jonathan Spyer

Aleppo, Syria

The area around Aleppo, Syria's largest city, is famous for the Dead Cities, a group of about 700 abandoned settlements, empty since the 10th century. These were once of great interest to archaeologists. Today, Bashar al-Assad is trying to turn Aleppo into another city of the dead.

I entered Aleppo governorate in broad daylight, crossing through an olive grove on the Turkish border. Once over, I was picked up by a driver affiliated with the Free Syrian Army, and we continued on our peaceful way, taking the highway to the warzone of Aleppo city. The Assad regime no longer exists as a functioning presence in the surrounding countryside. The FSA, in its various local manifestations and with its various political allies, has the final word.

One of the Arab world's great cities, ravaged by the Assad regime

As we made our way through villages and towns, we passed through a line of FSA checkpoints. Bored rebel soldiers waved us on, after a couple of perfunctory questions. The differing quality of the FSA units was immediately apparent. The frequency of checkpoints and the military bearing of the men crewing them grew more serious as we got closer to the city.

At the entrance to Maare village, the checkpoint was maintained by fighters of the Tawhid Brigade. These uniformed men have an obvious élan that distinguished them from most of the other fighting units in the opposition. Still, the coordination and governorate-wide organization of the rebels revealed by the system of checkpoints was impressive.

The relative tranquility in the villages between the border and Aleppo city is deceptive, however. Assad's power is not manifested in the few remaining points on the ground he controls but in his near-complete mastery of the air. This enables the dictator to maintain a reign of terror even over areas physically held by his opponents, as we would discover.

There is a sharp change in atmosphere as one enters Aleppo city from the surrounding countryside. Assad has conceded the battle on the ground in the area north of the city, but in the urban area itself the dictator is fighting for every inch. Aleppo is one of the great cities of the Arab world—larger than Syria's capital, Damascus. Assad understands that he must break the advance of the rebellion there or lose his crown. Failure to do so will mean forfeiting any serious claim to being the ruler of Syria, and becoming just another side in a civil war. The rebels, too, understand the central significance of the fight for Aleppo.

Evidence of the last two months of fighting was inescapable traveling through the city. Much of Aleppo appeared to be devastated. We spent three days touring the frontline outposts, a strange and eerie landscape. The forward positions of the FSA, where the rebels clash with the government forces, were empty of civilians. The streets were strewn with rubble, many of the buildings reduced to bombed-out husks. Destroyed cars and buses marked out the territory. The rebels drag and arrange them at the ends of streets to hinder the movement of armored vehicles.

All around, there are two constants. The first is the incessant noise of small arms fire and the explosion of mortar shells, punctuated every so often by the huge noise of an aerial bomb detonating. The second is the smell of the frontline—an acrid combination of uncollected garbage, excrement, smoke, and cordite.

Yet deeper inside rebel-held territory, in the Sha'ar

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neighborhood, for instance, something resembling normal life is continuing. People are on the streets going about their daily business. Shops and cafés are open. This is a normality of the most fragile kind. It can be broken in an instant by the appearance of one of the regime's fighter jets or attack helicopters, which strafe the rebel-held parts of the city, firing rockets and dropping bombs.

So how are things going in the battle for Aleppo? I asked Abu Ahmed, a gravel-voiced commander of the Storm of the North battalion, at a frontline position in the Bustan al-Basha section of the city. Abu Ahmed, who was clearly exhausted, described an attempt by the regime army the previous week to regain control of the neighborhood. "First they started shelling, so we evacuated the civilian population from here," he said. "Then they came in with tanks and soldiers and *shabiha* [the Assad regime's paramilitary forces] guiding them in the first line. It was heavy fighting for two days. But in the end they had to fall back. Then they started the shelling again—and the bombs from the air, of course, and the rockets. But we're in control here."

Tawhid Brigade fighters, whose élan distinguishes them from other rebel units; a bombed-out mosque and destroyed regime tank

Who's winning, I asked. I expect a propagandistic reply. Instead, Abu Ahmed acknowledged a stalemate: "We're pressing them all the time, but the regime is gathering its strength in the center of Aleppo, at the citadel, which it knows it has to hold.

"We're short of weapons," he continued. "Everything we get we take from the regime army. The world doesn't back us because they think the revolution is Salafi [extreme Islamist]."

This impression of tense stalemate was reinforced as we traveled into areas held by other rebel battalions. Saumar, the big, slow-talking commander of the Afhad al-Rasul battalion in the Mashad district of the city, acknowledged the rebels' shortage of weaponry and ammunition. "In general, we're on the attack," he said. "We control the Salah al-Din neighborhood now. We're near the Ramous highway. But the problem is equipment and bullets."

News reports suggest that the rebels now control between 60 to 70 percent of Aleppo. I had no opportunity to meet the government troops, of course, but they are reportedly tired, demoralized, and afraid. The rebels that I met are not in that frame of mind. They are tired, too, after the bloody two-month slogging match in the city. But morale is high. They believe they are on the road to victory.

The rebel forces in Aleppo consist of a large number of independently constituted battalions, each gathered around a particular neighborhood and a particular commander. Saumar notes that commanders of all battalions meet daily to coordinate operations. He and Abu Ahmed are both Sunni, neither of them Islamist. Both describe themselves as loyal to the Free Syrian Army.

Neither commander professed loyalty to the notional overall leadership of the FSA, at the time still based in Turkey. "I'm a field commander," Saumar said, "and I'm part of the Aleppo military council. But I'm not part of any external group, and I don't see them as authoritative."

Both men stressed an underlying unity among rebel units deriving from the simple goal of defeating and destroying the Assad regime. In Aleppo, I found no reason to doubt this claim, but it raised as many questions as it answered. The FSA is almost exclusively Sunni Arab. But it is not, as one Assad propaganda campaign with some success in Western capitals has it, motivated solely or mainly by Islamist ardor, either of the Muslim Brotherhood or the Salafist variety. But if the FSA's only basis for unity is military-tactical, what does this mean for the future political direction of Syria, in the event of the regime's defeat?

My attempts to bring up the subject of the Syrian

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN SPYER

National Council or any of the other supposed umbrella groupings of the opposition were immediately dismissed.

The two most noticeable rebel units in Aleppo, and the only two who appear to transcend the general arrangement of local FSA-affiliated battalions, are the Tawhid Brigade and the Ahrar al-Sham group, both of which are tied to the Islamist current. Checkpoints affiliated with these groups have been established at the most prominent entrance points to the city, testifying to a sort of hierarchy of units, in which these feature close to the top.

Ahrar al-Sham fighters, in their mode of dress and their slogans, clearly identify themselves as Salafist Islamists. Their checkpoints and positions fly white, black, and green flags with slogans from the Koran written on them. They are rumored to be supported by Saudi Arabia and to be affiliated with al Qaeda. My own contacts did not extend to this organization.

The basement of Dar al-Shifa hospital during an aerial assault

Tawhid fighters, by contrast, do not markedly differ in their appearance from the FSA groupings. But the brigade, doubtless the largest single rebel group operating in the Aleppo area, maintains a separate leadership structure from the Aleppo military council and the FSA. I met with one of Tawhid's leaders, in the Saif al-Dawli section of the city. The man, middle-aged, ginger-bearded, from the Al-Bab area northeast of Aleppo, described himself as one of the five commanders of the brigade. He was frank regarding Tawhid's differences with the FSA and the Aleppo Military Council. "At the moment the Military Council has cut support from us. But we believe it will be restored in the near future."

What was the reason for the cut in support, I asked. "Fear," he said. "Fear of the Islamic states." (Tawhid is rumored to be a major beneficiary of aid from Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood.) And was this fear justified? Was Tawhid receiving aid from Islamic countries and movements? I didn't expect a straight answer and was not disappointed. "Relief materials only," he replied.

In contrast to the FSA fighters and field commanders that I met, the Tawhid commander had no hesitation in describing his political ambitions for Syria. "All the forces want one thing, one thought—an Islamic state, but with protection for minority rights."

He was predictably dismissive of the Syrian National Council, describing it as a "spokesman" for the Syrian people, rather than a political authority. "The real leadership is inside Syria, in the field—not in Turkey."

He had the usual cool politeness and optimism of Islamists. But his parting words to me combined strategic optimism with tactical concern. "The rebels trust in their own motivation and in the help of God. But what we need right now," he added, "is antiaircraft weapons."

The helplessness of the rebels in the face of aerial attacks was demonstrated during my time in Aleppo. I was at the Dar al-Shifa hospital in the Sha'ar neighborhood when it was attacked by a regime jet fighter.

Dar al-Shifa is one of two hospitals serving both FSA fighters and civilians in the rebel-controlled part of the city. Along with hospital staff and families of patients, I was forced to take refuge in the basement of the hospital during the attack. The fighter jet dropped a bomb that landed about 10 yards from the entrance to the hospital, killing and wounding a number of people in the street. The jet made a second run over the hospital, firing off a salvo of rockets that caused the electricity supply in the hospital to temporarily shut down.

The bombing of a hospital is a war crime, an attack against a defenseless civilian population. According to Dar al-Shifa staffers, it is a near-daily occurrence.

Airpower is Assad's main weapon at this stage in the battle for Aleppo. Jet fighters and helicopters drone above like large insects. Flying uncontested over the city, they seem to cruise or hover aimlessly, before swooping down to release their charge with terrible noise and devastation among the population below.

The fighter jets drop a type of bomb that resembles an oildrum filled with explosives. It hits the ground, then explodes about five seconds later. Aleppans have grown used to waiting, but my driver, Mahmoud, was almost killed when he ran into the street to try to move his car after a bomb hit the ground, thinking that the noise it made on impact was the explosion itself. An Aleppan who held him back saved his life. The car was badly damaged, the windshield shattered.

Later, I visited the site of a major aerial bombing in Azaz, north of Aleppo. The bombing, in which around 75 people were killed, had reduced a whole neighborhood to rubble. An old man was moving what remained of his

property from the ruins of his former dwelling. Two of his nephews had died in the bombing. He worked himself into a fury as we asked him about the details. "Neither the Jews, nor the Americans, nor the French, nor the British ever did anything like this," he said, as he counted off modern Syria's fabled enemies on his fingers.

The aerial bombings have created a huge population of Syrian refugees across the border in Turkey, living precariously in the countryside along the border fence, or at the makeshift refugee camp established at the Bab al-Salaam crossing point, due north of Azaz and about two hours' drive from Aleppo.

To encounter this population is to understand the terrible human cost of the methods employed by the Assad regime. A schoolteacher from Azaz, encamped with his family at Bab el-Salaam, told me that his children become hysterical when they hear the sound of aircraft. Another man, who had been prescribed anti-depressant tablets, handed me a roll of them. "Here," he said, "a present. You'll be needing these when you get back."

A refugee boy cradles his sister, wounded by a bomb fragment.

A third man, whose attempts at eloquence gave way to tears, sent his son to bring me one of his daughters from the tent. The little girl, who could not have been more than 4, had suffered severe brain damage from a bomb fragment. She squirmed and wriggled in her brother's arms, her mouth opening and closing. Her father, weeping silently, showed me the scar on her head where the fragment had entered.

A crime of great magnitude is under way in Syria. As the dictatorship loses ground, it is attacking its own civilian population with terrible and indiscriminate violence.

Observation of the military and political situation in Aleppo from a Western point of view leads directly to an inescapable dilemma. On the one hand, the Assad regime is a criminal enterprise, now busily engaged in the energetic slaughter of a considerable part of its own civilian population. It is also an ally of the most dangerous anti-Western and aggressively antidemocratic alliance in the Middle East, the Iran-led bloc.

For all these reasons, increased aid and intervention on behalf of the rebellion would appear to represent a rare alignment of strategic and ethical responsibilities. The means by which this could be undertaken are familiar: a no-fly zone in the north, increased weaponry including antiaircraft ordnance for the rebellion, a safe zone for refugees.

But there is another consideration that became clearer to me during my talks and meetings in Aleppo. Sunni Islamism is having its moment in the Arabic-speaking world. This is apparent in the nature of the Syrian insurgency. The most powerful forces engaged against the dictator do not represent liberty in the form recognizable to the Western mind.

There are many non-Islamist fighters and commanders among the rebels. But the best-organized, and the only ones with a clear vision of Syria beyond Assad in the crucial Aleppo front, are the Islamists. It is important to note that the more extreme, al Qaeda-type jihadists exist only in relatively small numbers. But the insurgency as a whole was born in rural Sunni Arab communities. Today in Aleppo, the rebel fighters hail overwhelmingly not from the city itself, but from the surrounding villages and towns of Aleppo governorate. If victorious, this rebellion will almost certainly give birth to a conservative, Sunni regime.

The question then is whether the Sunni Islamist ferment now under way across the region constitutes a greater danger to Western interests than the Iran-led bloc of which Assad is a cornerstone.

In the wake of events over the last month in the Middle East, that concern is yet more pressing. After a terrorist attack in Benghazi killing a U.S. ambassador and three other Americans, and the storming of the U.S. embassy compound in Cairo, it's hardly surprising that Americans are wary of backing a side in Syria that might in time turn against U.S. interests. And yet the failure to engage further with the rebellion makes a bad outcome certain: either the victory of Assad, or the emergence of a Sunni Islamist regime with no links, debts, or client loyalty to the West.

The United States and other Western powers have typically prioritized threats, to be dealt with in order of urgency. First there were the Nazis, and then the Soviets. The pressing issue in the Middle East is still the Islamist bloc led by Iran that is racing toward a nuclear arms program. Ensuring that the rebellion against Assad succeeds would strike a major blow against the mullahs. ♦

Claude Lanzmann (right) revisits Auschwitz, 1993

Witness to History

Claude Lanzmann's journey to 'Shoah.' BY BENJAMIN BALINT

Sometimes, a perfectly realized masterwork so far exceeds its mortal creator that it seems something larger and more powerful is speaking through him.

For all its virtuosity, little in the first three-quarters of Claude Lanzmann's memoir accounts for *Shoah*, his nine-and-a-half-hour testament to the extermination of Europe's Jews, an overwhelming film Marcel Ophüls called "the greatest documentary about contemporary history ever made." The bulk of *The Patagonian Hare*, published in France in 2009, narrates the transformation of a young man on the make into a jet-set Left Bank intellectual who pops up, Zelig-like, in an astonishing array of loosely connected scenes, wherever adventure beckoned.

The Patagonian Hare
A Memoir
by Claude Lanzmann
trans. by Frank Wynne
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 544 pp., $35

The book was not written, exactly, but dictated to two of Lanzmann's assistants, and the style is digressive ("I forgot to mention that. . ."). The tone rings wistful; it is a book written at the end of a full life. "I love life madly, love it all the more now that I am close to leaving it," says Lanzmann, now 86.

Here is Lanzmann as a teenaged fighter in the French Resistance, collecting cases of revolvers and grenades and laying crude ambushes for SS convoys. Here he is making love all through the night before the entrance exam to the École normale supérieure, or, after writing a dissertation on Leibniz, teaching philosophy *dans le boudoir* to a well-connected older woman. He presents himself as a seducer of women, and attests that he loathes "with every fiber of my being, the billing and cooing of courtship."

Later, he appears as the bon vivant freelance journalist writing celebrity profiles for *Elle*, covering sensational trials for *France Dimanche*, chatting with Sophia Loren in her kitchen at six in the morning, and aboard the *Calypso* as Jacques Cousteau's

GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY IMAGES

Benjamin Balint, a resident of Jerusalem, is the author of Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine that Transformed the Jewish Left into the Neoconservative Right.

ghostwriter. Elsewhere we find him sitting on the floor in a bare apartment in a Tunis suburb, entranced by Frantz Fanon discoursing about the Algerian revolution, or at a manor in Heidelberg discussing the monuments to the Thousand-Year Reich with Albert Speer.

Then he is dining with Kim Il Sung as a member of the first Western delegation to North Korea, enjoying a long audience with President Nasser in Cairo, crossing the Suez Canal with Ariel Sharon hours after the ceasefire of the Yom Kippur War. Above all, here he is with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in the editorial offices of *Les Temps modernes*, the cultural review they launched in 1945, and which Lanzmann edits to this day.

"I met them all," Lanzmann writes.

Of them all, the existentialist duo made the most lasting impression on Lanzmann, who recounts here both his deepening affection for the combative Sartre, despite the philosopher's "infantile fits of jealousy," and his love affair with Beauvoir, 17 years his senior. "I am the only man with whom Simone de Beauvoir lived a quasi-marital existence," Lanzmann writes. (She described the relationship differently: Lanzmann, she wrote to Nelson Algren in 1954, "is for me rather a kind of incestuous son than a lover. . . . He asks for a motherly tenderness rather than something else.") To make matters even more claustrophobic, Sartre had meanwhile set up Lanzmann's sister Évelyne as his secret mistress.

Sartre put his young prodigy on a collision course with what would become his life's (and this memoir's) deepest theme. When, at age 21, he came upon Sartre's description of "Jewish inauthenticity" in his essay *Anti-Semite and Jew* (originally published in 1946 as *Réflexions sur la question juive*), Lanzmann writes, "I suddenly found a portrait of myself, perfectly depicted." On reflection, he adds, "I was identical to the Jew described in it, raised outside any religion, any tradition, any culture that might be called Jewish."

Not that Lanzmann hadn't been aware of his Jewishness. He describes being "profoundly shaken and terrorized by the force and the virulence of the anti-Semitism at [my] Parisian *lycée*." But that awareness came accompanied by something else: "I also became aware of the fear and the cowardice in myself. Hiding behind a pillar in the school playground, I watched—petrified, making no attempt to intervene, terrified that I might be discovered—as my classmates all but lynched a lanky, red-haired Jew named Levy."

ROGER VIOLLET / GETTY IMAGES

Over time, as others noticed him, his fear transmuted itself into rage. In her memoir *Force of Circumstance* (1963), Beauvoir wrote:

> I could feel, buried inside him, flexing its muscles, a violence always ready to explode. Sometimes in the morning after some disturbing dream, he would wake up shouting at me: "You're all kapos!"

In the effort to confront his Jewish identity and his feelings of shame and fear—and in thrall to the image he had of the ardent pioneers of the kibbutzim, aglow with limitless idealism—Lanzmann embarked on his first trip to Israel in 1952. His encounters with the fledgling state over the next two decades would both distance him from Sartre—who, according to Lanzmann, displayed an "obstinate refusal even to try to understand Israel"—and lead to his first documentary, *Israel, Why* (*Pourquoi Israël*), released in 1973.

This first film, in turn, led to the suggestion from an Israeli official that he make a film about the Holocaust. Making it would consume the next dozen years of Lanzmann's life, and the behind-the-scenes account he gives in the last quarter of *The Patagonian Hare*, where everything comes into focus, affords the first glimpse of a man seized, at last, by a sense of urgency.

During a speech Lanzmann later delivered at the Memorial of the Shoah in Paris, he made clear how the resolve that spurred him to his life's greatest work was rooted in the earlier preoccupation with Jewish identity:

> Since we are among ourselves, I have the right to ask myself about what binds us, what we have in common. So, what does unite us, if not this bond of pain, this relationship to the flesh in its greatest suffering, surviving deportees, orphans, decimated families, which, generation after generation, transmit the flame.

In the last section of this memoir, which rises in places to lyricism, Lanzmann makes clear that he himself was singed by his own efforts of transmission. "For twelve years I tried to stare relentlessly into the black sun of the Shoah," he writes. "I forced myself to get as close as I could."

Shoah (1985) is defined by its uncompromising refusals: no archival footage, no newsreels, not a single corpse. No voiceover eases its transitions. The only commentary comes on-screen from Raul Hilberg, author of the magisterial three-volume *The Destruction of the European Jews*. "The purpose of *Shoah* is not to transmit knowledge, in spite of the fact that there is knowledge in the film," Lanzmann has said. It is not a film about survivors, nor about the roundups and deportations, but about death. As though refusing to explain the inexplicable, it declines any hint of redemption. "*Shoah* is an arid and pure film," its director says.

Instead, Lanzmann weaves the film—"a vigil to absolute suffering,"

he calls it—from firsthand testimonies, a plait of voices in French, German, English, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish. To bring the suffering within earshot, three groups are made to bear witness, or false witness. We hear from memory-afflicted Jewish victims, including members of the Sonderkommando like Filip Müller, Abraham Bomba, a barber at Treblinka, and heroes like Simcha Rotem, a fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. We must listen to six perpetrators, self-satisfied or evasive, including Franz Suchomel, the SS-*Unterscharführer* at Treblinka, Franz Grassler, former Nazi deputy commissioner of the Warsaw Ghetto, and Walter Stier, a high-ranking former Reichsbahn official and planner of the transports of the Jews to death camps, the very archetype of what the Germans call *Schreibtischtäter*, or "desk murderers."

Finally, we look into the eyes of Polish bystanders who averted their eyes (a locomotive driver, a Sobibor stationmaster, indifferent peasants in primitive villages like Chelmno). Lanzmann, a filmmaker who never studied filmmaking, intersperses his interviews with these men and women with lingering shots of stones and wastelands, train tracks and ruins of gas chambers in snow-covered silence—a topography of accursed places in which pastoral present contends with infernal past.

In creating this polyphony, Lanzmann writes that he saw it as his task to coax his subjects to relive "a past both incredibly remote and yet very close, a past-present etched forever in their minds." Etched in their faces, too. In *Shoah*, we do not see death, only the faces of those who saw it, with more or less comprehension of what they have seen. To accomplish this, Lanzmann remarks that he worked on his films in much the same way he pursued his earlier journalism and reportage:

> In-depth research, distancing myself, forgetting myself, entering into the reasons and the madness, the lies and the silences of those I wished to portray or those I was questioning, until I reach a precise, hallucinatory state of hyper-alertness, a state that, to me, is the essence of the imagination. It is the one rule that makes it possible for me to reveal other people's truth—to flush it out if necessary—to make them real and alive for all time.

At times, Lanzmann, his profile in the periphery of the frame, finds little difficulty flushing out the witnesses. "I was the first person to return to the scene of the crime, to those who had never spoken and, I was beginning to realize, wanted so much to speak, to speak torrentially."

But more often, the on-camera flushing-out appears far from gentle. Take the scene filmed in a Tel Aviv barbershop in which Lanzmann asks Bomba, scissors in hand, to describe what he felt as he was made to shear a woman's hair in the antechamber of a Treblinka gas chamber. Bomba loses his composure, and lapses into silence. Finally:

> I won't be able to do it.
>
> *You have to do it. I know it's very hard. I know and I apologize.*
>
> Don't make me go on, please.
>
> *Please. We must go on.*

In another scene, Lanzmann records Suchomel with a hidden camera as the former Nazi cheerfully croons the hymn that the condemned of Treblinka were forced to sing for their guards' amusement:

> *Looking squarely ahead, brave and joyous,*
> *at the world, the squads march to work.*
> *All that matters to us now is Treblinka.*
> *It is our destiny.*
> *That's why we've become one with Treblinka in no time at all.*
> *We know only the word of our commander,*
> *We know only obedience and duty,*
> *We want to serve, to go on serving,*
> *Until a little luck ends it all. Hurray!*

"Sing it again," Lanzmann demands. In an instant, the tables turn: Now the Jew forces the Nazi to sing, and to condemn himself. That imperative, "Sing it again," informs *Shoah* in its entirety, and fashions it into an incomparably haunting threnody of words, images, and silences, utterly singular in its power. ♦

B&A

Out of Africa

The Dark Continent in the mind of white America.

BY LIAM JULIAN

The Lower River
by Paul Theroux
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,
336 pp., $25

Last March the social-networking thickets caught fire, sparked by an online video called *Kony 2012*. Its creator, founder of the San Diego-based group Invisible Children Inc., was hoping to broadcast the misdeeds of the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony. The short film was viewed tens of millions of times in just several days.

Kony 2012 subsequently "started a conversation," as intended, but the conversation was not about Joseph Kony as much as the ethics involved when a white man distorts ongoing violence in Africa and makes it the basis for a hip viral campaign, complete with red, Livestrong-like wristbands. It was a conversation about what the Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole called "the White Savior Industrial Complex." The author Dinaw Mengestu, an American born

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in Ethiopia, was one of many to add his voice to the dialogue. He wrote that *Kony 2012*

> wants to tell us about Joseph Kony and his atrocities, but much more than that, it wants to convince us that there is a solution. . . . That solution, however, only works in the myopic reality of the film, a reality that deliberately eschews depth and complexity, because of course the real star of Kony 2012 isn't Joseph Kony, it's us.

All the publicity, perhaps needless to say, did not bring down Joseph Kony. He still lurks in the Ugandan bush—far, far away from globally conscious Americans and their MacBooks.

Kony 2012 was but the latest, major example of the West's chronic misunderstanding of Africa, especially its presumption that remedies to the continent's problems are not only relatively simple but also must be West-centric ("the real star . . . isn't Joseph Kony, it's us"). After hundreds of years of busting up the place, white people in the 1960s decided it was time to atone for the sins of colonialism by making Africa their project. Since then, awareness has been raised and aid has flowed. But what good has it done?

Paul Theroux asks this question in *The Lower River*, a gripping novel set largely in southern Malawi, where Theroux worked as a Peace Corps teacher for two years in the early 1960s. The story begins in Medford, Massachusetts, where an aging man named Ellis Hock, the latest in a line of Hocks to own and oversee a downtown menswear shop, is undergoing a series of what are sometimes called "life traumas." His wife is leaving him, his only child wants nothing to do with him, and the store he has run for decades is going out of business. His world is crumbling, so Hock's mind returns to another world, to a village named Malabo in the Lower River region of Malawi, where, like Theroux, he had volunteered with the Peace Corps in his twenties. It was, he says, the only time in his life when he was truly happy.

Hock determines to return to Malabo, to leave his life in Medford behind. And he does. But the place he returns to isn't quite as he remembered it. In Blantyre, the city in southern Malawi from which Hock sets off on his expedition to the Lower River, he pops into the club abutting his hotel only to quickly retreat after being swarmed by prostitutes. The official at the American consulate is unimpressed by Hock's desire to buy and send school supplies to Malabo. "You're doing a good thing," he tells Hock. "But it's a bottomless pit. Money, medicine, books, pens, even computers. Where does it all end up?" And as he drives out of Blantyre, the landscape strikes him:

> None of what he saw from the car was lovely: the Africa of people, not of animals. And that was its oddity, because it looked chewed, bitten, burned, deforested, and dug up. A herd of elephants could eat an acre of trees in a day, leaving behind a mass of trampled and splintered limbs, yet that acre stayed green and grew back. But this human settlement was befouled, the greenery slashed and burned, or dragged away until only dirt and stones remained—a blight, a permanent disfigurement.

And then the car in which he's riding gets a flat tire, the driver has no jack, and they are stranded for hours on the side of a poorly paved, vacant road, bracketed by impenetrable tall grass.

Hock eventually arrives in Malabo but it, too, has changed. The school, the structure he worked so hard to build decades before, is ruined, inhabited by vegetation and snakes. The latrines are covered with lewd graffiti. When Hock attempts to begin resurrecting the place, the boys he recruits to help him leave when he's not looking and make off with his tools.

The discomfort he almost immediately feels in Malabo is heightened by the obsequious village headman, Festus Manyenga, who has a habit of drowning Hock in compliments just before asking him for money. Manyenga presents Hock a hut in which to stay and then, as the two stand before it, ostentatiously bemoans the state of the hut's thatched roof: "But the roof must be replaced. I want to get an iron roof for you, but—eh! eh!" The next day, Hock agrees to hand over $200 in kwacha notes to buy iron sheets, even though he knows Manyenga will buy the sheets, keep the change, "and perhaps put aside the scraps to sell or trade."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Joseph Kony, 2006

This becomes a trend: Manyenga and other villagers asking Hock for money, and Hock acceding. Part of him realizes he is being used; part of him doesn't want to admit it. He loses track of time, forgets how long he has stayed in the hut in Malabo. Gradually, he comes to understand that

the villagers don't want him to leave, and that they won't let him.

What has happened here on the Lower River? The idyll of Hock's youth has become a savage, denuded land whose inhabitants are greedy, dishonest, scheming, and callous. Surely Malabo was never the paradise that absence and time created in Hock's mind, but it couldn't have been this aggressively corrupt and malicious. What has happened, it seems, is that the people of the Lower River, over the past 50 years, learned that it is easier to manipulate the ubiquitous do-gooders and aid organizations—to accept the white man's handouts (and steal some more)—than to do the hard work of building and maintaining a self-sufficient society.

The people of the Lower River are like people anywhere: Flooded with free food and money and goods, they take them—and then they expect more.

There is a scene in *The Lower River* where Hock finds himself in the midst of an aid drop. A helicopter descends on a clearing, rock music blasting, and a white man in sunglasses and cowboy hat (read: Bono) and a woman with red lips and a skintight outfit (read: Angelina Jolie) begin tossing boxes and bags to the scrambling bodies below. It is a mêlée, with children clawing and ripping at each other, trying to snatch food or clamber into the helicopter. When the scene becomes too messy, the aid workers and their celebrity passengers lift up into the sky and fly away, leaving behind in their dust a vicious brawl. Men on motorcycles, waiting patiently in the woods just beyond the clearing, then drive into the scrum, scoop up the boxes, and speed off. Later, they will sell their loot.

It is a disaster. But the aid agency is long gone. It drops the bounty and leaves. Complexity, unintended consequences, long-term effects—these things are not its concern. *The Lower River* is a fast-paced, exciting adventure story, but it is also an indictment of all those who, literally or metaphorically, drop in on places they don't know and don't understand, do much damage, and then float away. ♦

B&A

Attic Treasure

A document dump for ten centuries of Jewish history.

BY SUSANNE KLINGENSTEIN

When Alice fell through her Oxford rabbit hole in 1865, she landed in a world in which the hidden elements of her imagination took on an oppressive materiality. The unknown land revealed to Alice might have changed her readers' perception of childhood, if only they could have decoded what Alice encountered.

Sacred Trash
The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza
by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole
Schocken, 304 pp., $26.95

Thirty-one years later, in late December 1896, a learned rabbi and scholar from Cambridge fell through a rabbit hole in Egypt and discovered a vast, encrypted world whose laborious decoding would fundamentally change (among many other things) our understanding of post-biblical Jewish intellectual culture, and our view of the Mediterranean world between the birth of the Babylonian Jewish leader Saadia Gaon in 882 and the death of Moses Maimonides in 1204.

The story of how the middle-aged but nimble-minded Solomon Schechter came to climb up a ladder in the crumbling Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo's slummy Fustat district to enter an airless, stinking chamber filled to the rafters with 10 centuries' worth of Hebrew literary junk, and how that junk had come to be accumulated in the first place, and how it came to be resurrected and restored to intellectual glory in the century following Schechter's discovery—all that is told in this radiant jewel of a book.

The story begins with a chance meeting in a Cambridge street. On a May afternoon in 1896 Agnes Lewis—the arthritic half of a set of superbly self-taught female Scottish twins who were scholars of Arabic and Syriac, liberated into learned adventures by the early deaths of their husbands and a paternal legacy consisting of both money and a thirst for education—spied her friend, the blustery Schechter, the reader in rabbinics and son of Russian Hasidic Jews living in Romania who had arrived at Cambridge in 1890 by way of education in Vienna and Berlin.

She asked him to come look at a bundle of manuscripts she had bought in Cairo. To his utter amazement, Schechter discovered among the smelly scraps a fragment of the Hebrew original of Ecclesiasticus, an apocryphal book of the Bible also known as Ben Sira, or Sirach.

The reason for Schechter's excitement was not that the Hebrew original had gone missing for a thousand years, but that the Hebrew original was urgently needed in his seemingly quixotic tilting against the windmills of Protestant arrogance, which argued that Jewish history was a steady "falling off from the heights of early revelation and prophetic vision to a preoccupation with ceremony and legal sophistry."

"Second Temple Judaism was [seen as] a mechanical priestly cult," write Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, "and post-Temple or rabbinic Judaism … was dismissed outright as a spiritually sterile legalism." Or, as Julius Wellhausen, a German star of higher Bible criticism, said about Jewish law as given in the five books of Moses: "[I]t blocks up

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access to heaven . . . and spoils morality." A Hebrew text of Ben Sira, however, "would confirm the existence of a moral and spiritually vital Second Temple Judaism . . . hardly desiccated by excessive legalism or the mechanical maintenance of priestly rites."

Thus, the stakes were sky-high for Schechter, who held rabbinic Judaism in high esteem. And although hardly a man cut out for grimy adventures *en orient*, he went, and five days after arriving in Cairo, entered the geniza of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat.

A geniza is a repository that may contain the written name of God (*shem*). Because God's name is absolutely sacred, such documents cannot be burnt but must be ritually buried. While awaiting burial, they may be stored. A geniza, then, is a kind of morgue for Hebrew texts. Over time, as learning declined in Fustat, all Hebrew texts came to be regarded as *shemot*, and, for about 10 centuries, were simply thrown into a small, airless chamber at the end of the women's gallery.

Schechter was not the first scholar with the right learnedness in ancient Jewish texts to enter the geniza, or to lay eyes on several torn, filthy, malodorous bundles of "sacred trash" taken from the geniza. In fact, his friend Elkan Adler had entered the geniza in January of 1896, bringing multitudinous scraps back to England for Schechter and Adolf Neubauer—Schechter's greatest rival, a multilingual Hungarian Jew who was Oxford's reader in rabbinics and cataloguer of the university's extensive Hebrew holdings—to see. But, confronted with the prospect of traveling to Egypt himself to take a look at the geniza, Neubauer, looking over the "trash" Adler had hauled back, declared it "a lot of worthless rubbish" and stayed in England.

It took a tremendous amount of imagination and optimism to recognize in the hundreds of thousands of crumbled pieces of writing one of the greatest treasures in Jewish literary history, comparable to the find of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri. Working for four weeks in the insect-infested chamber, and nearly suffocating in the dust of 10 centuries and brought to the brink of rage by the constant demands for bakshish by all associated with the synagogue, Schechter packed almost 200,000 manuscript fragments into nine large tea chests and sent them back to Cambridge. For the next five years, Schechter labored almost daily over the "stinking heaps of *shemot*," sorting them and identifying gems, including letters written by Maimonides, legal decisions by Saadia Gaon, and, most thrilling of all, more of the Hebrew text of Ben Sira.

When the new century arrived, he was exhausted by this effort and accepted an offer to become president

Ben Sira fragment from the Cairo geniza

of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. He promptly hired European scholars to the faculty and emphasized the scientific study of Jewish texts, only to hear from community leaders that this was "far too highbrow" for the mass of American Jews.

With Schechter's move to New York, Hoffman and Cole transition into the brilliant second half of their book, in which they unpack the treasure chest of the geniza. They do it by wisely limiting themselves to five large areas of scholarship that were either boosted or brought into being by geniza material.

The brilliance of the second half consists not only in the exquisitely clear and gracious presentation of complex intellectual matters, or in the practical exercise of the usually neglected insight that less is more, but in the craftiness with which the authors force readers to think on two time levels at once: that of the scholar working on the material in 1930s Germany and late-1940s Israel, and then in 2007, globally hooked up. Because of the unpacking of the geniza boxes, the recognition of the literary or scholarly value of so much "worthless rubbish" is also the story of the emergence of academic Jewish studies.

Having begun with Schechter's unearthing of the Hebrew Ben Sira, Hoffman and Cole then discuss the sleuthing necessary to recover the work of the legendary sixth-century liturgical poet Yannai, a task undertaken by Israel Davidson (born in 1870 in Lithuania) and, later, by Galician Jew Menahem Zulay, plucked out of Palestinian poverty by the German department store magnate Salman Schocken in 1927 as a Hebrew tutor for his children.

The first to recognize the historic worth of the geniza's nonliterary debris was the humorless Jacob Mann, a descendant of Belzer Hasidim in Poland, who arrived in England in 1908. His wide-ranging book about the Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fatimid caliphs, based entirely on geniza documents, was the first to chart Jewish life across a Muslim empire, preparing the ground for the historian S.D. Goitein, who arrived in Palestine from Frankfurt on the same boat as Gershom Scholem and, by sheer chance, turned into "the century's greatest explorer of the documentary Ben Ezra material." It was the indefatigable Goitein who declared that "in Geniza research, quantity is quality."

Our authors know, however, that in modern America, brevity is trump. So they add only two more chapters: one on the astounding heretical writings found in the geniza, resurrecting for us not only the radical skeptic Hiwi al-Balkhi but also the rigorous world of the Karaites; and a chapter on the beautiful, nonliturgical Hebrew poetry of medieval Spain, from Dunash ben Labrat to Yehuda HaLevi, and delivered from the Fustat purgatory by the eccentric Jefim Hayyim Schirmann and his dedicated student Ezra Fleischer.

Sacred Trash is the rabbit hole through which readers can fall into 2,500 years of Jewish history encoded in a thousand smelly heaps of tattered leaves. Unlike Alice, though, we are not alone, but encounter a gallery of uprooted, displaced scholars who fell through that rabbit hole before we did, slogged through the junk, and then laid out for us in the clearest print the mesmerizing world of ancient and medieval Mediterranean Jewry. ♦

GREEK BIBLE IN BYZANTINE JUDAISM PROJECT

B&A

Pathology of Power

Sally Bedell Smith and the many forms of monarchy.

BY NOEMIE EMERY

John F. Kennedy at Santa Monica, 1962

Sally Bedell Smith has a thing for kings. Or, not kings quite so much as powerful people who form courts around themselves as a function of power or wealth. Her very best books all describe these arrangements: *In All His Glory*, about the CBS mogul William Paley; *Grace and Power*, about the Kennedy White House; *For Love of Politics*, about Bill and Hillary Clinton; even *Reflected Glory*, about onetime kept woman Pamela Harriman, who, after a lifetime as *maîtresse en titre* to men of means and/or power, evolved in time into a sort of queen dowager, with retainers and knights of her own.

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Elizabeth the Queen
The Life of a Modern Monarch
by Sally Bedell Smith
Random House, 688 pp., $30

Of all these people, the least grandiose was Bill Clinton, who ran his White House much like a campus, allowing male aides to wear long hair and earrings, strew pizza boxes on conference tables, and play loud rock music in the Executive Office Building next door. Yet all of Smith's subjects enjoyed the illusion and aura of power, exerted in various ways.

"The image of Jack and Jackie as king and queen surrounded by their court had occurred to many," Smith writes; Isaiah Berlin saw a resemblance to the court of Napoleon, David Ormsby Gore compared it to the court of the Tudors. "The place is lousy with courtiers and ladies-in-waiting—actual or would-be," wrote Stewart Alsop. And Richard Neustadt thought that the Kennedy White House resembled apartments one saw at Versailles. Owing to propertied parents and in-laws, the Kennedys enjoyed access to a number of luxurious getaways approximating the lesser holdings of royalty: "As with court life in earlier centuries, the Kennedy entourage made a stately progress from the White House to expensive homes in the Virginia hunt country, to Palm Beach, Hyannis Port, and Newport—all playgrounds for the rich and privileged."

Left to himself, Kennedy might have run the White House as he ran PT-109; but his wife, an aesthete, had different ideas. "Jackie wanted to do Versailles in America," said her designer, Oleg Cassini, who also said that she modeled herself on Madame de Maintenon, consort of Louis XIV. Hence the use of her wardrobe as a political statement, the restoration of the White House as a historical landmark, and the relentlessly high-toned classical music evenings, through which her bored husband dutifully sat.

No one lived on the grand scale so much as Paley, described by Smith as "The Prince" and "The King," who seized what he could of the world and its riches: two beautiful wives, numerous doxies, a splendid collection of antiques and paintings, lavishly beautiful homes. "They lived on a level of luxury I never met in England before the war, and I had been to quite a few great houses like Blenheim," said an English acquaintance. "They ran it in a way that money didn't seem to count."

A despot by nature, Paley treated his friends like his servants, and his employees very much as his slaves. At CBS in New York, an executive was tapped to walk him home nightly, deposit him at the door of his East Side apartment, and take a cab home. On one trip, an aide was assigned to trail him about with a chair at the

BETTMANN / CORBIS / AP IMAGES

ready: "When he paused to sit, he didn't bother to glance back," Smith tells us. "[H]e knew the chair would be there."

With both Paley and Kennedy, guests were expected to pay their own way. "Jack and Jackie Kennedy would quite literally command their courtiers to sing and dance," Smith tells us, with Navy friend Paul Fay singing "Hooray for Hollywood" and Cassini doing his Charlie Chaplin walk.

> Kennedy knew he was a potentate, and at a dinner for 150, he would point a finger at you and say, "Talk," said Cassini. "Was I a performing seal? Yes, and it was a slightly naughty thing. He did it with a lot of people. In Palm Beach, after a heavy lunch, he told everyone to do pushups, and everyone did."

But the main self-indulgence that bound together Smith's powerful men was their fondness for *droit du seigneur*. Paley's amours ranged from Edwina Mountbatten to secretaries and showgirls. As for the presidents, they carried on in the White House under the eyes of their consorts, Kennedy seducing an intern in Jacqueline's bedroom, Clinton meeting his in a pantry close to the Oval Office one Easter Sunday, after walking back from church with his wife.

After tales such as this, it is with relief that one turns to Smith's first book about genuine royalty, Elizabeth II, queen of England for some 60 years now and, by some standards (those of Henry VIII, for example), the least kinglike in manners of all. There are no displays of ego, much less of sadism. Her tastes and her interests are modest and simple. Her surroundings and temperament seem at an impasse: She seems like, and probably is, a good civil servant on a very high level, plunked down in settings of incredible splendor, an upper-middle-class woman who lives in a palace and now and then puts on a tiara and rides in a coach.

Three of her four children have been divorced (two are remarried) and some of her kin have been fodder for tabloids; but she herself has been happily married for 65 years to the man she fell in love with at the age of 13. One of these things is not like the others, and she is entirely different from Smith's other subjects, which is a function not only of temperament but of the order of power she wields.

Queen Elizabeth II, 2007

A great tycoon dominates the organization he owns and has limitless power within it, and the institution is shaped by his character. A president fills an institutional office with a mystique of its own, infused with his personality, as he tries to advance his agenda. A constitutional monarch such as Elizabeth inhabits a world in which her personality is subsumed by the office she holds. A tycoon or a president leads by imposing his will; Elizabeth has been trained all her life to disguise her intentions. Presidents lead by imposing their preferences, but a queen's job is to deny that she has any, and, in this, her efforts have met with success.

"It has also taken vigilance and discipline for her to keep her views private," writes Smith. "With the exception of a few relatively inconsequential remarks . . . her political views remained a matter of conjecture long after the *Sunday Times* tried to portray her as a soft Tory, against Margaret Thatcher's hard line." The chapters about her relations with Thatcher—the brilliant, abrasive, controversial prime minister—describe the differences between institutional and political leaders, and why the two jobs are so very different.

One such difference is the active-and-passive discrepancy, a divide which is still more profound. While the others sought out, and fought for, their destinies, Elizabeth was given her job by external forces, through no decision or choice of her own. The lives of presidents and executives involved drama, self-reinvention, and great shifts of fortune—Clinton and Paley rose from obscurity to power and wealth, Kennedy was born to power and wealth but reset his whole life on the death of his brother. Elizabeth was born to her social position, became the heir to the throne while still a child, and has been much the same person for all of her life.

This person is nicer than Smith's other subjects; but then, she has never had to be otherwise. They clawed their way up against fierce competition while she ascended serenely, with no opposition, to a life term (or life sentence!) in office. Job security doesn't seem to be one of her problems: She will never be faced with a primary challenge, and no one is going to run against her for queen. One way of saying this is that presidents, by definition, are abnormal people who fight for and largely enjoy their own power, while royals, more or less, are normal people who find themselves by sheer happenstance in an office much larger than life.

As Smith says, "The story of Elizabeth II turns on what she made of the life that was given her." With the others, it turns on the lives that they invented.

Elizabeth's luck—and her country's—is that she seems wholly designed for the life that fate gave

her. She is highly intelligent in a practical, commonsense manner, strong-minded while being nonconfrontational, perceptive while being non-otherworldly, reliable, calm, and diplomatic by nature, a woman whose constant, dependable presence makes her a sturdy sheet anchor in times of high tides and strong winds.

This is in contrast to her son, the prince of Wales, who has, over the years, "questioned the values of a materialistic consumer society, denounced climate change skeptics, called for a 'revolution' in the Western world's 'mechanistic approaches to science,'" and attacked genetically modified crops for "jeopardizing the delicate balance of nature"—for which he was condemned by his father and sister, who have done a great deal of charity work against hunger and said that without such crops, millions of people would starve.

And so, where are we now? Oddly enough, it is the one man without government office who comes closest to the stereotype of the brute and tyrant. The presidents rank somewhere in the middle, and the genuine monarch, descended from a long line of monarchs, the most modest and plain of them all.

The word used by Smith again and again to describe Paley is "spoiled" (which she uses for nobody else in her canon), and for the modern equivalent of the Henry VIII type of despot, he comes closest to filling the bill.

On a descending scale, Paley and Clinton fit the stereotype of the king with a wench in one hand and a turkey leg in the other, JFK has the wench minus the turkey leg, and Elizabeth is much more like Queen Victoria, her more immediate forebear who, in her palaces, exemplified the model of bourgeois, or (upper-) middle-class, life.

From this, the moral is self-evident: If you want symbolism, be a modern constitutional monarch; if you want genuine power in the historical sense, then be a president. But if you want to live like a king on the old-fashioned level, don't be a queen, or even a president. Be a modern tycoon. ♦

B&A

Innocence of Mormons

How two cultures respond to criticism.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

In New York City, at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre on West 49th Street, Broadway audiences are spending $1.6 million per week to attend *The Book of Mormon*, a no-star extravaganza advertised solely by the words "the new musical from the creators of *South Park*." It is the most ecstatically praised and blissfully attended production since Mel Brooks's *The Producers*. It won nine Tony Awards. It did not receive a single negative review.

In light of the world-shaking controversy surrounding *The Innocence of Muslims*, the 14-minute YouTube movie/video/trailer, and the undeniable insult it delivers to the Prophet of Islam, I thought it might be worth summarizing the plot of *The Book of Mormon* in detail for those who haven't seen it, because there are some similarities between the two.

The Book of Mormon tells the story of two 18-year-olds raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They have both completed their training as missionaries, and do not know where they will be sent to seek converts to their faith. One, Elder Price, is clean-cut, well-tailored, and devout. His dream is to be sent to Orlando, his vision of paradise on earth. The other, Elder Cunningham, is a fat, sloppy, science fiction-obsessed compulsive liar, and an embarrassment to his parents. "You're making things up again, Arnold," is the refrain Cunningham always hears.

To Price's disappointment, he is sent to Uganda; to his horror, Cunningham is assigned as his partner. When they arrive at their mission in a remote village, they meet other missionaries who tell them to apply what they take to be the church's philosophy to difficult situations and difficult thoughts: "Turn it off. Like a light switch." A sister dies of cancer? Turn it off. Gay thoughts in fifth grade? Turn them off.

A local gang lord harasses the people of the village, who are riven with AIDS. They do a big production number in which they teach the missionaries the song they sing to ward off their bad thoughts: "Hasa Diga Eebowai." It means, "F— you, God."

Price preaches the Word; no one listens, but he refuses to buckle under. "I am a Mormon, and a Mormon just believes," he says. "I believe that ancient Jews built boats and came to America. . . . I believe God has a plan that involves me getting my own planet." He confronts the warlord and, in response, the warlord literally takes the *Book of Mormon* and shoves it up Price's posterior (we see an X-ray picture of his stomach). This causes Price to lose his faith.

Meanwhile, Elder Cunningham learns there is an idea abroad in the village that if a man has sex with a baby, it will cure his AIDS. In desperation, he begins to spin a tale of Joseph Smith, the founder of his church—that he, too, had had AIDS and was going to have sex with a baby until God came down to him and said he should have sex with a frog instead. Upon learning of the practice of female circumcision, Cunningham goes on to say that Brigham Young, who took leadership of the Mormon church after Joseph Smith's murder, had circumcised his daughter—and that God had punished him by turning his nose into a clitoris.

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

A Ugandan (Rema Webb) greets Elder Price (Andrew Rannells) and Elder Cunningham (Josh Gad) in 'The Book of Mormon.'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The entire village converts. Leaders of the church arrive excitedly to see this great missionary accomplishment and are greeted by a pageant staged by the villagers acting out Cunningham's story. The leaders are, of course, outraged, and demand that Price and Cunningham return to America in disgrace. But Price sees the good Cunningham has done in the village, and that all religions are just stories anyway, and they turn his tall tale into a new faith—*The Book of Arnold*. The compulsive liar has become the new prophet. Even the warlord who violated Price converts. The curtain falls. The applause is deafening.

Cartoonish, cheerfully sophomoric, and often hilarious it might be, but *The Book of Mormon* is far more insulting to the LDS church than *The Innocence of Muslims* is to Islam. Its creators, Trey Parker and Matt Stone (working with Robert Lopez), have said that they were moved to write the show because they were amused by the discrepancy between how nice Mormons are and how ridiculous their religion is.

Stone and Parker are equal opportunity offenders—despisers of religion. They first came to public attention with a short film in which Jesus kills Santa Claus ("there can be only one"). They made a show insulting Scientology that ran afoul of their cable channel's parent company and its relationship with leading Scientologist Tom Cruise. And they made an episode of *South Park* ripping the censorship of the Danish newspaper cartoons parodying Muhammad—only to have the episode itself censored by their cable channel after a jihadist threatened their lives.

But in this case, they chose their target wisely. How have Mormons greeted *The Book of Mormon*? In a word, nicely. The church's official statement was this: "The production may attempt to entertain audiences for an evening, but the Book of Mormon as a volume of scripture will change people's lives forever by bringing them closer to Christ." Asked about it in December 2011, Mitt Romney said, "I do want to see it, sure. It's a Tony Award-winner, big phenomenon—yeah, I want to see it someday. But I don't have a lot of time for Broadway shows."

In his equanimity, Romney expressed not a thousandth of the horror at the blasphemy tossed at his faith that has characterized the Obama administration's reception of *The Innocence of Muslims*. The repetition of the words "reprehensible" and "disgusting" in relation to the YouTube video by the president and secretary of state and others suggests that there was, and is, something uniquely awful about *The Innocence of Muslims* that demanded their outraged intercession.

The Book of Mormon demonstrates that there was, and is, nothing uniquely awful about it. It's just a sustained assault on people whom the creators feel no need to appease—in this case, a small number of Americans toward whom Barack Obama and those like him in the American cultural elite—aggressive in their demands that minorities be respected and honored—feel no commonality and no common civic responsibility whatsoever. ♦

"O Snubs Bibi for Babs & Co.: Disses UN world leaders to gab with the gals of 'The View'"
—New York Post, September 25, 2012

PARODY

NEW YORK POST • September 25, 1957 • A3

Ike to Mr. K: Sorry, Nikita—Got a Big Date with Rita!

BY PAUL SANN

Global bigshots were stunned today when President Eisenhower, in New York City to attend the opening session of the U.N. General Assembly, declined an invitation to meet privately with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the U.S.S.R. mission on East 67th Street.

"Frankly, I am astonished," said Great Britain's top diplomat, Selwyn Lloyd, shaking his head. "At a moment when East-West tensions are so high, this was a regrettable use of the president's time."

Grinning and waving from the backseat of his Cadillac limousine, Ike appeared to be unaffected by such bellyaching and, accompanied by First Lady Mamie Eisenhower and starry-eyed White House staff, chose to go Hollywood instead. The presidential entourage paid a two-hour visit to the set of "Separate Tables," the United Artists screen version of the Terence Rattigan play, currently filming on location in Manhattan and starring the President's old pal, and wartime pin-up favorite, Rita Hayworth.

"Yeah, maybe he should have seen Khrushchev," said presidential press secretary James Hagerty. "But the president's a big Rita Hayworth fan, and he and Mrs. Eisenhower relished the opportunity to see her and meet Deborah Kerr and thank David Niven for his service in the British Army."

Eisenhower's scheduled meeting tomorrow morning with resident "Today" show (NBC) chimp, J. Fred Muggs, also had reporters buzzing [illegible] home

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Above, Rita Hayworth on the set of "Separate Tables"; below, her Admirer-in-Chief.

Alaska Statehood Bid Gets Icy Reception in Congress