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CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

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DEBATE SMACKDOWN!

**FRED BARNES • JAMES W. CEASER
WILLIAM KRISTOL • HARVEY MANSFIELD
JOHN MCCORMACK • JAMES PIERESON**

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Mau-Mauing the Kennedy Center

THE SCRAPBOOK resolutely refuses to take the Kennedy Center Honors seriously, and this year's carefully balanced, politically vetted selection of lifetime achievers in the performing arts—Dustin Hoffman, Led Zeppelin, Buddy Guy, Natalia Makarova, David Letterman—prompts us to change our mind not one whit. Discerning readers will note that there is the requisite Hollywood figure (Hoffman), African American (Guy), TV personality (Letterman), and representative of High Art (Makarova). We're not quite sure where Led Zeppelin fits in here, but since last year's list featured Neil Diamond, and Sir Paul McCartney made the cut the year before, we have an idea where this is going.

Those with an eye for ethnic politics, however, will note that, in the dozen years since Michael Kaiser has been president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, only two people with a recognizably Hispanic surname (Chita Rivera, Plácido Domingo) have been honored.

This unremarkable statistical anomaly seems to have drawn the attention of Felix Sanchez, Esq., a Texas-born lawyer and former aide to Sen. Lloyd Bentsen who has done well for himself in Washington as a PR man and lobbyist for the gas and methanol industries. He is also chairman of an organization called the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts (NHFA), a brainchild of Sanchez and a handful of celebrities (Esai Morales, Sonia Braga,

Jimmy Smits, etc.) which, as it says on its website, “has concentrated on increasing access to Hispanic artists and professionals while fostering the emergence of new Hispanic talent.”

Anybody who has spent time observing lawyers and flacks who profit by their ethnic identity will recognize the loaded character of the word *access*. Accordingly, Sanchez showered Kaiser with emails and calls to demand to know why there weren't more Hispanic surnames among the honorees. No doubt to his regret, Kaiser accepted one of the calls—and in a brief, heated dialogue in which Sanchez suggested to Kaiser that he is a racist, Kaiser told Sanchez to go “f— yourself.”

When THE SCRAPBOOK first read about this unhappy encounter in the pages of the *Washington Post*, we were inclined to cheer Kaiser on: The world contains too many self-appointed spokesmen for all manner of human categories making arrogant public demands on people (like Michael Kaiser) who have worked conscientiously to enhance the cultural life of the nation.

But then, as citizens of Barack Obama's Washington, we realized that our pleasure would be short-lived. And sure enough, Kaiser soon dispatched a message to Sanchez in which he apologized for the language he employed “during our telephone call. It was an unfortunate choice of words and I deeply regret using them in frustration.” Then came the inevitable abject declaration: “Much of my career

has been spent working with artists of color. I have been passionate about presenting excellence and diversity in artistic and educational programming, and Latino arts and programs have enjoyed a dynamic presence.”

Translation: A lobbying organization, headed by a professional influence peddler, has succeeded in guaranteeing that next year's Kennedy Center Honors list will contain at least one Hispanic surname, whose honor will be instantly ascribed to Felix Sanchez's bumptious strong-arm tactics, and hence diminished.

It goes without saying that Sanchez was singularly ungracious in his response to Kaiser: “While the Kaiser apology was a few Hail Mary's [sic] short of a full mea culpa, it's important to move past the issue of civility and on to a discussion of the structural reforms [the NHFA and an allied group] need to see happen at the Kennedy Center Honors.” But we must also sadly conclude that Kaiser, having surrendered to the likes of Sanchez, probably deserves whatever humiliation the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts has in mind.

All of which reminds THE SCRAPBOOK of the Beverly Hills chapter of the NAACP which, in 1985, vigorously objected to the depiction of black men in Steven Spielberg's production of *The Color Purple*. A few months later, that same chapter excoriated the Academy Awards when *The Color Purple* won no Oscars. ♦

Absurd on Its Face

Anyone who doubts that the social psychologists of our great nation are underemployed will want to wait for the new issue of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, which will soon publish a paper called “Appearance-based Politics.” Out at UCLA, a few graduate students with nothing better to do collected photographs of all 435 members of the House of Rep-

resentatives. Then they ran the photos through a software program called FaceGen Modeler using the Photo Fit Tool, which is not to be confused with the Gender Morph Tool, though they used the Gender Morph Tool too.

Why would they do such a thing? Because they wanted to judge the “sex typicality” of each politician's “facial cues.” Couldn't they have just gone to the beach?

As it happens, the scholars discov-

ered that Republican female House members were more likely than their Democratic counterparts to have a “face that reflects gender norms,” or, to put it another way, to have “stereotypically feminine facial features,” or, to put it still another way, to be better looking. The difference from one side of the aisle to the other was so pronounced that a group of undergraduates were able to correctly identify many politicians as Republicans or

Democrats on the basis of looks alone.

The researchers festoon their paper with an intimidating array of the hieroglyphs of modern social science: regressions and slopes and equations modeling hierarchical data into mediated pathways—enough scribbles to fill the walls of the grandest pharaoh’s tomb. These won’t satisfy the more cynical laymen, who might wonder why we need social psychologists to tell us the difference between the party of John Thune and Kelly Ayotte and that of Harry Reid and Barbara Mikulski.

More interesting are the many buried assumptions in the paper and its methodologies. The researchers reached the conclusion that Republicans are prettier than Democrats because Democrats aim “to diminish gender disparities (e.g. women’s rights, abortion rights)” while Republican politicians “bolster traditional sex roles” with policies like “military spending [and] national defense.” Among Republicans, “feminine women are highly regarded,” and feminine women are, according to the researchers, “stereotypically feminine.” Thank God for social science.

We wish the paper’s premises and explanations were more coherent than this, but they aren’t. Besides, isn’t there something vaguely sexist in the conclusion that women who like a big Pentagon budget are more likely to be, in the outmoded phrase of David Letterman, babelicious? Or that women who advocate positions that the researchers find congenial—“women’s rights”—are more likely to be, as it were, Rosa DeLauro? Perhaps the next step in UCLA’s research can be a study called “The Dumb Blonde Hypothesis: A Reappraisal.” The researchers will find all the subjects they need the next time they head to the beach. ♦

Sentences We Didn’t Finish

‘T he first debate between President Obama and Mitt Romney, so long anticipated, quickly sunk into an unenlightening recitation of tired talking points and mendacity. With few sparks and little clarity on the im-



mense gulf that truly separates the two men and their policies, Wednesday’s encounter provided little guidance for voters still trying . . .” (*New York Times* editorial, October 4). ♦

Unlamented

I n noting the death last week in London of Eric Hobsbawm, *THE SCRAPBOOK* observed its usual doctrine of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. But then our attention was drawn to his *New York Times* obituary, which blandly explained that Hobsbawm’s “three-volume economic history of the rise of industrial capitalism established him as Britain’s pre-eminent Marxist historian.” That made us sit up straight—

and confirmed, once again, that when it comes to the reputation of certain (inevitably left-wing) public figures, all is forgiven if you live long enough. Eric Hobsbawm was 95 when he gave up the ghost.

Now, if Hobsbawm had been nothing but “Britain’s pre-eminent Marxist historian,” *THE SCRAPBOOK*’s attitude would be simple: “God rest his soul, the poor misguided fellow.” For Marxism, while egregiously wrong and an inspiration for the 20th century’s most durable and bloodthirsty tyrannies, is a legitimate (if misguided and discredited) point of view. As Ronald Radosh notes elsewhere in this issue, Eugene Genovese—the great historian of the South who also died last week—began

his long, fruitful intellectual career as a Marxist.

Yet Hobsbawm was more than a “Marxist historian.” He was a Communist (he only let his party membership lapse when the Soviet Union disappeared) and, worse, was a lifelong apologist for the despotism, violence, oppression, mass murder, and genocidal impulses of Communist regimes which, had he lived in one of them, would undoubtedly have killed him.

But Hobsbawm, who was born in Egypt, was fortunate: His Jewish family sent him to live in England, where he thrived unmolested for his ethnic identity, religion, or beliefs. And toward the end of his life, he was showered with honors. In this country, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; in England, he was elected to the British Academy, awarded a degree by Cambridge, and made a Companion of Honour.

The prime minister who conferred that distinction on Hobsbawm, Tony Blair, had this to say on his death:

He wrote history that was intellectually of the highest order but combined with a profound sense of compassion and justice. And he was a tireless agitator for a better world.

THE SCRAPBOOK is willing to wager that Blair never waded through all of Hobsbawm’s economic history of Europe, or his various excoriations of the United States and all that it stands for. But we would like to think that even Blair might have hesitated to embrace this “tireless agitator for a better world” had he pondered this exchange on the BBC in the early 1990s:

INTERVIEWER: What your view comes down to is saying that had the “radiant tomorrow” actually been created, the loss [in Soviet Russia] of fifteen or twenty million people might have been justified?

HOBBSBAWM: Yes.

Suppose Eric Hobsbawm had been a lifelong fascist, a member of the Nazi party long after the death of Hitler and the collapse of the Third Reich, sentimentally attached to the “dream of the . . . revolution,” and happy to justify—decades after

the end of World War II—the killing of fifteen or twenty million people for National Socialism. Would Cambridge have awarded him an honorary degree? Would the *New York Times* have set aside four columns for his obituary? Would Tony Blair overlook Auschwitz to celebrate Eric Hobsbawm’s sense of compassion and justice and intellectual history of the highest order?

The question answers itself. ♦

Required Reading

THE SCRAPBOOK is delighted to commend the latest collection from our celebrated contributing editor Joseph Epstein, *Essays in Biography* (Axios Press), and not just because some of the chapters originally appeared in these pages. As readers of this magazine know, Epstein is a gifted storyteller, a discerning critic, and a peerless stylist. *Essays in Biography* collects his thoughts on figures as diverse as T.S. Eliot and Michael Jordan, Max Beerbohm and Saul Bellow, Adlai Stevenson and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

It’s fair to say that a variety of over-used adjectives—witty, urbane, intelligent—are in this case quite appropriate. The book is a hefty 603 pages, and THE SCRAPBOOK assures you that you will wish it were longer. If you savor it, and you should, it will keep you entertained through the cold months ahead. Buy one for yourself, and lay away a few more for gifts in the upcoming holiday season. ♦

HarveyMansfield.Org

Elsewhere in this issue you can read Harvey Mansfield’s elegant résumé of the Romney-Obama debate. But if, like THE SCRAPBOOK, you find that a little Mansfield only whets your appetite for more, you will join us in celebrating the philanthropic act of the year. The Foundation for Constitutional Government has launched a curated website devoted to Mansfield’s writings, HarveyMansfield.org. We trust you will consult it and share with your friends. ♦

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Dim Viewer

I recall an interview with William Faulkner in which he said that he didn't read books but read *in* books, the distinction being that he seldom consumed a volume from start to finish but preferred to stick his toes in here and there, read favorite chapters over and over, proceeding from finish to start if necessary.

I don't precisely follow Faulkner in this—although I do like to scandalize my alluring wife by reading the ends of novels before the beginnings—but it occurs to me that, over a lifetime, I have tended to dabble in movies rather than watch them from opening credits to finishing scroll. Why is this? I'm not sure. Impatience, I suppose—but also the same instinct that compels me to find out how a novel ends before I have started it. I tend to be bored by stories—my idea of a complicated plotline is an episode of *Seinfeld*—and I am considerably more interested in styles of writing or moviemaking, language and stagecraft, than in what happens next.

The practical result of this is that there is a shockingly long list of “classic” movies that I have never seen in their entirety. This is a cocktail party line that packs about the same punch as announcing that I have never watched a Super Bowl in my life, or set foot in Florida. For the list includes such shockers as *The Godfather I, II, and III*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Schindler's List*, *Ben-Hur*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Jaws*, *The African Queen*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Chinatown*, *The Sound of Music*, *Titanic*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Shampoo*, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Wizard of Oz*, all the *Star Wars* installments except *The*

Empire Strikes Back, and all the Indiana Jones movies except *The Temple of Doom*. And on and on.

I confess that I take a certain perverse pleasure in all this: I once lived a block away from the blockbuster theater in Washington where *Star Wars* played for a year (1977) or more—and never set foot inside, nor was tempted to do so. And yet, through some mysterious alchemical process, I have



somehow managed to see (largely on television, now on YouTube) most of the relevant sequences in most of these movies, and so can readily identify Joe Buck, or J.J. Gittes, or Jack Dawson, or Judy Garland's companions in *Oz*, or the shark that menaces Amity Island. For any consumer of popular culture, reader of a newspaper, or watcher of TV, it's impossible to avoid these references. Alas, I know the title of the theme song to *M*A*S*H* and the *Close Encounters* five-note signal in spite of myself.

To be sure, there are gaps in the catalogue. Reference was recently made in these pages to Luca Brasi (*The Godfather*), and, not understanding the reference, I was obliged to repair to YouTube to witness the poor man's murder by garrote. Sometimes igno-

rance is bliss. After decades of seeing repeated versions (including parodies, sometimes hilarious) of the famous scene in *Taxi Driver* where Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) addresses his mirror—"You talkin' to me?"—I watched the movie from start to finish and, sad to say, with the exception of Bernard Herrmann's famous score, found it considerably less impressive than its reputation.

Case in point: I am an extravagant admirer of Muriel Spark's brilliant novella *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), and after 1969, on TV and elsewhere, it was difficult to avoid witnessing Maggie Smith's scene in the movie version in which she breaks down while describing the love affair of Dante and Beatrice during a classroom slide show. Recently it occurred to me that, liking the novel as much as I do, I ought to see the film, which, conveniently, was playing on some cable channel that evening. One hundred and sixteen minutes later, I emerged in a desperate state: I had never been so disappointed in a movie version of a much-loved novel, not to mention enduring Rod McKuen's Academy Award-winning song ("Jean") not once but twice.

Which may explain the obverse side of this particular character flaw. While studiously avoiding certain films I should probably see, I watch a handful of movies over and over with undiminished pleasure. No doubt the list tells more about me than about their qualities as film—*The Browning Version*, *Harvey*, *Our Man in Havana*, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (the 1941 screwball comedy with Robert Montgomery and Carole Lombard, not the 2005 Brangelina vehicle), *The Big Sleep*, *The Third Man*, any Busby Berkeley musical or Terry-Thomas comedy—and the discerning reader will detect a certain pattern of taste. But so what? Give me *Destry Rides Again* before *Dances with Wolves* anytime.

PHILIP TERZIAN

The Winning Answer

Almost 25 minutes into last Wednesday night's presidential debate, it was already clear Mitt Romney was doing better than expected, and that Barack Obama was a bit flat. But it wasn't yet obvious at the end of the debate's first segment that the debate would produce a decisive winner.

Then moderator Jim Lehrer moved from taxes to a discussion of "what to do about the federal deficit, the federal debt." Mitt Romney spoke first. His two-minute answer was the inflection point in the debate. After that, he was on a roll—a conservative roll. And President Obama would be reduced to an ineffectual defensive crouch—a liberal crouch.

Romney's statement deserves to be reproduced in full:

ROMNEY: Good. I'm glad you raised that, and it's a—it's a critical issue. I think it's not just an economic issue, I think it's a moral issue. I think it's, frankly, not moral for my generation to keep spending massively more than we take in, knowing those burdens are going to be passed on to the next generation, and they're going to be paying the interest and the principal all their lives.

And the amount of debt we're adding, at a trillion a year, is simply not moral.

So how do we deal with it? Well, mathematically, there are three ways that you can cut a deficit. One, of course, is to raise taxes. Number two is to cut spending. And number three is to grow the economy, because if more people work in a growing economy, they're paying taxes, and you can get the job done that way.

The presidents would—president would prefer raising taxes. I understand. The problem with raising taxes is that it slows down the rate of growth. And you could never quite get the job done. I want to lower spending and encourage economic growth at the same time.

What things would I cut from spending? Well, first of all, I will eliminate all programs by this test, if they don't pass it: Is the program so critical it's worth borrowing money from China to pay for it? And if not, I'll get rid of it. Obamacare's on my list.

I apologize, Mr. President. I use that term with all respect, by the way.

OBAMA: I like it.

ROMNEY: Good. Okay, good. So I'll get rid of that.

I'm sorry, Jim, I'm going to stop the subsidy to PBS. I'm going to stop other things. I like PBS, I love Big Bird. Actually like you, too. But I'm not going to—I'm not going to keep on spending money on things to borrow money from China to pay for. That's number one.

Number two, I'll take programs that are currently good programs but I think could be run more efficiently at the state level and send them to the state.

Number three, I'll make government more efficient and

to cut back the number of employees, combine some agencies and departments. My cutbacks will be done through attrition, by the way.

This is the approach we have to take to get America to a balanced budget. The president said he'd cut the deficit in

half. Unfortunately, he doubled it. Trillion-dollar deficits for the last four years. The president's put it in place as much public debt—almost as much debt held by the public as all prior presidents combined.

The Republican presidential candidate—the conservative presidential candidate—packed a lot into this two-minute answer.

- Romney was willing to argue morality, not just money. His argument on the deficit was made on behalf of future generations against the self-indulgence of the present one. Romney didn't quote Edmund Burke, but he might have: Society is "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born." Romney claimed his Burkean reform conservatism isn't only more prudent than Obama's baby boomer self-indulgent liberalism. It's also more just.

- Romney made the case against raising taxes because doing so would undermine economic growth. Romney has spoken a lot during the campaign about jobs and about small business creating jobs—but now he nodded to the



Edmund Burke



Ronald Reagan



Chris Christie

broader Reaganite case for economic growth as key to our general social well-being.

- Romney promised to repeal Obamacare—the example of expensive and intrusive big government social engineering, hostility to which triggered the rise of the Tea Party and the Republican sweep of 2010. No amount of propaganda and browbeating has made Obama’s signature legislation any more popular today than it was then. But the repeal of Obamacare had been strangely absent from Romney’s advertising, and not emphasized in his core message. No longer, one trusts.

- Romney, amused by Obama’s embrace of “Obamacare,” replied briskly: “Good. So I’ll get rid of that.” But not just that. Romney emphasized he was willing to put even the beloved Big Bird on the chopping block. The Obama campaign and all the liberal elite’s horses and men and women leapt to Big Bird’s defense. They know Americans like Big Bird, and they assume Americans are so stupid as to think everything they like deserves a government subsidy. With a manly and candid conservatism, Romney said no. He did so not in the spirit of Oscar the Grouch (though *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* is rather fond of Oscar the Grouch), but in the good-natured spirit of, say, Chris Christie, explaining government can no longer afford things just because we like them, if they aren’t essential.

So: The Burkean case against trillion-dollar deficits. The Reaganite case for broad-based economic growth. The Tea Party-infused case against Obamacare. The Chris Christie-like case against unnecessary government spending.

Most of the rest of the debate consisted of Romney elaborating on these themes. They did the job Wednesday night. Properly developed and elaborated over the next month, they can do the job on Election Day.

—William Kristol

Tax Cut Man

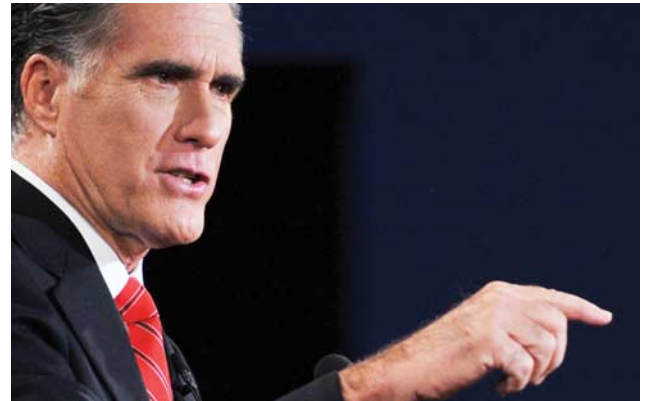
When Mitt Romney stepped on stage at the first presidential debate in Denver on October 3, he had been losing to President Obama on the issue of taxes for two solid months. The Obama campaign bombarded Romney with TV ads claiming he would raise taxes on middle-class families by \$2,000 in order to pay for his tax cut for the rich. Throughout August and September the Romney campaign did little to rebut the charge or attack Obama as a tax-hiker.

During Romney’s 4,100-word address at the Republican convention, he barely uttered 50 words about taxes. In contrast, an attack on Romney’s tax plan was at the heart of Bill Clinton’s speech at the Democratic convention a week later.

Obama kicked off his own convention speech by mocking Romney’s tax plan. On September 17, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that four different polls showed Romney had lost his advantage on the tax issue to Obama.

So it was astonishing to watch Romney rout Obama in a debate whose first 25 minutes were dominated by a lengthy and detailed argument about taxes. That first segment wasn’t even Romney’s strongest. But it seems to have been enough to begin to turn the tax issue around.

Following the debate, a CNN poll showed that by a 9-point margin (53 percent to 44 percent), voters thought Romney would handle the issue of taxes better than Obama. Even the pollster for the pro-Obama super-PAC Priorities USA acknowledged its focus group showed “Romney did gain ground on the president on the issue of taxes, and he largely negated the advantage Obama had on the issue when respondents first walked into the room.”



‘I will lower taxes on middle-income families.’

Democrats and their allies in the media are attributing Obama’s debate loss to a simple lack of passion. But this was an issue-heavy evening. Obama attacked Romney’s tax plan during the debate as thoroughly as Bill Clinton did at the Democratic convention. Romney got the better of the argument during the debate by repeatedly rebutting Obama’s claims, explaining the rationale of his own plan, and attacking Obama for trying to raise taxes on small businesses during a recession.

At the center of the dispute between Romney and Obama is a study by the Tax Policy Center (TPC), a project of the liberal Brookings Institution and the Urban Institute. The study claims Romney cannot cut tax rates by 20 percent across the board without adding to the deficit or raising taxes on the middle class. According to TPC, even if all deductions and exclusions were eliminated for Americans making more than \$200,000 per year, there would still be an \$86 billion hole in Romney’s tax plan in the year 2015.

But there are three big flaws in the TPC study. First, as Alex Brill of the American Enterprise Institute has pointed out, it assumes tax reform must pay for repealing Obamacare’s tax hikes—totaling \$29 billion in 2015—rather than assuming that repeal of Obamacare’s spending pays for

repeal of Obamacare's tax hikes. Second, it wrongly assumes that \$45 billion of annual tax expenditures on interest on state and local bonds and life insurance are off the table. Third, and most important, it assumes pro-growth tax policy can't actually produce economic growth. According to one model created by Harvard economists Greg Mankiw and Matthew Weinzierl, Romney's tax plan could annually produce an extra \$53 billion in growth. Correct for these three erroneous assumptions, and Romney's plan can yield \$127 billion to fill an \$86 billion hole.

Of course, it's not clear that repealing tax expenditures is politically feasible. Romney hasn't specified which loopholes he'd close in the tax code, saying he's willing to work with Congress on that front. What happens if Congress is unwilling to close enough loopholes—or to put a strict enough cap on the total deductions any taxpayer can take, if Romney chooses to take that route? Romney implied at the debate he'd then settle for as large a rate reduction as possible without violating three hard and fast principles. "I'm not looking for a \$5 trillion tax cut. What I've said is I won't put in place a tax cut that adds to the deficit. That's part one," Romney said. "Number two, I will not reduce the share paid by high-income individuals. . . . And number three, I will not, under any circumstances, raise taxes on middle-income families. I will lower taxes on middle-income families."

Romney has been attacked by Democrats and grilled by

the press for not providing enough specifics on his tax proposals. But the same criticism can be made of Obama—and should. Obama has proposed corporate tax reform but provided few details of how it should be implemented. When I asked the Tax Policy Center after the debate how Obama's corporate tax reform plan would work, TPC's Robertson Williams replied in an email: "TPC has not tried to analyze his plan. He has not provided enough detail for us to evaluate its effects. So we have nothing that would help explain his plan or its effects."

If it's okay for Obama to offer a broad framework for corporate tax reform, why isn't it okay for Romney to offer a broad framework for federal income tax reform? For that matter, what's the logic of Obama favoring tax reform for big corporations but not for small business? Why does Obama want to lower the corporate rate to 28 percent but raise the individual rate—paid by many small businesses—to nearly 40 percent, while carving out more selective loopholes? Is that good tax policy?

During the 2012 campaign, most media have proven unwilling or unable to press Obama on such issues. But as the debate on October 3 showed, Romney can take the fight to Obama on the tax issue. He and his running mate, Paul Ryan, will have to continue to do so. It's hard to see them winning the election if they don't first win the tax debate.

—John McCormack

Break the Monopoly of Mediocrity in Education

By Thomas J. Donohue
President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

When unionized teachers in Chicago took to the picket lines in September, leaving classrooms empty in the first weeks of the new school year, it caught America's attention. Now that the debate over education has been reignited, let's put the focus back where it belongs—on the students.

Many Americans are deeply concerned about the state of public K–12 education—and others are downright mad. A new Hollywood film features the fight of one mother and one teacher who are fed up with the low standards, union control, and bureaucratic bungling that contribute to chronically failing schools. *Won't Back Down* is inspired by a true story and illustrates how a community can impact critical issues like teacher quality, teacher tenure, and school choice. It should shock no one that union leaders don't want Americans to see this

movie. Moreover, they're intensifying efforts to fight education reforms being undertaken in states and cities.

Fed up parents, educators, and students have a ready ally in business. Business is often the first to see the end result of a poor education when potential workers apply for a job. Studies show that most 4th graders and 8th graders aren't proficient in reading and math. Thirty percent of U.S. students don't complete high school in four years, and the dropout rate is more than 50% for African-Americans and Hispanics. And half of U.S. students who do graduate lack the advanced literacy and math skills necessary for college or skilled employment.

Lack of skills and training is why roughly 3.5 million American jobs sit vacant—workers don't have the right tools and education. It's why businesses spend billions annually on remediation training for new hires. And it's why business leaders—through individual effort or by working with local chambers of commerce, foundations, or public education

funds—are supporting effective school board governance at the local level.

To bring the reform debate to cities across the nation and get local businesses more involved, the Chamber's Institute for a Competitive Workforce will launch the *Breaking the Monopoly of Mediocrity in Public Education* tour on October 10. It will address communities' specific education challenges and the importance of reform to local economies. To learn more, visit www.BreakTheMonopoly.com.

Parents want their children to learn and grow, teachers want to set students on a path to achievement, and employers want to hire them. All parties need to be engaged and find consensus on commonsense reforms that put students first. Such reforms can help shape our students' education, sharpen our workforce, and secure our economic future.



100 Years Standing Up for American Enterprise
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Obama's Boys on the Bus

The media pull out all the stops to reelect the president.

BY FRED BARNES



The *Time* cover story last week was headlined “The Mormon Identity.” The cover, featuring Mitt Romney in a stained-glass window, said in smaller type, “What Mitt Romney’s faith tells us about his vision and values.” *Newsweek* had President Obama on the cover, identifying him as “The Democrats’ Reagan” and heralding the story inside as “What Obama Will Achieve in His Second Term.”

Neither of the stories, to put it mildly, was helpful to Romney’s presidential campaign. The piece in *Time* was fair, but the timing, long after Mormonism had faded as a factor in the election, was suspect. In *Newsweek*, Obama was lionized, while Romney and Republicans were treated like hyperpartisan right-wingers.

My point in citing the newsmagazines is not that they’re colluding to reelect Obama. They don’t have to. It comes quite naturally to these pillars of the mainstream media to elevate issues

with a pro-Obama tilt. And they’re not even the biggest contributors to the liberal bias that has dominated media coverage of the presidential race.

The bias has been so massive, palpable, and unprecedented that the scales have begun to fall from the eyes of a few stalwarts of the media establishment. Obama, Mark Halperin of *Time* noted last week, “has been covered as a candidate, rather than as an incumbent whose record needs to be scrutinized.” As you might suspect, this coincides neatly with the president’s reelection strategy.

The *Huffington Post*’s Howard Fineman has suggested the media have all but given the president a free ride. “Obama was such a cool and uplifting story to so many in the media in 2008 that they have essentially ceded ground to him that they have yet to reclaim,” Fineman wrote. The president has campaigned “without having to seriously and substantively defend his first-term promises or shortcomings, and without having to say much, if anything, about what, if anything, he might do

substantially differently if he is fortunate enough to win again.”

The most explosive criticism of press bias has come from Patrick Caddell, the former pollster and adviser to Democrats George McGovern, Jimmy Carter, and Gary Hart. “We have a political campaign where, to put the best metaphor I can on it, the referees on the field are sacking the quarterback of one team, tripping up their runners, throwing their bodies in front of blockers, and nobody says anything,” Caddell said in a speech.

If you hadn’t guessed, the refs are the media, their victims Romney and Republicans. No fan of Romney, Caddell said Obama is protected by the media. Any other president who flew to Las Vegas for a fundraiser hours after the killing of the U.S. ambassador in Libya would have been “crucified,” he said. But Obama wasn’t. “It should have been the equivalent, for Barack Obama, of George Bush’s ‘flying over Katrina’ moment,” Caddell said. “But nothing was said at all and nothing will be said.”

Coverage of the Obama administration’s response to the Libyan attack also reflects the media’s double standard. Within 24 hours, Pentagon and intelligence officials had concluded the assault on the Benghazi consulate was an act of terrorism planned for the eleventh anniversary of 9/11, according to numerous reports. Yet five days later, Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, insisted it “began spontaneously” as a reaction to the Cairo demonstrations against a “hateful video.” White House press secretary Jay Carney continued to say the same.

An obvious question arises, or at least should. Was there a cover-up? If we had a Republican president—or even a Democratic president not named Obama—the press would be pursuing that possibility with great intensity. And the national news would be focused on efforts of the president and his aides to deflect blame for the eruption of assaults on American embassies in Libya and across the Middle East. But in Obama’s case, this hasn’t happened.

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Kirsten Powers of the *Daily Beast* is one of the few journalists to doubt the administration's motives. Its spin doesn't make sense, she wrote, "unless it is seen as a deliberate attempt to mislead Americans into believing al Qaeda has been decimated, as President Obama has been known to assert." But "most of the media herd was fretting" about Mitt Romney's taxes, she added, thus too busy to probe a far bigger story that might embarrass Obama.

In the treatment of Romney and Obama, the double standard has become habitual. The hunt for gaffes is the defining trait of the media in regard to Romney. But the most egregious gaffe by Obama this year—"You didn't build that"—was ignored for four days and reported only after the conservative press had created a mini-firestorm over the comment.

In September, Romney innocently joked in answer to a reporter's question. "Look at those clouds. It's beautiful. Look at those things." This was turned into a running gag "for no other reason than to make Romney seem wooden," wrote *Gawker's* John Cook. "Imagine if Obama's every 'heh' or 'uuuhh' made it into his quotes."

Media "fact checkers," too, have been notoriously one-sided, to the detriment of Republicans. Paul Ryan's speech at the Republican convention was flyspecked in a novel way: He was faulted not for what he said but for what he didn't say. Meanwhile, Joe Biden's constant stream of misstatements, goofy comments, and gaffes are routinely tolerated. "From insensitively telling a wheelchair-bound state senator to 'stand up' to not recognizing how many letters there are in the word 'jobs,' the media have let Biden get away with gaffes that would have gotten GOP VP picks pilloried," says Geoffrey Dickens of the Media Research Center.

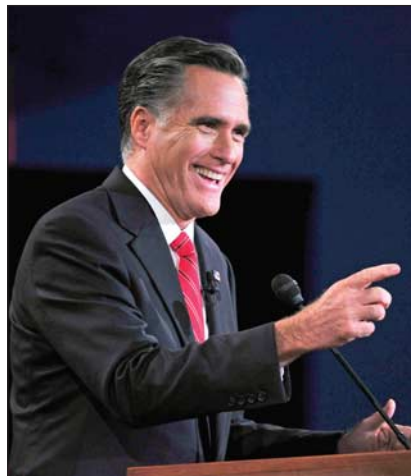
Several months ago, a journalist with four decades of experience and I discussed the matter of media bias in the election. We agreed it would probably be worse than ever. And it has been. But we never figured it would be this bad and, a month before Election Day, still getting worse. ♦

An Unspinnable Debate

How Romney won a clear victory in Denver.

BY JAMES W. CEASER

The highly anticipated debate in Denver was the rarest of all things in American politics: an unspinnable event. Almost all who watched the contest concluded that there was one president on the stage, and it was Mitt Romney. Obama sympathizers took the measure of the



Mitt the Manhandler

situation and decided that the best thing to do was to hoist the white flag and get out of Dodge. Chris Matthews asked, "Where was Obama tonight?" James Carville observed that it "looked like . . . President Obama didn't want to be there." A few half-hearted attempts to deflect the result by arguing that Mitt Romney had bullied Jim Lehrer collapsed under the revelation that Barack Obama had held onto the microphone for four minutes longer than his opponent.

Yet before the milk bottles are

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opened at Romney headquarters in Boston, his advisers will have to consider whether a victory in a debate by itself can change the trend of a presidential campaign. After all, President Obama committed no decisive blunder, nor was there anything like the perfect "gotcha" moment to replay time and again for the next month. Experience has shown that a defeat for an incumbent in an early debate, like the one George Bush experienced at the hands of John Kerry in 2004, can turn out to be just one of those "bumps in the road." The only way for the Romney camp to transform this impressive win on debate points into a political advantage is to find the compelling themes that can be integrated into a fuller campaign strategy.

Romney's greatest success in Denver came from his threading of two needles.

First, he projected himself as a leader who was at the same time bolder yet warmer, stronger yet more human, than most had viewed him until now. Romney was on the offensive throughout—he was more "aggressive" than Obama (Tom Bevan said he "manhandled" the president), but he also managed to make himself appear more likable, charming, and compassionate.

Romney discovered a formula that had eluded him throughout the past year, and it is a remarkable feat of alchemy. Up until this point, the two qualities of political strength and personal warmth were, perhaps reasonably, thought to be opposites. One of them could be pursued only at the expense of the other: hence the decision at the Republican convention to give an acceptance speech that avoided strong policy statements in an effort to reveal

to America the personal Mitt, hitherto buried somewhere deep inside a stiff public persona. The personal anecdote of his father giving his mother a rose every day was touching, but was it a pathway to the presidency?

There is no doubt that Mitt Romney has suffered from a failure to display warmth and empathy. The poll results on this point are striking. On the question who seems more likable and friendly, Barack Obama—hardly the cuddly and fuzzy type himself—beats Mitt Romney better than two to one (61 percent to 27 percent) and is deemed far more in touch with the problems of the middle class (57 percent to 37 percent). Political analyst Bill Schneider has argued that these qualities are decisive: “The only way that the president can get reelected in this difficult economic environment is by exploiting his personal appeal.”

Romney used the debate to show that his deficiency in “connecting”—his lack of a political gene—can best be overcome by pressing his political case. His concern for the middle class and the unemployed, as he explained, is demonstrated not just in his profession of caring, but also in his policy of resisting a tax increase and lowering tax rates. It was the argument for these positions, advanced with passion and conviction, that helped make the case for Romney’s warmth and showed his sincerity. Mitt Romney in public is always going to be primarily a public person; for him, this is the best way to sell his private side.

The second needle Romney managed to thread in Denver was even more unexpected. Romney was able to appear at one and the same time more conservative and more postpartisan than he has till now.

For weeks within the Republican party, the Romney campaign has been criticized for adopting a strategy of “referendum” over “choice.” “Referendum” refers to the theory that this election will be won by voters deciding that they do not want to reelect Barack Obama. The challenger’s job is to make himself acceptable, a credible alternative, so that voters dissatisfied with the president can easily choose a

safe option. “Choice” refers to the theory that the public also needs compelling reasons to vote for the challenger.

Referendum is naturally associated with lying low and trying to target independents piecemeal (women in particular). From this point of view, articulating big, bold plans at this stage represents nothing more than intellectual chest-thumping that is disconnected from politics on the ground. The independents want a more conciliatory candidate who can work with the other side. The choice school contends that it is only by laying out a big, bold alternative program that a challenger can persuade and motivate voters, including the independents and undecideds who hold the balance.

Romney found the sweet spot here. He did make big appeals in the debate, moving far more to the choice position than he had in recent weeks. Yet when the opportunity was presented to embrace the logic of the referendum position, he took it too.

The plain fact is that many of the voters who are undecided at this point are the very ones who are sick of

deadlock and partisan conflict. Partisans and “big idea” people may think what they will, but this feeling in the electorate was a significant reason for Obama’s appeal in 2008. Romney captured the postpartisan mantle from Obama at the point where the president brought out what he thought was his trump card, commending Mitt Romney for initiating Romneycare. Romney took the compliment, insisted on some of the differences with Obamacare, and then showed how he had passed his program in Massachusetts working with a legislature that was 87 percent Democratic. The Frank Luntz focus group of independents found this to be one of the most appealing moments in the debate. Romney’s supposed Achilles’ heel, after his political ACL surgery, has turned into one of his greatest strengths.

These two themes—a leader whose empathy comes from strength and conviction and a person whose bold plans are not in tension with a temperament conducive to bipartisanship—are the “takeaways” from last week that can put Mitt Romney on the path to victory. ♦

Rocky Mountain High

Romney resets the race.

BY JAMES PIERESON

U ntil last week’s debate, the presidential campaign had followed a fairly conventional path. True to form, Democrats struck early, trying to score a knockout before Labor Day and before their opponent had a chance to get his campaign off the ground. Over the summer, President Obama’s

reelection campaign spent large sums on ads designed to portray Mitt Romney as an out-of-touch investment banker and right-wing ideologue. By late September, this strategy appeared to have worked. Obama was leading by several points nationally and by larger margins in swing states, especially in Ohio, where Obama’s bailout of the auto industry gives him some powerful talking points. In addition, Romney’s personal ratings were “underwater”:

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More voters viewed him in a negative than in a positive light. Many in the mainstream news media concluded that the race was all but over.

Also true to form, Republicans held their fire over the summer in the belief that swing voters make up their minds in October rather than in July or August. Romney suffered through a miserable summer as Obama hammered him daily in the swing states. His convention turned out to be a dud; his own acceptance speech lacked fire and substance. By early October, with his supporters demoralized and the election slipping away, Romney's emphasis on the first debate as a potential "game changer" appeared more and more a strategy of desperation. Few could have anticipated that his bet would pay off.

Romney's surprising performance in last week's debate may turn out to have been the pivotal event in this year's presidential campaign, much as Kennedy's confrontation with Nixon in 1960 was a turning point in that contest. Like Nixon, Obama had a reputation as a master debater; unlike Kennedy, who was something of an unknown, Romney had a reputation as a fumbler with a penchant for gaffes. Far more than Kennedy's, Romney's triumph was a stunner for the nearly 70 million viewers who watched it. President Obama, meanwhile, seemed bored with the proceedings, not unlike George H. W. Bush, who was caught checking his watch in a 1992 debate with Bill Clinton.

The debate did not win the election for Romney, but it energized his campaign, gave it a theme, and put him in a position to close the gap on Obama. Romney's supporters, knowing that they have a candidate, will now be more willing to make calls, knock on doors, come out to vote, and open their wallets for the cause. Independent voters, opposed to Obama but doubtful about Romney, will now give him a second look.

More important, Romney was able to use the debate to land some near lethal blows against Obama-care and Obama's slow growth/high deficit economy. Romney set forth

a multi-count indictment against Obama's signature health care legislation: It takes \$716 billion from Medicare; it was rammed through on partisan votes; it diverted attention from jobs and the economy; it is too expensive and complex; it delegates authority over health care to an unelected board in Washington. On the economy and the deficit, Romney almost sounded like a

to drive interest rates down and the stock market up. The latest jobs report from the Labor Department, which pegged the new unemployment rate at 7.8 percent, the first time it has been below 8 percent in nearly four years, shows the risk to the Romney campaign of depending too heavily on a jobs-jobs-jobs mantra.

Romney's debate triumph almost guarantees that the outcome of the



A campaign rally in Virginia, the day after

born-again supply-sider, emphasizing growth, tax cuts, and elimination of regulations. These attacks appeared to have caught Obama off-guard. Obama, having invested so much in disqualifying Romney, forgot that he might have to defend his own record.

Obama has invested much of his ammunition in a now-failed effort to put Romney away. He will undoubtedly recycle his attacks on Romney's taxes and background in private equity, but these may prove stale in the midst of a newly spirited debate over national policy and the future direction of the country. Nevertheless, Obama maintains certain advantages of incumbency, one sign of which was the announcement in September of the Federal Reserve Board's latest bond-buying program designed

election will be close. At the same time, it may yet succeed in raising the level of the campaign to one commensurate with the magnitude of the problems the nation faces. The entitlement state is lurching ever closer to an existential crisis. Internationally, the postwar system, propped up by the American dollar and American military power, is headed toward an uncertain transition. An America burdened by debt and slow growth cannot maintain either its domestic programs or its role abroad. Neither candidate, least of all President Obama, has yet scaled up his game to address these challenges. By besting Obama in Denver, Romney blew up the president's plan to win with a "small ball" campaign. In doing so, he may have inadvertently forced a debate over the issues that really matter. ♦

Obama's Ennui

And Romney's achievement.

BY HARVEY MANSFIELD

Two things were notable in the debate on October 3: the ennui of Barack Obama and the twist made by Mitt Romney.

President Obama looked ill at ease, as if he were tired of his office. Does he really want to stay for another four years? Certainly he wants to run for a second term; he enjoys campaigning and he is good at it. But the direct, personal confrontation with Romney was a reminder to him of the necessities of governing, best shown in the infighting of compromise and the building of majorities. Outside on the hustings are speeches, applause, and acclaim; inside Washington are the deliberations of choice and the deals that result. For all his partiality to government, Obama is an outside-the-Beltway man. When it comes to governing, he loses his steam and looks as if he longs to be elsewhere.

Mitt Romney, however, accomplished a twist from private to public. In the primaries against Republican opponents he was the businessman, as opposed to his rivals who had spent their lives in government. In the debate he made three passing references to how his business experience made him aware of actions by government that people always in government might not see, regarding regulation, overseas jobs, and health care. He also related anecdotes of his experience in campaigning. But above all, Romney made a point of his experience as Massachusetts governor—as a politician. As a politician he knew how to work with both parties; he could be bipartisan and govern successfully in a Democratic state.

Bipartisan in what? In the passage

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of a health care law uncomfortably close to Obamacare, a law that had been his chief disadvantage in his candidacy to the Republican party. Romney now turned the minus into a plus: The very bipartisanship that was suspect among Republicans was now his main argument against Obama. The president had promised a bipartisan transformation but had actually sought and obtained a narrow partisan triumph. It was all the more a triumph not only because no Republican had voted for Obamacare but also because it was unpopular. If Obama had cared to do it, more work with the other party would have produced a law that would feel better to more people. Romney presented himself not as a businessman, nor as a reluctant politician nourished on nonpolitical experience, but as a politician with political experience, a better one than Obama. He enjoyed the debate and looked as if he would enjoy being president.

The economic basis for bipartisanship is growth. Without sufficient growth government must either tax or cut spending or do both, with an emphasis on one or the other. Implicitly Obama abandoned growth in this debate and has done so throughout the campaign; this is the meaning of his failure to produce a plan for the next four years. He never said that the consequence of no growth is austerity, but that is what is in his mind and, he believes, in the voters' minds. In a climate of reduced hope, which means hope in growth, Obama promises the people that he will be on their side. That is the thinking behind his effective abandonment of bipartisanship. Without growth we are headed toward a battle of the parties, essentially the rich versus the middle class, in which Democrats will have the advantage over the oligarchic defenders of the

rich. Their call is for "fairness," and Obama repeated it in the debate.

Fairness means redistribution, not so much in a spirit of generosity as with a certain vengeance against the greedy among the rich. The mellow rich—captains of green industry and Hollywood entertainers—will be exempted from the exactions of fairness or rewarded with the glow of virtue. Fairness is the new substitute for progress, because progress requires growth. A growing economy makes America an example to the world and justifies its leadership as the only superpower. Fairness without growth leaves us in the condition of Europe, with little ambition except to live as fairly as possible—a goal that Europe now finds difficult if not impossible. The struggle for fairness is what lies ahead, according to the Democrats. It will be partisan, perhaps bitterly partisan, in the coming climate of austerity. Obama's air of ennui in the debate arises not just from his personal character of cool but more from his thoughts about the future. He sees America in decline. He does not say it, but he sees it, and it determines his politics as well as his demeanor.

Romney looked confident in himself and in growth, and consequently in the prospects of America. This is not logic, but it's politics. Government has a role different from Obama's view. Its purpose is not to "cut out the middleman" so as to provide fairness to the people (as Obama boasted he had done in putting government in charge of student loans), but to foster growth. Growth means growth in jobs more than in wealth, because growth redistributes wealth through jobs, in which people earn their checks for themselves rather than wait for them to come in the mail. Government does not really cut out the middleman; it becomes the middleman. Romney was willing to guess that the private sector would be less costly than the government. This is not the antigovernment animus of the Tea Party, but it aims at the same goal with greater effect because it can reasonably claim to be bipartisan. With the same stroke Romney gave his party a considerable boost. ♦

A Historian Taught by History

Eugene D. Genovese, 1930-2012.

BY RONALD RADOSH



Eugene D. Genovese, 1973

The death late last month of Eugene D. Genovese was a loss not only to the world of professional historians, but to American intellectual life as a whole and especially to the conservative intellectual movement. Best known for his prize-winning 1974 book *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, Genovese transformed the way in which scholars came to understand the slave South. Arguing that a conflict existed between a bourgeois North and a pre-capitalist South, he wrote about the effects of the policies of the Southern slave-owning class. He used the concept of “hegemony” derived from the work of the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci

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to argue that the slaveowners created a social structure in which slaves, despite their subordinate role, were able to build their own communal space and assert their humanity.

Even when Genovese wrote as a Marxist, he always stressed that history was made by human beings, not by historical forces over which they had no control, and certainly not any preordained economic process. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the greatest Marxist scholar of his generation ended his life as a traditionalist Catholic who believed in the importance of faith for creating a humane society. A clue to the direction in which he was evolving can be found in an essay Genovese wrote in the 1990s, in which, still a Marxist, he complained, “For the political Left, there is an especially dark side to the question of ideological

bias and its attendant contempt for religion.” The Christian message, Genovese the historian found, was central to both the slaveholding class and the black yeomanry and “created between them” an “unbreakable bond,” one that became a route out of slavery. For Genovese, the same leftists who scolded believers and criticized Christianity for barbaric policies pursued in its name had themselves supported the “seventy-year experiment with socialism” that brought “little more to our credit than tens of millions of corpses.” It was time, he admonished his readers, to undertake a “reconsideration of the Christian idea of justice and equality before God and of our own blood-drenched romance with the utopia of a man-made heaven here on earth.”

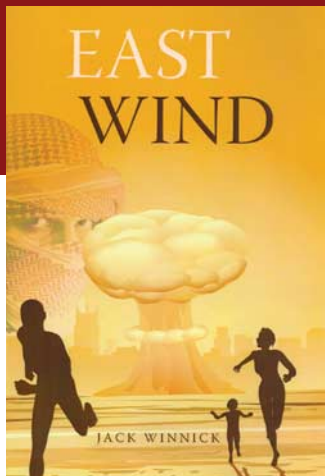
I was fortunate to have known Genovese for over half a century. When we met, I was a young graduate student, and he was teaching at Brooklyn Polytechnic (now the Polytechnic Institute of New York University). He had what Princeton’s Robert P. George calls a “passion for justice” and a complementary “passion for truth.”

At age 15, he had joined the Communist party, but his membership was brief. Outspoken and beholden to no one, Genovese was expelled for the crime of “white chauvinism.” As he explained, “I zigged when I should have zagged.” He continued, nevertheless, to write and speak as a supporter of the Communist cause and a defender of the Soviet Union. That shortsighted act of expulsion by the party’s leaders freed him to pursue his search for truth in directions the official Communist party historians never would have tolerated in a party member. But it also led Genovese to further political misjudgments.

When we met in the early 1960s, he had moved on to a short-lived fixation with Maoism and membership in the first Maoist political group in the United States, the Progressive Labor party, which stood with the Chinese in the Soviet-Chinese

GETTY IMAGES

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-- **Gerard Casale, Jr., Shofar Magazine**

East Wind is available at:

Firesidepubs.com | Kindle.com
 Amazon.com | Nook.com
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split. He became editor in chief of the *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly*, writing editorials and commissioning articles arguing that Mao's path would lead to the long-awaited world socialist revolution.

But Genovese was also digging into a long career of serious intellectual work, beginning his magisterial books on slavery. The last of these include *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (2005) and *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (2011), both coauthored with his historian wife, the late Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. Historian David Brion Davis called him "one of the greatest historians of American slavery."

This is not to say that, once immersed in the academic life, Genovese forgot about politics. An ardent opponent of the Vietnam war, he spoke at a 1966 teach-in while working at Rutgers University and scandalized liberals by saying, "Unlike most of my distinguished colleagues . . . I do not fear or regret the impending Vietcong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it."

Yet, a few years later, Genovese confounded his allies on the left by fiercely opposing their effort to get the American Historical Association to pass a resolution condemning the war. Those of us who backed the resolution were shocked to hear Genovese argue that its effect would be to dangerously politicize the profession, forcing opponents of the resolution to resign from the AHA. The assembled New Left graduate students and professors met his argument with a cascade of boos. Genovese responded that we were a bunch of "totalitarians," and he called on the association to "put [the antiwar activist historians] down hard, once and for all." The majority of historians cheered, leaving the radicals horrified and speechless.

How could Genovese—who wrote such careful and nuanced history, and was so keen to protect the integrity of his profession—adhere for so long to an ideology that

justified mass terror as necessary for the attainment of a good society? He realized that he had to address that question directly, and he did so in a brave essay in *Dissent* in 1994, "The Question." That question turned out to be: "What did you know, and when did you know it?" Genovese did not blame others, but included himself among those who had to take responsibility. "In a noble effort to liberate the human race from violence and oppression," he wrote, "we broke all records for mass slaughter, piling up tens of millions of corpses in less than three-quarters of a century." He called for "a sober reassessment of the ideological foundations of our political course."

For most, that reassessment never came, despite the failure of the socialist societies. Genovese concluded that "deep flaws in our very understanding of human nature" made the "moral and ethical baseline" of religion a more worthy guide to the moral life than human ideology, and he returned to the Catholic faith of his youth.

As already noted, there were early hints of the direction Genovese's thought would ultimately take. As far back as the 1970s, he wrote for *National Review*, whose editor, William F. Buckley Jr., he admired and whose audience he judged to include open-minded readers. In 1978 Genovese told me, "There are many things that come out of conservative criticism, not only of the left but of liberalism, which are very important," and he took seriously the arguments of social conservatives. He always insisted that there are "outstanding right-wing people." That is something few on the left would say, then or now.

His "frank assessment" that all forms of socialism had been proved wrong and that false assumptions "underlay the whole left" was one that few on the left could countenance. In rejecting the path he had followed for so many years, Eugene D. Genovese displayed the rare courage that defined him as a human being, a scholar, and a man of integrity. ♦

Happy Warriors

For Merrie England, against the Dreary EU.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

Birmingham, England

For people once described by David Cameron as “fruitcakes and loonies and closet racists, mostly” (I’ve always savored that sly “mostly”), the members of UKIP—the euroskeptic United Kingdom Independence Party—gathered in Birmingham last month for their annual conference were a bright, friendly, and refreshingly normal bunch.

They were also surprisingly upbeat. The euro—that Freddy Krueger of currencies—remains as indestructible as it is destructive, and José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, is openly using the once-taboo F-word, pressing for transformation of the EU into a “federation of nation-states.” But never mind all that, the cheerfully determined folk at the conference reckoned that events were moving their way. UKIP, said its leader, the indispensable, charismatic, and hugely entertaining Nigel Farage, is “a party in a very good mood.”

Indeed it is, and why not? Nearly two decades after its founding in 1993, UKIP has come a very long way, despite bouts of internecine strife, a series of scandals, serial eccentricity, and a collection of electoral disasters that would have made even Harold Stassen pause. As Farage explained to the conference, things had been a “bit shambolic” in the past, a confession that was no revelation.

Thanks to the EU, and in more ways than one, this dismal state of affairs has been changing. The relentless intrusions of Brussels into everyday British life have sustained a market for UKIP’s ideas in a nation that was never euro-ophile to start with. And one shocking

continental innovation—proportional representation—has given UKIP a position unimaginable under Britain’s first-past-the-post voting system.

The mathematics of first-past-the-post are brutal for upstart political parties, except in areas where they can find concentrated support such as that enjoyed by nationalists in Scotland and Wales. The Liberal Democrats took 23 percent of the vote in the 2010 election, but only 57 seats in the 650-member House of Commons. UKIP fared even worse, winning 3 percent of the popular vote and taking no seats at all.

Such results feed upon themselves. The electorate shies away from casting votes that will be wasted—or worse. Much of UKIP’s support comes from formerly die-hard Tories, and many more of that growing tribe would follow their lead were it not for their (justifiable) fear of splitting the right-wing vote and letting the left slip in through the middle. As it is, defections to UKIP probably cost the Conservatives some 20 seats—and an absolute majority—in the 2010 election. The Tories thus ended up in a coalition government with the euromaniacal Liberal Democrats, an irony lost on few and a strong disincentive for many potential UKIP voters to slip the Tory leash. And UKIP hasn’t done much better in local elections. It has just a handful of councilors and supreme power only in the Cambridgeshire town of Ramsey (population 6,000).

Thanks to proportional representation, worries about wasted or counter-productive votes have not been such an issue in elections to the EU’s Potemkin parliament. The few concerns have been further diluted by the suspicion—not quite as justified as in the past—that the world’s only commuting legislature (as a result of some ancient compromise, it sits in both Brussels

and Strasbourg) counts for very little. UKIP celebrated the election of its first three members of the European parliament in 1999. Five years later, UKIP came third with 16.1 percent of the vote and 12 MEPs. In 2009 it overtook the governing Labour party, grabbing 16.5 percent of the poll and a haul of 13 seats out of a British total of 72. UKIP’s leadership is convinced the party has a good chance of coming out on top in the 2014 EU elections.

The very nature of a European election makes it an obvious vehicle for a protest against the Brussels oligarchy. That fact, combined with a typically low turnout (in 2009 an unimpressive 34 percent of the British electorate), means that those percentages overstate UKIP’s real backing. Nevertheless the prospect of UKIP topping the euro-poll in 2014—and the momentum that would come with it—must worry David Cameron, facing a national election the following year.

UKIP already stands at some 7-10 percent in national opinion polls, something that cannot just be put down to midterm disillusion with the Tories. There is a wide and growing disconnect between the pedantically centrist, tiresomely PC prime minister and a good number of his party’s natural supporters. Many of these are euroskeptic, and so this breach is only worsened by Cameron’s refusal to respond with anything other than curiously arrogant disdain to mounting British disgust with an EU that displays an ambition only exceeded—thanks to the flailing euro—by its troubles. One recent poll showed almost half of all Britons wanted out of the EU, while only under a third preferred to stay in. Making matters worse still for Cameron, however unfairly, is the U.K.’s failure to emerge from the economic mess his government inherited. Put all these circumstances together and UKIP’s allure is not hard to understand. Nor is the fact that the party’s appeal is reinforced by its plague-on-all-your-houses outsider status.

And that’s no act: The Birmingham conference was a long way in thinking and in feel from Britain’s political establishment. From the endearingly

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self-deprecatory remarks that accompanied so many speeches, to the occasional organizational glitches, to the misfiring microphone at the conference's Friday night "gala dinner" (tickets cost all of \$55), this was a gathering that featured little of the bombast and none the slickness of the larger parties' shindigs. The auction that accompanied the gala included some cheaper items—tea bags in a fancy box, a woven silk portrait of the queen, and a painting that would have been unforgivable even had the artist been blind—that only underlined the distance between UKIP's grassroots essence and the political establishment some UKIP members refer to as the Lib-Lab-Con.

At a desk near the entrance to the conference, some volunteers—including Mrs. Farage (a German, as it happens)—could be spotted selling Ukitsch: umbrellas, pens, mugs ("The EU is NOT my cup of tea"), tote bags ("The EU is NOT my bag"). Then there was the moment when Mr. Farage—no velvet ropes here—started hawking "Belgian damp rags" to a delighted crowd at five pounds each. (Full disclosure: I bought two.)

Autographed by Farage, these, uh, striking kitchen towels are decorated with the dispiriting features of Herman Van Rompuy, the president of the EU's European Council. They are an allusion to the one event, more than any other, that made Farage the YouTube star that he is today, a status he cemented with a series of speeches that did much to ensure his recognition by *Der Spiegel* as the "seventh most dangerous politician" in Europe, no small honor. In 2010 Farage, an MEP since 1999, greeted Van Rompuy—world famous in Belgium, if nowhere else—to the European parliament shortly after the former Belgian prime minister had been appointed the quasi-head of the EU's quasi-state. After asking who Van Rompuy was, and how he had been picked for this job, Farage compared the new potentate's charisma to that of a "damp rag" and his appearance to that of "a low-grade bank clerk" (Farage apologized later to bank clerks). It was a virtuoso, deftly theatrical performance, but, as so often with Farage, there was a

knife concealed within the knockabout. After the laughs there was this, delivered more quietly:

I sense though that you are competent and capable and dangerous and I have no doubt that it is your intention to be the quiet assassin of European democracy and of the European nation-states.

This display of unruly parliamentary vigor was too much for the EU's mausoleum of democracy. Farage was fined \$4,400 for his *lèse-Rompuy*, not a bad price for the publicity it brought.

Farage, 48, a smoker (despite a bout of cancer in his 20s) who enjoys a drink or two, is well aware of his naughty, none-of-the-above appeal. The Belgian damp rags were decorated with a small, impish photograph of UKIP's leader roaring with bad-boy laughter. UKIP's antiestablishment message was a familiar refrain from the conference floor. The term "political class" was a frequent punch line, repeated with more resignation than anger, the exasperated lament of passengers who have found themselves on a peculiarly poorly run vessel but are still debating how violent the mutiny should be.

One thing that does seem certain, however, is that the Conservative party is in danger of being shoved over the side. It's not just the EU, or the economy, or the drift to a witless center, although it is all those things. There's something else. UKIP's activists are a smart lot, and they understand but do not appreciate the contempt in which they have for too long been held by Cameron's metropolitan clique. There's recently been talk of some sort of UKIP-Conservative nonaggression pact for the 2015 general election. In his keynote speech, Farage appeared to leave a door slightly ajar "to consider it," but only in exchange for a promise "written in blood" of an in/out referendum on the EU. A later speaker wanted something else: an apology. The applause that followed ought to be a reminder to Cameron to be careful in the future about whom he chooses to demonize.

As always in Britain, resentment comes wrapped in the country's class

sensitivities. The accents at the conference were provincial. Toffs were scarce on the ground. As I listened to the talk, time went into reverse, to Conservative constituency meetings of 30 years ago. These were Thatcher's people; many of them had come of age under the Iron Lady's reign. They were nonsense, often self-employed, and not the sort invited to the dinner parties that had dreamt up the rainbow coalition of politically correct gestures that, in the end, failed to carry Cameron to clear victory in 2010 against one of the most incompetent governments in British history.

To date the border between UKIP and the Conservative party has been ill-defined and rarely policed. That may be changing. If UKIP is to anchor itself at home as well as in the European parliament—essential if it is to increase its clout—it cannot just be about Brussels (the conference's slogan was "Beyond the EU"). That will mean staking out a position more clearly distinct from the Tories than hitherto. Farage (who quit the Conservative party in 1992 over the EU's Maastricht Treaty) has been successful in excluding racists and the jackbooted from his party, and describes himself as libertarian. But it is easy to see that the search for votes—particularly from what Farage terms "patriotic old Labour"—may be easing the party in the direction of the harder-edged, bigger-spending populism of euroskeptic parties on the continent, such as the Finns party (also known as the True Finns) and the Danish People's party.

That could cause trouble in time, but for now Brussels remains the bogeyman around which UKIP can rally, a piñata for all, bashed in Birmingham by Farage in top form, clever, incisive, and witty. Later, "with greetings from the eurozone," came Timo Soini (*Der Spiegel's* "fifth most dangerous"), the leader of the Finns party and the politician responsible for forcing the previously supine Helsinki establishment to do something to protect its taxpayers from the ravages of a dysfunctional monetary union. Soini was hammer to Farage's saber, but he was amusing and touching, too—proud of his country

but also of de Gaulle's grand vision of a *Europe des Patries*. If this conference was a celebration of xenophobia it was taking a very strange form. The single currency itself was, of course, singled out for rough treatment and rougher prophecies, not least from the distinguished City of London economist (and former Treasury adviser), UKIP cobelligerent Roger Bootle: "When did things go wrong with the euro? Right at the beginning."

That was the fun stuff. It's when discussing the next stage in this saga that the usually ebullient Farage began to look a little anxious. He has long been skeptical, for good reason, about the terms of any referendum that Cameron might offer the British electorate. His new concern is that Barroso's attempt to push for federation will provide an extremely convenient escape hatch for Cameron, by providing him the opportunity to offer the British to vote on joining a closer union or remaining "as is." The problem with that choice is that, unless the position of those EU member states who choose to remain outside the deeper union is fundamentally renegotiated, "as is" is not good enough. It might seem attractive to a country easily bored by the technical complexity of the EU debate, but Britain would remain subject, in practice, to the heavy burden of EU regulation, not to mention the exorbitant costs, direct and indirect, of membership. In short, it would be a very limited victory. The electorate's fear of the unknown will make an in/out referendum a risky proposition for UKIP and its sympathizers, whatever the current opinion polls may predict, but for now it remains the last best hope.

Making matters worse is the gradual approach of 2015 and the likely election of a europhile Labour government and, with it, the closing of the exit door, quite possibly, forever.

And writing those words makes me think of a scene in the final *Lord of the Rings* film. As Gimli, the martial dwarf, contemplates the perils ahead, he turns to his companions, and remarks, "Certain death. Small chance of success. What are we waiting for?" Gimli, I feel, would have been a member of UKIP. ♦

Another Reason to End Preferences

Affirmative action also hurts the 'beneficiaries.'

BY TERRY EASTLAND

Arguably the most notable brief filed in the Supreme Court's big case on affirmative action comes from a pair of lawyers who have just published a book on the subject. The case is *Fisher v. Texas*, and the coauthors are Richard Sander, who is also an economist, and Stuart Taylor, the legal affairs writer. The argument they press is that "the biggest problem for minorities in higher education is no longer race but rather racial preferences." If you ask why that is, their answer is "mismatch," which also serves as the title of their book.

Here, from *Mismatch*, is how Sander and Taylor explain the concept:

An institution of higher education admits a student using such a large admissions preference that the student "finds herself in a class where she has weaker academic preparation than nearly all of her classmates." The student, whose test scores and grades in high school indicate she would do fine at, "say, Wake Forest or the University of Richmond, instead finds herself at Duke, where the professors are not teaching at a pace designed for her. Instead they are teaching to the 'middle' of the class, introducing terms and concepts at a speed that is challenging even the best-prepared student."

The student "falls behind from the start and becomes increasingly lost as the professor and her classmates race

ahead." Grades on her first exams put her at the bottom of the class. "Worse, the experience may well induce panic and self-doubt, making learning even harder."

Large preferences can be and are used to admit legacy applicants and athletes. Still, it is usually the case, Sander and Taylor write, that large preferences are used to admit minorities—mainly African Americans and Hispanics—whose academic credentials are significantly lower than those of whites and Asian Americans. There are, of course, minority applicants whose scores and grades are excellent and on that basis alone would gain admission. But substantial numbers are admitted thanks to large preferences. And where such

preferences are integral to an admissions policy, mismatching occurs. Most selective colleges and universities, and most professional schools, use large racial preferences in admissions. And "a striking feature of our system of preferences," the authors write, "is its tendency to cascade like a row of dominoes." Elite schools "get their pick of the most academically qualified minorities, most of whom might have been better matched [academically] at a lower-tier school." And the second tier of schools, "deprived of students who would have been academic matches, must then in turn use preferences to produce a representative student body, and so on down the line."



Abigail Fisher

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Sander and Taylor observe that if the top schools practiced “strict racial neutrality,” then schools in every lower tier would be able to use much smaller preferences, or none at all, to achieve their racial diversity goals. But of course the top schools don’t practice such neutrality, though they do admit the most qualified minorities. As a result, “the cascade effect” multiplies “the scale on which preferences are used and effectively forces second- and third-tier institutions . . . to use larger preferences than do the schools at the very top.” And so it leaves many minorities even more mismatched.

Sander and Taylor accurately describe the system of preferences as it has evolved over the past five decades. And they show, drawing upon data and empirical tests, how the mismatching that results from large preferences, to quote from the book’s subtitle, “hurts students it’s intended to help”—students who do have, the authors emphasize, “what it takes to succeed.”

In most cases it’s a matter of where the students are enrolled. If students are mismatched and thus in “academic environments where they feel overwhelmed,” they tend to receive lower grades than if they were not mismatched, to learn less, and to drop out. Strikingly, they also tend to flee more rigorous subjects than would otherwise be the case, and to abandon aspirations to be scientists or scholars.

The *Fisher* case, the authors correctly observe, doesn’t directly pose the problem of mismatch. Abigail Fisher is a young white woman who was not admitted to the University of Texas and claims that the school’s racially preferential admissions policy unconstitutionally discriminated against rejected applicants from non-preferred groups, like herself. That’s the question before the Court, and it’s been the usual question in challenges like *Fisher*’s.

Accordingly, under the Court’s cases, a preferential admissions policy must not “unduly burden individuals who are not members of the favored racial and ethnic groups.” The Court’s doctrine thus accepts the possibility

that a preferential policy can indeed, even unduly, inflict harm on non-preferred applicants. But what no majority has yet to see is that a preferential policy may actually harm students it’s supposed to benefit. To the contrary, in the *Grutter* case in 2003, the last majority (a bare one led by then-Justice Sandra Day O’Connor) to opine on preferences in admissions accepted the notion in the course of sustaining the Michigan law school’s admissions policy that preferences do indeed help minority students.

‘Mismatch’ contributes to the case for abolitionism. For if a preferential policy can harm both the preferred and the nonpreferred, why have such a policy at all? And is not the lesson to be drawn from the system of preferences and the mismatching it produces that it’s not such a bad idea to treat people without reference to their race?

Sander and Taylor’s friend-of-the-court brief in *Fisher* is one of 92 such briefs. It is also one of the two that support neither party. Sander and Taylor’s declared purpose is to bring to the Court’s attention “a growing volume of very careful research, some of it completely unrebutted by dissenting work, [suggesting] that racial preferences in higher education often undermine minority achievement.” Where relevant, research treated in *Mismatch* is included in the brief. And notwithstanding the brief’s neutrality, Sander and Taylor understand the implication of their empirical arguments for the Court’s legal doctrine: “If preferences turn out to have mostly harmful effects—or even if the effects are often harmful and on balance ambiguous—then the fundamental legal premise for permitting this

type of racial classification is gone.”

Sander is mostly liberal in his politics and Taylor less so but not a conservative. They have, you could say, been mugged by reality. Or as they put it in *Mismatch*: “It is this growing body of evidence that has caused the present authors to slowly drift over the past 25 years toward greater sympathy with the abolitionists.”

Still, they are not abolitionists—who would do away with preferences altogether—but reformers, willing to accept small racial preferences but also favoring disclosure requirements that would force schools using preferences to state that they are doing so, to indicate the size of the preferences, to tell students about the academic outcomes of past enrollees with comparable entering credentials, and to make publicly available data on the size of the preferences used and the learning outcomes of those who receive them.

The disclosure requirements are a terrific idea. But no reader of *Mismatch*—a major focus of which is “the pervasive secrecy that veils the operation and effects of racial preferences even from most academics,” leading “to deception, ostracism of truth-tellers, lack of accountability, and an unwillingness to face awkward facts and undertake needed reforms”—can think such requirements will be easy to put in place, much less enforced.

Ultimately, *Mismatch* contributes to the case for abolitionism. For if a preferential policy can harm both the preferred and the nonpreferred, why have such a policy at all? And is not the lesson to be drawn from the system of preferences and the mismatching it produces that it’s not such a bad idea, after all, to treat people without reference to their race?

Maybe what is needed is some reminder of the moral reason behind that idea, which is, as William Van Alstyne, then of Duke Law School, put it, that “individuals are not merely social means; i.e., they are not merely examples of a group, representatives of a cohort, or fungible surrogates of other human beings; each, rather, is a person whom it is improper to count or discount by race.” ♦

To Viktor Go the Spoils

Is Europe right to distrust Hungary's prime minister?

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

‘P’robably the nation which is most difficult to govern is the Hungarians,” says the man who governs them. It is late on an unseasonably warm Friday in September. Sunlight is slanting through the windows of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s office, which looks onto the Danube from the crimson-domed nineteenth-century parliament building in Budapest. “Ten million freedom fighters,” Orbán says. “That has some advantages, but from the governmental side it’s difficult.”

Orbán, the youngest of Hungary’s Cold War heroes, ought to find it easier to govern Hungary than his predecessors. Still in his 40s, widely read, Calvinist (like many Hungarian politicians through the ages), tough when he has to be (and sometimes when he doesn’t), he has a vision of a proud and prosperous Hungary that his followers find stirring. Two years ago, his Fidesz party took two-thirds of the seats in parliament—enough to rewrite Hungary’s constitution and reorder its society. Orbán and Fidesz have done just that. With the opposition split between a discredited post-Communist party, a disreputable fascist party, and a new party called Politics Can Be Different that is green in every sense of the word, Hungary is unlikely to produce an alternative to Fidesz in the near term. Orbán, therefore, has more power than any conservative leader has had in the West since Margaret Thatcher ruled Britain in the mid-1980s. Hungary is the clearest example we have of how a 21st-century conservative government behaves when it rules untrammelled.

Yet Orbán is running into trouble. His name is mud in much of the West. Fidesz may be the party of Hungary’s business class and its working class. But it is not the party of Hungary’s intellectuals, its artists, and most of its journalists—those with good English and contacts abroad. It has not been viewed favorably by the network of foundations

around George Soros, the Hungarian-born investor—even if it was Soros who funded Orbán’s brief stint at Pembroke College, Oxford, in the late 1980s.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton dressed Orbán down on her last visit to Budapest. Freedom House altered Hungary’s “media freedom ranking” from “free” to “partly free.” The Franco-German Green politician Daniel Cohn-Bendit, speaking in the European parliament, accused Orbán of being anti-European. Orbán himself has a different explanation. “A chapter of European history is closed,” he says. “We are not competitive any more. We cannot live as we once lived. What we need is a deep transformation of European life. The only question is, which governments are strong enough, and have enough of a majority in parliament, to lead such a transformation, and which are not.”

THE GOULASH ARCHIPELAGO

Orbán became a political celebrity one day in the early summer of 1989. Then in his mid-twenties, he was invited to speak at a ceremony for the reburial of Imre Nagy, the Communist prime minister executed for permitting the 1956 uprising against Soviet rule. There were still tens of thousands of Soviet troops in Hungary. The Berlin Wall stood. Orbán was speaking as a representative of Hungary’s coming generations, and he looked the part. He had long hair and a Clark Gable mustache, and a weakness for loud, Wild-and-Crazy-Guy blazers, even if he didn’t wear one that day.

He had recently helped found Fidesz, which is a Hungarian acronym for “Alliance of Young Democrats,” and at the time it admitted no members over the age of 35. This was a group that saw no “good intentions” in communism, nor anything the past generation had contributed to Hungary except terror and corruption. Orbán’s speech was of a shocking brusqueness. He told the Soviets they should get out of Hungary, lock, stock, and barrel. Later, when Communists were negotiating a transition arrangement that would have allowed the party to maintain “workers’ combat groups” and party representatives

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Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán in Brussels, January 24, 2012

in workplaces, Orbán was among those who blocked it. He has been the country's top conservative politician for most of the intervening decades, serving a term as prime minister at the turn of the century.

Hungary has been among the least successful Eastern European countries emerging from the Cold War. It has resembled not so much Poland or the Czech Republic as Russia minus the mafia. Like Russia, Hungary has monopolies and alcoholism, and it has hemorrhaged jobs. In this country of 10 million, there are now a million fewer jobs than there were when the Berlin Wall came down. As the philosopher and former member of parliament G.M. Tamás put it recently, "What has happened is the failure of the democratic republic and of the liberal market régime to create a social order which is clearly superior to what preceded it."

In retrospect, Hungary had a couple of specific problems that made its transition out of communism tricky. If you look out the windows of Orbán's offices you can see the Budapest Hilton across the Danube. Building began on it in 1972, in the depths of the Brezhnevian freeze in the Cold War. Joint ventures to bring in foreign expertise and hard currency were a Hungarian specialty. The uprising of 1956 had left the Soviet Union solicitous to keep conditions in

Hungary as comfortable as possible. One result was a relative openness to business—for state bureaucrats at first, and then, by the 1980s, for entrepreneurs. There was more consumer choice here than elsewhere in the East Bloc. The novelist György Dalos referred sardonically to his country as the "Goulash Archipelago." This not-quite-totally-Communist economy never really worked. The government of János Kádár borrowed, and overborrowed, to meet expectations. In 1982, Hungary negotiated a deal with the IMF.

But Goulash communism had an important political consequence when the Wall came down. In the 1990s, there was not, as happened elsewhere, a purge of Communists by new elites with ties to international business. In Hungary, Communists *were* the elites with ties to international business. That gave the country an economic jump on its neighbors—in the early 1990s it was getting more direct foreign investment than the rest of the East Bloc countries combined—but this proved a political liability. That is why, when you ask Orbán what strain of anti-communism he belongs to, he likens himself to Lech Walesa rather than Solzhenitsyn or Havel. "Okay, I'm a guy from university," he says, "but I belong to the plebeian tradition of Hungarian politics." He is not of the nomenklatura.

In this sense, Orbán's "revolution at the ballot box"

has something in common with what Jaroslaw Kaczynski and his twin brother, the late Lech Kaczynski, did over the past decade in Poland. Tardily, quixotically, and sometimes unreasonably, he aims to deprive post-Communist elites of every legacy advantage they carried away from authoritarian rule. As in Kaczynski-era Poland, political rhetoric has taken a turn for the divisive and denunciatory. Fidesz has carried out a wave of renamings. Ferihegy Airport is now named after Ferenc (Franz) Liszt. Moscow Square has been renamed for turn-of-the-century prime minister Kálmán Széll. A square named after Franklin Delano Roosevelt has also been renamed, although a Ronald Reagan monument went up in Freedom Square last year.

Hungarians have chosen the MSzP, successor party to the Communists, to lead them (in coalition) for most of the period since the Cold War. Voters never took the party to their hearts, but they trusted it to do something about those million jobs that had gone missing. The MSzP, alas, showed a gift for running the economy into the ground. The Soviet-educated Gyula Horn, a backer of the Russians in the 1956 uprising, was forced to accept a grinding austerity package as prime minister in 1995. After 2002, Péter Medgyessy, a lover of Cuba who was revealed during his term to have been a high-level intelligence operative under communism, raised public salaries 50 percent and added a “thirteenth month” to pensions.

But it was in 2006 that politics in Hungary really fell to pieces. By then, the Hungarian economy was hurtling towards disaster. The charismatic socialist Ferenc Gyurcsány (pronounced roughly “Dear-join”), a millionaire businessman married to a Politburo member’s granddaughter, defeated Orbán in a close-fought race. A few weeks later he gave a speech to a closed meeting of MSzP leaders. It was secretly recorded, and the bits leaked to the press over the coming days changed the course of Hungarian history. On the tape, Gyurcsány confides to his colleagues:

We did whatever was possible to do in secret in the preceding months, making sure that papers on what we were preparing for would not surface in the last weeks of the election campaign. . . . We have screwed up. Not a little but a lot. No country in Europe has screwed up as much as we have. It can be explained. We have obviously lied throughout the past 18 to 24 months. It was perfectly clear that what we were saying was not true. . . . And in the meantime we did not actually do anything for four years. Nothing. . . . I almost perished because I had to pretend for 18 months that we were governing. Instead, we lied morning, noon, and night. I do not want to carry on with this.

Neither Gyurcsány nor his fans realized why the admission of lying drove the public into a fury—and they do not fully understand it even today. Paul Lendvai, a Hungarian-born Austrian journalist particularly smitten

with Gyurcsány and his circle, wrote in a recent book, “Before we turn to the frenzied consequences of the revelations, we have to raise the question of who leaked the damaging extracts.” (Really? Why?) I spent half an hour with Gyurcsány in front of the Lajos Kossuth monument next to the parliament, where he was staging a fast to protest Fidesz’s new election laws. “I understand,” he said. “In the hands of my rivals, this speech became a nuclear weapon. They used it.” It is true that Gyurcsány spoke to propose reforms, but Hungarian voters can hardly be faulted for considering an admission of lying more important than an exhortation to stop it.

Gyurcsány rejected calls for his resignation. Orbán rallied a movement against the government and organized demonstrations. On the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 rising, police—many wearing masks and not wearing the badges that bore their identification numbers—attacked crowds in Budapest. These demonstrations were not wholly peaceful—one group tried to burn down a radio station. But neutral observers have criticized police conduct. “They did not beat the violent demonstrators but the ones they could catch,” says Tamás Bodoky, the publisher of an investigative blog, who wrote a book on the subject.

The rage against Gyurcsány kept building. In 2008, Orbán forced a referendum on Gyurcsány’s (rather sensible) proposals to institute school tuition fees and copayments for doctors’ visits. The drubbing Gyurcsány received destroyed his government. In 2009 the MSzP businessman Gordon Bajnai agreed to head a technocratic government, just to stave off bankruptcy, and promised not to run again. Bajnai raised taxes, cut subsidies, froze government hiring, and negotiated a \$25 billion IMF credit. It was impressive. Many Hungarians, moderates as well as leftists, hope he will run again. I met a sociologist at a rally Gyurcsány held on Batthyány Square in mid-September, who said of Bajnai’s year in power: “Of the last 22 years, it was the only rational one.”

Bajnai’s success did not make Hungarians forget Gyurcsány, and in 2010 Orbán picked up practically every vote that was not riveted, chained, welded, and super-glued to the Socialist party. In an American- or English-style vote he would have picked up not 68 percent but 98 percent of the seats. Hungary has always had a tendency to patronage politics, and suddenly, for the first time since the 1940s, its Socialists found themselves without a single scrap to offer their supporters. The upshot was panic.

Although there are few politicians in the West less like Barack Obama than Viktor Orbán, the two have a situational resemblance. Both became symbols of opposition at a time when voters wanted to send a message of contempt to a party they had grown sick of. But so unanimous was the swing against the incumbents that voters wound up doing

far more than blowing a raspberry at the old crowd. They wound up creating a new government with no effective checks on it. In the United States, the result was Obamacare. In Hungary, the result was a new constitution.

ORBÁN'S IDEOLOGY AND CONSTITUTION

Unlike other Central and Eastern European countries, Hungary did not start from constitutional scratch after the end of communism in 1989. Until this year, society was being guided in large part by a constitution written in 1949. The new constitution, which came into force in January, defines marriage as between a man and a woman and declares that life begins at conception (although abortion remains legal and easily available). It changes the country's name from the old Soviet-era "Republic of Hungary" to just "Hungary," but it explicitly states that the form of government shall be a republic. It makes the chief prosecutor responsible to the legislative, not the executive, branch. The constitution also tips its hat to the role of Christianity in Hungary's history—but no more than the Portuguese constitution does to the role of socialism, Orbán's supporters insist. If you back Orbán, you will note that there is nothing in the constitution that does not follow established practice in some other Western country. If you oppose him, you will say that the whole can be less free than the sum of its parts.

In the constitution and in various new laws, Orbán's opponents see a gradually tightening vise of authoritarianism. When Orbán said a few months ago that Hungary needed "an Eastern wind in our Western sail," he meant to allude to the economic dynamism of the Asian countries. Gordon Bajnai cited a familiar line of the poet Endre Ady, that Hungary is a "ferryboat" that travels between east and west, and implied that Orbán intended to moor his ship in the same port as such eastern authoritarians as Russia's Vladimir Putin and Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko.

Orbán believes his opponents' real problem with the constitution is that it runs counter to the ideology of the last generation of European leaders. "That is the reason why, in Europe, the constitution is so fiercely attacked, especially by the generation of 1968," he told me in his office. "It is not just a constitution, it is the antithesis of their understanding of European history."

There are points to be made on both sides, but on balance, Orbán has the stronger case. His opponents are right to worry about the concentration of regulatory power—but Orbán freely admits this is intended to make the country's system of government more "presidential." His opponents are right to oppose his new laws regulating media—but wrong to impute widespread journalistic layoffs to political meddling rather than the worldwide collapse of the journalism industry. His opponents are right to see Orbán as motivated by a desire to remove those bureaucrats he views as Communist-era deadwood—but wrong to say there is no check on his power to do so. (His law that judges must retire at 62, like other civil servants, was overturned by Hungary's high court.) The Hungarian opposition has done a

poor job of distinguishing between their own policy preferences of the moment and the Western constitutional tradition. Their case for worrying about the new Hungarian constitution would be stronger if they were willing to admit that there were any such thing as a legitimate constitution that did not include abortion and gay marriage.

Last winter Orbán went to Strasbourg to defend his constitution before the

European Union's parliament, which had considered censuring him for it. "I went there and I defended the constitution," he recalls. "Successfully—as I understood it, anyway. I said I understand that in European intellectual circles there is an understanding of European history, that there is a trend from religious to secular, from nations to internationalism, and from the family to the individual. That is what you call progress. I don't know whether you are right or not. But I don't think this is the only possible interpretation of European history. I think God and religion, family and nation, do not belong only to the past. They belong to the future as well. So I'm ready to start the discussion. It's a believer-based, family-based, nation-based constitution. What is the problem with that?"

A HUNGARY MAN IS AN ANGRY MAN

Certain peculiarities of Hungarian history leave Europeans uneasy about Hungary's desire to go it alone, constitutionally or otherwise. One is that Hungarians' idea of Hungarian-ness extends to their ethnic brethren in other countries. Hungary was on the wrong



Protesters in Budapest rally against the new constitution.

side of both world wars. In 1920, at the Treaty of Trianon, it lost two-thirds of its territory and 3 million of its citizens. Today there are Hungarian-speaking enclaves in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic. Their fate is the most passionate foreign-policy preoccupation of Hungarians of all political stripes.

Orbán has made June 4, the day of the Trianon treaty, a Day of National Unity and established a fast track to Hungarian citizenship for Hungarians abroad. Again, this is no fringe enthusiasm. When the citizenship bill came before parliament, out of 386 members only 3 (all Socialists, including Gyurcsány) voted against it. Orbán insists that there is no nationalism, revanchism, or ethnic exclusivity in such moves. On the contrary, he says during our interview, the ability to make contact with their cousins after years of being cut off from them leads Hungarians to value their integration into wider Europe. “This is the reason why a majority of Hungarians”—84 percent at the referendum—“supported EU membership. The EU means no borders.” Orbán may be right, but this is very hard for non-Hungarians to grasp.

And it gets harder when they consider with alarm that Hungary’s third-largest party, known as Jobbik, has nationalism, and even fascism, at its heart. (Ferenc Gyurcsány interrupted our conversation when Jobbik came up, to say: “I want to be clear—it is a neo-Nazi party.”) The right-wing ambit in Hungary has been large for quite some time. The playwright István Csurka, who died earlier this year, used to rant about Jewish conspiracies. Zsolt Bayer, a founder of Fidesz in the 1980s, wrote a notorious anti-Semitic article in 2008. Given the gory efficiency with which Hungary’s Arrow Cross government eliminated the entire rural Jewish population of the country in World War II, a hair-trigger sensitivity to such gestures is not out of place.

Jobbik took 17 percent of the vote in the last election, and almost a quarter of votes cast by those under 29. It devotes a great deal of its mental energy to Hungary’s roughly 700,000 gypsies (or Roma, as they are also called), who account for much of the country’s poverty and crime, and to Israel. Jobbik’s leader is 34-year-old Gábor Vona, a founder of the so-called Magyar Gárda, a group of young

men given to marching, uniformed and unarmed but in massive numbers, into gypsy neighborhoods. Authorities have banned the Gárda, but a year ago a similar mob attacked gypsies in the small town of Gyöngyöspata. This past summer, the alleged murder of a 26-year-old woman, Katá Bándy, in Pecs by a gypsy man caused an outpouring of anti-Roma fury there.

Jobbik wants to establish literacy tests for voters, a measure that would disenfranchise gypsies, many of whom are illiterate. Websites close to the party assert that Israelis are “buying up” Hungary. This view is shared by

Márton Gyöngyösi, an affable and well-read Jobbik member of parliament. On the question of whether he believed there were Jewish plans to buy up Hungary, he referred me to a YouTube video, evidently much visited by Hungarians, in which Shimon Peres appeared to be cracking jokes (in Hebrew) on a podium. “Shimon Peres is a serious person,” Gyöngyösi says, adding, “He said that there is a plan to colonize through financial means and business countries like my country. And if I see Salomon Berkowitz, Yoav Blum, and some other Jewish businessmen doing their business in Hungary, this is the first quotation that comes to my mind.”

Gyöngyösi views Viktor Orbán as part of a “handpicked group of people who were educated by the

Soros Foundation, who were educated in the West under communism.” Still, Jobbik has become a problem not just for Hungary in general but for Orbán and Fidesz in particular. Orbán has said that he has “zero tolerance for anti-Semitism and racism.” Not even his political enemies accuse him of those things. Fidesz has several Roma members of parliament. Orbán’s first Fidesz government, in 2000, established a National Memorial Day for the Holocaust. His present one has just devoted a year to commemorating the centenary of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who rescued thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Holocaust. Fidesz’s Roma programs are run by Zoltán Balog, a Calvinist pastor and minister of human resources in the Orbán government. Balog’s background is in human rights (as opposed to law enforcement). His ministry has introduced affirmative action programs for Roma.

Fidesz is not Jobbik. But non-Hungarians grasp that



New recruits for Jobbik’s paramilitary arm, 2007

only with difficulty—“despite the Fidesz leadership stating practically every day for eight years that they will have nothing to do with Jobbik,” as the Anglo-Hungarian writer Tibor Fischer puts it. The philosopher and Fidesz member of the European parliament György Schöpflin complains that certain Hungarians blur the distinctions between the parties as well. “The Hungarian left,” according to Schöpflin, “appears to have no theory of the democratic center-right and, hence, to assume that they and they alone own democracy.”

A TEST CASE

Orbán’s constitutional experiment remains on a respectable part of the spectrum of historical Western constitutionalism. But that does not mean he is assured of being able to carry it out. The economy remains in tough shape. The average worker earns under \$13,700 a year. Unemployment is around 10 percent. The employment rate is an abysmal 55 percent, well below the 65 percent of the Czech Republic. A legacy of governmental profligacy (for which the first Orbán government is not blameless) has left Hungary deep in debt and beholden to those who can bail it out.

Whether or not it taps its funds, Hungary cannot afford to alienate the IMF, and European Union rules make it necessary for Hungary to negotiate such funding through the EU. The EU is using this economic vulnerability to pressure Orbán on various noneconomic matters. His government feels unfairly singled out by Western leaders, especially the ones in the EU who have imposed themselves as intermediaries between Hungary and the IMF. Spain was granted permission to run deficits over 5 percent; Hungary had the book thrown at it for deficits under 4 percent.

“Orbán is the sort of person of whom the Heritage Foundation deeply disapproves,” says one of his Fidesz colleagues, referring to the conservative Washington-based think tank. Orbán admits, “What Hungary is doing is not in accordance with what has been, up to now, the mainstream in the international finance world.”

Actually, there is a good deal of Hungarian economic policy that the international finance world would approve of. Orbán has, like Germany, pushed through a draconian budget-balancing mechanism, even if the national budget has not yet returned to balance. Hungary has the highest value-added tax in Europe—27 percent. (A good sign, since it taxes consumption, not job creation.) Hungary, like its neighbors in Slovakia and Romania, has a flat tax on income (set at 16 percent), but with a wrinkle that Orbán is particularly proud of: big, off-the-top deductions for families with children. Fidesz has made the tax code more generous to families with children. This is a “conservative

flat tax,” as Orbán calls it. Having children is important to Orbán. “Demography is the key factor. If you are not able to maintain yourself biologically, how do you expect to maintain yourself economically, politically, and militarily?” he asks. “It’s impossible. The answer of letting people from other countries come in ... that could be an economic solution, but it’s not a solution of your real sickness, that you are not able to maintain your own civilization.”

Orbán is, however, more skeptical about free markets than conservatives of even five years ago. After 2008, any thinking conservative would be, but Orbán has been an especially capricious regulator of Western multinationals, in particular of banks, springing sudden new taxes on them. He also favors bans on genetically modified organisms. (“Even foods?” I ask. “Especially foods,” he replies.)

If you ask Orbán where he gets his economic ideas, he points to Ludwig Erhard and the “social market economy” that Germany’s Christian Democrats introduced in the 1950s and 1960s. He wants common people to have money to spend. That is why he is throwing everything but the kitchen sink at the problem of low disposable income. When it became evident that many Hungarians had taken out home loans in fast-strengthening Swiss francs, he made them payable in Hungarian forints at considerable cost to both the state and the banks that made the loans. “We are looking for some kind of equitable burden-sharing,” he said at the opening session of parliament in early September, “trying to involve others besides normal taxpayers.” He raised the minimum wage. Controversially, he nationalized part of the public pension system in order to spare Hungary from being subjected to an IMF austerity program. Whether you consider this mix of programs an admirable syncretism or a contemptible amateurism, it is unconventional. “We cannot get out of this crisis with the same policies that led us into the crisis,” Orbán says.

Last spring in Washington, I heard one of Orbán’s oldest Fidesz associates, member of the European parliament József Szájer, plead for a bit more understanding and a bit more time for Hungary. “Hungary is a test case,” Szájer said. “We are dealing with problems everyone is dealing with, and we are giving some answers. Let this be a debate between equals. Even the United States can learn from us.” It is a good point, one that may be at the heart of the clash between Orbán and his neighbors. The financial crisis has revealed Western countries as fiscally irresponsible, intellectually exhausted, and out of economic-policy tricks, yet the scope for giving different programs a try keeps narrowing. The West has much to gain from letting nations follow any peaceful inclination that would allow them to serve as laboratories of policy. To judge from their reaction to Viktor Orbán’s Hungary, never have Western leaders been less willing to countenance any such thing. ♦



The high-water mark of hopey-changeyness: Senator Obama, in classical setting, accepts the Democratic presidential nomination, 2008.

The Stakes Are High

The threat of Obama's second term. BY JEFFREY H. ANDERSON

This is perhaps the most lucid, even-handed, and convincing examination to date of the threat that President Obama—and his potential reelection—poses to our republic. No one who reads *I Am the Change* will come away thinking this election is about the economy. In truth, this election pits America's founding principles against Obama's efforts to transform them. Obama noted as much in October 2008, declaring in a rare moment of candor, "We are five days away from fundamentally transforming the United States of America." Kesler cautions: "Those words mean *this will be a different country* when he's finished with it"—"a new land."

Professor of government at Clare-

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I Am the Change
Barack Obama and the Crisis of Liberalism
 by Charles R. Kesler
 Broadside, 304 pp., \$25.99

mont McKenna College and editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*, Charles R. Kesler says that Obama "is playing a long, high-stakes game, and it's not at all clear he's losing." He writes that unless Obama's centerpiece legislation, Obamacare, is repealed, "his staggering victory" in imposing it will have "earned him a future place on the Mount Rushmore of liberalism, alongside those other supreme hero-statesmen of the creed, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Lyndon B. Johnson." Kesler knowledgeably and engagingly traces the history of modern American liberalism,

bookending it with an outstanding discussion of Obama and his efforts to thrust it "forward." The movement has twice changed names, from "Progressive" to "liberal" (after Progressivism had largely been discredited), and back. Kesler writes that "it's an odd sort of 'progress' [for liberalism] to go back to a name it surrendered 80 years ago." Still, progressives have always maintained the inevitability of progress, starting in earnest when Woodrow Wilson was elected president a hundred years ago, in 1912.

More than any other president to date, Wilson waged something of a frontal assault on the American Founders. He had little regard for the Constitution or its protections—the separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism—against consolidated power, and hence tyranny. He regarded the Founders as simpler men,

LYNN GOLDSMITH / CORBIS

from a simpler time, who frankly had gotten it wrong. Government shouldn't be limited; it should be emancipated—and empowered.

Wilson generally failed to convince Americans that the Founders had been wrong, which limited his ability to advance the liberal agenda. But Franklin Roosevelt had far greater success. As Kesler once put it when speaking at a conference, by avoiding a frontal assault on the Founders, FDR took one step backward to take two steps forward. Roosevelt conveyed that the Founders had gotten things right—for their time. Their assertion of unalienable, God-given rights was correct; it just needed to be supplemented with new (government-given) “rights.” This sounded fine, Kesler said, if one didn't look too closely at the details; those who did would see that these new “rights” were inevitably provided at the expense of unalienable rights—particularly the right of property, but also of liberty. After all, if you have a “right” to, say, health care, then someone else has a corresponding duty to treat you—and pay for it.

But Roosevelt consciously glossed over this difficulty, repeatedly using language reminiscent of the Founding. He had the 1936 Democratic platform read like the Declaration of Independence. (“*We hold this truth to be self-evident*—that twelve years of Republican surrender to the dictatorship of a privileged few . . .”) And he subtly tweaked the Founders' words: Government's duty “to secure” the right to “the pursuit of Happiness” became government's duty “to promote the safety and happiness of the people.” But securing a right and promoting a result aren't quite the same thing.

As Kesler notes, FDR particularly tried to enlist Thomas Jefferson as a symbolic ally, putting his image on the nickel and building and dedicating the Jefferson Memorial. Yet one Jefferson quote found in that memorial's basement (where the quotes weren't chosen during the Roosevelt administration) crystallizes their differences: “The true foundation of republican government is the equal right of every citizen, in his person and property, and in their management.” That's not

something you'd hear from Wilson, FDR, or Lyndon Johnson—or Obama.

Kesler's readers will be struck by how much Obama has learned from Wilson, FDR, and LBJ, and how little he has learned from Jefferson, Washington, and Lincoln. True, Obama's “rare combination of Ivy League degrees and Chicago street cred, of high-sounding post-partisanship and hard-core partisanship” often “leaves people guessing.” Kesler notes his “soothing and disingenuous language,” and writes, “Notice how craftily . . . Obama shifts his examples of social duty from picking up the



Charles R. Kesler

fallen to sending someone else's kids to college.”

But Obama's agenda is anything but commonplace. It's highly ambitious and aims at supplanting, rather than embracing, a Founding that he has never really tried to understand. Writes Kesler:

Returning, say, to Lincoln's and the Founders' own understanding of themselves, reconsidering their arguments for the Declaration's principles, never occurred to him as a serious possibility.

Kesler highlights a passage from Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* (2006): “Implicit . . . in the very idea of ordered liberty,” writes Obama, is “a rejection of absolute truth.” Yet the Declaration places absolute truths at the core of the American creed (“*We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .*”). In marked contrast, Obama—who, when

reciting the Declaration's language as president, has repeatedly omitted its reference to our Creator as the source of our rights—says, “Lincoln, and those buried at Gettysburg, remind us that we should pursue our own absolute truths.” Kesler replies, “*Our own absolute truths?* Those words ought to send a shudder down Americans' constitutional spine.”

Martin Luther King certainly believed in absolute truths, as his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” attests. Likewise, King thought the Declaration and the Constitution should be celebrated; the problem was that we hadn't lived up to those documents' lofty ideals. Obama, however, views our founding documents as having been fatally flawed from the start. This partly explains why apologies for America roll so easily off his tongue.

If it's *not* a self-evident truth that governments are instituted to secure certain unalienable rights, as the Declaration says, then what exactly is government's proper role? In the spirit of his liberal forefathers, Barack Obama believes government's purpose is to bequeath rights—the more, the better. Kesler describes this as “the First Law of Big Government: the more power we give the government, the more rights it will give us.”

All of which brings us to Obamacare, the current pinnacle of what Kesler calls modern American liberalism's “authoritarian streak.” He writes:

The more one ponders [Obama's] electoral, policy, and longer political agenda, the more the health care bill stands out as the centerpiece of the whole political enterprise. Stop it . . . and you have a good chance of stopping the transformation he seeks. Fail, or worse don't even try, and you permit what can be called, without exaggeration, gradual regime change at home. For the health care question involves . . . nothing less than the form of government and the habits and character of the American people.

Invoking Alexis de Tocqueville's warning that in a democracy in which “administrative centralization” takes root, “a more insufferable despotism [will] prevail than in any of the absolute

monarchies of Europe,” Kesler conveys the grave danger Obamacare poses to liberty. Highlighting its “vagueness, incompleteness, and amorphousness,” and the “breathtaking power” it would delegate to unelected officials, he writes, “This new kind of statute—one hates to call it law—is not meant to be ‘a settled, standing rule,’ as John Locke defined law.” Rather, it is “deliberately . . . left vague so as to give maximum discretion to the unholy trinity of bureaucrats, congressional staffers, and private-sector ‘stakeholders’ who will flesh out the act with thousands of pages of regulations (9,000 and counting so far).”

In other words, Obamacare represents the triumph of the arbitrary rule of man over the fixed rule of law. (Witness all of the Obamacare waivers already issued.) Adds Kesler: “Obamacare is an excellent test case for how the original U.S. Constitution is faring against the living constitution.”

A young Abraham Lincoln, contemplating what dangers could threaten our form of government, said, “It is to deny what the history of the world tells us is true, to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us . . . [and] seek the gratification of their ruling passion. . . . The question then is, Can that gratification be found in supporting and maintaining an edifice that has been erected by others?” If not, then “it will require the people to be united with each other, attached to the government and laws, and generally intelligent, to successfully frustrate his designs.”

In other words, if our citizenry plays its part well, our form of government could still prevail against this onslaught of ambition. And if Obamacare is repealed, Kesler writes, “Obama’s legacy and his claim to leadership will lie in ruins.”

As we approach a nation-defining election, Charles R. Kesler has produced a timely and exceptionally well-written book, full of insight, erudition, and wit. It’s a must-read for swing-state independents still open to persuasion, for conservatives of all stripes—and for liberals interested in honestly examining the intellectual underpinnings of their political faith. ♦

BCA

The Fandom Tollbooth

Calculating the price of obsession.

BY STEFAN BECK

‘**W**hat really matters,” said Rob (John Cusack) in *High Fidelity*, “is what you like, not what you are like. Books, records, films—these things matter.”

A version of that line appears in the novel by Nick Hornby, which was published in England in 1995—nearly a decade before the arrival, in a puff of sulfurous smoke, of Facebook. One wonders if Hornby is shocked to see how completely Rob’s sentiment—the sentiment of a fanboy, an obsessive, the kind of guy who handles his possessions with latex gloves and surgical tongs—has been embraced by the mainstream. We are constantly apprised that Facebook knows “everything” about us, when what it really has is an inventory, incomplete and bereft of context, of what we like. (A friendly reminder: *What* you like, considered in isolation, is meaningless. *Why* you like and, above all, *how* you like, are vastly more important because, *pace* Hornby’s Rob, these are reliable indicators of *what you are like*. And that still matters most.)

Geoff Dyer, British novelist and critic of photography, books, music, movies, and miscellany (sex in hotels, say, or model airplanes), has written a book about his obsession with *Stalker*, a 1979 science fiction film by Andrei Tarkovsky. It would be hard to imagine a more convincing demonstration of superfandom than *Zona*, a book-length panegyric, and, generally speaking, the

critics have adored it. (Some, of course, prefer to quibble over which of Dyer’s previous efforts they liked even more.) In the fan section, here is the *New York Observer*: “Cultural artifacts worthy of this degree of obsession are rare and

it’s a pleasure to read Mr. Dyer’s wrestling with one.”

One of those things is true: It is a pleasure to read Mr. Dyer’s wrestling with *Stalker*.

But one could name

dozens of films “worthy of this degree of obsession” without even taking a breath. There are many things to love about *Stalker*: the tormented, expressive face of its star, Aleksandr Kaidanovsky; Aleksandr Knyazhinsky’s gorgeous cinematography; and a host of dreamlike, unforgettable scenes and images. What it has little of, perhaps even by art house standards, is *story*. When one is reassured that whatever a film or book appears to lack has been left out on purpose, one can’t help thinking of practical productions, like cars: *Stalker* is a Ferrari without wheels, a beautiful, meticulously crafted thing that doesn’t go anywhere.

Why do Dyer’s fans say otherwise? Some of them do because they mean it, no doubt, and those few, those happy few, must be giddy at finding their tastes aligned with a celebrated critic’s. The rest, frantically clicking “Like,” have missed the point altogether. Whatever Dyer’s intentions, *Zona* isn’t about *Stalker*. It’s about appreciation itself, and it works best if you haven’t seen *Stalker*, if you’ll never see *Stalker*, if you can persuade yourself that *Stalker* doesn’t exist—that Dyer invented a movie simply to illustrate the phenomenon of how

Zona
A Book About a Film
About a Journey to a Room
by Geoff Dyer
Pantheon, 240 pp., \$24

Stefan Beck writes about fiction for the New Criterion and elsewhere.

we fall in love with a work of art.

The plot of the film is skeletal enough to make that plausible. In brief: At the center of a numinous, forbidding, Chernobyl-like Zone, there is a Room in which one's most deep-seated wish will be granted. The Stalker (Kaidanovsky) is a guide who leads pilgrims through the Zone, though he himself may never taste the fruits of the Room. The entire movie, nearly three hours long, depicts the Stalker and his two charges, Writer and Professor, wandering around in meadows, ruins, culverts, cisterns, and so on, in search of the Room.

The first part of the film is shot in black and white. It turns to color once the principals penetrate the Zone. A footnote says, "The similarities between *Stalker* and *The Wizard of Oz* have been widely remarked on." Dyer relates them—not only the switch to color, but also the anticipation of wish-granting—and then adds, "I've never seen *The Wizard of Oz*, not even as a kid, and obviously have no intention of making good on that lack now."

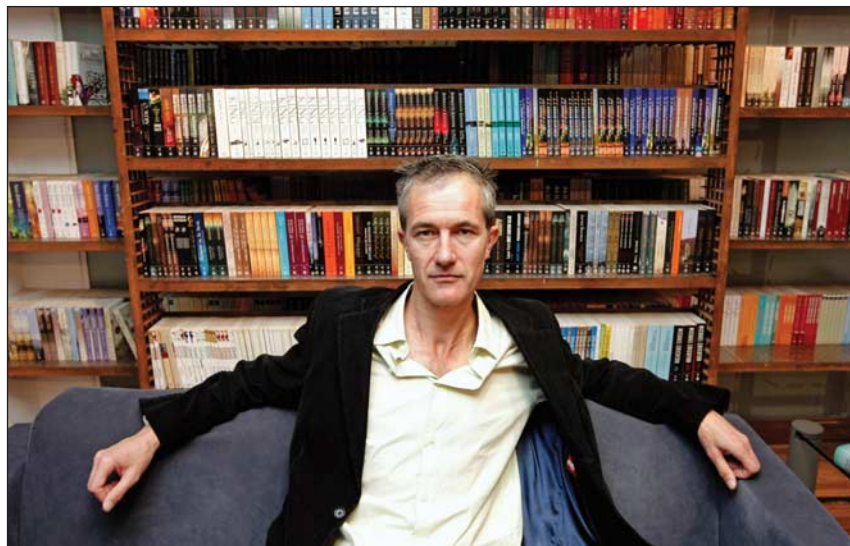
A comparison of the two films would have been welcome, but one guesses Dyer raised the specter of one merely to congratulate himself for regarding a classic as dross. Similarly grating is his boast that he won't watch *Stalker* on TV or DVD, saving it for *Brigadoon*-like occasions when it's revived at the local art house. A *Stalker* skeptic may think: Yes, well, the shelves of film students are filled with movies it's easier to be "obsessed with" than to watch.

These cavils are worth mentioning not to cast doubt on Dyer's ardor, but to underscore that he really is the *ur*-connoisseur: vain, picky, spectacularly well-informed when he wants to be, and dismissive when he thinks it might add to his mystique. His book is a reminder of just how fraught the business of appreciation is. One loves a work of art, but then, sensing that one's passion is itself a creative act, one becomes jealous of that passion. Do we not, after all, have a term, "cult classic," for movies which most everyone enjoys but which some can't even tolerate without imagining that

they got to it first, that they alone really get it, really deserve the credit for getting it?

Stalker isn't such a movie—most people don't know it, much less like it—but it's an ingenious reminder of why the finest cultural artifacts make people feel so proprietary. Great art creates a Zone, a Room, a palace of wish-fulfillment, where one's desires and expectations are mirrored back,

further. "If the regular length of a shot is increased, one becomes bored, but if you keep on making it longer, it piques your interest, and if you make it even longer, a new quality emerges, a special intensity of attention." This is Tarkovsky's aesthetic in a nutshell. At first there can be a friction between our expectations of time and Tarkovsky-time and this friction is increasing in the twenty-first century as we move further and further away from Tarkovsky-time towards moron-



Geoff Dyer

and fulfilled. This might have come across in a discussion of some other film, but in this book, it's encoded in the subject itself.

"So what kind of writer am I," Dyer asks late in *Zona*, "reduced to writing a *summary* of a film? Especially since there are few things I hate more than when someone, in an attempt to persuade me to see a film, starts *summarizing* it, explaining the plot, thereby destroying any chance of my ever going to see it."

It's a bit disingenuous. The summary is the least part of Dyer's appreciation—a collage of memories, confessions, and digressions—and he knows it. He knows he's issued a rebuke to the culture that clicks "Like" and expects a pat on the back. *Zona* is above all an injunction to slow down one's responses to all things:

[Michelangelo] Antonioni liked long takes but Tarkovsky took this a stage

time in which nothing can last—and no one can concentrate on anything—for longer than about two seconds.

This may seem like an old-fashioned, even curmudgeonly, complaint, but it's a necessary one. We like many things, often without thinking for very long or hard about why. Books, records, films—they do matter, when they've truly caught and held our attention, when they have acted as a Room in the Zone of our cultural consumption. As Dyer writes, "[E]ven if you keep up-to-date with new releases (books, records, films) . . . you realize that these latest things can never be more than that, that they stand almost no chance of being the last word, because you actually heard—or saw or read—your personal last word years earlier."

We may be profligate with our "Likes," it seems, but unless we're very lucky, we may love only once. ♦

Insight Hollywood

Won't Back Down's *Lance Reddick* has something to say, on- and off-screen. BY KELLY JANE TORRANCE



Lance Reddick (second from left) in HBO's 'The Wire'

Halfway through what feels like the usual interview with a Hollywood entertainer in town to promote a new work, I'm stopped short.

Lance Reddick had discussed the television work that made his name—roles on the gritty HBO series *Oz* and *The Wire*, then the mind-bending cable shows *Lost* and *Fringe*—and his longstanding desire to move into film. He noted, like many actors before him, that he became a producer to create the parts no one was asking him to play. Then, explaining why he thought his latest movie so meaningful that he

Kelly Jane Torrance, assistant managing editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD, is the Washington Examiner's movie critic. Won't Back Down is a production of Walden Media, a subsidiary of the parent company that owns THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

accepted a modest role in it, Reddick mentions Aristotle.

I can assure you that Hollywood actors don't typically cite Greek philosophers. Lance Reddick is not your typical actor. But then, *Won't Back Down*, which stars the Oscar-nominated actresses Maggie Gyllenhaal and Viola Davis as a parent and teacher trying to wrest control of their failing elementary school from an unconcerned bureaucracy, isn't your typical feature film, either.

For example, movie critics don't ordinarily find themselves targets of a propaganda campaign. But this reviewer received multiple emails from interest groups attacking *Won't Back Down* in the weeks before its release. The president of the American Federation of Teachers wrote that "the film contains several egregiously misleading scenes with the sole purpose of undermining people's confidence in public

education, public school teachers and teachers unions." And the Center for Media and Democracy warned: "The emotionally engaging Hollywood film *Won't Back Down* [promotes education reform supported by] two controversial right-wing organizations: the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the Heartland Institute."

It is, indeed, emotionally engaging: This gripping drama presents an unflinching portrait of the sad reality of American public education. More gratifying is that it suggests, with the help of its skilled cast, how unlucky children might be offered a happier fate.

Won't Back Down has provoked the sort of protests normally reserved for religious dramas directed by Mel Gibson. Twentieth Century Fox screened it at both political conventions, sparking a demonstration at the Democratic gathering in Charlotte. The New York premiere last month featured protesters carrying signs reading, "*Won't Back Down*, get out of town."

Lance Reddick, talking to me before the film hit theaters, wryly predicts that it will "get people talking." But, he adds, "At the end of the day, as the saying goes, talk is cheap. I don't know that one film is going to change things." Spending resources in an election year to influence movie critics signals that the nation's largest teachers' union thinks it could, and Reddick admits he holds out hope it will. That's why he signed on: "The way the system is set up now is not working."

Reddick, who struggled as a young actor to get his own daughter out of public schools, is proud to play a part in *Won't Back Down*. "I thought it was an important film," he says. "Because of how controversial the subject was and the head-on attacks, I was surprised that it was getting made." Reddick plays the husband of Viola Davis's teacher, who is worn down by the system but is finally inspired to fight it. "I'll be honest with you: I did question whether I wanted to do the role, because it felt so peripheral."

But it was Aristotle who persuaded him. Reddick believes that film and television can change hearts and minds. "You can kind of trick people," he says. "Like Aristotle said, you can entertain and instruct."

Reddick has an impressive pedigree: The 49-year-old son of Baltimore teachers, he studied music composition at Peabody and Eastman and drama at Yale. "I wanted to major in philosophy, but I was afraid I wasn't smart enough," he says. He was exposed to Aristotle outside the classroom: "I stumbled upon Ayn Rand when I was 18 and she changed my life."

Like Paul Ryan, Reddick is quick to note that he doesn't agree with everything the author of *Atlas Shrugged* wrote, but her obsession with Aristotle stuck with him. "I don't want to go off on a tangent about her stuff," he says, but her "*Romantic Manifesto* completely changed my idea about aesthetics. . . . One thing Ayn Rand was trying to say over and over again was learn to think for yourself. And trust what you think. It's part of what gave me the courage to finally leave music school and say I don't want to be a classical composer."

Reddick doesn't seem to have mentioned his affinity for Ayn Rand in earlier interviews. Have I found a rare conservative—or at any rate, a libertarian—in Hollywood?

Reddick realizes such apostasy might not be permitted: "*Well,*" he says slowly when asked to elaborate on his political beliefs, "you could call me pretty left. I feel like I'm a Democrat by default." He doesn't sound very leftist, though. There's another long "*Well,*" then, "I'm conservative about some things, radical about others. One thing I think white middle-America would be shocked to find out is that, socially, most middle-class black people are very conservative."

The political atmosphere has become much more "rabid" and "polarizing" since 9/11, he argues. And he blames the very industry of which he's becoming a prominent part: "I hate to say it, but the way the media—even Hollywood film and television—plays out, it's in collusion. Ever see *A Face in the Crowd*?"—the 1957 Elia Kazan film starring Andy Griffith as a hobo who becomes a media phenomenon—"It's a film that was obscured in Kazan's filmography because he named names." But Reddick recommends it as an "incredible film" about the power the media wield: "It's

very difficult when you've got people believing The Other is the way they're portrayed on TV."

The Wire, he believes, is a positive example of that power. But chatting about *The Wire*, which explored Baltimore's troubles through various levels of society, leads back to politics: "I think the war on drugs is a joke," Reddick says. "It's a war on poor people of color." When I point out that the country's first black president has intensified that war,

even targeting states that have legalized medical marijuana, Reddick—who at 6'4" usually plays authority figures—is silent for a few moments. "I feel like I'm an Obama man, so I've got nothing to say," he finally admits.

So maybe the rising star whose first media gig was delivering copies of the *Wall Street Journal* will have more to say after Election Day. Or perhaps Hollywood, the world's loudest media machine, will keep him quiet. ♦



Perchance to Dream

One-third of a lifetime in a twilight of the mind.

BY TEMMA EHRENFELD

David K. Randall begins this glide through dreamland with a quote from Aldous Huxley: "That we are not much sicker and much madder than we are is due exclusively to that most blessed and blessing of all natural graces, sleep."

If Huxley could see us now. In our zippy global economy, sleep has begun to seem quaint. People take glowing laptops to bed and pride themselves on sleeping as little as possible. In fact, scientists don't know why humans need sleep at all. From an evolutionary perspective, the idea is odd: Lying corpse-like for long and regular stretches of time once left humans open to attacks by animals and took hours away from hunting and gathering, much as it now interferes with jobs that demand travel across time zones and rapid email response.

Yet we *do* need this odd time time-out—even more than we think—which is why Texas Rangers coach Fernando Montes makes his pitchers nap before games in the bowels of the stadium.

A veteran reporter at Reuters with a sleepwalking problem, Randall tours the history, science, and sociology of

Temma Ehrenfeld is a writer in New York.

Dreamland
Adventures in the Strange Science of Sleep
by David K. Randall
Norton, 304 pp., \$25.95

sleep, as well as the debates over practical issues like sharing a bed (if sleep is the priority, best not) and which mattress to buy (it doesn't matter). And at 304 pages, *Dreamland* is quick, lucid, and modest, providing something like the effect of a good 20-minute nap. You'll emerge with the sense of time well spent, more alert to the satisfactions of a well-rested life.

Sleep was different and better before the advent of electric light. Once upon a time, night was both more fearsome and more peaceful than it is today. Farmers in feudal Europe raced to get inside city walls before they were locked out—for fear of hours in the wilderness fending off robbers and wolves. Stabbings, sword fights, and the sound of dead bodies splashing into canals were ordinary occurrences on dark city streets. Indoors, the sleeping arrangements were far worse than any hostel or dormitory room: Soon after sundown, families checked their one room for

rats and bugs before blowing out a candle; parents retreated to a mattress unworthy of the name by modern standards; children curled nearby on soft heaps of rags.

Yet those peasants seem to have slept better than we do. Sleep came in two parts: “The first sleep,” mentioned in *The Canterbury Tales* and 15th-century

awash in prolactin, a hormone connected to the peace after orgasm.

In short, people who lived without artificial light enjoyed an hour each and every night that now takes an entire day at a spa.

That sleep-killer Thomas Edison saw no problem with the fact that his light bulbs were creating

solving ability, creativity, and, in extreme cases, moral judgment. Randall tells the story of American soldiers in Baghdad who executed four Iraqis against orders, dumping their bodies in a canal. Their lawyers and a military psychologist argued (unsuccessfully) that they were too tired to behave rationally.

The problem has grown to the point that fatigue management is becoming an industry, and governments in the United States, Australia, Canada, and Europe have begun to regulate it to prevent industrial accidents. In 2010, the oil industry agreed to take steps at every major plant to reduce overtime, train supervisors to recognize an overtired worker, and allow workers to confess fatigue. Martin Moore-Ede, a onetime professor at Harvard Medical School, now consults on fatigue management for a client list including more than half of the Fortune 500 companies. One transportation company discovered that fatigue-related accidents were costing \$32,000 for every million miles traveled by its workers and equipment. Rules to restrict long work shifts and require workers to pass awareness tests brought those costs down to \$8,000, Randall reports.

The Iraq war also prompted American armed forces to be kinder to sleep as well. Thomas Balkin, chief of Walter Reed’s Department of Behavioral Biology, has put sleep at the top of his list of ways to keep soldiers effective. By the end of 2020, wristwatch-sized sleep monitors are expected to become standard gear, and once commanders can see how many hours a soldier has slept, they can make appropriate assignments, keeping fatigued soldiers away from tasks that require patience with civilians or strategic choices.

For women seeking better nights, one simple idea is to sleep in a separate bed if their husband snores. Women are far less likely to snore and also tend to be lighter sleepers. In one study, University of Pittsburgh psychiatrist Wendy Troxel concluded that the quality of the wife’s sleep predicted happy interactions between



'The Nightmare' by Henry Fuseli (1781)

medical texts, lasted from sundown until midnight. Then people normally enjoyed a blissful hour or so of prayer, study, and (often) sex. Apparently both men and women liked it better when they had a good rest before lovemaking. After their interlude, people slept again until dawn.

In the 1990s, National Institute of Mental Health psychiatrist Thomas Wehr kept his subjects away from artificial light for up to 14 hours a day. At first, they slept “like kids in a candy store”—catching up. “After a few weeks, the subjects were better rested than perhaps at any other time in their lives,” Randall writes. Then they began stirring after midnight and enjoying an hour awake, following the old pattern. When Wehr tested their blood he learned that, in that midnight hour, their brains were

graveyard shifts on assembly lines. He argued that any more than four hours of sleep a day was unhealthy, but treated himself to frequent naps, keeping a small cot and pillow in his lab. Now, Randall writes, “we have so much artificial light that after a 1994 earthquake knocked out the power, some residents of Los Angeles called the police to report a strange ‘giant, silvery cloud’ in the sky above them. It was the Milky Way.” In the United States only 1 percent of the population lives in an area that does not meet the standard of light “pollution”: when artificial lights make the night sky more than 10 times brighter than nature intended.

In our overbright world, sleep loss is taking its toll. People stay out late and go to work early. Fatigue causes accidents and erodes human problem-

couples more than any other measure of stress. Couples, however, tend to see bedtime as their best chance to be alone together. Sharing a bed does lead to more sex; so, as ever, choices must be made, but sleep quality should not be ignored.

Men also are more likely to sleepwalk, a subject to which Randall, a sleepwalker, gives an entire chapter. He includes the tale of Ken Parks, a gambler and embezzler whose wife had banished him to the couch. One Saturday night, Parks got off the couch and drove 14 miles on a busy highway to the home of her parents.

His father-in-law awoke to the sensation of being strangled, lost consciousness, and awoke again with a police officer in his bedroom—fetched by Ken Parks, who had walked to a nearby police station and announced, “I’ve just killed two people.” He’d stabbed his mother-in-law five times and beat her over the head with a tire iron. He later appeared to have no memory of the night’s events; he had been sleepwalking, an event that occurs to about one in five people at least once in their lifetime.

Parks was acquitted of the murder and assault. His wife divorced him. ♦

BCA

Emigré’s Song

It’s a long, long while since Kurt Weill got his due.

BY JONATHAN LEAF

Not long ago, a *New York Times* critic presented his list of the 10 greatest composers of all time. Absent were Handel, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Puccini, and Strauss. Present, though, was Béla Bartók.

If you believe that melody lies at the core of the musical art, you may be inclined to wonder how such criticism could reach print in the pages of the *Gray Lady*. But, to be fair, this may be a case where the strange thinking it represents is merely a symptom of an affliction—grouphink—rather than a means by which a bacillus of thought spreads. A real reconsideration of 20th-century music remains overdue.

So, a useful step in fashioning a proper appreciation for the music of the last hundred years is an assessment of the relative importance of the two halves of the career of Kurt Weill, the tunesmith who serves as one of the paired subjects of Ethan Mordden’s

Jonathan Leaf, a playwright in New York, is the author of The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Sixties.

Love Song

The Lives of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya
by Ethan Mordden
St. Martin’s, 349 pp., \$29.99

fine new dual biography of the musician and his wife, actress Lotte Lenya.

Like so many of the greatest composers, Kurt Weill was short and homely. Born a cantor’s son in Dessau, Germany, in 1900, he was severely myopic in addition to being just five-foot-three. That may be why he managed to make it to his 18th birthday without being drafted into service of the kaiser. Regardless, as Germany’s armies retreated towards the Rhine in 1918, Weill matriculated at Berlin’s most prestigious conservatory, the Hochschule für Musik. Finances prevented him from staying long, though, and he soon drifted into work as an assistant conductor for regional orchestras and rehearsal pianist. From there, Weill moved to a masterclass with the great composer and keyboard virtuoso Ferruccio Busoni.

This was his musical salvation, for Busoni stood in opposition to the modernist currents of the day, teaching Weill never to undervalue a good tune. And, although some of Weill’s early pieces were irritatingly avant-garde, the principles that Busoni inculcated grew, and by the time Weill met playwright Bertolt Brecht in 1927, he was ready to write unabashedly catchy melodies. Here was the instruction that would lead to “Mack the Knife” and “September Song.” Brecht and Weill were already talked-about figures on the Weimar cultural scene, but this meeting was of vastly greater importance to the playwright than to the composer—and one of the many virtues of Mordden’s account is that he has few illusions regarding Bertolt Brecht’s character, politics, or the claims he made to authorship.

Had Weill not worked with him, it’s likely that Brecht would have been forgotten well before his death. Instead, his association with Weill brought him acclaim which drew better ghostwriters. Recent scholarship has shown that one of these (Margarete Steffin) was the principal talent behind *The Life of Galileo* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the only full-length plays with Brecht’s name on them that still hold up. (Needless to say, the timing of Steffin’s premature death coincides with the end of the meaningful phase of Brecht’s career.)

The partnership with Weill also generated a fortune, if one which Brecht consistently misappropriated from Weill. In spite of this—and the general ineptitude and plagiarism in Brecht’s adaptation of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* into the pretentiously confusing and haphazardly plotted *Threepenny Opera*—they would pair up on two more significant compositions: *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, the chamber opera, and a ballet, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Both share the characteristic faults of everything Brecht wrote with collaborators other than Margarete Steffin: The stories make little sense and are contradictory, while the characters are off-putting and one-dimensional. As Paddy Chayefsky once remarked,

Brecht wasn't a playwright; he was a "scenewright."

What stands out in all three works is not the Marxist slogans boldly inserted into the libretti, but the music, sometimes quite simple but often strikingly unorthodox. Thus, "Mack The Knife" is just a short melody repeated with variations in the accompaniment, while *The Seven Deadly Sins* features vocal accompaniment from a male quartet plus an ensemble including accordion and banjo.

These compositions also brought attention to Weill's persistently unfaithful wife, Lotte Lenya (née Karoline Blamauer). A lapsed Catholic, Lenya was an Austrian of modest background who often boasted, in later years, that prior to her union with Weill she had supplemented her meager income as a dancer and actress by prostituting herself. Not surprisingly, she proved effective in portraying jaded, hard-bitten women, and, if not everyone was taken by her far-from-mellifluous singing voice, Weill was not alone in thinking it well-suited to Brecht's takes on underworld life.

The major critical question concerning Kurt Weill is how to judge the music he wrote after he emigrated to the United States in 1936. Without Brecht's anticapitalist bumper stickers ("Who is the greater criminal? He who robs a bank or he who founds one?"—*The Threepenny Opera*), Weill's works purposefully assimilated popular American styles. And while a number display a left-wing political consciousness, they are not only crowd-pleasing but frequently and unashamedly patriotic.

A signal moment in Weill's reinvention of himself was his attending a dress rehearsal for the first production of *Porgy and Bess*. He had been invited by Ira Gershwin, and afterwards commented, "It's a great country where music like that can be written—and played." In the years that followed, Weill and Lenya

refused to self-segregate with other émigrés and made a point of speaking English when alone with one another. (To the same end, Weill asked that his name be pronounced "while" rather than "vile.")

When commissions from opera houses ceased coming, he took pleasure and pride in writing Broadway musicals, which often prompts the vaguely derisive critical tone towards



Kurt Weill, Lotte Lenya, ca. 1940

his later work. Yet Weill found more competent, if less prestigious, collaborators in America. One of his most important works was a thoroughly accessible opera based on Elmer Rice's Pulitzer Prize-winning domestic tragedy, *Street Scene*, with lyrics adapted by Langston Hughes.

Weill found similarly talented (though very different) collaborators in Ira Gershwin and Moss Hart (*Lady in the Dark*), Gershwin and Edwin Justus Mayer (*The Firebrand of Florence*), Ogden Nash (*One Touch of Venus*), and Maxwell Anderson (*Knickerbocker Holiday*, *Lost in the Stars*, and a gorgeous but unfinished *Huckleberry Finn*). The music improved as well: "Speak Low," "That's Him," "Sing

Me Not a Ballad," "September Song," and "O Captain! My Captain!" were all written in America. And while these songs present Weill's special gift for adopting the mood and perspective of his characters, they possess a warmth often lacking in his work with Brecht.

Still, Weill's music continued to have its bite, never drifting into the cloying cheeriness or maudlin vulgarity of so many show tunes. It is also why Weill grew to be such a favorite composer for rock singers like Jim Morrison and Marianne Faithfull.

In the past decade, "serious" aficionados have opened their arms to Stephen Sondheim: Thus, *Sweeney Todd* is performed in opera houses and Sondheim's musicals are now the darling of summer stock and regional theaters. But cultural arbiters would do better to look to Kurt Weill: Although in need of a rewrite to its book, *The Firebrand of Florence*, Weill's offbeat operatic musical about Benvenuto Cellini, has one of the best scores ever written for the American stage—and no cannibalism or cheap psychologizing about presidential assassins.

A reassessment of Weill ought to be part of a broader reevaluation of the music of his time. In Europe, there is a rapidly developing awareness that his contemporary, Erich Korngold, wrote one of the great romantic operas in *Das Wunder der Heliane*. And here in America, there is increasing acknowledgment of the importance of the operas of Leoš Janáček and Francis Poulenc, an appreciation that ought to go hand in hand with renewed respect for all of the century's great melodists: Sergei Rachmaninoff and Sir Edward Elgar, of course, but also Richard Rodgers and Cole Porter and Frederick Loewe.

The reawakening of interest in Kurt Weill has been a gradual phenomenon since his death in 1950. It needs to be a component in a broader shift in taste and understanding. ♦

GETTY IMAGES

Passeth Understanding

An impressive rendition of nothing at all.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

When a movie receives rave reviews from critics who say they need to see it again to understand it fully, you should treat such a recommendation as though you were Will Robinson from the old 1960s TV show *Lost in Space* hearing his friendly robot companion as it flails its accordion-like arms and shouts, “Warning! Warning!” You must proceed with extreme caution—unless your intention is to see that film after or while imbibing or smoking a controlled or illegal substance.

And yet I have to confess that sometimes inscrutable and pretentious movies transcend their limitations. Terrence Malick’s *The Tree of Life*, released last year, was both, and yet was pretty much a knockout. Paul Thomas Anderson’s *The Master* is this year’s *Tree of Life*, a wildly ambitious effort to create a major statement about America and manhood and faith. Set in the late 1940s and early 1950s, *The Master* has the crisp, sharp focus of Alfred Eisenstaedt’s *Life* magazine photography and nearly perfect art direction.

As has long been the case with Anderson (whose notable previous works are *Boogie Nights* and *There Will Be Blood*), this movie has the remarkable directorial authority that does signify a truly great talent, and I think that authority is what accounts for the puzzled enthusiasm that *The Master* has earned from so many critics. They—we—see so many lousy and timid movies that when we find ourselves watching something

made by a true original with a genuine eye, we want to celebrate it simply because it has a quality of artistic command for which we thirst.

And yet the admirers of *The Master* have struggled to come up with discerning adjectives to describe it. In

so doing, they have mostly come up with synonyms for “enigmatic,” “suggestive,” and “elusive,” none of which constitutes

praise in the conventional sense of the term. Summing up the consensus view of the critical community, A.O. Scott of the *New York Times* offered this astounding sentence: “This is a movie that defies understanding even as it compels reverent, astonished belief.” Yes, that’s one way to put it. Another way to put it is “put a sock in it.”

Occam’s razor offers the perfect solution to Scott’s bafflement: The reason *The Master* defies understanding is that there is nothing to understand. It is evident from the proceedings that Anderson took two unconnected and ill-formed ideas for movies and glommed them together in hopes he could come up with one Big Thing.

One of the ideas was to offer a fictionalized account of the creation of Scientology, featuring Philip Seymour Hoffman as L. Ron Hubbard. The other idea was to offer a singular character portrait of a traumatized World War II veteran, played by Joaquin Phoenix, who has retreated into sexual obsessiveness and violence because he cannot process what he saw and did in the Pacific theater. Anderson was right that neither scenario was enough for one movie; but when he put them together, whatever logical sense each

might have made on its own was destroyed by its proximity to the other.

Unless you find intriguing a character whose happiest moment comes when he simulates sex on an island beach with a woman made of sand, you are unlikely to find much interest in the twists and turns and torments of the Phoenix character. In a rare casting misstep by Anderson, who usually has the best eye in the business, Phoenix is at least 15 years too old for the part; an actor barely out of boyhood might be able to evoke the pathos of this lost soul, but as he is pushing 40, Phoenix just makes Freddie seem like a deviant psychotic beyond all reach.

Freddie simply wanders onto a boat and passes out, only to find himself the sudden disciple of its captain, a fellow named Lancaster Dodd who has created a cult called The Cause. Anderson decided he did not want to portray Dodd as an out-and-out charlatan, but rather as a complicated father-dictator-shyster-lover whose motives are not all bad. That may sound interesting, but it really isn’t; an out-and-out fraud is what L. Ron Hubbard was, and when you take the con out of the con man, you are left only with a disparate collection of behaviors rather than a believable character.

Anderson gets so lost in the pointless and incredible relationship he establishes between Dodd and Freddie—who have absolutely no reason to have any kind of emotional connection whatever—that by the movie’s calamitous conclusion, Freddie is able to discern Dodd’s location by means of a David Lynch-like dream.

That dream is surely one of the many touches that defied A.O. Scott’s understanding; if he and other reviewers had not surrendered their good critical senses, they would have understood it to be a mark of the movie’s witlessness. Instead, in a near-comic parallel with Scientology followers, the critics who have fallen all over themselves praising *The Master* find its nonsensical narrative simply another excuse to express their “reverent, astonished belief” in this colossal creative failure.

Danger, Will Robinson! Danger! ♦



John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD’s movie critic.

**"This is what happens when [you] pick John Kerry as your debate coach."
—Michael Moore via Twitter, October 3, 2012**

PARODY

Window Help

Mail

| From | Subject |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| john_kerry@senate.gov | on the ropes! |
| samuelljackson@gmail.com | Wake the f-- up! |
| wjc@clintonfoundation.org | Must I do everything? |
| reggie.love@whitehouse.gov | Re: Anniversary gift suggestions |

on the ropes!

From: John Kerry <john_kerry@senate.gov>
Date: October 4, 2012 7:33 AM
To: Barack Obama <choom61@whitehouse.gov>
Subject: on the ropes!

Good Morning, Mr. President!

And what a great morning it is! So is it just me or did you rock that debate? Now if you haven't read the papers yet, don't even bother. Take it from me, you won. I simply cannot tell you how pleased I was with your performance. Our 60-minute prep the other day (during the commercials while watching that baseball game) really paid off.

Didn't Mitt look too happy to be there? I mean, what kind of guy is happy to be at a debate? You, on the other hand, looked downright presidential. You've got a lot on your mind, and it's good the American people got to see your serious side—all those decisions you need to make about the Middle East, the economy, and who to pick as your next secretary of state.

Which reminds me, we should talk about that foreign policy debate. There will probably be a few questions on the latest developments overseas, so we should focus on the key issues—the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the national strike in Indonesia, and East Timor. Knowing Romney (and don't I know him!), he is going to go after you on the need for electoral reforms in Moldova and Mauritius—we need to be ready for this.

You might be hearing from some of your advisers that last night did not go as planned, but here's what I'd say: No one is perfect. Sure, we'll work on your delivery and timing (I think you need to speak more slowly and take your time before answering—close your eyes if you have to). But other than that, you did great. After all, you learned from the best!

See you soon,

John

P.S. Teresa and I are heading to Miami this weekend. You and Michelle should join us. Do you like windsurfing?

There are no pending schedules

the weekly
Standard

OCTOBER 15, 2012

le!
brewing your own beer
ave Paul Ryan's abs!
wing your own weed
ength and girth—no pumping!
**orget last night
usiness proposition**

Do not taunt Happy Fun Ball