the weekly Standard

GEORGE McGOVERN
1922-2012
JOSEPH BOTTUM

A PRESIDENCY FADES AWAY

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A 2008 Obama campaign poster near Georgia Avenue in Washington, D.C.

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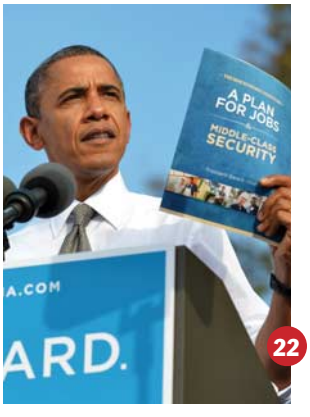

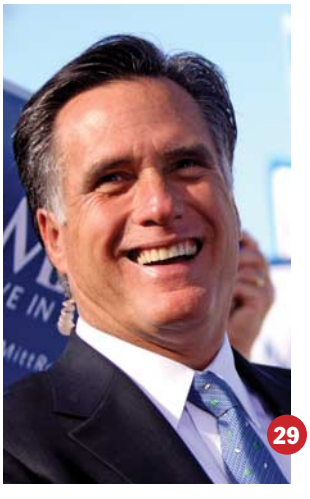

COVER: TOM WOLFF, 2009

The Incredible Shrinking Obama

With our embassies around the world besieged, and some 47 million Americans on food stamps, the pettiness of Barack Obama's presidential campaign has been something to behold. The leader of the free world has spent the last few weeks before Election Day talking about Big Bird and "binders full of women." His latest gambit—accusing his challenger of having "stage three Romnesia"—manages the adolescent twofer of simultaneously mocking his opponent's name and making light of cancer.

We were convinced the Obama campaign had hit bottom, but if the president has one thing going for him it's his ability to surprise. And so last week the Obama campaign unveiled a new campaign ad featuring Lena Dunham—the young actor, writer, and director behind HBO's critically lauded TV series *Girls*.

Dunham's argument for voting for Obama is, uh, curious: "Your first time shouldn't be with just anybody. You want to do it with a great guy. It should be with a guy with beautiful—someone who really cares about and understands women." The comparison of surrendering one's virginity to voting for Barack Obama is obviously beyond tasteless, and the reaction to the video has mostly been derision and mockery. (For what it's worth, as The Scrapbook writes, the video has 5,396 likes and 7,242 dislikes on YouTube.) It also does no credit to the Obama campaign that parallels were quickly discovered between the Dunham spot and an election ad for Vladimir Putin, whose attitudes towards gender equality are not usually held up as a model by American feminists.

Interestingly, The Weekly Standard's movie critic John Podhoretz recently praised Dunham and her show in these pages for "bitter honesty" in portraying the misadventures of four young women in Manhattan, in contrast to the "profoundly false we-are-women-hear-us-roar gender-solidarity fantasy that was *Sex and the City*." However, the *Washington Examiner*'s Joel Gehrke notes that Dunham's ad turns all that on its head:

> As Dunham puts it, "It's super uncool to be out and about and someone says 'did you vote?' and [you reply] 'no, I didn't feel—I wasn't ready.'"
>
> If a girl's not ready, she's not ready. The president, who has two daughters, surely understands that and probably wouldn't have released this ad if he weren't having a hard time while asking voters for four more years in the White House.

Considering that Democrats have spent the last few months making the vile argument that Republicans who don't support abortion on demand are encouraging rape, the president of the United States running a campaign ad implying that young women who don't let themselves get pressured into sex are "super uncool" is more than enough to make any normal person's head explode.

In any event, we have a shiny new penny for the first reporter that asks the president whether he thinks young women who don't have sex are "super uncool." (Or better yet, maybe someone should ask Mrs. Obama what she thinks of all this.)

Dunham's ad lasts only a minute, but it says volumes about the cynicism of Obama and the Democratic party when it comes to women. It doesn't matter to them that millions of young women can't find jobs and may be struggling to feed their children. They do not feel compelled to appeal to women by addressing any issue that doesn't directly pertain to their sexuality. They'll say anything to get them to hop into the voting booth with Barack Obama, and it's a safe bet they won't care if these women end up regretting it the morning after. ♦

Annals of Publicity

Jon Meacham's new blockbuster—*Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*—landed on The Scrapbook's desk with a thud last week, and we do mean thud: At 762 pages of text, plus a special 16-page color illustration section, as well as black-and-white pictures and 30 introductory pages, it can serve as doorstopper, footstool, or ship's ballast.

But holding it in our hands—no easy task, we finally had to lower it onto our lap—we were reminded of F.R. Leavis's famous remark about the Sitwells belonging to the history of publicity, not literature. For Jon Meacham, having run *Newsweek* into the ground and cohosted a short-lived PBS program, seems to be pursuing the great American tradition of failing upward. Now that Stephen E. Ambrose is dead, and David McCullough has retired from the field, we would guess that Jon Meacham is challenging Doris Kearns Goodwin in the pop history sweepstakes.

Skeptical? You need only examine *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* from the outside to see what we mean. The Scrapbook is a connoisseur of dust jacket blurbs, and perusing *Thomas Jefferson*'s front and rear covers, it's evident that Meacham is a serious competitor. All the usual suspects are present—Michael Beschloss ("Meacham's best book yet"), Walter Isaacson ("A true triumph"), even Doris Kearns Goodwin herself ("This terrific book . . . ")—and Meacham's Pulitzer Prize is advertised not once but three times. The copywriters at Random House, where Meacham is "executive editor and executive vice president," wisely shift into overdrive to describe the boss's work: A "magnificent biography . . . brings vividly to life an extraordinary man and his remarkable times."

At which point The Scrapbook's appetite was whetted, and we eagerly turned to the Author's Note and

Acknowledgments (pp. 507-14), where the ideal specimens of pomposity and professional logrolling are usually found. Once again, we were not disappointed: "I did not set out to write a full life and times of Jefferson. . . . This book is a portrait, rather, of the man and of the world in which he lived." Or this gem: "This project began with a delightful lunch in Princeton"—which, of course, raises the question of whether the lunch's location would be mentioned if it had occurred in, say, Hoboken. Among the "selfless readers, advisers, interlocutors and editors" may be found Walter Isaacson (again!), Ron Chernow, Joseph J. Ellis, Sean Wilentz, David McCullough, Robert A. Caro, Doris Kearns Goodwin (again!) and "the late Christopher Hitchens." A veritable who's who of blockbuster/pop history. And this curious, but suitably self-conscious, observation: "I agree with Christopher Buckley's view that Amanda Urban [his literary agent] will be my first call if I ever fall into the hands of the Taliban."

Which leads The Scrapbook, in the end, into speculative mode. First, having coughed up previous blockbusters, on Churchill and FDR, on Andrew Jackson, and on God and the Founders, what is Meacham's likely next target? The Scrapbook guesses Abraham Lincoln—a crowded field, but lucrative—or Martin Luther King, perhaps John Kennedy or Billy Graham. And second, most important from a marketing strategy: Which comes first, *Fresh Air* or *Charlie Rose*? ♦

Trick or Treat at the *New York Times*

The chief defect of the *New York Times*, it has long seemed to The Scrapbook, is that it is at heart a deeply provincial paper. We have nothing against New York itself—it's a fine city full of decent and remarkable people. But the *Times* is even more provincial than that. There is a strain of unreflective liberal condescension endemic to the city's wealthier neighborhoods that the paper embodies. It was on full display last week in a column entitled "A Nightmare on Park Avenue." Here's the first paragraph in full:

> If you didn't have children, or any affinity for them—if, perhaps, you actively dislike them—then the Upper East Side, especially Carnegie Hill, would be a very alienating place to live. On Madison Avenue, between 67th and 94th Streets, there are approximately 20 children's clothing stores (at least four of them French), one children's furniture store (offering a desk in the style of Jean Prouvé), and a Gymboree. Is this why you moved to Manhattan? To be besieged by tiny things made of cashmere? Certainly, some periods of the year would be more tolerable than others: summertime, for instance, when so many of these children are in Maine or Nantucket or Taormina, Sicily. But October presents challenges anew.

The article goes on to decry those who display Halloween decorations and encourage children to celebrate that holiday, in the most obnoxious and elitist terms possible. We think the writer is being tongue-in-cheek when she argues against capital gains tax cuts for fear it might give the city's wealthy hedge fund managers more money to spend on "glitter pumpkins, mock corpses, enormous fake spiders, moving cobwebs and mechanical skeletons" to place outside their townhouses, but we aren't entirely sure.

Now, The Scrapbook admits to being not overly fond of Halloween. The fact that "Sexy Big Bird" is a pop-

ular costume this year says a lot about the less wholesome tendencies of both our politics and the holiday. However, we tolerate Halloween for one reason and one reason only—the pure enjoyment it brings to kids. In that regard, the underlying sentiment of the *Times* article is both unmistakable and ugly.

And yet we have to assume that several members of the *New York Times* staff were involved in conceiving, commissioning, writing, editing, and publishing this article without any real objection. They simply can't imagine that most Americans—even most New Yorkers—would have trouble getting through the first paragraph without reaching for an air sickness bag. ♦

Gasbag Alert

Last week on CNN, Anderson Cooper interviewed presidential historian Douglas Brinkley about his interview with President Obama for *Rolling Stone*—the one in which the president called Mitt Romney a "bullshitter." Asked by Cooper about the president's change in tone, from positive to negative, Brinkley said he considered this to be a good thing:

> That's my central point. I mean, in 2008 it was, "Yes, we can." Now it's like, "No, you won't." No, you won't undo decades of progressivism. No, you won't overturn *Roe* v. *Wade*. No, you won't drill ANWR. No, you know—no, you won't make Medicaid or Medicare into a voucher system. On and on.
>
> In many ways, he's a custodian of the Great Society and New Deal. And the last of a line of really major progressive presidents, if Obamacare sticks—and incidentally, he told me he likes being—thinks it's great that we call it Obamacare—if that sticks, it will be seen as a giant achievement. If he loses, it will get—Romney/Ryan will go after it from—the president—as Governor Romney said, from day one they'll try to undo Obamacare.

"But," Cooper rightly responded, "'No, he won't' or 'No, we won't' is more a reactive thing, as opposed to a forward vision of what I want to do over the next four years."

"I think it is," said Brinkley. "And you know, but we're dealing with unusual politics. In Bill Clinton's day, you still had moderate Republicans. I was with Lowell Weicker last night. He's a Republican from Connecticut. He's for Obama now. Colin Powell we just mentioned. There's nobody in a lot of ways to do business with because the Republican party's become . . . "

Sorry, but do we even need to finish this sentence? ♦

Election News Online

This issue of The Weekly Standard, as it happens, will be the last one to carry campaign news before Election Day. (Next week's issue will go to press shortly before the election but will reach most readers after the results are known.) We don't want to leave you high and dry in the critical final few days. So be sure to go to our website for breaking news and analysis. Visit weeklystandard.com early and often! ♦

the weekly Standard

www.weeklystandard.com

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George Herbert Walker Obama

The news readers from NPR were mum-mum-mumbling in the background the other morning as I was putt-putt-puttering around the house when . . . all of a sudden . . . running counter to every fiber of my being . . . pulling against my every natural inclination . . . I began to pay attention! President Obama, one of the news readers said, was giving a speech in the Midwest to road-test a new theme for the campaign's final weeks: "trust."

"There's no more serious issue in a presidential campaign than trust," the president said. "Trust matters!" The Midwesterners cheered.

At these words my attention loosened and my mind, what's left of it, flew backwards in time, 20 years almost to the day, and I was sitting in a room in the White House, in 1992, huddled with two other speechwriters around a little speaker set on a table in a high-ceilinged room. We were listening to a closed-circuit transmission from a campaign rally in the Midwest. A different president was desperately seeking reelection. This was President Bush—the first President Bush, I mean, the one that Democrats hated but later pretended to like after they decided they hated his son more.

We speechwriters were anxious that afternoon because—well, because presidential speechwriters are always anxious—but we were particularly anxious because at this rally in the Midwest, the president was going to road-test a new campaign theme.

One issue surpassed all others, President Bush said. "It's called trust. When you get down to it, this election will be like every other. Trust matters!"

The Midwesterners cheered. We looked at each other across the tiny speaker, satisfied. We had our new theme! The president's senior staff, at their daily meeting the next morning, gave the chief speechwriter a standing ovation.

It was only over the next several days that we began to suspect that the theme wasn't working. Voters already knew President Bush was an honorable man. They liked the other guy better anyway. As a campaign issue, "trust" seemed an evasion, deflecting a more serious criticism that was thrown at us hourly, by the press and by voters themselves, in focus groups and surveys. The president, it was said, had no agenda.

SILENT JAMES

Again our campaign leapt into action. Frantic phone calls were placed to federal agencies and cabinet departments: Who's got an agenda? From the Department of Health and Human Services came a "health care reform"—something having to do with tax credits. The Education Department sent over scraps from an "education reform" that the president hadn't been able to move through Congress; something with tax credits. And child care—a big issue in '92—where the hell can we find a child-care policy? Somebody dug one up at Labor, where it had been buried a year earlier. A child-care tax credit.

The agenda was strung together and packaged in a booklet with glossy blue covers. The president could hold it up at rallies, with a look that said: No agenda, eh? What do you call *this*, smart guy? Chopped liver? The word *renewal* was testing very well with focus groups—better than *reform*, even—so our booklet got called *Agenda for American Renewal*. Millions of copies were mailed to voters. Perhaps you still have yours?

Me neither. Indeed, I hadn't thought of the *Agenda* in years, until I saw President Obama on TV, at another campaign appearance. His opponents say he has no agenda for a second term. In response his campaign has produced a booklet. It has glossy blue covers and a title to make a focus group swoon: *The New Economic Patriotism*. It's a hastily assembled ragbag, stuff from the agencies and cabinet departments. Three and a half million copies will be mailed to voters. The president waves it around at rallies. It looks suspiciously like chopped liver.

Any veteran of the '92 presidential campaign has learned to identify marks of intellectual exhaustion. The déjà vu this year is especially creepy. President Bush went to a Waffle House to illustrate Bill Clinton's "waffling" on the issues. He took to calling Al Gore "Ozone Man," and surrogates warned darkly of Clinton's unexamined past, just as the president today dwells on Big Bird and "Romnesia," and his surrogates raise half-baked questions about foreign bank accounts. Both presidents are dignified men, yet their campaigns have felt compelled to abase themselves in the same way for the same reason. They couldn't think of anything else to say.

I see you can buy *Agenda* on Amazon for $141. It's a ridiculous price, but I briefly thought of buying a copy anyway, for old time's sake. Then I realized I wouldn't know what to do with one if I had it—like an incumbent with a second term.

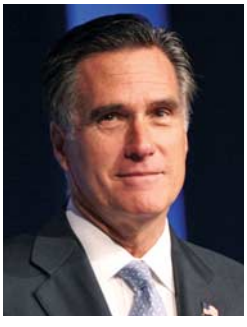
Andrew Ferguson

the weekly Standard

Marvellous Mitt

Six months ago, in an editorial titled "President Romney," I speculated that Mitt Romney—then behind in the polls—could prevail this fall: "If Romney can speak to Americans' sense that it's a big moment, with big challenges, and if he can make this a big election rather than a petty one, then he can win—perhaps big." I continued: "Romney needs, over the next six months, to convince some number of swing voters he can and should be the next president. The easiest way to do this is by . . . behaving like a president. If you want to seem presidential, be presidential. . . . Let Obama lower himself by acting as campaigner in chief rather than commander in chief. Let Obama be shrill. Let his campaign be petty. Meanwhile, Romney can lay out his governing agenda to restore our solvency, put us on a path to prosperity, attend to our security, and safeguard our liberty. . . . If Romney can make that case, he has a very good chance to win."

Andrew Marvell



Mitt Romney

I quote myself not to claim prophetic powers. For one thing, I don't know as I write on Friday, October 26, what will happen 10 days hence—though the signs are promising. For another, I've been wrong as often as right this election season. I recall this editorial of a half year ago only to make this point: If Romney wins, he'll have won for the right reasons. He'll have run a general election campaign that has avoided doing anything that would diminish the presidency or damage the country. It would perhaps be an overstatement to say of Romney, as Andrew Marvell said of another political figure centuries ago, *He nothing common did or mean / Upon that memorable scene*. But it is a fact that Romney and his running mate, Paul Ryan, have run an uncommonly un-mean campaign.

President Obama and Vice President Biden, by contrast, have run a remarkably low and dishonest campaign. If their campaign of "vulgar spite" (Marvell again) fails to scare voters away from Romney, and if Romney prevails after a sober and dignified and, yes, presidential, effort, then Romney's victory will have begun to lay the groundwork for a successful presidency.

If Romney wins, he may do so with the highest percentage of the popular vote won by a Republican presidential candidate since the end of the Cold War. He'll be the first challenger to defeat an incumbent who hadn't been weakened by a primary challenge since 1932. Victory will be a real achievement, and it will be made more striking by the character of his campaign. So Romney will have a broad field in front of him on which to lay out plans to govern. He should be able to resist the temptation to default to a cautious and mushy moderation, on the one hand, or on the other to fall into the pit of small-minded and petty politics.

There will be urgent things as well as important ones for a President Romney to do, and they will be difficult to accomplish. But he and Paul Ryan should take the time they need to make the most of the opportunity they'll have. President Obama was guided by the pseudo-Machiavellianism of his chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." In his rush to take advantage of the crisis, he wasted his presidency. Mitt Romney has the chance to see to it that a serious mandate—should he win one—doesn't go to waste.

It won't be easy. To actually devise and implement a reform conservative governing agenda will be hard. And the forces of reaction won't go away. He'll need to keep on fighting, as he's done in this campaign, to overcome a desperate liberalism defending a desiccated status quo. Here's Marvell, one last time:

And for the last effect
Shall keep thy sword erect;
Besides the force it has to fright
The spirits of the shady night,
The same arts that did gain
A pow'r, must it maintain.

The good news is that Romney can live up to Marvell's exhortation. The same arts that gained Romney power are arts that can enable him to govern the country. As president, Mitt Romney will have the extraordinary opportunity to rescue America from the spirits of the shady night of a decadent liberalism, and lead the nation onto the broad sunlit uplands of solvency, prosperity, and, yes, greatness.

—William Kristol

The Omertà Administration

At a speech in Davenport, Iowa, on October 24, with 13 days left in the presidential election, Barack Obama introduced a new closing argument: "Trust matters," Obama said.

"There's no more serious issue on a presidential campaign than trust."

We agree. It's a good way—among the most important ways—to evaluate a leader.

On October 18, five weeks after terrorists attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, killing four Americans, President Obama told television host Jon Stewart that his administration had moved quickly to share all of the intelligence with the public. "Everything we get, every piece of information we get—as we got it we laid it out for the American people."

The president reiterated this point in an interview with Philadelphia talk radio host Michael Smerconish on October 26. "This is something that the American people can take to the bank . . . my administration plays this stuff straight. We don't play politics when it comes to American national security. So what we consistently have done throughout my presidency and what we did in this circumstance is as information came in we gave it to the American people. And as we got new information we gave that to the American people. And that includes, by the way, members of Congress."

This is false. We know this because senior members of the Obama administration have spoken about the need to keep information from the American people. From the White House to the State Department to the FBI, administration spokesmen have said that they are withholding information until the completion of the several administration-backed investigations into the matter.

On September 14, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland declared that the department would no longer answer questions related to the Benghazi attacks. "It is now something that you need to talk to the FBI about, not to us about, because it's their investigation." The FBI, not surprisingly, won't answer questions about an ongoing investigation.

NEWSCOM

What about the White House? Last Wednesday, a spokesman for the White House's national security staff refused to answer very basic questions about the president's schedule during and after the attacks, telling reporter Fred Lucas: "We decline to comment."

And the secretary of state? When reporters asked Hillary Clinton last week about emails that the White House received as the assault was unfolding, indicating possible terrorist involvement in the attacks, she refused to provide details. "The independent Accountability Review Board is already hard at work looking at everything, not cherry-picking one story here or one document there, but looking at everything—which I highly recommend as the appropriate approach for something as complex as an attack like this."

And the president himself? Late Friday, Kyle Clark, a reporter for a Denver television station, attempted to get answers directly from Obama in an interview at the White House. Did the president committed to sharing everything make good on his promise? Here is how Clark's report of the interview began: "President Barack Obama would not directly address repeated questions from 9NEWS on whether Americans under attack in Libya were denied requests for assistance during the September 11th terror attack."

Basic questions. No answers.

We know this much: What Barack Obama said is unambiguously false. Members of his administration have not provided information to the American people about Benghazi as they have received it. And in many instances, the opposite has been true. The Obama administration has used every means at its disposal to avoid sharing information about the Benghazi attacks—not only with the American people, but with Congress, too.

Sources tell The Weekly Standard that the administration is ignoring—or denying—routine requests for information from the congressional committees with oversight on national security. "I've never seen anything like this," says one congressional Republican. "Basic questions—unanswered for literally weeks."

One could argue that this is good news. An administration refusing to provide information about the attacks is an administration that isn't providing misleading information about those attacks. And that's what the American public got for the better part of four weeks.

• There was "no evidence" of a planned terrorist attack. At his briefing on September 18, a full week after the attacks, Jay Carney said this: "I'm saying that based on information that we—*our initial information, and that includes all information*—we saw no evidence *to back up claims by others that this was a preplanned or premeditated attack*." (Emphasis added)

There was, in fact, abundant evidence of a planned terrorist attack. Emails sent to the White House as the attacks unfolded reported that Ansar al Sharia (AAS), an al Qaeda-linked group in Libya, had claimed credit for the attack. Virtually everything else about the assault suggested planning—from the precision of the mortar attacks to the "blocking maneuver" used by the terrorists to attempt to ambush the Americans as they fled the consulate for the CIA annex.

• The protest outside the U.S. consulate in Benghazi was about a YouTube video. More Carney from September 18: "We saw evidence that [the attack] was sparked by the reaction to this video. And that is what we know thus far based on the evidence, concrete evidence—not supposition—concrete evidence that we have thus far." The basis for this claim was a telephone intercept between two al Qaeda-linked terrorists, one from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the other from the Libyan branch of Ansar al Sharia. There was no "concrete evidence" that the video played a role. The AAS terrorist, who took part in the attack, reported to the AQIM operative that he had been watching the activities in Cairo before participating in the Benghazi attack. He said nothing about the film. Importantly, he never claimed that the Benghazi attack happened because of the Cairo protests. There was never a direct link between the YouTube video and the Benghazi attack. But the administration claimed—repeatedly, and for weeks—a causal relationship between the video and the attack in Benghazi.

The Obama administration built its entire explanation of Benghazi around this detail it learned from a call between two al Qaeda-linked operatives. But as the administration made its public case that the 9/11/12 attacks resulted from a mob spun out of control, top Obama officials emphasized (and manipulated) that detail while excluding the far more relevant fact that the conversation took place between . . . two al Qaeda-linked operatives. Beyond that, there was no protest in Benghazi, as virtually everyone now acknowledges.

So where the administration didn't hide information, it cherry-picked what it would share. And where the administration shared information, it manipulated that intelligence. Now, as Americans seek information about what happened in Benghazi, the administration stonewalls.

The State Department's Accountability Review Board is due to report on November 15—9 days after the election. "We don't play politics when it comes to American national security," Obama says. What will the State Department have learned in 65 days that it won't know after 56 days?

And what about the president's claim, "Everything we get, every piece of information we get—as we got it we laid it out for the American people"?

It's simply not true. And trust matters.

—Stephen F. Hayes

The Campaign Dog that Didn't Bark

Farewell, Mediscare.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

GARY LOCKE

When GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney announced on August 11 that he had selected Paul Ryan as his running mate, the consensus was that he had made a daring choice with a huge risk: being demagogued on Medicare cuts.

Ryan's reputation rested on his bold proposals as the House Budget Committee chairman to offer seniors "premium support" payments to purchase their own Medicare coverage. Even though the program is facing an astronomical $38 trillion in unfunded liabilities and is the single-largest driver of America's mounting debt, Medicare reform has historically been a big electoral loser for Republicans. As recently as May 2011, Democrat Kathy Hochul came from behind to win a special congressional election in New York's 26th—traditionally a GOP seat—after Ryan's Medicare plans became the key issue in the race. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi began claiming that three issues would help Democrats reclaim a majority in the lower chamber: "Medicare, Medicare, Medicare."

Naturally, Democrats were giddy when Ryan was added to the GOP ticket. "Democrats seemed just as exuberant with the choice as Republicans," reported the *New York Times*. "Mr. Obama's campaign manager, Jim Messina, argued that the Republican ticket 'would end Medicare as we know it,' a preview of the messages that will play out in what will be the most expensive presidential campaign in history." The Obama campaign soon unleashed a torrent of ads claiming that if Ryan's Medicare reforms were implemented, "seniors could pay $6,400 more a year," a talking point Obama and Biden embraced on the stump.

But after months of heated rhetoric and ads savaging the Romney-Ryan ticket, Democrats are finding that their tried and true Mediscare playbook hasn't worked. An October 8 Pew survey found that 46 percent of voters trusted Obama more on Medicare, compared with 43 percent who trusted Romney-Ryan more—the issue was effectively neutralized. With the presidential election a little over a week away, almost no observers believe Obama is going to carry Florida, where retirees are a dominant electoral force. The issue hasn't helped Democrats down ballot, either. Earlier this month, *Politico* ran with the headline "Paul Ryan plan not the weapon House Dems had expected." Even if Romney and Ryan end up losing, it will be very difficult to argue that it was because of their position on Medicare.

Ryan, an articulate and gifted campaigner, has worked hard to defuse the notion that he didn't care about the future of the program. He hit the campaign trail with his mother—a Florida retiree on Medicare—to combat the notion he was out to destroy the program. This is a tactic Ryan appeared to borrow from Rep. Mark Amodei, a Nevada Republican who won a special election in September 2011. Amodei parried Democratic Mediscare attacks

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by addressing the issue in campaign ads with his elderly mother. Amodei's election was almost a mirror image of the New York special election four months before—the National Republican Congressional Committee circulated a memo and video presentation using the Amodei race as a template for defending the Ryan plan.

Crucially, Amodei won by favorably contrasting the GOP's Medicare reform plans with Obamacare—another tactic embraced by Romney and Ryan. "Democrats largely disarmed themselves when they gave Republicans that talking point that Democrats took $716 billion out of Medicare to fund a new entitlement," says Michael F. Cannon, a health care policy expert at the libertarian Cato Institute.

How Medicare interacts with the provisions in the 2,700 page Obamacare law is a complicated matter to explain to voters. To the extent the Obama and Romney campaigns sparred on the issue, it quickly devolved into dueling soundbites—the Obama campaign's $6,400 question versus the Romney campaign's claim that Obamacare raided $716 billion from Medicare.

But Republicans had a big advantage over Democrats—their number was correct, and there was no honest basis for the Obama campaign's figure. Obama's accusation that Ryan would make seniors pay thousands for Medicare derived from an earlier version of Ryan's plan. Originally, Ryan pegged the cost of the premium support payments to seniors to inflation. A study done in April 2011 by the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities came up with the $6,400 figure by estimating what seniors would have to pay out of pocket to keep up with medical costs, which are rising faster than inflation.

However, Ryan had revised his reform proposal to address this issue long before the Obama campaign unveiled its attack ads. The plan attacked by Obama ads was not the version embraced by the Romney ticket—and for good reason. Ryan's fixes were ones first proposed by Romney during his primary campaign. The Obama campaign's Medicare critique was based on a proposal that the top of the GOP ticket had never endorsed and the bottom of the ticket had abandoned.

The GOP's decision to highlight the $716 billion Obamacare took from Medicare proved very difficult for Democrats to rebut. The Obama campaign's defensive spin on the matter was transparent and weak. At the first debate, the president tried to claim that money taken from Medicare was a matter of savings. "Seven-hundred-and-sixteen billion we were able to save from the Medicare program by no longer overpaying insurance companies by making sure that we weren't overpaying providers," Obama said.

The problem with this argument

The plan attacked by Obama ads was not the version embraced by the Romney ticket—and for good reason. Ryan's fixes were ones first proposed by Romney during his primary campaign.

is that Medicare doesn't overpay—indeed, it often pays doctors below market rates to treat patients. You can't lower Medicare costs this way without limiting seniors' access to care. Romney's response at the debate was accordingly damning:

> On Medicare, for current retirees, he's cutting $716 billion from the program. . . . That's not just going after places where there's abuse. That's saying we're cutting the rates. Some 15 percent of hospitals and nursing homes say they won't take any more Medicare patients under that scenario. We also have 50 percent of doctors who say they won't take more Medicare patients. . . .
>
> We have four million people on Medicare Advantage that will lose Medicare Advantage because of those $716 billion in cuts.

Ultimately, Obamacare was Romney and Ryan's biggest weapon. "When seniors hear that Obamacare took $716 billion out of Medicare, they don't need to know exactly how it did that—they don't even need to know how the administration and their echo chamber in the media, particularly fact checkers, are wrong when they say, 'Oh, I took that money away from providers, not beneficiaries,'" observes Cannon. "They know that means their subsidies are going to go down, and they don't like that. It's more of an intuitive, gut-level reaction that people have."

As for intuitive, gut-level reactions, Tevi Troy, a former deputy secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and an adviser to the Romney campaign on health care policy, also attributes the failure of Mediscare to a change in public attitudes.

"The fiscal realities that we are facing have become more apparent," he says. "When you see countries like Greece and Spain going through what they're going through, and when you also see the financial collapse we went through just a few years ago, people recognize that you can't just continue on the current unsustainable path."

While the public is increasingly cognizant of the threat posed by Medicare's trillions of debt, Democrats have been thumbing their nose at the public's fiscal anxiety by impeding Medicare reform for political gain. In an article for *Commentary* last year, Troy observed that Senator Patty Murray, in her capacities as both head of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and Democratic co-chair of the deficit reduction supercommittee, was actively blocking efforts to compromise on Medicare. "We shouldn't be giving away our advantage on Medicare. . . . We should be very careful about giving away the biggest advantage we've had as Democrats in some time," a source close to Murray told the *Washington Post*.

The *New Republic*'s Noam Scheiber also reported that the White House blew up the $4 trillion "grand bargain" deficit negotiations, including Medicare reform, to avoid throwing the Republicans a bone on taxes:

"Let me get this right," [GOP senator Jon] Kyl finally said to [White House aides Jack Lew and Gene Sperling] as the discussion became tense. "You're saying there are Medicare savings you think would be good policy. But you won't do them unless we agree to raise taxes?" Lew and Sperling looked back at him stone-faced and simply said: "Yes." A few days later, on June 23, [GOP House majority leader Eric] Cantor and Kyl withdrew from the negotiations.

By contrast, Troy points out that Ryan was building bridges on the issue. "You've had prominent Democrats saying of Ryan's plan, 'Hey, this seems to be an appropriate response,'" he says. Ryan worked on his proposals with former Democratic Office of Management and Budget director Alice Rivlin, and a version of his premium support plan was endorsed by Democratic senator Ron Wyden. Ryan's Medicare proposals have also been praised by Erskine Bowles—the co-chair of President Obama's own National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

Voters appear receptive to the GOP's message that Medicare reform is urgently needed, even as Democrats fail to offer a serious solution. "If you get up there and say, 'We're going to keep Medicare as it is'—that's the fastest way to destroy Medicare. That is the path to bankruptcy," says Troy. "What Ryan has been talking about for a long time, and what the Romney-Ryan approach is, is let's fix Medicare so that we have it for our children and grandchildren."

Of course, even if the polls show the Republican ticket erasing the Democratic advantage on Medicare, they also show voters aren't entirely sold on adopting Romney and Ryan's Medicare reform plans. But the voters aren't running from Medicare. Cannon thinks that should Romney and Ryan win, "it's been enough of an issue that they can claim a mandate to put a Paul Ryan-like [plan] in place." Still, whatever happens on November 6, it's likely this election will herald the end of an era—the days of Mediscare attacks might finally be over. ♦

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington?

The Pennsylvania Senate race is too close to call.

BY MICHAEL WARREN

Plumcreek Township, Pa.

Last year, Tom Smith looked at the U.S. Senate race in Pennsylvania with dismay. The incumbent, first-term Democrat Bob Casey Jr., seemed vulnerable. The son of a well-liked, pro-life former Democratic governor, Casey had served in the Senate for six undistinguished and forgettable years. His vote for Obamacare, with its mandates and subsidies for abortion, was a blemish on his supposedly pro-life record. With a good message and enough money, a solid Republican candidate might knock off Casey by courting Reagan Democrats across the state. It had been done two years before, when conservative Republican Pat Toomey defeated liberal Democrat Joe Sestak. But Smith saw the opportunity slipping away.

Tom Smith

"I was hoping that they had a Pat Toomey-type person warmed up in the bullpen ready to come in," Smith tells me. "But that never happened."

So Smith says he felt an obligation to give Casey a real challenge. "I was not about to concede that seat to Senator Bob Casey," he says.

And concede he hasn't. In the last month, Smith has moved within single digits of Casey, who has been running a minimal campaign. Casey held his first rally in weeks in Philadelphia on October 18, and only recently has he started advertising on TV there. Meanwhile, the latest Rasmussen poll shows Smith just one point behind Casey.

"I think Tom Smith has turned into a terrific candidate," says Toomey. "I think the race is dead even."

Smith says he's modeled his campaign on that of Republican senator Ron Johnson, the businessman and entrepreneur from Wisconsin who shocked the political world in 2010 by toppling incumbent Democrat Russ Feingold. Johnson, for his part, says he sees a lot of the same dynamics in Smith's race in Pennsylvania.

"I think people like Tom Smith are exactly what we need in Washington," Johnson says. "He isn't doing this because he wants to be a career politician."

If Western Pennsylvania were its own state, Smith would likely be its next senator. But Democratic-heavy Philadelphia always makes Pennsylvania an uphill struggle for conservatives. Smith's challenge is to pull away the swing voters in the Philadelphia suburbs who might be displeased with Obama and Casey. Smith has spent a significant amount of his own money—over $16.5 million, his campaign says—on the race, mostly on television ads. For several months, he was running the only political advertisements on TV in Philadelphia.

The question Smith first had to answer, he says, was, "Who's Tom Smith?" An ad from May introduced him as a "conservative Republican" businessman and family man. "In the Senate, I'll fight to repeal Obamacare, cut spending, and I'll never vote to

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raise the debt ceiling," Smith says over images of him in a boardroom and talking with voters in a coffee shop. The final shot shows Smith standing with his wife, daughters, and numerous grandchildren.

Another features a voiceover inviting viewers to "meet Tom Smith." "His story is the American dream," the narrator says. "At 40, he was a union coal miner with big dreams. So he mortgaged his family farm to start his own energy company." The ad shows a photograph of a younger Smith wearing a hard hat and covered in black soot, crouching in a coal mine. It's the kind of ad meant to persuade viewers that this conservative businessman is "one of them."

For nearly his entire life, Smith was "one of them," at least politically. A registered Democrat until shortly before he ran for Senate, he's a first-time candidate. In fact, Smith has never lived outside the two square miles of property he owns in this rural township an hour northeast of Pittsburgh.

On the face of a hill overlooking acres of corn and wheat sits Smith's home, a modern ranch-style farmhouse. The driveway curves into a large parking lot, which is already half full with cars when I arrive early one morning. Attached to the house is a state-of-the-art gymnasium with a basketball court, a running track, a batting cage, and a kitchen. Smith built the gym when his oldest daughters were playing high school volleyball, and now, the building is open every day of the week for use by the community. The "Smith Complex"—that's how the signs on Smith Road directing you there read—is used for youth basketball and volleyball games, school dances, and even a neighbor family's Thanksgiving dinner.

At 65, Smith may now be the local patrician, but he's come a long way. The fourth of five children, he began working on his family's dairy farm at a young age. When Smith was 20, his father died, leaving the farm and a newly acquired school bus company in the hands of his mother. Unlike his older siblings, who had gone to college, Smith stayed home, running both the farm and the bus company until his younger brother was old enough to take over the latter.

Smith continued to farm but also started working for some of the area's coal mines, "running equipment." He convinced his wife, Saundy, that they should mortgage their house so he could purchase his own mine. "Mrs. Smith helped me build this," he says.

One mine became three mines, and soon Smith was one of the largest independent coal mine owners in the business. He became a multimillionaire as he purchased more real estate and started a car wash (pronounced "car warsh") business. He also began buying more farmland around the old Smith homestead, where corn and wheat have supplanted the dairy cows. In his black Ford pickup, we drive past newly sowed rows of wheat that he says he planted himself.

"This farming, Mike, once you get it in your blood, you're stuck. You can't get it out," he says.

We pass the small Lutheran church on the edge of his property where Smith was baptized and where he's still an active member. We also spot the farmhouse his grandparents owned and where Smith's father was born. There are now at least five generations of his family who have lived on this land. He has seven children, including four adopted, and nine grandchildren, including a newborn. I ask him about his background. How long have Smiths lived in this township? Where did they come from?

Smith is briefly silent as we drive up another green hill. "I thought about checking that out, but I never seemed to take the time to do it," he says matter-of-factly. "I've always been a little busy."

A few miles away from the farm, we visit the mines that kept Smith so busy these last three decades. He sold his mines two years ago, but we drive down into the deep mine as if he still owns the place. Smith may be new to politics, but he's an expert on coal mining. I ask him to explain what we're looking at.

"That's the coal seam," Smith says, pointing to the black layer cropping out of the ground underneath several feet of sandstone. "Upper Freeport, it's about 36 inches thick. At the end seam, it's probably about 12.6 BTU, 1.3 sulfur. But what we had to do here was, you know, take, pull the topsoil off, and there's piles of topsoil saved and seeded down. Then the subsoil, and we piled it up, seeded it down. Then we remove all the dirt and rock above the coal seam. That's what we call the overburden. It's all stored down here and we removed all of that, then we loaded that coal out that was in this pit. Then we started underground."

At a nearby coal refinery, Smith spots a familiar face. "Is that Mouse?" he asks as we pull up to a man whose face and hands are black with coal dust. Mouse, whose real name is Richard, is missing a few teeth. He's eating an orange ice cream bar.

"I'd shake your hand, but they're filthy," Mouse says to me.

"When are we gonna have a poker night?" Smith asks Mouse.

"You're busy all this month, probably," Mouse replies.

"Yeah, but you guys go ahead," Smith says. "Yeah, once this election's over, it'd be nice to get together."

"Yeah, that's what I figure, after the election," Mouse says.

Smith asks Mouse who he's voting for.

"Obama," Mouse answers with a sly grin. "My ass!" He breaks out in laughter.

There are plenty of Romney-Ryan and Tom Smith signs scattered throughout this part of the state, but there are just as many anti-Obama signs, all of them focused on the president's "war on coal." A new Smith ad features a young miner from Rockwood named Colt Bowman who says he was recently laid off as a result of Obama's regulations on the industry. "If Bob Casey is reelected, we could lose even more jobs, but worse, we could lose our way of life," Bowman says.

Smith says Casey doesn't have any answers for people like Bowman, and so he hasn't earned reelection.

"It comes down to this: What has Senator Bob Casey done as a United States senator?" Smith says. "Where's his plan? Where's his idea?" ♦

Independents' Day

Romney's advantage with unaffiliated voters could prove key. BY JAY COST

With a week to go until the 2012 presidential election, Mitt Romney has a decided leg up on President Barack Obama.

The polls are clear. Since the fallout from the first debate in Denver on October 3, Romney has enjoyed a relatively durable lead over the president in the *Real Clear Politics* average of the national polls. While the lead is small, it has persisted over time, and, more important, history suggests that this is trouble for an incumbent. The only sitting president to mount a last-minute comeback against his challenger was Gerald Ford in 1976, and of course Ford still lost. Usually, late deciders in a presidential campaign either break for the challenger or split about evenly between the two sides.

The problem for the president is Romney's strong and sustained lead among independent voters. Despite four years of boasting from the Democrats that they were in the process of transforming the electorate, the fact remains that voters unaffiliated with either party determine the outcome of national elections. And with these voters, Romney has a substantial lead. The most recent Rasmussen Reports poll shows Romney besting Obama by 13 points, 52 percent to 39 percent, among unaffiliated voters. Since 1972, the first year of exit polling, no candidate for president has won election while losing independents by such a wide margin.

What is driving this is, above all, Romney's growing advantage on who can best handle the economy. The most recent ABC News/*Washington Post* poll gives the Republican a 9-point lead on this issue, which remains the top determinant of most vote choices. The recent Associated Press-GfK poll found Romney with a 6-point lead on the economy among likely voters, as well as an 8-point lead on who can better handle the deficit.

More broadly, it looks as though Romney has passed a threshold among voters in terms of being an acceptable alternative. According to the *Real Clear Politics* average of the national polls, Romney's favorable rating is about 49 percent and his unfavorable rating is 43 percent. That compares well with Obama's rating of about 50 percent favorable and 45 percent unfavorable. In other words, it looks as though Romney has a lead because he has convinced a plurality of Americans that he is a decent person who can handle the tough issues better than President Obama.

Mitt Romney in Youngstown, Ohio

And what of the state polls? Romney seems to have the edge in states whose electoral votes add up to 261 (with 270 needed for a majority), while Obama has the edge in states that add up to 237. Four states remain true tossups at this writing: Iowa, Nevada, Ohio, and Wisconsin. If Romney carries the states where he has the edge—and wins either Ohio or Wisconsin—he will be elected the 45th president of the United States.

It is worth asking: How did we arrive at this point? After all, it was not long ago that pundits pronounced the Romney campaign dead and buried. All that was left was the voting, we were told. Now, Romney has a lead in the nationwide polls and the momentum in the swing states.

The announcements of Romney's demise said a lot more about the bias of the mainstream media, as well as their ignorance of how voters make decisions, than it did about the Romney team. The reality was that this was always bound to be a close race, and even when Romney was down in the polls, he was laying the groundwork for a strong finish.

Much of an election outcome depends on forces outside anybody's control; very little is within the power of a candidate and his campaign. Yet Romney managed to do the things he could do quite well.

He finished the GOP nomination season without dividing his party and without having to take positions on issues that would later alienate swing voters. He raised a tremendous amount of money. He picked a fantastic candidate for vice president. His convention was solid, if not spectacular. And his debate performances uniformly gave the impression that he is a decent man who is fluent on the issues and whose highest priority is exactly what the American people most want, a robust economy.

The Obama team thought it could effectively disqualify Romney from the presidency before the real campaign even began, but this was a mistake. In truth, they committed the same error that so many in the mainstream press did: They underestimated Romney's appeal as a candidate, which, as everybody saw in the debates, is in fact very strong.

And now the Obama campaign is

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in a real bind. With a week left and behind in the polls, the president must dislodge the voters' impression that Romney is the better man to handle the big issues. Hence, Obama's starkly negative tenor and tone over the last few days. More and more, his campaign resembles those run by losers in the modern era; there is a kind of annoyance and anger to his attacks, which so far are not resonating with average Americans. Perhaps before the campaign is over, he'll repeat Bob Dole's frustrated cry of "Where's the outrage?"

The president could have done more. And if he ultimately loses, the comparison with Bill Clinton will be instructive. After his rebuff in the 1994 midterms, Clinton made a course correction that likely saved his presidency. He rightly interpreted the Democrats' drubbing that year as a sign of public frustration with the drift of the government, and a demand for greater cooperation between the two sides. A modified direction and greater cooperation is exactly what Clinton delivered through 1995 and 1996, with the bipartisan welfare reform bill serving as capstone.

President Obama, on the other hand, basically ignored the 2010 midterm verdict. The public clearly was demanding greater comity between the two sides and a focus on solving the problems of the economy and public finances, yet Obama brokered no lasting deals with his Republican foes. Instead, he battened down the hatches, figuring that he could wait out the Tea Party storm, then castigate the GOP as a bunch of right-wing crazies who had made things worse.

That strategy seemed to be working until the debates, when Romney utterly shattered the mold Obama had cast for him. Now, the country is left with a choice: more of the same with Obama or a change with Romney. More and more, Americans are coming around to the idea that a President Romney would be a change for the better, which means that—barring some unforeseen shift in public opinion—Obama's days in office look to be numbered. ♦

Botching the Debates

How Biden and Obama blew it.

BY FRED BARNES

Joe Biden was forewarned. When he did a walk-through at the site of his debate with Paul Ryan, he asked if there might be double screens when the debate was broadcast. Yes, indeed, he was told, though it would be up to each TV network and cable channel whether to show both candidates at once on a split screen.

Biden may have ignored how he might appear on one screen while Ryan was speaking on the other. Or he may have purposely run the gamut of disdain from mockery to disgust as he listened to Ryan. Either way, he played the fool—to the detriment of the Obama campaign.

If looks could kill

That the debates have dominated the presidential race as never before is indisputable. And what's most striking about them is how well Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan performed and how thoroughly President Obama and Vice President Biden misunderstood what was required to appeal to the broad audience of voters.

Without the debates, Romney would be on his way to losing the election. With them—and especially the first and third presidential debates—he now has a 50-50 or better chance of winning the presidency.

Why the first and third debates? Those were the ones in which a single moderator was assigned to give Obama and Romney 2 minutes each to answer a question, then let them go at each other for 11 minutes, as much as possible without interruption. This sequence was supposed to be repeated six times, only moderators Jim Lehrer and Bob Schieffer wisely didn't insist on it. They allowed the candidates to talk far past the arbitrary time limits.

The freewheeling format aided Romney. He had plenty of time in the first debate to present himself as knowledgeable, reasonable, and likable—without the moderator breaking in. In the third debate, he was able to lay out his agenda for dealing with foreign policy issues, again absent the moderator's intervening frequently with questions.

This wasn't possible in the second presidential debate, with its town hall format. The moderator, Candy Crowley, repeatedly interrupted the candidates to summon a questioner she had selected to ask a question she had personally decided on. It was as if the questions were more important than the candidates—that is, more important than the president of the United States and the Republican presidential nominee.

As you might expect, Romney didn't do as well in the town hall event. In the other two, however, he was also aided by a strategic mistake by the Obama campaign, a blunder abetted by the president's contempt for Romney.

In leaks to the media, Obama let it be known he regarded Romney as a poor excuse for a candidate and someone not qualified to be president. His campaign, in turn, spent tens of millions on TV ads characterizing Romney as a cold-hearted, greedy, and immoral

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businessman—and right-wing extremist to boot.

Given their view of Romney, what happened in the first debate was inconceivable to them. To their shock, Romney destroyed the caricature they had created in their ads. What were viewers to believe, negative ads or their own eyes as they watched Romney unfiltered and in person on live television? Well, as everyone by now knows, they believed their own eyes.

Misjudging Romney wasn't the only mistake Obama made. He and his team seemed to think that scoring debating points was the way to win a debate. The more points you score, the more lopsided your triumph. But *Washington Post*/ABC News polls found after each debate that voters had a better opinion of Romney—even after the debates they thought Obama won.

Had Obama's strategists never watched the 1980 debate between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan? Some may disagree, but I think Carter won on points. But, in 90 minutes, he lost his presidency. Reagan understood debates are won or lost on the overall impression a candidate makes. He made a positive impression while undermining any thought he might be a warmonger or extremist. With Romney, "it was 1980 all over again," a Republican debate expert told me.

There's still another lesson from the debates that was lost on Obama. Romney had participated in 20-plus debates during the Republican primaries. And he'd gotten better as the race wore on. After Newt Gingrich defeated him in the South Carolina primary, Romney responded by crushing Gingrich in the next debate and vastly improved his prospects of winning the nomination.

Obama, I suspect, didn't think his lack of practice since the 2008 campaign would matter. But it did. He was rusty. It might have helped if he'd had numerous press conferences and faced an adversarial press corps. He hasn't.

In 1984, I was one of three panelists in the first debate between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale. Reagan made a weak impression and badly lost the debate. I think Romney would have lost in similar circumstances in which the candidates were forced to lurch from subject to subject. Fortunately for him, he didn't have to.

Debates with a panel of questioners are long gone. They turned debates into press conferences that brought out the least in the candidates. Scoring points and dispensing one-liners were usually the best a candidate could do.

Town hall debates may be the next to go. They began in 1992, when President George H.W. Bush preferred that format. It didn't serve him well. He was caught on camera looking at his watch as if he wished the debate were over.

What's kept the town hall concept alive is the notion that the public is partial to the format. But the Commission on Presidential Debates, after the fiasco with Candy Crowley, isn't partial. It plans to research the matter. It's a good bet the commission will jettison town hall debates in favor of four single-moderator, let-the candidates-go-at-it debates in 2016.

And split screens will continue. They were used sparingly before 2012. In 2000, Al Gore's sighs at George W. Bush's remarks were audible, but Gore was not shown on screen.

Obama, by the way, was forewarned about the split screen. He saw the Biden-Ryan debate. Yet in the third debate, while Romney talked, he often appeared impatient and irritated. Romney, with a quarter-smile on his face, looked on intently as Obama spoke. His expression didn't change. He won the battle of the split screens, and maybe the election as well. ♦

Wisconsin Saves America?

That's Ryan's hope.

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

Milwaukee

Speaking at a Tea Party rally on a sunny Saturday in June in southeastern Wisconsin, Paul Ryan confidently predicted Governor Scott Walker would win the recall election he was facing that coming Tuesday, June 5. "On Tuesday, we save Wisconsin," Ryan said to applause from the crowd of 4,000. "And on November 6, Wisconsin saves America."

Ryan's prediction of a Walker victory wasn't very bold. The governor's budget reforms had been the subject of intense debate for over a year, and every public poll taken during the final month before the election showed Walker clocking in at or above 50 percent with a solid lead over his Democratic challenger.

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But Ryan was a little audacious predicting that Wisconsin would hand Obama a loss in November. The president won the state by 14 points in 2008. And the same electorate that gave Walker a 7-point victory on June 5 backed Obama over Romney 51 percent to 44 percent, according to the exit poll.

But that was before Romney tapped the Wisconsin congressman to be his running mate, before Romney's successful presidential debates against Obama, and before both presidential campaigns flooded the state with television ads.

Now, a week from the November 6 election, the state is a tossup. Control of both the White House and the Senate may hinge on Wisconsin. And both the Romney and Obama campaigns know it, as they devote much of their precious remaining time and resources here.

In the middle of October, the Green Bay media market was seeing more presidential campaign TV advertising than any other market in the country, according to NBC News. Romney and Obama are running ads in the pricey Minneapolis market to reach a few hundred thousand voters in western Wisconsin. Joe Biden campaigned in Wisconsin on Friday, October 26, and Romney, Obama, and Ryan will be there respectively on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

"On election night, the first places to watch will be Virginia and Florida. If Romney wins there, watch Ohio," pollster Scott Rasmussen wrote on October 26, a day after his poll found Romney and Obama tied at 49 percent in Wisconsin. "If the president wins Ohio, Wisconsin is likely to be the decisive battleground state of Election 2012." If Romney wins Florida, Virginia, and Ohio, he'll need just one more battleground state to win the Electoral College. If Romney loses Ohio, but wins Wisconsin, he would probably need Colorado, plus Iowa, New Hampshire, or Nevada.

The problem is that Ohio is usually more Republican than Wisconsin in presidential elections. Bush won Ohio in 2000 and 2004 by 3.5 and 2.1 points, respectively, while losing Wisconsin each time by less than one-half of 1 percentage point. In 2008, Obama's margin of victory was 9 points higher in Wisconsin than in Ohio.

It would be unusual, to say the least, for a Republican to lose Ohio and win Wisconsin. But there are at least five reasons why Romney could break the trend in 2012.

First, Democrats have been campaigning hard on the auto bailout in Ohio. But the issue doesn't play as well in Wisconsin, where the bailout failed to save the GM plant in Ryan's hometown of Janesville.

Second, Scott Walker's collective bargaining reform has been very successful at keeping local taxes low and avoiding painful layoffs and school program cuts. In contrast, the collective bargaining reform in Ohio (which went further than the Wisconsin law) was enjoined before taking effect and struck down by voters in a November 2011 referendum, 61 percent to 39 percent.

Third, Republicans say the June recall election was a perfect dry run for the November operation. "What people don't understand is how much work and how highly technical getting together the list of potential GOP voters is," says RNC chairman Reince Priebus, former chairman of the Wisconsin GOP. The data collected in June could prove invaluable to getting out the vote next week.

Fourth, Ohio has been carpet-bombed by TV ads more than any other state for the past year—with the Obama campaign enjoying a 3-to-1 advantage over the Romney campaign through the beginning of September, according to the Nielsen ratings. Ohio voters may be immune to advertising at this point. In Wisconsin, the polls have been more volatile, and both presidential campaigns just went up on air last month.

Native son Paul Ryan in Janesville

AP / THE JANESVILLE GAZETTE / BILL OLMSTED

And fifth, there's Mitt Romney's running mate, Wisconsin's native son Paul Ryan. "I would really watch out for that First Congressional District," which Ryan has represented for seven terms, says Priebus. "If you look at Racine and Kenosha counties and you see numbers that are markedly better than Bush in the Bush/Gore race of 2000, well, we're going to win." According to polls, Romney's greatest advantage over Obama in Wisconsin is the issue of the debt. And Ryan, author of the bold entitlement-reforming budget, could help drive that issue successfully in the closing days of the campaign.

After a wild year and a half of protests in the state capital and recall elections, Wisconsin may also prove pivotal to control of the Senate.

The man Republicans are resting their hopes on is Tommy Thompson, the former four-term governor and HHS secretary under George W. Bush. Thompson started out with a double-digit lead in August over Democrat Tammy Baldwin, an extremely liberal congresswoman from Madison. As Romney slipped far behind Obama in September, though, Thompson lost his lead. He now seems to be running a point or two ahead of Baldwin in the Rasmussen and Marquette polls.

The Senate race has been much nastier than the presidential race, and Baldwin and Thompson have the favorability ratings to prove it (-13 for Thompson, -15 for Baldwin, according to a Marquette poll). Baldwin has attacked Thompson for selling out to special interests by working as a lobbyist in Washington after his tenure as HHS secretary. Thompson has attacked Baldwin for being the most liberal member of Congress: She's voted against Iran sanctions and backed single-payer health care and numerous tax hikes.

The fact that Baldwin might become the first openly gay senator has been mostly a nonfactor in the race. Neither campaign wants to talk about it. And when a Thompson campaign aide emailed a video of Baldwin awkwardly dancing at a gay pride festival in Madison, the (brief) backlash was against Thompson. The aide was reprimanded, and the Thompson campaign has been averse to talking about social issues, even abortion. During the primary, I asked Thompson if he'd draw any contrasts with Tammy Baldwin (a supporter of partial-birth abortion and tax-funded abortions) on the issue. He answered with a corny attack line: "I can tell you Nancy Pelosi has to turn left to look at her."

With both the Senate and the White House potentially on the line, expect all eyes to be on Wisconsin at least one last time on November 6. ♦

The Negative Guys

Josh Mandel's uphill struggle.

BY KATE HAVARD

Columbus, Ohio

You might think an über-liberal like Democratic senator Sherrod Brown would be losing big time in moderate Ohio this year, but he isn't.

As the race between Brown and Republican state treasurer Josh Mandel enters its final days, the polls all show Brown at least slightly ahead. The problem, says political consultant Fritz Wenzel, is that "Ohioans don't know just how liberal Sherrod Brown really is, and they don't really know Josh."

With his disheveled hair and gravelly voice, Sherrod Brown looks like a populist, blue-collar Democrat. In Ohio, Brown talks about his love for Ohio-made cars, the "auto rescue," and fair trade. But in Washington, Brown is one of the most liberal members of the Senate. He has a 100 percent rating from the pro-choice group NARAL. As an outspoken proponent of gay marriage, Brown was one of the few House members to vote against the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996.

Josh Mandel

Brown is also far-left on economic issues. He not only supported the stimulus, he said that it "didn't do enough." He supports a controversial EPA rule that cracks down on coal-fired power plants, something that won't win hearts in southeastern Ohio. In 2010, Brown didn't just support Obamacare, he pushed for a government-run public option. A year later, the people of Ohio voted two to one in favor of a ballot measure to block Obamacare's individual mandate.

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When the Occupy Wall Street protests began, Brown applauded the group's "energy" and borrowed some of the movement's language for his website. This support came back to bite him in May, when five men associated with the Occupy Cleveland movement were arrested for trying to blow up a bridge in northeastern Ohio.

Unsurprisingly given the above, Brown's Senate seat was considered vulnerable when Josh Mandel, a rising political star, announced his run. The 35-year-old state treasurer has packed a lot of achievement into a short career. He lowered property taxes as a city councilman in Lyndhurst, just outside Cleveland, represented a heavily Democratic constituency in the state legislature, and served two tours in Iraq as a Marine. After he was elected treasurer in 2010, Mandel was responsible for Ohio's $4.1 billion investment fund (where local governments park their assets), which has earned the highest possible rating from Standard & Poor's.

Young and even younger looking, Mandel sees himself as a "force multiplier" for the Romney campaign. "There are lots of ways I can help Mitt Romney here in Ohio," he says. "One of those areas is young people. You know, I'm 35 but I look like I'm 19. We see that youth and energy as a strength."

Mandel's challenge has been to convince voters to see the substance beyond his youthful appearance and rapid ascent. On October 22, he gave a series of press conferences at doctors' offices in Westlake, Mansfield, and Columbus to discuss his 10-point health care reform plan. "I have a great deal of respect for congressman [Paul] Ryan's plan," he tells me. "But it's important, as a leader, to provide your own." Afterwards, he was comfortable hashing out the details with reporters as they asked questions about health savings accounts and insurance portability. He was respectful, studied, serious, and a bit nerdy.

Unfortunately, that's not the Mandel featured in Brown's negative ads, which portray him as too young and out of his depth. Many customers at the Kroger Marketplace in Lewis Center say all they know about the race is that they're overwhelmed by the ads. "I'm undecided because of all the smears," one 30-year-old woman tells me.

"Who's running?" says a young mom, when I ask for her thoughts on the Senate race. When I tell her, she says, "Oh! The negative guys."

It's no wonder Ohioans are reeling from the ads. This has been the most expensive Senate campaign in the state's history. The question of the week in the *Delaware Gazette*'s advice column is "Dear Mariann: How do I stay sane during this continuous campaign bombardment of political ads?"

Indeed, they are hard to escape. Ads for Mandel link Brown to higher taxes, higher spending, and the "War on Coal." Brown's strategy is to turn Mandel's age against him. One omnipresent ad accuses Mandel of hiring young, underqualified staffers, both for his campaign and as treasurer. Travis Considine, Mandel's communications director, says the candidate has hired "qualified professionals," and that "the accomplishments of the office speak for themselves."

In his second debate with Brown, Mandel defended those accomplishments: "While the U.S. credit rating was downgraded, we've earned the highest rating on our bonds, the highest rating on our investments, portfolio up $2 billion since the day we took office [in January 2011] . . . and we've voluntarily cut our budget two years in a row. Compare that to Washington."

Even so, the attack ads have taken a toll. To make matters worse, PolitiFact Ohio has been practically a partner of the Brown campaign. The organization even "fact checked" Mandel's

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Marine medals, something it has not done for other veterans. Although PolitiFact Ohio admitted it was "true" that Mandel was a "decorated veteran," it felt compelled to add that he had not "received the valor device, which denotes performance in combat." Mandel never said he had.

PolitiFact Ohio has given Mandel six "Pants on Fire" rankings. Brown has received only one. And PolitiFact Ohio writer Tom Feran hasn't hidden his partisanship. In August, the website Media Trackers caught him referring to Republicans as "wingnuts" and promoting an article that called conservatism a "cancer" on his Twitter feed.

Sherrod Brown cites PolitiFact's rulings as evidence Mandel is running a dishonest campaign. What he doesn't mention is that PolitiFact Ohio is run by the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, where Brown's wife, Connie Schultz, was a popular columnist. Schultz left the paper last year, after she was seen filming Mandel, already her husband's likely opponent, at a Tea Party event.

All the attacks have left Ohioans with a bad taste in their mouths. Carl Heines, 63, says: "I don't like either guy. This mudslinging is so counterproductive." Heines usually votes Republican, but he's not so sure this time. "Do I like Sherrod Brown? No. But he's seasoned, he's been out there, and things haven't collapsed. How do I know Josh is going to be different? How many people does he owe, after all his campaign contributions?"

Eric Sattler, 44, says he's a Republican voting against Sherrod Brown, not for Mandel. "I shouldn't say this, but Mandel, I don't have a lot of confidence in him, he's just so young. . . . I certainly think his heart's in the right place." Still, Sattler adds, "Putting Mickey Mouse in would be better than Sherrod Brown."

Despite the attacks, Mandel has been closing the gap. After trailing Brown by as much as 15 points earlier this year, the latest Rasmussen poll has him behind by 4 points, and a SurveyUSA poll has him down by only 1. If the trend continues, he might just add "U.S. senator" to the top of his résumé. ♦

Obama's Second-Term Agenda

Entrenching his first-term 'achievements.'

BY JEFFREY H. ANDERSON

He has an agenda, but you won't find it in this book.

Observers on both sides of the political aisle have noted, often with surprise, President Obama's failure to offer an agenda for a second term in office. It would be a mistake, however, to assume Obama has no second-term agenda; he simply doesn't have one he can express aloud. In truth, the president's main agenda item for a second term is to cement the result of his first term that Americans like least—Obamacare. It is fitting, then, that the principal reason why Obama seeks reelection may prove to be the primary cause of his defeat.

If Obama loses his bid for reelection, it won't be because the economy hasn't turned around, or because his tone of incivility has started to grate on voters, or even because he apparently didn't bother to prepare for the first presidential debate and ran up against an opponent who did (although each of these things will have played a key role). It will be because of Obamacare.

The week before Obama gave his June 2009 speech to the American Medical Association—the unofficial kickoff of the health care debate—Gallup's polling showed that the American people overwhelmingly approved of the way he was handling his job as president. His net approval rating was plus-30 points (61 percent approving, 31 percent disapproving). In addition, the president enjoyed an overwhelmingly Democratic House, a filibuster-proof Democratic Senate, and the true believer's conviction that spearheading government-run health care would secure his place "on the right side of history."

Nine months later, as he signed

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Obamacare into law, Obama's net approval rating had plummeted 25 points, to plus-5 points (49 percent approving, 44 percent disapproving) in Gallup's weekly polling of all adults, meaning he was probably underwater with likely voters. It has never recovered. More than two-and-a-half years later, Obama's net approval rating in Gallup's most recent weekly polling is right where it was when he put his pen to Obamacare—at plus-5 points among all adults (50 percent approving, 45 percent disapproving).

There are several reasons why Obama's popularity fell dramatically during the health care debate and never rebounded. For starters, his emphasis on Obamacare was the first indication of something that's become increasingly obvious to voters over time: Obama doesn't really care about the economy. For nine months, while the American people wanted him to focus on the economy, Obama wanted to focus on putting the nation's health care system under the yoke of the federal government. So that's what he did.

In spearheading Obamacare's passage, moreover, the president didn't just neglect the economy; he made it worse. The looming specter of Obamacare provides powerful incentives for businesses not to hire new workers. And once the law fully takes effect (unless it's repealed first), Obamacare will provide similarly strong incentives for businesses not to employ workers for as many as 30 hours a week—the point at which any employer of 50 or more workers will be compelled to provide federally approved health insurance. As a result, the 29-hour workweek—and corresponding pay—will become commonplace.

Nor has Obama's interest in the economy increased noticeably over time. During the presidential debates, he didn't even convincingly feign interest in promoting economic growth to spur job creation. The two job-creation proposals that he most frequently espoused during the debates were his desire to hire more teachers at taxpayer expense and to "invest" more taxpayer money in "green energy" jobs. But the former seems to relate more to his concern for education (at best) or his desire to provide payback to a supportive union (at worst) than to a desire to fuel the economy as a whole, while the latter seems to excite Obama not because it would create jobs, but because it would allow Obama to funnel more people into activities of which he approves. As for a plan actually designed to increase economic growth, he's had next to nothing to say.

The process by which Obamacare was passed also exposed the president's odes to bipartisanship as empty and disingenuous. In truth, it's hard to imagine a process more partisan than the ugly one by which Obamacare was forced on the opposition party and an unwilling citizenry. It included colorfully named backroom deals to secure key votes (the Cornhusker Kickback, the Louisiana Purchase, Gator Aid). It involved a Grinch-like Christmas Eve vote in the Senate. Then, after even the voters of Massachusetts had seen enough and sent Republican Scott Brown to fill the Senate seat vacated by the death of Ted Kennedy, it involved circumventing the normal legislative process and passing Obamacare through "reconciliation"—a process intended to facilitate deficit reduction, not to launch a massive new entitlement. In the end, not a single Republican in either chamber of Congress voted for the overhaul. The whole sordid process was to bipartisanship as the 1962 Mets were to baseball greatness.

Obamacare has hurt the president's popularity in another crucial way. Contrary to what Obama may have thought, Americans didn't elect him for the job of "fundamentally transforming the United States of America"—as, in a moment of candor five days before the 2008 election, he pledged to do. It was during the health care debate that Americans got their first glimpse of what Obama had in mind when he uttered those words.

As the citizenry quickly recognized, Obamacare is no ordinary piece of legislation. It's an unprecedented 2,700-page onslaught on limited government, liberty, and the ideals of the American Founding. If not repealed, it will mean having the federal government—for the first time in our nation's history—compel private American citizens to buy a product or service of the federal government's choosing, simply as a condition of living in the United States. It will mean living in a more litigious society, as bureaucrats continually add to the 13,000 pages of Obamacare regulations already written.

It will mean granting a frightening degree of unchecked, quasi-legislative power to the secretary of health and human services, who has already decreed—in flagrant disregard of religious liberty—that almost all Americans are hereby banned from buying health plans that don't provide "free" coverage of birth-control pills, sterilization, and the abortion drug ella. It will mean granting similar quasi-legislative power to a 15-member Independent Payment Advisory Board of Obamacare's creation, which will order Medicare cuts that—as the law stipulates—cannot be overruled even by the people's representatives through the normal legislative process. It will mean empowering scores of other newly created bureaucratic boards, commissions, agencies, and the like, few if any of which will be directly accountable to the citizenry.

In short, it will mean consolidating and centralizing unconscionable sums of power and money in Washington, as the federal government effectively takes control of the nation's health care system—nearly one-fifth of our entire economy.

Yet Obamacare isn't designed to stop at "effectively" taking control. Obama has previously expressed his support for a government monopoly over health care (preferring to call it a "single-payer health care plan"). About a year before his breakout speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Obama said, "I happen to be a proponent of a single-payer, universal health care plan. . . . That's what I'd like to see. But . . . first we've got to take back the White House, we've got to take back the Senate, and we've got to take back the House."

In the context of these remarks, it is

perhaps easier to see why Obama was so determined to push Obamacare forward, to keep pushing after the public uprising during the 2009 August recess, and then to keep pushing even after the election of Scott Brown. Along the way, however, Obama was forced to relinquish the "public option," the highly unpopular proposal to have government-provided insurance—subsidized through an almost bottomless supply of taxpayer funding—"compete" against a hamstrung private insurance industry on an uneven playing field. Eventually, the "public option" would be the only "option" left standing and—*voilà!*—single-payer health care would arrive on our shores.

The "public option" would have bred disastrous results. But without it, Obamacare isn't even designed to succeed. This is of little concern to the president—for, once Obamacare has led to the collapse of the private insurance industry, the only option left will be a complete government takeover. It is, however, of grave concern to the American people. Describing Obamacare as passed, after the "public option" had been jettisoned, Yuval Levin put it this way in these pages:

> The result is not even a liberal approach to escalating costs but a ticking time bomb: a scheme that will build up pressure in our private insurance system while offering no escape. Rather than reform a system that everyone agrees is unsustainable, it will subsidize that system and compel participation in it—requiring all Americans to pay ever-growing premiums to insurance companies while doing essentially nothing about the underlying causes of those rising costs. . . . Once implemented fully, it would fairly quickly force a crisis that would require another significant reform. Liberals would seek to use that crisis, or the prospect of it, to move the system toward the approach they wanted in the first place.

In short, Obamacare "is designed to push people into a system that will not exist—a health care bridge to nowhere."

And that's where Obama wants to lead us in a second term. ♦

The Paradoxes of China

Understanding our rival.

BY CHARLES WOLF JR.

China, on the cusp of a major leadership transition, has cropped up only sporadically in our presidential campaign. The candidates, in their occasional comments on our largest lender and trading partner, seem only to vie with one another in how "tough" each will be. But "toughness" is not a policy.

China is rife with paradoxes. They include paradoxes of class, foreign aid, military spending, and corruption. Whether and how they are resolved will seriously affect the evolution of policies within China, as well as its future relations with the United States.

I laugh at your 'toughness.'

The Class Paradox

In principle and doctrine (Mao, Marx), communism in China aspires to a classless society. In practice, it is formally stratified into a multitiered hierarchy of specified classes. The 27 tiers encompass not only government officialdom, but the Communist party's 83 million members as well: At the middle and higher levels, most government officials are also CPC members. The defined classes extend to state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the military's upper reaches, and such public services and NGO entities as hospitals, schools, and research institutes. Since Jiang Zemin called for eligibility for CPC membership to businessmen and businesswomen, the stratification encompasses some from the private sector as well.

The steps on the stratification ladder are differentiated in several ways. Compensation levels vary widely, consisting of an explicit "visible" component, and a substantially larger, "invisible" component, including different allowances, benefits, and other perquisites. For the visible component, the spread between top and bottom is a modest 10-fold; for the invisible component, it is probably several orders of magnitude, that is, a thousand or more times, larger.

The classes are also sharply differentiated by the honorific conferrals that accompany them. The rarefied top reach of Class 1 is thinly populated by the party general secretary (who also is China's president and chairman of its Central Military Commission) and several of the other eight members of the Politburo's Standing Committee, including the premier and the chairman of the National People's Congress. Class 2 includes the vice president and deputy premier, other members of the Politburo, and the first vice chairman of the People's Congress. Classes 3 and 4 include members of the Central Committee and the State Council, governors of major provinces and of megacities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Chongqing. As a rough approximation, these top four classes correspond to what was referred to in the bygone Soviet Union

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as its *nomenklatura*; in China, they have some of the trappings of royalty.

China's remaining classes are filled in descending order by government leaders of smaller provinces and cities, and by the lower-level officials and CPC cadres who occupy the remaining tiers of the class pyramid.

The system provides for meritocratic mobility among the classes, although an element of legacy intrudes in this process. For example, the so-called princelings—children and relatives of previous top-tier leaders—often inherit upscale status, quite apart from their merit. The recent Bo Xilai-Gu Kailai-Wang Lijun scandal in Chongqing was replete with evidence of the legacy phenomenon.

How the paradox of a sharply stratified class structure juxtaposed with a principled doctrine of classlessness will resonate in an extensively networked and increasingly informed population of 1.3 billion people is a high-stakes "riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma," as Churchill once said about Russia.

The Foreign Aid Paradox

In recent years, China's annual worldwide foreign aid has been very large (more than China's officially reported defense budgets), concentrated on development of natural resources (fossil fuels, ferrous and nonferrous metals), and extended to 93 countries with exacting, "quid pro quo" conditions attached to the loans that require repayment in kind, and thus accord with the direct economic interests of the donor. Hence, China's aid has a distinctly "capitalist" character, in contrast to the more "philanthropic" aid extended by the "capitalist" West.

Development of natural resources comprised nearly 40 percent of the pledged totals, while infrastructure development amounted to 45 percent, and the remaining 15 percent consisted of technical assistance, humanitarian aid, education aid, and recipients' sovereign debt acquired or forgiven by China.

Most of this aid is financed by subsidized loans from the China Development Bank, its Export-Import Bank, and the China-African Development Fund. These sources are supplemented by technical and financial support from major SOEs that have natural resource development interests. Formal management responsibility for China's foreign aid resides in the Ministry of Commerce.

Loan agreements accompanying foreign aid projects typically stipulate that commodities produced by the natural resource projects will be exported to China, that the lending institutions establish escrow accounts into which the revenues from these exports are deposited, and from which the lending institutions withdraw interest and principal for debt servicing and for fees and other payments due to contractors.

The paradox of China's foreign aid is that, unlike traditional aid provided by the capitalistic United States, EU, and Japan, which is philanthropic in character, the quid-pro-quo, transactional conditions attached to China's foreign aid projects are distinctly capitalistic.

The Military Spending Paradox

To frame the military spending paradox, two points are crucial: The first relates to the special meanings that the labels "liberal" and "conservative" have in China; the second relates to the pace of military spending growth in China.

"Liberals" in the China context are those who favor economic reform with a dominant role for market-based pricing and market-based resource allocation, and who seek to reduce central planning and government control. "Conservatives," on the other hand, favor increased reliance on state enterprise, central planning, and protectionism, and diminished reliance on markets.

During the first decade of the 21st century, China's real GDP increased at an average annual rate of 10.2 percent, while real military spending increased at an average annual rate of 12.1 percent; both rates were the highest among all the world's major economies, while the substantially higher rate of military spending growth was unique to China.

China's "liberals" endorse the growth of military spending no less enthusiastically than do China's "conservatives." Indeed, China's liberals view rapid increases in peacetime military spending as an essential part of economic reform, distinguishing them from the liberals of the Western world, who press for lower levels of military spending, and for lower rates of growth in peacetime military spending.

The Corruption Paradox

Members and adherents of the Communist party of China confront two sharply divergent views of corruption—defined as officialdom's use of public authority to extract personal profit at the expense of the public good.

Mao Zedong viewed the practice permissively, if not dismissively. He analogized strict efforts at curtailing corruption to trying to "squeeze out all the toothpaste" from the tube: not likely to succeed, and not worth the effort. At moderate levels, he viewed it as a peccadillo, and perhaps a lubricant for the smooth functioning of the system. According to Mao, "among those whose labor is good, no (corrupt) label should be given," and rehabilitation should be quick and easy.

A sharply different view is advanced by others, including some in the upper levels of the hierarchy referred to in the above discussion of the class paradox. They see the conspicuous rise in corruption as a threat to the party's "legitimacy" and its continued monopoly on political power. Furthermore, some of those holding this view worry that as long as the state plays a major role in the economy, corruption will grow. Consequently, they favor greater reliance on the private sector and freer markets, and sharp reductions in the state's economic power.

The paradoxes that pervade the China scene are deep, abiding, and, in some cases, counterintuitive to Western thinking. Still, when it comes to assessing the complexities of U.S.-China relations, the paradoxes should be an important part of the calculus—indeed, more important than reiterated "toughness." ♦

The Day After

Four scenarios for the next four years

By James W. Ceaser

For the small school of political analysis that draws its inspiration from the great French 17th-century philosopher René Descartes, the cardinal methodological rule is to begin from what one can know "so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt." The only important fact about the election contest today that meets this stringent threshold is that someone named either Barack Obama or Mitt Romney will be declared president, most likely on November 7.

Beginning from this point of certainty, Cartesians are already at work surveying the possible alternative post-November 7 political landscapes. "I prognosticate. Therefore I am."

The election of Barack Obama or Mitt Romney may be either a larger victory or a narrower one. The resulting four scenarios are as follows:

1. The larger Obama victory, which can be called "Vindication," refers to a result in which the president wins by a margin of some 3 percentage points or more, in which the Democrats gain more than 12 seats in the House, and in which the Democrats, while losing a seat or two in the Senate, retain control of that body.

2. A narrower Obama victory, labeled "Hanging On," describes a scenario in which the president ekes out a win by under a point and perhaps captures an Electoral College victory while losing the popular vote, maybe even by a considerable margin. (This result is what many polls suggest would be the outcome if the election were held today.) Democrats pick up only a few seats in the House, under 10, while Republicans gain a tie in the Senate or, against all odds, capture a majority.

3. A narrower Romney win, "Reversal," describes a victory margin of under 2 points, a modest loss of 6 to 10 seats for the GOP in the House, and a gain of a couple Senate seats, still leaving Republicans short of a tie or an outright majority.

4. A larger Romney victory, called "Game Change," designates a scenario in which President Romney is elected by a significant margin, 3 percentage points or more, where Republicans suffer minimal losses in the House, and where the GOP captures the Senate (which, in the case of a Romney victory, requires only a tie). This result will also bring some real surprises, including victories in states that few expected and upset wins in some of the Senate contests. To put a cherry on top, the GOP could pick up a net three or four governorships.

Just hanging on, or cast out?

Assessing the probabilities of these outcomes is a task for ordinary punditry. But what is striking about the campaign thus far is that the scenario that was most likely just a few weeks ago, Vindication, appears least likely today, while the scenario that was the least likely at that time, Game Change, is today within the range of plausibility.

The two Obama victory scenarios, while quite different, share key points. An Obama victory, no matter what kind, means that Barack Obama keeps what he has already achieved. From Obama's perspective, isn't that mostly what this election is about? President Obama could do almost nothing new in his next term—indeed, he has proposed very little by way of new programs during the campaign—and he will still have accomplished the most important goals of his presidency, which include Obamacare and creating a much larger welfare state. If Obama wins, liberals and conservatives will go on to contest new issues, but they will do so on a new terrain that accepts the core of Obama's changes.

An Obama victory also secures his place in the pantheon of great progressive leaders. On that imaginary liberal Mount Rushmore—perhaps to be carved out as a

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shovel-ready project for a new stimulus package—the face of Barack Obama will appear alongside those of FDR and LBJ. These are the three liberal presidents who did something big, something irreversible, in expanding the role of the federal government and altering the relation between citizens and the state.

Of less historic moment but greater interest, Obama's victory will also settle his ongoing rivalry with Bill Clinton. The theme of the Obama campaign of 2008, Hope and Change, was meant not just as a rejection of George Bush's policies, but also those of Bill Clinton. Obama's defeat of Hillary Clinton for the nomination added a personal element to the rivalry, sending Bill for a time to his tent to brood like a postmodern Achilles. Now fast forward to August this year, when President Obama, sensing some vulnerability in his race, asked Bill Clinton to be a featured speaker at the Democratic convention. Appearing back-to-back on the last two nights, Clinton gave a far better defense of the Obama presidency than the president was able to give himself. In bestowing his blessing on Obama, Clinton did not fail to extract a small measure of revenge, stating that "no president, not [even] me . . . could have repaired all the damage" in four years. Still, whatever Clinton's popularity, an Obama victory guarantees that he will overshadow Clinton in the history books. Obama took the big risk in his first term, refused to play it safe or back off, and he won.

It is fair to ask why a result in which a president loses political strength compared to his first election merits the name of Vindication. After all, other presidents—Reagan, Clinton, George W. Bush—increased their margin of victory between their first and second campaigns. But the "meaning" of an election is a political concept. It must be calculated not in absolute terms, but in how it is viewed at the time and plays in the current context. Given the state of the economy, this race began with the assumption, shared by political analysts and the public, that Obama could never equal his margin over John McCain in 2008. Obama's campaign strategy has been to keep the core of his 2008 coalition, while allowing a drop off of a couple of points. It would be a slight retreat, but with the essential asset safeguarded.

More important, the terms defining the meaning of this election were set by mutual agreement of the two parties in the aftermath of the 2010 midterm elections. Republicans judged their stunning victory to be a repudiation of Barack Obama. Obama viewed it as a small setback to the great mandate of 2008, a proverbial "bump in the road." Each side dug in—neither had the power to do more—and both accepted that the competing claims to represent the wishes of the American people could only be settled by another election. Politics over the past two years has been about marking time, getting ready for the gunfight at the O.K. Corral.

Vindication means that this contest has been resolved. The understanding of relevant contemporary history—the so-called dominant narrative—has been decided in favor of 2008. A modest Obama victory negates the claim of 2010. Yes, the Republicans still have their majority in the House, but the Democrats, if not the president himself, will say that the 2010 elections were nothing more than a bunch of idiot Tea Partiers getting in the way of the forward movement of history. Vindication will also allow a broader and bolder articulation of the president's foundational concepts. Obama's intellectual supporters often played hide and seek during his first term, backing some very bold ideas akin to "we built it," only to retreat in the face of public opposition to claim that, aw shucks, Obama is nothing more than a country pragmatist. Vindication will allow the president to state more openly his social democratic principles, bringing about the intellectual transformation of American politics that he has sought.

Political campaigns are primarily about devising strategies to win elections. But campaigns have another dimension: They affect the general standing or acceptability of a candidate in the eyes of the American people. Some campaigns add to, or at least do not detract from, a candidate's general standing. Even members of the losing party, though disappointed, recognize something positive about the victor. Other campaigns burn up a candidate's standing and spend his moral capital. Obama's campaign of 2008 was of the positive kind, while his campaign this year, based on personal assaults on his opponent and divisive appeals, has drawn down his stature. The audacity of hope has given way to the defense of Big Bird.

Yet his followers under the scenario of Vindication will find something new in him to admire. Liberals have a moralistic side, waxing poetic about feelings of goodness coursing through them, but they also admire the cool calculator and the tough street fighter. While costing the president among Americans generally, victory will bring him encomiums. There will surely be a new biography, published in 2013, entitled *Obama: The Messiah and the Fox*.

The Republicans' position under this scenario is not a pretty one. In terms of institutional power, Republicans will have lost nothing and may even have gained some in the Senate. Yet six months ago Republicans were supposed to have carried the Senate, so a small gain looks more like a loss. Numbers aside, how will they think of themselves? Yes, Republicans can take solace in their strength in many states and in their stable of impressive young leaders. But at the national level, in the short term, it is hard to imagine how they will avoid splitting apart. Will Republicans stop talking about repealing Obamacare? Many will, while others will carry on and blame defeat on Mitt Romney as yet another example of a moderate who lost for a lack of

true conviction. Will Republicans resist completely the president's deficit reduction plan, including a tax increase on the wealthy? Some will stay the course, but others will conclude they must give way. One thing is certain about the scenario of Vindication. If there is one person no one would want to be, it is John Boehner.

Under a scenario of Hanging On, President Obama will gain little or no credit from the 2012 election. If the president should suffer a defeat in the popular vote, it would be a stunning rebuke—a president who has governed for four years and who is rejected by a majority of the American people. Democrats would still hold their victory parties, but the mood would be subdued. The emails and tweets would go out from David Plouffe: smile.

One of the meanings of this outcome is that President Obama will not easily be able to reclaim control of the political narrative. Who owns the majority will remain contested. Still, the president will hold onto his real estate at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and there will be no foreclosures. As time goes on, the public will forget about the election results and focus on his record of accomplishment in office.

Will he get the last laugh?

How much difference will there be in the conduct of politics if Hanging On is the scenario rather than Vindication? Obama will still be able to protect what he has done, but Republicans, especially if they achieve the long shot of winning the Senate, will have more confidence to fight. The public will demand an accommodation of some kind on budgetary matters—this time there will be no waiting for another election—but Republicans can enter these negotiations, supposing that they reach a consensus, on a strong and even superior footing. After all, Congress is still "the first branch of government." One thing certain to change is the degree of resistance to Obama's announced plan of working around Congress by administrative means to accomplish certain ends. If Republicans capture the Senate, look for Congress to draw a bright line and strongly defend constitutional principles that limit this new form of presidential usurpation of powers.

A Mitt Romney victory, even by a slim margin, will count for much more than the numbers might suggest. Romney will not only have defeated a sitting president, no small feat, but triumphed over a leader whom Democrats have celebrated as the very best they could offer and the greatest figure of the age. Furthermore, Romney's win will have all the drama of coming from behind, of an improbable fourth-quarter drive reminiscent of those engineered by John Elway or Eli Manning. Everyone loves a victory, but how much sweeter an upset!

A Romney victory will mean that the people have spoken, definitively. Americans will have said not just that they wish to go in a new direction, but that they want to undo much of what has been done in the past four years. A Romney win provides warrant to erase much of Obama's program. It also changes the narrative of current political history, according to which 2008 marked a new beginning for modern American politics, akin to Year One of the French Revolution. Suddenly, 2008 appears as the odd election out. It is the aberration. If there is a trend in current political history, it begins in 2010. The cumulative effect of 2010 and 2012 supplies the key for interpreting current American politics. The implications of this new narrative will likely be pushed back even before 2010. The nation will be reminded that Obamacare, while technically legal, was never legitimate in the first place. It was a product of corrupt buyoffs—remember the Cornhusker Kickback?—and the false prosecution of Senator Ted Stevens. The core of the Obama agenda will be subject to relitigation.

A Romney victory also changes the stature of the central figure in current political history: Barack Obama. It is unlikely that Democrats will openly blame him for defeat, given how much they have invested in him. To condemn Obama would be to indict themselves. But many will begin to kill him softly with faint praise. Having already slipped from an exalted status to that of an ordinary mortal, he will be brought further down, condemned as a person of nothing more than unusual talent and great intellect. As much as Barack Obama has been lionized by his supporters in Washington, few really like him very much, in part because he doesn't like them very much. Outside of a narrow circle, Obama has few friends in Washington.

Obama's defeat poses a delicate problem: What do you do with a retired messiah? Resuming a career as a law professor and sitting on boards of progressive foundations just won't cut it. Something much bigger, such as the presidency of a prestigious university, might come closer to the mark. University presidents do not have that much to do, other than to raise money and deliver high-toned and empty

GAGE SKIDMORE

speeches, tasks at which Obama has excelled. Most fitting might be a position at a university in California, where he would be greatly esteemed by the local population and close to his investments in Solyndra and Fisker.

Setting his political agenda aside, President Romney appears as a different kind of political leader. His victory ends the melodrama of the "great leader" who raises politics to a pseudo-religious level. It restores normalcy to the relationship between the public and the presidency. When historians write the account of Mitt Romney's comeback, they will discover Americans' latent wish for a steady hand and a more calibrated and businesslike view of what a president should be, and they will take note of Americans' longing for more self-restraint and greater modesty in presidential conduct. The election will mark an end of charisma and a rebirth of constitutionalism.

A Romney victory will also punch above its weight because of the character of his campaign. Though it was not "elevating" or emotional—that was the point—it was relatively enhancing. Romney did not vilify or impugn his opponent. At most, Democrats accused the Romney campaign of misrepresenting the president, but even here their objection was that he misrepresented himself. He was guilty of vagueness and "Romnesia," hardly the most serious of all campaign crimes. Most important, however, Romney will escape charges that he bought the election, because the Obama camp spent more.

Democrats facing a Romney presidency confront a grim reality. Who will be put forward as the new face of their party on November 7? It will not be a young and dynamic vice president, nor can it be the governor of the nation's largest state (Jerry Brown). The current head of the DNC, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, and the minority leader of the House, Nancy Pelosi, are improbable choices. It is difficult, in fact, to imagine what Democratic senator or congressman has the stature at this point to serve as a credible spokesperson. For Democrats it will be a time for regrouping and searching for a new generation of leaders.

The difference between the two Romney victory scenarios for what the election means is not that great. But the differing implications for governance will be substantial. Under the scenario of Reversal, President Romney will face a situation of divided government, with the Senate in the hands of the Democrats. As an interesting "first" in American politics, the two most important leaders in the nation will be Mitt Romney and Harry Reid, both Mormons. But their common faith has never led to a warm working relationship. Democrats under Harry Reid will have to decide what strategy to adopt toward the new president. Having derided the Republicans over the past four years for being the "party of no," Democrats might find that they wish to adopt that role with a vengeance. But it is unclear whether all Democrats in the Senate would follow this path. They have their own careers to consider, and the Democratic party without any strong national leader in charge will be a different beast altogether. If some Democratic senators are pushed too far, they might not only resist, but consider defecting to the other party.

Divided government would not be the worst situation for a cautious President Romney. If this arrangement allowed him to succeed with his core agenda on economics and tax plans, it might provide a reason for putting off some of the more contentious issues. Divided government allows a president to avoid taking all of the responsibility. The president would have no choice but to honor the easiest of all campaign slogans and work across the aisle.

The Game Change scenario, on the other hand, would raise the Republican party to its highest point since before the Depression. True, Republicans controlled the presidency and both houses of Congress after the election of Eisenhower in 1952, and then again after the elections of 2000 and 2004. But in the first case much of the voters' support for the party was due to the popularity of Ike; in the second, Bush had lost a popular majority; and in the third, Bush was mired in a war and had no goodwill from his adversaries. Romney's victory would be more advantageous, and it would be backed by support from a huge majority of Republican governors. The scenario of Game Change would represent a remarkable comeback from 2008, when Democrats spoke of the exhaustion—both political and intellectual—of the Republican party and boasted of a massive realignment and a new era of Democratic governance.

No one on the Republican side today will make similar claims. The notions of grandiose leaders and realignments are the fantasies of another age. In any case, such is not the kind of leadership that Mitt Romney will seek to offer. The three breakthrough moments of the last century when plenary power was vested in one party (during the New Deal, the Great Society, and after the election of Obama), are aberrations, caused respectively by the Depression, the assassination of John Kennedy, and a series of accidents in a few Senate races. Republicans will never achieve this kind of majority, and it is best that they do not. A leading characteristic of a Romney presidency will be a return to a more constitutional form of rule, but with a strong popular injunction for a change of course.

Still, such a change of course would be a potential Game Change—opening up the prospect of a period of successful Republican governance in the wake of a failed one-term Democratic presidency. In the final presidential debate, Obama derided Romney's wish to revive the "policies of the 1980s." It would be ironic if Obama's defeat makes possible in the next decade the kind of political dominance by a reenergized conservatism last seen in the . . . 1980s. ♦

Prairie Democrat

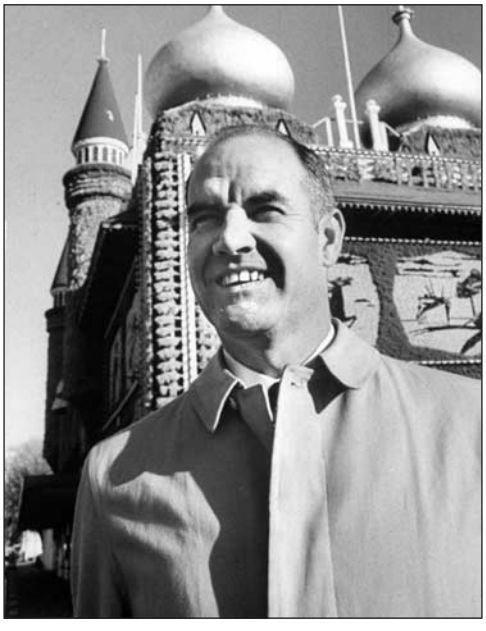
George McGovern, 1922-2012

By Joseph Bottum

I only really spent time with him once. Well, no, that isn't entirely true. I also met him briefly when I was a child, trying to fish for rainbow trout one summer morning in the Black Hills. He was a stranger, coming down the stream in hip-waders, green rubber overalls, but he stopped to help unsnarl my line from the dark pines that overhang Rapid Creek.

I remember liking him—a pleasant, soft-spoken man—and we walked together back toward the cabins for lunch. I thought, in fact, he must be a professional fisherman, with his fancy rod and his willow-woven creel, and we talked about fly-fishing on narrow streams (small movements, he told me: Use the wrist, not the arm) as the pale dust of the dirt road trailed up behind us.

Then my grandmother called out from the cabin door, thanking him curtly and hauling me inside. "We don't talk to that man," she explained, stiff and unhappy. And we didn't talk to him, apparently, because he was George McGovern. And because political memories are long and bitter in a small state like South Dakota. And because George McGovern, the prairie Democrat in the U.S. Senate, had somehow progressed with enormous speed from opposing the Vietnam war to representing "Amnesty, Abortion, and Acid"—had somehow gone from holding a reasonable if unusual position for a plains senator to being the figurehead for all the turmoil and agitation of the nation.



At the Corn Palace in Mitchell, S.D., 1960

ART SHAY / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

It was as though he had set up a snow fence, one of those droopy, temporary things of wooden slats and wire, across a narrow patch of prairie. And every tumbleweed and piece of litter, every stray political cause and unattached reason for social unhappiness, came piling against it—driven by the strange eddies of those times, till the detritus towered above the fence, out on the empty plains.

A political analyst might say, of McGovern's legacy, that the political winds of America would quickly blow the whole thing over, scattering its pieces to kingdom come. The man lost the 1972 presidential election, after all, in one of the greatest landslides in history: 17 electoral votes to Nixon's 520.

We shouldn't forget, however, that he won the Democratic nomination that year by, in essence, handing the party over forever to representatives of all those drifting causes—interest groups, we call them now—ripping it away from the city bosses, blue-collar Catholics, labor leaders, and Southern senators who had treated it as their private reserve since Franklin Roosevelt's time. And that new-formed party of McGovern's didn't go away. Not by a long shot. In the years since he sat back to watch the circus of the 1968 Democratic convention and figured out how he would ride the protesters to the next cycle's nomination, the party he created has held the presidency 16 out of 44 years. Not great, certainly, but hardly proof of eternal repudiation.

Over that same time, for that matter, the Democrats have controlled the House for 30 years and the Senate for 28: not Roosevelt's sort of dominance, but not peanuts, either. In truth, the Democrats have won just often enough since McGovern that they have not had to redefine themselves in any fundamental way. Oh, the three Democratic presidents after 1972—Carter, Clinton, and Obama—all campaigned in certain ways against their McGovernite origins, representing themselves as outsiders and triangulators and healers of national division. But whether or not they meant it, their administrations rapidly silted up with the usual run of activists, community organizers,

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racial analysts, feminists, and class-action lawyers.

With Democrats, in other words: true-believing members of the party that still resides where George McGovern left it in 1972. The founder and definer of that institution of the permanent revolution, McGovern remains more consequential in American political history than Woodrow Wilson or maybe even Barry Goldwater. He belongs in the elite class of politicians that includes, in this country, the likes of Andrew Jackson and Franklin Roosevelt.

Not that he wanted to talk about it when, as an adult, I met him again. The encounter was unplanned. I happened to run into him at a Washington restaurant, where we both were about to sit by ourselves. But we spent an hour and a half talking—and talking and talking: among the most enjoyable lunches I've ever known. Enjoyable enough, anyway, that we visited again a time or two before the relationship drifted away.

When pushed for direct comment, he would mouth the platitudes of his political class and time. "Reproductive choice"—he wouldn't say the word *abortion*—is the fundamental civil rights battle of modern America. Poverty derives from racism and the failure of government to combat it. The root causes of war are the defense industry and power-mad politicians. Yadda, yadda. The blather and the boilerplate. He just didn't seem much interested (although it may have been only that he wasn't going to bother for someone as uninterested, or uninteresting, as me).

But what he *wanted* to talk about was South Dakota and the people he had known there. He remembered my Great-uncle Joe—the man from whom, by a margin of 597 votes, he first won his Senate seat. (*Stole* the seat, my grandmother would have snarled, and given the doubtful voting returns out of Ellsworth Air Force Base—and the Democrats' ugly rumor-mongering about Joe's drinking—I couldn't contradict her.)

The son of a preacher and something of a preacher himself, he remembered the Methodist circuit riders, the heroes of his denomination, who filled in at churches across the West. He recalled with amazing fondness and respect both the stern Mennonite farm families, people of weight and seriousness, in the eastern half of the state, and the wild cowboys, as free and unattached as the clouds, in the western half.

If you listened to him speak about anything personal—or anything at all before 1968—you could easily spy the shapes moving beneath the surface, like those silver fish in Rapid Creek, always just beyond the hook: A lot of libertarianism. A little nostalgia. A dose of that old-fashioned, noble-working-man kind of populism. Some serious religion. He could sound, in fact, a lot like a Republican. But then the subject would shift, and he'd rise back up to the political present. Yadda, yadda. The blather and the boilerplate.

And that's the lasting puzzle of George McGovern, isn't it? The irreconcilability that still had found no solution when he died on October 21, at age 90, in a Sioux Falls hospice.

It's a curious thing, but from Harry Truman to Jimmy Carter the Democratic party has often cast up what today would be seen as fairly reactionary figures—liberalism overseen and shepherded for more than 30 years by figures who each had something of a conservative streak.

Adlai Stevenson, for instance, was nearly as much of a prig as Eleanor Roosevelt, with skirts almost as clean. His distant cousin Alben Barkley may have ended up as Truman's vice president, but he began his long political career as an ardent supporter of Prohibition. John F. Kennedy—not much of either a prig or a Prohibitionist—clearly saw himself as a cold warrior. Hubert Humphrey first came to national attention as the anti-Communist mayor of Minneapolis: the man who had purged the radicals from the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party's rolls.

Even George McGovern was . . . Yes, well, what was McGovern? The Prairie Populist who lost the popular vote so badly he couldn't get even his own state to vote for him in a national election. The antiwar figure who won the Distinguished Flying Cross and piloted 35 bomber missions during the Second World War. A gentle man, a genuine believer, who led the Food for Peace program and went on to run some of the most vicious campaigns his home state has ever seen. A brilliant political strategist—his capture of the Democratic presidential nomination was a masterwork—who ran a general-election campaign notable mostly for its utter incompetence.

Lost in the shadows of Watergate, the bizarre details of that 1972 battle against Nixon are hard to remember. Still, we shouldn't let go of the fact that a political campaign as clueless as McGovern's has rarely visited America. "I wanted to run for president in the worst way," he would later quip, "and I sure did."

Being labeled the candidate of the loony left was only the beginning of McGovern's problems in the general election, and his replacing of Thomas Eagleton with Sargent Shriver as his vice-presidential running mate, three weeks after the convention, only one among many missteps. "This man's ideas aren't liberal," the AFL-CIO's George Meany complained. "This man's ideas are crazy." And as Steven Hayward notes in *The Age of Reagan*, big labor went on to sit out the fall campaign—the only time it declined to rally support for a Democratic nominee.

McGovern's preconvention campaign, however, was one for the textbooks. Fifteen Democrats entered the nomination fray that year, although many of them were, in truth, boutique candidates, typically looking to push an agenda rather than win an election. George Wallace and Shirley Chisholm. Patsy Mink, of all people, and Walter Fauntroy. Sam Yorty. Even Scoop Jackson, representing the rump of liberal anti-Communists who had survived the Democrats' changes after 1968.

Wilbur Mills wanted to be a national candidate, but he came to the convention only as the favorite son holder of Arkansas's votes. The former Republican John Lindsay and the former folk-hero Eugene McCarthy were both past their sell-by dates. Terry Sanford and Vance Hartke never went on sale. The candidates of the party's establishment were the previous cycle's presidential and vice-presidential nominees, Hubert Humphrey and Edmund Muskie. And Humphrey, who'd won the 1968 nomination without directly entering a single primary, actually drew more total primary votes in 1972 than McGovern did.

McGovern with the McGovern Democrats: Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug

BETTMANN / CORBIS / AP

What neither Humphrey nor Muskie realized, however, was that the establishment they represented was no longer the party's actual establishment. McGovern had taken it away from them by overseeing reforms of the delegate-selection process. The McGovern Commission, as it was called—officially it had the nicely Stalinist title of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection—was appointed by Senator Fred Harris, the national chairman, to ensure that the protests at the 1968 convention were never repeated. But by forcing states to hold primaries, weakening state officials' patronage power to name delegates, and demanding proportional representation for women, blacks, and "the young" (the 1968 protesters and, not coincidentally, the antiwar McGovern's greatest supporters in 1972), the commission mandated exactly the nomination campaign McGovern was best situated to run.

The shortcomings of the result would be apparent before the convention itself was over. Tom Eagleton was chosen for vice president in what was reported to be only an hour, and news reports about his psychiatric shock treatments would soon cause his resignation. The convention itself dragged on and on—nuttier with each passing moment, till even Chairman Mao had gotten a nomination—and McGovern finally delivered his (very good) acceptance speech "Come Home, America!" at 3:00 A.M., to a television audience awake only in Guam.

In other words, McGovern constructed a machine he couldn't control, and it ran him over. Still, the magnitude of what he achieved shouldn't be dismissed. He established the coalition of "campus, ghetto, and suburb"—educated elites, minorities in the inner cities, and abortion-favoring upper-middle-class moms—that remains the party's core.

The sadly little-remembered Fred Dutton, author of the 1971 *Changing Sources of Power: American Politics in the 1970s*, deserves credit for the idea; through his work on the delegate commission he convinced key Democrats that the New Deal coalition could jettison its more conservative elements—especially the Catholics and Southerners who were holding back the party's liberalism—and still win elections. George McGovern, however, was the one who took the idea and tried to make it a reality—the reality that would eventually produce our current president. Barack Obama comes from the heart of the party that McGovern created. From rooms in the house that George built.

The question, of course, is how much of it all McGovern himself believed. For most other politicians, the simple answer would be that he cynically used his darting streaks of conservatism and his overall patina of liberalism for political gain, whenever either was convenient. But that doesn't seem right for describing McGovern. Even his most furious detractors admitted he was always sincere about his positions.

Sincere. It's one of those words that occur again and again when the topic of McGovern comes up. The man was wonderfully, excruciatingly sincere. He was almost

a masochist about it all—except, good sadist, he was equally determined to force recognition of that sincerity on everyone around him.

The trouble is figuring out exactly what he was so sincere about. After he lost his Senate seat to James Abdnor in the Reagan sweep of 1980, McGovern tried his hand at running a Connecticut motor inn. He ended up losing his entire investment, and in 1992 he took to the *Wall Street Journal* to describe how government regulations contributed to his failure: "I . . . wish that during the years I was in public office, I had had this firsthand experience," he wrote. "We intuitively know that to create job opportunities, we need entrepreneurs who will risk their capital against an expected payoff. Too often, however, public policy does not consider whether we are choking off those opportunities."

Contemplating such lines from McGovern—his more recent opposition to union card-check elections deserves mention as well—some writers have suggested in recent days, as he slipped into the coma that would claim his life, that McGovern grew more conservative as he grew older: another easy kind of answer to the puzzle of the man. But that, too, won't do. Many of those same impulses were present from his earliest days as a politician. He wasn't insincere when he based his Senate campaigns on what would later be called Blue Dog Democratic principles—even while, back in Washington or out on the national campaign trail, he espoused a pretty undiluted liberalism.

On December 12, 1994, McGovern's daughter Teresa froze to death in a snowdrift outside a Wisconsin bar. His 1996 book about her, *Terry: My Daughter's Life-and-Death Struggle with Alcoholism*, is astonishingly sad to read, as McGovern expresses his "regret over the ways in which my political career and personal ego demands deprived Terry and my other children of time, attention, direction." Even while he recognizes that she spurned the family's efforts to help, he spares himself very little: "I do not regret one single act of kindness, patience, or support that I gave to Terry. What I regret is her slowly developing death and the feeling that I could have done more to prevent it."

As the reporter Mark Stricherz has pointed out, he was willing to examine even the effect on her when the family doctor sent her out of state to have an abortion at age 15: "An important part of Terry was devastated by the abortion. Her innocence, her fun-loving nature, and her self-confidence were all deeply shaken, first by an unpleasant sexual experience and then by a pregnancy that she feared and yet did not want to terminate. . . . I never expressed anger, nor did I ever hint at any concern about possible political consequences. But Terry felt shamed and reduced by this episode."

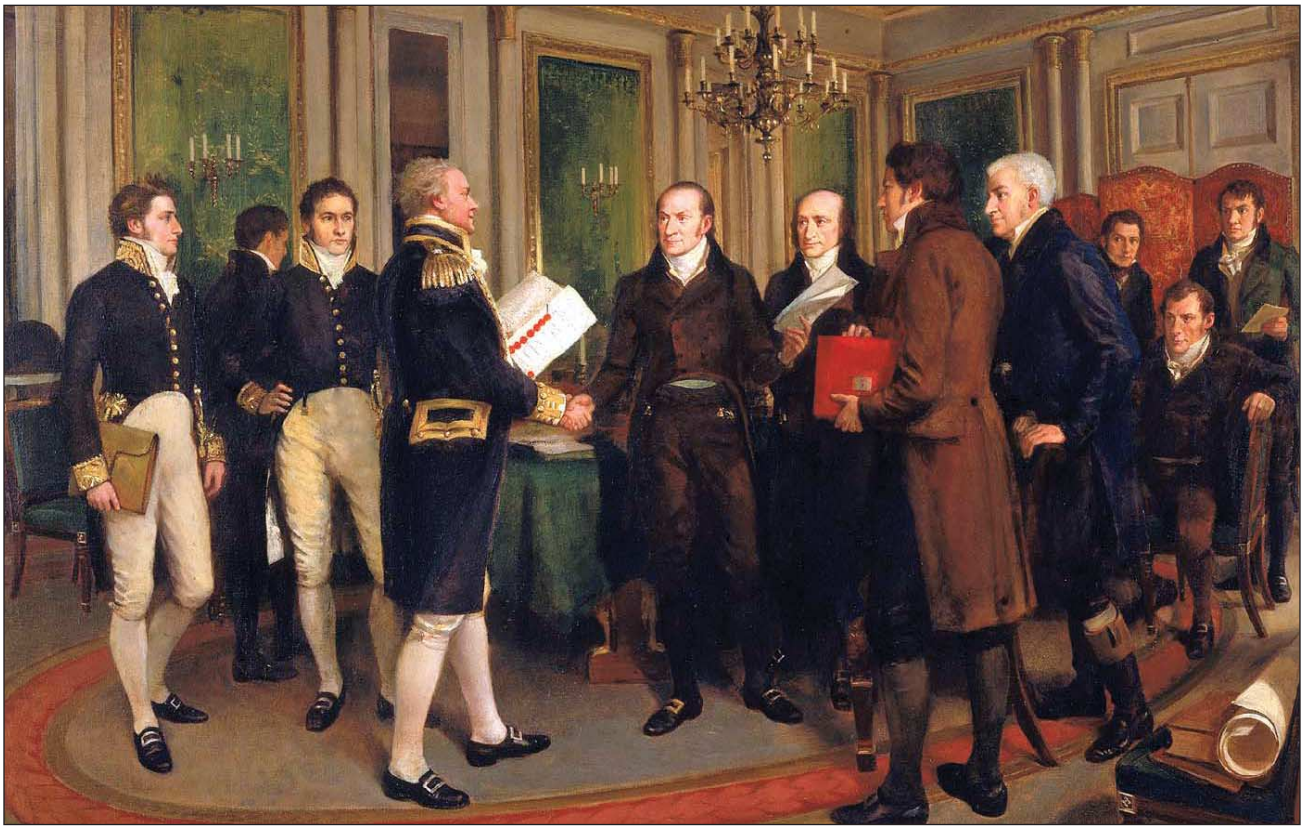
Compare all that to his 2011 book, *What It Means to Be a Democrat*—his victory lap when, as he insists, the election of President Obama brought about at last the triumph of the political coalition he assembled in 1972. He boasts how he brought into the party "millions of Americans who felt they were outsiders to the political decision-making process." He claims paid family and medical leave, the stimulus, and Obamacare as his legacy. He even praises legalized abortion as an unmitigated good, with no look back at the personal experience he describes so painfully in *Terry*.

I've always been tempted to think that the one real thing was his opposition to the Vietnam war, a position he took in 1965 when it was a dangerous and lonely place for a politician to be. All the rest he just adopted as it was thrown up by the wave he rode to the 1972 nomination.

Friends and foes alike, however, testify that he truly believed all the blather and boilerplate, and a better explanation might be something akin to the Doctrine of Double Truth, against which Thomas Aquinas and the other medieval Aristotelians so bitterly inveighed. Like the mutual incoherence of poetry and physics, there were private truths for George McGovern and there were public truths—and they did not contradict each other because they could not contradict each other. They operated in noncontiguous realms. They shared no common ground over which they might squabble, for they lived in worlds that did not touch—both held firmly, sincerely, in the different hemispheres of McGovern's mind, with a wall between them so high that he never climbed up to look beyond it.

Ah, well. May he rest in peace, gathered home now to his Methodist fathers. So many remembrances in recent days have spoken of love for the man, and he had that, as well: an indefinable air of lovability. If I had gotten to know him better and weren't burdened with the weight of old South Dakota history, I might have learned to love him, too. But I would never have followed him, for he had nowhere to lead, really: no coherent worldview to teach.

To visit him in the public spaces of his mind, if you were a Democrat, was to nod impatiently while Grandpa mouthed platitudes about what you already knew—or, if you were a Republican, to run away as fast as you could to vote for Richard Nixon or Jim Abdnor, anybody but George McGovern. To visit him in the private spaces, however, was to feel something else. Gratitude, I think, that you were allowed to walk down a dusty country road with such a man, talking about fishing. ♦



'The Signing of the Treaty of Ghent, Christmas Eve, 1814' by Amédée Forestier

War Without Victory

A bicentennial reflection on the War of 1812. BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.

The War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States—"the American War" to Britons—was part of the closing phase of the Napoleonic Wars. Those wars composed the final of three world conflicts—60 years of them—reaching back at least to the Seven Years' War (our French and Indian War) of the mid-18th century, and including the American War of Independence. Some historians even see the Napoleonic Wars as the last gasp of what they call the Second Hundred Years' War—extending longer than a century, in fact—commencing as far back as the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14) for dominance in Europe and overseas.

The Weight of Vengeance
The United States, the British Empire, and the War of 1812
by Troy Bickham
Oxford, 344 pp., $34.95

Moreover, since, despite its dispiriting prosecution, the War of 1812 secured American sovereignty once and for all, it's sometimes called "the Second War of Independence." It was the nation's first chosen war and the first to be declared by Congress under the Constitution. It was also a war of huge scale, fought not only in the northeastern states and Canada, but along the Gulf Coast, in the Caribbean, and on the Atlantic.

Given all this, you'd think that the War of 1812 would bulk large in British and American histories of the era. But it doesn't. Why not? Because nothing about the War of 1812 meets the normal, unrealistic criteria by which we like to measure American wars: It didn't end conclusively; it had no striking immediate consequences; it offered up no undisputed victor. Cynics point out that the War of 1812 gave us little to celebrate, save perhaps some naval battles, the repulse of the British at Fort McHenry, and Andrew Jackson's victory over British regulars at New Orleans.

As these scoffers point out, it was a misbegotten conflict. The British

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didn't want a war with the United States; they were already in the midst of a titanic fight on the Continent. They aimed only to control American freedom of commerce during the island nation's struggle with France, as if the United States could be treated as a dependent power. Once an American declaration of war over British trade restrictions threatened, Britain repealed the offensive restrictions, the Orders in Council, to head the war off. But due to the day's slow communications, President James Madison had already sought and received a congressional declaration of war, which stood even after one of the president's principal pretexts no longer existed.

The remaining stated causes for war—the impressment of American seamen and Britain's troublemaking among the Indians around the Great Lakes—remained. Impressment was a particularly insulting irritant to the United States. Even if, as Britain claimed, thousands of British seamen needed for war had deserted to the American commercial and naval fleets, the Americans could not tolerate the insult to their honor resulting from British ships' stopping American vessels on the high seas for the removal of supposed British tars. The war commenced.

As detractors also point out, the war was badly fought, especially by American forces. Most of the engagements that Americans found themselves fighting ended badly, some of them embarrassingly or tragicomically. Ragtag ground forces repeatedly proved themselves ill-led, and the nation's celebrated naval victories yielded few strategic gains, save perhaps those at the war's very end. Nor did the war cast up a great generation of indomitable warriors, although many of its figures (Winfield Scott, for instance) went on to later military fame, and two (Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison) became president. Most historians agree that had the war ground on longer, the United States would have decisively lost—and lost in such a way as to threaten its very integrity.

As if this weren't enough to doom the war's reputation, cynics point out that its most celebrated battle, Jackson's victory over the British at New Orleans in early January 1815, was unnecessary to the war's outcome. The battle took place after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed roughly 10 days earlier—a fact that, once again because of slow communications, Americans didn't learn until February. In another era, Jackson would have been denied his glory, and the war would simply have fizzled out.

A notable characteristic of recent histories is their questioning of the claim that the war was of little significance to the United States. That view is no longer tenable. As we can see now, the war was critical to the subsequent history of the United States, and much of the rest of the world.

These are standard items in all histories of the War of 1812. And each warrants attention. But in contrast to most earlier historians, Troy Bickham is at pains to emphasize that what was more important than the war's prosecution was its consequences. It has long been said that we gained nothing from it; after all, didn't the Treaty of Ghent leave everything as it had been at the start—*status quo ante bellum*—despite two-and-a-half years of fighting and roughly 15,000 American casualties, to say nothing of Canadian, British, and Indian dead? Yes, it did. But a notable characteristic of recent histories of the war is their questioning of the claim that the war was of little significance to the United States. In their telling, that view is no longer tenable. And surely they are correct. As we can see now, the war was critical to the subsequent history of the United States, and much of the rest of the world.

Take the Treaty of Ghent itself. As many have pointed out, while Britain may have won the war, America won the peace and, arguably, the ideological upper hand thereafter. As Bickham emphasizes, Great Britain had long wished to keep the United States a client state, one subordinate to Britain's own commercial interests around the globe. In that aim it failed; the United States succeeded in preserving its independence and freedom of action while winning the permanent regard (however grudging) of its former mother country for having done so.

It's also the case that *status quo ante bellum*—neither enemy conceding anything to the other—was better than an alternative outcome—*uti possidetis*, the retention of territories in the possession of each nation. Not that Britain possessed much American territory at the war's end. But had the victor over Napoleon wanted to continue the war, and sent the future Duke of Wellington to command British forces across the Atlantic, the United States would have been in grave danger. Fortunately, Wellington advised against an invasion, and Lord Liverpool's ministry took his counsel. There would be no revanchism after this war.

Bickham's book, taking up such large realities, comprises only a modest proportion of the torrent of books and films already accompanying this bicentennial of the war. Yet it is among the most authoritative, up-to-date, and readable works that have so far appeared—modern scholarship at its very best.

The Weight of Vengeance owes much to the recent effort among students of politics, institutions, and diplomacy—the stuff of traditional history—to understand those classic topics in the context of the social and cultural realities surrounding them. To these historians, a war is not just a series of campaigns and battles topped off by a negotiated peace, but a large human

event that can be fully understood only by taking into account such matters as the ethno-racial composition of military forces, the words used by governments and propagandists to explain and justify it, and the intellectual content of strategic decisions.

This political-culture approach has greatly broadened our understanding of politics in recent years, and has led to a welcome revival in the study of political, diplomatic, and military history—albeit all in new forms and with new emphases. Bickham's book is an example not only of this new approach but also of the effort, steadily gaining ground, to place American history in its world context. His War of 1812 is, as it must be, part of a world war, its prosecution and diplomacy affected at every turn by what is going on elsewhere.

Andrew Jackson conducts 'The Battle of New Orleans,' by Edward Percy Moran (1910).

Thus, anyone reading this book should be prepared to encounter not warfare history as they've known it, nor even as (improved in recent decades) it has become. Bickham gives us a war without warfare, something more akin to political history: no battlefield gore and terror, no attention to the realities of fighting, no arguments about tactics or grand strategy. Emblematic of this is the fact that *The Weight of Vengeance* contains only a single chapter among eight on what we would normally think of as the war itself—its prosecution and its battlefield and naval consequences.

Concentrating instead on public opinion, especially newspaper opinion, in Britain and America, Bickham shows how policymakers in both countries were hemmed in domestically. Both miscalculated the other's will to fight. Accordingly, Britain was astonished that the Madison administration didn't call off the war once the Orders in Council had been repealed, and it underestimated how dreadfully its possessions in Canada and the West Indies would suffer during the war's first half. As for the United States, it failed to understand how Britain, not for the first or last time, felt itself to be in a life-and-death struggle with a continental power, and would do everything to protect itself and its far-flung interests.

Thus, Bickham immerses us in the world context of this two-and-a-half year conflict and, unlike so many earlier historians, takes it seriously. He sternly notes, for instance, that to Britain, the war was "not a sideshow or distant nuisance." It was central to Britain's larger global struggle against France and its allies. Yet he does not let readers forget the realities that drove the United States to undertake the risk of confronting the world's dominant seaborne power, a risk that put America on the ropes by 1814: its coast blockaded, its Navy bottled up and facing defeat, and Britain ready to throw everything at the infant nation, including a massive invasion of ground forces.

Yet, determined to face down Britain's "grating imperial arrogance," America fought on. Bickham skillfully fills the scene on both sides of the Atlantic as these two powers—one fighting in this conflict alone, the other fighting over much of the world—grappled with one another to a diplomatic stalemate, brought on by tough American diplomacy as much as by British fatigue.

One unaccountable feature of Bickham's book is the author's apparent failure to have consulted the extraordinary letterpress edition of Madison's writings now available through June 1814 in the ongoing series of volumes under the title *The Papers of James Madison*. Like similar series of the papers of such central figures as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, the Madison volumes result from a blend of private and federal funding, without either of which the records of our revolutionary and constitutional Founding would have remained unavailable to anyone but the most sedulous researchers and scholars. That Bickham did not use the wealth of information and documentation relating to the Madison administration that is available in the published volumes casts some doubt on the accuracy and dependability of the whole. Nor does it help that a book about a war stretching around the world contains not a single map.

So where does this fine book leave us? Above all, it elevates the war's significance in the sweep of American history higher than it has ever been, and not so much because of the war itself but because of its consequences. One must, of course, tread lightly here to avoid two snares: The first is to see the

war as a cause of what came after simply because it came first; the second is to misapply counterfactual thinking to the war—that is, to be too enthusiastic in imagining what otherwise might have occurred had the war turned out differently, or not taken place at all.

Yet putting this work together with others recently published, and those yet to come—all of them adding immeasurably to our thinking about the subject—makes clear that the War of 1812 was at the very least, as J.C.A. Stagg puts it in *The War of 1812* (see review by Nelson D. Lankford, The Weekly Standard, July 2, 2012), "a critical episode in the emergence of North America's nation-states, in their internal development, and in the history of their indigenous peoples." For the native tribes, especially those in the United States, the war was (once again in Stagg's words) "devastating" and "disastrous." They would never recover, and the pattern of their control and annihilation, set in motion during the colonial era, now became a permanent fixture of American policy.

In addition, the War of 1812 had the ironic effect—instead of gaining Canadian territory for the United States, as Madison's political and military strategy sought without success—of creating what hadn't existed before: Canadian nationalism. To this day, Canadians see the war as having given them, even during this colonial period of their history, a sense of shared situation, of distinctiveness from American governance and aspirations, and of comfort under British governance, which slowly began to adapt to new Canadian realities. Modern Canada emerged from the War of 1812.

For Americans, the war was of major significance. Once and for all, the United States gained its warranted standing among independent nation-states, something it sought at the outset. The settlement of long-outstanding issues with Britain soon followed. Commercial relations were restored on a more equal footing, fishing rights were negotiated, naval armaments on the Great Lakes were limited, and the two-centuries-long peace between the United States and Canada that exists today commenced. Those issues settled, the Monroe Doctrine (1823), by which the United States warned off European powers from the Western Hemisphere, was probably only a matter of time. "Manifest Destiny" was not far behind.

What's more, the failure of American civil and military institutions during the war laid the groundwork for the slow emergence of a stronger national government and stronger military forces, both of which would be tested and proven in the Mexican War (1846-48) and then in the Civil War. The War of 1812 also cemented American, just as it created Canadian, nationalism. It gave courage to newly independent Latin American republics that had been born in revolution against Spain at about the same time. Regarding Spain, with which the Treaty of Ghent settled nothing, the war gave America confidence to continue to pursue its interests in Florida and along the Gulf Coast, and ushered in the spread of Americans (and their slaves) southwestward along the Gulf and into Texas.

The war was also, in recent lingo, part of a larger postcolonial war in which former colonies throughout the Western Hemisphere battled their former rulers, the United States finally freeing itself of British neocolonialism. And as a forthcoming work will argue, the War of 1812, by leading Britain to repeal many of its trade restrictions, helped put an end to the great age of mercantilism and opened the liberal era of free trade among nations.

An inconsequential war? Far from it. The Treaty of Ghent was part of an arrangement among the great powers of Europe that reordered relations among Western powers for roughly a century. The United States figured in that settlement, and bent it toward her own interests. ♦

B&A

Dark Laughter

Depravity at the heart of contemporary England.

by Kyle Smith

Lionel Asbo
State of England
by Martin Amis
Knopf, 272 pp., $25.95

Despite the inapt "literary bad boy" label that continues to trail along behind Martin Amis like a disappointed autograph seeker, he has never been a shock novelist. Rather, he's a comic-hyperbole man, forever pushing up into the thin air atop Mt. Absurdity.

Nor does Amis write state-of-England novels—so the subtitle of this latest one is both surprising and enticing. Amis has spent a large portion of the last decade writing, with great moral seriousness, about Islamism and the Gulag, and his last comic novel (*The Pregnant Widow*) was uncharacteristically personal and soul-searching, a sobering critique of the unforeseen consequences of the sexual revolution.

In his sixties, could he be ready to apply the same analytical rigor to his homeland as he has to Stalinism and jihad? Then *Lionel Asbo* begins. It's about a 15-year-old boy who is having a sexual affair with his 39-year-old grandmother.

The list of ills plaguing contemporary England is long—but grandmotherly

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incest is not, at least as this issue went to press, on it. So. Fine. Amis is back to doing outrageous comedy, making farce from the filthiest and most inappropriate situations, as in his most scabrous novels—*Dead Babies*, *Money*, *London Fields*. Yet as the boy, Desmond Pepperdine, meets his soulmate, attends university, becomes a respectable journalist, and grows into a responsible young father, he can no longer be dismissed as a mere comic object like Amis's most memorable antiheroes, Keith Talent (*London Fields*) and John Self (*Money*). The laughter gradually dwindles. This supposed return to comic form is less unified of purpose than Amis's best work.

Desmond's foil is the more Amisian title figure, a lifelong criminal who brags that he stole cars as a toddler. Aged 3 and 2 days (Amis solemnly informs us), Lionel was issued his first Restraining Directive: "A childish interest in cruelty to animals was perhaps only to be expected, but Lionel went further, and one night made a serious attempt to torch a pet shop."

The acronym ASBO stands for "anti-social behavior ordinance," a quaint, daft project of Tony Blair's late Labour government that simultaneously defined deviancy up and down. The ASBO became a way of administering the feeblest possible tap on the wrist for minor crimes, such as making graffiti or urinating in public, and yet also a way of registering official disapproval for general rudeness.

The ASBO died a much-ridiculed death under David Cameron's Tory/Liberal government after it became associated with such cases as that of an 88-year-old man who was issued one informing him that he was not to be sarcastic to his neighbors. Meanwhile, accomplished young frighteners collected ASBOs with impunity, treating them as slightly less burdensome than a stern lecture from a headmaster. In the grim gray warehouses of public housing, an ASBO became a badge of honor.

So Lionel Pepperdine, Desmond's 21-year-old uncle, changes his surname to Asbo. A happily antisocial life beckons until, during one of his many prison stays, Lionel learns that he has won £140 million in the lottery. Now that Lionel is no longer socioeconomically deprived, can he become a true gentleman?

To hint that things might take a Dickensian turn—think *Great Expectations* with paparazzi—there are wry little references to the Victorian master (whose sentimentality and earnestness mark him as a seeming ideological foe to Amis). For instance, Desmond, who is effectively an orphan (his mother is dead and he never knew his father, so he is raised by Lionel), attends a school called Squeers Free, which is dubbed "the worst in England."

Martin Amis, Christopher Hitchens, Tina Brown, New York, 1995

DAFYDD JONES / POLARIS / NEWSCOM

But anyone who knows Amis knows that he could never lower himself to the cliché that character is a mere plaything of circumstance. Lionel Asbo would simply laugh at (and leverage) such efforts at "understanding" as Cameron's notorious "hug a hoodie" speech. "What was the matter with him?" Desmond wonders, deciding that his uncle "gave being stupid a lot of very intelligent thought." Amis suggests that the sensationalist press, which immediately dubs Asbo the "Lotto Lout," has a superior understanding of depravity as a choice, and some of the most hilarious sections of the novel diagram the clash of Lionel's ridiculous wealth with his equally ludicrous (at least in the world of comic fiction) lack of morality.

Career criminals do exist, yet Amis is content to remain at a distance and open fire with comic riffs. At the same time, he develops a lot of fondness for Desmond, and even some for Lionel, who earns sympathy in the book's funniest scene when he decides it would be splendid to be seen wasting a fortune on drinks and dinner, but is soundly defeated by his own lack of education in the ways of lobster consumption.

> [Lionel] went back inside to confront the scarlet fortress of the crustacean. . . . There were two skewers (one with a curved tip) and a nutcracker. He picked up the gangly device: like the bottom half of a chorus girl made of steel. . . . [T]he key moment came ten minutes later, when he threw down his weapons and reached for the enemy with his bare hands.

It's a scene right out of *London Fields*, in which Keith Talent undergoes similar torment when challenging a restaurant to make a curry so hot he can't eat it. But *Lionel Asbo* is building to a genuinely unnerving scene that negates Lionel's attempted development and is (unlike the lightly handled incest at the beginning) painted in tones of suspense, and even horror, rather than silliness.

A sick joke can be funny, but only if it doesn't invite or allow too much genuine feeling for its characters. *Lionel Asbo* is an uneasy, and at times unsatisfying, mix: too outrageous to be taken in earnest, but also too human to be purely comic. ♦

B&A

See Things as They Are

Mark Blitz on politics and philosophy.

BY CHRISTOPHER LYNCH

Mark Blitz's *Plato's Political Philosophy* makes, and keeps, some large promises.

At the top of the list is Blitz's intention to bring to light Plato's depiction of the full range of human life by "articulating the realm of political philosophy," the sphere of distinctively human existence, according to Blitz. It is a realm suffused by opinions about human life as a whole and about *the* whole itself, the cosmos of which man is but a part.

An understanding of these opinions can enable readers of Plato (guided by Blitz) to discern what is both distinctive and noble about human life by indicating how what is beyond politics is, in fact, above it. Human life is thereby elevated and enlarged by awareness of its place in the larger cosmos, rather than flattened out or reduced to insignificance.

An unstated motive here, it would seem, is to make plausible to our dogmatically skeptical age the idea that actions of moral beauty issue from excellent human souls. Our souls are open to a cosmos whose intelligibility is increasingly clarified the more we reflect on the world in which we live. And that world is the political world. Blitz offers a stunning reprise of the premodern dictum according to which man is the microcosm.

Blitz's method, and his chosen audience, are capacious. He takes a "generalizing approach" that ranges throughout nearly the entire Platonic corpus, and he aims to benefit both beginners and scholars. He seeks to convince the former of the importance of Plato's "more refined, complicated, or abstract thoughts" while still benefiting the "more advanced" through his own reflections on Plato's ideas. Above all, Blitz wishes to remind both of "how Plato's most abstract thought is rooted in ordinary political and moral questions," and to demonstrate how "to uncover his practical answers to them."

Blitz does not obtrude his ambition: He stresses, instead, the apparently more modest goal of "thinking together with Plato." Yet one shouldn't be misled into believing that Blitz's aim is merely academic. When this book is read in conjunction with his *Duty Bound* (2005) and last year's *Conserving Liberty*, it becomes apparent that Mark Blitz seeks to understand the limits of our political order as well as defend and ennoble it. He is as keenly aware of the practical importance of politics as he is of the theoretical significance of the political.

In *Duty Bound*, he developed the idea that responsibility is the virtue that guides and limits freedom in a democratic order founded on natural rights—an order that he, in keeping with the usage of political theorists, calls liberal democracy or liberalism. It is to be distinguished not from conservatism, but from orders founded on (or dedicated to) principles other than natural rights—such as moral virtue or the common good of ancient political philosophy. *Duty Bound*'s early parts show how stolid institutions like federal bureaucracies and seemingly staid and stale fields such as administrative law can be realms within which genuine human excellences can do their work, especially when seen through the prism of reasonable responsibility as a virtue.

In this manner, Blitz counters the complacency of those who think our political life is a machine that runs of itself, and others who look down on modern democratic politics with knee-jerk contempt. Blitz counters crucial challenges to liberal democracy in a manner that does full justice to the spirit of freedom.

In *Conserving Liberty* Blitz is at his most practical, even if theoretical considerations do not recede entirely. He makes the case that a conservatism founded on reason rather than tradition offers the best prospect for preserving our country's core principles as well as its characteristic practices and institutions. America can continue to serve as the bulwark of a freedom that amply provides the conditions for human happiness.

In the final chapters of *Duty Bound*, however, Blitz identifies challenges to our liberal democratic order that can be met fully only by transcending liberalism, by seeing it from a higher, or more comprehensive, perspective. In those

Plato's Political Philosophy
by Mark Blitz
Johns Hopkins, 336 pp., $24.95

Mark Blitz

CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

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chapters, he places the theme of responsibility within the broadest context of human ends, goods, and choice.

Liberal democracies tend to flatten both aspirations for, and visions of, the human good. They also leave their citizens with little guidance regarding key questions of modern life, and the answers to some of these questions may well determine whether human beings will even continue to desire the good ends entailed in human happiness.

Blitz neither indulges in vague formulas about balancing desired outcomes, nor reverts to claims about the dignity of the human person rooted in revelation. Rather, Blitz explores what is required for us to pursue human goods, especially moral and intellectual goods. Moreover, he does so without being moralistically or legalistically prescriptive: He deftly distinguishes his arguments from those on both left and right which have "an atavistic ring" in their flight to simple traditions, poetic imaginations, or "prescientific worlds."

In *Duty Bound*, he writes:

> These standpoints . . . threaten to give away what one most wishes to protect, our rational powers. . . . Genuine reflection on what makes our goals good and on the place of thought in enriching or even threatening these goods is a central task if we are to govern technology responsibly, especially given the emergence of biotechnology. Post-Heideggerian thought can contribute to this.

Plato's Political Philosophy is a signal instance of such genuine reflection. Among its most satisfying aspects is the significance of its reflections on specific virtues in both their common, conventional guises and their rarer, natural, and, ultimately, philosophical versions. Blitz shows how careful reflection enables one to follow the movement from courage as a virtue of the body to courage as a virtue of the mind. Courage first comes to sight as the most bodily virtue, the activity of standing one's literal ground with brute spiritedness; under Blitz's guidance, we see how that primitive version naturally points to the paradoxical philosophic definition of a knowledge ennobled by its connection to truly good ends.

Blitz pushes this standard account one dialectical step further. On the one hand, such intellectualization of courage does reveal the truth that courage is only a part of the whole of virtue understood as knowledge; on the other hand, it conceals the truth that courage is a part of virtue that stands apart as a relatively stable whole in its own right.

Mark Blitz makes the case that a conservatism founded on reason rather than tradition offers the best prospect for preserving our country's core principles as well as its characteristic practices and institutions.

Similarly, the reverence entailed in religious piety reproduces what natural piety does when, for example, Socrates stands in awe of what is best in himself, especially insofar as that part of him imposes hard demands for precise knowledge of things as they truly are. And as though to make clear that he means to maintain the distinctiveness of piety itself, Blitz later gives piety its due by suggesting that "we cannot simply split the pleasure of virtue, of moral beauty, from fearful awe."

The conventional and natural versions of each virtue bear more than merely formal similarities to one another. Each can also actualize the potential of the same part of the soul—and without such virtues, the souls that possess them would be smaller and less whole. A link between the conventional and natural versions is imitation, intended by the virtuous person or not. So, for instance, Blitz's conclusions would allow one to account for the superiority of Socrates' courage to Achilles' without having to deny the nobility of Achilles or the reality of his courage. The courage of each stands out as a striking part of the whole he is most truly a part of, even while it necessarily appears tarnished from the perspective of the whole to which he is a relative stranger.

Achilles' courage on the Trojan battlefield shines forth; but as a human being within the whole of things, his limits become apparent. To Athens, Plato's Socrates appears as a true stranger, even and especially while performing his proper function as a part of the whole of things which stands apart and opens itself moderately to that whole. We could not see Socrates' nobility as clearly without seeing Achilles' first.

Thus, Blitz can help us ascend from the political to (as he calls it) the "co-philosophic" world that supervenes upon those phenomena without requiring us to look back on politics with contempt. Instead, we can do so with a greater ability to see the political community as a whole, some of whose parts are splendid. Blitz's perspective on politics allows us to see Socrates and the likes of Pericles as similar in their splendid hardness, in that each (as Blitz says of Socrates) is "noble by being himself in defending his own."

Blitz's concluding comments on *the* Platonic work on knowledge, the *Theaetetus*, apply just as well to Blitz's own emphasis on the centrality of politics for knowing in general, and for knowing the ends of human life in particular.

> Even if justice is natural and, therefore, we can properly understand [the centrality of politics for knowledge], we could not reduce self-knowledge or freedom to politics. Freedom cannot exist apart from virtue and, hence, from the political community, but it also cannot exist apart from questioning virtue. We cannot be free apart from the confidence

or courage that Socrates urges on Theatetus, but we also cannot be free apart from perplexity and wonder. The link between the human good and the city and between the good and the whole is crucial but difficult to discern.

If the difficulty of arriving at a full understanding of this crucial link overcomes more than a few readers—including this one!—of this challenging book, there is nonetheless an intermediate boon: Blitz demonstrates by example and argument that the activity of knowing is constituted not only in the upward and outward striving to comprehend the whole but also by the drive to see each part with precision. Indeed, human happiness may consist in the union of these two activities of the whole human soul. Reflection on the rational striving to combine and separate each of the beings opens the soul to itself—and, therefore, to the whole itself.

While some contemporary readers of Plato look with grim seriousness to Socrates for decisive refutations of even the most inscrutable alternatives to philosophy, Blitz delights in the pursuit of a full articulation of the permanent problems first divined in our apprehension of things. This is especially true of things experienced as wholes made up of parts, and as parts of the whole. And where, say, medieval or Renaissance readers of Plato saw a clear hierarchy of ends governing a harmonious cosmos, Blitz sees hierarchies, too—but as layers of problems whose recalcitrance is the occasion for continued thought, and such thought must be as hard as the problems themselves.

If these connections seem difficult to understand, it is because they are. And at times this reader senses that the very bounds of intelligibility are being approached—not to say transgressed. Yet by thinking together with Mark Blitz's Plato, readers are bound to do justice to what is best in themselves by gaining greater clarity about what is simply best. "When we understand things as they are," writes Blitz, "we are the same as others yet remain at the peak of our own powers." ♦

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B&A

Drama in Twilight

The good and the bad of Arthur Miller's middle period.

BY COLIN FLEMING

Arthur Miller, Marilyn Monroe, 1956

With their first volume of Arthur Miller's collected plays, the Library of America provided one-stop shopping for what most people would think of as the playwright's canonical works. You got most of the big boys: *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *All My Sons*, and *A View from the Bridge*. But with this second entry in the series, it's departure time for the intrepid Miller buff, or any reader keen to have a look around the back alleys of his mind, where everything got a whole let less traditional, and a whole lot more *outré*.

After the Fall (1964) bridges the period between the early years and the often radical work found throughout these 14 plays, which are supplemented by a trove of Miller's explanatory, prefatory, and critical musings. Voyeurs hoped that they would be in for a treat with *Fall*, the play providing a public airing of what went on behind closed doors in Miller's marriage with Marilyn Monroe. Reading it now, you realize how disappointed the salacity-seekers must have been: It's a labyrinthine, episodic work that takes place in the mind rather than the boudoir. It's also an absolute psychological corker, and Miller's foreword (which reads like a warning) is reprinted as well: "This play is not 'about' something," he begins, before suggesting, "hopefully it is something." That idea

Collected Plays 1964-1982
by Arthur Miller
edited by Tony Kushner
Library of America, 848 pp., $40

Colin Fleming is the author of the forthcoming Between Cloud and Horizon: A Relationship Casebook in Stories.

of actuality—the thing and not something that suggests the thing—is a constant here, even as the specters of symbol and metaphor circle around Miller's protagonists.

The short, one-act *The Reason Why* (1970) encapsulates Miller's midcareer aesthetic of fashioning drama that could exist entirely on its own, in a vacuum, sustained by its own meaning, but which also sends us searching for what we might think of as an antecedent for the action unfolding. In the case of *The Reason Why*, that antecedent is man's fall from grace, in the Garden of Eden, as hoary a literary trope as you could find. But one doesn't need to give a fig leaf about Eden or anyone's fall from it to wrest meaning from this tale of two men sitting on a porch, contending with a rogue woodchuck. The latter inspires a lot of conversation on hawks, wars, and the classification of rodents until one of the men, as though he had just come up with an idea for a fifties B film, remarks, "He is monstrous." And so he is; and put down as well, with a bit of ace marksmanship.

Not a lot of writers can pull off funny and grim at the same time, and while Miller had certainly mastered the darker side of human interactions, the humor in a work like *The Reason Why* feels newly minted. But as soon as the reader comes to enjoy it, it's undercut: "Just leave him," one of the men says, regarding the late—and not so lamented—woodchuck. "The hawks'll come." And just like that, it's goodbye humor, and hello visage of the apocalypse.

Fame, from the same year, tweaks the humor/anguish paradigm and features a writer named Charley, a worn-around-the-edges figure one can envision stepping out of a Ring Lardner story. Our man has recently hit it big, and, wouldn't you know, success is a downer. Miller excels at quiet details that spark both humor and sadness, and what we might term a sort of insistent nostalgia. A friendly bartender calls attention to a button dangling from the writer's jacket, suggesting a fix. "No, that's got a couple of days yet," he responds—a man clinging to his past literally by a string. A reunion with a loutish ex-classmate follows, and we see how vaporous identity can appear in Miller's world, and how it must be fought for: Charley is no more able to place the lout than the lout can understand that Charley the classmate and Charley the writer could be one and the same person.

Other works abandon the vignette approach for splashier effects, although with mixed results. Good luck with *The Poosidin's Resignation* (1976), with its cartoonish dictator-characters talking in a patois that suggest nothing so much as Jar Jar Binks. Much better is *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1977, revised in 1984), a blend of Pinter-style intrigue and the kind of double-dealing one associates with James Bond films. Provided there is any double-dealing. It's one of those plays where no one seems to have any clue what anyone else is up to, or if anyone might be listening in, somewhere else.

Potentially bugged rooms make for lively theatrical fodder, where paranoia overrides personalities, and the true voice of the individual is challenged to make itself heard and accepted as fully legitimate. It's a very Milleresque directive, as far as this middle period goes, and one that announces itself on every page. ♦

B&A

Papa's Secret

Words, as well as deeds, are the key to understanding Hemingway. **BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.**

This superb revisionist study suggests to me that its subject, once the cynosure of writerly interest, may soon emerge from a long eclipse. No American writer was more obsessively studied and imitated half a century ago. Then Ernest Hemingway fell as far from fashion as any great writer ever does. Some of it was his own doing: He wrote some later novels that read like inferior parodies of himself.

Hemingway's Boat
Everything He Loved in Life, and Lost
by Paul Hendrickson
Vintage, 704 pp., $16.95

But in the time of my youth he was still golden. My Hemingway memories are associated with a great English department mentor at Chapel Hill, Harry K. Russell, under whose tutelage I wrote a term paper on Topic A: "The Hemingway Style." My main finding, as I recall, was that Hemingway did not always write in hypnotic and sensuous declarative sentences linked by "and," but often committed complex sentences as well. The paper is long lost, and was probably as sophomoric as its writer. But Russell graciously cited it in one of his class lectures, inflating my already ample ego.

To revive these old memories is to explain to intervening generations that this *ur*-obsession with Hemingway's craft was overwhelmingly stylistic. Tragedy is a challenge for boys of college age. But anyone with writing ambitions, however modest, could bend an ear to mannerisms. You can catch the flavor of our puerile obsession in Woody Allen's recent movie about expatriate Paris in the 1920s, in which the Hemingway character speaks a wooden patois we thought Hemingway wrote. Few of us, if any, achieved that "fifth dimension" of poetic implication he sought, after the

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example of the great Anton Chekhov.

Hemingway himself was not guiltless of encouraging puerile superstitions. In *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), he affected a tough-guy mask and said some valuable things (extolling Flaubert, Twain and Kipling, Poe and others) and some things that were silly and even brutal. To wit: If he could bring Conrad back by grinding Henry James to a fine powder, he would head for the errand with his sausage-grinder. As time passed, the macho mask hardened, and Hemingway seemed to write and talk the way people with tuneless ears thought he did.

The most valuable feature of *Hemingway's Boat* is that it does justice to the shadow under which Hemingway lived and wrote, the clinical depression that he probably inherited from his physician father. Both were suicidal and both ultimately acted on the impulse. An adequate grasp of the deadly dangers of depression only came to the literary scene long after Hemingway blew his head off one summer morning in 1961.

Gregory Hemingway, Ernest Hemingway in Cuba, ca. 1950

Earlier biographers and critics—even Carlos Baker, who wrote the big biography nearly half a century ago—were relatively clueless about Hemingway's condition of spirit and its subtle effects on his art. In that earlier era, criticism had rebelled against scholarship that "historicized" writers, instead pretending that authors' tales had little to do with their lives: a view as extreme, and often as misleading, as the biographical pedantry they had revolted against.

Paul Hendrickson makes no such mistake. He builds his account around Hemingway's fishing yacht, the *Pilar*, which he bought in New York in 1934 and fished from for decades in Key West and Havana. Hemingway's fascination with big-game fishing becomes the frame for a sympathetic look into many neglected corners of his life, some of them very dark. All are revealing, but perhaps the most revealing is the story of Hemingway's youngest son, Gregory, known to the family as "Gi-Gi." Gregory was a devoted physician when he chose to be, but he was also a man of confused identity who secretly began slipping on his stepmother's stockings at age 11. By the end of his erratic and often drugged and exhibitionist life, he had undergone sex-change surgery. But even then he continued to oscillate between male and female roles.

Implicit psychologizing in such a matter can be tricky and tasteless, but Hendrickson navigates this treacherous terrain with tact and compassion—and plausibility. And having looked into these painful aspects of Hemingway's life, he finds hints in the writings congruent with Hemingway's third son's (let us merely say) ambiguities. It is as if Gregory Hemingway may have enacted inherited, if unconscious, impulses. *May have*—let that conditional phrase be emphasized.

Is there a clue here that illuminates the elaborate façades of bluster and bravado that so often damaged Hemingway's work and reputation? Is it conceivable that the legacy of the puritanical, macho culture in which he grew up hid a soul that clamored for expressive release? That is the implication of *Hemingway's Boat*.

Fishing was always Hemingway's first love among sports, beautifully evoked in the early Nick Adams stories. But then came a frenzied intensification of hunting different types of game that went well beyond sport: the slaughter of African beasts, the often self-satirizing work on bullfighting, the boisterous drinking and whoring and celebration of warfare.

It cannot be baldly speculated that these were psychological "defenses"—that would simplify a complex man and artist. What can be said, after Hendrickson's diligent book, is that Hemingway's finest novels and tales may now be seen in a more revealing light, for they sound an insistent tragic note. In a way, we knew that all along, but not so clearly. Jake Barnes, in *The Sun Also Rises*, a book whose title echoes the bleak wisdom of Ecclesiastes, cannot consummate his love for Brett Ashley. He has been emasculated by a "rotten" wound in the First World War. (Or so it seems; the problem is never made explicit.) Frederic Henry, in *A Farewell to Arms*, deserts the Italian front—where the young Hemingway served as an ambulance driver—in that war to run away with his great love. But she dies one rainy day in childbirth.

In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," a dying writer laments wasting his talent with drink and frivolity, and yearns for the distant, austere purity of the mountain. In the parallel African safari story, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," an episode of cowardice estranges Macomber's wife, who takes up with their white hunter and later shoots Macomber. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the heroic old fisherman hooks a magnificent fish, only to see it nearly devoured by sharks before he can bring it ashore.

One is reminded of the familiar lines of Matthew Arnold about Sophocles long ago, who *Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought / Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow / Of human misery*. That is one "fifth dimension" that sophomoric readers and writers of 50 years ago did not fully discern. ♦

"I don't want to lose this election. Not because of what losing would mean for me—Michelle and I will be fine no matter what happens."
—Barack Obama fundraising email, October 23, 2012

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