the weekly Standard

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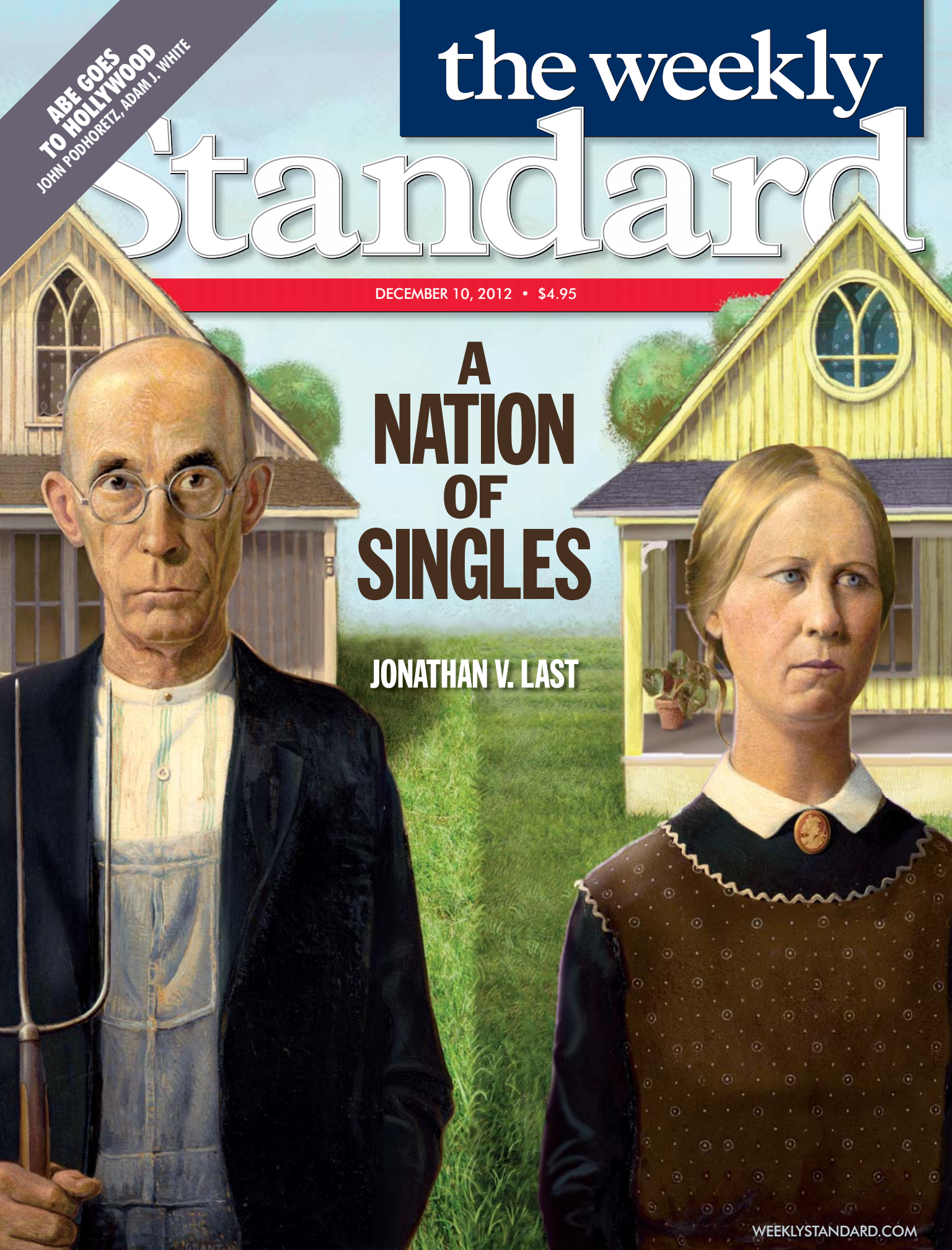
ABE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
JOHN PODHORETZ, ADAM J. WHITE

A NATION OF SINGLES

JONATHAN V. LAST



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Most Credulous Communists Alive

The Scrapbook has always believed that larger lessons can sometimes be gleaned from smaller, even seemingly inconsequential, events. Consider, for example, this week's misinterpretation of a recent post on the *Onion*—the treasured website that features satirical "news stories" and hilarious videos that are virtually indistinguishable from "real" television news reports.

The *Onion* recently designated North Korea's Kim Jong Eun as its "Sexiest Man Alive," in imitation of *People* magazine's annual Sexiest Man Alive feature (Mel Gibson, George Clooney, Bradley Cooper, etc.) and *Esquire*'s Sexiest Woman Alive (Angelina Jolie, Halle Berry, Mila Kunis, etc.). Kim Jong Eun, of course, is the 29-year-old son of the late North Korean tyrant Kim Jong Il. He is also the current dictator—or figurehead, depending on your point of view—in Pyongyang; and while frightening in his way, not exactly everyone's idea of a Sexiest Man Alive.

Here is the *Onion*'s description:

> With his devastatingly handsome, round face, his boyish charm, and his strong, sturdy frame, this Pyongyang-bred heartthrob is every woman's dream come true. Blessed with an air of power that masks an unmistakable cute, cuddly side, Kim made this newspaper's editorial board swoon with his impeccable fashion sense, chic short hairstyle, and, of course, that famous smile.

To be sure, The Scrapbook also believes that satire which needs to be explained is probably not successful satire. But we feel constrained to point out that the *Onion*'s description of Kim is just a half-millimeter removed from the way *People* would go on (and undoubtedly did) about, say, Jude Law or Johnny Depp. One need only momentarily gaze upon images of North Korea's Supreme Leader to realize that the *Onion* mash note ("round face . . . impeccable fashion sense . . . famous smile") was intended to mock, not exalt. And yet the editors of the online version of the *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist party in Beijing, picked up the *Onion* story and featured it, along with a 55-page photo spread of Kim.

This is either very funny or mildly disconcerting. For the editors of the *People's Daily Online* read English and must surely have seen the *Onion*'s Sexiest Man Alive feature fully in context with other *Onion* features. And yet they seem to have taken it entirely at face value, and seen it not for the obvious joke that it is but a rare Western compliment to the dictator of a Chinese client state.

This is not the first time that a totalitarian news organization has comically misconstrued the *Onion*. During the recent U.S. presidential campaign, the official Iranian news agency excitedly reprinted an *Onion* story about some rustic Americans who would rather vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad than for Barack Obama, quoting one "West Virginian" to the effect that he would prefer to take in a baseball game with the Iranian strongman because, unlike Obama, "he takes national defense seriously."

Which proves either that dictatorial regimes are continuously in search of positive coverage, from any source; or that years of living in a police state tend to condition, distort, and eventually dull the critical faculties.

The Scrapbook's perspective is this: While there is much to be concerned about in a xenophobic, aggressive, nuclear-armed People's Republic of China, there is some consolation in the

Stupidest website alive? People's Daily Online *hornswoggled by the* Onion.

knowledge that we are pondering a potential adversary whose propagandists look at North Korea's Kim Jong Eun—and see the Sexiest Man Alive. ♦

Required Reading

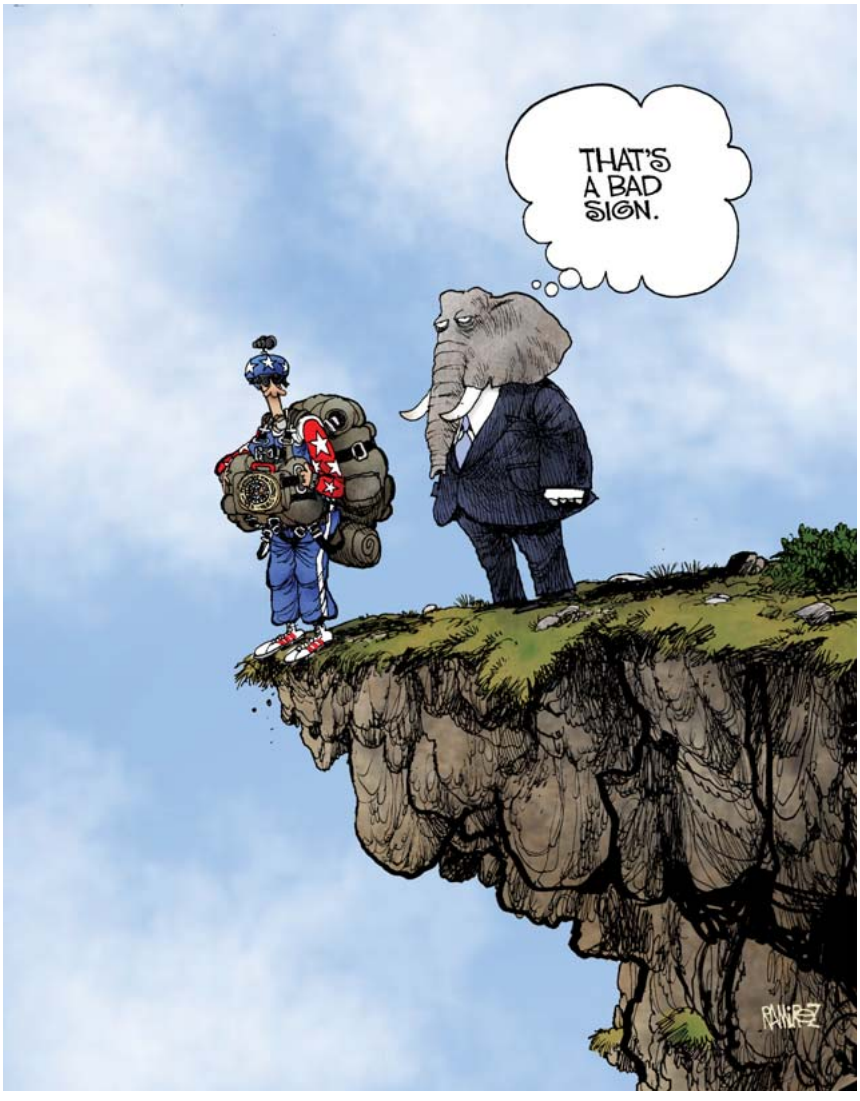
Our contributing editor and former colleague Joseph Bottum, now resident in his native Black Hills of South Dakota, has (we think unexpectedly) added Christmas Laureate to his distinguished résumé. His Kindle Single *The Christmas Plains* was a big hit last season, and is now published in hardback/e-book form by Random House.

And with the new holiday season also comes a new Christmas e-book, *Wise Guy: A Christmas Tale*, now available on Amazon. It tells the biblical story of Balthasar, one of the three Wise Men, transforming him into a Wise Guy who faces a Christmastime dilemma. The Scrapbook chooses to reveal no more—except to say that *Wise Guy* is a delightful tale, written with the author's sure touch, and certain to charm readers and those to whom it is read. ♦

Permission to Snicker?

It wasn't long after General David Petraeus's affair was revealed that progressive types started queuing up to explain that the real problem wasn't the CIA director's lack of moral judgement—it's the repressive nature of military culture. The Scrapbook wasn't shocked to see this argument rear its head—we always look forward to the requisite eruption of Puritan-bashing and/or France-envy from the chattering classes during a Washington sex scandal. But we were mildly surprised to see the form it took in the pages of the *Washington Post.*

Laura Cannon, who like Petraeus and Paula Broadwell is a West Point graduate, penned an op-ed for the *Post* titled "No sex? Permission to speak freely, Sir." Cannon served in Iraq and seems now to be an aspiring comedian and author. She writes



a blog under the nom de guerre "War Virgin," and her act is loosely based on how her military career and "former Jesus obsession" conspired to make her remain a virgin well into adulthood. For that, she blames General Order No. 1, the rule that bans sex and alcohol while deployed:

> I had no idea that a combat zone would be such a sexually charged environment. Blame it on amped-up testosterone pouring out of aggressive, athletic men. Or blame it on combat stripping even the strongest of men and women down to their core, raw emotions. Combine that with forming special bonds with comrades who promise to do whatever it takes to ensure your safe return home, including sacrificing their life for yours. What do you think happens?

Did Cannon really have no idea that a co-ed combat zone would be a "sexually charged environment"? The problem in that case is terminal naïveté, not repression. She is, unwittingly, reiterating an argument against women in combat. Not being distracted by the opposite sex makes concentrating on the life or death tasks at hand considerably easier.

Of course, that's not to say that there haven't been examples of women who were exemplary warriors, or that turning the clock back to when women didn't serve is a possibility. But as we recall, the debate over women in combat went something like this: Opponents argued that this would lead to sexual distractions in dangerous situations, and those in favor insisted

that professionalism would win out. Now that it's clear that sex in combat zones is happening a lot, Cannon and her ilk insist that it's stupid to insist on any professional prohibitions, with the exception of making sure that sexual harassment rules remain in place. What could go wrong?

Cannon goes even further—aside from sex in combat zones, she thinks the students at U.S. military academies should also be permitted to have sex.

The argument here is pure snark: "Yes, to become a leader of character and serve my country well, it is imperative that I not have sex in my college bedroom." It's also true that in college bedrooms outside military academies, students are taking horse tranquilizers recreationally and studying French semioticians with alarming earnestness. The ubiquity of self-destructive behavior among college kids elsewhere is not an argument to lower the standards of the taxpayer-subsidized education of the men and women we expect to lead our military.

And aside from the obvious reasons to dismiss Cannon's argument, we suspect she wrote this just to get attention. Her Twitter feed consists of little other than blasting the recent *Washington Post* clip out to famous comedians, hoping they'll notice her.

If she doesn't appear to be especially witty or insightful, it seems War Virgin is going to settle for notoriety. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'I don't know [Susan] Rice at all, so I have no opinion on her fitness for the job, but I think the contrived flap over her Libya comments certainly shouldn't disqualify her. That said, my own nominee for secretary of state would be the current education secretary, Arne Duncan. Yes, yes, I know. Duncan is not . . ." (Thomas L. Friedman, *New York Times*, November 27). ♦

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The Day the Twinkie Died

Just as everyone remembers where they were when JFK was shot (I was in Heaven with Jesus and Buddy Holly, still unborn), it will similarly be impossible to shake the memory of where you were on the day that Hostess died. I was in my car, listening to public radio. The news of 18,500 people losing their jobs, not to mention the demise of an American institution—one that predates FM radio, the ballpoint pen, radial tires, and rock 'n' roll—came almost irreverently. Torn between disrespectful Twinkie jokes and food-scold haughtiness, the faux-nostalgic announcers were unable to invoke crushing grief, the only kind called for on this tragic day. The kind they'd feel if, say, *This American Life* went on hiatus, or the Hipster Snack Emporium stopped selling wasabi peas.

But being a man of action, I had no time to grade people on their grieving. As I'm pretty sure it says in the Bible somewhere, "There is a time to mourn, and a time to hoard." Though we were on an errand to pick up my 13-year-old son Luke from a school function, I redirected the family SUV to cruise by local grocery and convenience stores, knowing the shelves would get licked clean of remaining Hostess product by sentimentalists and eBay flippers.

In store upon store, the hyenas had already ravaged the carcass. The half-empty shelves were a cruel reminder of the empty years that lay ahead, with only Hostess's thick-ankled stepsisters left to fill the void: Mrs. Freshley's Chocolate Bells, or Little Debbie's Zebra Cakes, or the crème 'n' cardboard offerings of TastyKake, an ironically named company that bakes even worse than it spells.

On the ride between stores, as if being taunted by the fates, we saw a Hostess truck pass. My 10-year-old-son Dean banged on the window. "Pull over!" he mouthed to some soon-to-be-out-of-work Teamster. But the driver either ignored him, or couldn't see out of his own tunnel of darkness. The paltry take from our Hostess run: four Suzy Qs, four Twinkies, two boxes of Hostess CupCakes, and a lonely lemon pie. Not a lot when you figure it has to last forever.

CHRIS GASH

We never stock the stuff at home, mind you. My fitness-conscious wife claims that "it turns me into a bad person." In the past, she's taken to hiding the Hostess behind more health-centric foodstuffs, depriving the children of a chance to ransack it before she does. While the pundit postmortems have seen everyone putting on their team jerseys and playing their dutiful parts—liberals blaming the company's demise on vulture capitalists, conservatives faulting spoiled unions—there has been a prevailing sentiment by most windbags that part of the problem was that the country has moved on from Hostess's brand of naked decadence.

Like most windbaggery wisdom, this is crap, as anyone who has waddled out of the office and bumped into his fellow fat Americans (who on average consume more than 156 pounds of added sugar every year) would know. That was the beauty of Hostess. It was what it was and made no apologies for itself. Yes, it could surprise you with its nutritional well-roundedness: filling your sugar quota, while stealthily providing 9 percent of your daily recommended sodium.

But it wasn't snacking-as-cultural-signifier. It carried none of the red-velvet froufrou-ery that has caused every hipster in retro ranch-hand shirt and dork-glasses to open annoyingly named cupcakeries ("Cake My Day"), where they serve confections impishly decorated like iPhone apps, with so much icing you need to eat it with a steak knife. No, Hostess was a clean, crisp Budweiser in a land of overcomplicated microbrews. It was simple and honest. It didn't come with a "story." It was something to be bought surreptitiously, thrown in a 7-Eleven bag, and wolfed down in the parking lot in shame, as God intended us to take our earthly pleasures when He bounced us from The Garden, thus enhancing the enjoyment.

With our own stash quickly decimated, my family gathered around the table for what Dean called "The Last Supper." Online recipes now proliferate, instructing you how to make your own. But it won't be the same. The sugar and wheat flour are doable. But how to lay hands on the monocalcium phosphate, the locust bean gum, the Polysorbate 60—the chemical alchemy that yielded the old black magic?

As Dean put down his last cupcake while blowing "Taps" on an imaginary bugle, my wife asked Luke if she could have a bite of his Twinkie. I suggested she was some kind of monster, infringing on the last Twinkie he will ever know. "You make Hostess not fun," she snapped.

Guilty. All deaths in the family are un-fun ones.

Matt Labash

the weekly Standard

The GOP's Payroll Tax Opportunity

Despite the outcome, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney did many things right during the course of this year's campaign. Perhaps most notably, polls suggest that he was able to convince a plurality of Americans that the GOP's plan for smaller government was better for promoting long-term economic growth than the president's statist approach. But there was one line of attack Romney was never able to overcome, and which may well have cost him the working-class voters he needed to win: The Obama campaign effectively drove home the notion that Romney, and Republicans more generally, care more about the rich than the middle class.

There can be no doubt that answering that charge, by proving it wrong, will be essential to the GOP's electoral future. That cannot mean adopting policies that Republicans don't believe are right, but it must mean taking every opportunity to apply conservative principles for the benefit of working families, and showing voters why conservative ideas are better for everyone, emphatically including the middle class.

John Boehner

Barack Obama

And yet, mere weeks after the election, we find congressional Republicans once again at risk of falling into the Democrats' trap. The so-called fiscal cliff that is now riveting Washington's attention involves the automatic application of the spending cuts agreed to in last year's debt-ceiling talks combined with the expiration of several tax policies, which promises to increase the tax bills of many Americans. The two most significant tax increases result from the expiration of the Bush tax cuts (which would raise everyone's income taxes) and the expiration of the payroll-tax holiday enacted in 2010 and renewed last year (which would raise everyone's payroll taxes).

Republicans want to retain the Bush income tax rates for everyone, while Democrats want to retain them for Americans earning less than $200,000 (or $250,000 for couples). The dispute between them on that front, in other words, is about whether taxes will go up for upper-income households and many small businesses. It is a fight worth having, but both parties seem oddly complacent about the return of higher payroll-tax rates—which would hit far more Americans, and especially middle-class families.

For households squarely in the middle class, income taxes are less of a burden today than payroll taxes, because a variety of deductions, credits, and exclusions either exempt most of these households from any income tax liability at all, or leave them paying very little.

Not so with the Social Security and Medicare payroll taxes. Prior to 2011, the combined Social Security and Medicare payroll tax was 15.3 percent for households with incomes up to about $100,000, with half paid by the employer and half paid by the worker. For a family making $50,000 per year, that's a tax liability of $7,650. According to the Tax Policy Center, households in the middle quintile of the income distribution pay an effective payroll-tax rate that is, on average, nearly three times what they pay in income taxes.

For these households, the 2 percent increase in the payroll tax that would result from a failure to renew today's rates would be significant—a worker earning the median income would see his tax bill rise by $1,000 a year, which would be more than enough to make him take notice. The message for the GOP should be obvious: The party of low taxation must apply that broad principle not just to income taxes but to payroll taxes too.

And yet, rather than start a fight to prevent a middle-class tax increase, Republicans seem resigned to it, and may even leave an opening for the Democrats to oppose the increase while the GOP focuses exclusively on defending low rates for top earners.

This is not the first time Republicans have missed the opportunity to make the case for this middle-class tax cut. The idea of responding to our weak economy by lessening the tax burden on the middle class came first from conservatives. In 2009, as Democrats were preparing their pork-ridden stimulus bill, a few conservative economists—most notably Lawrence Lindsey (in these pages) and Douglas Holtz-Eakin—argued that Republicans should propose a significant reduction in the payroll tax as their alternative means of encouraging growth. Repub-

NEWSCOM

licans never took the advice, and instead it was President Obama who seized that idea a year later.

In 2010, after the GOP's midterm-election victory, the president proposed a one-year reduction in the Social Security payroll tax, taking the employee share of the tax from 6.2 percent to 4.2 percent (employers continue to pay 6.2 percent). Though reluctant, Republican leaders went along with the cut because it was combined with an extension of the Bush-era tax rates. In late 2011, the payroll-tax cut was extended for another year, through 2012.

Now, as the president and congressional leaders negotiate over how to steer clear of the tax hikes and spending cuts looming at the beginning of 2013, the future of the payroll tax is very much up in the air. A few Democrats (like Chris Van Hollen, on the House Budget Committee) have expressed support for extending the cut, but others (including House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi) have expressed opposition, and the administration has been noncommittal. The opening is there for Republicans to become the champions of extending the cut, and thus the champions of all 155 million American wage earners whose tax burdens would be kept from rising—including millions of middle-class workers not much affected by the income tax debate.

So why the reluctance? A sizeable faction in the GOP is skeptical of the economic value of cutting payroll taxes, especially if it is only done temporarily. But this concern ignores some key facts about the current economic moment. For starters, all the grave worry about the "fiscal cliff" centers on the fact that it would involve too much fiscal consolidation too quickly. Most economists believe that the $600 billion in tax hikes and spending cuts scheduled to take place in 2013 would push the economy back into recession. The payroll tax is a key component of this problem. At $95 billion, the sudden jump in payroll taxes would be second only to expiration of the Bush-era tax rates in terms of the burden it would place on the American economy.

Moreover, conservatives have argued for years that one crucial key to improving long-term growth is reducing marginal tax rates as much as possible in order to avoid undermining not only the incentives to save and invest but also the incentives to hire and work. The payroll tax is a direct tax on employment and work. If it were lower, employers would have stronger incentives to hire, and workers would have greater incentives to work longer and earn more.

The primary criticism of extending the payroll-tax cut, however, is that it would undermine Social Security and weaken the incentives for fiscal discipline in the program. Social Security is effectively financed through payroll-tax receipts deposited into the Social Security Trust Funds. At moments (such as now) when the trust funds are projected soon to be depleted, the only remedy before Congress has been to scale back benefit commitments, increase revenue, or both. When the payroll tax was cut in 2011 and 2012, however, neither party wanted it to come at the expense of the trust funds. So the lost payroll-tax revenue was covered with direct payments from the general fund of the Treasury. This precedent has some in both parties worried.

Conservatives fret that the door has been opened to papering over Social Security's long-term deficit with similar transfers from the Treasury in the future, thus reducing pressure for reform. Liberals, on the other hand, worry that introducing general-fund financing into Social Security will weaken political support for the program. Up until the past few years, the amount of money collected by the payroll tax was at least as great as the amount paid out in benefits by the program, thus creating the perception among workers that they had "earned" their benefits. If Social Security were partially financed out of the Treasury's general fund, the program might begin to be viewed more like other government spending programs, including welfare.

Neither of these concerns should hold Republicans back from embracing an extension of the payroll-tax cut. The idea of earned benefits in Social Security was always a fiction. Today's beneficiaries are not paid back money they put into the system but are paid with money that today's workers pay in taxes. And money raised through the payroll tax is not put aside for Social Security. It is spent by the Treasury on other things in return for a formal commitment to pay benefits when they come due. The payroll tax is essentially used as a source of low-interest borrowing for the rest of the government, undermining fiscal discipline more than reinforcing it.

If the idea of a trust fund with its own balance sheet once served as an impetus for reform (as it surely did in the late 1970s and early '80s), today it serves only to shield Social Security from the pressure for reform that results from the federal government's overall fiscal imbalance (which is greater than that of the Social Security trust funds). It is the reason why Democrats can say (as White House press secretary Jay Carney did last week) that Social Security, which is the largest line item on the federal government's badly imbalanced budget, "is not a driver of the deficit."

Moreover, within Social Security, there are large transfers from high-wage to low-wage workers and from dual-income households to single-income households. There is no reason why these transfers should be obscured by the mythology that everything is "paid for" with payroll taxes.

Republicans should not allow themselves to fall into the position of insisting on high payroll taxes to finance the government's irresponsible entitlement-spending commitments. That is terrible economics, and lousy politics too. Instead, payroll taxes should stay low to help struggling working families, without in any way jeopardizing benefits for current recipients. The program should come to be seen (as it has always in fact functioned) as part of the government's overall budget, and therefore part of its budget problem, rather than being shielded from reform thanks to a misunderstanding of how the government uses the money it

raises through a regressive tax that makes the lives of working families harder. In the coming years, entitlement reform is absolutely necessary, and for that purpose, too, a lower payroll-tax rate is far better than a higher one.

The fiscal cliff talks offer Republicans an opportunity to apply their low-tax, pro-growth principles to the plight of the middle class, and so to show voters that conservative ideas are at least as helpful to working families as to business owners and investors. And more important, they offer an opportunity to provide tax relief that would actually help spur the economy, and do so by helping some of those most in need of a break.

—James C. Capretta & Yuval Levin

Don't Go Wobbly

Four years ago, President Obama followed the advice of Rahm Emanuel never to let a crisis go to waste. He proposed an economic stimulus package brimming with pork and favors for Democratic interest groups. House Republicans were fearful of crossing a new president as the recession deepened, but they mustered the moxie to vote no, unanimously. It turned out to be one of the smartest moves they ever made.

Freshly reelected, the president wants to exploit a crisis again. This time it's the fiscal cliff mess. His plan would avoid the cliff, but at the cost of strangling the economy. Republicans are wary of mounting full-throttle opposition, especially to Obama's bid to raise taxes on the rich. But that's what is required, and it will benefit them—and the country—in the end.

Republicans are in a stronger position than in 2009. Obama isn't. He won reelection thanks to a negative campaign of historic proportions. He has no mandate. And now he's made the mistake of thinking he's more popular and powerful than he really is. This is how second terms crumble.

House speaker John Boehner has rejected the president's proposal as unserious. Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell broke into laughter when Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner outlined it for him. It's a wonder even Geithner kept a straight face. Because what the president wants is the same-old same-old: tax hikes immediately, spending cuts down the road. We know how this plays out. Taxes go up, spending cuts never materialize. Obama is also seeking a new $50 billion stimulus. And there's more. Obama wants to raise the debt limit without the approval of Congress and force banks to refinance troubled home mortgages.

At the moment, Republicans don't have the option of walking out of compromise talks with the White House. They may have to later if Obama refuses to back down. But for now, their assignment is to negotiate wisely with Obama on an array of issues.

* Taxes. An increase in the individual income tax rate for the affluent may be unavoidable. Obama did spend the past two years proselytizing for such a hike and, as he says, voters were well aware of it when they reelected him. But the White House has said the rates don't have to return to Clinton-era levels—to a 39.6 percent top rate from the current 35 percent—and Republicans can take advantage of this concession. Obama's nemeses, as he has often told us, are "millionaires and billionaires." So why not urge that the higher tax rates be applied only to those with incomes above $1 million and not to couples earning more than $250,000 and individuals making $200,000? Also, Republicans could agree with Obama on taxing "carried interest" as regular income rather than capital gains without aggravating anyone except hedge-fund plutocrats.

* Tax reform. In his zeal for redistribution, Obama would hit prosperous Americans and small businesses with a double whammy. He'd raise their tax rates now, then use tax reform in 2013 to eliminate their deductions and preferences—in effect, two tax increases. Republicans can upset Obama's scheme by substituting deductions as much as possible for rate hikes now. The reason? In tax reform deliberations, higher rates would probably be a nonstarter.

* Spending cuts. Besides deferring the so-called sequester, which would ravage military spending, Obama is vague about spending reductions. His proposal refers to "savings from non-entitlement mandatory programs." Douglas Holtz-Eakin, the former head of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), insists specific cuts are easy to find. "It would take 15 minutes," he says. Republicans should find them.

Good places to look are food stamps and Social Security disability payments. When he met with congressional leaders on November 16, the president mentioned both programs, whose costs have skyrocketed. His actual proposal, however, didn't cite them.

Obama has a favorite cut: a $1 trillion reduction in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)—that is, wars. But this cut is imaginary. It would count—as savings—funds that never would be spent, American forces having left Afghanistan. Bob Woodward, in *The Price of Politics*, his book on negotiations on a "grand bargain" on taxes and spending, says Republicans secretly agreed to fake OCO cuts in 2011. They shouldn't agree again.

* Medicare. Obama's plan includes $400 billion in entitlement savings over the next decade. The cuts are unspecified, but Democrats always favor smaller payments to providers like doctors and hospitals. After campaigning against the president's $700 billion cut in these payments

to help finance Obamacare, Republicans can't credibly flip now, nor should they. Republicans have embraced Medicare reform, not cuts. McConnell says a fiscal cliff agreement should include structural changes in Medicare such as a higher age for eligibility and "genuine means testing." He's right, though these would merely be a downpayment on full reform based on premium support.

To strengthen their hand, Republicans would be smart to stress two things. One is the Simpson-Bowles commission's strategy for handling the debt and deficit crisis. The Obama-created commission said uncontrolled spending is the cause of the problem, that the best way to gain more revenue is through tax reform, and that any deal must be bipartisan. Republicans agree and should say so loudly. Obama doesn't agree.

The other is the prospect of a recession. The fiscal cliff is really a tax cliff. Taxes would instantly soar by $400 billion on January 1 and, according to the CBO, would drive the economy back into recession. So might the tax increase of $1.6 trillion advocated by Obama, in addition to higher taxes to finance his health care law that begin next year. Surely the president understands this.

If he doesn't and insists on something close to his plan —that's when Republicans take a walk.

—Fred Barnes

A Fine Mess

Is the Grand Old Party in as much disarray as it seems? Yup. For one thing, Republicans are electorally shellshocked. For the past couple of years, they had been confident Barack Obama would lose in November. Many Republicans held that belief going into Election Day. This was the first time since 1948 that Republicans were confident they were going to win a presidential election—and then lost it. The Republican psyche will take a while to recover from the shock of November 6.

It's also gradually sunk in that the GOP has lost the popular vote in five of the last six presidential elections, and that the GOP has been thumped in three of the last four national contests (2006, 2008, and 2012). Since the end of the Cold War, the Republican party has had only two really good election days, in 1994 and in 2010. Those were both off-year victories in reaction to the mistakes of first-term Democratic presidents, and in neither case proved harbingers of presidential victory two years later.

Well, if the electoral scene isn't pretty, maybe the legislative one is better? It's true Republicans still control the House. But this turns out to be at best a mixed blessing. Because they're in control, House Republicans are supposed to negotiate with the president on the budget and taxes. They're united in scorning President Obama's opening proposal. But what's the GOP proposal for averting the fiscal cliff? There doesn't seem to be one.

Might it be prudent for Republicans to acquiesce, for now, to a modified version of Obama's proposal to keep current income tax rates the same for 98 percent of Americans, while also insisting on maintaining the reduced payroll tax rate of the last two years (see "The GOP's Payroll Tax Opportunity" above) and reversing the dangerous defense sequester? That deal would be doable, wouldn't wreck the country, and would buy Republicans time to have much needed internal discussion and debates about where to go next.

Nope, can't be done! There's a pledge, you see, enforced by a stern and precise pledge-master who would be very, very upset if members of Congress were to have the presumption to unshackle themselves. As our modern-day Angelo (the original can be found in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*) put it last week, "Everybody who signed the pledge, including Peter King, who tried to weasel out of it, shame on him. . . . I hope his wife understands the commitments last a little longer than two years or something."

Well, perhaps this evidence that their pledge-master has, shall we say, lost some perspective on life will help Republicans think for themselves. After all, surely Republican members of Congress understand there's something crazy about appearing to fight to the death for a tax code in which Mitt Romney and others pay a 14 percent tax on millions of capital income—while silently allowing the payroll tax on labor to go up from 13.3 percent to 15.3 percent for all the working stiffs?

By the way, why isn't allowing the payroll tax to go up a violation of the pledge? Well, we're told, that cut was temporary. But weren't the Bush rate cuts temporary too? Isn't that why we're going over the fiscal cliff—because we revert to the permanent rates on January 1? No, because apparently in the murky metaphysics of the plutocratic pledge-master, some temporary tax cuts are less temporary than others.

Will Republicans in Congress be successful at finding a way out of their current mess? Who knows. This year, the most well-funded Republican candidate in history, with the most professional campaign, supported by the most sophisticated super-PACs, proved unable to find a path to victory—even though such a path was eminently findable. Republicans in Congress are equally capable of winding up on the losing side of the equation. So 2012 could end up a lost year for the GOP.

And 2013? Politics is full of surprises. The Grand Old Party sure seems to be in a grand old mess. But messes can produce moments of opportunity, lemons can be turned into lemonade, and it's always darkest before the dawn.

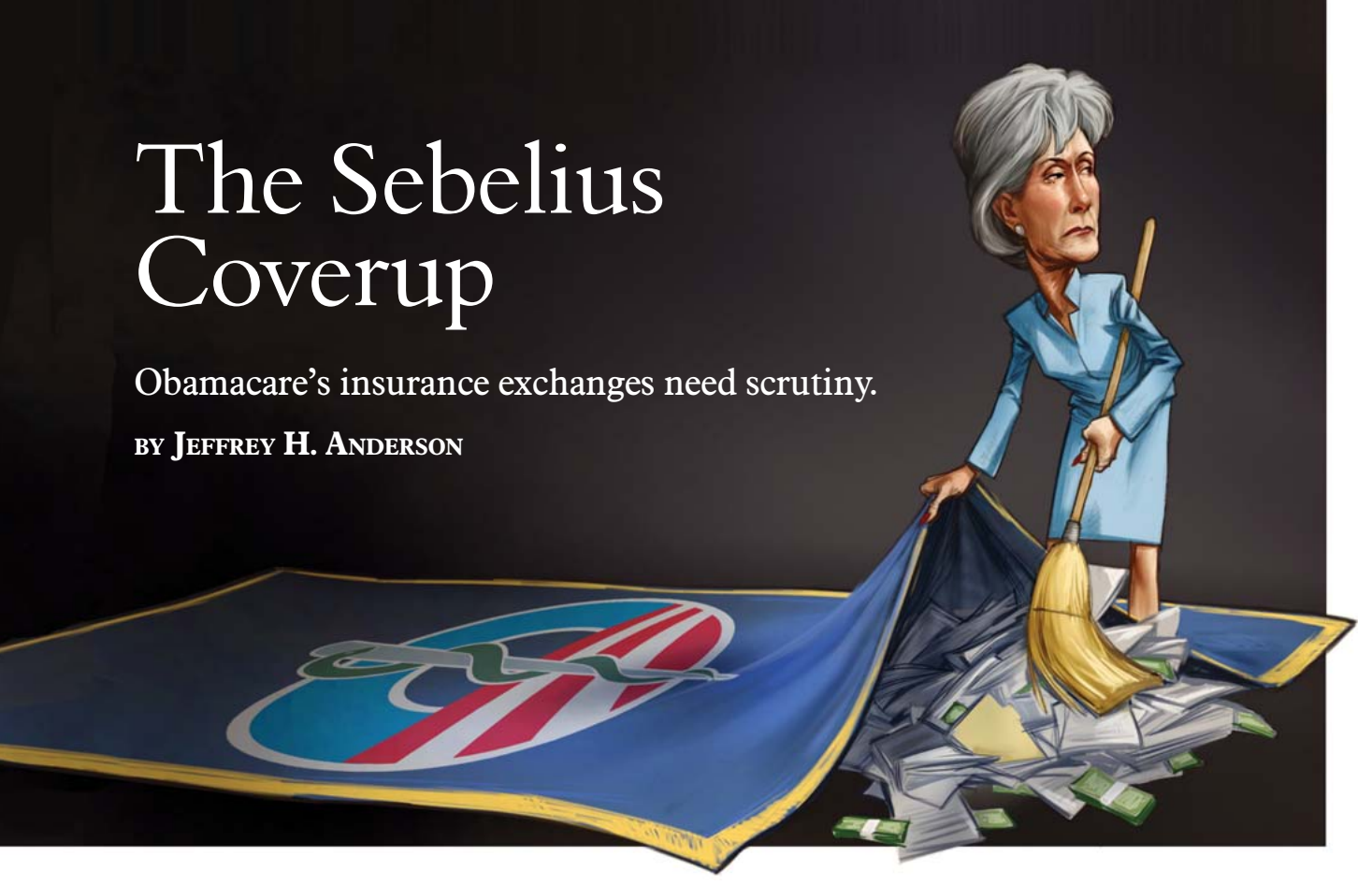
Except when it turns pitch black.

—William Kristol

The Sebelius Coverup

Obamacare's insurance exchanges need scrutiny.

BY JEFFREY H. ANDERSON



Many states are wisely signaling that they aren't interested in doing the Obama administration's bidding on Obamacare. As a result, many if not most of Obamacare's insurance exchanges—the heart of the beast—will have to be set up and run by the Obama administration at the federal level.

States are not required to set up Obamacare exchanges, but it seems to have surprised observers that many are choosing not to. *Politico* reports that, with only 17 states so far having said they will set up the exchanges, the "Department of Health and Human Services's role in bringing the law to life is going to be a lot bigger than originally thought." More than a third of all states have already said they won't set up the Obamacare exchanges. Among others, Republican governors Scott Walker, John Kasich, Sam Brownback, Rick Perry, Bobby Jindal, Nikki Haley, Nathan Deal, Paul LePage, Robert Bentley, Mary Fallin, and Sean Parnell have said they'll refuse to set up the exchanges in their states.

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In Missouri, voters took matters into their own hands, approving a ballot measure to vest authority over the decision in the Republican-led state legislature, rather than leaving it up to the Democratic governor. Missouri will not be establishing an exchange. Utah governor Gary Herbert, meanwhile, has opted for a sort of mild civil disobedience, saying that his state will continue to pursue "our version of an exchange based on defined contribution, consumer choice, and free markets"—a type of exchange that is rather plainly banned by Obamacare.

States' refusal to be complicit in this crucial aspect of Obamacare should shine a spotlight on the development of the federal exchanges—and what it illuminates won't be pretty.

The Obama administration's congressional allies botched the drafting of this aspect of the health care overhaul, as the plain language of Obamacare doesn't empower federal exchanges to distribute taxpayer-funded subsidies to individuals; it empowers only state-based exchanges to distribute the subsidies. (The administration pretends otherwise.) Moreover, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is lagging behind in developing the federal exchanges.

It gets worse. HHS has contracted with a subsidiary of a private health care company to help build and police the very exchanges in which that company will be competing for business. The person who ran the government entity that awarded that contract has since accepted a position with a different subsidiary of that same company. An insurance industry insider (speaking on the condition of anonymity) says that HHS, in an attempt to hide this unseemly contract from public view until after the election, encouraged the company to hide the transaction from the Securities and Exchange Commission.

According to my source (the basis for most of this account), in January, HHS awarded Quality Software Services, Inc. (QSSI) what the *Hill* describes as "a large contract to build a federal data services hub to help run the complex federal health insurance exchange." At that time, the director of Obamacare's newly established Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight (CCIIO)—which the *Hill* describes as "the office tasked with crafting rules

DAVE MALAN

for the national exchange"—was Steve Larsen. Larsen had been the insurance commissioner for Maryland when Obama's HHS secretary, Kathleen Sebelius, was the insurance commissioner for Kansas, and the two are reportedly close. The CCIIO awarded the Obamacare exchange contract to QSSI while Larsen was the CCIIO's director, and he played a central role in planning the construction of the exchanges—although it's not known whether he made the decision to award the contract to QSSI or not.

Under the contract that it signed with HHS, QSSI's power would be substantial—as QSSI would shape, run, and affect companies' ability to compete to sell insurance through Obamacare's federal exchanges. The *Hill* writes, "A draft statement of work for the contract awarded to QSSI states the contractor should provide services necessary to acquire, certify and decertify health plans offered on a federal exchange." Moreover, "It stipulates the contractor should monitor agreements with health plans, ensure compliance with federal standards and"—somewhat strikingly—"take corrective action when necessary."

QSSI, apparently realizing what a valuable asset it had in the contract, started shopping itself around. Meanwhile, Larsen left the CCIIO and took a highly paid position with Optum, a subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group, in June. Sometime this summer, UnitedHealth Group bought QSSI.

The *Hill* writes that the "quiet nature of the transaction, which was not disclosed to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), has fueled suspicion among industry insiders that UnitedHealth Group may be gaining an advantage for its subsidiary, UnitedHealthcare." The *Hill* adds, "One critic familiar with the business rivalries of the insurance industry compared UnitedHealth Group's purchase of QSSI to the New York Yankees hiring the American League's umpires." In other words, UnitedHealth Group, through QSSI, would be able to police the same field in which it would be a competitor.

In addition, QSSI would have access to valuable data. The Obama administration likes to compare Obamacare's prospective insurance exchanges to websites like Travelocity and Expedia, but the comparison is inapt. Travelocity and Expedia don't regulate airlines, stipulate the length of runways, or transfer money from younger passengers to older ones. In truth, Obamacare's federal exchanges will be an extremely complicated technical endeavor to set up and run, as (among other things) they would involve compiling massive amounts of risk-selection data on individual Americans. In addition to raising extraordinary privacy concerns, the data involved would be like gold to insurers. To quote my source, "If you can capture this data, you're going to win."

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When HHS became aware of UnitedHealth Group's purchase of QSSI, it couldn't realistically void the contract, because the Obama administration was already too far behind in setting up the federal exchanges. To void the contract would mean delaying the exchanges' implementation by many more months. The *Hill* writes: "[G]iven how late the administration has been in issuing rules for the exchanges, it would be extremely difficult to void a key contract, find another company to perform the work and still meet the 2014 deadline."

Unwilling to void the contract, HHS instead went to work on setting up a firewall designed to block UnitedHealth Group from gaining access to QSSI's data, presumably out of a desire to keep UnitedHealth Group from gaining an unfair advantage. Then, likely in concert with the White House—and to the chagrin of many HHS employees—Sebelius and other senior HHS officials decided that word could too easily get out about the firewall project. If it did, it would alert people to UnitedHealth Group's having gained a potentially huge competitive advantage—a political concern for the White House on the cusp of the election, especially in light of the crony capitalism charges that have plagued this administration. Therefore, HHS, under Sebelius's leadership, suspended work on the firewall and told UnitedHealth Group not to alert the SEC to the purchase—as UnitedHealth Group was legally required to do within four days of the transaction—until after the election.

HHS's actions have drawn the attention of the Senate Finance Committee. The committee's ranking Republican, Sen. Orrin Hatch, has asked Sebelius for information, but Sebelius has not complied with his written requests and deadlines.

Prior to the election, most reporters—or their editors—weren't interested in looking into any of this too closely. But in the wake of the refusal of elected GOP leaders in the states to do the Obama administration's bidding on Obamacare, the development of the federal Obamacare exchanges might now receive closer examination. The idea of funneling about $1 trillion (according to the Congressional Budget Office) over Obamacare's real first dozen years (2014-25) from American taxpayers, through Washington, to private insurance companies was always problematic. But it's more problematic to hire a subsidiary of one of those insurance companies as an architect and policeman of the exchanges through which the Obama administration intends to have this abundant taxpayer money flow, more problematic still that Obama's first head of the CCIIO may have profited personally from the venture, and most problematic of all that HHS may have told a private company to violate federal securities law in order to aid Obama's reelection prospects.

Is this really the sort of "reform" of the American health care system that anyone wants? ♦

The Blessings of Liberty

Secured by immense power.

BY ADAM J. WHITE

Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*, portraying the president's battle to abolish slavery at the end of the Civil War, illustrates one of the fundamental paradoxes inherent in constitutional democracy: that sometimes high principle can be vindicated only through low politicking. In the last week, myriad political commentators have explored the implications and applications of that point. But by focusing on "Lincoln the politician," this debate assumes, or at least presumes, an even more significant paradoxical truth: That very political system needed to secure our liberties is sustainable only because the government is empowered to violate our liberties.

"I am the president of the United States, clothed in immense power," Spielberg's Lincoln thunders to his assistants, desperate to win passage of the antislavery Thirteenth Amendment. "You will procure me these votes."

Political commentators have reflected on Lincoln's power strictly in terms of domestic politics. "Spielberg's 'Lincoln' gets this point," writes David Brooks. "The challenge of politics lies precisely in the marriage of high vision and low cunning. . . . The hero has a high moral vision, but he also has the courage to take morally hazardous action in order to make that vision a reality." Through that lens, *Lincoln* shines a light on the actors and issues and actors of our time: public debt and immigration, according to the *Washington Post*'s Michael Gerson; the fiscal cliff, according to Bloomberg's Al Hunt; Obamacare, according to MSNBC's Chris Hayes.

This is, to be sure, a worthwhile discussion. And a well-timed one: Exhausted from a seemingly endless presidential campaign, and looking ahead to a lame-duck session devoted to debating taxes and spending, the public needs now more than ever to be reminded that ordinary politics are a noble undertaking.

But by his own admission, Spielberg was able to convey this story only by drastically truncating the film's breadth—not Lincoln's entire life, not even his presidency and the Civil War, but instead a single political fight lasting four months. This truncated story achieves Spielberg's aim of conveying the gravity of Lincoln's principles and his political prowess, but not without cost: "By leaving out (or fleetingly referencing) what came before and after," Ross Douthat observes, the film "does, indeed, sacrifice some very important realities that complicate the movie's portrait of the past."

And that sacrifice is immense. By focusing on Lincoln the politician, we too easily forget that Lincoln could not politick in 1865 without first preserving the government itself. And that, in turn, required Lincoln to wield the most controversial political weapon known to our nation's history and Constitution: unilateral presidential power.

By late 1864 and early 1865, when the film's events take place, the Union's continued viability could be taken for granted. The war had not yet ended, but the end was in sight, such that Lincoln could speak in his Second Inaugural Address of "striv[ing] on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds," and to "achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace." It was a far cry from four years earlier, he noted, when "all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war," as "insurgent agents were in the city [of Washington] seeking to destroy it," and half the nation was preparing to "make war rather than let the nation survive."

The city might well have been destroyed, and the republic, the house divided, might well have fallen, were it not for Lincoln's aggressive assertion of unilateral presidential power. First and foremost, he suspended the writ of habeas corpus—the right of prisoners to challenge their imprisonment in court—in April 1861. When Chief Justice Roger Taney ordered the government to free the pro-Confederate prisoners, President Lincoln ignored the order.

Lincoln argued that the

Daniel Day-Lewis's Lincoln, right, presides over a cabinet meeting, above.

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

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Constitution obliged him to take those unprecedented unilateral actions, because to allow the rebellion to proceed in Maryland was to put the city of Washington, and thus the republic itself, at grave risk. "To state the question more directly," Lincoln famously asked Congress later that year, "are all the laws but one to go unexecuted, and the Government itself go to pieces lest that one"—the writ of habeas corpus—"be violated?" Lincoln insisted that his suspension of habeas corpus was legal in and of itself, but by those words he stressed that even an illegal suspension would have been constitutionally justified to preserve the government itself.

In those words, and in Lincoln's conduct of the war's early months, the president exemplified the paradoxical principle underlying even the Declaration of Independence: that our rights may be "unalienable," but we ultimately must be "secure" by the very creation of a government capable of abridging those rights. And of the government powers erected by the Constitution to "secure the blessings of liberty," the most important defense against existential threats is the president's capacity to act swiftly, decisively, and controversially.

In short, Lincoln's ability to free the slaves through the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 depended upon his ability to unilaterally act against the threats of 1861. Spielberg and his audience rightly exalt Lincoln's fortitude in exercising the Constitution's Article V amendment powers, but no less crucial was Lincoln's exercise of the Article II executive powers. The road to the Thirteenth Amendment began not in January 1865, or even at Gettysburg, but at that moment in 1861 when President Lincoln resolved not to let "the Government itself go to pieces."

"I am the president of the United States, clothed in immense power," Lincoln thunders on the screen. He was, and his successors are. The very power that threatens our liberty secures our liberty, and we must forever grapple with that contradiction. ♦

Benghazi Storytelling

Too many answers, not enough truthfulness.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

The White House has had quite enough of the controversy over ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice, the misleading talking points she used in TV interviews about the jihadist attacks in Benghazi, and the Obama administration's contradictory narrative about those attacks. "There are no unanswered questions about Ambassador Rice's appearance on Sunday shows and the talking points that she used for those appearances that were provided by the intelligence community," asserted White House spokesman Jay Carney at his briefing on November 27.

Susan Rice

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof has also had enough. In a tweet that seemed to capture the feelings of many of his fellow commentators, Kristof wrote, "I'm sick of Republican intransigence over Ambassador Rice. Her misstatements were small potatoes. Time to move on."

New York Times national security reporter Scott Shane is on the same page. In a lengthy "news analysis" on November 28, he dutifully amplified the administration's line: Obama officials stuck faithfully to intelligence community-approved assessments of Benghazi. Yes, there were "honest mistakes," but Republicans who complain are acting from political motives. "A genuine tragedy has been fed into the meat grinder of election-year politics." His point was clear: Enough already!

A few Republicans also want to move on. Some of them are tired of being called racist for criticizing Rice. Others would rather discuss different aspects of the Benghazi debacle—the inadequate security before the assault, the failure to respond effectively during the attacks.

Those other issues are important. But the talking points matter, too. Less than two months before the presidential election, the Obama administration attempted to sell the American public a narrative about the assassination of an ambassador that they now acknowledge was inaccurate. Credible information that contradicted the administration's preferred storyline was minimized or ignored altogether. And there was lots of it. Significantly, this is not the first time this has happened. The White House response after two previous jihadist attacks—the attempted bombing of an airplane on Christmas Day in 2009 and the botched attack in Times Square in 2010—followed a similar pattern.

Jay Carney is wrong. The administration has not answered even the most basic questions about Susan Rice, the talking points, and the misleading narrative top officials pushed in the days after 9/11/12.

In mid-November, several top intelligence officials appeared before Congress to field questions about Benghazi. House Intelligence chairman Mike Rogers wanted to know who was responsible for removing references to terrorism and al Qaeda from the initial unclassified talking points circulated within the administration. He asked the officials—Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and acting

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CIA director Mike Morell on November 15 and former CIA director David Petraeus on November 16—individually and directly. Each response was the same: I don't know.

Four days later, the story changed. CBS News reported that Clapper had made the changes. This caused some confusion on Capitol Hill among members of Congress who had heard Clapper say that he didn't know who made the changes. Six days after that, the story changed again. *Foreign Policy*'s Josh Rogin reported that Clapper "did not change the talking points on Benghazi." A spokesman for the DNI told Rogin: "It was not Director Clapper who personally modified the talking points" but someone in his office. The CBS story was changed—the talking points were modified after they had been passed from the CIA to Clapper's team and then were edited again when they went to the FBI.

This new version of the story didn't last 24 hours. On November 27, as Carney was insisting from the White House podium that all questions had been answered, acting CIA director Morell offered yet another account of the talking points story in a meeting with three senators. Morell was on Capitol Hill with Susan Rice as she met with three Republican senators—John McCain, Lindsey Graham, and Kelly Ayotte—in order to answer questions about the administration's handling of Benghazi. Several minutes into the meeting, following some sharp criticism of the administration from McCain, Graham asked about the edits to the unclassified talking points provided to Rice. Morell told the senators that the FBI had made the edits—an explanation that surprised his audience. When Graham asked him why the FBI would have made the changes, Morell had an answer ready: They did not want to jeopardize the ongoing criminal investigation into the attacks. Graham was furious. He pointed out that this was yet another explanation of the changes to the talking points and asked Morell how referring to al Qaeda participation in the attacks would affect any investigation.

Within hours, the story changed again. The CIA notified the GOP senators that Morell had been wrong and that the changes to the language about al Qaeda had been made by the CIA and not the FBI.

All of which raises the question: How is it that Morell, who accompanied Rice precisely so that he could provide an authoritative account of what had happened, didn't know? Another problem: The latest version contradicts Petraeus, who had testified that the reference to al Qaeda that was in the version he approved was only taken out after the CIA passed them along.

That's five changes to the story about the talking points in two weeks—and we still have a glaring contradiction between the testimony of the former CIA director and the latest claims from his replacement.

The reasons Obama officials have given for the edits have changed, too. At first we were told that al Qaeda references were excised because the links were thought to be "tenuous"—despite the fact that one of the pieces of intelligence supporting the al Qaeda ties was an intercepted phone call. Perhaps mindful of that evidence, we were later told that mentioning al Qaeda in the unclassified talking points could jeopardize sources and methods. Then came Morell's contention that the FBI didn't want to compromise an investigation and, following that, the current claim that we didn't want to tip off the attackers that we were on to them by publicly assigning them responsibility.

When I asked a former senior intelligence official about that possibility, he said: "Nobody who can spell the word 'intelligence' believes that for a second." A U.S. official investigating Benghazi was more blunt: "Complete bullshit."

Senator Bob Corker, a top Republican on the Foreign Relations committee, met with Rice and Morell last week. The meeting, he says, "was a terse conversation, a direct conversation." His questions remain unanswered. "I was in Libya after the attacks," he says. "I spent a lot of time with our [CIA] station chief on that trip. He told me that he was communicating with Washington in real-time and said immediately that this was a terrorist attack that was probably carried out by al Qaeda and its affiliates." He says the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. embassy in Tripoli told him the same thing. (The Associated Press reported earlier that the CIA station chief sent a cable to Washington fingering Ansar al Sharia and possibly Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.)

The classified reporting, available to Rice before her September 16 TV appearances, "was filled with information about al Qaeda involvement" in the attacks, says one congressional Republican. "If she read any of that material, she knew."

So why did Rice speak of a "spontaneous protest" sparked by a "hateful video"? Why was information about the involvement of al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists kept out of the administration's public narrative? Good question. It's happened before.

When the FBI questioned Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab after his failed attempt to bring down a jet over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, he offered abundant detail about his links to terrorists. The *Washington Post* reported on December 26 that "federal officials have strongly suggested to lawmakers that the Nigerian man who attempted to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight has connections with the al Qaeda terrorist network in Yemen." The paper quoted Jane Harman, a California Democrat who was then chair of the House Homeland Security subcommittee on intelligence. She said she'd been briefed about "strong suggestions of a Yemen-al Qaeda connection and an intent to blow up the plane over U.S. airspace." And yet two days after the story was published, on December 28, when President Obama first spoke to the country about the attacks, he suggested Abdulmutallab was "an isolated extremist."

When Faisal Shahzad attempted to detonate an SUV in Times Square five months later, administration officials at first attempted to downplay the incident and his ties to jihadists. Speaking the day after the attack on Sunday talk shows, Janet Napolitano, the secretary

of homeland security, claimed that Shahzad's attack was a "one-off" event and that he didn't have ties to terrorist networks. But U.S. intelligence had information immediately demonstrating Shahzad's ties to the Pakistani Taliban and al Qaeda—something the administration would acknowledge several days later.

Is it possible that Janet Napolitano, the administration's representative, hadn't been informed about Shahzad's ties to the Pakistani Taliban before she claimed his attack was a "one-off"? The intelligence community knew, and the information had been reported publicly, but the fact that she appeared just one day later makes a communication failure plausible. What about the president? Is it possible he was unaware of Abdulmutallab's ties to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula when he spoke three days later and called the terrorist an "isolated extremist"?

And Rice? She addressed the country five days after the Benghazi attacks, at a time when the classified reporting was filled with information about the al Qaeda ties of the attackers. Was it another failure to communicate? Or was she sent out to sell a story she knew wasn't true?

"She was far too ready to go on and be a political operative," says Corker. Rice's appearance came a little more than a week after the Democratic convention, where speaker after speaker praised the president for crippling al Qaeda and bringing the war on terror to an overdue end.

As Obama said himself: "We've blunted the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan, and in 2014, our longest war will be over. A new tower rises above the New York skyline, al Qaeda is on the path to defeat, and Osama bin Laden is dead."

How would it look if a group "on the path to defeat" staged a sophisticated attack that took the life of a U.S. ambassador? Not great. We end, then, where we started—with lots of questions. Who wrote the talking points? Who edited them? Why? And why have top U.S. officials had so much trouble simply telling us what happened? The truth is rarely so complicated. ♦

Capitalism and Its Discontents

The worst economic system, except for all the others.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

Funny, they don't seem very worried.

Almost everyone knows that without banks we couldn't get mortgages, businesses couldn't get credit to grease the wheels of commerce, and there would be no machine on every corner to spit out cash when we need it. But by and large we hate banks and most especially bankers. Everyone knows that without our medical system we would be sick longer and in the end die sooner. But by and large we hate insurance companies, hospitals, doctors, and big drug companies. Everyone knows that without cable companies we wouldn't get to see our favorite teams and shows, and be reduced to, er, reading. But by and large we hate our cable provider, the apparent inventors of "Press 1 for English," followed by maze-like instructions that get you nowhere. And everyone knows that it is the telephone companies that allow us to call anywhere, anytime, from anywhere, but mention any phone company by name and you will unleash tales of incomprehensible bills, indifferent service, and "We value your business, so please hold for an hour or so while we monitor your call for quality purposes."

So if you want to know why capitalism is under attack, don't bother with the scores of books attacking and defending bankers and other miscreants, the warmed-over Marxist tracts, the pleas for a return to the good old days of Adam Smith by writers who have never understood the Great Scot's work or have forgotten what they once knew. Think of your own

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life, and how it shapes your view of capitalism as practiced by many companies. That's what I do.

Start with your local telephone provider. In my case, this paragon of efficiency has spent several years trying to make the second line in my house work. It failed. But its billing department is more efficient than its maintenance team—the bills for the unusable line kept coming for years, and only recently have been stopped, or so we are told by a nice person at a call center somewhere in the Pacific region. Then there is my cable provider. It took great effort to get it to take my money—for a subscription last year to the NBA package, needed by this former New Yorker who wants to watch teams other than the Wizards so that he can remember what the game is supposed to look like. Several calls to the cable company finally got me out of the endless loop (hint: exercise none of the options offered and just stay on the line). But the live person, who should be eager to sell me something, had never heard of the package, did not know its price or the channel number. Start over. Try again. Finally, complete the transaction at a cost in time that exceeded the fee for the service.

That done, grapple with your computer manufacturer, or try to get the maker of a defective watch to return a call, which I did, silly me. Don't blame it on the non-English-speaking person you might eventually reach. He didn't set up the system that calls on him to use a language skill he doesn't possess. Or perhaps you want to book a trip—just try to get your preferred airline to answer promptly. So use your computer, as I did, and find that some of the flights you know exist are not listed. When you finally reach the representative of the company that has assured you during your hours on hold that "your business is important to us," there is no explanation of the listing omission. Still, you get a booking after finding out that your miles are good on any day that doesn't end in "y," and on the 31st of September, April, June, and November.

Sure, you have alternatives. You can drop landline telephone service and rely on your cell phone, as many people are doing, and hope you are in an area in which cell service is reliable and calls don't mysteriously drop. You can try to get permission from your neighborhood association or the management of your highrise to install a dish. You can try to find an alternative carrier if you are booking a flight on a route not dominated by a single, merger-created carrier, or one that might not think it a good business practice to steadily shave the value of the airline miles you have painfully accumulated. And for good measure you can try to find someone at your bank who can explain how you managed to spend the $4,335,667 at your local supermarket that is shown on your statement. Good luck.

Consider what life might be like if even the imperfectly functioning markets that frustrate us were replaced in our economy by the single-provider systems so beloved of the liberal left.

These experiences have many things in common that tell us about the capitalist market system. And about ourselves. We want great service from the airlines *and* really low fares. We want our bank to have an army of representatives ready to answer any questions, but we want "free checking" and cheer congressionally imposed limits on credit card charges. We want the cable company to be responsive, but we don't want to look at our neighbors' unsightly dishes. We want all sorts of things that we are not prepared to pay for.

The wonderful thing about capitalism is that in the absence of government, union, or monopoly interference, if we are willing to pay, someone will spring up to provide the service. That is what is happening in health care—boutiques will for a fee actually provide access to real doctors. Wireless carriers are wooing customers away from landlines with increasingly varied offers. Google and Verizon are leading a costly charge to provide a full alternative to your local cable company, already suffering from assaults by Netflix. As for the airlines, we have Amtrak's Acela trains on the East Coast, and newly automated check-in procedures that will make it unnecessary to confront a representative who has just had her pension reduced and wants to take it out on you.

Competition and technology—not all you might want, but in our capitalist system they provide alternatives, unless government can make such market entry impossible, as it tries to do in the case of many things, from hairdressing to taxi service to burial services. Or unless the state owns the incumbent (China in many instances and in the case of electric service on Long Island, the state of New York), or the business is a friend of the ruler (Russia), or one needs some license to go into business (Greece et al.). Then the incumbent is protected.

There is a lesson here. Or several.

■ You get what you pay for in many cases. Champagne does not sell at beer prices, and big first-class seats cost more to provide than cramped economy-class ones.

■ High switching costs can make it more economical to suffer indignities inflicted by existing suppliers than to bear the costs of changing.

■ It's well worth the fight to eliminate barriers to entry, such as monopolies on slots at airports, bogus health and safety regulations that prevent fledgling entrepreneurs from offering a better mousetrap, and anticompetitive practices by entrenched incumbents.

■ Consumers should support the efforts of nonbanks trying to compete with the hoary old sort, but prevented from doing so by "consumer protection" regulations that are actually designed to protect incumbents.

Most of all, consider what life might be like if even the imperfectly functioning markets that frustrate us on a regular basis were replaced in our economy by the single-provider systems so beloved of the liberal left. That might make you view capitalism a bit more kindly, its flaws notwithstanding. ♦

Now with the Union Label

The TSA's new uniforms.

BY KATE HAVARD

If you're headed to the airport for the holidays, here are some tips to keep you off the Transportation Security Administration's "naughty list": Holiday puddings (even the figgy kind) are considered "gel-like" substances and must be carried in clear plastic containers of no more than 3.4 ounces. Cakes and pies are okay, but may be "subject to additional screening." Snow globes must be no larger than "approximately tennis ball size" and fit into the quart-sized clear plastic bag with your other toiletries.

Although their scanners can see through paper just as easily as they can see through your clothes, "wrapped gifts are allowed, but not encouraged." If an alarm goes off, the TSA won't hesitate to open your presents.

Oh, and amid all this holiday cheer, Christmas has come early for the TSA. On November 9, the baggage screeners ratified their first union contract, joining with the powerful public-sector union, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE).

Alas, this does not bode well for travelers. The contract is not aimed at making the lines go faster. Airport security procedures, including the ever-popular pat-down and the full-body scanner, remain the same. But you may notice that the latex-gloved strangers groping you in the name of national security have shiny new uniforms.

Under the new contract, the TSA uniform allowance has risen from $232 to $446 a year, courtesy of the taxpayers. Yet a representative from the TSA office of public affairs told me that the changes in the labor contract "will not impact the TSA budget."

If that proves to be the case, they may want to share with the rest of the federal bureaucracy the alchemy by which TSA can nearly double the uniform budget for 44,000 federal security screeners without spending more money. But odds are, the spokesperson is just being optimistic. TSA's budget has steadily expanded since its creation, from $4.7 billion in 2002 to $7.8 billion in 2012.

Look for the union groper.

A study commissioned by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee concludes that the TSA's new labor agreement "provides few real benefits to TSA employees and only further diverts focus from TSA's core functions of analyzing intelligence and ensuring the security of air travelers."

Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.), chairman of the House committee, criticized TSA management for spending their time and energy regulating "tie tacks and tattoos" when they should have been "improving upon [their] poor track record of security blunders and missteps." Mica pointed to what he called "significant security meltdowns" that recently occurred under TSA's watch.

In October, the Department of Homeland Security released a report revealing that TSA officers at Honolulu International Airport habitually failed to screen checked baggage for explosives—sometimes even clearing bags without opening them. In the aftermath, TSA fired 28 employees and suspended 15. Similar problems have flared up at airports in Newark, Charlotte, and Orlando.

Though each incident is troubling in itself, at least the TSA was able to respond quickly. Under the new labor contract, that could change.

"Any time you put a contractual situation in there where changes have to be negotiated, you're going to slow things down even more," says Daniel R. Moll, one of the authors of the House study.

For this reason, the TSA once prohibited collective bargaining. In 2003, a senior TSA official issued an order barring such a move because it was "not compatible with the flexibility required to wage the war against terrorism."

However, in 2011, Obama-appointed TSA administrator John Pistole reversed the order and announced that bargaining collectively would be allowed. He assured the public that the labor negotiations would not affect security.

The TSA's website published a fact sheet in favor of unionization which asserted, "Bargaining would not be allowed on security policies, procedures or the deployment of security personnel or equipment, pay, pensions and any form of compensation, proficiency testing, job qualifications or discipline standards."

However, once the union negotiations began, things started to change. One of the principal changes negotiated in the contract is an overhaul of the TSA's pay for performance system. Bidding for vacation time will be based on seniority. Standards have been established for the temperature of the work environment and the

NEWSCOM

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visibility of tattoos. (For the curious: "Tattoos must be . . . not visible to the general public. When an employee is wearing a short sleeve shirt, tattoos may be covered by a plain, single-colored royal blue acceptable band or sports sleeve that does not detract from the uniform.") And just in case there's a problem, TSA will allow an employee "to serve on official time on a full-time basis for the Union." The TSA is to provide this employee with a workspace, if possible, at the airport, "for easy access to employees."

None of these changes seem likely to make life easier for passengers. And, as critics point out, TSA's efficiency and the public's trust in the agency aren't just about convenience. These are also security issues.

"The FBI wouldn't be allowed to unionize, for security reasons," says Patrick Semmens, a spokesman for National Right to Work. "We're told that the TSA is supposed to be out there on the front lines of national security. They should seek to minimize any potential risk, not to introduce it by adding a whole new bureaucracy."

"Ultimately, the power of the union is to strike," Semmens says. "Just because a strike is illegal doesn't mean it won't happen. It's happened before, and amnesty for striking just becomes another bargaining chip in the negotiations."

The unionization of the TSA and the collective bargaining agreement is being hailed as a historic win for public-sector unions. And it's a big win for the AFGE in particular, which previously had 250,000 members. That means it's also a big win for the Democrats.

This year, AFGE's political action committee spent about half a million dollars supporting Democratic candidates like Sen. Claire McCaskill, Sen. Sherrod Brown, and Rep. Shelley Berkley. AFGE members fork over $14 to $16 per paycheck to the union. Now that they've added the TSA screeners, they stand to net an additional $16 million a year.

In effect, you'll now be giving Democrats a boost every time you fly. Just something to ponder as you enjoy your pre-holiday pat-down. ♦

NEWSCOM

The Quality of Morsi

Egypt's new strongman.

BY LEE SMITH

Egypt's political crisis seems to be testing the conviction, long held in certain Western circles, that actually having to govern a modern nation-state will moderate Islamists. The counterargument is that executive power will merely give free rein to tyranny, justified by rigid doctrine and implemented by torture, prison, and executions. It may be some time before that question is answered in Egypt. Mohamed Morsi, its new Muslim Brotherhood president, is still figuring out how to ride a sphinx.

An anti-Morsi protest in Cairo

Buffeted by the various furies of a political culture that were unleashed with the fall of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, Morsi has been hemmed in by opposition forces as well as a judiciary composed largely of Mubarak-era appointees. The lower house of parliament was dissolved, as the upper house may soon be along with the assembly tasked with drafting a new constitution. For Morsi, the most pressing question is not how to rescue the Egyptian economy, or how to protect the country from dangerous regional dynamics that might drag it to war with Israel, or, more abstractly, how an Islamist is to rule. The question rather is simply, how does he—how does anyone—govern Egypt?

Not surprisingly, Morsi is inclined toward the dictatorial. Late in November, he assumed a host of extraordinary powers and thereby sent thousands of protesters to the street who warned that the purpose of the revolution was not to replace Mubarak with another despot. Morsi and his aides say the president will relinquish the privileges he arrogated to himself—for instance, that his declarations, laws, and decrees are final and binding—when (or if) the constitution drafted at the end of last week is passed in a referendum to be held this month. With a new constitution, Egypt can then move to elect a new lower house of parliament to replace the one the supreme constitutional court dissolved in June.

"Anyone else in Morsi's position might have done more or less the same thing," says Joshua Stacher, a professor at Kent State who specializes in the Muslim Brotherhood and has met with Morsi frequently in the past. "It was an incredibly partisan move, and the Brotherhood has said a lot of stupid things this week. But they have a point when they say that we can't keep having elections until the Brotherhood loses."

Tamara Wittes, director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution and a former deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs in the Obama State Department, agrees—up to a point. "Morsi's frustration with the transitional process is understandable," says Wittes. "There

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are real problems in the judiciary and fecklessness in the opposition. But none of that is to say this is necessary or wise. Morsi's cure is far worse than the disease. He has increased polarization. He came to office promising that he would be the president for all Egyptians and he has rejected that role in favor of a partisan role."

Morsi's "constitutional declaration" managed to unite opposition blocs that despise each other—the revolutionaries of Tahrir Square who brought down Mubarak in February 2011, and the remnants, or *feloul*, of the regime that they toppled.

Morsi had perhaps hoped that parts of his declaration would get the revolutionaries off his back. For instance, he dismissed the current prosecutor general, a Mubarak appointee who, the revolutionaries believe, failed to prosecute Mubarak allies responsible for violence against the revolutionaries. Another article promised to retry those who targeted the revolutionaries back in 2011. However, the revolutionaries were not appeased and once again took to Tahrir, which over the last 22 months has become Cairo's premier political forum.

"The opposition can't beat the Brotherhood in elections because they don't have the networks that the Brotherhood has," says Stacher. "Moreover, [the Brotherhood has] an electoral mandate. The elections were procedurally clean, and there was a large turnout. People bought into it."

The fact that protesters are willing to take to the streets to air their grievances is proof to many, in Egypt and abroad, that the democratic revolution that deposed Mubarak won't be reversed. And yet for every thousand in Tahrir, there are millions of Egyptians who want the sort of stability that will allow them to put food on the table. This silent majority is angry at the protesters and becoming increasingly frustrated with a government that can't keep the streets clear.

If Morsi's domestic agenda has largely been stalled, when not marked by conflict, he has distinguished himself on the international front. Where many speculated that an Islamist-run Egypt was likely to get cozy with Iran, Morsi used his trip to Tehran to berate his hosts for supporting Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's blood-soaked regime. When Israel embarked on Operation Pillar of Defense, Morsi dispatched his prime minister to Gaza to lend Hamas moral support, but otherwise kept his criticism to a minimum—which couldn't have been easy for him since Hamas and the Brotherhood are blood relatives.

The White House credited Morsi for "sponsoring" the ceasefire, but that is an overstatement. There was no deal for him to sponsor, merely a return to the status quo, with dead Hamas commanders and a depleted missile arsenal. What's important is not the part that he played in negotiations, says Wittes, but "the role Morsi played in Egypt. Any Egyptian political actor has a strong incentive to use Israel as a football in Egyptian politics. But Morsi articulated the rationale for pursuing peace in terms of Egyptian national interests."

The White House is keen that Morsi continue to recognize those interests are best served by staying within the U.S. regional security architecture, and out of any conflict with Israel. The test for Morsi is to what extent he is able to close down Iran's supply routes to Gaza via smuggling tunnels from Sinai. The jihadist attack in August that killed 16 Egyptian border guards in Sinai convinced the army that national security was at risk. The result is that the Morsi government has proven much more willing to shut down tunnels than the Mubarak regime ever was. Whether Morsi will effectively go head-to-head against the Iranians in Sinai, or cut a quiet deal with them, is another question.

There's been speculation that with Morsi's helpful role during the Gaza conflict, the Obama administration may have decided to look the other way when he made his power play at home. It's true that the White House's criticism has been less than full-voiced, but the reality is that Morsi's gambit is straight out of the traditional Arab regime playbook: Use the prestige earned from high-profile diplomatic engagement with Washington to make a move at home.

Perhaps the more relevant factor in Morsi's timing is the International Monetary Fund loan of $4.8 billion. The IMF has warned that the instability caused by Morsi's declaration might delay the loan. However, the money is contingent on an economic reform program, including cuts in subsidies, that will be difficult to push through a faction-ridden political arena without a parliament.

According to critics, the newly drafted constitution that is supposed to pave the way to elections is riddled with problems. Some argue that this draft constitution has gone further than the 1971 constitution in its references to *sharia* law. "I can see why it's frightening," says Stacher. "But in the end, Egyptians are likely to interpret law in line with what they've done in the past. But because of the focus on *sharia*, the Islamists have stuffed all this other nonsense into the constitution."

One article, for instance, makes it illegal to criticize not only religious figures, like the prophet Muhammad, but also any human being. "Does this mean an Egyptian is breaking the law if he criticizes someone's tie?" says Wittes. The opposition is threatening to boycott the referendum on the constitution, which would make it a further source of contention dividing Egypt.

"The fundamental concern," says Wittes, "is how to get away from a majoritarian approach to making some important political decisions. The solution then is greater inclusion, dialogue, and compromise. The Brotherhood knows how to make bargains. They cut deals with the regime for years."

There's no one else besides Morsi in Egypt's political landscape who is positioned to mediate between competing political interests and ambitions. There's no Mandela-type figure of redemptive understanding that can forge consensus between the government and opposition. Rather, there's only a president whose background, sensibility, and leadership skills all tend toward the authoritarian. The future of Egypt may well depend on whether or not Morsi is capable of reinventing himself. ♦

A Nation of Singles

The most politically potent demographic trend is not the one everyone talked about after the election

By Jonathan V. Last

For a brief moment last month—roughly a 72-hour span beginning at 11:00 p.m. on November 6 and concluding late in the evening of November 9—everyone in America was interested in demographics. That's because, in addition to rewarding the just, punishing the wicked, and certifying that America was (for the moment) not racist, President Barack Obama's victory over Mitt Romney pointed to two ineluctable demographic truths. The first was expected: that the growth of the Hispanic-American cohort is irresistible and will radically transform our country's ethnic future. The second caught people by surprise: that the proportion of unmarried Americans was suddenly at an all-time high.

Unfortunately, by the time the window closed on the public's demographic curiosity no one really understood either of these shifts. Or where they came from. Or whether they were even particularly true. As is often the case, people tended to fixate on a relatively small, contingent part of America's changing demographic makeup and look past the bigger, more consequential part of the story.

So let's begin by asking the obvious question: Hispanics are America's demographic future—true or false? The answer is, both. Sort of.

Start with what we know. As of the 2010 census, there were 308.7 million people in America, 50.5 million of whom (16 percent) were classified as being of "Hispanic origin." Of that 50 million, about half are foreign-born legal immigrants. Another 11 million or so are illegal immigrants. A few other facts, just to give you some texture: 63 percent of American Hispanics trace their origins to Mexico, 9.2 percent to Puerto Rico, and 3.5 percent to Cuba. And more than half of the 50 million live in just three states, California, Texas, and Florida.

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But what makes people's heads snap to attention when they talk about Hispanic demographics isn't any of that stuff. It's the rate of increase. From 2000 to 2010, America's Hispanic population jumped by 43 percent, while our total population increased by just 9.7 percent. Or, to put it another way, from 2000 to 2010, America grew by 27.3 million people. Fifteen million of those faces—more than half of those new Americans—were Hispanic.

If you extrapolate those trends the numbers get even more eye-popping. In 2008, the Pew Research Center projected that, at current rates, by 2050 there would be 128 million Hispanic Americans, making the group 29 percent of the American population. The census projection is a little higher; they guess the total will be 132.8 million, 30 percent of a projected total population of 439 million.

Where do these numbers come from? It's not rocket science. Demographers depend mainly on two variables: net migration to the United States by people from Spanish-speaking countries and the fertility rate of Hispanic Americans.

The big 130-million projections come from assumptions based on the 2000 census. Back then, immigration from south of the border was booming, with a net of about 900,000 new people—both legal and illegal—showing up every year in America. (In 2000 alone, 770,000 people came from Mexico.) Because of that trend line, demographers assumed that we'd be netting roughly 1 million new immigrants every year between now and 2050.

But trends don't always continue to the horizon, and we're already going in a different direction on immigration. America's net annual immigration numbers started declining in 2006, sliding from just over 1 million in 2005 to 855,000 in 2009. We don't have good totals for 2010 or 2011 (because the Census Bureau rejiggered its formula in 2010, making it hard to compare to previous years), but we do have numbers for Mexican immigration alone, which show—amazingly—that in the most recent years there's been a net flow of *zero* immigrants from Mexico. Since Mexico has historically made up nearly two-thirds of our Hispanic immigrant pool all by itself, this would suggest that when we do get

comparable data we will see that there has been a *significant* drop in immigration already.

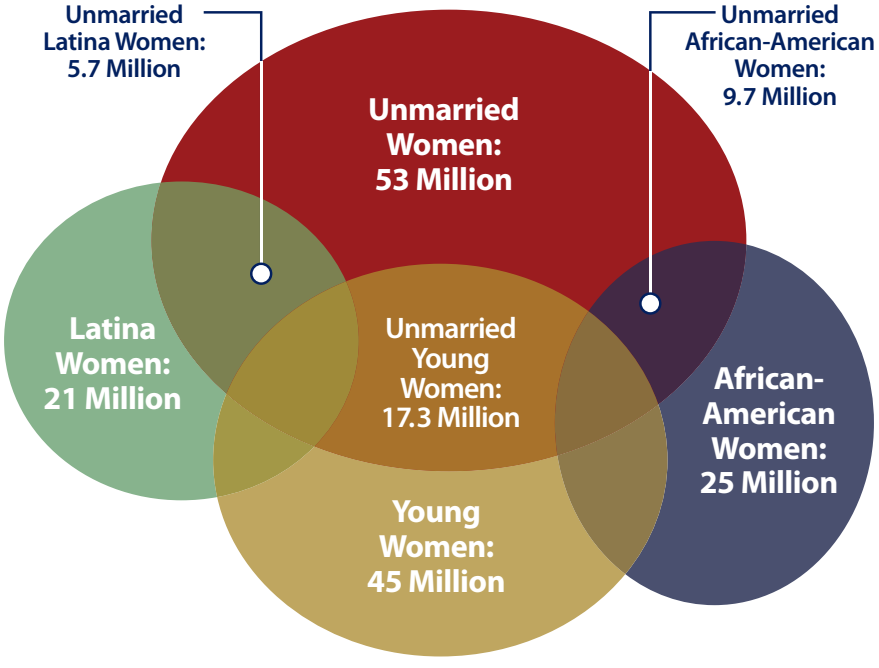
Economists who have noted this sudden shift are quick to explain it as a byproduct of the recession and the bursting housing bubble, which dried up jobs—particularly in the construction industry—causing prospective immigrants to stay put and pushing many illegal immigrants already in the country to head home. The implication of this argument is that as soon as our economy goes back to "normal," the patterns of migration will, too.

Demographers aren't so sure. Speaking broadly, when it comes to immigration there are two kinds of countries—sending and receiving. The economic factors distinguishing the two are what you'd expect—rich vs. poor; dynamic vs. lethargic. But there are demographic markers, too. Receiving countries tend to have very low fertility rates—generally below the replacement rate of 2.1. (That is, if the average woman has 2.1 children in her lifetime then a country's population will maintain a steady state.) In the short run, fertility rates below replacement cause labor shortages. Sending countries, on the other hand, have fertility rates well above the replacement rate, and resultant labor surpluses.

When you look at immigration rates from Central and South America to the United States, you find that these demographic markers are fairly reliable. Over the last decade or so the high-fertility countries (Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia) have sent larger numbers of immigrants to America while below-replacement countries (Uruguay, Chile, Brazil) have sent relatively few. Consider, for the sake of illustration, the cases of Guatemala and Costa Rica, two tiny Central American countries. With a population of 14 million, Guatemala still has a relatively robust fertility rate of 3.18. And as of 2010, there were a million people of Guatemalan descent living in the United States. Costa Rica has a population of 4.6 million and a fertility rate of 1.92. There are only 126,000 Costa Ricans in America—about 66 percent fewer than you would expect if the Guatemalan rates prevailed.

What else happened between 2006 and today, aside from the housing bubble and the Great Recession? Mexico's fertility rate—which has been heading downward on an express elevator since the 1970s—started nearing the replacement rate. The data are slightly conflicting on how low it is—some people believe it has already dipped below 2.1, others put the number just over 2.2. But everyone agrees that the trajectory is downward still. And that the same is true of nearly every other country south of the American border.

So will America add another 38 million Hispanics by 2050 just through immigration alone, as the projections suggest? No one knows, of course. But it seems an uncertain proposition. The boom days of Hispanic immigration may already be a thing of the past.



SOURCE: WOMEN'S VOICES WOMEN VOTE, BASED ON 2010 CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY AND NOVEMBER 2012 SUPPLEMENTS ON VOTING AND REGISTRATION, BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Which leads us to the fertility rate of Hispanic Americans. As a cohort, Hispanics have the highest fertility rate of America's racial groups, around 2.7. Much research has been done trying to figure out if, and when, the Hispanic-American fertility rate will fall toward the national average (which is closer to 2.0). Some researchers believe that by 2050, our Hispanic fertility rate will be at replacement. Others suggest sooner. Some scholars, looking at the data by cohort, suggest that Hispanic-American women currently in their childbearing years will finish them close to the replacement level. All of the research, however, indicates that in recent years the fertility rate of Hispanic Americans has been moving downward faster than it has for any other ethnic group.

Last week the Pew Center reported that from 2007 to 2010 America's birth rate dropped by 8 percent. The

decline was relatively modest for native-born Americans—only a 6 percent drop. But the immigrant birth rate dropped by 14 percent. And the birth rate for Mexican-born immigrants dropped by 23 percent. These declines were outsized, but they fit the larger trend. From 1990 to 2007, the Mexican-born birth rate had already dropped by 26 percent.

None of this is meant to predict that by such and such year there will be exactly so many Hispanic Americans. Social science has limits, and they are even nearer than you think. But when you look at the assumptions underlying the predictions for America's Hispanic future, they're even more uncertain than usual—and in fact are already a decade or so out of step with reality. America's Great Hispanic Future is probably being oversold. And possibly by quite a bit.

You don't hear nearly as much about the rise of single voters, despite the fact that they represent a much more significant trend. Only a few analysts, such as Ruy Teixera, James Carville, and Stanley Greenberg, have emphasized how important singletons were to President Obama's reelection. Properly understood, there is far less of a "gender" gap in American politics than people think. Yes, President Obama won "women" by 11 points (55 percent to 44 percent). But Mitt Romney won married women by the exact same margin. To get a sense of how powerful the marriage effect is, not just for women but for men, too, look at the exit polls by marital status. Among nonmarried voters—people who are single and have never married, are living with a partner, or are divorced—Obama beat Romney 62-35. Among married voters Romney won the vote handily, 56-42.

Far more significant than the gender gap is the marriage gap. And what was made clear in the 2012 election was that the cohorts of unmarried women and men are now at historic highs—and are still increasing. This marriage gap—and its implications for our political, economic, and cultural future—is only dimly understood.

Americans have been wedded to marriage for a very long time. Between 1910 and 1970, the "ever-married rate"—that is, the percentage of people who marry at some point in their lives—went as high as 98.3 percent and never dipped below 92.8 percent. Beginning in 1970, the ever-married number began a gradual decline so that by 2000 it stood at 88.6 percent.

Today, the numbers are more striking: 23.8 percent of men, and 19 percent of women, between the ages of 35 and 44 have never been married. Tick back a cohort to the people between 20 and 34—the prime-childbearing years—and the numbers are even more startling: 67 percent of men and 57 percent of women in that group have never been married. When you total it all up, over half of the voting-age population in America—and 40 percent of the people who actually showed up to vote this time around—are single.

What does this group look like? Geographically, they tend to live in cities. As urban density increases, marriage rates (and childbearing rates) fall in nearly a straight line. Carville and Greenberg put together a Venn diagram which is highly instructive. Of the 111 million single eligible voters, 53 million are women and 58 million are men. Only 5.7 million of these women are Hispanic and 9.7 million are African American. Nearly three-quarters of all single women are white. In other words, the cohort looks a lot like the Julia character the Obama campaign rolled out to show how the president's policies care for that plucky gal from the moment she enrolls in Head Start right through her retirement. You may recall that because of President Obama, Julia goes to college, gets free birth control, has a baby anyway, sends her lone kid to public school, and then—at age 42—starts her own business (as a web designer!). What she does not do is get married.

Singles broke decisively for Obama. Though his margins with them were lower than they were in 2008, he still won them handily: Obama was +16 among single men and +36 with single women. But the real news wasn't how singles broke—it was that their share of the total vote increased by a whopping *6 percentage points*. To put this in some perspective, the wave of Hispanic voters we've heard so much about increased its share of the total vote from 2008 to 2012 by a single point, roughly 1.27 million voters. Meanwhile, that 6 percentage point increase meant 7.6 million more single voters than in 2008. They provided Obama with a margin of 2.9 million votes, about two-thirds of his margin of victory. Back in 2010, Teixera noted that 47 percent of all women are now unmarried, up from 38 percent in 1970. "Their current size in the voter pool—more than a quarter of eligible voters—is nearly the size of white evangelical Protestants, who are perhaps the GOP's largest base group," he writes. "And since the current growth rate of the population of unmarried women is relatively high (double that of married women), the proportion of unmarried women in the voting pool should continue to increase." In the medium run, he's almost certainly correct.

How did we get to an America where half of the adult population isn't married and somewhere between 10 percent and 15 percent of the population don't get married for the first time until they're approaching retirement? It's a complicated story

involving, among other factors, the rise of almost-universal higher education, the delay of marriage, urbanization, the invention of no-fault divorce, the legitimization of cohabitation, the increasing cost of raising children, and the creation of a government entitlement system to do for the elderly childless what grown children did for their parents through the millennia.

But all of these causes are particular. Looming beneath them are two deep shifts. The first is the waning of religion in American life. As Joel Kotkin notes in a recent report titled "The Rise of Post-Familialism," one of the commonalities between all of the major world religions is that they elevate family and kinship to a central place in human existence. Secularism tends toward agnosticism about the family. This distinction has real-world consequences. Take any cohort of Americans—by race, income, education—and then sort them by religious belief. The more devout they are, the higher their rates of marriage and the more children they have.

The second shift is the dismantling of the iron triangle of sex, marriage, and childbearing. Beginning in roughly 1970, the mastery of contraception decoupled sex from babymaking. And with that link broken, the connections between sex and marriage—and finally between marriage and childrearing—were severed, too.

Where is this trend line headed? In a word, higher. There are no indicators to suggest when and where it will level off. Divorce rates have stabilized, but rates of cohabitation have continued to rise, leading many demographers to suspect that living together may be crowding out matrimony as a mode of family formation. And increasing levels of education continue to push the average age at first marriage higher.

Fertility rates play a role, too. Nearly one in five American women now forgo having children altogether, and without babies, marriage is less of a necessity. People's attitudes have followed the fertility rate. The Pew Research Center frequently surveys Americans about their thoughts on what makes a successful marriage. Between the 1990 survey and the 2007 survey, there were big increases in the percentages of people who said that sharing political or religious beliefs was "important to a good marriage." In 2007, there was a 21 percent increase in people who said it was important for a marriage that the couple have "good housing." Thirty-seven percent *fewer* people said that having children was important. The other indicator to decline in importance from 1990 to 2007? "Faithfulness."

As Kotkin explains, comparatively speaking, America is still doing pretty well when it comes to singletons. In Europe, Asia, and most advanced countries, people are running away from marriage, children, and family life at an amazing rate. To pick just a smattering of data points from the highlight reel: Thirty percent of German women today say that they do not intend to have children. In Japan in 1960, 20 percent of women between 25 and 29 had never married. Today the number is more than 60 percent. Gavin Jones of the National University of Singapore estimates that "up to a quarter of all East Asian women will remain single by age 50, and up to a third will remain childless."

The question, then, is whether America will continue following its glidepath to the destination the rest of the First World is already nearing. Most experts believe that it will. As the Austrian demographer Wolfgang Lutz puts it, once a society begins veering away from marriage and childbearing, it becomes a "self-reinforcing mechanism" in which the cult of the individual holds greater and greater allure.

What then? Culturally speaking, it's anybody's guess. The more singletons we have, the more densely urban our living patterns are likely to be. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg believes that the masses of city-dwelling singles will sort themselves into "urban tribes," based not on kinship, but rather on shared interests. The hipsters, the foodies, the dog people, and so on. Klinenberg teaches at NYU, so he would know. As a result, cities will gradually transform from centers of economic and cultural foment into what urban theorist Terry Nichols Clark calls "the city as entertainment machine."

The urban tribes may be insipid, but they're reasonably benign. Kotkin sees larger cultural problems down the road. "[A] society that is increasingly single and childless is likely to be more concerned with serving current needs than addressing the future," he writes. "We could tilt more into a 'now' society, geared towards consuming or recreating today, as opposed to nurturing and sacrificing for tomorrow."

The economic effects are similarly unclear. On the one hand, judging from the booming economic progress in highly single countries such as Singapore and Taiwan, singletons can work longer hours and move more easily for jobs. Which would make a single society good for the economy. (At least in the short term, until the entitlement systems break because there aren't enough new taxpayers being born.) There is, however, an alternative economic theory. Last summer demographers Patrick Fagan and Henry Potrykus published a paper examining the effect of nonmarriage on the labor participation rate. Fagan and Potrykus were able to identify a clear statistical effect of marriage on men's labor participation. What they found is that without the responsibility of families to provide

for, unmarried American males have historically tended to drop out of the labor force, exacerbating recessionary tendencies in the economy. We'll soon find out which view is correct.

And as for politics, the Democratic party clearly believes that single Americans will support policies that grow the government leviathan while rolling back the institutions that have long shaped civil society. The Obama campaign targeted these voters by offering them Planned Parenthood and Julia.

That the Republican party hasn't figured out how to court singles may partly be a function of failing to notice their rapid growth. But before the GOP starts working on schemes to pander to singletons, it's worth considering an alternative path.

Rather than entering a bidding war with the Democratic party for the votes of Julias, perhaps the GOP should try to convince them to get married, instead. At the individual level, there's nothing wrong with forgoing marriage. But at scale, it is a dangerous proposition for a society. That's because marriage, as an institution, is helpful to all involved. Survey after survey has shown that married people are happier, wealthier, and healthier than their single counterparts. All of the research suggests that having married parents dramatically improves the well-being of children, both in their youth and later as adults.

As Robert George put it after the election, limited government "cannot be maintained where the marriage culture collapses and families fail to form or easily dissolve. Where these things happen, the health, education, and welfare functions of the family will have to be undertaken by someone, or some institution, and that will sooner or later be the government." Marriage is what makes the entire Western project—liberalism, the dignity of the human person, the free market, and the limited, democratic state—possible. George continues, "The two greatest institutions ever devised for lifting people out of poverty and enabling them to live in dignity are the market economy and the institution of marriage. These institutions will, in the end, stand or fall together."

Instead of trying to bribe single America into voting Republican, Republicans might do better by making the argument—to all Americans—that marriage is a pillar of both freedom and liberalism. That it is an arrangement which ought to be celebrated, nurtured, and defended because its health is integral to the success of our grand national experiment. And that Julia and her boyfriend ought to go ahead and tie the knot. ♦

A Recipe for Violence

Obama's 'offshore balancing' and the New Middle East

By Thomas Donnelly

The greater Middle East, the mostly Muslim lands stretching from North and West Africa to South Asia, is in the throes of profound change. And it's not just the "Arab Spring" and its aftermath. Two other trends are shaping the region's future: the imminence of a nuclear-armed Iran and the retreat of the United States. Taken together, these three factors are likely to result in a lot of violence.

The prospects for Arab governments to move quickly and decisively from autocracy to democracy were perhaps never that bright. Neither is it written that these revolutions will inevitably result in Salafist rule. But the collapse of the corrupt Arab nationalist regimes that were ushered in by the end of European colonialism and the rise of the United States as the region's dominant outside power is now nearly comprehensive. Bashar al-Assad is not going down without a lot more fighting in Syria, moderate monarchs like Jordan's King Abdullah II have been prematurely written off before, and the House of Saud and the Gulf emirates have bought their way out of many past periods of unrest. But the legitimacy of such regimes is in steep decline; more will fall.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic of Iran that grabbed power in the wake of the shah has proved remarkably durable, surviving internal faction and dissent as well as external sanctions. While Iran's rise to regional dominance has been often foretold and never realized, and the exact state of its nuclear program is opaque, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad have good reason to believe that their time is near. Even without the nukes, the Arab cacophony is, mostly, sweet harmony to Tehran.

As is the American withdrawal. In 2008, the United States looked as though it was in Iraq to stay. Even Barack Obama had moderated his campaign promises of a precipitate retreat. His lieutenants, particularly in the Pentagon, where Robert Gates still ruled and a cadre of Trumanesque Democrats filled most policy posts, talked of a continuing if lesser garrison and a renegotiated "status of forces" agreement. And in 2009, the president pledged his own "surge" of troops in Afghanistan. But that commitment was hedged by an even stronger commitment to a date-certain drawdown, and Obama was out of Iraq by 2011. Since then, there's been a series of events—the abandonment of Hosni Mubarak, the "leading from behind" campaign in Libya, persistent public displeasure with Benjamin Netanyahu, the empty call for Assad "to go," the "Pacific pivot," reductions to the defense budget—that adds up to a pretty clear signal: The Middle East is now, at best, an "economy of force" interest for the United States. The Obama Doctrine—let it burn—has supplanted the Carter Doctrine, under which control of the Persian Gulf region was deemed a vital U.S. interest.

The consequences of a return to pre-1979 "offshore balancing" are impossible to predict. For the foreseeable future, the U.S. military may be too small for regime change or counterinsurgency—if it was ever large enough to do that properly—but it's still able to hand out a lot of punishment. And the rest of the world's developed and developing economies still need the oil and gas; maybe China or some condominium of other powers will pick up some of the burden. Still, the near-term forecast has to be for violence, followed by intermittent violence and then renewed violence. A tour of the regional horizon shows how much and how fast the old order is decaying.

Egypt and North Africa

Egypt's role in negotiating the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was portrayed in Washington as a sign of continuity in Cairo. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared, "Egypt's new government is assuming the responsibility and leadership that has long made this country a cornerstone of regional stability and peace." But by the end of the week Mohamed Morsi, the new Muslim Brotherhood president of Egypt, decreed himself above the law, or at least not bound by the Mubarak holdovers in the judiciary. This has not only united the disparate Egyptian opposition against him, again filling Tahrir Square with antiregime protesters, but badly wrong-footed the Obama administration.

It's true that Morsi didn't play the Islamist card in the Gaza crisis, as Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, did when he labeled Israel a "terrorist state." But the Egyptian government has never had much love for Hamas, particularly an increasingly Iran-backed Hamas. The smuggling of long-range Iranian rockets through the Sinai underscores Egypt's weakness and corruption.

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And rather than use the political capital won in Gaza to bank aid from the United States or a badly needed bailout from the International Monetary Fund, Morsi chose to tighten his grip on power. For a generation, we have thought of Egypt as the beginning to a Middle East solution, "a cornerstone of regional stability and peace," as Clinton said. At best, that's premature, and it may well represent the triumph of hope over the experience of the past weeks.

One step to the west, in Libya and Tunisia, where the Arab Spring first bloomed, the situation is even more chaotic. The post-dictatorial governments in Tunis and Tripoli face challenges from al Qaeda-affliated Salafist groups. How powerful these groups are is very difficult to tell, but at least on September 11 in Benghazi they were fatally powerful. Indeed, the strongest indictment of the Obama administration's reaction to the assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi is that, in what was no doubt a very confusing time, it could only hear an echo of its own propaganda: Al Qaeda was on the ropes, therefore the consulate attacks could not have been conducted by an affiliated terrorist group. Whether it lied or not, the White House clearly couldn't grasp an inconvenient truth.

Two steps from Egypt, in Algeria, there was good news recently: Makhfi Rabah, also known as Sheikh Abdenacer, a senior leader of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, was killed by Algerian forces. But that's also a reminder that Algeria has long been under assault from Islamists. And North Africa's problems have also migrated southward, particularly into Mali, once offered as an exemplar of American success in the global war on terrorism. Driven from Libya, the Islamists of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA) temporarily made common cause with the Tuareg rebels in Mali to capture Timbuktu, but of late they've taken to committing atrocities against one another.

Mohamed Morsi's Egypt remains by far the most important piece of the North Africa puzzle. The U.S-Egypt partnership has been a pillar of American Middle East strategy. Now it's an uncertain and shaky foundation for the future.

The Levant

The civil war in Syria has claimed 40,000 lives. Probably 10 times that many are homeless. The longer the war continues, the uglier the aftermath is likely to be.

It's been more than a year since President Obama declared that Bashar al-Assad "must go." But as long as his forces retain a decisive firepower advantage over their opponents, no one's going to make him go. The opposition is on a roll militarily, overrunning a Syrian Army regiment in Aleppo, shooting down a helicopter and a fixed-wing fighter. But even if it can overthrow Assad, that's not likely to be the end of the Syria mess.

There's been a lot of handwringing, and rightly so, over the radicalization of the Syrian opposition. But it would be almost as bad to have a Syria that breaks up into local fiefdoms—warlordism may not be as bad as Islamism, but it's not that much better; and as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the Haqqani family have demonstrated in Afghanistan, warlordism and Islamism are compatible bedfellows.

And so Syria might go the way of Lebanon. The rump regime in Damascus would be weak, and in that sense less dangerous than the Assad family has been. But it would also be a recipe for constant strife, this time involving Turkey, a NATO ally, and with a clearer Sunni-versus-Shiite sectarian overlay. Iran will have lost an ally but retained a playground.

Obama's let-it-burn approach to Syria has badly damaged U.S. credibility. In recent weeks, Britain and France have made more interventionist moves, and there has been speculation that the White House might do the same, now that the election campaign is over. Better late than never, perhaps, but the dithering over the last year has also foreclosed some options. Syrians who have been fighting and suffering won't take kindly, for example, to government by exiles. The hard men who end up surviving are less likely to be democratically inclined, or Western-oriented. And establishing government control throughout the country won't be easy. Either an Iranian-backed Shiite or an al Qaeda-affiliated Sunni insurgency—or both—seems a good prospect, and Iran can cause immense trouble in the outside world even from small sanctuaries in Syria.

One small benefit of the Syrian civil war appears to be that it's preoccupied Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, who continues to play a waiting game. Beyond cheering on Hamas in Gaza, he's remained reluctant to provoke Israel since 2006. Though that incursion is still widely regarded as a defeat for the Israelis, Nasrallah's famous public regrets over the campaign have been reflected in his behavior since then. Hezbollah has been concentrating on more far-flung operations, including in Latin America, and its trainers are in high demand by insurgent organizations everywhere.

Jordan, too, is experiencing a spike of dissent. Recent protests pushed past previous boundaries of acceptable dissent in complaining about King Abdullah personally; that's outlawed in Amman. Even though the Hashemite regime has repeatedly defied predictions of its demise, the generational changes sweeping the region, Palestinian unrest, the civil war in Syria, and the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq isolate Abdullah—another pillar of U.S. strategy—more than usual.

All in all, the war in Syria makes the situation in the Levant roughly analogous to that in North Africa. The most powerful status-quo Arab autocracy hasn't had its regime-change moment, but it's plainly in view. And the United States is scrambling to keep up with events.

The Persian Gulf

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states retain a tighter grip on power than others, but also have more troubles than in the recent past. With Riyadh's backing, and indeed, with Saudi troops, Bahrain cracked down hard on Shiite demonstrations last year. But the war in Yemen continues, and a nuclear Iran lurks just over the horizon.

To be sure, Tehran's balance sheet has lots of minuses to go with the pluses. Assad's fall would be a significant setback. But there would still be post-Assad opportunities in a weak and divided Syria, and in Iraq, Iran showed its ability to make temporary alliances of convenience with Sunni extremists. The Islamic Republic must also deal with a variety of domestic problems, from factionalism within the regime to the economic pain caused by sanctions.

But compared with its neighbors, Iran looks stable and secure; the likelihood of regime change in Tehran seems low. The Iranians don't need to be in a nuclear rush, either; much better to pile up supplies of enriched uranium, to work on missiles and a couple of warhead designs, so that the breakout moment, when it comes, rapidly produces a credible deterrent of not one weapon but a dozen or more. In the meantime, watch the Americans retreat and the Sunni regimes worry about their increasingly dissatisfied people.

Israel and Turkey

The winds of Arab change complicate life for those who live next door, or, in Israel's case, in the same house. Israel's predicament is acute. The Israelis had, over many decades and with lots of American help, established a crude but durable kind of strategic partnership with the status-quo Arab regimes. Fear of Iran meant that the logic of the partnership would continue; Israel's "isolation" among Arabs would not pose an existential danger. And it still might—again, Morsi's Egypt is key—but Israelis have good reason to be more jittery than they've been for some time. Walls and "Iron Domes" and "mowing the grass" in Gaza cannot really suffice for Israeli defense. Preemptive attacks and punitive raids have long been needed to keep more numerous foes off balance, and Arab regimes largely looked the other way when it came to the Palestinians or the Shiites of southern Lebanon.

Life is also getting complicated in Ankara. Prime Minister Erdogan's experiment in modern Islamic rule has all but eliminated the last vestiges of the Kemalist tradition, including in the Turkish Army. But "neo-Ottoman" posturing hasn't gone down well among the Turkic states of Central Asia, and efforts at a broader Islamic appeal, such as the "flotilla" to the Palestinians in 2011, have mostly underscored the limits of Turkish power. So has the Syrian civil war. The conflict has produced a flood of refugees along what was already an unstable border, and Turkey faces a range of intolerable outcomes. Whether Assad hangs on, Syria breaks up, or radical Islamists take over—none of it looks good to Turks.

Israel and Turkey have been America's best allies in the region. The U.S. commitment to Israel, like that to Great Britain, is woven into the fabric of American strategy. Turkey is of course a NATO nation, and that alliance remains a solemn treaty vow. Indeed, not that long ago Israel and Turkey were themselves strategic partners, but no longer.

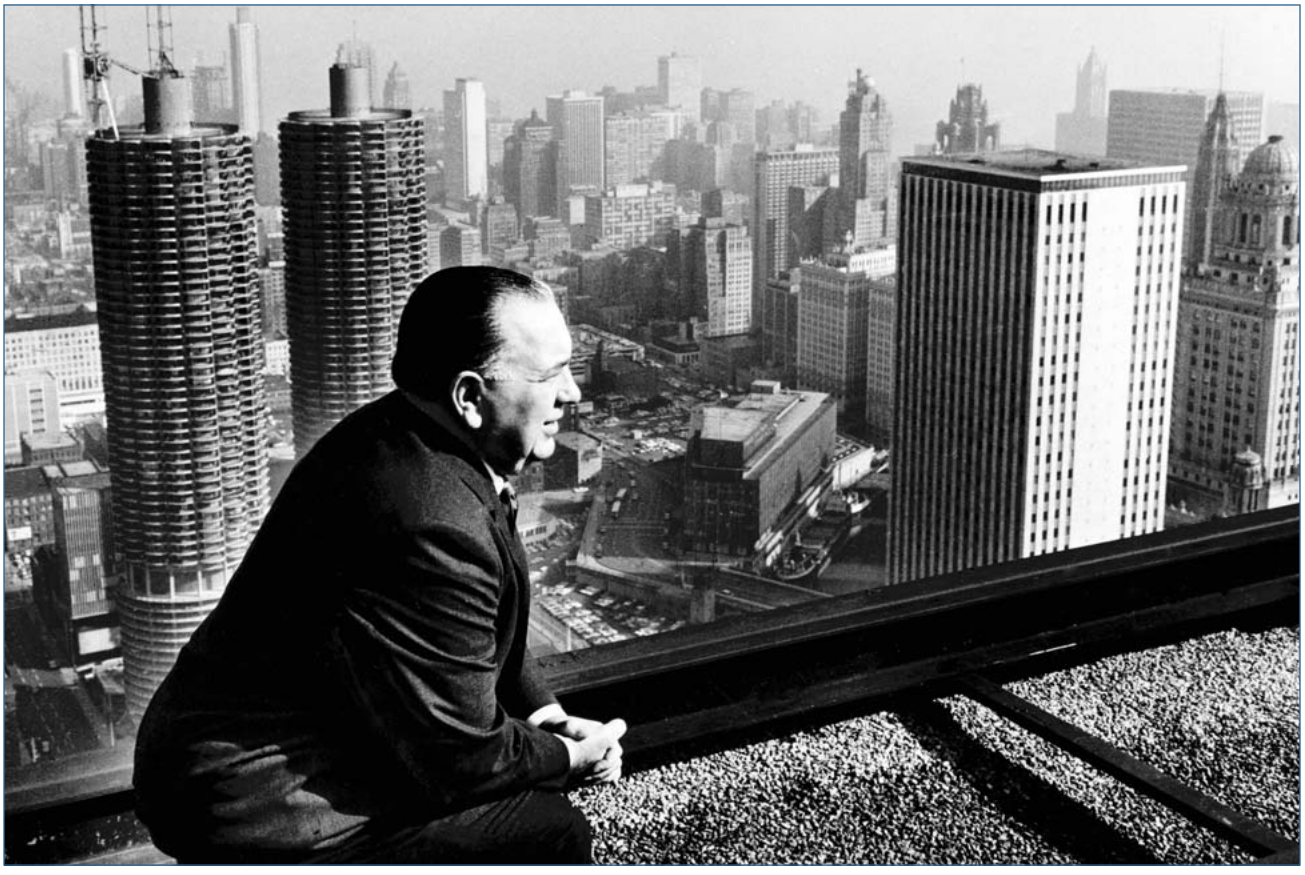
An Ebbing American Tide

When Barack Obama declared, "the tide of war is receding," what he meant was that the United States would no longer play the directing role it had previously assumed in the greater Middle East. That role began well before 9/11. It grew out of the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine in 1979. The 1990-1991 Gulf War marked a further Rubicon. Then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney famously promised the Saudi king that U.S. troops would leave once the job of kicking Saddam Hussein's army out of Kuwait was complete, but they didn't. There wasn't a stable status quo to return to. There isn't one now. We have chosen what's likely to prove a very bad time to tire of intervening in this region.

If the opportunity to shape the new order is slipping away, so are the means to do so. The U.S. military has made it through the post-9/11 wars by the skin of its teeth. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps, even when mobilizing much of their reserve strength, were not big enough to properly fight in Iraq and Afghanistan at the same time. The U.S. Navy, supposedly the big beneficiary of the "Pacific pivot," is running at ramming speed in and around the Persian Gulf and the eastern Mediterranean.

Never mind the "sequestration" arm-waving. As the Obama 2014 budget request is certain to reveal, sequestration-level defense budgets are now the ceiling, not the floor. Perhaps a lame-duck deal will mitigate some of the immediate effect, but the likelihood of deeper defense spending cuts in 2014 and beyond is very high. Taxophobic Republicans will go along with what the president proposes. The Joint Chiefs of Staff will obey orders.

"Offshore balancing" in the emerging Middle East will be very much like shelling the continent of Africa, as Joseph Conrad put it: emotionally satisfying but without purpose or result. Some of the satisfaction will be lost when we balance the human cost of letting local conflicts run their course, as in Syria. But beyond what our moral sense can tolerate, there will be more tangible consequences. No one can predict with precision what they will be, but it's a pretty good bet that the one thing worse than trying to put out all the fires will be letting them burn. ♦



Mayor Richard J. Daley overlooking a public-works project (1966)

Whose Kind of Town?

Understanding the Second City. BY ANDREW FERGUSON

Twenty years ago an editor for the *Chicago Sun-Times* told Neil Steinberg—at the time a young reporter for the paper—that he might someday become the next Sydney J. Harris, and Steinberg, for reasons unclear, did not punch him in the kneecaps. Harris was dead by then, but from the 1950s to the 1980s he had tortured *Sun-Times* readers with a column composed of nothing but aphorisms, sententious squibs, little dollops of uplift that were so banal or dubious they perversely compelled a reader's attention.

"The greatest enemy of progress is not stagnation, but false progress," Harris would write, letting the sentence hang there all alone in a sea of newsprint until an asterisk pulled a reader's eye, kicking and screaming, down to the next one: "The time to relax is when you don't have time for it." And so on, for a good 10 inches or more, day after day, four days a week. No reporter could have pondered a career as a neo-Sydney J. Harris without a soul-deep shudder.

You Were Never in Chicago
by Neil Steinberg
Chicago, 256 pp., $25

Maybe Steinberg is a more forgiving guy than he lets on. As it happens, he did grow up to be a columnist for the *Sun-Times*—and a four-day-a-week man, too, like Harris. The two columnists are alike in one other (and only one other) respect: They are both distinctively Chicago products. It's hard to imagine, I mean, another newspaper market in which such odd ducks could not only survive but flourish, developing large and loyal readerships. But then the history of Chicago journalism is rich in newspapermen who were, as they seldom say in Chicago, *sui generis*—from George Ade to Carl Sandburg and Ring Lardner; Ben Hecht to Mike Royko and Bill Mauldin.

Steinberg's new book is a pleasing

MCT / GETTY IMAGES

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

blend of what makes him and his city distinctive. *You Were Never in Chicago* is a sort-of memoir of his professional life, a kind-of love letter to the city—a scrapbook, as it were, of Chicago eccentricities. Unlike most columnists who get called "humorists," Neil Steinberg is a funny writer. A nebbish, too. One of his first books, *A Complete and Utter Failure*, was a "celebration" of history's greatest flops and disappointments. The reluctance of readers to wallow in unhappiness helped the book live up to its title, at least commercially.

Another book ventured into the hottest genre in publishing: chronicles of the business world—except the story Steinberg chose to chronicle was the collapse of American hat manufacturing. He also wrote about a transatlantic voyage he took with his estranged father in a touching attempt at reconciliation; by the book's conclusion, the two disliked each other more than they had at the beginning. A memoir of his harrowing struggle with alcoholism was accompanied by an acknowledgment that, knowing himself as he did, he'd probably start drinking again before too long. Imagine Mitch Albom—if Albom had spent 35 straight winters in Chicago.

A celebration of Chicago just now might seem like another of Steinberg's adventures in perversity. Nobody knows, of course, whether the rough patch the city is moving through at the moment is merely a glum episode or a further stage in a long and irreversible decline. Its newly minted status as the murder capital of the world is just the start. It also has the largest street-gang membership of any city in America, and, by many measures, the worst public schools. And while most cities of comparable size face the same fiscal cyclone of unfunded debt obligations, the refusal of Chicago's political class to reckon with impending solvency is San Bernardino-like in its obstinate stupidity.

All 50 city council members are Democrats. True to their faith, they have created a tax and regulatory environment ferociously hostile to any business they don't like. It took Walmart nearly a decade of petitions and hearings and waivers to open a store where residents of the forsaken South Side could work and shop. The city levies one of the highest sales taxes in the country and imposes a head tax on suburban commuters.

If you tax something, the economists say, you get less of it, and so fewer and fewer people bother to seek work in the city. The private sector has shrunk accordingly. The top two employers in Chicago are the federal government and the public school system, followed close behind by the city and county governments. The city lost 200,000 residents between 2000 and 2010.

Still more shocking, according to recent data, 25,000 of those who fled Chicago in the last decade chose to move to Rockford, Illinois. Have you ever seen Rockford?

And yet: Maybe you have to see Chicago close up to understand the glories it's still capable of—and the love it can inspire in the beating heart of a stubborn enthusiast, of whom there are millions, Steinberg included. As a writer he's not given to flights of poetry—not even the rough-hewn, horny-handed, tough-guy prose poetry of other Chicago boosters like Nelson Algren and Sandburg. But at moments the place can leave him a little breathless, as on a fog-wrapped night downtown, with the spires disappearing upwards into the mist: "It is an eerie, marvelous sight, this city of mystery and beauty, half-seen, half hidden, distant yet right there." He's quite good at evoking the skyline, the lakefront, and the neighborhoods beyond. He knows that the city's sheer size and variety are both intimidating and consoling, especially for scribblers.

"A small town is lucky to boast one or two central elements," he writes. Chicago, on the other hand, "can be whatever a writer wants it to be. . . . It can be a city of theater and plays, or music and concerts, or food and restaurants. God knows there's politics—election and corruption. A bottomless pit of crime, if you prefer, a city of murders and murderers."

The Chicago that Steinberg has constructed for himself as a columnist has pieces of all of the above. Well, not politics, which bores him and about which, on the evidence here, he has nothing interesting to say. He has an eye for the colorful, an ear for the quirky. Anachronisms please him very much. His favorite haunt in Chicago over the years has been the Division Street Russian Baths, the last survivor of the public bathhouses that once dotted the city; as late as 1965 the park district operated eight of them. They were built for working men.

> The baths were always open, twenty-four hours a day, because people worked three shifts. Men labored in steel mills and slaughterhouses and coal yards—not the type of filth and grime you wanted to wash off in your own home if you could avoid it.

The baths bore no resemblance to the health spas outfitted for today's urban sophisticates; no sweet-smelling cedar paneling, no chipper attendants in polo shirts. They were subterranean rooms tiled in ceramic and running the length of barns, with lead pipes gushing tap water into pickle buckets and roaring ovens that customers tended themselves with discarded two-by-fours.

The baths were pre-ironic Chicago. This is a Steinberg specialty: a functional enterprise that had essential uses before the age of affluence arrived to place them in self-conscious quote marks—before anyone got the idea to refurbish decaying tenements with exposed brick walls and Viking ovens, or to open faux "diners" with gouda cheese fries and make-believe "dive bars" selling $12 mocha-appletinis. People lived in that older Chicago not for its cultural amenities or its bistros serving fusion cuisine or its "walkability" or its bikeshare racks; they lived there because it's where the work was.

They earned their livelihoods in the factories that Steinberg shows us in the moments before they vanish: the Jays potato chip factory at 99th Street and Cottage Grove; the Chicago Mailing Tube company on North Leavitt;

the Brach's candy plant on Kinzie, which is the largest candy manufacturing plant in the world.

Or was. Like the baths, most of the manufacturing that enthralled Steinberg as a Chicagoan and a columnist are gone. He's a clear-eyed nostalgist, however. He knows it's in the nature of cities to change texture and shape—and in the nature of city dwellers to lament the passing of the golden age, which always seems to have ended the day before yesterday.

> Pick whatever era in history seems most exciting, most distinctive, real and alive, then examine that period closely; you will find that Chicagoans of the time were also nostalgic, also troubled by what they considered society's decline, also confronting a problematic present while mourning some imagined superior past.

In Chicago, the point holds true even in the face of a declining population, the coming fiscal calamity, the murder rate, and those combat-zone schools. Every new era brings its compensations, and even a member of the vast Chicago diaspora will recognize some of them: Neil Steinberg, for example, has replaced Sydney J. Harris. Every reader of this funny and touching book will be grateful. ♦

B&A

Metre Reader

America's coming-of-age in poetic form.

BY WYATT PRUNTY

The Open Door begins with Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" and zooms from there, highlighting 100 years of modern poetry, including that of Louise Bogan, Hart Crane, e. e. cummings, H. D., T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and William Butler Yeats.

Descendants of the modernists are even more numerous: A. R. Ammons, W. H. Auden, John Berryman, Gwendolyn Brooks, Basil Bunting, Seamus Heaney, Randall Jarrell, Donald Justice, William Meredith, James Merrill, W. S. Merwin, Sylvia Plath, Theodore Roethke, Richard Wilbur, Charles Wright, James Wright.

The list goes on.

Poetry is a monthly that publishes many more poems per year than quarterlies and other little magazines.

The Open Door
One Hundred Poems, One Hundred Years of Poetry *Magazine*
edited by Don Share and Christian Wiman
Chicago, 224 pp., $20

Add to that its being in continuous production for 100 years and numbers alone make the case for just how representative the magazine is. This new anthology provides a broad range of practice, extending from formal to free verse (Auden and Wilbur to Moore and Williams), and from a poetry of self-expression (Plath's occluded fronts, for example) to the dry weathers of Donald Justice and Thom Gunn.

Harriet Monroe founded *Poetry* in 1912 with the stated purpose that it remain "free of entangling alliances with any single class or school." The editors of *The Open Door*, Don Share and Christian Wiman, have remained faithful to Monroe's principle. That said, *The Open Door* is nevertheless a child of *Poetry* magazine, which, in turn, was the offspring of modernism, a movement with many "alliances." One modernist trait that involved "alliances" is experimentation, and that activity is readily evident in these pages, as the title suggests.

Over the course of the 20th century, a number of schools experimented with poetry: Imagists to Confessional poets, the New York School to the New Formalists. And while *The Open Door* emphasizes no one movement, there are numerous examples of innovations which characterized different parts of modernism.

Poetry may have started as a little magazine, but it has grown into an institution. Today it enjoys a large circulation and a generous endowment. It does, nevertheless, still retain the accessibility (one part of which is simply small size) of the little magazine; *Poetry*'s editors do remain interested in new work and are eclectic in choice where subject and style are concerned. Its century-long run has given the anthology a large net to pull through a modern and late-modern sea of poems, and, facilitated by a thoughtful introduction, *The Open Door* offers an interesting sample of that sea. (Meanwhile, also in the spirit of accessibility, *Poetry* keeps all past issues of the magazine online and free to the public.)

While *The Open Door* could be larger, the decision to limit it to 100 poems led to careful selection. Share and Wiman have operated in the spirit of Glenn Miller, who said that his band would make it on good arrangements. The first poem is an early version of Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," which appeared in *Poetry* in 1913. That choice plays in response to what readers are accustomed to seeing in print today. *Poetry*'s version, reproduced by *The Open Door*, reads:

> *The apparition of these faces in the crowd :*
> *Petals on a wet, black bough .*

Today's standard anthology reads:

> *The apparition of these faces in the crowd;*
> *Petals on a wet, black bough.*

Wyatt Prunty, Carlton professor of English at the University of the South (Sewanee), is the author, most recently, of The Lover's Guide to Trapping.

The vividness of Pound's description, along with his brevity—and, in the early version, his use of spacing—indicate his interest in exact language and in the power of the image—what Pound famously called "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."

These are classroom matters today, but they were not so when *Poetry* published Pound's poem in 1913. The spacing seen in the earlier printing of "Metro" reminds us of Pound's restless innovation and of the artistic influence he had on succeeding generations of poets. So, to emphasize the point, while *Poetry* may have striven to avoid "alliances" and "schools," the poets who gave purpose to its pages did not.

Pound, as an example once again, was a great proponent not only of Imagism but of T.S. Eliot, H.D., James Joyce, and others. *The Open Door* reminds us of the vitality of modern and late-modern poetry. Poetry "makes nothing happen," as Auden famously observed. Certainly poetry's language is nonutilitarian. But by that measure, it is free to look to the center of most anything that *is* happening. And by covering 100 years of poetry, *The Open Door* offers an ample record of such observation.

Another early modernist landmark included here is Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." *Poetry* published that poem in 1915, and its unique power was felt immediately. Pound and Eliot, plus the other modernists included here, amount to a well-earned crow on *Poetry*'s part, celebrating the large changes that resulted from little-known writers publishing in a little magazine.

Wallace Stevens's early contributions provide other examples of success. When asked by Harriet Monroe for information about himself to be placed in a contributor's note for the publication of "Phases," Stevens wrote in reply, "My biography is, necessarily, very brief; for I have published nothing." In fact, Stevens *had* published before. (And with this exchange in mind, one smiles over the inclusion of the Stevens poem "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," in which the speaker states, *I was the world in which I walked*.)

Then there is Marianne Moore's "No Swan So Fine," in which Moore says,

No swan
. . . so fine
as the chintz china one with fawn-brown eyes and toothed gold
collar on to show whose bird it was.

William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot (ca. 1925)

Lodged in the Louis Fifteenth
candelabrum-tree . . .
it perches . . .
. . . at ease and tall. The king is dead.

The spareness of language and the clarity of eye evident in Moore's poem supplants what the modernists considered to have been 19th-century windiness. Starkness and clarity became benchmarks for generations to follow, and examples of it have been published regularly in the pages of *Poetry*.

Not all modernist poetry is spare, however, so one wonders why Stevens's "Sunday Morning," first published in *Poetry*, and a high point in modernism, is missing—unless the editors did not want to tangle with second-guessing Harriet Monroe's insistence that Stevens shorten the poem. (He did so for Monroe's periodical, but restored the poem for its inclusion in *Harmonium*.)

"I see no objection to cutting down," Stevens wrote Monroe. But, using language that resonates with another great Stevens poem, "The Idea of Order at Key West," he did require a certain order for the stanzas, saying, "The order is necessary to the idea." As Pound's early and late versions of "Metro" suggest, and as Stevens had in mind when he wrote Harriet Monroe, ideas that gave order were foremost to the modernist enterprise.

There are other poets here who provide great moments—Auden and "The Shield of Achilles," for example, or William Butler Yeats and his late poem "The Fisherman." But perhaps the most interesting poems are ones that are not so well known. "Look" by Laura Kasischke has a jammed-prose appearance and a fierceness of account that makes it a high-speed chase through a domestic odyssey of near-Biblical violence.

The poem opens, *Look! I bear into this room a platter piled high with the rage my / mother felt toward my father!*

And it concludes:

God punched a hole in the drywall on earth and pulled
out of that darkness another god. She—
just kept her thoughts to herself. She just—
followed him around the house, and every time he turned a light on,
she turned it off.

Or there is Craig Arnold's "Meditation on a Grapefruit," which finds that, in an early morning's ritual over a grapefruit in the kitchen—*when all is possible / before the agitations of the day*—one encounters

a pause a little emptiness
each year harder to live within
each year harder to live without.

GETTY IMAGES

One distinguishing characteristic of the younger poets is a tendency to rely upon personal experience. Although Auden and other moderns can be quite personal, the focus found in the poems by the younger Kasischke and Arnold, for instance, is different in degree. Some of this was initiated by the modernists' first offspring, the poets of Randall Jarrell's generation and those somewhat younger: Robert Lowell, who is not included in this anthology; John Berryman, who is included; W.D. Snodgrass, who is not; Sylvia Plath, who is. It should be added that Auden played a significant role in Jarrell's thinking, as Jarrell's essay on Auden, "Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry," makes clear. But a perspective which, at first, was mostly unique to Jarrell has become general, and, if anything, focused at an even closer range, making Jarrell a pivotal figure for what has followed.

Jarrell's poem "Protocols," which is about Birkenau, is placed in the consciousness of a child: *They had water in a pipe—like rain, but hot*, the child tells us. Then, in a voice from the dream-like state in which the child has been for part of the time, we are told, *The water there is deeper than the world / And I was tired and fell in in my sleep / And the water drank me. That is what I think.*

The poem ends by fusing two levels of consciousness (dreamlike and sentient) in order to state one fact:

> *And that is how you die.* And that is how you die.

The alternation between italics and roman type is just the sort of physical tinkering modernists like Pound and Eliot, or H.D. and cummings, would employ. But in Jarrell's poem, the scale of drama—the Holocaust—has been condensed to a child's helplessness. That shift reflects an increased reliance upon a personal perspective for a poem's authority. One reason poets writing after World War II have given experience an increased emphasis has been their increased doubt about the reliability of reason, language, the tradition, and history. While the experiments have continued, therefore, some of the expectations have contracted.

On the other hand, here is a poem that, despite the author's displacement during World War II, is personal in focus yet farsighted in expectation: Lisel Mueller's "In the Thriving Season" begins,

> *Now as she catches fistfuls of sun*
> *riding down dust and air to her crib,*
> *my first child in her first spring*
> *stretches bare hands back to your darkness*

Harriet Monroe (ca. 1885)

The poem ends, *Now in the thriving season of love / when the bud relents into flower / . . . / love grows by what it remembers of love*.

In a darker vein of family recollection, here is Anne Stevenson's "Inheriting My Grandmother's Nightmare":

> *Consider the adhesiveness of things*
> *to the ghosts that prized them,*
> *the "olden days" of birthday spoons*
> *and silver napkin rings.*

And Belle Randall's "A Child's Garden of Gods," part of which reads,

> *The summer that my mother fell*
> *Into the hole that was herself,*
> *We children sat like china dolls*
> *Waiting mutely on a shelf*
> *For the horror to be done. . . .*
>
> *When autumn came, like birds on wire,*
> *Tilting forward in our rows,*
> *We waited for our father to*
> *Rise from his oriental pose*
> *And save the fallen lady.*

Belle Randall and the others are to be admired for the control they maintain over complex situations. Much of that control is the result of such modernist virtues as spareness in description and statement. Randall's "china dolls" and "birds on wire" are good examples.

The focus on children reminds one of Randall Jarrell again, in such poems as "Protocols," "A Sick Child," "Moving," "The Lost Children," and "Mother, Said the Child." The concision Mueller, Stevenson, and Randall display suggests modern control, but their subject matter involves vulnerability. There is a degree of understatement here worthy of the moderns, but it comes with an emphasis on things personal.

Then there are more recent, and perhaps more distilled, versions of the personal. A.E. Stallings puts matters this way: *To leave the city / Always takes a quarrel. . . . But if instead / Of turning back, we drive into the day, / We forget the things we didn't say*. Her poem "On Visiting a Borrowed Country House in Arcadia" ends:

> *Call it Nature if you will,*
> *Though everything that is is natural—*
> *The lignite-bearing earth, the factory,*
> *A darkness taller than the sky—*
> *This out-of-doors that wins us our release*
> *And temporary peace—*
> *Not because it is pristine or pretty,*
> *But because it has no pity or self-pity.*

This last line exemplifies another way modernist objectivity persists in what otherwise are the mostly quieter and more personal realizations of those poets who have followed the modernists.

The Open Door gives good representation to several generations of poets. It allows an insightful read of poetry's barometric pressure over the last century, and it reminds us what a large role a small beginning (such as a little magazine) can play in a culture in which poetry may "make nothing happen," but it makes sense. ♦

B&A

Eminent Precursors

Distinguished groups in Bloomsbury before there was a Bloomsbury Group. **BY EDWARD SHORT**

Victorian Bloomsbury
by Rosemary Ashton
Yale, 400 pp., $40

Looking back on 19th-century England, Lytton Strachey saw what he called the "Glass Case Age," taking particular exception to Victorian intellectuals.

> Their refusal to face any fundamental question fairly—either about people or God—looks at first sight like cowardice; but I believe it was simply the result of an innate incapacity for penetration—for getting either out of themselves or into anything or anybody else. They were enclosed in glass.

Here, as elsewhere, Strachey's laborious sarcasm distorts more than it illuminates. Still, he does confirm the derision with which the Bloomsbury set regarded the age that preceded their own. In *Victorian Bloomsbury*, the intellectual historian and professor of English at University College London Rosemary Ashton revisits the district in which so much of Victorian rationalism flourished to uncover a number of hitherto neglected aspects of University College in Gower Street, the British Museum in Great Russell Street, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in Percy Street, University Hall in Gordon Square, and Bedford College in Bedford Square. Anyone interested in 19th-century intellectual history, or the history of London, will find this book not only a useful corrective to Strachey's flippant distortions, but a fascinating study in its own right.

The roots of the rationalism to which Bloomsbury continues to cater can be traced back to the Protestant reformers, whose repudiation of authority and sanction of private judgment culminated in Henry VIII's break with the church of Rome and continued under different guises during the protectorship of Oliver Cromwell, despite the persistence of a strenuously high-church Anglican theology. In the 18th century, David Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment waged a powerful counterattack against this theology, which would give new life to rationalism and the reform movements it inspired in the 19th century. The greatest of these, the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, provided the University of London with its founding principles.

Sir Antonio Panizzi in 'Vanity Fair' (1874)

One of the most amusing of Ashton's illustrations is of the clothed skeleton of Bentham, which one of his executors gave to University College in 1850. Bentham was a firm believer in what he called "auto-icons," and even recommended that the landed gentry consider adopting them for their estates: "If a country gentleman had rows of trees leading to his dwelling, the Auto-Icons of his family might alternate with the trees." In the wooden box enclosing his own auto-icon (which you can still see in the South Cloisters of the college), the personification of rationalist reform looks out at the visitor with imperturbable self-satisfaction, eternally ready to remake the world in accordance with utilitarian principles.

Ashton is particularly good in dealing with the different personalities that drove forward the reformist agenda. One of the most unbiddable was Francis Newman, the brother of the future cardinal, who taught at the Ladies' College (later, Bedford College) for a time before being pressured to resign because of his Unitarian views. After being shown the door, he advised his former employers that they should either decide on a creed and demand that their teachers adhere to it, or ignore creeds altogether; otherwise, their attempts to hire suitable teachers would be impossible.

> Imagine such an Advertisement as this: "Wanted, a Professor of Physical Geography . . . who must not be a Deist, nor a Puseyite, nor a Unitarian, nor a Roman Catholic. A liberal Churchman or Quaker will be acceptable, if not too deep in Rationalism."

Another highly talented man who ran afoul of the creedal sensitivities of his fellow reformers was Frederick Denison Maurice, the Christian socialist and theologian who was instrumental in forming the Working Men's College in Red Lion Square with such other Christian socialists as Charles Kingsley, Thomas Hughes, and John Ludlow. Maurice was revered by most of his confreres—Kingsley, Hughes, and the publisher Daniel Macmillan all named their sons Maurice after him—but many found him unintelligible, including Matthew Arnold, who once quipped that Maurice "passed his

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Edward Short is the author of Newman and His Contemporaries *and the forthcoming* Newman and His Family.

life beating about the bush with deep emotion and never starting the hare." Another wag observed that listening to Maurice was like trying to eat pea soup with a fork. After publishing a book of theological essays in 1853 setting out his unorthodox Anglicanism, Maurice was dismissed from the theology chair of King's College, London—though he always retained the respect and affection of the indefatigable reformer Octavia Hill.

Bedford Square, Bloomsbury

Then, again, Ashton paints a vivid picture of Antonio Panizzi, an impecunious political exile from Modena who first gained a position teaching Italian at University College before rising to become the head librarian of the British Museum. Ashton relates the long-standing quarrel that Panizzi had with Thomas Carlyle, which began when the irascible historian asked the proud librarian to furnish him with "a quiet place to study … in your Establishment" while he was researching his life of Frederick the Great.

Panizzi's response was unyielding:

> Our reading-rooms of course are not as quiet and as snug as a *private* study; ours is a *public* place; no public convenience can equal a private carriage: even in a first class carriage you must occasionally put up with squalling babies and be deprived of the pleasure of smoking your cigar when most inclined to enjoy it.

This, as Ashton relates, was the exchange that inspired Panizzi to propose what would become the Round Reading Room. "Though others had already suggested ways of making use of the redundant inner courtyard of the new Museum building," she writes, "Panizzi's idea was enthusiastically taken up by the architect Sydney Smirke, and in January 1854 the Treasury approved his detailed plans and allotted £86,000 for the Reading Room's construction."

The presiding genius of the book, however, is Henry Brougham (1778-1868), the wily Scottish lawyer and politician who had a finger in nearly every reformist pie and helped to found not only University College but the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and the *Edinburgh Review*. Ashton quotes from a profile of Brougham in the Tory *Morning Post* that perfectly captures the affectionate distrust with which his contemporaries viewed the orator:

> He carries not in his satchel the tomes of antiquated philosophy, nor the venerable volumes of Revelation; they are to him as dust thrown into the eyes of reason, and as cobwebs that entangle the poor insect in its flight after truth. He is the *Solomon* of science—the master of mechanical systems—the chemist of nature refining human virtues from the dregs of corruption. … He has founded his University—he has established his Institutes—he is heard in the Senate, and at meetings for mutual instruction. … The day is at hand when he shall stand forth the Great Captain of the Age, and at the head of his legions begin the march of intellect.

Ashton treats this impresario of rationalist reform with the critical sympathy he deserves (he still lacks a proper biography)—though she omits to call her readers' attention to John Henry Newman's satirical series of letters to the *Times*, which he later published as *The Tamworth Reading Room* (1841). In these letters, the leader of the Oxford Movement took Brougham to task for setting up a library from which all theology would be excluded, and insisted on the moral benefits of knowledge.

> When Cicero was outwitted by Cæsar, he solaced himself with Plato; when he lost his daughter, he wrote a treatise on consolation. Such, too, was the philosophy of that Lydian city, mentioned by the historian, who in a famine played at dice to stay their stomachs. And such is the rule of life advocated by Lord Brougham. … It does not require many words, then, to determine, that taking human nature as it is actually found, and assuming that there is an art of life, to say that it consists, or in any essential manner is placed, in the cultivation of knowledge—that the mind is changed by a discovery, or saved by a diversion, or amused into immortality—that grief, anger, cowardice, self-conceit, pride, or passion, can be subdued by an examination of shells or grasses, or inhaling of gasses, or a chipping of rocks, or observing the barometer, or calculating the longitude, is the veriest of pretence which sophist or mountebank ever professed to a gaping auditory. If virtue be a mastery over the mind, if its end be action, if its perfection be inward order, harmony, and peace, we must seek it in graver and holier places than libraries and reading rooms.

That A.C. Grayling, former professor of philosophy at Birkbeck College, has recently established what he is calling the New College of the Humanities along Brougham's exclusively secular lines demonstrates the extent to which age-old sophistry continues to beguile our own rationalists. One of the first to respond to Grayling's call for teachers was the evangelical atheist Richard Dawkins.

With such talent in tow, the march-of-intellect proceeds apace. ♦

RUSS LONDON

B&A

Monochrome Picasso

Weaving the Master's spell without color.

BY DANIEL GOODMAN

'The Maids of Honor' (1957)

ESTATE OF PABLO PICASSO / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY, NEW YORK / GASSULL FOTOGRAFIA

It may be hard to believe that one of the more underrated New York art exhibits of recent times is a current Picasso show at the Guggenheim, but such is the case. "Picasso Black and White" is not only one of the best Picasso exhibitions to visit New York; it is one of the better exhibitions of any artist to visit New York in the past few years.

Some may be hesitant to see yet another Picasso show, but this installation—in New York's most distinctive museum—is unique in its own right. An unprecedented gathering of 118 black-and-white works of art reveals that there is terra incognita even in the realm of Picasso exhibitions. This is the first American exhibition solely devoted to Picasso's black-and-white artwork, and many of the pieces have never before been exhibited in the United States.

Picasso Black and White
Guggenheim Museum
New York
Through Jan. 23, 2013

As expected in an installation of this scale, there are works on loan from across the world. The high point may be a loan from Barcelona's Museu Picasso, *The Maids of Honor* (1957), one of the 44 variations Picasso painted of Velázquez's masterpiece, *Las meninas* (ca. 1656). Other highlights include more sobering works, such as his studies for *Guernica* (1937), his reworking of classical themes in *Rape of the Sabines* (1962), and the fascinating *Mother with Dead Child II* (1937).

Black and white was an important subset of Picasso's body of work, and visitors will understand why his daughter Maya believes that his black-and-white works express his true spirit. The show illustrates that there is nothing milquetoast about the medium: A spare palette and simple, sparse drawings can be just as evocative as highly textured, elaborately colored works. In fact, black and white can be more interesting than color (something cinephiles have long noted).

Although the exhibition showcases only the artist's black-and-white works, it grants visitors a panoptic view of Picasso's diverse repertory. The variegated sampling of Picasso's work also imparts a sense of the variety of styles that engaged him, from the classical and serene to the jarring and phantasmagoric, with the more recognizably cubist works in between. The motifs that resonate through all of his work—embracing couples, guitars, the recumbent female nude—are just as present here as in his color pieces. Other subjects that he was fond of depicting, such as his various inamoratas, can be glimpsed as well. The installation also displays works that presage both the primitive Iberian-African style of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) and the bleak, tragic style of *Guernica*.

As usual with Picasso, there are paintings which you would never guess were Picassos—this is especially the case with works from his classical phase. Only rarely do we see cubism; many of this exhibit's paintings are from Picasso's Blue and Rose periods, when much of his work was monochromatic. We also see the maestro riffing on contemporary artists such as Gustav Klimt and Wassily Kandinsky. Paintings of embracing couples resemble cruder forms of Klimt's *The Kiss* (1908), in which the couple's kiss is not mutual (the male is kissing, while the immobile female is unresponsive).

"Picasso Black and White" not only showcases Picasso's versatility and impressive range, it gives us a glimpse into his ceaseless work ethic as well. In contrast to some other 20th-century greats (James Joyce comes to mind), Picasso escaped the specter of dissipation. His extraordinary vitality

Daniel Goodman is a lawyer and rabbinical student in New York.

drove him to paint into his twilight years. Working until his death at the age of 91, he never experienced an artistic dotage. "I have less and less time and more and more to say," he observed in his old age. His stupendous output of paintings, sculptures, and drawings amounts to a kind of visual graphomania: Picasso produced anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000 works during his lifetime, many of which have had an incalculable influence upon modern art.

Of course, Pablo Picasso isn't sacrosanct. But this reminder of his remarkable artistic fecundity—even in overlooked genres such as black-and-white painting—suggests that Picasso exhibitions may be just as inexhaustible as the artist himself. ♦

B&A

Goodbye, Columbus

A brief 'au revoir' to the Battleground State.

BY JOE QUEENAN

I think I speak for many Americans when I say how much I am going to miss talking about the great state of Ohio for six to eight hours a day now that the 2012 presidential election is over.

As was true in 2004, 2008, and almost every other year, the election ultimately came down to who won the Buckeye State. Even after various media outlets declared President Obama the winner in Ohio, Mitt Romney refused to throw in the towel, delaying his concession speech until after midnight. It was as if he could not believe that the Buckeye State had let him down. When was the last time people in the Buckeye State let *anybody* down?

The whole thing was engrossing, riveting. I enjoyed every microsecond of the 24/7 speculation about the Ohio mindset over the past six months—reveling in every chart, every graph, every robo-poll, every conspiracy theory about rigged voting machines and vote-counting software secretly designed by Glenn Beck and Ann Coulter. There is literally nothing I enjoy more than hearing about Ohio and the Electoral College, Ohio and the popular vote, Ohio and the auto industry bailout. I especially love the stuff about the vital

importance of getting out the vote in Cuyahoga County.

I love that state. Love it. And I particularly love Cuyahoga County. "Ohio," by the way, derives from the Iroquois word for "big river." But most of you know that. Home to George Armstrong Custer, Toni Morrison, Annie Oakley, Doris Day, Halle Berry, the lead singer from the Pretenders, and the last American president to be born in a log cabin (James Garfield), the great state of Ohio has tradition in spades. That's why we love it so. That's why you can't get elected president without winning Ohio. Whither goeth Ohio, goeth the nation.

But now the circus has left town, and Ohioans, as usual, have been ditched and left to their own devices. This comes at a bad time: LeBron James up and left Cleveland two years ago, then won a title in Miami. That rankled. The Cincinnati Reds blew a 2-0 lead over the San Francisco Giants in the division series and then watched them go on to win the World Series. Kerpowee. The beloved Ohio State is ineligible for postseason play because of assorted infractions. Darn, darn, darn. The Columbus Blue Jackets can bring no joy to residents of the Greater Columbus area because they are horrible, and their league is out on strike, and no one even knows that they exist. And the Cleveland Browns, Cleveland Indians, and Cincinnati Bengals all stink. The only consolation here is that the Browns, the Indians, and the Bengals *always* stink.

There is more bad news. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is running out of bands to induct; this year's nominees include The Meters and Kraftwerk. Sorry, guys, it's the Rock and Roll Hall of *Fame*. They are even running out of songwriters to induct. This year's nominees include Randy Newman, author of "Burn On," a 1972 song ridiculing the city of Cleveland. It's like New York giving Gerald Ford its Man of the Year award.

Neil Armstrong just died. So did Phyllis Diller. Nobody likes George Armstrong Custer anymore.

I love the great state of Ohio. It has the best sports fans in America. It has the most beautiful concert hall in the country. It has museums, universities, and orchestras that are the envy of the world. And the people are just the nicest folks anywhere.

That's why I hate the way it gets shafted every four years. Every four years, the comeliest damsels and sprightliest beaux beat a path to its door, preening and pirouetting, peddling their tacky wares. That courting period lasts exactly nine months. Then Ohioans wake up on the first Wednesday in November and, just like four years ago, it's *what have you done for me lately, you hapless rubes?*

I don't think this is fair. Because "Ohio" is not just the Iroquois word for "big river." It is the English word for "Rust Belt state that keeps on giving." We're lucky to have it. All that we are we owe to O-H-I-O.

Just ask Mitt Romney. ♦

Joe Queenan is the author, most recently, of One for the Books.

B&A

A Lincoln Portrait

The Great Emancipator transcends the material, as usual. BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Almost everything about *Lincoln* is good—and, in many aspects, far better than good—save its most notable element. Steven Spielberg is the most successful, wealthiest, and most garlanded motion-picture director in the history of cinema, and he can make any film he wants. Only Spielberg could have gotten a lavish biographical portrait of Abraham Lincoln produced for the big screen in the first place. Yet his staging of the proceedings is—there is no other word for it—lame. The pacing and framing and handling of the material are so tedious, flat, and stiff that they do real damage to what is otherwise one of the best and most serious American movies in years.

Lincoln
Directed by Steven Spielberg

With regard to hiring others, Spielberg did a masterful job. The settings and costuming and makeup are wondrous and exacting. Even the beards are spectacular—which is no small feat, as anyone who spent hours being distracted by the fake hair adorning the faces of Jeff Daniels and Tom Berenger in Ronald F. Maxwell's comparable Civil War pageant *Gettysburg* can attest.

Spielberg engaged Tony Kushner to write the screenplay, an odd choice given Kushner's obsession with tiny distinctions in postwar left-wing ideology and hysterically Manichean rendering of present-day American political differences. But what emerged from Kushner's pen is an uncommonly elegant and highly sophisticated screenplay. *Lincoln* is a drawing-room political drama about the machinations in Washington in late 1864 and early 1865 that attended Lincoln's insistence on a vote in the House of Representatives to ratify the 13th Amendment. Even though the result is a foregone conclusion, Kushner manages to create fascinating conflicts and no small amount of tension in the maneuvering.

By focusing on a period of a few months as the war is ending, Kushner also gives us the first cinematic Lincoln in full maturity, having earned the unbounded affection of the American people in his reelection bid, readying what would prove to be the greatest piece of oratory in the English language, and thinking through the political and social ramifications of the reconstruction that would follow the war he was about to win at such terrible cost.

Spielberg also cast the movie perfectly, from the extras to Daniel Day-Lewis, who gives a performance so entirely transcendent that no adjectives of praise could possibly do it justice. Much has already been made of Day-Lewis's inspired rendering of Lincoln's tenor voice and refined backwoods accent; what has been little noted is how that unexpected voice causes the listener to *hear* Lincoln as he speaks, rather than getting lost in the uncanny Mathew Brady-ization of Day-Lewis's face.

Even more surprising is the evidence that Day-Lewis, surely with the agreement of Kushner and Spielberg, chose to disdain the cheap and anachronistic theorizing about Lincoln's clinical depression, or his torments as a supposedly closeted gay man. Like most people who have spent time in Lincoln's historical company—save perverse intellectual miscreants like Edmund Wilson or philosophical neo-Confederates—these three men came away lost in admiration for one of history's truly providential figures. They give full airing to his wit, his cleverness, his erudition, his kind manner, his immense patience, and his supernatural genius with words.

Day-Lewis's own acting clinic is enhanced by the performers surrounding him, who show both the virtues of highly contained underplaying (David Strathairn, masterful as William Seward) and wildly entertaining scenery-chewing (Tommy Lee Jones as the abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens and James Spader as the political fixer W.N. Bilbo).

And yet, with all this bounty, Spielberg the director defaults to the kind of clumsy, wooden, overly deliberate approach found in the deadly 15-minute films one sees at history museums. The fluid camerawork and sense of dramatic urgency that Spielberg brought even to the glossy early scenes of *Schindler's List* are entirely absent here. You can almost feel Spielberg's relief when he can fall back on one of his patented schlocky "moments of wonder"—when he aims his camera upward at someone who is doing something noble—though at least, in this movie, he doesn't use a fan to blow their hair backward, maybe because it might harm the fake beards.

So what happened? Spielberg first announced his intention to make a movie about Lincoln a decade ago, with Liam Neeson in the role. A few years later, Doris Kearns Goodwin published her mammoth bestseller *Team of Rivals*. Spielberg optioned it, and its penultimate chapter gave rise to the idea of centering the movie on the passage of the 13th Amendment, which only takes up a handful of pages in the book. The project stopped and started many times, Spielberg has said, before the elements came together.

The point is, Spielberg wanted to make a movie about Lincoln but had no idea what kind of movie to make—and it shows. Kushner gave him a crackling behind-the-scenes melodrama and Daniel Day-Lewis has given him one of the greatest performances ever recorded by a camera. And Spielberg took them and tried to stuff them inside a static diorama. That the movie works at all—and it does, often brilliantly—is a miracle in itself. ♦

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

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