the weekly Standard

THE HAGEL FIASCO
STEPHEN F. HAYES • WILLIAM KRISTOL

$4.95

FEBRUARY 11, 2013

ABANDON 'THE CHILDREN'

We need a better argument against federal debt

BY MEGHAN CLYNE

Contents

February 11, 2013 • Volume 18, Number 21

COVER BY JACK DAVIS

Faster and Furiouser: The Sequel

A store calling itself Fearless Distributing opened early last year on an out-of-the-way street in Milwaukee's Riverwest neighborhood, offering designer clothes, athletic shoes, jewelry and drug paraphernalia," begins an investigative report by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* on the latest Keystone Kops operation carried out by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). As you might expect from the agency that carried out the disastrous "Fast and Furious" gunrunning program along the Mexican border, the store was part of an elaborate sting aimed at getting guns off the streets. The agency arrested some 30 people on low-level criminal charges in conjunction with the operation, but in at least three cases the ATF seems to have identified the wrong suspect. In one case, they charged a man who was in prison during the time he was alleged to have been selling drugs to them. Not only that, he was in prison as a result of a prior arrest made by, yes, the ATF.

The ATF was paying such high prices for guns that at least one defendant, Courvoisie Bryant, was buying new guns at a nearby sporting goods store and selling them back to the ATF at a tidy profit. During the operation, three guns were stolen out of the back of an ATF SUV parked nearby—"a Smith & Wesson 9mm handgun, a Sig Sauer .40-caliber pistol and an M-4 .223-caliber fully automatic rifle." (Ammunition and an ATF radio were also stolen.) The very next day, Marquise Jones, 19, sold the Sig Sauer handgun back to the ATF for $1,400. Jones wasn't arrested for another two months, and, perhaps to save face, none of the charges against him are related to the vehicle break-in. He's merely charged with possession of a stolen handgun. Meanwhile, the other handgun and a fully automatic rifle are still loose on the streets of Milwaukee.

Finally this past October, four men were seen breaking into Fearless Distributing, walking away with $35,000 in taxpayer-purchased goods. The landlord, David Salkin, claims the ATF owes him $15,000 in lost rent, damage from the burglary and an overflowing toilet, and for exceeding their utility allotment. But the ATF agent who signed the lease gave him a fake name and address. After Salkin contacted the ATF to get them to pay up, ATF attorney Patricia Cangemi sent him an email saying, "If you continue to contact the Agents after being so advised your contacts may be construed as harassment under the law. Threats or harassment of a Federal Agent is of grave concern."

The Scrapbook has low expectations for the ATF but was nonetheless a bit taken aback by this comment from Michael Bouchard, former assistant director for field operations for the agency. "I have never heard of those kinds of problems in an operation," he told the *Journal Sentinel*. The Scrapbook wishes Bouchard a speedy recovery from the coma he must have been in for the last few years, during which it came to light that the ATF gave Mexican criminal gangs thousands of weapons as part of the botched Fast and Furious operation (named after a 2001 movie in which an undercover cop attempts to infiltrate a criminal ring).

But you know what they say—incompetent law enforcement agents who think they're living out a bad action flick are doomed to repeat themselves. Notes the *Journal Sentinel*, "The operation created a Facebook page and chose a striking logo—a skull with a slew of guns and knives fanned out behind—ripped off from a recent Sylvester Stallone movie, 'The Expendables.'"

If they keep it up, Congress might decide *The Expendables* is a fitting name for the ATF. ♦

The Bugle Boy Is Blowin' Taps

If anyone doubts that fame can be fleeting, The Scrapbook recommends the January 31 edition of the *New York Times* where, on page A17, may be found an obituary for Patty Andrews, the last surviving Andrews Sister of musical fame, who died in Los Angeles, two weeks shy of her 95th birthday.

To be sure, the Andrews Sisters broke up a half-century ago, and a majority of their fans (The Scrapbook would guess) preceded Patty Andrews in death. But the Sisters did sell 75 million records in their day, dominated the pop music charts for more than a decade, and in their distinctive three-part harmony, introduced any number of huge hits—"Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy (of Company B)," "Rum & Coca-Cola," "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree"—that define the popular music of the World War II era.

For that reason, above all, The Scrapbook was a little surprised to note that the end of Tina Fey's *30 Rock* was noted on the front page of the *Times*, but that Patty Andrews's death was not—nor was it mentioned on the page-two "Inside the Times" feature, which highlighted stories about the fashion world's fear of the flu and a thrifty Chicagoan who sublets two apartments while sleeping in a closet.

The Scrapbook is a little disheartened as well. The Andrews Sisters were not necessarily the best pop vocal trio of all time—indeed, they patterned their distinctive style on the pioneering, jazz-oriented Boswell Sisters—and other singers of the day (Bing Crosby, for instance) sold more records. But the Andrews Sisters are best remembered for their service during World War II, entertaining troops all over the globe, at a time when show business was almost wholly mobilized in the struggle against the Axis.

It's been a while since anything like that has happened. During the Vietnam war, apart from Bob Hope, you could count the number of performers who entertained the troops on one hand. And things only marginally improved in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the Second World War, however, it would have been tough to find any actor, singer, dancer, or comedian who didn't do his part—and the war produced its own set of stars (Jo Stafford, Glenn Miller, Martha Raye, Bob Hope) who found particular favor with the men in uniform.

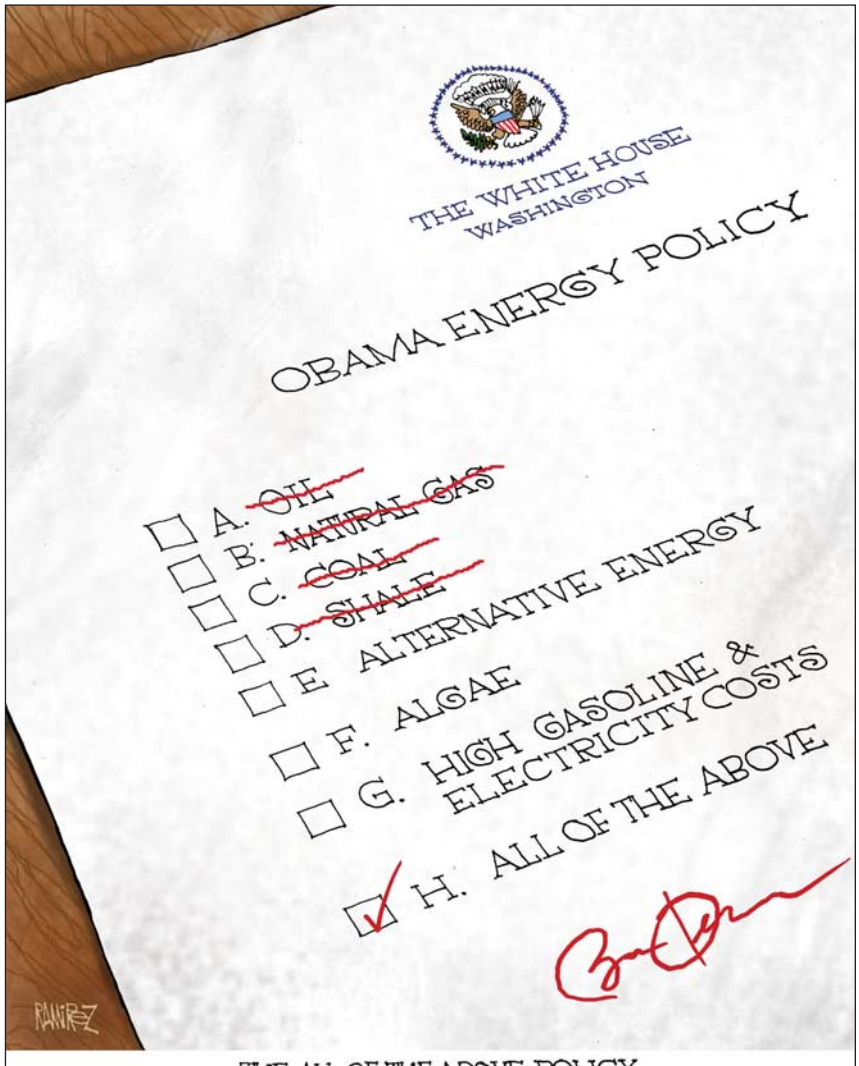
For them, Patty Andrews and her sisters were first among equals. Dressed in their faux uniforms, selling war bonds, touring tirelessly in every major theater of war, the Andrews Sisters' syncopated sound and nimble lyrics reminded the troops of the lives they had left behind—and, of course, why they were fighting. ♦

Social Science News You Can Use

There's an important article in the latest *American Sociological Review* which The Scrapbook passes along in the interest of disseminating scientific knowledge. What you do with that knowledge is your own business. The paper is titled, "Egalitarianism, Housework, and Sexual Frequency in Marriage." Here is the abstract:

> Changes in the nature of marriage have spurred a debate about the consequences of shifts to more egalitarian relationships, and media interest in the debate has crystallized around claims that men who participate in housework get more sex. However, little systematic or representative research supports the claim that women, in essence, exchange sex for men's participation in housework. Although research and theory support the expectation that egalitarian marriages are higher quality, other studies underscore the ongoing importance of traditional gender behavior and gender display in marriage. Using data from Wave II of the National Survey of Families and Households, this study investigates the links between men's participation in core (traditionally female) and non-core (traditionally male) household tasks and sexual frequency. Results show that both husbands and wives in couples with more traditional housework arrangements report higher sexual frequency, suggesting the importance of gender display rather than marital exchange for sex between heterosexual married partners.

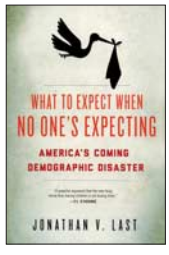
The Scrapbook is reminded of the old line, often attributed to Henry Kissinger: "No one will ever win the battle of the sexes. Too much fraternizing with the enemy." ♦



THE ALL OF THE ABOVE POLICY

Required Reading

The Scrapbook is delighted to announce that our colleague Jonathan V. Last's brilliant essay, "America's One-Child Policy," which appeared in these pages two-and-a-half years ago, has grown into an even more brilliant new book, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting: America's Coming Demographic Disaster*.



Except for the misanthropes out there, the news Jonathan reports is grim (our population is going to be shrinking and aging, unless present trends are reversed). But the book is superbly written and argued, and a consistent pleasure to read. Buy one for yourself and another for each of your 1.93 (on average) children. ♦

IRS Update

The Scrapbook had no idea legal briefs and decisions could provide as many laugh-out-loud moments as a P.G. Wodehouse novel. But a welcome update to our item last week on a federal court's ruling that the IRS's unprecedented scheme to license independent tax preparers was "an invalid regulatory regime" did just that.

"This is an unlawful power grab that exceeds the authority granted to the IRS by Congress," is how the Institute for Justice's Dan Alban, lead attorney on the case against the agency, put it—and the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia agreed. The IRS submitted a desperate motion to stay Judge James Boasberg's injunction ending the program. Last week, the court denied it.

Judge Boasberg's latest decision in *Loving* v. *IRS* is refreshingly commonsensical—"why should tax-return preparers continue to pay into a system the Court has found unlawful?"—but the IRS's final brief provides the laughs. Government lawyers whine, "Rather than address the merits . . . the Plaintiffs spent 40 pages attacking the Service, the government, and undersigned counsel." And then they complain that IJ was "zealous" in . . . attacking the merits of the IRS's argument.

It's hard to choose just one IRS knee-slapper, but here goes. The agency insists IJ's "suggestion that the return preparer program is the product of a tainted lobbying effort is belied by support for the program from the Taxpayer Advocate, the Electronic Tax Administration Advisory Committee, numerous consumer advocacy groups, and comments from individual practitioners."

The ETAAC is an IRS-administered panel whose members include lawyers and CPAs—who weren't subject to the regulations—and people with connections to H&R Block and Jackson Hewitt, big businesses happy to help the government force the little guys out of the industry. ♦

the weekly Standard
www.weeklystandard.com

William Kristol, *Editor*
Fred Barnes, *Executive Editor*
Richard Starr, *Deputy Editor*
Claudia Anderson, *Managing Editor*
Christopher Caldwell, Andrew Ferguson, Victorino Matus, Lee Smith, *Senior Editors*
Philip Terzian, *Literary Editor*
Stephen F. Hayes, Mark Hemingway, Matt Labash, Jonathan V. Last, *Senior Writers*
Jay Cost, John McCormack, *Staff Writers*
Daniel Halper, *Online Editor*
Kelly Jane Torrance, *Assistant Managing Editor*
Julianne Dudley, *Assistant Editor*
Michael Warren, *Reporter*
Ethan Epstein, Kate Havard, Jim Swift, *Editorial Assistants*
Philip Chalk, *Design Director*
Barbara Kyttle, *Design Assistant*
Carolyn Wimmer, *Executive Assistant*
Max Boot, Joseph Bottum, Tucker Carlson, Matthew Continetti, Noemie Emery, Joseph Epstein, David Frum, David Gelernter, Reuel Marc Gerecht, Michael Goldfarb, Mary Katharine Ham, Brit Hume, Frederick W. Kagan, Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer, Yuval Levin, Tod Lindberg, Robert Messenger, P.J. O'Rourke, John Podhoretz, Irwin M. Stelzer, *Contributing Editors*
Terry Eastland, *Publisher*
Nicholas H.B. Swezey, *Advertising Director*
Catherine Lowe, *Digital Business Director*
Jim Rossi, *Audience Development Director*
Richard Trocchia, *Fulfillment Manager*
T. Barry Davis, Todd A. Miller, *Senior Advertising Managers*
Kathy Schaffhauser, *Finance Director*
Taybor Morris, *Office Manager*
Andrew Kaumeier, *Advertising Operations Manager*

Advertising inquiries: 202-293-4900

The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except the first week in January, third week in April, second week in July, and fourth week in August) at 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington D.C. 20036. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-386-597-4378 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $4.95. Back issues, $4.95 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Say It Ain't So, Lance

Stan Musial, the St. Louis Cardinal who died a few weeks ago, seems to have been one of those great athletes of good character—player-hero, civic monument, example to youth—that sportswriters forever seek but seldom find.

If you're a reader of a certain age you might remember a time when O.J. Simpson—now resident at the Lovelock Correctional Center in Lovelock, Nevada—was universally admired, a nice guy, superior football player, star of movie comedies and TV commercials, blessed with a sense of humor about himself, and winning manner. Not anymore! Now the axe has fallen on Lance Armstrong, professional cyclist and cancer survivor, whose many victories in the Olympics and the Tour de France were won with the help of performance-enhancing drugs.

What really infuriates the mentioning class, however, is not so much Armstrong's misbehavior—which, given the supreme difficulty of the Tour de France, might have prompted a debate about "performance enhancement" in sports—as the fact that he misled the mentioning class for so many years, and with such vehemence, about his drug-taking. Even a session with America's mother-confessor, Oprah, seems not to have abated the anger directed at Armstrong.

To all of this, I say: Serves you right.

There is something almost touching about the public's appetite for translating good athletes into great human beings, as if the qualities that inform their play might somehow influence their behavior. And this passion for hero-worship in the NFL ranks, or the NBA, or in Major League Baseball is especially human since it is so readily contradicted by facts and experience. I have nothing against jocks as a class—I was, if I may say, a better than average hitter, swimmer, and lineman in my youth—but

DAVID GOTHARD

science has yet to find any correlation between character and athletic prowess. We don't expect distinguished painters or famous piano players to be excessively humble or nice to their mothers; we tolerate, in fact, a certain flouting of convention in the wake of genius. Why should it be otherwise for brilliant athletes?

And professional athletes, above others. These are (usually) men whose superlative gifts separated them from their peers at an early age, and who have been told for years how remarkable they are and worth every penny of their multimillion-dollar wages. They are hardly to be blamed if they come to believe it; and since athletic ability has little to do with brainpower or moral judgment, their behavior is not always a pretty sight.

I should, of course, point out at this juncture that there are exceptions to every rule (see Stan Musial, above) and that most great athletes are perfectly good citizens. But to my mind, it is a curious instinct to project onto jocks certain qualities—generosity, humor, moral character, humility—having nothing to do with their ability to play. And it should come as no surprise when disappointment ensues.

This may prove, I suppose, only that I am not quite the fan that others can be. I confess to boredom when the private lives of Olympic athletes become part of the story; if I want pathos and personal drama, I know where to find them. When I was a lad I cut out a color photograph of Harmon Killebrew, the great Washington Senators slugger, from the newspaper and taped it onto the closet door in my bedroom. I was deeply interested in Killebrew's batting average, always thrilled to watch him swing at a pitch, and can still recite the number of home runs he hit (42) in 1959. But I knew almost nothing else about him, apart from the fact that he came from Idaho, and that was enough.

(On Killebrew's behalf I should mention that I met him, decades after his playing days, and had the pleasure of introducing him to my son. He seemed like a nice man, and undoubtedly was; but that was not the reason I approached him.)

In the meantime, Washingtonians are investing their hopes in the rookie Redskins quarterback Robert Griffin III, who is a very good player—or was, until he injured his knee—was a genuine scholar-athlete in college (he graduated from Baylor in three years with a degree in political science), and appears to be an admirable young man. Indeed, I hope he is.

For the moment, however, I reserve judgment, always mindful of the sportswriter's closing words in "Champion," the Ring Lardner story about a boxer, Midge Kelly, whose brutal temperament and sadistic behavior are disguised by the press: "It wouldn't get us anything but abuse to print it. The people don't want to see him knocked. He's champion."

Philip Terzian

the weekly Standard

Deal Breaker

What is it about "compromise" that President Obama doesn't understand? Is it that he and Democrats would have to give up something—perhaps numerous things—to reach an agreement with Republicans? Or is a bipartisan deal unappealing simply because Obama and Democrats would have to share the credit with Republicans?

The issue this time is immigration. And Obama has resumed his familiar role not as compromise-maker but as compromise-wrecker. He spurned bipartisanship on the stimulus and Obamacare and twice raised his demands so high that a grand bargain with Republicans on taxes and spending was impossible, first in 2011, then in 2012.

Now Obama is confronted by a compromise on overhauling the immigration system that's already been reached by eight senators, four Democrats and four Republicans. In a speech last week, Obama said the agreement is "very much in line with the principles I've proposed and campaigned on." Yet he's dissatisfied.

The president wants more. He would tilt the deal in a Democratic direction by putting the 11 million illegal immigrants in this country instantly on a path to American citizenship. Border security? That comes later (if at all). If Obama prevails, the compromise will be shattered and odds on passage of immigration reform reduced to near zero.

That outcome, by the way, would please the zealous bloc of conservatives whose battle cry is "Keep Illegal Immigrants Illegal"—in other words, maintain the unstable status quo, or worse. And it would squander a rare opportunity to break the impasse on immigration with a deal that treats illegals fairly and decently and, better still, is good for America.

The Senate agreement is a true compromise. Both sides gave up a lot, and, should it pass in some form or other, neither will be able to claim exclusive victory. It's win-win, which is what a compromise is supposed to be.

The eight senators last week issued a set of principles for rewriting immigration laws, and a bill is expected in March. The aim is to pass the legislation by the August recess. The House would take up the immigration issue in the fall.

The compromise would do three important things. First, illegal immigrants would be given legal status immediately. They wouldn't be eligible for federal benefits, but they wouldn't be deported either. Second, they would gain green cards and be allowed to apply for citizenship in 8 to 12 years—after a special commission that includes state and local officials has certified America's southern border as secure. And third, the newly legalized would go to the end of the immigration line (shortened by cleaning out its backlog).

It's a long and tedious process. But the legislation won't be drafted by a few senators in secret meetings, then whisked directly to the floor. That's the way Senate majority leader Harry Reid normally operates. This time, so-called regular order will be followed—hearings, mark-ups, and debates, a Senate-House conference, a bill on the president's desk.

What's surprising is the breadth of the concessions that produced the compromise. The four Democrats—Bob Menendez (New Jersey), Michael Bennet (Colorado), Richard Durbin (Illinois), and Charles Schumer (New York)—yielded on a guest worker program, which Democrats usually oppose. They accepted a "trigger," based on quantifiable improvements in border security, to clear the path to citizenship. They yielded on federal benefits, Obamacare included, which the new residents won't get. And they agreed to increase the number of highly skilled and educated workers given green cards. All that, plus billions more to enhance border security.

Republicans had to accept, finally, that the 11 million could become citizens despite having broken the law upon entering the country. True, it's a two-step process that may take 15 years or so, but it arrives at the same place simple "amnesty" would. Even before that, the "undocumented workers" would be legal residents of the United States. Republicans also accepted the Dream Act, which gives special status to immigrants brought here as children.

The four Republicans—Marco Rubio (Florida), Lindsey Graham (South Carolina), and John McCain and Jeff Flake (both Arizona)—are veterans of immigration reform struggles. They knew what they were doing. Rubio told Rush Limbaugh that if the insistence on securing the border were removed, he'd vote against the bill.

As for Obama, he had a choice. "He can either decide that he wants to be part of the solution or he can decide he wants to be part of a political issue and try to trigger a bidding war," Rubio said. The next day, Obama took the political tack.

It won't lead to success. Obama would create a freeway to citizenship from day one. That's a poison pill for Republicans. Scrapping the guest worker program would also alienate Republicans, the business community, and those conservatives who regard it correctly as an alternative to illegal border-crossing.

Obama didn't talk about guest workers in his speech. But Richard Trumka, the head of the AFL-CIO, was sitting in front of him in Las Vegas when he spoke. Organized labor

has long opposed the program and was instrumental in killing it in the 1960s.

The president's motives are suspicious. In 2007, he backed a bipartisan bill, while voting for amendments certain to scare off Republicans. One was to kill the guest worker provision after five years. It passed by one vote. It wasn't the only reason the bill ultimately died, but it was a factor.

Now Obama is demanding immigration reform be speeded up or he'll unleash his own proposal. Coming from a president who promised to tackle immigration in his first year, then waited until after his reelection, this requires political moxie. He has plenty of that. Being accused of hypocrisy won't faze him either.

Should Congress balk at his timetable, Obama is no doubt ready to blame Republicans. And he'll blame them if Democrats adopt his recommendations, bipartisanship vanishes, and the legislation collapses. He may even blame Republicans if the bipartisan compromise becomes law. A better bill was available, he'll argue, and Republicans blocked it.

Republicans needn't worry. Nor should they expect Hispanic voters to swoon over their part in reforming immigration. Credit will come, over time, from having done the right thing for the right reason. Eleven million immigrants, having come to America to decide their own destiny in life, will recognize who and what made it possible.

—Fred Barnes

Any Profiles in Courage?

On October 3, 2005, President George W. Bush announced his intention to nominate his White House counsel, Harriet Miers, to succeed Sandra Day O'Connor as an associate justice of the Supreme Court. On October 27, after vigorous statements of opposition from conservatives and quiet expressions of dismay from Republican senators, Miers withdrew her nomination.

Conservatives and Republicans had no grudge against Harriet Miers. They simply thought she wasn't a first-rate candidate. They were confident that Bush, the Court, and the country could do better. They were right. President Bush then nominated Samuel Alito for the position. Alito was confirmed by the Senate, and now serves with great distinction on the Court.

We may, as George Orwell observed, "have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men." But there isn't an intelligent liberal, or for that matter a sentient one, who doesn't know, after last week's confirmation hearing, that Chuck Hagel isn't a first-rate candidate for secretary of defense. He isn't even a second-rate candidate. Has there ever been a more embarrassing confirmation hearing than Hagel's for a major cabinet position? For a minor cabinet position? For a sub-cabinet position? We don't know of one.

Yet so far liberals seem to be trying to pretend that all is well. Or they have simply averted their gaze from the ghastly train wreck. Or, they tell us (and themselves)—well, the secretary of defense doesn't really make policy, and there are lots of capable bureaucrats who can run the department. Or, they grumble—well, we can't give Hagel's critics the satisfaction of acknowledging that this appointment is a disaster.

The question is whether there are a few good men or women—serious liberals willing to speak truth to power, honorable Democratic senators willing to put country before party—who will step forward to sink the Hagel nomination.

It will be revealing about the state of liberalism and the condition of the Democratic party if there are none. It wasn't pleasant in 2005 for conservatives and Republicans to oppose a nominee—in this case a close friend—of a president they supported. It certainly wasn't pleasant to seem to give any comfort to the president's critics. Still, to use a corny but apt expression, it was the right thing to do. And a willingness to do it was a sign of the health of American conservatism.

American liberalism shows no such sign of health. Liberals are pretending not to recognize that Hagel is manifestly unqualified. A few have the wit to argue in excuse that associate justice of the Supreme Court is a lifetime appointment while secretary of defense is not. On the other hand, the damage an incompetent secretary of defense could do over the next four years is very great.

Conservatives and Republicans will stand firm in opposing Chuck Hagel as secretary of defense. They will do so with a clear conscience, basing their opposition on his obvious unsuitability for the position. Are liberals and Democrats willing to sell their souls for . . . Chuck Hagel?

John Kennedy was in many ways a flawed leader and a problematic president. But the bestselling book published under his name, *Profiles in Courage*, attests to the fact that once upon a time liberals sought to lay claim to that ancient virtue. And just last month, in his second Inaugural Address, President Obama said, "Our brave men and women in uniform tempered by the flames of battle are unmatched in skill and courage."

Our brave men and women in uniform deserve better than Chuck Hagel. Are there any courageous liberal voices who will find it within themselves to say so? Are there a few courageous Democrats in the United States Senate who will announce that they will not consent to a secretary of defense unqualified for that high office? Is there even one Democratic senator who will hearken to President Kennedy's admonition, "Sometimes party loyalty asks too much"?

—William Kristol

The Hagel Fiasco

Worst confirmation hearing ever?

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

DAVE CLEGG

Finally John Warner let Chuck Hagel speak. Warner, having declared that he was discarding his prepared remarks in the interest of sincerity and brevity and then spoken for 15 minutes, turned to Hagel with a friendly warning: "You're on your own."

Truer words, as they say.

Hagel would testify for nearly eight hours in the service of his confirmation to be the country's next secretary of defense. And what started as an unsteady, unimpressive performance soon turned disastrous. Republicans were tough and aggressive, pushing Hagel to elucidate his past positions and to explain his sometimes-odd statements. Democrats were accommodating and generous, repeatedly rephrasing Hagel's jumbled syntax and reframing his confusing claims.

Despite their efforts, Hagel was indeed on his own. And any senator who takes the advise-and-consent role seriously had to have real concerns about the nominee's basic competence.

By the end of the day, Hagel had declared the Iranian regime the "legitimate, elected" government of the Iranian people (it's not); he'd refused to acknowledge that the Iraq surge was a success (it was); he'd declined several opportunities to declare the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist entity (it is); and he seemed not to understand the relationship between the Budget Control Act and the coming sequester (the first created the second).

Even for senators who came into the hearing expecting to support Hagel—out of respect and admiration for his military service or deference to presidential prerogative—any one of these bizarre misstatements might be enough on its own to generate doubts about Hagel's understanding of his prospective job and the world. Taken together, they might be disqualifying.

But there was much more. Hagel made several basic errors of fact. For instance, Hagel justified his much-discussed comment about the "bloated" Pentagon budget by claiming that he made it "before the Budget Control Act." In fact, it came as a response to a question about sequester cuts. Hagel was clearly confused about the BCA and the sequester throughout the day, so perhaps this mistake was innocent.

It's hard to be quite as forgiving about another erroneous claim. Hagel was questioned several times about a report that he coauthored for Global Zero, an organization opposed to nuclear weapons. The report—not surprisingly, given the group's raison d'être—called for significant cuts to U.S. nuclear arms stockpiles. Hagel claimed the paper wasn't meant to be prescriptive, but its plain language—it called the cuts "desirable" and

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

argued that they "should happen"—belied his argument.

It wasn't the only past position Hagel tried to recast. Among the most problematic: his refusal to vote for an amendment that would have classified Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity. At the time of the vote, late September 2007, the facts about the IRGC's terrorist activities had been well known for years. The IRGC and its Quds Force had actively engaged in funding, training, and equipping jihadists in Iraq and Afghanistan responsible for killing hundreds of American troops. The IRGC played a crucial role in enabling insurgents, particularly in Iraq, to shift from attacks using basic improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which the U.S. military had learned to counter, to the far more lethal explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) during the war's deadliest years. This information was widely reported, and Hagel, whose biography boasts that he was a "senior member" of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, had access to reams of additional, classified intelligence documenting the relentless efforts of the Iranians to kill Americans.

At the hearing, when Hagel was asked about his opposition to the amendment, he pointed to former Virginia senator Jim Webb. Webb had opposed the amendment, too, arguing rather hysterically that a vote for the amendment would provide the Bush administration with the opening it allegedly sought to go to war with Iran. The amendment passed 76-22; the Bush administration continued its futile attempts to engage the Iranian regime, and there was, of course, no war.

Later in the confirmation hearing, Hagel was asked why he was to the left of many Democrats on the vote, including Hillary Clinton (who voted for it) and Barack Obama (who cosponsored a similar measure). Hagel suddenly dropped his claim that he was simply following the lead of Jim Webb and struck the pose of a maverick, arguing that he's an independent thinker and not the least bit influenced by what other senators do. And yet not long after that, Hagel was once again citing Webb as the reason he voted against labeling the IRGC a terrorist group.

On this issue and so many others, it was as if Hagel didn't understand why he'd held the views he had or was reluctant to discuss them. That's not necessarily novel. Confirmation hearings often involve nominees revising their long-held views with the hope of making themselves more acceptable to those voting on their nomination. Hagel's problem—or one of them, anyway—is that he often seemed to mean what he said originally and not to buy his own (alleged) change of heart.

Even for senators who came into the hearing expecting to support Hagel, any one of these bizarre misstatements might be enough on its own to generate doubts about his suitability for leading the Pentagon.

Hagel, to his credit, apparently understood just how poorly he was doing. If senators voted only on the basis of his performance before the committee, it's hard to imagine anyone supporting him. As his testimony drew to a close, Hagel anticipated and tried to answer two of the main objections senators surely have to his confirmation, first acknowledging his own ignorance and then touting as an asset his own powerlessness.

"There are a lot of things I don't know about," he said. "If confirmed, I intend to know a lot more than I do. I will have to." Moments later, Hagel adopted the minimalist argument his advocates have lately advanced as part of their case on his behalf. "I won't be in a policymaking position."

If the best you can say on your own behalf is that you're aware of your limitations and you won't be very consequential, it's not a great case. ♦

Cameron and the Euroskeptics

Color them unimpressed.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

David Cameron leaves things late. Leadership by essay crisis, it has been called, a nod to procrastination by generations of students. But his belated response to the mounting political turmoil over Britain's membership in the EU—a speech proposing an in/out referendum—won't save him from disaster in the 2015 general election.

Some early responses were encouraging—outrage from EU parliamentarians, a disapproving Obama administration, cries of good riddance in France, and, according to one grandee, "shock" in Davos—but British voters were not so easily taken in. Polls showed the Conservatives trailing Labour by a little less, mainly on the back of a few percentage points grabbed from the euroskeptic United Kingdom Independence Party, but Cameron's speech was no game-changer. UKIP still stood at around 10 percent. UKIP, which largely draws its support from the right, took just 3 percent of the vote in 2010, but that was enough to cost the Tories some 20 seats—and an overall majority.

That's the math forcing Cameron to call for a referendum he had always opposed. With his own (largely euroskeptic) Conservatives mutinous, UKIP polling in the teens, the economy faltering, and 2015 drawing closer, something had to be done. Cameron's calculation was straightforward. With no other establishment party (for now) backing a referendum, and with UKIP (thanks to Britain's first-past-the-post system) having little prospect of winning a parliamentary seat, let alone forming a government, the Tories are tempting euroskeptics with the only chance of the in-or-out showdown for which they have been pining. By contrast, voting UKIP in 2015 would divide the euroskeptic vote, help (europhile) Labour and the (euromaniacal) Liberal Democrats, and risk throwing that opportunity away.

The referendum timetable has been organized to underline that point. Nothing much will happen for now. Instead, Cameron will go to the polls in 2015 with a request for a mandate "to negotiate a new settlement with our European partners." Once those negotiations have been concluded there will be a "referendum [in 2017, most likely] with a very simple in or out choice." The referendum is thus dependent on Cameron's reelection: Vote for him, or the nation-state gets it.

That so many UKIP supporters have yet to be won over is, to a degree, a reflection of the way the party has become an expression of broader popular discontent with the liberal status quo. UKIP is "about" more than the EU. But there's something else: On closer inspection Cameron's proposal looks less than convincing, and that's even if we ignore the fact that his chances of victory in 2015 are on the order of a snowball in hell, or Romney in California.

There *is* a credible way for the U.K. to exit the EU (it involves Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty; I'll spare you the technicalities), but Cameron's "negotiations" are not it. Anything involving the repatriation of enough powers to impress enough euroskeptics would need a new treaty to be agreed on by each EU country, a tall order for reasons that are both practical (there are currently 27 member states) and philosophical. The EU is driven by the

GARY LOCKE

Andrew Stuttaford works in the international financial markets and writes frequently about cultural and political issues.

idea of "ever closer union," a process that only moves in one direction. Once a competence has been transferred from the national level to the EU it cannot—must not—be handed back. Were Britain to win an exception to this principle, it would make a shambles of what the EU is meant to be. "Europe," warned the EU's *prominenti*, is not "à la carte." Britain was either in or, well, the rest was left unsaid by just about everyone other than the French.

Cameron understands this. He has framed his proposed negotiations—they should be part of a wider effort to create "a leaner, less bureaucratic union"—in a way designed to address this concern. If the broader Brussels menu could be made more attractive, Britain would need fewer special orders. Given the rhetoric in Berlin (sometimes), Stockholm, Prague, and elsewhere in the EU's north and east in favor of Britain's more free market tack, this is an approach that ought to make sense.

But talk is cheap. When it comes to actually doing something to reduce the Brussels deadweight, the EU's more economically liberal governments typically fall silent, still in thrall to the European dream to which most Britons—who were told they were joining a "common *market*"—have never subscribed. And when Cameron asks for support for a less *dirigiste* treaty, that dream (or nightmare) will stand in his way. For once negotiations start, where will they end? After all, the EU's electorates are restless, and profoundly divided about what they want from "Europe."

Within hours of Cameron's speech, a leading member of Angela Merkel's party was talking darkly about the dangers of opening "Pandora's box," a comment then echoed across the continent by a cast of characters that included the finance minister of the crumbling Hellenic Republic, Pandora's repeatedly bailed-out basket case, sternly warning of the dangers of renegotiations, a performance that would suggest that *chutzpah* as well as *cynic* is a word with roots in ancient Greek.

Cameron may be gambling that the euro's problems will force that box open regardless. National politicians sucked into the eurozone's drama will keep trying to bypass the need for treaty revision and its awkward requirement of unanimity (as they did with the 2012 Fiscal Compact, which is formally a side-agreement) in their efforts to fix the currency union. But the far deeper integration that this repair work must eventually entail (and for which the Brussels bureaucracy is pushing) cannot be achieved without it. Amending the treaty would require British consent, and that could be Cameron's moment. The U.K. would never be expected to opt into any EU "core," but the price of doing nothing to impede its formation ought to be agreement to the sort of looser association that most Brits would anyway prefer over a clean divorce.

That's how this story could work out, but it relies on improbable contingencies, stretched assumptions, and tightly crossed fingers. Many euroskeptics—even if they could be persuaded that Cameron has a shot at victory in 2015—would not regard that conclusion as a happy ending. What they want is a clean break. What they fear is that even the half-decent second-best solution—a looser association—will not be what it could be thanks to David Cameron. He may be frustrated by the EU, but he doesn't have the imagination to risk anything approaching separation.

What, I suspect, they anticipate is that he won't even get that chance, that the eurozone will struggle on as is, and that Cameron will be thrown a few scraps at the end of pantomime negotiations, which he will then declare to have been a triumph. This will set the stage for a referendum in which a misled, there-is-no-alternative British public will vote for the "yes" for which Cameron has already declared—an odd thing to do *ahead* of any negotiations—that he will campaign "heart and soul." That is not the language, and these are not the scenarios, designed to reassure euroskeptic hearts, minds, or even souls in time for 2015. ♦

Documenting Reagan

Another poor effort.

BY CRAIG SHIRLEY

There are now some 1,000 books about Ronald Wilson Reagan and, according to Amazon, 86 documentaries. The bad ones are sloppy; the worst sloppily push a political narrative.

The latest documentary has a few good moments, but it breaks no new ground. *The Reagan Presidency* doesn't cover the old ground accurately, either. But the greatest failing of the film, tentatively scheduled to air on PBS in mid-February, is its lack of texture. It doesn't convey the great arguments of the era, many of them brought to the surface by Reagan. The Clintons derided the 1980s as the "Decade of Greed," but as things turned out, that was an appellation more properly applied to their own decade. The 1980s were a time of decisive debates about freedom and tyranny, good and evil. *The Reagan Presidency* touches upon none of this.

The three-hour documentary is

Craig Shirley is the author of two books on Reagan's campaigns and the bestselling December 1941. *The president of Shirley & Banister Public Affairs, he is a Reagan scholar at Eureka College and working on a book about his post-presidency.*

presented in three parts, the first on domestic affairs and the second and third on foreign policy. It starts with Reagan's early years, but moves quickly into the falsehood that Reagan "waded into controversy" in 1980 by launching his postconvention campaign from the Neshoba County Fair in Mississippi in an attempt to appeal to white racists. This is a slander often peddled by liberals, and to repeat it here, writer-director Chip Duncan must overlook Reagan's speech to the Urban League in New York two days later, which was warmly received. While in New York, Reagan called on Vernon Jordan, the head of the league, who was recovering from a gunshot wound. Also unmentioned are the endorsements Reagan received that year from Hosea Williams, who was Martin Luther King's top lieutenant in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Charles Evers, a civil rights activist who worked alongside his assassinated brother, Medgar.

Misrepresented again

Nor does the documentary report that President Carter began his own campaign in Tuscumbia, Alabama, a former Ku Klux Klan hotbed. Carter was joined on the dais by the old "seggie" George Wallace, whose wheelchair Carter personally pushed onto the stage. In point of fact, neither Reagan nor Carter was racist, but this documentary predictably leaves the impression that the Republican nominee was and the Democrat was not. Andrew Young, Carter's first ambassador to the United Nations, declares of Reagan's Mississipi appearance, "It was a clear message to the reactionaries and racists of America that they were going to be back in charge."

The 1980 presidential debate was one of the most significant in American history—it actually changed the outcome of the election. But here the narrator merely says, dismissively, that "many pundits suggested that Reagan exceeded expectations." This is not a throwaway line; it gets the story completely wrong. The punditocracy said Reagan had lost, but the polling showed the American people thought he'd won. They rewarded him with their votes.

The Reagan Presidency includes extensive interviews with Robert Reich, Richard Reeves, Henry Cisneros, Gary Hart, Walter Mondale, Bill Bradley, Steve Weisman of the *New York Times*, and Andrew Young, whose anti-Semitism became such an embarrassment for the Carter administration that he was fired as ambassador. During the 1980 campaign, Young continually played the race card against Reagan, making references to the KKK and white hoods and, incredibly, said if Reagan was elected, it would be "alright to kill niggers." The other critics of Reagan don't offer much insight either. Reich insists, "Reagan won because of cynicism." Reeves says Reagan "turned the country against government"—as if that were a bad thing.

The film summons Reeves, a journalist and author critical of anything that smacks of Republicanism, including in his books on Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, and especially Reagan, as a witness against the Reagan administration's Central American policies. Duncan asserts that the Soviet threat in that region was "debatable." This was a time when the Soviets were using submarine tenders in Cuba for their nuclear missile attack subs, actively arming rebels in El Salvador, and supporting the Communist regime in Nicaragua with arms and funding. Reeves's ideology can be discerned from his description of the contra rebels fighting Nicaragua's Communist Sandinistas as "thugs." It's no surprise that he dismisses Reagan's policy of arming them as "total folly." The liberation of Grenada is mentioned only in passing; the poignant scenes of hundreds of American medical students kissing U.S. soil when rescued by troops dispatched by Ronald Reagan didn't make it on screen.

But the documentary truly touches bottom when Weisman ridiculously claims that Reagan "brilliantly exploited the assassination attempt." Reagan's near-death experience is only dealt with in political terms, not spiritual, except for brief insights from Douglas Brinkley and former Democratic congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, who says the president handled the shooting with "a style and grace uniquely Reagan."

Those who knew or have studied Reagan will recognize one giant omission in the film: There is no mention of how influential and important Nancy Reagan was to his career. Someone once said that if Reagan had wanted to be the best shoe salesman in the world, she would have made sure it transpired. It just so happened that he wanted to be president. Without her behind-the-scenes counsel, cajoling, and combat with those she felt were not helping "Ronnie," he never would have won the White House.

Reagan's character and philosophical maturation go largely unexamined. The redoubtable Ed Meese is there to explain his old friend, but other than cameos from Bud McFarlane, George Shultz, Peter Robinson, and Kiron Skinner, there are few identifiable Reaganites, or even people with an intimate understanding of the life and times of Ronald Wilson Reagan. There's no one from the Reagan Ranch, the Reagan Library, or the family. There are no interviews with Fred Ryan, Jim Baker, Dick Allen, Lou Cannon, John Sears, Frank Donatelli, Peter Hannaford, Ken Khachigian, Jim Hooley, Joanne Drake, Dennis LeBlanc, Mike Reagan, or any of the dozens of other people who really studied, reported on, knew, worked for, and observed Reagan. Not even Peggy Noonan, who it seems is required to appear in every Reagan documentary, makes the cut. Only Brinkley gets the chance to attempt an explanation of the meaning of Reaganism beyond the man and his term of office.

The worst flaw of *The Reagan Presidency* is its moral equivalency between East and West. We see the inevitable footage of Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate telling Gorbachev to "tear down this wall." To the filmmaker's credit, he also excerpts Reagan's May 1988 speeches at Spaso House and Moscow State University, both arguably more consequential than his Berlin Wall declaration. But at no time in the three hours are the horrors of the Soviet regime recounted. There's no mention of the Gulag, the ruthless treatment of Jews and many others, or the victims in Warsaw Pact countries and Afghanistan, where invading Soviet troops routinely murdered men, women, and children. The documentary dwells more on the accidental downing of an Iranian airplane by the United States in 1988 than all the atrocities by the Kremlin combined. It even finds a parallel between the Iranian incident and the Soviet shootdown of Korean Air Lines flight 007 in 1983, which killed hundreds, including a U.S. congressman.

The film won't say that the West "won" the Cold War, but it repeatedly states that Reagan and Gorbachev "ended" it. Throughout, it refers to Mikhail Gorbachev as Reagan's "partner," and once as his "partner for change." In fact, the Cold War ended in the same fashion as a referee calling a boxing match—because one fighter is getting pummeled so badly. Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II are barely mentioned. Lech Walesa, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Natan Sharansky, and other towering figures in the global struggle against communism are airbrushed out of the 20th century.

Winston Churchill once refused a pudding offered at a dinner party, stating it "lacked a theme." This new documentary on Reagan not only lacks a theme—it misses the essential theme of the era it examines. Perhaps 87 documentaries on the man who saw the fight against communism in starkly moral terms—and helped win that fight, one of the most important battles of his century, with moral courage—are not actually enough. ♦

How to Kill a Story

China versus the Tibetans.

BY GORDON G. CHANG

Dharamsala, India

At the Tibetan Children's Village, where India's high mountains meet the first row of the Himalayas, the latest arrival is a two-and-a-half-year-old girl, who came last February. Before 2008, when China effectively closed its border, children used to stream into Dharamsala to attend this school for refugees.

The story is the same at the Transit School, for older children and young adults who have escaped their homeland on the Tibetan plateau. Located in the valley far below the Children's Village, this institution now has only 280 students. It used to feed, house, and teach over 800.

And in Kathmandu, the Tibetan Refugee Reception Center reported that 871 people escaped from Tibet and came to Nepal in 2011. Last year, journalist Maura Moynihan told me, fewer than 600 reached the Kathmandu center. Last March, she saw only 20 Tibetans there. Last week, she counted 6. Before 2008, 2,500 to 3,500 fled each year. The reception center in Dharamsala, home of the Tibetan government-in-exile, is now also empty.

These days, the monthlong journey across the Himalayas to Nepal is more dangerous than it has ever been. Beijing is behind an unprecedented crackdown there, where the Chinese used their economic might to get the government in 2009 to ban "anti-Chinese activities."

Kathmandu, responding to Chinese pressure, has worked hand-in-glove with Beijing to stop the refugee flow. The Nepalese have consistently violated their so-called gentlemen's agreement with the U.N. high commissioner for refugees by allowing Chinese troops to pursue Tibetans inside Nepal and, in defiance of human rights norms, return them to China. Nepal's border guards even sell Tibetans they catch to the People's Liberation Army, according to observers on the ground. With the closing of the traditional escape routes to Nepal, especially the Nangpa La Pass near Everest, there are only two out-of-the-way paths across the high mountains.

"China is killing the story," says Moynihan, who has watched the comings and goings at the Kathmandu center for three decades. "They do not want witnesses." Because Beijing has almost completely sealed its long border with India, Nepal, and Bhutan, fewer Tibetans are able to speak to those outside, at a time of desperation over Chinese rule.

At last count, 99 Tibetans have set themselves on fire since February 2009, almost all of them inside China and most of them last year. The last confirmed suicide, that of a 26-year-old man named Konchok Kyab, occurred in China's Gansu Province on January 22.

Inside Tibet, authorities in recent weeks have moved to stop the fiery protests, claiming the self-immolations are the work of organized networks under the direction of the Dalai Lama. In the second half of January, officials arrested at least eight Tibetans for promoting the suicides. On the 26th, two Tibetans were put on trial for intentional homicide for inciting eight people to set themselves on fire. Both were convicted and given heavy sentences last week.

Imprisonments, of course, will not end the suicides. "This is a people's movement, so it is hard to say when they will stop," says Kirti Rinpoche, the chief abbot of the

Gordon G. Chang is the author of The Coming Collapse of China *(Random House).*

Kirti Monasteries, in December in his office in the Dharamsala hills. "The suicides were caused by China's oppression, so they will stop when the oppression stops." Chinese authorities, however, have no intention of ending oppression. For the last two years they have locked down his monastery in Ngaba, the home of many of the monks who have taken their lives by fire.

Since the first self-immolations, this horrifying form of protest has spread throughout Tibetan society, and now even mothers are killing themselves, leaving behind young children. The willingness to take one's life is against the tenets of Tibetan Buddhism and the wishes of its leader, but the suicides stem from Tibetan selflessness, which activist Tenzin Tsundue says comes from an ingrained culture.

Beijing's decades-long attempt to suppress Tibetan culture, religion, and way of life—what Kirti Rinpoche calls "identity genocide"—is obviously floundering. The Chinese overlords do not seem to understand their Tibetan subjects. Their policy is to overwhelm the people of Tibet with economic development and modernity, yet their efforts have only stiffened resistance. Tsundue, with his trademark red bandana around his forehead, explained it to me this way: "Our life depends on the struggle. The struggle makes sense of our lives."

And that struggle, which has now taken the form of self-destruction, has galvanized the Tibetan exile community at a time when it was dividing into rival camps. The Dalai Lama has been promoting his "middle way"—autonomy inside the People's Republic of China—while other exiles demand *rangzen*, independence. The dispute has, in recent years, become bitter, and some have openly criticized the Dalai Lama for trying to work out an accommodation with Beijing. Yet the horrific suicides have reminded exiles they have a common responsibility to those facing unrelenting repression in Tibet. The challenge for the scattered Tibetans going forward is preserving their sense of community.

That is why Lobsang Sangay, who heads the Tibetan government-in-exile, is his own education minister. He is insistent on teaching Tibetan identity and raising learning standards. His favorite story is that of a woman who fled Tibet but later returned to care for her family. She had attended Indian schools while in exile, so she was not permitted to attend college in Tibet. For six years, she returned to India every year, trekking over the mountains, to take exams and pick up course materials she smuggled back into Tibet. Eventually, she earned her Indian college degree and, after finally leaving Tibet, a Ph.D.

Education is the focus of the struggle between Tibetans and Beijing. Inside Tibet, Tibetans cannot build private schools, and monasteries are being closed or tightly monitored. Public education is all about spreading Chinese language and influence. Outside, in India and Nepal, few children are reaching freedom, and consequently schools lack new students. For the Tibetans to prevail, they have to pass on their culture and religion to the next generation.

At the moment, it looks like Beijing has all the advantages. Tsundue talks about the necessity of "decolonizing" education in Tibet, but that cannot happen as long as the Chinese rule—and occupy—his homeland. Yet as powerful as China may seem these days, there is no final victory over those who refuse to submit. Tsundue proudly speaks of his people's "irrational resistance."

Lukar Sham resisted reeducation, surviving five years in a Chinese jail in Tibet. He now runs the Gu-Chu-Sum halfway house in Dharamsala for ex-political prisoners who, like him, were able to escape after release. The upper floor of the house is devoted to an exhibit of photographs of the victims of Chinese violence in Tibet, a graphic education for Tibetans who grew up in exile and so know only the peace and serenity of this Indian hill city.

Surrounded by a dozen friends in a damp kitchen at the end of last year, Sham tells me his people will outlast the occupier. "We failed when we fought the Chinese," he said with a smile, "and we failed when we negotiated with them, but we will not fail to sustain our community." ♦

The Issue Left Behind

Republicans and education reform.

BY CHESTER E. FINN JR.

As the Republican party searches its soul and its ranks for policies, strategies, and leaders that can restore it to fighting strength at the national level, few expect education reform to loom large among the issues needing close attention. Yet it's hard to get very far on such central challenges as economic growth and international competitiveness without paying close heed to the capacity of America's workforce in the medium term—and to the prowess of our scientists, inventors, and entrepreneurs over the long haul.

Keep this in mind, too, as any pollster will tell you: The more Republicans talk about education, the better they do with voters.

A number of GOP governors, past and present, have figured this out, among them Jeb Bush, Mitch

Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the author, with Jessica Hockett, of Exam Schools: Inside America's Most Selective Public High Schools *(Princeton, 2012).*

Daniels, Bobby Jindal, John Kasich, Chris Christie, Scott Walker, and Rick Snyder. And plenty of education reform is underway at the state and sometimes local levels.

The national party, however, appears somewhere between oblivious and brain-dead on this topic. Observe, for example, a Congress that's many years overdue in revamping and reauthorizing such core federal education programs as No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

No, it's not just a GOP problem. Gridlock and institutional dysfunction are at work. But Republicans face a quintet of distinctive dilemmas on the education front.

No harm in honking

First, the Obama administration has stolen much of their former thunder. Vouchers remain a GOP preserve in Washington (though no longer in some state capitals), but charter schools, rigorous teacher evaluations, ranking schools on the basis of performance, even versions of merit pay are as apt to trip off the tongue of education secretary Arne Duncan as from the mouth of any Republican. Yes, this means the GOP has won the "war of ideas," but at the cost of removing clear distinctions between the parties.

Second, the Tea Party and its congressional acolytes aren't helping, with their futile calls to "abolish the Education Department" or "just let the parents decide." Though elements of those ideas have great merit and, carefully crafted, might even prove enactable, mindless sloganeering of this sort scares educators, delights Democrats, and comes across as far too radical for most parents—who turn out to be a rather traditional lot when it comes to their children's schools.

Third, it's tricky to rein in teacher unions without demonizing the country's three million classroom instructors, mostly earnest, caring, hardworking and not-very-well-paid members of the middle class who (like Latinos) might even vote Republican if the party didn't appear to hate them.

Fourth, the federal budget plainly needs reining in, too, but if defense isn't to weaken and entitlements remain untouchable, there's nowhere to go but "discretionary domestic spending," which includes just about all of the education action.

Finally, there is the dilemma of what to do—indeed how even to talk—about the "Common Core" academic standards for English and math that are generally superior to what states came up with on their own but are decried by some on the right as the camel's nose of nationalization and federal control of the schools. (Obama and Duncan made this worse by wrapping themselves too tightly around the new standards, which in fact arose from the voluntary coming-together of most states.)

Despite these dilemmas, there are compelling reasons for the GOP and its leaders to engage the education issue. Herewith some suggestions:

■ Beat the drum of economic competitiveness and its education prerequisites. These include STEM schools (science, technology, engineering, math), gifted-and-talented programs, and other opportunities for acceleration (e.g., "early college"). Here, the Democrats have backed themselves into a corner with their obsession with "closing achievement gaps"—surely important but not the sum of our educational objectives, either.

■ Demand more bang from the education dollar. The surest way to do this, as in every other field, is by deploying technology to make the system more productive. Online and "blended" learning (school days divided between teacher-led classes and learning-via-computer) have the additional benefit of customizing instruction and fostering choice, particularly in locales where schools are small and far apart. Federal agencies other than the Education Department could even be helpful here. Imagine math-and-science MOOCs (massive open online courses) for high school students taught by scientists at the NIH, NASA, Centers for Disease Control, etc.

■ Insist on more school choices for more kids, including those who live in smug suburbs. But also insist that the choices be effective schools. Shut down the bad ones, whether district-operated or charter—and stare down everyone (both profit-hungry plutocrat and jobs-centered union heavy) who presses to keep them open despite persistent educational failure.

■ When it comes to federal policy, get the "tight-loose" balance right. No Child Left Behind, we now know, got it backwards, laying heavy regulation from Washington upon states, districts, and schools regarding the *means* of education while being almost totally laid back about the ends. The GOP should reverse this, embracing rigorous—and common—academic standards and the means of assessing (and comparing) performance across the land, but liberating schools (and states and districts) to operate as they think best.

■ Apply the principles of transparency and comparability to school finances, too. Today it's impossible to find out how much money the education system spends on a given child, even a given school, much less what that money is spent on. It's harder still to compare how those dollars flow in Springfield, Ohio, with their amounts and uses in Springfield, Ill.—and Springfield, Mass., Ga., Tenn., etc. It's time America had a uniform system of financial accounting for its education system.

These are more than talking points. They're important emphases and policy directions. Some will prove more immediately popular with the electorate than others, but this is no time for hollow slogans and policy-via-focus-group. Rather, it's time, in education as in many other spheres, for the party of Lincoln to craft a new platform for itself, one that would make the United States a better place to live for a long time to come. ◆

NEWSCOM

Why We Might Get Tax Reform

For incredibly cynical and corrupt reasons.

BY IKE BRANNON

Argentina hasn't always been a basket case: In the early 1990s the country embarked on a radical privatization of government assets, with the result being a decade of strong growth and foreign investment. Much of the successes of that time have been reversed, but the story of how the statist Peronista party came to embrace such a radically pro-market agenda contains a political message for our country today, namely that sometimes the conditions are ripe for politicians to do the right things for the wrong reasons. And that is precisely why tax reform may now be feasible.

Before Carlos Menem was elected president of the country in 1989, he had the résumé that one would expect of a corrupt, quasi-socialist party hack. As governor of La Rioja, a populous province, he ensured his reelection by dramatically expanding government jobs until a majority of households in that province had at least someone on the government payroll.

However, when he assumed the presidency this was no longer an option: His predecessors had pursued the same strategy for decades at the national level, to the extent that the country was broke and dysfunctional. To cite just one example, businessmen in downtown Buenos Aires, despairing of ever getting the state-owned telephone company to fix their lines, had resorted to sending messages via carrier pigeon at one point.

Enter President Menem, slightly shocked at the depths to which things had sunk and finding himself in a spot where his campaign supporters expected certain . . . favors to be done for them. In an environment in which every government business was hemorrhaging money, it was difficult to siphon off much more for one's cronies.

Menem's advisers quickly hit on a solution: Sell government assets and take a kickback on the proceeds from the sale. With the Soviet Union crumbling, privatization was in the air all over the world, so it wasn't an outlandish proposal at the time, although for Menem to be the instigator of such a reform was a bit incongruous.

Menem's plan passed the legislature and became law, and Argentina began privatizing everything, not just factories and phone companies but also the post office, water and electric utilities, and even some roads. The government collected a significant amount of revenue, the privatized businesses greatly improved service and productivity, and the economy began to function again. The 1990s were a period of exceptional economic growth for the country, with significant capital inflows creating an investment boom.

It didn't last, of course, owing to an overvalued currency tied to the dollar and a structural deficit that privatization revenues obscured for a number of years. The government was loath to tackle either one until the two combined to throw the country into a deep recession, which led to Argentina's breaking its dollar-peso peg, defaulting on its bonds, and ushering in the populist, incompetent governments of the Kirchner husband-and-wife team that have reigned the last decade.

What does this have to do with the need for tax reform here? Plenty. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, comprehensive tax reform has very little momentum, mainly because the act involves taking away credits, deductions, and exemptions that greatly benefit a few highly motivated recipients and giving the masses a fairer and more pro-growth tax code. In the long run this benefits everyone, but in the short run these gains would be difficult to discern—while the losers in this game would be ready to spend all sorts of resources to make the lives of the congressmen who gored their sacred cows a living hell. Why would anyone want to do that?

For the same reason that Menem's Peronista party went along with his massive privatization scheme: because it sets the table for a new round of graft—err, I mean, campaign contributions and other favors. As things now stand it has become exceedingly difficult for a member of one of the tax-writing committees to secure a break for a particular cause, whether it is a nascent industry or a valued constituent. If such raw power cannot be exercised, then raising money is much more difficult: A member of the Senate Finance Committee can get only so much money from protecting sacred cows—there's more money in creating them from scratch.

With a clean tax code, free of the encrusted credits and deductions and exemptions from decades gone by, members can start doing favors all over again, no doubt beginning by restoring some of the breaks they've just removed. Of course, the current string of trillion-dollar deficits would make ladling out tax breaks more difficult—but easier than such a thing is today.

Should we care what motivates our members of Congress to do tax reform? Not if clearing out the underbrush of credits, deductions, and exemptions will help us keep tax rates down and boost economic growth. Understanding why this might happen is an argument for being vigilant if and when we do achieve major tax reform, but for any sentient observer of Congress, that's already a given. If Menem's Argentina could do mass privatizations, we should be able to manage comprehensive tax reform. ♦

Ike Brannon is a senior fellow and director of research at the R Street Institute.

Abandon 'the Children'

We need a better argument against the massive federal debt

By Meghan Clyne

Politicians are not known for originality. In their public speech, most cling to the security of clichéd stock phrases the way toddlers hold fast to threadbare blankets. Thus Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney posed before an enormous national debt clock and intoned that the nation's "debts get passed on to our kids." Speaker of the House John Boehner addressed the opening session of the 113th Congress by professing: "In our hearts, we know it is wrong to pass on this debt to our kids and grandkids." On the eve of President Obama's second inauguration, Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell warned that no problem America faces "is more urgent than the massive federal debt that is hanging over the heads of our children and grandchildren." Late last month, House majority leader Eric Cantor celebrated a budget bill that will help "mak[e] sure we can begin to reduce the mountain of debt that is facing our children."

Unfortunately, she won't be voting for 17 years, either.

But while "our children" are the favorite—and often the only—reason offered to whip debt now, this rhetorical standard seems stubbornly ineffective. Our debts are still here, still growing, with no solution in sight.

Why does this ubiquitous line fail to spur Americans to demand fiscal reform? In part because it is poorly suited to those who most need convincing: younger Americans. This group was essential to reelecting Barack Obama, who has overseen an expansion in publicly held federal debt greater than all his predecessors combined. Indeed, younger voters preferred Obama to Mitt Romney by a 23-point margin. According to a Pew Research Center analysis of national exit-polling data, younger voters also strongly prefer more expansive government: 59 percent of voters aged 18-29 said "government should do more to solve problems," compared to 35 percent among the 65-and-older group. And while Pew has found that younger adults are more likely than older Americans to say that providing Social Security and Medicare benefits at current levels will place too great a financial burden on younger generations, even the 18-29 cohort still believes that preserving Social Security and Medicare is more important than reducing deficits, 48 to 41 percent.

Republicans have clearly got some explaining to do. But simply lamenting that a failure to curb spending today will unfairly burden our "children and grandchildren" isn't likely to cut it. A great many of these younger voters don't have children, and convincing them to forgo the benefits of government spending now for the sake of someone else's kids is a hard sell. Some may, for the moment, want to preserve generous Medicare and Social Security benefits for the sake of their own aging parents and grandparents. And many of them may not even want children of their own: Demographic trends suggest that today's younger Americans are relatively unconcerned about producing children and grandchildren, let alone their fiscal situation. The young women who supported Obama because he forced employers to fund their preferred methods for *not* having children seem particularly unlikely to be persuaded by calls for generational forward-thinking.

Moreover, because the argument that the debt will bring ruin upon future generations is so overused, Americans may tune out debt warnings completely. Some version of the line has been around forever: In his farewell address, George Washington urged Americans to avoid "the accumulation of debt" rather than "ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burden which we ourselves ought to bear." Though Dwight Eisenhower presided over an impressive decline in the national debt, he nonetheless declared in 1960 "that it is absolutely necessary that we have savings to put on this debt that we are passing on to

Meghan Clyne is managing editor of National Affairs.

someone else." The Reagan-Bush years saw endless handwringing (mostly from Democrats) about the immorality of passing deficits on to future generations. Even Senator Obama fretted in 2006 that "Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren."

But as Obama's outgoing secretary of defense, Leon Panetta, said in 1988—when he was a California congressman reflecting on Reagan's borrowing—the longer people warn of debt "doom and gloom" without the onset of crisis, "the harder it is to convince others that something needs to be done." This may be the greatest danger of the continued argument that federal debt will harm "our children and grandchildren": It gives younger voters the sense that a debt crisis is no nearer now than it was during all those past warnings.

Unfortunately, that sense is false. Our staggering debt will start causing serious problems well within the next 20 years—*this* generational window. And it will hit today's younger Americans—not their offspring—hardest.

Our staggering debt will start causing serious problems well within the next 20 years—*this* generational window. And it will hit today's younger Americans—not their offspring—hardest.

The debts we face now are not like any debts we have seen before. The U.S. debt-to-GDP ratio has spiked in the past only during wars or major crises like the Great Depression. Only once in our history has our debt as a percentage of GDP been higher than it is now—during and immediately after the massive mobilization for World War II, when it peaked at 108.7 percent. But that figure dropped dramatically in the 1950s, after the war ended and the United States enjoyed the economic boom made possible by the fact that virtually every other industrialized country in the world was in ruins.

Our deficits today, and our projected debt over the next two decades, are not climbing in response to catastrophes. They are not projected to come back down. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) anticipates that they will rise inexorably, surpassing the World War II record and heading into uncharted territory sometime between 2025 and 2026. That's when people now in their late teens, 20s, and early 30s will be working, paying taxes, and raising children—well *before* their children assume responsibility for the nation's finances.

The main drivers of this debt are entitlement programs, and those, too, will pass solemn milestones on this generation's watch. Medicare's trustees project that the trust fund for Medicare Part A, which provides seniors with hospitalization coverage, will go bankrupt in 2024. Social Security's finances, meanwhile, already slipped into deficit in 2010; the program's trustees project that they will remain in the red indefinitely.

What's more, because so much of the federal spending that will drive our growing debt is now locked in—as entitlement programs or as interest payments on existing debt—our fiscal- and economic-policy options are increasingly limited. Paying down the debt will require massive structural reforms of major federal programs, the last thing any politician wants to tackle. Hence the series of fiscal-policy "crises" that have been engineered over the past few years. This has left citizens, businesses, and investors laboring under clouds of uncertainty about fundamentals like tax rates and government spending, which can hinder investment, spending, and hiring in the private economy.

These distinctive features of today's debt problem are poised to exacerbate the two major consequences of excessive government debt: increased borrowing costs and economic stagnation. And those consequences will be most painful for today's young Americans, not future ones.

Consider the danger of an interest-rate spike. The U.S. government has long been seen as one of the least risky borrowers in the world; the interest rates it charges set the pace for all other borrowing costs in America, including for private loans. Should the government have to pay significantly more to satisfy lenders concerned about its creditworthiness—or about the Federal Reserve inflating away the debt—American students, home buyers, entrepreneurs, drivers, and shoppers will pay more for their loans, too.

America's creditworthiness will likely be most at risk as our debt begins to reach unprecedented levels—starting around 11 years from now and rising from there. That risk will coincide with the prime borrowing years of today's young Americans. According to the National Association of Realtors, for instance, the median age of home buyers is 42; the largest age cohort of home buyers is 25-34; and younger buyers (aged 25-44) are more likely than older buyers (65 and up) to finance their home purchases (97 percent versus 56 percent). Americans in their early 30s or younger are thus most likely to be taking out mortgages right around the time interest rates could begin skyrocketing as America's debt becomes unmanageable.

The same is true of other common types of borrowing. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the largest share of total student loan debt is held by Americans in the 30-39 age group. Today's youngest voters, who

might hope to go to graduate school in a decade or so, could find that climbing interest rates make student loans unaffordable. Meanwhile, according to the 2010 Survey of Consumer Finances, 72.8 percent of all vehicle-loan balances are held by households headed by people aged 30-59, meaning today's Americans in their early 30s and younger could pay steep interest rates when they are most likely to borrow to buy a car for home or business.

Credit card borrowing will be particularly painful for this generation of Americans. Unlike mortgages, which usually have fixed interest rates, credit cards tend to offer variable rates—meaning rising borrowing costs will be felt immediately by consumers. As a new study by Sarah Jiang of Capital One Financial and Lucia Dunn of Ohio State University explains, credit card debt generally increases when borrowers are younger, peaking around age 55. Jiang and Dunn also find that Americans born in the 1980s—people now in their 20s and early 30s—carry more credit card debt than their parents and grandparents did at the same age and pay it off much more slowly. Today's Visa-swiping young Americans will likely carry their heaviest credit-card burdens precisely in the years when our government's debts spiral out of control. Should a crisis drive up interest rates, Dunn says, today's twentysomethings "would be very hard hit."

In general, the Survey of Consumer Finances finds that total indebtedness peaks among households headed by Americans in the 40-49 age bracket. Today's 20-year-old enters that range in 2033, the year in which Social Security is projected to go bankrupt and in which the national debt held by the public is projected to reach 165 percent of GDP. He exits that prime borrowing cohort in 2043—the year for which the CBO stops making specific projections because its model cannot handle debt that exceeds 250 percent of GDP. When politicians tell the nation, including young voters, that the consequences of government's reckless borrowing will be borne by "our children and grandchildren," they're peddling a dangerous deception. If you're alive and working now, *you* will bear those consequences.

This is especially true considering that today's younger Americans may face the other grave danger of high debt—economic stagnation—even sooner. Americans save only so much money; as the CBO explained in a 2010 report, under "persistent deficits and continually mounting debt . . . a growing portion of people's savings would go to purchase government debt rather than toward investments in productive capital goods such as factories and computers; that 'crowding out' of investment would lead to lower output and incomes than would otherwise occur." Also in 2010, economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff tried to quantify the relationship between government debt and GDP growth, finding that the economic harms in advanced countries become noticeable when gross debt (debt held by the public in addition to the money the government owes itself) exceeds 90 percent of GDP. The United States passed that threshold in 2010; last year, the gross debt figure stood at 104.8 percent.

If growing debts prolong our economic stagnation—extending today's high unemployment, suppressed wages, and anemic growth—the results could be devastating for today's younger Americans. There are the stories of college graduates who can't find jobs and of young adults returning to live with mom and dad, and there are the numbers: Last month's unemployment rate for Americans between the ages of 20 and 24 was 14.2 percent, much higher than the national average of 7.9 percent. As debt rises indefinitely, Americans in their late teens and 20s could experience a "lost decade" like the one that harmed so many young people in Japan. Researchers have observed that most wage growth and job mobility happen in the first 10 years of a person's career; for young people now in that crucial stretch, years of debt-induced economic languor (not to mention recession) could be poisonous to their lifetime earning prospects.

Some, of course, will deny the imminence of debt "doom and gloom." Interest rates, for instance, are at rock-bottom and are expected to remain there. But this is only a temporary condition, resulting from the Federal Reserve's commitment to keep rates low until hiring picks up and from the fact that, while U.S. debt is growing fast, many other industrialized countries are in worse shape. A debt crisis, however, would take the power to control interest rates out of the Fed's hands. And it would be the definition of hubris to assume that no other country will emerge as a promising investment prospect in the next two decades.

All of this adds up to a dire warning that should be heeded above all by the young Americans whose aspirations are most likely to be crushed by our fiscal mismanagement. But it is unlikely to be, as long as our politicians insist that the reason to control our debt is our "children and grandchildren." This throwaway line may appeal to older Americans, but they already vote for candidates who promise to cut spending and reform entitlements. It now desperately needs to be supplemented with an honest, fact-based argument aimed at the self-interest of younger voters.

There is no shame in appeals to self-interest, as our greatest political rhetorician understood. Invited to address a temperance society in 1842 about how to make its appeals more effective, Abraham Lincoln advised his listeners to speak less about the distant future and more about today. "Posterity has done nothing for us," he said. "And theorize on it as we may, practically we shall do very little for it unless we are made to think we are at the same time doing something for ourselves." Today's fiscal hawks could use that advice. ♦

Obama the Bargainer

How to lose friends and alienate Congress

By Jay Cost

The recent inaugural festivities would have seemed more than a little strange to the Framers of the Constitution, had they been on hand to see the show. After all, here was their "republic" unified in celebration of vast executive powers being vested in a single human being. Did they not wage a bloody war to overcome such 17th-century notions?

And yet, the republic bequeathed by the likes of Madison and Jefferson prizes the inaugural ceremony. It is the most important rite in what Gene Healy of the Cato Institute calls "the cult of the presidency," which is a decidedly bipartisan affair. Liberals celebrated Obama's power, conservatives bemoaned it, but all acknowledged it.

What then is this power, exactly? The answer is scarcely to be found in the Constitution itself. Article II is shorter than your average newspaper column and spends most of its time reviewing the complicated procedures by which the chief executive is to be selected.

The presidency has come to mean much more than the measly powers granted its occupant by the Constitution; the job of the modern president is to fill the spaces left between the various articles and sections and clauses of the founding document. What our system disperses among branches, states, localities, parties, and interest groups, the president brings together, coordinating their efforts for the national good.

This is a virtually impossible task, for the formal powers of the president do not meet the informal expectations we the people have set for him. As Harry Truman predicted in the summer of 1952, when it was clear that Dwight Eisenhower would succeed him, "He'll sit here and he'll say 'Do this! Do that!' *And nothing will happen.* Poor Ike—it won't be a bit like the Army. He'll find it very frustrating."

As usual, the ornery Missouri-farmer-turned-haberdasher hit the nail on the head. Commands simply won't cut it, for many of the people whom the president would command need not heed him. Members of Congress, judges, cabinet department heads, even leaders of the military have their own mandates that do not require ironclad fealty to the president.

Instead, a president succeeds by *persuading* others to do what he wants. As presidential adviser Richard Neustadt once put it, the job of the president

> is to induce them to believe that what he wants of them is what their own appraisal of their own responsibilities requires them to do in their interest, not his. Because men may differ in their views on public policy, because differences in outlook stem from differences in duty—duty to one's office, one's constituents, oneself—that task is bound to be more like collective bargaining than like a reasoned argument among philosopher kings.

Thus, with the festivities finished and the glow of the inauguration fading, it is fair to ask: Just how powerful will President Obama be in his second term? In other words, how successful will he be at persuading the diverse agents of our government to do what he wants them to do?

If the lessons of his first term guide our expectations for the second, then the most likely answer is: not very.

At first blush, this assertion might sound absurd. A weak President Obama? Proof of the contrary is in the pudding: The massive stimulus, the health care bill, and financial reform were all epic in their scope and ambition. Surely both left and right agree—whether they celebrate or bemoan the fact—that Obama is a very strong, liberal president.

But presidential power—the ability to persuade—has many sources, some external, some internal. The external sources are all reducible to "the political context." How many seats does the president's party control in Congress? What is the status of the opposition party? What was the relative strength of the president and his party in the last election? What is his job approval rating? And so on. All of these factors set the boundaries for how easily the president can persuade others.

In 2009 and 2010, President Obama enjoyed a very

Jay Cost is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

favorable political context. Today, the political context is more favorable to him than it was in 2011, but markedly diminished from the heady days of 2009. So, for instance, President Obama can call for action on "climate change" until he is blue (or, perhaps, green) in the face, but the political environment—including arguably the most conservative House of Representatives since the 1920s—means he lacks the power to make it happen.

The internal sources of strength are the president's political skills, which he deploys in particular circumstances. So the question becomes: How good is he at persuading others, *given* the political context? If political context is the science of presidential power, quantifiable in electoral results and congressional voting scores, persuasive skill is the art. Here, we must put down the *American Political Science Review* and pick up Machiavelli's *Prince*. As for President Obama's first term, no other incoming president in recent history had such a surplus of political capital and misused it so terribly. The reason? He lacks important skills that are integral in the exercise of presidential power.

Obama seems most out of touch on Capitol Hill. He does not understand what the key players in Congress expect, yet he is convinced he knows them better than they know themselves. What's more, he gives little guidance as to what he expects from them.

All presidents are unique, each possessing or lacking skills useful to a chief executive. Obama is notable in that he has mastered some vital skills better than any recent predecessor, but he exhibits virtually no facility with others. His strengths have been enumerated extensively by a fawning press corps. His favorable coverage is due not only to the media's ideological commitment to his policy goals, but also to his natural gifts. He awes the press, and many other groups in society, by his very presence. Moreover, he knows he has this power over them. This ability, more than any other, made him president and remains his single greatest source of power.

Yet though he affects some people intensely, he himself seems largely unaffected by others. This helps explain why he has used his speaking ability so unevenly: He is wont to misread people, and therefore situations. His Tucson speech, for instance, after the shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, was a political stroke of genius. He intuited what the moment called for and delivered it perfectly. By contrast, his 2009 speech to the International Olympic Committee pitching Chicago was a waste of time and made him look small. Similarly, he has time and again left business leaders feeling nonplussed, inviting them to the White House mainly to serve as window dressing for another teleprompter performance.

It is on Capitol Hill that Obama seems most out of touch with his audience. In particular, he does not understand what the key players in Congress expect, yet he is convinced he knows them better than they know themselves. What's more, he gives little and inconsistent guidance as to what he expects from them. That goes for both Republicans and Democrats.

For Republicans, the warning signs appeared early, on the stimulus bill passed in the president's first month in office. Obama and his team were supremely confident that they could get a $900 billion package through Congress with solid Republican support, so much so that when House minority whip Eric Cantor warned that they would receive no backing from House Republicans, they told him not to embarrass himself with such an absurd prediction.

Team Obama failed to anticipate how turned off the congressional GOP would be by the spending side of the package: Democratic appropriators were unloading a wish list that had accumulated during more than a decade of Republican governance. The White House also thought the Republicans would be attracted to the tax cuts that constituted roughly one-third of the package. But the White House did not understand how Republicans view taxes—specifically, the difference between tax credits, which the stimulus favored heavily, and rate cuts, which Republicans prefer. None of this should have come as a surprise to anyone who had done any homework on the congressional GOP. After all, Republicans killed a 1993 stimulus bill that was qualitatively similar, but less than a tenth the size of the 2009 package.

What did Team Obama surmise when its predictions fell flat? It certainly did not take time to gauge the congressional GOP more carefully, to build a more nuanced picture of Republicans' motives and expectations. Instead, it adopted the cartoonish caricature one finds in a Paul Krugman column: Republicans are contemptible knaves, willing to let the economy go down the drain to embarrass the president.

The stimulus also featured another theme of presidential-congressional relations under Obama: mixed messages from the White House. Early in the negotiations over the bill, President Obama told House minority leader John Boehner and Cantor that he was interested in their ideas. He did not want to play partisan games; he just wanted to jump-start the economy. Yet when Cantor presented the president a list of suggestions, Obama brought the dialogue

to an icy conclusion by infamously declaring, "I won, so I think I trump you on that." During the deliberations on the bill, the president's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, was known to respond to other GOP suggestions by shouting, "We have the votes. F— 'em!"

For the first two years of Obama's tenure, congressional Republicans did not register with the White House at all. Contact was so sparse that when the GOP took control of the House of Representatives, the White House did not even have Boehner's cell phone number so the president could place a congratulatory call.

The case of Michigan Republican Dave Camp is illustrative. According to Bob Woodward in *The Price of Politics*,

> The administration's approach to Congress was different from what he was used to. He had first come to Washington as a congressional staffer during the Reagan administration. Reagan had deployed administration liaisons all over Congress. Camp could remember Reagan getting on the phone with a lowly freshman congressman to discuss legislation. . . . During Obama's first two years in office, Camp was the ranking Republican on the Democrat-controlled Ways and Means Committee. He was one of the more politically moderate House Republicans. Yet the administration's Hill staff didn't even seem to know who he was. He never saw them.

During the debt ceiling battle of 2011, the president again exhibited cluelessness about the motivations of congressional Republicans. Precious time during the month of July was wasted as Obama insisted again and again on decoupling the Bush-era tax cuts, making permanent the cuts for those making under $250,000, and letting the cuts in the high-end rates expire. His argument was that the congressional GOP could avoid the wrath of Grover Norquist because it would not actually have to vote to increase taxes. It seemed never to cross his mind that tax rate increases such as he was proposing were anathema to congressional Republicans.

The bigger problem during the debt ceiling fight, and probably the biggest contributor to the near-default of the country that summer, was Obama's failure to heed Boehner's warning that $800 billion in additional tax revenue was his "red line," above which he could not go. The justification for that figure was that it was all that could be squeezed out of tax reform (and even that was optimistic according to many analysts); beyond that, tax rates would have to be raised in order to bring in more revenue. In late July, after Boehner had made a "grand bargain" offer that included $800 billion in new revenue, Obama asked for another $400 billion. Memories diverge on exactly who said what—Boehner is convinced Obama said he had to have the extra money, while Obama believes he only suggested it. This ambiguity might have been avoided if Obama had not made the rookie mistake of making such a big request over the phone instead of in person. And, anyway, he should have known not to ask, given Boehner's previous warnings about his red line. Unsurprisingly, the deal blew up shortly afterwards.

It boils down to the difference between listening and waiting to talk. With congressional Republicans, Obama always seems to do the latter. So, once again, he was left disappointed, and once again he assumed the worst of his negotiating partners. He surmised that there were simply too many extreme Tea Party Republicans who were prepared to breach the debt ceiling, and that Boehner lacked control of his caucus. Again, a basic understanding of Republican history would have corrected this notion. Like Newt Gingrich and Denny Hastert before him, Boehner is responsible to a majority of the Republican caucus, which for generations has opposed the kinds of rate increases that $1.2 trillion in new revenue would have required.

'You first.' 'No, after you, I insist.'

Not only did Obama fail to listen during the debt ceiling struggle, he consistently sent the other side mixed messages. A case in point: Obama's demagogic April 2011 speech blasted Paul Ryan's budget as "leaving seniors at the mercy of the insurance industry" and abandoning "the

fundamental commitment this country has kept for generations." In private, however, Obama had praised Ryan for offering a serious proposal and emphasized that both sides had to avoid scaring the elderly for political points. Worse, he had held a bipartisan summit that very day to encourage the two sides to come together on a plan.

Obama's problems communicating with Congress are not limited to the right side of the aisle. Although Democrats need not worry about White House demagoguery or fret that Obama fails to understand their concerns, he has nevertheless done a poor job of engaging them in dialogue. In particular, the White House has often cut congressional Democrats out of the loop, inhibiting interbranch coordination and angering leaders by what they feel is trampling on their institutional rights.

Indeed, the president's signature achievement—Obamacare—almost did not happen because of this. The process by which the health care bill was written was chaotic, to say the least. At one point five bills were circulating on Capitol Hill, three in the House and two in the Senate. Each differed, sometimes dramatically, in how to expand coverage and how to pay for it. And yet the White House did virtually nothing in 2009 to coordinate these efforts.

In fact, White House aides privately thought the final House bill was a liberal fantasy, and they had worked out a deal with medical providers that did not include the so-called public option. Yet the president never came out against that proposal, or any other, for that matter. After multiple calls over the summer of 2009 for President Obama to set some ground rules on what he expected, he gave a speech in early September that, though his aides promised specificity, was once again vague.

Finally, in early January, when the two chambers had passed their bills and it came time to work out the finer points, President Obama actually stormed out of a meeting after Nancy Pelosi tartly expressed her frustration with his lack of leadership. It was left to Emanuel to finish the negotiations. Worse, the needless delays due to the lack of presidential leadership sapped public support for the reform effort, led to Scott Brown's victory in the Senate race in Massachusetts that January, and eventually forced Democrats to pass a gratuitously slipshod and ill-conceived bill that otherwise never would have become law.

After the 2010 midterms, House Democrats lost their majority, but not all of their clout. It would have been virtually impossible for Boehner to pass a compromise debt ceiling plan through the House in 2011 without at least some Democratic support, so it was appropriate for Pelosi and her leadership team to be kept in the loop. For a while, they were, but as Boehner and Obama approached a grand bargain, House Democrats were excluded.

Amazingly, so was Harry Reid. Any deal would obviously have to bear the imprimatur of the Senate majority leader, yet he was cut out of the final talks. It was only after the *New York Times* scooped the Boehner-Obama grand bargain that the White House brought Senate Democrats into the loop. Unsurprisingly, they were apoplectic, believing that the deal extracted too little from the congressional GOP, and feeling that they had been ignored. In fact, it was the outrage of the Senate Democrats that prompted the White House to go back to Boehner at the last minute to ask for more tax revenue, scuttling the big deal once and for all.

All of these stories point in the same direction: This president does not have a solid congressional outreach program, does not have a steady grasp of the expectations of legislators in either party, and does a notably poor job of communicating to them what he expects. Thus, a drifting and listless policy process, finally given direction by some power player outside the White House, often acting to avert imminent disaster, has marked almost every major deal during his tenure.

There is little reason to expect anything different in the next four years. In the end, President Obama simply does not spend enough time talking to members of Congress. He is too aloof, and most accounts suggest he dislikes the seemingly petty, parochial nature of Capitol Hill.

In an interview with journalist Ron Suskind, President Obama articulated what he believes to be the core of a president's job, and what he learned from the troubles of his first term:

> The reason people put me in this office is people felt that I had connected our current predicaments with the broader arc of American history and where we might go as a diverse and forward-looking nation. And that narrative thread we just lost, in the day-to-day problem solving that was going on. . . . What the president can do, that nobody else can do, is tell a story to the American people about where we are and where we need to go.

While this statement would surely make the republicans of the founding generation turn over in their graves, it does encapsulate the job of the modern president, but only in part. Yes, he is to stand, almost godlike, above the political process and tell a story, but the modern presidential deity is not in line with the watchmaker God of the 18th-century rationalists. It is not enough to put the pieces in motion, then stand back. Instead, a president must be more

like the God of the Old and New Testaments, above the world and sovereign over it, but also intimately involved in it, guiding, encouraging, cajoling, and threatening people to make the right choices.

The ideal modern president, to borrow a phrase from Theodore Roosevelt, is one "actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood." President Obama does not much care for the arena, and his successes came despite this distaste, not because of it. In fact, Nancy Pelosi probably deserves most of the credit for the legislative victories of 2009-2010. She functioned as a de facto prime minister, with her eyes always on big, national projects while she dealt with the provincial concerns of this committee chair or that subcommittee member. She, not Obama, was the one "in the arena."

What this means is that major breakthroughs on legislation in the next four years are likely to depend on political actors outside the White House. Pelosi's power is only a fraction of what it was, but policy success will still depend on congressional entrepreneurs as long as the White House remains disengaged. Thus, a whole host of issues will likely go unaddressed, above all, the looming entitlement crisis. One issue that could see movement is immigration reform, a topic of discussion where there is overlap between the parties and there are potential leaders in Congress, like Marco Rubio, who could help in whipping his party and negotiating a compromise with the other side.

But little such progress will be due to President Obama. It is highly unlikely that he will act as the collective bargainer Neustadt envisioned. He will not be the one to help hammer out policy differences between Senate Democrats and House Republicans, such as illegal immigrants' status under Obamacare, or help the appropriators find the money needed for enforcement, or create a political space where both parties can declare victory.

Sure enough, last week's campaign-style speech in Las Vegas on immigration reform was classic Obama. Not only did it do nothing to advance the ball on the sensitive negotiations in Congress, but the president demanded immediate amnesty, something to which Republicans will never agree. He also said he would "insist" that Congress vote on his proposal if it did not act in a timely fashion.

That captures Obama's problem in a nutshell. "Insisting" that Congress do something is a good way to make sure nothing happens. Instead, as Harry Truman once said, the president must spend his time "flattering, kissing, and kicking people to get them to do what they are supposed to do anyway." Barack Obama does not do this. He thinks it beneath him. After four years in office, he still fails to grasp the essence of modern presidential power. ♦

Losing Streak

The Democratic ascendancy and why it happened

By Jeffrey Bell

In the six presidential elections between 1992 and 2012, the Democratic party has regained the solid popular-vote majority it enjoyed during the New Deal/Great Society era (1932-64) but relinquished in the six elections between 1968 and 1988.

Since losing in 1988, Democrats have carried the popular vote in five of six elections and won the Electoral College in four. Of the two close elections in the current era (2000 and 2004), Republicans won the presidency in both. The four Democratic victories, by contrast, came by comfortable popular margins of 5.6, 8.5, 7.3, and 3.9 percentage points (in order, the two Clinton and two Obama wins). These Democratic showings were good for 370, 379, 365, and 332 electoral votes, while George W. Bush's two wins featured 271 and 286 electoral votes, just slightly above the 270 needed for election. In 2012 Barack Obama became the first president since Ronald Reagan to win two popular majorities (52.9 percent in 2008 and 51.1 percent on November 6).

Republicans cannot take much comfort in their 234-seat majority in the House of Representatives. For one thing, Democrats won the 2012 House popular vote by 1.2 percentage points, a sharp improvement from their 6.6-point deficit in 2010. More important, since ticket-splitting achieved mass proportions in the 1950s, greatly aiding House and Senate incumbents seeking reelection, congressional dominance has been on a different track from presidential dominance. It has arguably become something of a lagging indicator. The fact that Republicans never came close to a House majority between 1968 and 1988 was small consolation to Democratic nominees who lost the presidency time after time. More recently, Republican congressional landslides in 1994 and 2010 did nothing to prevent the subsequent reelection of Democratic presidents.

In the midst of these recent losses, Republican analysts (including me) became adept at finding one-off, "special" circumstances to account for supposedly anomalous Democratic wins. Bill Clinton ran as a moderate or even a conservative on selected issues like crime and welfare reform. Ross Perot's independent candidacy confused the electorate and divided the Republican vote in 1992 and 1996. Barack Obama in 2008 benefited from bipartisan goodwill as the first minority nominee for president. A mediocre or bad economy wrecked Republican chances in 1992 and 2008.

But Obama's reelection makes the GOP's minority status in presidential politics impossible to analyze away. Economic conditions—stagnant growth and high unemployment—seemed to fulfill the classic conditions for a "referendum" election that would very likely result in the ouster of the incumbent. The president's signature domestic accomplishment, Obamacare, was rejected by majorities in poll after poll. The charisma and voter euphoria that marked Obama's election in 2008 had seemingly long since dissipated.

When most polls during 2012 showed Obama with a slender lead over Mitt Romney, Republican elites questioned the pollsters' methodology. Some samples projected a bigger Democratic share of total turnout than in the banner Democratic year of 2008, which seemed implausible given the close national numbers. Many polls showed Romney leading among independents, in past elections a harbinger of victory. Moreover, the Romney-Ryan ticket made no game-changing mistakes, and in the judgment of both sides, Romney dominated the first presidential debate, invariably in earlier cycles the most important.

But when all the votes were counted, the election was not very close. Obama's victory margin was a hair under 5 million votes. Of the 28 states he had won in 2008, he held 26. Of the 12 "battleground" states, Obama won 11—8 of them by a margin of more than 5 percentage points. Remarkably, this meant that if there had been a uniform 5-point swing toward the Republicans in the national popular-vote margin—that is, had Romney won the popular vote by 1.1 percentage points instead of losing it by 3.9—Obama would still have prevailed in the Electoral College, winning 23 states and 272 electoral votes.

In the last two decades of Democratic dominance, 18 states and the District of Columbia have voted Democratic six out of six times. These currently have 242 electoral votes, which is quite close to the 270 needed to win the presidency. There are 13 states that have voted Republican in every election since 1992, but they total just 102 electoral votes. This means that to win, a Republican nominee

Jeffrey Bell is policy director of the American Principles Project and author of The Case for Polarized Politics: Why America Needs Social Conservatism *(Encounter Books, 2012).*

must either break a generation-long Democratic winning streak in one or more states, or carry 168 of 194 electoral votes among the "purple" states that have gone both ways since 1992. Not for nothing have political insiders taken to calling the GOP path to an Electoral College majority the equivalent of drawing to an inside straight.

If the next two decades are anything like the last two, the presidential outlook for Republicans is pretty bleak. Yet even while digesting some earlier defeats, conservatives could take a bit of comfort from the notion that Democrats had been forced to move toward the center to become competitive again after their disastrous showings in the presidential elections of the 1980s. In the elections from 1992 to 2000, and even to a degree in 2004, the term "New Democrat" was often heard in the land. After 1984 Democrats seldom campaigned for broad-based tax increases or deep cuts in defense spending. Far more Democratic senators voted for the authorization of war against Iraq under George W. Bush than had voted to authorize the Persian Gulf war against Iraq a decade earlier under his father. More Democrats were talking tough on crime, many became supporters of the death penalty, and in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the party pretty much dropped its decades-long campaign for federal gun control. In 1996 President Clinton made good on his 1992 campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it" and in 1997 signed a good-sized tax cut as part of a deficit-reduction deal with a Republican Congress. Even on the core Democratic commitment to unlimited abortion rights, New Democrat rhetoric was to make the procedure "safe, legal, and rare."

There, there

Things began to change in the last decade and a half with the rise on the Democratic left of what came to be called the "Netroots." At first it seemed possible this was a reaction to high-profile events that infuriated the left, especially the impeachment and trial of Bill Clinton in 1998 and the election of George W. Bush, who in December 2000 was in effect declared the winner of the Electoral College by a 5-4 vote of the U.S. Supreme Court in an election carried by Al Gore in the popular vote. MoveOn.org, a trendsetting militant left organization, got its name from opposition to 1998's impeachment process, and there is no doubt that the resolution of the 2000 election was a traumatic event for the left. Bush's unusual status as an elected president who had lost the popular vote contributed to making Democrats far more confrontational toward him than they had been toward his father.

But when Howard Dean saw his presidential fundraising go through the roof in 2003, it was clear something much deeper was happening in the Democratic party. By 2008, all three Democratic candidates for the presidential nomination—Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards—were running to the left of earlier primary candidates and (in the case of Clinton and Edwards) well to the left of where their own Senate voting records had been just a few years earlier. Obama's nomination was correctly considered a victory for the left, and Clinton clearly benefited from her husband's centrist aura in the more conservative primary states, yet it is difficult to remember a single issue where either Clinton or Edwards was to the right of Obama's stated positions. Today the term "New Democrat" is the equivalent of a curse among the party's political and policy elites.

The Democrats' sharp move to the left since 1998 is the most recent leap forward in polarization, which has been the underlying trend of American politics since the 1960s. What few could foresee is how well the Democrats' decision to embrace the left would work politically. Political polarization involves a rallying of popular forces behind or against a worldview. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nixon rallied what he called the Silent Majority against the left-led cultural and political upheavals of the 1960s. Reagan did something similar in California when he took office as governor in 1967 in the wake of unprecedented campus upheavals and urban rioting that had erupted there in 1964 and 1965.

Reagan was also increasingly involved in the American conservative movement, which had unexpectedly prevailed over the Eastern establishment in the epic Republican nomination struggle of 1964. In becoming its preeminent figure following the landslide defeat of Barry Goldwater and his own election as governor, Reagan inherited a grassroots state-by-state infrastructure that helped him battle an incumbent president to a near-standstill in the primaries of 1976, laying the groundwork for his nomination and election in 1980.

Reagan did more than benefit from an existing conservative movement. He transformed it and brought it to maturity. Influenced by Jack Kemp, between his 1976 and 1980 campaigns he embraced supply-side economics, adding an important pro-growth component to Goldwater's advocacy of limited government. In foreign policy, he fully identified with the anti-Communist forward strategy of Goldwater and *National Review* but placed increased emphasis on America's commitment to spreading our founding principles and democratic values around the world. He directly challenged the realism of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and became an advocate of "morality in foreign policy" (the title of a Reaganite plank added unanimously to the 1976 platform). On social and cultural issues, which in an earlier

form had been key to his election as governor, he had a pro-life conversion and added the first militantly anti-abortion plank to the Republican platform in 1980. In his first term Reagan became such a central figure in the debate about the right of people of faith to advance their beliefs in the public square that during the 1984 campaign, Democratic nominee Walter Mondale accused him of being an "ayatollah."

All of this proved effective in pushing previously Democratic voting streams toward the Republican presidential coalition between 1976 and 1984. But the most striking thing about Reagan as a political leader was his integrated worldview and his determination to advance it on a broad range of policy fronts. None of Reagan's five successors as GOP nominee fully shared his integrated worldview, but the momentum of his positive polarization continued in 1988 when Lee Atwater and Roger Ailes, both high-level alumni of the 1984 campaign, turned the race against Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis into a debate about the Massachusetts governor's social liberalism on such issues as prison furloughs and his veto of saying the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools. Nonetheless, before the end of his first and only term, George H.W. Bush had turned against supply-side economics and embraced a "big tent" on the abortion issue—ironically via a speech delivered by Atwater—which was designed to play down polarization on behalf of a "kinder and gentler" society and presidency.

Barack Obama, of course, openly models himself not on Reagan's Republican successors or on his own pragmatic Democratic predecessor Bill Clinton, but on Reagan, whom he has recognized as transformational. In the context of his first term, his reelection campaign, and (especially) the weeks since, Obama is proving effective in pushing an ideologically comprehensive, consistent, and unapologetic left agenda. By its nature, this involves polarization. And in our age of polarization, aided by the comeback of the left that began to gain momentum after 1998, this has already made him a more consequential president than Bill Clinton, for all his popularity, could ever dream of being.

Since the 1960s, two social trends have laid the groundwork for the revitalization of the American left. The earlier and more significant one is the left's reorientation toward social and sexual liberation, rather than government ownership of business, as its center of gravity. This was not so much an innovation as a return to the origins of the left in late 18th-century France. It then took the form of an assault on organized religion and the traditional family, formulated by Rousseau and first executed politically by Robespierre and the Jacobins in the 1790s, when the left was first named.

The second is the steady increase as a share of the electorate—about 1 percent per year for the last 10 years or so, as measured by surveys of the Pew Charitable Trust, among others—of voters who list "none" as their religious affiliation. In an era marked by frequency of religious observance as the single most important factor in determining Republican/conservative allegiance, the rise of the "secularlars" has added several percentage points to the share of self-described liberals in the composition of voter turnout, though by no means bringing them close to parity with conservatives. The Obama campaign of 2012 was well aware of this trend in a reelection effort heavily dependent on turning out its existing ideological base, and this explains much of its in-your-face pursuit of social issues like same-sex marriage, support for Planned Parenthood, and imposition of contraceptive and early-term abortion mandates on the Catholic church and other traditional religions.

In taking a passive position in response to left-inspired polarization on these issues, the Romney campaign was pursuing an economics-only strategy fully supported by the Republican establishment. It even extended, with establishment approval, to Romney's decision not to bring up the Obama administration's Benghazi fiasco in the presidential debate on foreign policy. One can be confident of this full establishment agreement from the fact that Karl Rove and his associates, with close to a billion dollars of completely independent advertising money, did not run a single ad critical of the administration on social issues or any aspect of foreign and defense policy, including Benghazi. Instead their ads limited themselves to echoing the Romney campaign theme that the U.S. economy was not vibrant and had continued high unemployment.

There is little evidence that for all this advertising, Republicans achieved much of a net benefit even on economic issues. When Bill Clinton in his convention speech asked rhetorically why, with some progress being made, we would want to return to the policies that brought us the financial crisis in the first place, the Romney campaign and other Republicans offered zero rebuttal. The lack of a persuasive economic narrative is still haunting Republicans in the polarized economic debate pursued by the president since the election.

So why is the left winning, and in particular why did it prevail in 2012? In the words of Christopher Caldwell's postelection article in these pages ("Values Voters Prevail Again," November 19, 2012): "[S]tructurally the outcome was the same one that we have seen decade after decade. Where two candidates argue over values, the public may prefer one to the other. But where only one candidate has values, he wins, whatever those values happen to be." This is particularly true in our age of polarization, and Republicans need to relearn the lesson taught by both Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama before their party drops completely off the charts. ♦

Sgt. John Guerra of the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team in Baghdad, February 2007

Victory in Iraq

How it was won, how it may be lost. BY BARTLE B. BULL

It was December 2006. Al Qaeda was near the peak of its influence in Iraq. The United States was widely considered to have been defeated in a humiliating war of choice in a country of extraordinary importance.

Hauled from a prison for suspected terrorists, the emir of a virulent Islamist group fighting in Iraq's Sunni insurgency spoke to a British general charged with reaching out to such elements. Neither of them could know it then, but they were near a turning point. The civilian death toll in Baghdad that month would exceed 3,500 for the only time in the eight-year war.

The Endgame
The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq
by Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor
Pantheon, 800 pp., $35

"The Koran makes clear that a force of occupation can be resisted for however many years it takes," said the insurgent leader. "We have watched you in Anbar for three-and-a-half years," he continued. "We have concluded that you do not threaten our faith or our way of life. Al Qaeda does."

If there is one key moment in *The Endgame*, an impressive account of America's Iraq war from the fall of Saddam Hussein until the final U.S. withdrawal in December 2011, this is it.

It is nearly all there in this encounter: the tragically wasted years of 2003-06, the allies' new sophistication in 2007, the ultimately decisive combination of the patriotism of the Iraqi people and the decency and determination of the allied project in their country, and the bottom line that the whole thing was ultimately about the Iraqis, not us. Finally, unmistakably, there is in this exchange all that we need to know about the long-term potential the United States enjoyed in Iraq, and

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bartle B. Bull, former foreign editor of Prospect, *manages an Iraq-focused investment fund.*

about the wanton profligacy of spurning such a valuable and hard-won alliance, as we did in late 2011.

Today, a year on from our departure, and with a weakened American administration doubling down on a posture of diffidence in the Middle East, the lessons in this important book are as worthy of our attention as they have ever been. Thanks mostly to Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor's extraordinary access to key American and allied sources, and Gordon's journalism from the frontlines of the conflict itself, the authors give us war in three dimensions—from the grand sweep of White House strategy discussions down to the dust whipped up by the rotor blades of American Apaches—in a way that few historians have matched in other conflicts.

When the forces of Shia rabble-rouser Moktada al-Sadr hole up around the Mosque of the Imam Ali during the second battle of Najaf in 2005, we see then-prime minister Ayad Allawi breaking his hand as he slams a desk in anger. Later, Allawi and Sadr finally meet in person for the first time—in Damascus, of all places—when they bump into each other while paying court to Bashar al-Assad. Allawi tells his younger countryman that he had known the latter's martyred father and great-uncle. Neither had been a sectarian, says Allawi suggestively—and Sadr agrees with him. Who knew? But that's exactly how Iraqi politics works. The players know each other's families, and they are almost all related, one way or another. Their interactions are bare-knuckled but pragmatic. The country stays together. If you do not understand that, you do not understand Iraq.

Seen from today's perspective, as the West allows Syria to burn despite its potential and importance, that last scene is powerful. Here are two major leaders from the region's natural Arab hegemon as they find themselves cap-in-hand in the capital of a poorer, smaller neighbor. The local tyrant works to prevent the emergence of their freedom; meanwhile, his own despotic reign slouches towards an all-out civil war such as Iraq would ultimately reject. Characteristically, the authors do not overplay the scene. Their cool, diplomatic style is a relief. The sober details come one after another, the long meticulous narrative building while the reader is left to draw his own conclusions.

When General George Casey, the four-star commander of allied forces, finally leaves Iraq in 2007, after almost four years, he gives his service revolver to then-and-now-prime minister Nuri al-Maliki. Could there be a better expression of the sincerity and futility of those wasted Casey/Rumsfeld years? Later, in 2008, months after the new strategy has proven successful, the authors give us another vignette: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice kicking General David Petraeus under a table in the White House as the general tries to suggest his own trip to Syria. In the 68 pages of notes, we see why Gordon and Trainor are such a formidable pair when it comes to pulling such scenes into a narrative. Their work is so comprehensive and deeply sourced as to be something akin to a documentary history in its own right. There are hundreds of interviews with the players, from Army grunts to presidents, prime ministers, and generals. There are private notes, shared confidentially with the authors, of numerous others: an unnamed "meeting participant," "SEAL officer," or "former [Coalition Provisional Authority] official."

With a weakened U.S. administration doubling down on a posture of diffidence in the Middle East, the lessons in this important book are as worthy of our attention as they have ever been.

Gordon's extensive reporting from the American side provides welcome color. When the surge pushes American troops into the vicious "Baghdad Belts" around the capital, we are there on the ground with the participants as the big picture plays out in wild local battles. When fighting erupts in a tiny place called Hawr Rajab, we see the "England" logo on the T-shirt of a sheikh of the local Sunni Awakening while we hear the American soldier not far away shouting, "I need another body bag."

The result coalesces as a valuable reminder of the trajectory of a conflict which, by 2008, had ended in a military victory that gave the United States a historic strategic opportunity. Even many who followed the war closely will have forgotten the fact that the hapless Jay Garner, first ground commander of the U.S.-led occupation, had cut his teeth in the field of air defense. From these early days through to the end, we repeatedly see American civilian officials "trapped in the Green Zone," unable to visit and understand the country beyond their blast walls. It can be easy to forget just how soon—and how successfully—Iraq's first free election occurred. In January 2005, despite attacks on over 300 polling stations, 58 percent of the voting population turned out.

In February 2006, we see the key moment in Iraq's descent towards the sectarian war that the Sunnis required if the Americans were to be persuaded to leave: the Sunni bombing of the Shias' Samarra mosque. At the end of that terrible year, we see the Baker-Hamilton commission deliver its report recommending a swift withdrawal and a "transition" to Iraqi security forces that were known not to exist. We see this declaration of defeat taken up by freshman Illinois senator Barack Obama, who, a few months later, will cite it as the model for his Iraq War De-Escalation Act.

The year 2007, then, was a stunning one: Americans pushing small units deep into the streets of Iraq's towns and cities, especially Baghdad, during bloody summer months; the Anbar tribes reaching out—near Ramadi at first, and then elsewhere—for an alliance against al Qaeda; the Surge of Concrete—25 miles of temporary blast walls carving up West Baghdad

alone—helping to calm the capital after the bloodletting. Six years later, as we divine what the second Obama administration will do with the "flexibility" it has promised Russia (and presumably Iran), it is useful to be reminded of what happened when General Petraeus went to Washington for his confirmation hearing at the beginning of that remarkable year. How many recall that, on the day of Petraeus's testimony, Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware was holding his own hearing, calling for the breakup of Iraq itself? Now that personal scandal has blighted Petraeus's career, we ought to remember the dignity with which he handled the "General Betray Us" accusations of presidential candidate Obama's key allies and donors. Now is not the time to forget the claims of Senators Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton that Petraeus's numbers and conclusions were simply not to be believed.

Replete as it is with hidden moments of the little picture, and comprehensive as it is in reminding us of the larger events in America's third-longest war, *The Endgame* is ultimately about a different perspective altogether. It is the story of strategy, of the big picture. This story is told as it happened, through the quotidian developments of a long conflict. Related this way, the war takes shape before the reader's eyes as the painful effort of a stubborn power, half-blindfolded, stumbling about a new and vicious place and trying to find a formula that worked.

Most Americans know the turnaround of 2007 simply as "the surge." In fact, there were two main themes of that year in Iraq. There was the surge itself, George W. Bush's commitment of an additional five combat brigades (roughly 20,000 troops) to be deployed under General Petraeus according to the doctrines of counterinsurgency, an approach that focuses mainly on the protection of the civilian population. And there was the Awakening, the phenomenon that saw much of the former Sunni insurgency join our side of the fight.

Parts of the Awakening began before the surge had even started, and the initial planning and articulation of the surge had never envisaged anything like the Awakening. There is debate over which movement mattered more; such controversy, however, is beside the point. Without large numbers of additional American troops on the ground, a more engaged and intelligent American tactical posture, and a strong sense of the depth of American commitment, the Awakening would not have moved very far past the outskirts of Ramadi, where it began.

From the Iraqi perspective, *The Endgame* is strongest where it matters most to current policy. The final moments of the story relate how the Obama administration threw away the achievements of a generation of U.S. policymakers and war fighters that will long be remembered for extraordinary seriousness and courage. There is no doubt that, in 2011, the Iraqi government wanted American troops to stay, and stay in significant numbers. As Gordon and Trainor point out, the concern on the Iraqi side was merely to make the legal fine points acceptable to the Iraqi electorate. These technicalities were not difficult to resolve, and the Americans knew that even 20,000 U.S. troops would be acceptable to the Iraqi prime minister.

But the new administration was not serious about a commitment to Iraq, which it signaled in the clearest terms by proposing a residual troop number—5,000—that was 50 percent lower than what its own generals believed to be the safe minimum, and by insisting on a wholly unnecessary (and constitutionally meaningless) ratification of any agreement by the Iraqi parliament. The Iraqis were stunned, the negotiations fell apart, and the United States withdrew completely.

In 2003, General Petraeus, leading the 101st Airborne north with the initial invasion, famously, repeatedly, asked an embedded reporter, "Tell me how this ends." *The Endgame*'s title comes not from the dispiriting end to the story but from America's search, from the beginning, for victory's elusive formula. The title gains its poignancy from the wastefulness of the conclusion we chose once that winning strategy had been found and successfully implemented. ♦

B&A

Books of Hours

One man's meat is another man's stuffing.

BY PETER TONGUETTE

How Literature Saved My Life
by David Shields
Knopf, 224 pp., $25.95

The title of David Shields's latest book could hardly be more straightforward, but by the time we are finished with it, we are not sure how Shields would define "literature," or what it is that is supposedly saved. The books Shields admires have saved . . . something. His ego, perhaps, or his sanity; but his life?

The early chapters, describing Shields's unremarkable struggles with his parents, his relationships with women, and his stutter, belie such a high-flown setup. It is easy to imagine certain historical figures making Shields's title convincing—Admiral Stockdale recalling Epictetus to steel himself for seven years as a prisoner of war, to name a well-known example—

Peter Tonguette is the author, most recently, of The Films of James Bridges.

but Shields seems like the sort of fellow who would rely on *War and Peace* to get over a breakup. For a book purporting to be about the palliative effects of the *written* word, Shields is inordinately fond of movie references, so he will appreciate this one: As a character in *Stardust Memories* says of a self-indulgent film director, "They try to document their private suffering and fob it off as art."

That is not to say that some of what Shields writes is not diverting. Entering Brown University, he is so naïve yet eager that he supposes Goethe is pronounced "Go-eth." (In a similar vein, Susan Sontag once told an interviewer that as a teenager she thought Proust was pronounced "Prowst.") A long, discursive account of Shields wooing a fellow student at Brown, as he surreptitiously reads her journal entries detailing her view of their intense romance, is quite funny:

> I loved her impatient handwriting, her purple ink, the melodrama of the whole thing. It was such a surprising and addictive respite, seeing every aspect of my being celebrated by someone else rather than excoriated by myself.

David Shields

TOM COLLICOTT

The episode also manages to subtly illustrate one of his main themes: the difficulty of "living anywhere other than in language" (meaning written language), which was apparently one of the aftereffects of his stutter. Naturally, the love affair ends after he confesses his furtive journal-reading to his would-be soulmate.

Yet there is a diminutive quality to Shields's anecdotes. Setting aside the fact that they only rarely grapple with matters of life and death, they lack the can't-put-the-book-down urgency of, say, Martin Amis's account of his dental fiasco in *Experience*. What's more, they start to run together after a while: At least twice, we read of Shields burying his troubles in dishes of ice cream, while a tribute to J.D. Salinger and *The Catcher in the Rye* opens with the unpalatable image of our narrator gulping buttermilk to soothe a sore throat. Maybe these repeated references to food and mouth are meant to connect (however imperceptibly, to the casual reader) to Shields's stutter, but it seems more likely that he is just being sloppy.

The sole exception, and the most powerful segment, deals with Shields's dalliance with suicide. It is also one passage in which Shields's minimalistic prose suits the subject matter: He dispatches with the episode in four sentences, the last of which reads, "Shutting my eyes and turning off the light, I try to imagine what broken glass would sound like in the dark." Hauntingly, he says no more. (The passage is adapted from a lengthier, less effective one in a Shields novel). Elsewhere, though, Shields's self-conscious attempts at collage backfire, as when quotations about humanity's purpose are offered by Tolstoy, Ice-T, Burt Reynolds, and Samuel Beckett, in that order.

Shields writes a great deal about other books and other writers, but the quantity is deceptive; he is apt to play hide-and-seek with what insights he has. Early on, he repeats a few phrases twice in a row—"maybe, maybe" and "it does, it does"—but it takes another 80-odd pages before we can infer that he is doing so in homage to a tic he describes from Renata Adler's *Speedboat*, one of his favorite books. Later, he runs through "fifty-five works I swear by" in about 17 pages, and counts on certain assertions being left unchallenged. He claims that the "expository first chapter" of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* "renders moot the rest of the book and everything else he ever wrote." This unconventional view reflects Shields's proud, well-publicized distaste for fiction—he offers an out-of-nowhere tsk-tsk to Don DeLillo for writing *Point Omega* as a novel rather than as the "beautiful film criticism" it really wants to be—but he fails to mention that when Vonnegut forsook storytelling entirely in his last book, *Timequake*, the result was a slipshod mess.

"Straightforward fiction functions only as more bubble wrap, nostalgia, retreat," Shields writes, implicitly slighting the very sort of books that most readers actually rely on for guidance or solace. Of course, many of the works he enthuses about are essential—St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Philip Larkin's *Whitsun Weddings*, the essays of Montaigne—but you have to wonder about him when he reluctantly refers to James Joyce's "The Dead" as "'great'" (in ironic quotation marks), while later extolling *Sh*t My Dad Says*, which, he concedes, is "not great or even good, probably, really, finally, but above all it's not boring." I'm not sure which is more ridiculous: the idea that this book (based on a Twitter account) is "literature," or that it had any role in saving anyone's life, ever.

Shields gives the impression of being hard on himself, but is he really? At one point, in an amusingly thorough but dated rant, he claims to share a litany of unappealing qualities with George W. Bush—but by the end, we suspect the point was to make Bush look bad, not himself. To his credit, though, Shields ends this maddening volume on a rare tough-minded note. "I wanted literature to assuage human loneliness," he writes. "Nothing can assuage human loneliness. Literature doesn't lie about this—which is what makes it essential." ♦

B&A

Woman of Texas

The 20th-century journey of Lady Bird Johnson.

BY WILLIAM MCKENZIE

Whatever you may think about the reliability of oral histories, the set of interviews that Lady Bird Johnson gave Michael Gillette and Harry Middleton allow the reader to go deeper into the life of one of the most interesting, and least understood, modern first ladies.

From 1977 to 1991, Johnson spoke 36 times with Gillette, who, for most of that time, directed the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library's Oral History Project. From 1994 to 1996, she gave eight interviews to Middleton, who was then the director of the library. As you may expect from a symbiotic relationship, they didn't pose questions that Robert Caro might have asked. Still, these exchanges (which Gillette has compiled) help us understand the culture, values, and background that shaped a wife who, from afar, could seem overshadowed by her mythically large husband, but was actually an independent woman for her times.

One way to understand this Southern woman is through the way her life mirrored the arc of Texas. Naturally, that aspect will interest those of us who are Texans; but understanding the trajectory of her home state is important to appreciating Lady Bird Johnson's evolution, as well as the nation's shift in the middle of the last century. We see Lady Bird rise from isolation in East Texas to become a pioneering businesswoman in emerging Austin, to a political wife in the midst of a cultural shift in racial relations in her state and country.

There was little in Claudia Alta Taylor's background to predict that she would become a central player in one of America's most dramatic upheavals, brought on by the Kennedy assassination and the turbulent sixties. As those who read Jan Jarboe Russell's excellent *Lady Bird: A Biography of Mrs. Johnson* (1999) know, the future first lady grew up far removed from the center of American life in tiny Karnack, Texas. In her early days, Texas—especially East Texas—had the feel and rhythms of a novelist's imagination; you can almost hear the cicadas in the background as she describes Karnack. She lived in a large house with a big front porch in a rural town. Her father was a successful lumberman/businessman, and a leading citizen. But he later would tell his only daughter not to return there after finishing at the University of Texas. He knew she had a better future elsewhere.

Lady Bird Johnson
An Oral History
by Michael L. Gillette
Oxford, 416 pp., $29.95

At the LBJ Ranch, 1965

Some of the most revealing and poignant insights come from her remembrances of being a shy, bookish girl who lost her mother at age 5. When her father sent her to finish high school in nearby Marshall (which seemed urban compared to Karnack), all the hours she had spent around adults since her mother's death came into play. Said the future first lady, who one day would live a very public life:

> Shyness is a fairly common phenomenon, particularly when you get to be about thirteen or fourteen. But if you've been raised way out in the country and not associated with a variety of people, it can be pretty excruciating, and in my case it was. I imagined that everybody knew more about how to behave and dressed better than I did.

We also see how she started to enter the mainstream of American life after she left the University of Texas with degrees in history and journalism. Her prosperous father gave his favored daughter and a friend a trip to New York; here is how Lady Bird described the coming-of-age voyage she and Cecille Harrison took from Galveston to the Big Apple:

> This tour also included going to a nightclub. Our eyes were out on stems; we had a great time. We were not the least bit apprehensive about going to a nightclub. Then, we went down in the dreadful part, the really skid row part of town. We'd see people huddled on the sidewalk, clutching a bottle or asleep or raggedy. Of course, this was June and it wasn't as miserable as it probably was in January, but it was an eye-opener.

Lady Bird's interviews stopped before she got too deeply into the tumult of the 1960s, and the sessions came to a halt as she proceeded into her eighties, leaving the White House years largely untouched. But we know from hindsight what role she and her husband played in the civil rights

TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

William McKenzie is a columnist at the Dallas Morning News.

revolution. Like LBJ, she stumped for racial equality. Her efforts included a whistle-stop train trip through her native South in 1964, largely motivated by her experiences growing up in segregated Texas.

Even her famous nickname comes linked with the complexities of that past. For years, the nickname "Lady Bird" was attributed to a black nurse. But Gillette says she told him that two black playmates, nicknamed "Stuff" and "Doodlebug," had given her the name. She could not let that become too well known, though, given the sensitivities of black and white children mixing together in her earlier days.

And her awareness of others with fewer advantages was not simply for show. The current director of the LBJ Library, Mark Updegrove, told me recently that she would invite whoever happened to be working at the LBJ Ranch to stop and have lunch with her. After her husband died, she and the house staff and ranch hands, who often were Latino, would break bread together.

Most readers will want to know to what degree Lyndon Johnson dominated their life together. This book does not give a clear indication. Yes, there are plenty of accounts in which Lyndon says this, and the Johnson family does that, and she describes him in a way that acknowledges his many sides, including this stream-of-consciousness depiction:

> Marvelous. Contradictory. Great natural intelligence. Showman sometimes; hurtful sometimes; very often tender and giving.

Lyndon Johnson was undoubtedly a force of nature. Witness how he asked her to marry him on their first real date: She recalls being too astounded even to answer. But about three months later, they married—after what she described as a "ridiculous" ride. They left her home in Karnack one day—she still not certain she was going to marry him—and by day's end they had arrived in San Antonio, where he had arranged a ceremony by phone from the road and, *whoosh*, they were married in an Episcopal church.

So, yes, it would be impossible not to get caught up in that force-field. Yet we need to remember, too, that Lady Bird Johnson was a pioneering businesswoman in Austin in the 1940s, using her inherited wealth to buy a radio station, which she left Washington for a while to staff and run. Female entrepreneurs were hardly common then, or during the 1950s, and LBJ promoted her independence, encouraging her to go beyond her shyness and engage the public, saying things like: "You had two majors at the University of Texas, you can do that." ♦

B&A

Seeing and Believing

The scientific method for comprehending the world.

BY SUSANNE KLINGENSTEIN

A Little History of Science
by William F. Bynum
Yale, 272 pp., $25

In 1935, Ernst Gombrich, scion of a bourgeois Viennese Jewish family, and newly minted Ph.D. in art history, found himself out of work. Walter Neurath, a friend and publisher, asked him to look over an English history book for children and, if it was any good, to translate it into German. Neurath wanted to publish it in his new series "Knowledge for Children."

A few days later, the 26-year-old Gombrich returned the book with the remark, "I think I could write a better one myself." Neurath asked him to deliver. Reading in his parents' library in the morning, studying period documents in the afternoon, and writing at night, Gombrich produced, under great time pressure, what was to be his only book in German: *Eine Weltgeschichte von der Urzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (1936). The book was an instant success, and has remained in print. With its brevity and intended audience, it mocked the then-ubiquitous, multi-tomed, solid leather *Universalgeschichten* (global histories) designed to give heft to the achievements of the urban bourgeoisie.

Gombrich's tone was light, his approach literary, his attitude toward his young readers engaging and conversational. What would a 10-year-old in 1935 really have to know about knights and courtly love, or the rebirth of humanism, in order to begin her privileged life in one of Europe's most cultured cities?

Quite a bit, Gombrich thought: Even children were then expected to know things and to think about them. Gombrich squeezed all of European history, from the cavemen to the end of World War I, into 39 chapters, an appealing number to children because it's three times the creepy 13. He added chapter 40 only in 1985 when he revised the book for its 50th anniversary. The new chapter covered World War II, and Gombrich ingeniously called it "The Small Part of the History of the World Which I Have Lived Through Myself." He was thus able to connect the ending to his opening reflections from 1935: History is that which has occurred and is being told to be remembered.

Gombrich's book did not appear in English until 2005, when Yale University Press published it under the playful title *A Little History of the World*. The "world" aspect of it is a bit of a sham since, of the 39 chapters, only three deal with China and one with India.

Susanne Klingenstein is a lecturer in the Harvard/MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology.

The book is unapologetically Eurocentric, since its original intention was to explain to German-speaking children, in 1935, how they had come into being.

It is worth knowing all this about Gombrich's still-superb book because Yale is now publishing *A Little History of Science*, a brilliantly conceived and beautifully written companion volume that picks up precisely where Gombrich left off. Its author, a historian of medicine who received an M.D. from Yale and a Ph.D. from Cambridge, has retired from teaching at University College London and is an experienced hand at writing both short and long histories of medicine and science. This shows in the ease with which he packs the interrelated histories of mathematics, astronomy, physics, and chemistry, and their cousins, medicine, biology, and pharmacology, into 39 chapters, covering the expanding universe of the mind from the structuring of time in Babylonia to string theory in America, with an add-on 40th chapter about the new dimensions of science in the digital age.

Ernst Gombrich had made little noises about the "advances" and "blessings of science," but had focused on politics, economics, and culture, leaving out the ravishing history of science that unfolds in Europe, and very clearly only there until the early 19th century, when America and other places with modern universities begin to come into the picture.

If anything, Bynum's book is even more unapologetically Eurocentric than Gombrich's: Only three of his chapters are set outside Europe. One is regarding medicine and math in the medieval Islamic world, where ancient Greek knowledge was studied and rehashed. The other two chapters—about ancient Babylon and Egypt, and medieval China and India—constitute the fuzzy opening of the book. In them, Bynum is forced to use science as an agent in his sentences ("science is building . . .") because he cannot derive a good concept of science from the ancient cultures of Babylonia and Egypt, suffused as they were with religious and magical ideas. Nor can he derive a clear definition of science from the mind-boggling engineering feats of China (the Great Wall and the Grand Canal) or the thoughtful medical-philosophical teachings of India.

Bynum swims free of the fuzziness only when he reaches the Greeks, in the third chapter, and can deliver his first clear definition of science: "Thales really wanted to explain things in natural, rather than supernatural, terms. The Egyptians thought that the Nile flooded because of the gods." In the subsequent chapter on

Copernicus and his planisphere (detail), 1661

Hippocrates, an even better opportunity presents itself to define science.

The famous opening sentence of Hippocrates' essay on epilepsy, "The Sacred Disease," articulates the starting point of modern science: "I do not believe that the 'Sacred Disease' is any more divine or sacred than any other disease, but, on the contrary, has specific characteristics and a definite cause." Bynum wants to drive that message home: "[T]he firm statement—that you can't say a disease has a supernatural cause simply because it is unusual or mysterious or hard to explain—might be said to be the guiding principle of science." But then he blows the opportunity: "We may not understand it now, but with patience and hard work, we can."

Patience and hard work are also attributes of hunters, peasants, and Benedictine monks. What sets scientists apart is their rigorous observation of natural phenomena, allowing patterns to emerge that can be expressed in abstract formulae, which, in turn, can be applied to produce identical results any time they are reapplied in identical conditions. To "do science" means to subscribe to a mindset that distinguishes scrupulously between immanence and transcendence, between the natural and the supernatural, between what is in the world as a verifiable phenomenon and what is merely felt.

When you write for children, your definitions must be perfectly clear from the outset. A clear definition of the scientific mindset, which had its birthplace in ancient Greece and thrived in Europe as the Roman Catholic Church was beginning to lose its hold on intellectuals, is key to explaining the exclusion of most of Asia and all of Africa and South America from a history of science.

As Bynum moves on to Aristotle, Galen, Paracelsus, Vesalius, Copernicus, and William Harvey, his writing evolves into a marvel of conceptual and verbal clarity. Yet it is the structure of this book that is his greatest achievement. He begins his second triad of 13 chapters with Bacon and Descartes, zooming in on Descartes's insights that he had to start over again, and that he had to gain perfect clarity about the difference between matter and mind. In this second triad, Bynum moves—by way of Newton, Linnaeus, Lavoisier, Maxwell, Darwin, and many others—from the mind-body split to the sighting of bacteria. Bynum begins his third triad with the discovery of the mechanisms underlying infectious diseases, and moves in a grand sweep onward to discoveries of ever-smaller particles in physics and biology, until he arrives at bosons and the molecular building blocks of genes.

And then, miraculously, one is tempted to say, the reversal happens: Out of these tiniest of particles, one of which (the Higgs boson) is still a conjecture, the huge blueprints of life emerge, a potential "theory of everything" via string theory and the Human Genome Project—both of which have

AISA / EVERETT COLLECTION

come within cognitive reach only through splitting the world into ever-smaller elements.

This grand sweep of science, from getting to know the movements of bodies (planetary and human) to elucidating their deepest structure and tiniest building blocks, would have offered Bynum the opportunity to connect the ending to his beginning if he had started not with the triviality that "science is special" (followed by a hazy account of the Babylonians, who were "good at astronomy"), but with the razor-sharp narrative presented in the Book of Genesis. In the biblical "beginning," the world is divided into ever-smaller units, ending in the emergence of the consciousness that names them.

Had Bynum started with that "beginning," he would, like Gombrich, have come full circle and achieved "an easy commerce of the old and the new," as T.S. Eliot said. But this is a mere quibble with an otherwise stunning account of scientific progress that ought to be mandatory reading for everyone age 10 and up. ♦

B&A

Building Blocs

An exhibition at the intersection of politics, art, and urban design. **BY EVE TUSHNET**

New York

The phrase "political architecture" evokes the idea of architecture for and by politicians: a blank-faced Ministry of Truth; a giant Mussolini head on a wedding cake; or just the sullen civic compromises which remove anything distinctive because it might be offensive. And "architecture for the people" has mostly meant architecture imposed on the people, with the government as landlord. You'll live in my future and you'll like it!

This show at the Museum of Modern Art is an attempt to acknowledge, but get beyond, these criticisms. It opens with a critique: Gunter Rambow's poster "Utopie Dynamit." A giant blockbuster building blows open, and the shards form a border of tiny portraits, presumably showing the former inhabitants of the project. They hold chalkboards with their names and short messages. As the museum's caption states:

> What had begun as a utopian vision ended in architecture—large-scale housing projects, for instance—often perceived as impersonal, formulaic, and insensitive to the needs of everyday people.

9 + 1 Ways of Being Political
50 Years of Political Stances in Architecture and Urban Design
Museum of Modern Art
Through March 25

MoMA takes its definitions lightly. There are 10 segments of the show, but the boundary between "Occupying Social Borders" (#8) and "Interrogating Shelter" (#9) is pretty fuzzy. And a good half of the pieces on display could have fit under #2, "Fiction and Dystopia." The show tries to group artworks—including video of people actually building and using things, architectural blueprints, propaganda posters, and scale models—simultaneously by theme and by time period, which doesn't quite work. The chronological narrative is strong, telling a story of repeated chastening of utopianism followed by a revival of smaller-scale hope; but the thematic grouping is forced.

Even in the show's earliest installments there's a sense that actual existing people need more control of their landscape, rather than having to change to fit the dreams of the architects. Cedric Price's "Fun Palace" design (1959-61), which the show notes was "fully intended to be built," is a giant industrial funfair with tons of scaffolding and lights, a kind of Soviet McDonald's playland. Yet this imposing thing is meant to be constantly redesigned by its users. It's a "flexible framework into which programmable spaces can be plugged."

And in these earliest segments there is already a science-fictional sense of time: We're always looking back on the beautiful future that never was. The aesthetic of decay and fading (familiar to us from Instagram) can be seen in Bernard Tschumi's "Manhattan Transcripts," which show blurred, degraded newsprint photographs of buildings. Arata Isozaki contributes an image of skyways among the ruins. There are also decaying space cities, a punk-influenced 1980 poster showing an enormous undefeated tree emerging from a tangle of highways, and a series of huge green landscapes in boxes, which tell the story of a utopian/dystopian future world in which the ceiling of your box comes down and crushes you if you rebel against the planners!

In Gordon Matta-Clark's "Conical Intersect," from 1975, the artist cut holes through two 17th-century buildings scheduled to be torn down in advance of the construction of the Centre Georges Pompidou. In a video, the holes' outlines create powerful, jagged lines through which we see sky and birds. The images are reminiscent of the Surrealists: Magritte and—maybe especially—Lee Miller, the Surrealists' war correspondent. And politically, the piece is fairly reactionary, concerned solely with the destruction of the small old things in the face of the big beautiful schemes. It's startling to go from this piece to the video advertising Bradford, England's city beautification scheme, which was crowdsourced to a certain extent, but which still imposes a "collective ambition" on actual inhabitants.

Eve Tushnet is a writer in Washington, D.C.

This is not to say that big ideas in architecture can never succeed. But MoMA doesn't give us any examples of big success in action. We get lovely scale models of a proposed design for a public space in Seville, in which gentle, curving "mushroom-shaped growths" shade a plaza with open spaces for performance and commerce. It was launched before the financial crash but opened, incongruously, after it, in 2011. We never see how it was received. Even the hilltop library of Medellín, Colombia—a heartbreaking statement of hope in the face of violence, something anybody would want to applaud—is only seen from afar. We get photos of slum dwellers in the hills below, shadowed by their new library, but no pictures of people actually walking in and borrowing books.

What we see in action are the marginal uses, the repurposings. In "Occupying Social Borders," we see David Goldblatt's color photos of Johannesburg in 2001 and 2003. Here are people using the spaces—but not using them as they were envisioned. Instead they sit on the curb reading the newspaper while waiting to wash cars. They set up a tent tied down with rocks and construction debris, sitting on mismatched stools and chairs to make a barbershop out of broken things.

The most purely satisfying piece might be Didier Faustino's 2002 photo and scale model, "Stairway to Heaven." Faustino took a creepy, zigzagging concrete stairway from a public housing project—the thing is recognizable from across the room, it looks so exactly like what it is—and removed it from its depressing setting. He stood it by itself, with a single basketball court at the top in a kind of cage. You can watch someone shoot hoops, as he looks down and watches you. It's the fantasy of escape through play. It's a revolt against the housing-project aesthetic; it's subversive and, in a sad way, hopeful.

We also see one smaller project go from start to finish, in raumlaborberlin's 2011 "Centiere Barca (Boat Yard)." In this video we see a German political art collective go to a poor Turin neighborhood and, through "a building workshop with the underprivileged population," using a "bottom-up design process and recycling tactics," transform a depressing public space with vulgar graffiti into a bright, pretty place with nice art. The sequence showing the actual building of the wooden artworks and structures is exciting and inspiring: There's music, dancing, lots of kids playing, the joy of creation and of neighborhood solidarity.

'Stairway to Heaven' (2002) by Didier Faustino

The sequences showing what happened after the art collective left are much too short. It's impossible to tell from this video whether the new structures were actually accepted by the community, or whether they were abandoned and graffitied in their turn. The construction sequences show so much energy and optimism; but why don't the videomakers let us hear more of what the people are saying? There's a fast construction montage using lots of closeups of hands, which is pleasingly cinematic but serves to obscure faces and thereby hide any conflicts, discussions, or undisciplined emotions. Even in this ideologically human-scale project, the individual gets lost.

The opposite occurs in the powerful video that closes the show, Reynold Reynolds and Patrick Jolley's 2002 "Burn." This is part of the "+1" segment, which gets the title "Politics of the Domestic." It's an emotionally intense video of several people living in a house on fire. The colors are dirty, reddish, and grimy. The people's expressions are recognizable from our own moments of willful self-defeat: the angry half-smile of a man, the messy bun of a woman who leafs through charred and burning notebooks. A man pours gas over a sleeping woman in a bed, then over his own head. When the burning man flails into the living room and falls on the coffee table, right in front of a couple seated on the couch—they just loll back and look at each other wearily. On the couch, her thumb strokes the back of his hand, and their heads touch tenderly, or exhaustedly, as they sit in a snowstorm of plaster and ash.

That's domestic, all right; but the only political message I can discern is "This is who you're designing for. This is human nature and you can roll with it or you can reject it, but it isn't going to change."

There's a contradiction near the heart of secular, postmodern leftism. If our understandings of the world are created and imposed by power in the service of power, then change only represents the triumph of one power structure over another. A new, gentler, more egalitarian understanding of the world can itself only succeed when it's imposed by a powerful elite on the ungentle masses.

9 + 1 Ways of Being Political is a heartening attempt to recognize and evade that trap. Its most hopeful work suggests a low-rent, humanist kind of anarchism. In these works the small dreams—a library, music, work and ownership, freedom to play and imagine, knowing your neighbors—are the most beautiful ones. ♦

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

B&A

Parker Inaction

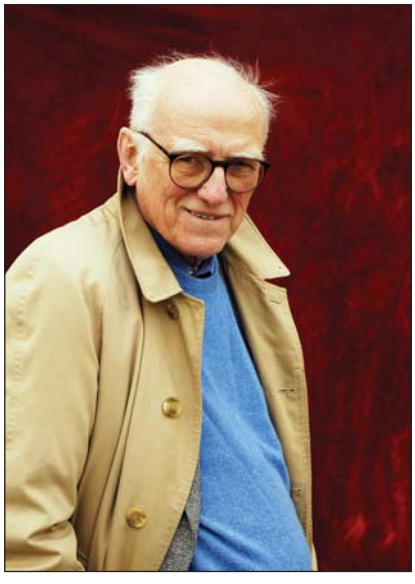
The criminal mind is not necessarily gripping entertainment. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

In 1962, Donald E. Westlake created his pulpiest character, the sociopathic criminal-of-all-trades named Parker, who became the protagonist of two dozen novels (written under the pseudonym "Richard Stark") before Westlake's death in 2008. In doing so, Westlake became part of an innovative movement in crime fiction: novels told from the point of view of the crooks, not the good guys. What was new in the Parker novels was the utterly cool and detached tone in which Westlake wrote about his character's brazen amorality.

Westlake had been preceded in this approach by the far darker Jim Thompson, who reveled in the psychopathy of a serial-killer cop in *The Killer Inside Me* (and whose book *The Grifters* Westlake would adapt for the big screen in 1990, getting an Oscar nomination in the process). Thompson was followed by George V. Higgins, whose languid novels about Boston lowlifes, cast almost entirely in dialogue, dwelled not on their crimes but their essential stupidity and fecklessness.

Parker was particularly alluring because he was so calm, so smart, so good at his job: The books are like imaginative clinics in how best to commit a robbery and get away with it, and how to take revenge if someone double-crosses you. For this reason, time and again, Hollywood has tried to bring Parker to the screen. Forty-six years ago, Lee Marvin played him in an overwrought movie called *Point Blank*. Fourteen years ago, Mel Gibson played him in an undercooked movie called *Payback*. The football player Jim Brown made a Parker movie. Robert Duvall made a Parker movie. (Even Jean-Luc Godard, the most critically admired French director of the 1960s, tried one.)

Parker
Directed by Taylor Hackford



Donald Westlake

None of them was very good. And now the director Taylor Hackford, whose work has ranged from *An Officer and a Gentleman* to *Ray*, has tried his hand at one—the first adaptation not only to be called *Parker*, but also the first whose central character actually retains the name "Parker." He is played by a British actor named Jason Statham, whom you've likely never heard of because he has starred in a bunch of films you've never heard of, including *Crank* and *Crank 2* (see?).

Parker is based on a later novel, *Flashfire*, published in 2000. Westlake set for himself the challenge of figuring out how criminals might stage a heist in Palm Beach, given that it is a small, heavily policed island whose drawbridges can be raised at any moment, making it impossible for thieves to escape. Parker ends up there not because it's his scheme, but because he was double-crossed by the guys staging the robbery, and he wants to set things right.

It's a good plot, and, in theory, it would have made a good movie. Hackford and his screenwriter, John J. McLaughlin, didn't go in for anything fancy; this is a head-on, efficient, old-fashioned, R-rated B-movie with guns and splatters and bared breasts. Hackford knows what he's doing behind a camera, and McLaughlin has adapted the book with admirable economy. But *Parker* reveals why every effort to turn Westlake's character into a cinematic immortal has been doomed to failure.

The simple fact of the matter is that *watching* Parker is boring. He's not witty, he's not interesting, he doesn't care about people, he has nothing to say. Every now and then he shoots somebody, or tells someone else to shoot somebody, or *doesn't* shoot somebody (which is supposed to be a big surprise).

Reading about Parker, however, is anything but boring. There's a lot going on inside his head. He is a study in the perversity of intelligence. He is brilliant, patient, and determined. He observes. He waits. He sets up plans with payoffs months later. He works out his play and improvises only when necessary. He's a craftsman with a craftsman's code. He believes in order, he only acts when things get out of order, and he doesn't make mistakes based on heated emotion.

In other words, he's a twisted version of his astoundingly prolific creator, who wrote something like 100 books in his career—books that specialized in highly elaborate plotting of the sort it might take another kind of writer years to work out, but which took Westlake a couple of weeks at most.

I had low expectations for *Parker*, a movie I very much wanted to like. That's as low a bar as you can possibly set. *Parker* didn't clear it. ♦

GETTY IMAGES

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

"Obama calls Netanyahu to congratulate him on Israeli election results."

—Haaretz, January 28, 2013

PARODY