

**CHANCELLORSVILLE,  
150 YEARS ON**  
GEOFFREY NORMAN

the weekly

# Standard

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## THE TWIDIOCRACY

**MATT LABASH**

**on the decline of Western civilization,  
140 characters at a time**

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# The Emperor Has No Diapers

Barack Obama's first big political moment was at the Democratic convention in 2004 where he gave a heartfelt oration about the differences between red states and blue states:

The pundits, the pundits like to slice and dice our country into red states and blue states: red states for Republicans, blue states for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the blue states, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the red states. We coach Little League in the blue states and, yes, we've got some gay friends in the red states.

It's a nice sentiment, and there's a lot of truth to it. But if there's been a vague sense that cultures in America are diverging, well, there's a reason for that. Blue states increasingly look down their noses at a lot of red state behavior—e.g., hunting and believing what the Bible says. As Obama famously told some donors four years after that big speech, people in the red states “get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy toward people who aren't like them.”

But say this for the so-called bitter clingers: Their folkways are

rooted in long traditions. Objectionable blue state behavior, on the other hand, often looks like sheer lunacy with no historical precedent. Take this very earnest *New York Times* story about the hot new trend in urban parenting:

When Jada Shapiro decided to raise her daughter from birth without diapers, for the most part, not everyone was amused. Ms. Shapiro scattered little bowls around the house to catch her daughter's offerings, and her sister insisted that she use a big, dark marker to mark the bowls so that they could never find their way back to the kitchen. . . . Ms. Shapiro, who is a doula, a birth and child-rearing coach, says it is practically now a job qualification to at least be able to offer diaper-free training as an option to clients. Caribou Baby, an “eco-friendly maternity, baby and lifestyle store” on the border of artsy Greenpoint and Williamsburg, has been drawing capacity crowds to its diaper-free “Meetups,” where parents exchange tips like how to get a baby to urinate on the street between parked cars.

Not surprisingly, the *Times* finds pediatricians are deeply skeptical of this approach. And that's not the only

ridiculous blue state idea THE SCRAPBOOK encountered while reading the papers last week. There was this from the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

San Francisco may have banned the exposure of genitalia, but that's not stopping the Department of Public Health from bringing back its giant Healthy Penis. Yes, the beloved six-foot-tall mascot for safe sex is literally coming out of the closet and will be back at parades and other city events—and this time he comes with free penis-shaped stress toys! The health department sparked some controversy when it debuted the three characters, all penises but in different hues, back in 2002. But the penis costumes—worn by health department staff and aimed at encouraging gay and bisexual men to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases—became popular and have been copied in San Jose and Cleveland.

Who needs to take the kids to Disneyland when you live in progressive America? After your child is done defecating between parked cars, he can watch the STD parade and get his picture taken with a multicultural array of giant penis mascots. Taxpayer-subsidized fun for the whole family. ♦

## There's No Tense Like the Present

SO THE SCRAPBOOK is rooting around on the Internet and stumbles on a blog piece by Ben Yagoda in the online edition of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. THE SCRAPBOOK begins to leave the page, but then hesitates: The *Chronicle* is not usually on THE SCRAPBOOK's reading list, but there's something about this essay, some indefinable something, that prompts THE SCRAPBOOK to pause—and read it.

What caught THE SCRAPBOOK's attention, in fact, was the headline:

“Ben Yagoda Gets Sick of the Historical Present”—which, as it happens, does not mean that Mr. Yagoda is alienated from his times, but has had just enough of the growing tendency—in the media, to be sure, but also among so-called scholars—to describe the past habitually in the present tense. You know what we mean. There's the paragraph before this one, for example; or you can imagine a documentary on the History Channel: “Kennedy arrives in Dallas. He knows he has to reconcile the two wings of his party. But waiting for him in nearby Fort Worth is a disaffected ex-Marine sharpshoot-

er named Lee Harvey Oswald . . . ”

Yagoda furnishes some worthy specimens: “There's a vacancy on the Supreme Court after Lincoln's won that second nomination, and everyone comes and suggests various people” (Doris Kearns Goodwin); “At some point L. Ron Hubbard takes to the sea and he moves the main people in Scientology to the sea with him” (Terry Gross). He mentions certain novelists and short-story writers (John Updike, Raymond Carver, Ian McEwan) who have used the tense as well. And he tries to understand why the historical present might work successfully in fiction

—as, *THE SCRAPBOOK* would agree, it occasionally does.

But mostly he's just fed up with the sudden ubiquity of the historical present, as are we. Yet while Ben Yagoda is willing to analyze the subject, *THE SCRAPBOOK* prefers to issue a blanket condemnation and blame the spreading virus on plain laziness and ignorance. It's bad enough that television documentarians feel as if they have to patronize their audience with a dumbed-down, breathless, you-are-there voice—"William and his army cross the Channel, and land at Pevensey!"—but it's worse when writers, historians, and people who should otherwise know better seem incapable of navigating more than one grammatical tense.

Everybody gets a good laugh at what might be called Valleyspeak, or the adolescent voice—"So I'm, like, at the mall and he's going, 'What are you doing here?' and I'm, like . . ."—but really, what's the difference between that and Professor Doris Kearns Goodwin describing 150-year-old events as if she were on a satellite feed from the Lincoln White House?

*THE SCRAPBOOK* tends to shun the curmudgeonly voice as well, but on this subject, we stand in solidarity with Ben Yagoda. ♦

## Risky Business

Buried deep in the recesses of President Obama's budget are two items that could have vast and potentially devastating consequences for millions of Americans involved with dozens of different risk markets. Though their names are more likely to induce slumber than Tea Party rage, these proposals serve as important reminders of the ways that misguided government policies can skew the economy and hurt consumers.

The first item has a moniker only a bureaucrat could love: the deduction disallowance for nontaxed reinsurance premiums paid to foreign affiliates. Dressed up by its proponents with populist rhetoric about



how it will close "loopholes," the proposal would slap a large protectionist tariff on dealings with just about every global insurance company.

Since insurance markets tend to rely on these global players to handle mammoth risks like hurricanes, earthquakes, and plane crashes, the consequences of chasing them from the U.S. market could be devastating. A study from the Cambridge, Mass.-based Brattle Group projects the tax would cost consumers \$140 billion over 10 years in increased insurance costs, while raising only a tiny fraction of that total in new tax revenues.

The second all-but-hidden proposal, something called "the Overseas Contractors Compensation Act,"

proposes that the U.S. Department of Labor create its own government-run workers' compensation insurer to cover on-the-job injuries suffered by U.S. overseas contractors—coverage that's currently provided mostly by private companies.

While the White House promises this will provide as-yet-unquantified savings over the current system, when it comes to running insurance programs, the government's record has been pretty poor. Whether it's the \$30 billion debt of the National Flood Insurance Program or Medicare's \$1 trillion-plus in long-term deficits, the feds have almost always overpromised, underpriced, and left taxpayers responsible for a big bailout.

That's not to mention the administrative problems that inevitably would result from transferring an international program from global insurers to a purely domestic agency, where most desk phones can't even make overseas calls.

While these two proposals, even taken together, aren't the equivalent of the president's massive, deeply problematic health care law, they show the true colors of an administration that believes it can always handle risks better than the private sector. ♦

## Happiness Is a Week in Bhutan

Oregon governor John Kitzhaber did his best Jerry "Moonbeam" Brown impersonation last week and traveled to the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, where the Democrat attended a conference focused on the concept of "Gross National Happiness" (GNH).

Bhutan eschews objective measures of national performance—GDP, per capita income, infant mortality—and instead tracks GNH using a formula that accounts for things like "emotional balance," "spirituality," "artisan skills," and "sleeping hours." It's a good thing that GNH doesn't include metrics like "human rights" and "personal freedom," because the country expelled its Nepali minority—a full fifth of its population—in the 1990s, and is also the only nation in the world to ban smoking completely.

Nevertheless, Governor Kitzhaber carved a full week out of his busy schedule to attend the GNH conference there, even as, according to the *Oregonian*, "the Legislature is in the middle of a long and intense debate over how to curb the rising cost of the Public Employees Retirement System."

But not to worry. According to another local news account, "Senate President Peter Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek assured the governor his weeklong absence would not interfere with the ongoing legislative

session," which may say more than was intended about lawmakers' opinion of Kitzhaber's governing skills.

Kitzhaber is in his third go-round as governor of the Beaver State—he previously served two lackluster terms from 1995 to 2003, ultimately calling the state "ungovernable." Things aren't going so well this time around either, with Oregon facing yawning budget deficits, high unemployment, and falling median incomes.

It's no wonder the governor is attracted to alternative methods of judging performance. Perhaps he'll return from Bhutan with a new mantra for the state's squabbling legislators and struggling residents: Think happy thoughts. ♦

## Kerry Nation

In an Earth Day press release last week, Secretary of State John Kerry referred to climate change as a "clear and present danger," and said that "if ever there was an issue that demanded greater cooperation, partnership, and committed diplomacy, this is it."

THE SCRAPBOOK would normally ignore this sort of silly hyperbole, chalking it up to the mindlessness of PR. On this occasion, however, we're disinclined to give Kerry a pass. A few days before his Earth Day palaver, the secretary of state was questioned by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and said of the investigation into Ambassador Chris Stevens's murder in Benghazi, Libya: "We've got a lot more important things to move on to and get done."

We're not sure if these parallel statements reveal a failure of judgment or of taste, but two things are certain: Six months after the murder of an American ambassador, his killers remain at large, and global temperatures haven't risen since 1997.

THE SCRAPBOOK humbly suggests that if Kerry wants his tenure at State to be a successful one, he should rejigger his priorities, and think a little more about which dangers actually are clear and present and which ones are hypothetical and remote. ♦

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## Against the Wind

Garden City (“What a misnomer!” said cousin Betty, who’d been there) is the seat of Glasscock County, a rectangular piece of flat, dry West Texas with a population density of two per square mile. The population of the “city” fell as low as 100 early in the last century, but the 2010 census put it at an all-time high of 334.

I assume that growth reflects the oil boom. On the March afternoon when my husband and I visited, the crossroads at the center of town was, if not exactly busy, not deserted. We got a friendly reception at the courthouse, where we stopped for directions to the cemetery, half a mile out on the plain. Driving there, we saw oil wells working and a new well being drilled just beyond the graveyard.

We made Garden City a stop on our trip across Texas because my grandmother grew up there, and her parents and grandparents are buried there. I especially wanted to see the haunts and resting place of my great-great-grandmother, Malissa Everett (1840-1933), who in her eighties wrote a memoir of moving from Tishomingo County, Mississippi, to Texas in a wagon in 1851 and making a life on the frontier. She grieved her lack of education, yet she was a vital person. Betty, the family historian, says Malissa made over 100 quilts to raise money for her church. Here’s how she ended her story:

I have always loved the west & am not sorry of my choice altho I have been deprived of lots of enjoyments that other people have had & went through with many hardships that others didn’t have to go through with, I feel like it was the Lords will

that I should & if I have been any help towards civilizing the country and making it a fit country for others to live in, give God the glory.

Malissa’s granddaughter Carmen was 17 when she married her teacher, L.E. Crutcher, Betty’s and my grandfather. They left Garden City for Big Spring, where they briefly ran a boardinghouse by the railroad track, before moving on and eventually settling in Loraine, the next stop on our tour. Grandpa taught there and



*Claudia, Jennifer, and Stephanie in Loraine*

became superintendent of schools.

Even though it’s just off the interstate, Loraine is dwindling. The population is down to 602, and the roads are turning back to dirt. The wooden house where my father grew up, on a small farm on the edge of town, is derelict, surrounded by prickly-pear cactus and mesquite. Yet the place no longer feels like the ends of the earth, as it did to me when we visited in my childhood. That’s partly because of the gleaming big rigs rushing by on the interstate, and partly because of the newcomers: On the horizon, eerie ranks of huge white windmills are encroaching. After Loraine, we drove across adjacent Nolan County, through what are said to be the largest wind farms in the world.

In ensuing weeks, home from

West Texas, the images lingered, and summoned others from the past. I remembered the thrill and fear I felt as a sandstorm blasted the Loraine house in about 1955 when I was 7. I fished out old pictures of my sisters and me playing dress-up with our grandmother’s hats and bags, and saw that all three of us were holding our hats against the wind.

I’m told there’s a view in certain quarters that those inhospitable plains should never have been settled as they were; that they aren’t ecologically suited to an agrarian way of life. Maybe that’s right, in an abstract sense. But there was no one to steer the pioneers to anyplace more promising. And so they struggled and endured.

In the family records Betty has assembled, there’s a poem about the plains. It’s by our grandfather’s sister Zenobia, who divorced her first husband, a letter carrier from Fort Worth, and moved to Dallas and married a Jew. Her poem expresses trust in the Providence that made her a daughter of this land and exults in the resilience that comes

from embracing and meeting the challenges of one’s circumstances. It was published in her collection *Voices in the Valley*. Here it is, a handsome legacy—“Buffalo Grass,” by Zenobia Crutcher Feineman:

*A Master Mind saw fit to place me here  
On arid prairie land—  
Where blazing sun and dry hot winds may sear  
And hide my face in sand.*

*My roots shall burrow deep in this my soil  
And find the strength to clasp  
And hold and cherish it against the toil  
Of wind’s rapacious grasp.*

*For this I know—in time a heaven-sent rain  
Will cleanse and freshen me  
And I shall lift strong-fibered hands again  
And wave triumphantly.*

CLAUDIA ANDERSON

## Barbarism in Philadelphia: an Exchange

In “Barbarism in Philadelphia: The Crimes of Kermit Gosnell” (April 29, 2013), Jon A. Shields performed a service in educating readers about how *Roe v. Wade* created a legal environment in which practitioners of late abortion such as Dr. Kermit Gosnell were able to conduct their brutalities with little scrutiny or restraint for decades. However, Shields fails to take note that in 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court for the first time upheld a ban on one method of late abortion—partial-birth abortion—and did so in a manner that may allow protections to be extended more broadly. For example, there is reason to hope that the Court would permit bans on abortion after the point that scientific evidence demonstrates that an unborn child can experience pain (20 weeks fetal age, if not earlier). Such bans, based on a model developed by National Right to Life, have now been enacted in nine states.

Shields demonstrated confusion on an important point in his opening sentence, when he characterized “killing seven fetuses born alive” as among the charges for which Gosnell is being tried. There are no such charges, because “fetuses born alive” do not exist. Both in medical terms and in legal terms, once a human being is born alive—that is, completely outside the mother and alive—he or she is no longer properly referred to as a “fetus,” but as a *baby* or a *newborn*. This is true no matter how premature that live-born baby may be. Gosnell is charged with killing not seven “fetuses,” but seven newborn human beings.

Shields went much further astray, in the same direction, when he asserted that only 27 states have laws protecting “babies who survive abortions,” and that therefore the act that Gosnell is charged with, murdering such babies, is “an act that is legal in nearly half the states. . . .” Untrue. Once entirely outside the mother, a living baby is a human being and a person under the laws of *every* state, and under federal

law. A person who deliberately kills such a live-born human being commits the crime of murder.

It is true that when such acts come to light, they often are not prosecuted, either because of difficulties in proof, or because in some jurisdictions an aura of political protection surrounds abortionists and causes clear legal principles to be disregarded—call it the “abortion distortion factor.” It is also true, as Shields noted, that prominent pro-abortion activists, including Barack Obama, have said things that indicate they do not really believe that babies born alive during abor-



tions should be regarded as human beings. But there is nothing in *Roe v. Wade* or any other U.S. Supreme Court decision, or in federal or state laws, to support this premise.

DOUGLAS JOHNSON  
Federal Legislation Director  
MARY SPAULDING BALCH, J.D.  
State Legislation Director  
National Right to Life Committee,  
Washington, D.C.

THE AUTHOR RESPONDS: In “Barbarism in Philadelphia,” I argued that Dr. Gosnell’s offenses cannot bear the weight of the death penalty under our present abortion regime. Douglas Johnson and Mary Spaulding Balch do not address that matter. But they raise important points. They assert that the killing of abortion survivors

is murder under the laws of every state. Nevertheless, 27 states have found it necessary to pass legislation explicitly protecting those infants, while many other states have explicitly refused to adopt such protections—an odd situation if the matter were really as cut and dried as Johnson and Balch say. How could a representative of Planned Parenthood affirm that doctors have the right to kill abortion survivors? How could abortion survivors be left to die, even in state hospitals, without prosecution?

I argued that the wrongness of killing abortion survivors remains controversial in our country, *not* clear and settled. Johnson and Balch concede that prosecutions are rare, partly because, as they put it, “in some jurisdictions an aura of political protection surrounds abortionists.” But to say that an “aura” is the main obstacle to the enforcement of abortion laws ignores the deeply felt, principled motives that drive the decisions of pro-choice state officials. In the Gosnell case, Pennsylvania officials balked not at enforcing significant restrictions on abortion but at performing *any oversight at all*.

Johnson and Balch are right that I should have been consistent in referring to infants born alive as babies or newborns, never fetuses. But my loose word choice reflects a deeper truth: The distinction between killing a 28-week-old fetus in the womb and killing a baby of 28 weeks’ gestation moments after it passes through the birth canal is morally meaningless. That is one reason some choice advocates feel able to defend killing abortion survivors.

Johnson and Balch express hope that the Supreme Court’s 2007 decision upholding a ban on a single technique, partial-birth abortion, will open the door to actual bans of abortion after 20 weeks. Perhaps it will. For now, the rights established by *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* appear as close to absolute as they did in 1973.

JON A. SHIELDS  
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# Against the ‘New Normal’

Are you alarmed by the counterterrorism failures increasingly evident as we learn more about the Boston terror attack? Don't be. Former CIA director Michael Hayden has helpfully explained, "This tragedy is the new normal."

Are you surprised that a whole city was ordered to "shelter in place" as one "knockoff jihadi," in Vice President Biden's term, roamed the streets? Don't be. It's the new normal. Are you shocked by the Obama administration's dissembling in response to terror attacks in Benghazi? Don't be naïve.

It's the new normal.

Are you worried that the president proclaims "red lines" to deter dictators from, e.g., using chemical weapons, then does nothing to enforce them? Don't be unsophisticated. As Rep. Adam Smith, ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, explained,

"The president said it was a red line. What the president never said was what that meant exactly." It's the new normal. Are you startled that the commander in chief accepts defense cuts that the president's own defense secretary said would be "devastating" and "a disaster" and "would inflict severe damage to our national defense"? Don't be foolish. It's the new normal.

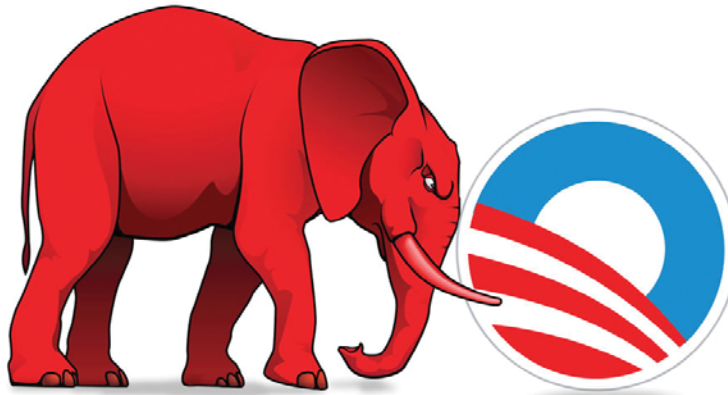
And do you think, back home, that we might do better than slow economic growth, high long-term unemployment, mountains of debt, and a massive health care reform that's a "train wreck," in the felicitous term of the Democratic chairman of the Senate Finance Committee who helped shepherd it through Congress? Didn't you get the memo? It's all the new normal.

By the way, the new normal is bipartisan. It's of course true that the administration in power during this period of national decline has a particular interest in selling the concept of a new normal. It's true that the idea fits uncommonly well with the fatalism that, beneath the airy talk of hope and change, lies at the heart of modern liberalism. But Republican elites aren't immune to the charms

of the new normal, which excuses subpar performance in so many areas.

So it's apparently the new normal for GOP leaders in Congress to be more interested in exempting themselves from Obamacare than in laying the groundwork for repealing it, and thereby exempting all Americans. It's apparently the new normal for GOP elites to spend all their time, money, and effort trying to quickly muscle through a poorly crafted immigration bill—which once passed will have irreversible effects—than trying to do anything

significant for American workers or against crony capitalism. It's apparently the new normal for GOP leaders, at once terrified and contemptuous of their own base, equally intimidated by donors and voters but uninterested in treating either group as grownups, to think they too can simply shelter in place, under the awning of



the new normal. (One might add that, when it comes to the leaders of both parties colluding to preserve power and perquisites, the new normal bears a striking resemblance to the old normal.)

Normal Americans, we would wager, don't accept the new normal. For one thing, they remember being told that all manner of problems, from the existence of the Soviet Union to economic stagflation to high crime rates to welfare dependency, had to be accepted as normal. Both party establishments were wrong in their earlier embrace of various pathologies deemed to be permanent. Why are they owed greater deference today?

There are times when the conservative party ought to be and has to be the party of normalcy, standing against utopian or destructive or foolish change. But there are times—and this is one of them—when a modern conservative party has to be the party that refuses to accept what is said to be normal. This is a time for a serious political party to point out that the new normal is merely a new excuse by the powers-that-be for their deficiencies and failures.

The historic task of American conservatism is not merely to defeat the liberal party in the next election, which, given the way things are going for this administration, shouldn't be very difficult. It's to refuse to accept, to boldly challenge, and to fundamentally reverse, an enervating "new normal" that would acquiesce in American decline and say farewell to American greatness.

—William Kristol

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## Created Equal

Two recent news items highlight the issue of income inequality in America. First, a study by the Pew Research Center found that the net worth of the upper 7 percent has risen by 28 percent since 2009 while the net worth of everybody else has dropped by 4 percent. Second, a recent poll conducted by Gallup found that 52 percent of Americans—an all-time high—think the government should “redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich.”

Income inequality receives more attention from the left than from the right. Conservatives usually view it as a consequence of a capitalist economy in which individuals of naturally unequal talents operate. It may be regrettable in the short term, but over the long term the same free market that produces inequality raises everybody's standard of living. Today's man of few means enjoys a better quality of life than did John D. Rockefeller a century ago, because of progress produced through capitalism.

But that should not be the end of the story. Many of the Founders, whom conservatives rightly admire, were worried about income inequality, even though the concept of governmental redistribution was foreign to them. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and their allies did not see wealth per se as a problem, but they worried about the potential for moneyed interests to tilt policy in their direction, at the expense of the public good.

This was the basis, for instance, of their opposition to the Bank of the United States. They saw it as an unconstitutional expansion of government favoring the “stock jobbers” at the expense of the agricultural majority. Worse, they saw how involvement in high finance corrupted public officials: Alexander Hamilton's assistant at Treasury, William Duer, used insider information to enrich himself and even tried to corner the market on Bank certificates. What's more, many congressmen acquired enough Bank notes to blur the line between public service and private profit. They worried that the Bank was creating a “Praetorian Guard” of financiers who depended upon govern-

ment favor and would do anything to protect their rents.

This should all sound familiar in this age of billion-dollar bailouts, crony capitalism, and “too big to fail.” But what might sound strange to modern ears is the Jeffersonian solution to creeping civic inequality: less government and a stricter interpretation of the Constitution. A government powerful enough to do grand things was also powerful enough to play favorites; and if, to accomplish those things, officials disrupted constitutional checks and balances, protections against undue influence would be eroded.

In other words, Jefferson and Madison might today argue that the modern left's preferred solutions to income inequality inevitably create more civic inequality. One need look no further than Obamacare to see this point. Liberals trumpeted the expansion of coverage to millions of uninsured, which is a worthy goal, but consider the scores of exceptions to Obamacare's mandates for the politically connected: big business, big labor, and now possibly even federal lawmakers and their aides.

Some measure of income inequality is undoubtedly baked into the cake of modern economies. That doesn't mean conservatives who rightly oppose government-imposed egalitarianism should throw up their hands. Two policy areas stand out. The first is constant vigilance against the rent-seekers encamped in Washington, D.C. The federal government *does* play favorites; well-connected interests receive special treatment. And they receive it from *both* sides of the aisle.

The second point of attack should be on the middle-class squeeze. If conservatives are opposed to government efforts to equalize wealth, they nevertheless can whittle away at the role of government in areas where it is already involved. That suggests an emphasis on the exorbitant costs of higher education, health care, and energy. The Pew study mentioned above is picking up the fact that paychecks have not been rising fast enough to cover these high-ticket items. The role government is already playing in these areas more often than not drives up costs—this should be a priority for conservatives. It's a good thing in itself to alleviate burdens on middle class families, but it will also reduce the appeal of the left's call for larger and larger government.

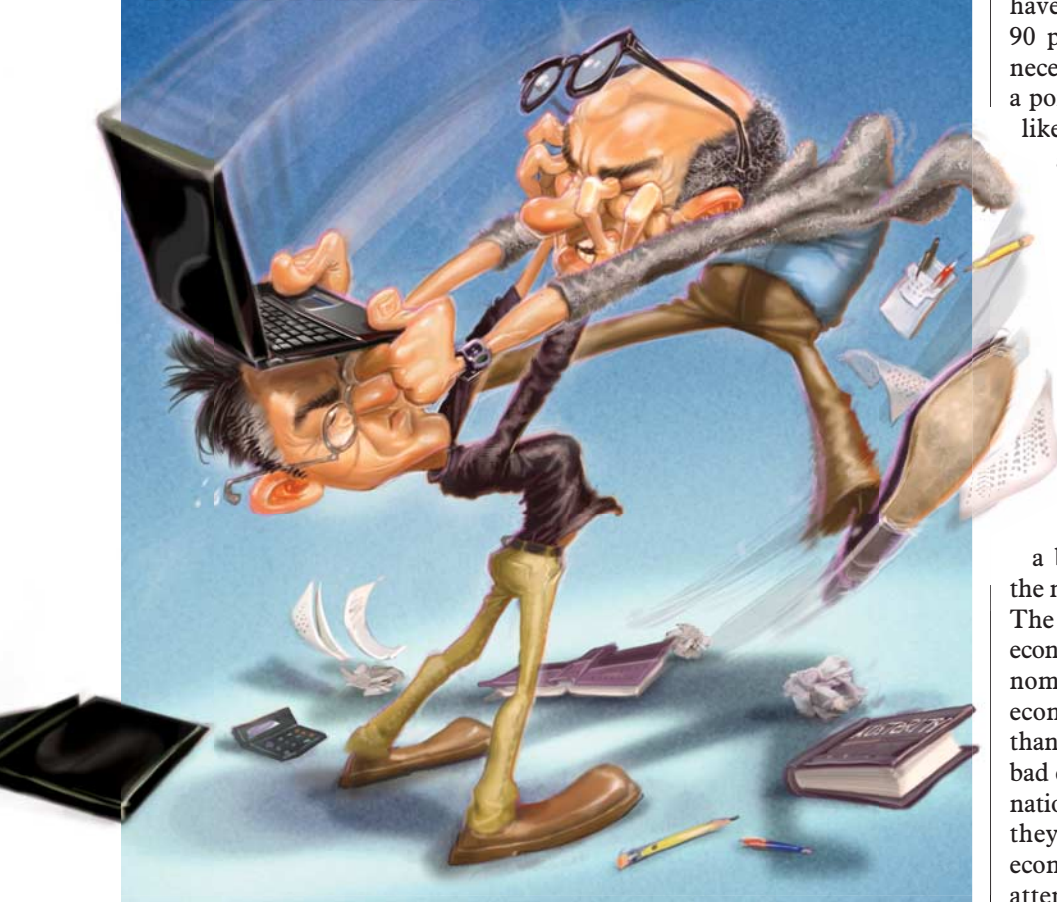
It is important to continue to make the case for free-market reform in Washington, especially regarding the undue regulatory barriers that businesses face. But that is simply not enough. As income inequality rises, so does the salience of the left's call for government intervention, which will only worsen the already growing problem of civic inequality. The left shouldn't have the first and last words on the subject. Special interest privileges and the middle-class squeeze are the most obvious places for the right to begin to push back.

—Jay Cost

# It Just Gets More and More Dismal

Caution: economists at work.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



**W**e moralize with numbers these days, under the guise of disinterested science. The only institution we trust any longer to discover the truth—excuse me, the “truth”—is science, even “social sciences” like economics and psychology and sociology that are sciences in name only. This is what happens when a nation’s intellectual class—excuse me, its “thought leaders”—no longer feel comfortable discussing

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questions with reference to traditional ethics or moral intuition, much less natural law or, God help us, God.

Consider the fate suffered in recent weeks by a pair of well-known economists, poor Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, both of Harvard. They are the authors of several scholarly papers, slightly fewer newspaper op-eds, and one big-selling book, *This Time Is Different*, which aim to prove scientifically that too much debt is bad for you. More precisely—and how could they be scientists if they weren’t precise?—they claim to have

discovered that when a government’s debt rises to 90 percent of its country’s gross domestic product, the country’s economy contracts by (on average) one-tenth of one percent per year. This is what masses of historical data from 44 countries around the world show. Really. You could look it up. “Our approach here is decidedly empirical,” they wrote.

Reinhart and Rogoff (RR, as they have come to be known) called this 90 percent figure a threshold—not necessarily a point of no return, but a point beyond which GDP dropped like a plumb. A few too many years at or past the threshold and a government’s appetite for debt would do lasting damage. As it happens, the United States’ debt-GDP ratio is more than 100 percent. Gulp.

RR published their finding in a scholarly paper in 2010, and the 90 percent threshold became a kind of cultural artifact. It captured the post-financial-crisis zeitgeist the way a pop song or a movie or a bestselling novel can summarize the mood of a particular place or time. The financial crisis, which almost no economist foresaw, and the weak economic recovery, which nearly every economist expected to be stronger than it is, have given policymakers a bad case of the jumps, so for an explanation of our present parlous position they have turned to—who else?—economists. By focusing everyone’s attention on a government’s debt load, RR helped inspire the austerity measures that have been enacted throughout the eurozone. Paul Ryan, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, cited them in making the case for the budget cuts outlined in his booklet “Path to Prosperity.” A presentation by RR serves as the dramatic centerpiece of *Debt Bomb*, a book by Tom Coburn, one of the Senate’s most insistent budget scolds. The *Washington Post* editorial page, which occasionally affects the cut-the-crap severity of a true budget hawk, has taken the RR threshold as a proven fact, airily referring here

GARY LOCKE

and there to “the 90 percent mark that economists regard as a threat to sustainable economic growth.”

That’s a treacherous phrase, *economists regard*. Economists do not speak with a single voice; indeed, their tedious and endless disputations are one way they convince themselves they’re practicing science. The green-eyeshades of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund gazed with horror at RR’s finding, but more partisan liberal economists dismissed RR’s obsession with debt as a magic key to our economic fortunes, obsessing instead over their own magic keys—higher government spending, higher government borrowing, and higher taxes on rich people. Few challenged RR on methodological grounds until this April, when three economists—informally called HAP, an acronym of their last names—released a paper debunking the idea of a threshold. Fondling the same sets of figures that RR had used, HAP found that RR had neglected to include some important historical data in their calculations. When those figures were factored in, the threshold vanished. On the graphs, GDP no longer dropped like a plumb after the debt-to-GDP ratio reached 90 percent.

HAP had other beefs with the way RR reached their conclusions, including a glaring transcription error on one of their spreadsheets. Just in case anyone missed the tendentious purpose of their own research, HAP closed their paper like so: “RR’s findings have served as an intellectual bulwark in support of austerity politics. The fact that RR’s findings are wrong should therefore lead us to reassess the austerity agenda itself in both Europe and the United States.” Let the word go forth: Par-TAY!

Liberal economics writers agreed. “This is huge,” wrote one in the online magazine *Slate*. Another, called Dean Baker, suggested that RR’s hands were red with the blood—or at least the pink slips—of unemployed Europeans. Baker began his article in the *Guardian* with the question “How much unemployment did Reinhart and Rogoff’s arithmetic

mistake cause?” His causal chain went like this: RR caused policymakers to worry about debt, the worry led them to impose austerity measures like spending cuts, and spending cuts caused unemployment to rise above 20 percent in Greece and Spain. “This is a mistake that has had enormous consequences.”

RR, Baker summed up, had tried to prove “that high ratios of debt to GDP lead to long periods of slow growth.” In fact, he continued, “the correct numbers tell a very different story.”

**The scandal, if that’s the word, goes beyond simple negligence or incompetence or the injection of ideology into science. Problems with Reinhart and Rogoff’s conclusions were plain from the start—so plain indeed that no highly trained economist could see them.**

In fact, though, they don’t. HAP’s recalculations of RR’s data eliminate the dramatic drop-off in growth rates at the 90 percent ratio. But they also show an unmistakable drift toward slower growth as the debt ratio rises. Countries with up to 30 percent debt-to-GDP ratio, according to HAP’s paper, average 4.2 percent growth; growth falls to 3.1 percent at a 60 percent ratio. Growth increases to 3.2 percent as the ratio reaches 90 percent. After 90 percent, growth averages 2.2 percent.

In other words, by the time a debt ratio rises above 90 percent of GDP, growth will be cut roughly in half—according to HAP’s own calculations. High debt-GDP ratios, once they take hold in a country, tend to last for 15 years or more. An annual loss of 2 percentage points in growth over such a sustained period really starts to add up: A country will be significantly poorer than if it had kept debt under control.

This is why RR, acknowledging

the spreadsheet and data errors with the appropriate amount of self-flagellation, seemed relatively undisturbed by HAP’s attempted debunking. “We do not,” they said in a statement, “believe this regrettable slip affects in any significant way the central message of [our] paper.”

By now, though, laymen who follow the RR-HAP controversy will have begun to have doubts about the whole enterprise. One thing that economists do agree on is the power of their elaborate, science-like calculations to describe and predict reality. It is this conceit, clung to by economists right and left, that is undercut by what liberal economists have come to call “the RR scandal.”

The scandal, if that’s the word, goes beyond simple negligence or incompetence or the injection of ideology into science. Problems with RR’s conclusions were plain from the start—so plain indeed that no highly trained economist could see them. For all their mounds of data—“data on forty-four countries spanning about two hundred years”!—only a handful of countries in RR’s set of numbers crossed the 90 percent threshold for any significant length of time; these provide a tiny sample from which to draw sweeping conclusions about how any given country will react under a similar debt load. And as for those mounds: It seems highly unlikely that statistics collected from dozens of sources about scores of countries over hundreds of years will yield reliable data that can be usefully compared across borders and epochs, especially when what’s being measured are such squishy concepts as “public debt” and “gross domestic product.”

And RR made no distinctions between *kinds* of debt or their varying effects on growth. Not all debt works the same way. Money borrowed to build roads and bridges has enduring benefits that help an economy grow; money borrowed to invest in Solyn-dra . . . doesn’t. RR can’t tell us which countries had which kind of debt during which periods.

Finally, there are the graphs themselves. The HAP graph shows a long

slow decline in GDP under heavier and heavier debt loads. RR shows a dramatic drop at the threshold. The HAP graph is inherently more plausible precisely because RR's is so dramatic. Cataclysms are rare in life; it's why they're so cataclysmic. Predictable cataclysms that happen on a regular schedule are even rarer. RR's graph shows countries meandering along until . . . WHOMP! The HAP graph shows countries meandering along until . . . they keep meandering along, en route to more meandering along. Which is a more accurate picture of life?

Meanwhile our scientific economists are fiercely debating the issue of causality in RR's finding. Granted that debt and growth are somehow related, does high debt lead to slow growth, as RR suggest (but never explicitly assert), or does slow growth result in high debt, as HAP suggests? Only an economist could fail to see that causality, in this situation as in all others, probably goes both ways, waxing here and waning there, commingled with dozens of causal factors beyond "public debt" and "GDP" that an economist could never control for. The economy that economists study is an artificial scheme imposed on the actions of tens of millions of actors—315 million of them in the case of the United States, not to mention the several billion others who daily do one thing or another that will have consequences far beyond their own borders.

This supposedly data-driven argument about causality and debt and growth is really an argument about values—values that dare not speak their name: ideology and beliefs about what's right and wrong, about the proper way for people and their governments to behave. When RR speak of their paper's "message," and HAP conclude their paper by encouraging governments to end austerity and start borrowing, the game is up. Deep down, I suppose, RR think debt is bad; HAP think you can't have enough of the stuff. But no one in our intellectual class wants to argue such a question on moral grounds. Pretending it's science makes us feel so much better. ♦

# Missing the Ping

So much for the surveillance state.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

As the country awoke to the news of a massive manhunt for the Boston Marathon bombers in the early morning hours of Friday, April 19, reporters began pressing sources at the FBI and the Justice Department for information on the two attackers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. The response, at least to some reporters: We don't know anything about them.

That claim, like so many that followed, wouldn't hold up. Just five days later it was clear that the U.S. government generally, and the FBI in particular, had known more than a little about Tamerlan Tsarnaev. The FBI had received a warning about the growing radicalism of the elder Tsarnaev brother back in the spring of 2011, two years before the attacks in Boston. The CIA received similar information seven months later. The Department of Homeland Security had it, too. And yet Tamerlan Tsarnaev traveled to Russia, spent six months in the Muslim-dominated region of Dagestan, was further radicalized, and led the plot to bomb the Boston Marathon.

How did this happen?

The standard investigation clichés apply: It's still early; there are many unanswered questions; it's unwise to rush to judgment. But the emerging picture is one of systemic failure, human error, and willful ignorance of the threats facing the country.

Just hours after the FBI told some reporters that it had no information

on Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the mother of the alleged bombers, Zubeidat Tsarnaeva, told *Russia Today* that the FBI had been in contact with Tamerlan for months. But some of her claims were bizarre and others demonstrably false, leaving reporters unsure what to believe. She contended, for

instance, that her sons had been framed and that the FBI had been not only monitoring Tamerlan but "controlling" him.

The FBI soon ended the confusion with a statement in the late afternoon of April 19 acknowledging that the bureau had, in fact, been in touch with Tamerlan. "Once the FBI learned the identities of the two brothers today, the FBI reviewed its records and determined that in early 2011, a foreign government asked the FBI for information about Tamerlan Tsarnaev." The foreign government was Russia, and on March 4, 2011, it reported that Tsarnaev was seeking to link up with Chechen rebels—or what the Federal Security Service (FSB) calls "underground bandits."

On background, government officials initially downplayed this revelation. They told reporters that the notification from the FSB was little more than routine intelligence-sharing among friendly security services and that the information in the FSB letter was vague and unsubstantiated.

Those claims were only partly true. The U.S. government gets thousands of notifications of potential threats each year, but very few from the Russians. And the FBI's own statement suggests that the Russians provided



Tamerlan Tsarnaev in 2009

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BARCRÖFT MEDIA / LANDOV

some important details, including (1) the nature of the potential threat, (2) the timeframe for Tsarnaev's radicalization, (3) his plans to travel to Dagestan, and (4) the ostensible purpose of his travels.

The Russian request stated that it was based on information that he was a follower of radical Islam and a strong believer, and that he had changed drastically since 2010 as he prepared to leave the United States for travel to the country's region to join unspecified underground groups.

The problem with this information, however, was that it consisted of the results of some kind of investigation of Tsarnaev without including evidence to support its claims. "The letter didn't have substance, it had conclusions," says Senator Jim Risch, a Republican from Idaho who sits on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The FBI launched a preliminary investigation, seeking out Tamerlan Tsarnaev and those close to him for questioning. They did not locate Tsarnaev immediately but made it known that they wished to speak with him. He reported voluntarily to the FBI the next day.

The FBI investigation of Tsarnaev turned up no "derogatory information" to corroborate the claims from the Russian security service, though authorities now understand that his radicalization had already begun, as the Russians claimed. Some of those involved in that early look at Tsarnaev wondered if the Russians were overstating the threat. The FSB has long targeted the Muslim-dominated Chechen rebel groups opposed to the central government in Moscow. The FBI went back to the Russians and asked for anything more they had on Tsarnaev and, according to the statement provided by the bureau, did not hear back.

Within weeks of hearing from the FBI, the Russians redirected their letter about Tsarnaev to the CIA. "It was basically a duplicate of what they gave the FBI," says one source familiar with the investigation. The CIA requested that Tsarnaev be placed in the TIDE (Terrorist Identities

Datamart Environment) database, which would, in theory, help U.S. counterterrorism officials monitor his travel in and out of the country.

It didn't. Sean Joyce, the deputy director of the FBI, told Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican from South Carolina, that the bureau did not receive any notification when Tsarnaev departed for Russia or returned to the United States.

Janet Napolitano, secretary of Homeland Security, appeared to contradict that claim when she testified, "The system pinged when he was leaving the United States. By the time he returned, all investigations had been closed."

So what happens when "the system" pings to alert counterterrorism officials that someone on U.S. watchlists is on the move? None of the dozen U.S. officials who spoke to THE WEEKLY STANDARD could say with any certainty, but it appears that the FBI was not included in the alert. "It wasn't a territorial dispute—'this is my territory, this is your territory,'" says Senator Dan Coats, a Republican from Indiana who serves on the Senate Intelligence Committee. "But it clearly was a hiccup in the system."

"Folks like me thought that if there was a ping like this, it went to everybody," says Senator Saxby Chambliss, a Republican from Georgia and vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. "It didn't happen, and we don't know all the details yet. But that's a real red flag."

Chambliss was operating on a reasonable assumption. The Russians had provided the FBI with a warning that Tsarnaev was a potential threat who wanted to return to Russia to connect with radical Islamist groups there. What's the point of adding a suspected jihadist to the various watchlists kept by the U.S. government if the agencies that have investigated him are not alerted when he does what the government was warned he might do?

"After 9/11, we thought we were creating a seamless path to breaking down stovepipes between agencies," says Chambliss. "The NCTC [National Counterterrorism Center]

was established to make sure information was shared. That obviously didn't happen here."

Investigators are looking at the possible involvement of others—both at home and overseas. Authorities tell THE WEEKLY STANDARD that Tamerlan's wife, Katherine Russell Tsarnaeva, notified him that he had been seen in the photographs and videos the FBI released on April 18. Russell delivered that warning to her husband without "any notion of surprise—just a report that 'you're being watched,'" according to one official briefed on the investigation. Those details came from the pre-Miranda interviews of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who was cooperating with FBI interrogators before the questioning was abruptly stopped by a federal magistrate, who read the younger Tsarnaev his rights.

But it is Tamerlan Tsarnaev's trip to Dagestan that has become a major focus of the investigation into the bombing. U.S. investigators in Dagestan are interviewing friends and relatives of Tsarnaev, trying to determine what contacts—if any—he had with jihadists in the region. Tsarnaev's father, Anzor, says that his son stayed at his home in Dagestan throughout the entire trip. There are reasons to be skeptical. Among the videos Tsarnaev uploaded to a YouTube channel that officials believe he operated were some featuring Gadzhimurad Dolgатов, a Dagestani jihadist leader who was killed in a gun battle with Russian security forces in December 2012. The two men were in Dagestan at the same time, though it's not yet clear if they met. As of this writing, the investigation has turned up a number of interesting leads but no concrete evidence that Tamerlan received training or guidance from the jihadists in the North Caucasus. The FBI told Coats that the bureau intended to reconstruct Tsarnaev's entire six-month trip to Dagestan.

Senator Richard Burr, a Republican from North Carolina who sits on the Senate Intelligence Committee, says the bombers' lack of planning for after the attack suggests that the operation lacked the sophistication one might

expect from someone with jihadist training. “You had one [brother] go back and start smoking dope, and while we don’t know exactly what Tamerlan did—these guys had no plan.”

But one intelligence official who participated in the briefings for lawmakers on Capitol Hill reached the opposite conclusion. “It’s almost

impossible to believe that these two guys pulled this whole thing off.”

Chambliss, the vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee, agreed. “The guy didn’t spend six months in Russia eating and sleeping, like his daddy said. If you believe that, I’ve got oceanfront property in Nebraska to sell you.” ♦

# Bush v. Obama

A study in contrasts.

BY FRED BARNES

*Dallas*

President Obama is not known for his graciousness. But the occasion—the dedication of the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum—called for kind words about his predecessor in the White House. So he said that if immigration reform passes Congress this year, “it will be in large part thanks to all the hard work of the president, George W. Bush.” Bush had “restarted” the drive to overhaul our immigration system seven years ago, Obama said.

Bush, always gracious, thanked Obama and wife Michelle for coming to the ceremony. “Unlike the other presidents here”—Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton—“he’s actually got a job.”

It was a pleasant interlude, nothing more, for the presidencies of Bush and Obama are quite different, as are the two men. True, Obama has adopted Bush’s policies on wiretaps, military detention of terrorists without trial, drone strikes, immigration, middle-class tax cuts, and a global war on AIDS. But the fact that Obama seldom acknowledges his reliance on Bush magnified his tribute to his predecessor’s role on immigration reform as a rare expression of gratitude by Obama.

A friend of mine has a test for



*Bush and Obama in Dallas, April 25, 2013*

leadership: Winners take responsibility, losers make excuses. Obama isn’t a loser, but he is a fountain of excuses. And this touches on a striking contrast between him and Bush. Obama blames Bush for much that’s gone wrong during Obama’s White House years. Despite press baiting, Bush has refused to criticize Obama on any matter.

One can imagine the self-discipline required to stay silent when Obama claims to have single-handedly prevented another Great Depression. In truth, the bank bailout during the final weeks of the Bush presidency foreclosed the possibility of a depression. All Obama had to deal with was a deep recession, which bottomed out five months after he took office and before his policies could have much effect.

Bush has taken responsibility for everything on his watch, including the poor response to Hurricane Katrina.

Bush’s mistake was to rely on the Louisiana governor and New Orleans mayor to take charge after Katrina struck. They failed to do so. Obama was luckier when Sandy hit the Northeast just before Election Day. Strong governors and mayors took charge.

Bush and Obama are both polarizing figures, but for different reasons. Bush’s policies, particularly on Iraq and terrorism, divided Republicans and Democrats sharply. But Obama goes a step further, constantly slamming Republicans and impugning their motives. Obama personally polarizes. Bush didn’t attack Democrats from the White House.

On immigration, Obama has been more partisan than Bush. As a senator in 2007, he voted for several amendments sought by Democratic interest groups—amendments that would shatter the bipartisan coalition behind immigration reform. Bush backed the coalition’s terms without exception. The measure died in the Senate before a vote.

Oddly enough, Bush and Obama have each ordered military surges. With little backing even inside his own administration, Bush ordered a last-ditch troop buildup in Iraq in 2007 and a new war strategy. He held on until they worked. Obama ordered a smaller surge in Afghanistan in 2009, also with little public enthusiasm. He later began withdrawing troops, having achieved minimal success.

Obama, we learned from a *New Yorker* article by Ryan Lizza, likes to “lead from behind” in foreign affairs. He did just that in Libya when dictator Muammar Qaddafi was ousted. The trouble with leading from behind is that it leaves the United States with less clout, as in Libya. Bush preferred to lead from the front. This gave him considerable influence with foreign leaders. It also brought him enormous blame when things went wrong, as in Iraq prior to the surge.

There’s a common thread in foreign policy: They both misjudged Russian president Vladimir Putin as a potential friend. Obama, as America’s first African-American president, is wildly popular around the world. But not with

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leaders. Bush was the opposite, scorned by the masses but embraced by the leaders. British prime minister Tony Blair and Spain's prime minister José María Aznar were close allies. Obama has no allies as close.

Domestic policy? Bush reached bipartisan deals on education (No Child Left Behind) and banks (TARP). Obama has done nothing comparable. Both presidents endorsed reform of entitlements to keep the deficit from soaring. Bush, once reelected, spent most of 2005 drumming up support for Social Security reform. He generated practically none. Obama, so far, has merely talked about reforming entitlements.

He and Bush now find themselves similar in popularity. Bush's favorability in a Fox News poll last week was 49 percent, Obama's 52 percent. A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll has Bush and Obama tied at 47 percent.

The Bush numbers may not seem worth bragging about—until you take into account where they were when he left office. In October 2008, his favorability was 25 percent (Fox), 23 percent (*Post*-ABC).

That Bush has stayed out of politics since he left office is likely to have improved his popularity. "That rise is exactly what one would expect, based on the history of other ex-presidents' approval ratings," David Leonhardt wrote in the *New York Times*. With his impressive museum and a spate of sympathetic reappraisals of his presidency, Bush's rating may keep rising.

Bush has a theory about presidential museums: They won't succeed if they're entirely about the president. "The first challenge is not only to be relevant, but to be long lasting," he told me in a recent interview. "If you make it about an individual, it won't be long lasting. The individual will fade, will die, go away. History will slowly focus on the next group of presidents."

To avoid this, the Bush Center has its own think tank, the George W. Bush Institute. Bush calls it a "do tank." Its aim is not to produce academic studies or policy reports but to achieve tangible results in six areas: economic growth, spreading

democracy, women's rights, veterans, global health, and education reform.

Bush says he's "hands-on" in developing the institute's programs. "We hire good people, set the strategic agenda, and pay attention to what they're doing," he says. Then it's appropriate for him to "butt out so they can get their work done."

Bush says he doesn't fret over how he'll fare in history. But his standing

is likely to improve with time. "The worse a president's reputation when he leaves office, the better chance there is for revision," University of Texas historian H. W. Brands told the *Washington Post*'s Dan Balz. "Every so often there's a new generation of historians and they have to come along and challenge the conventional wisdom." When that occurs, Bush is bound to soar. ♦

# The Philadelphia Inquisition

Its two weapons are fear and surprise . . . and ruthless inefficiency. **BY MARK HEMINGWAY**

*Philadelphia*  
The campus of historic Girard College in north Philadelphia contains a number of impressive marble edifices, penned in by a high iron fence that separates it from the rundown neighborhood. Stephen Girard, a French immigrant who fortuitously arrived here in May 1776, was said to be America's wealthiest man when he died in 1831. He bequeathed his estate to found the college, which had the admirable goal of educating fatherless boys along with the unfortunate stipulation that those children be white. After decades of litigation and numerous protests—Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at the gates in 1965—the college accepted its first black student in 1968. Now Girard's student body is predominantly black.

If Girard is a monument to the city's racial progress, that makes it an odd place for the city government to launch a racial inquisition—an investigation of *Philadelphia* magazine for the crime of journalism.

On April 18, the Philadelphia Human Relations Commission held

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a meeting to examine the controversy surrounding *Philadelphia*'s March cover story, "Being White in Philly." The author, Robert Huber, went around the Fairmount and Brewerytown neighborhoods near Girard and asked all manner of white people about racial tensions in these gentrifying areas of North Philly. The piece was by no means flattering to white people. Huber quoted them doing everything from using the n-word to wrestling with their consciences for failing to help 12-year-old black children selling drugs in their neighborhood. The article wasn't above criticism, and Huber himself seemed abundantly aware of this. "When I drive through North Philly to visit my son, I continue to feel both profoundly sad and a blind desire to escape. Though I wonder: Am I allowed to say even that?" he wrote.

The answer to Huber's question, said Mayor Michael Nutter, is an emphatic "no." Nutter released the following statement:

I therefore request that the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations . . . consider specifically whether *Philadelphia* magazine and the writer, Bob Huber, are appropriate for rebuke by the Commission in light of the

potentially inflammatory effect and the reckless endangerment to Philadelphia's racial relations possibly caused by the essay's unsubstantiated assertions. . . . The First Amendment, like other constitutional rights, is not an unfettered right, and notwithstanding the First Amendment, a publisher has a duty to the public to exercise its role in a responsible way. I ask the Commission to evaluate whether the "speech" employed in this essay is not the reckless equivalent of "shouting 'fire!' in a crowded theater," its prejudiced, fact-challenged generalizations an incitement to extreme reaction.

There are many stories that the national media find uninteresting. One of them, surprisingly, turns out to be the mayor of a major city ordering an investigation of a city magazine for its political content. The Philadelphia Human Relations Commission has broad authority to investigate various complaints and impose penalties. Even if the city's actions are blatantly unconstitutional, costly administrative proceedings can tie up accused offenders for years (see "The Sensitivity Apparatus," February 4, 2013).

Philadelphia's Human Relations Commission has an illustrious history. It was the first body of its kind in the country, founded in 1951, and was at the center of helping resolve the city's considerable racial tensions through the '60s and early '70s. In the late '80s, the commission pushed the city for ordinances protecting gays. But the justification for the commission's existence has been fuzzy for decades. The commission's slick PowerPoint presentation blandly states that "in the '90s the PHRC continued to hold hearings."

In fact, the commission has been defining discrimination down for years. It spent over a year determining that the owner of Geno's Steaks violated no laws with a sign asking customers to speak English. It crusaded against the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority for transgender discrimination because riders must check whether they are male or female on their ironically named "transpasses." The commission has also been enforcing a city law forbidding employers from asking job

applicants about their criminal records.

And now it's going after *Philadelphia*. To its credit, the magazine isn't playing along. A few days before the April 18 meeting, *Philadelphia* editor Tom McGrath sent the Human Relations Commission a polite letter informing them that the magazine would skip the meeting. (McGrath had already moderated a discussion with Huber and critics at the National Constitution Center.)

It's unclear how many people in the city even care about the magazine controversy. About 50 people showed up for the Human Relations Commission meeting in the auditorium at Girard, though that number drops to about 30 once you subtract the commission's members, staff, event photographer, sound guy, and two interpreters for the deaf.

The commissioners took seats at a long table on the stage above the crowd, and the hearing began with a statement from the acting chairman, Thomas H. Earle. He assured the audience that the commission respects the First Amendment. "Still," he said, "we are disappointed that the magazine has chosen to pass up the opportunity to participate in a real dialogue with a larger, more diverse group of residents than what was reflected in its article and to gain a fuller understanding of actual intergroup relations in the extended Brewerytown Fairmount community."

After that, the commission heard from the public. Almost none of the speakers were there simply because they are outraged at *Philadelphia* magazine. In fact, they'd avail themselves of any opportunity to get city officials to pay attention to the problems of North Philly and said as much. More than one elderly African American complained about high taxes. One woman complained that the hipster parents in her neighborhood are now holding parent-teacher meetings in "a saloon."

That revelation elicited a visible reaction from one commissioner, former mosque leader Saadiq Abdul-Jabbar Garner.

Mayor Nutter seems to have vastly overestimated the article's "potentially inflammatory effect" on the city. "I didn't want to waste my energy dealing with ignorance," Alex Peay, founder of the Rising Sons mentoring and tutoring program, told the commission. "There are a few things in that article that sort of made sense, too. Because there are some issues going on in our communities. There are kids out there who are selling drugs. . . . There are

a lot of abandoned houses, and there's a big swarm of gentrification going on." Pat Edouard, also of Rising Sons, made the point even more bluntly—dealing with the city's problems is more important than fretting over how they're discussed. "Adults that speak up, black or white . . . instead of saying, 'Oh, that's racist!'—*think*. Is it? Or is it real?"

One notable exception to this downplaying of the magazine controversy came from Mary Catherine Roper, a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania's Philadelphia office. After a perfunctory lecture on the importance of the First Amendment, she offered the following: "I'd like to speak as a white person who lives in Philadelphia for more than 25 years. . . . As a white person, I was deeply embarrassed by that magazine article, and that did not speak for me." The PHRC can rest easy about putting the press on the hot seat. The ACLU may give a nod to the First Amendment, but in this particular instance their heart's not in it.

Almost an hour and a half in, Mayor Nutter showed up at the meeting. He did his best to sound outraged. "Completely unbalanced piece of pseudo-journalism . . . hateful



stereotyping . . . harmful stereotyping . . . self-styled zeal.” Alas, no one was there from *Philadelphia* magazine to be called hateful by the mayor, and when Nutter was told this he said, “That’s tragic. It truly saddens me.”

The mayor continues: “I believe in the First Amendment as much as any other”—this is demonstrably not true—“but given the nature of the controversy that has ensued it seems to me that you would want to be respectful to the citizens of Philadelphia, even to your readers, regardless of where they live”—*Philadelphia* magazine sells a lot of copies to white people in the suburbs, in case you didn’t get the hint—“to truly listen to more voices than were heard supposedly in that one particular piece and to demonstrate respect to the folks who are here to hear what really goes on in our neighborhoods. I think it’s a lost opportunity, but that’s life in the big city.”

Nutter left shortly after his speech, so he wasn’t around at the end of the meeting to hear Allison from the Francisville neighborhood tell the commission of her experience living in North Philly. “It’s not about racism. It’s about a sense of community and what we’re going to do about it,” she said, her voice breaking. “I’m going to cry here. I was recently robbed after living there and knowing everyone on my street. And I had over \$30,000 worth of stuff stolen. . . . And nothing has been done about it. What was taken from me was the stuff I had, and I had needed, and I had bought a home to be here, to raise a child.” Allison had big plans that had been destroyed. “What was taken from me was my ability to adopt.”

Allison sat down to some encouraging applause, but it seems unrealistic to expect the Human Relations Commission to help resurrect her dream of raising a child in a safe environment. The city of Philadelphia has more urgent priorities, such as making sure the First Amendment isn’t “unfettered” and ensuring ex-cons aren’t subject to employment discrimination. And if Mayor Nutter had been around to comfort Allison, we can guess what he’d tell her: “I think it’s a lost opportunity, but that’s life in the big city.” ♦

# Downward Mobility

## Maryland’s sorry Republican party.

BY KATE HAVARD

*Timonium, Md.*

It’s not easy being a Maryland Republican. The little state on the Chesapeake is quickly becoming one of the bluest in the country, led by a high-profile governor with presidential ambitions.

In November, voters rebuffed two Republican-backed initiatives, thus

Maryland, for their spring convention, to lick their wounds, fight amongst themselves, and decide who could best bring their party out of the wilderness.

The Maryland Republican party is highly dysfunctional. At the convention, there were two near-fistfights in two days—one involving a gubernatorial candidate. It is plagued with

infighting and weighed down by scandal and, at times, something close to nihilism. “Sometimes it felt like we were running around rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*, you know, praying for the iceberg to just hit,” delegate Susan McComas (R-Harford County) says when asked to evaluate the legislative session.

Party members arrived at the convention Friday night, April 19, to find the hotel lobby fitted out with conflicting sets of signs



*The old headquarters*

upholding same-sex marriage and approving in-state tuition for illegal immigrants. When the legislature convened in January, Governor Martin O’Malley, feeling the momentum from his ballot-box victories, laid out an ambitious agenda: repeal the death penalty, pass some of the strictest gun control laws in the nation, and raise the gas tax by as much as 13 to 20 cents per gallon by mid-2016.

Because the Republicans are very much the minority party, there was little they could do to stop it. By the time the session ended April 8, O’Malley had gotten pretty much everything he wanted. And so the Maryland Republican party retreated to Timonium,

promoting three different candidates for state party chairman and several long-shot candidates for governor—there was no single banner declaring it the Maryland GOP convention. But as the night wore on, it became clear that despite internal conflicts, Maryland Republicans, in their hearts, are united around a kind of pride in being the minority.

“The Republican legislators in Annapolis, they were like the 300 at Thermopylae,” mused one failed state senate candidate, as he stared ardently into the distance. “They knew they were going to lose on the gun bill, but they fought like tigers anyway—they fought like Spartans.”

Heartwarming stuff. But in the cruel light of day, the state of the party looks far less romantic. In 2001, Maryland

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DANIEL LEADERMAN / THE GAZETTE

had an evenly split congressional delegation—four Democrats and four Republicans. In 2002, one of those congressmen, Robert Ehrlich, became Maryland's first Republican governor elected since Spiro Agnew in 1966. Just over a decade later, Maryland Republicans have a single congressman and no control at the state level.

In the Maryland statehouse, the Democrats have supermajorities in both houses: The 47-member state senate contains 14 Republicans; the 141-member House of Delegates has 43. Come 2014, those Republicans will face reelection in a new, aggressively gerrymandered map that will squeeze them out even further.

To make matters worse, some Republican representatives are a heavy drag on a party that needs all the help it can get. Delegate Don Dwyer returned to the capital this session facing the very Annapolitan charge of boating while intoxicated. Dwyer admits that alcohol was involved, but denies responsibility for the accident that

fractured a 5-year-old girl's skull. The House reprimanded another Republican for inserting language into a bill that would have directly benefited his real estate business. And mere steps from the statehouse, former Anne Arundel County executive John Leopold was found guilty of misconduct in office after a drawn-out, sordid trial revealed he used his state security detail to facilitate weekly bowling-alley parking-lot rendezvous with his girlfriend.

Certainly, Maryland Democrats have had their own share of scandal. A Prince George's County delegate, Tiffany Alston, was recently removed from office for misdemeanor theft, using state funds to pay for her wedding. But Democrats outnumber Republicans in the state by two-to-one. They can afford screw-ups; Republicans cannot.

David Ferguson, the Maryland Republican party's executive director, has a many-faceted plan for the party's revival. Ferguson comes from a big Alabama football family, and in

rolled-up sleeves and a baseball hat, he's coach-like in his demeanor—chipper and determined to convert the Bad News Bears Republicans into a winning team. "I'm a sucker for big challenges," he says.

When Ferguson signed on with the Maryland GOP, one of his first stops was party headquarters, a grand old office building just off of Annapolis's Church Circle. The historic building "had a nice façade but it was not good, functionally," Ferguson recalls. "The floors were falling in, there was mold, the heat and central air didn't work, and it was really expensive." Annapolis politicians often pointed to the gutted building with a lonely bust of Ronald Reagan in the window as a physical manifestation of the party's woes.

One of Ferguson's first priorities was relocating to smaller, cleaner offices just down the street—for a third of the price. The GOP needed every dollar it could get: When Ferguson opened the books, he discovered that not only was the party losing

## It's About Time for Immigration Reform

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

Immigration reform is one of the compelling challenges of our time. If we rise to that challenge, we can ensure that our great country can compete and win in the global race for talent. We can secure the lives and livelihoods of all Americans. And we can reaffirm our proud and honorable legacy as an open and welcoming society.

The time to act is now. Our current system isn't serving the interests of our economy, businesses, workers, or security. America cannot compete and win in a global economy without the world's best talent, hardest workers, or biggest dreamers. Gaps and shortages in our workforce put American jobs at risk—because if companies can't find all the workers they need here, they will be forced to move the work somewhere else.

Today, we have our best shot yet

at fixing our system. A bipartisan group of senators has shown true leadership and courage in forging a bill that has the support and input of business, labor, faith-based organizations, civil rights and ethnic groups, and law enforcement.

These leaders have proposed tough, practical measures to secure our borders, while still allowing people and commerce to flow efficiently and lawfully in and out of our country. Their bill includes a thoughtfully designed temporary worker program to allow employers to use immigrant labor when U.S. workers are not readily available. It better ties visas to market demands. It helps ensure that we don't educate the best foreign talent in the world and then send them home to compete against us. It makes E-Verify a national employee verification system. And it provides a path out of the shadows for the 11 million undocumented immigrants who live in the United States today, provided that they meet some strict conditions.

The Senate bill is only the beginning of what must be an open and transparent debate. We must respect all viewpoints in this important debate, even those that differ from our own. But we should have little patience for those who decide to prey on fear and misunderstanding—or those who place their own short-term political interests above the national interest.

This is a moment that cries out for principled, courageous leadership that puts it all on the line to build a brighter and more hopeful future for our children and grandchildren. We need this leadership on many serious issues—deficits, debt, entitlement reform, education, national security, and others. Let's start with immigration reform.

Let's show the world that America still has the ability to do great things. It's about time.



**U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
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politically, it was also hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. “Now, at least, we’ve paid off the telemarketers, the direct mailing, and all our other bills are current,” he says. He next got to work fundraising, and the party brought in nearly \$1.2 million in 2012.

Then he unveiled the big win strategy, “Growing Our Party 2020.” If it isn’t clear from the title, it sets the bar for victory pretty low. Ferguson’s plan emphasizes winning local elections, in which Maryland Republicans do much better, over big-ticket races for the Senate or the governor’s office.

“If we can’t play at the opponent’s level, we have to define our own success,” he says. “We need more people to run for the state senate, for the House of Delegates, and for the local positions. There are people who want to run for the governor’s office that are wholly qualified, could be great state senators, and could win there, but they don’t want to run for that seat.” He adds, “Everyone wants to be the top martyr, but we’re saying, run in a legislative race in your hometown that you can win. A rising tide raises all boats.”

It’s temperate advice in a year in which all tides seem to be against them. In the middle of this year’s tough session, Ferguson’s boss, state party chairman Alex X. Mooney, resigned and moved to West Virginia, where he is contemplating a congressional run. It wasn’t exactly a vote of confidence in the party’s future.

Mooney left his vice chair, real estate agent Diana Waterman, in charge of the fractured party. Many of the hostilities at the convention arose because the party had denied bloggers, including a small but vocal group of conservative bloggers, media credentials. The bloggers said that they were being shut out because they have the audacity to criticize party leadership. State party leadership said the bloggers were just whiners trying to score free convention tickets. In a state where Republicans need all the media attention they can get, it’s an unfortunate quarrel.

At the convention, delegate Justin Ready (R-Carroll County) led a workshop for potential candidates, largely aimed at healing the rift between

grassroots and party leaders, one he sees playing out nationally. The 31-year-old Ready, a freshman delegate, is considered a “young gun” of the party. He was one of the few officials at the convention who’s respected by both party leaders and activists.

The goal, he told the crowd, was to stick to principles while keeping in mind where the voters are coming from. “We can’t afford to write anyone off,” he said. “When we lose, it’s easy to form the circular firing squad and blame [each other], but the truth is, it’s hard in our state, and when you don’t have the senators, you don’t have the delegates, you don’t have the votes—you can’t make a difference. We can’t do it if we’re not united.”

Diana Waterman was officially elected to a full term as chair on Saturday and supported her rival, Collins

Bailey, in his bid for vice-chair, a promising sign for party unity. But Waterman takes a very different tack from Ferguson. She’s not content to wait until 2020, when the next census might lead to more favorable redistricting, to go for the big seats.

Term limits mean O’Malley cannot try for a third term in 2014. Waterman calls the governorship “an open seat, with no clear frontrunner on the Democrat side.” She adds, “When *they’re* fighting, that helps us. It opens the door a little wider.”

The new Maryland Republican party chair doesn’t sound like a supporter of “Growing Our Party 2020.” “Is it going to be a definite challenge to win back the governor’s seat [next] year or four years from [then]? Yes. But absolutely and totally unattainable? No.” ♦

# The Post-Welfare State Family

The original cradle-to-grave institution.

BY MARY EBERSTADT

**A**mong various unwanted truths that grown-ups of the Western world have to contend with these days, here’s one that doesn’t get nearly the traction it deserves: The days of the modern welfare state look to be numbered.

Yet it’s true. Even the most redistributive president in history can’t change the laws of arithmetic. As can be seen most recently in Jonathan V. Last’s book *What to Expect When No One’s Expecting*, the song of demographic unsustainability remains the same on both sides of the Atlantic.

*Mary Eberstadt is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and author of the just-released How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization (Templeton Press).*

From Nicosia to Athens, London to Washington, D.C., the benefits promised to seniors and others before Western people stopped having babies will be shouldered in the years to come by a shrinking cadre of younger taxpayers. Nor is the discrepancy just some accounting shortfall to be finessed. As British psychiatrist and pundit Theodore Dalrymple once noted, this crisis is system-wide, “civilizational.”

Two weeks ago, for instance, two news items independently offered clear windows onto different parts of the scene. In the *New York Times*, a harrowing front-page story entitled “More Children in Greece Start To Go Hungry” showed what can happen when an economy in free-fall meets the highest unemployment rates in Europe (27 percent):

More Greek youngsters underfed and malnourished; garbage-picking outside elementary schools; and an overall level of “food insecurity” that, according to one expert, rivals that in parts of Africa. And though “experts” can be expected to overstate, Greece, it helps to remember, is a country in the EU.

On the same day, in the *Washington Post*, columnist George Will used recent work by Hudson Institute scholar Christopher DeMuth to examine the political sausage factory that could push America toward a Grecian future. DeMuth argues that the borrowing for consumption effectively hides the real level of taxation from the public—“until,” as Will concluded his column, “the implosion.” Economists can fume over the numbers all they like. Any non-economist checking the financial pages can see that the welfare states of the West are living on borrowed time.

All of which raises a radical and interesting question also overlooked so far: Could the failure of the cradle-to-grave state have the unforeseen consequence of reinvigorating another institution that’s been ailing for some time across the Western world—i.e., what you might call the cradle-to-grave family?

After all, a case can be made that the welfare state has competed with the family for primacy from the beginning. It’s a point exquisitely if unintentionally illustrated by the Obama reelection campaign’s infamous “Julia” website, which showed the beneficent state stepping in to do at every stage of life what used to be done by competent families: babysitting, educating, influencing romantic decisions, caring for someone in old age.

Raw propaganda aside, some serious thinkers have also remarked over

the years on the zero-sum game that is the power struggle between family and state. Plato, for one, understood that the only sure way to make children reliable instruments of his Republic was to separate them from their families at an early age. British author Ferdinand Mount argued in a 1992 book that the family “is a subversive organization. . . . Only the family has continued throughout history and still continues to under-

family breakup, out-of-wedlock births, and other trends that have turned the modern state into an inefficient but all-encompassing substitute for a man of the house.

In sum, statism has been an engine of family destruction—and vice versa. All of which leads to a contrarian thought: Might the dark ages of the welfare state end in a family renaissance?

If the welfare states of the West finally do implode, it’s hard to think of any institution *but* the family that could step into that vacuum. When politics forces the truth that taking care of one’s own is less ruinous than having the state do it, it’s just possible that personal choices could come to reflect that fact.

Might divorce rates go down—as they did, suggestively enough, following the crash of 2008? Similarly, if there is a world after the welfare state, might there be earlier marriage and more of it, as the (unsubsidized) single

life becomes less tenable? Or consider the less tangible ways in which a world without a viable cradle-to-grave safety net could reinvigorate family ties. Might the unreliability of the state lead people to look nearer for emotional and social sustenance—meaning less family breakup, maybe even a rise in the birth rate as insurance against the loneliness and uncertainty of old age?

It’s all armchair speculation, for sure. But the “boomerang generation,” to take one small but interesting example of how hard times have a way of sending people home, may yet turn out to be a harbinger of a wholly unexpected future reality. In what would look in retrospect like a cosmic joke no one saw coming, the ongoing travails of the unsustainable state might yet refurbish the family nest somewhere down the road. ♦



*A woman in Athens: “Am hungry”*

mine the ‘State.’” Tocqueville, Mount pointed out, also grasped this fundamental antagonism between family and state; witness the great Frenchman’s observation that “as long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone.”

Looking away from theory and toward the public square, it’s also plainly true that the welfare state has interrupted the organic bonds of family in ways too numerous to count. As Milton Friedman once observed of Social Security, “The voluntary transfers [from young to old] strengthened the bonds of the family; the compulsory transfers weaken those bonds.” And certainly it’s the welfare state that has effectively bankrolled via many programs the expensive pan-Western fallout of the sexual revolution: the unprecedented levels of divorce,

# It Takes Two

## Immigration and the rule of law.

BY PETER SKERRY

With an immigration bill finally on the table, Republicans would do well to stop and ponder how they have arrived at this juncture. Since the November election they have been preoccupied with how to approach Hispanics on this critical issue. Because almost 80 percent of illegal immigrants are Hispanic, conservative elites have—appropriately—been wrestling with terminology and have just about persuaded themselves that “illegals” are more prudently referred to as “the undocumented.”

But the soul-searching seems to have stopped there. Whatever they call them, Republicans continue to insist that the undocumented must be treated as law-breakers, even as criminals, who must be penalized and not allowed to benefit from their transgressions. For a party struggling to renew itself, this isn't much progress. What Republicans now need to consider is that the undocumented are hardly the only law-breakers here. More precisely, Republicans must assess how much responsibility for illegal immigration can be fairly attributed to employers.

This won't be easy. Especially at this juncture in the process, no one wants to point fingers—certainly not at employers who are complicit in illegal immigration. To be sure, back in 2009 the Obama administration prioritized the criminal prosecution of employers who hire the undocumented and brought some large firms to heel. But right now, Democrats want to mobilize their troops and focus attention on the travails of worthy newcomers who just happen to be here without documents.

Republicans, as I have suggested, have their own problems. For them,

immigration enforcement has meant securing our border with Mexico, for which public support has been readily mobilized with images of imposing physical barriers, sophisticated surveillance technology, and thousands of Border Patrol agents. By contrast, interior enforcement has been a much tougher sell. After all, it arouses images of busy Americans being hassled at highway checkpoints or hard-working businessmen wasting their time filling out government forms and answering the questions of intrusive bureaucrats. And since employers tend to be well organized and vocal when it comes to immigration, Republicans have sought to avoid offending what looks to be a natural constituency. But then so have many Democrats.

As for the rest of us, Americans tend to identify with employers, who are like “us.” In many cases the employers *are* us, insofar as they are homeowners relying on laborers, gardeners, painters, carpenters, cleaning ladies, and nannies, who are typically undocumented.

In fact, casual reliance on illegal immigrant workers is unlikely to run afoul of the law. Individuals who hire fewer than 10 illegal workers during any 12-month period are effectively exempt from prosecution. To be sure, candidates for high government appointments and politicians are subject to embarrassing exposure on this point, and they might be legally vulnerable for failing to pay Social Security taxes for undocumented workers. But the average American can still drive down to the Home Depot parking lot and hire a day laborer without fear of violating the law.

And so it has been for most of our history. It was not until 1986, when Congress enacted the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), that employers were prohibited from

hiring noncitizens lacking work authorization. Up to that time, to be sure, it had been a felony to harbor illegal aliens. But at the insistence of agricultural interests, the so-called Texas Proviso stipulated that *employing* illegals was not to be construed as harboring them. So those who insist on upholding “the rule of law” would do well to consider how immigration law has evolved and changed.

In any event, IRCA changed all that, and for the first time, employers—excepting the homeowners described above—became subject to fines and prosecution for hiring undocumented immigrants. Yet an unholy alliance of immigrant advocates, business interests, and civil libertarians raised alarms about the creation of a “national identity card” and stymied efforts to create a secure means of identification that would allow employers to reliably determine the legal status of job applicants. At the same time, Congress enacted anti-discrimination provisions to discourage employers from avoiding the risk of hiring illegal immigrants simply by not hiring foreign-looking applicants. The result is that employers have been required to ascertain the legal status of their employees but discouraged from doing so aggressively.

It gets worse. To establish their eligibility for employment, applicants may rely on driver's licenses, Social Security cards, and birth certificates—all of which can be counterfeited. Yet employers are not required to verify the authenticity of such documents, merely to confirm that they “reasonably appear on their face to be genuine.” Documenting all this on the now-infamous I-9 form completes the ritual and allows employers to satisfy the letter of the law by affirming that they did not *knowingly* hire undocumented workers.

Despite such ease of compliance, employers—no one knows how many—still evade or violate the law outright. Many hire undocumented workers indirectly by relying on subcontractors who assume the risk of skirting the law. Perhaps most notorious for this tactic is Walmart, which has used subcontractors who secured undocumented workers to clean its stores. Much less

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notoriously, homeowners routinely hire, for example, landscaping contractors who employ illegals. Technically, such homeowners are not in violation of the law, but this was small consolation to Mitt Romney a few years back. More blatant is the hiring of undocumented workers off-the-books and paying them substandard wages “under the table” with no benefits.

Such common practices highlight why American employers have grown so dependent on illegal immigrant workers. The usual explanation is lower wages, which are undeniably part of the story. Yet not to be overlooked is the willingness of undocumented workers to work long hours on short notice. As economist Gordon Hanson has pointed out, illegals are valuable to employers precisely because they are more flexible and responsive to market forces than other workers. This is particularly true in agriculture but also in construction and the service industry.

This insight also sheds light on the motives of the undocumented

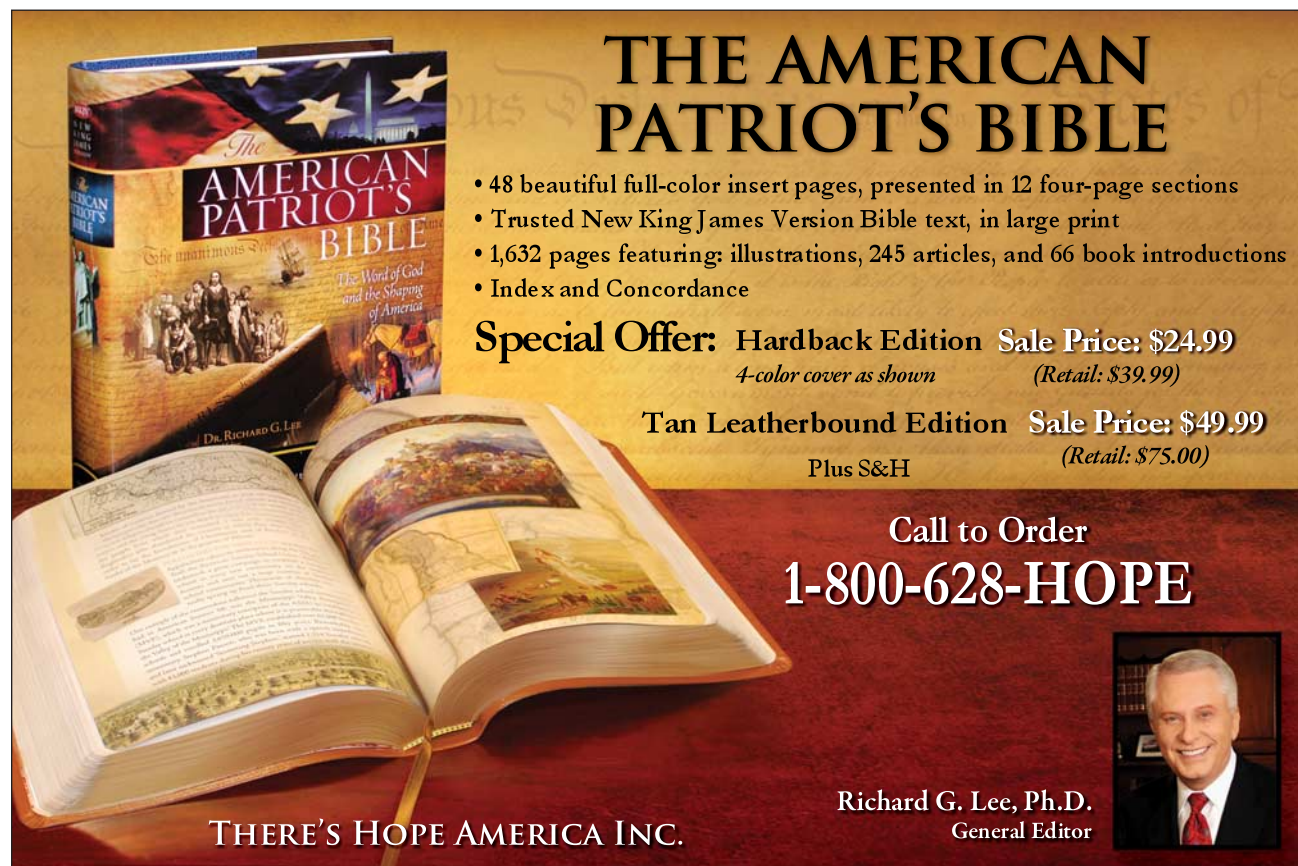
themselves. Invariably overlooked is that illegals do not typically plan to spend the rest of their lives here. In fact, they usually arrive as “target earners,” working several jobs to maximize income and enduring spartan, often substandard conditions to minimize expenses. With a long-range goal of returning home with their accumulated savings, the undocumented are often content with informal arrangements that allow them to avoid paying taxes and put up with long hours in unpleasant, sometimes dangerous conditions.

To be sure, their plans change over time, and many of the undocumented obviously end up remaining here and starting families. Yet the more fundamental point is that illegal immigrants are hardly mere victims of forces beyond their control. Indeed, one of the clearest and most consistent findings by economists is that the big winners in the immigration sweepstakes are immigrants themselves—illegal as well as legal. Yet such economic gains invariably involve considerable risk,

particularly on the part of illegals.

The irony here that Republicans fail to grasp is that undocumented workers tend to be entrepreneurial, not unlike many of their employers. And as with other entrepreneurs, the gains from the risks illegals incur redound primarily to them, while the costs tend to be more widely dispersed. Republicans are certainly sensitive to these costs, but remain oblivious to how undocumented workers are likely to be seen in this more favorable light. For example, when illegals cut corners to achieve their goals, many Americans regard them as ambitious, admirable, even heroic. But when employers cut corners, they get criticized as cheap and mean-spirited.

Months of difficult legislative negotiations now lie ahead. If a bargain is to be struck from which their party will genuinely benefit, Republicans will need to reflect more not only on what they think about illegal immigrants, but also about those who employ them. ♦



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# The Twidiocracy

*The decline of Western civilization, 140 characters at a time*

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BY MATT LABASH

*“The Machine,” they exclaimed, “feeds us and clothes us and houses us; through it we speak to one another, through it we see one another, in it we have our being. . . . [T]he Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine.”*  
—E.M. Forster, *“The Machine Stops”* (1909)

Austin

**A**t the risk of being abrasive, I am about to say something unthinkable, heretical. I am about to say six words you have likely never heard from a working member of the media, and may never hear again: Do not follow me on Twitter.

You can try, if so inclined. But unlike Kim Kardashian, Lady Gaga, the pope, the Dalai Lama, and the Church of England (which invited Twitter users to help select the next archbishop of Canterbury), you won’t find me there. I’m not on it, and hope never to be. I say *hope*, because the clip at which the Twidiocracy has infiltrated itself into every crevice of

society might leave me no choice. In the dystopian future—which in the age of Google glasses is starting to feel like the dystopian present—I might be forced to join Twitter in order to, say, collect my Social Security e-check when the time comes. Though the likelihood of there still being Social Security in 25 years is much less than the likelihood of people endlessly tweeting about how there’s no more Social Security.

If you’re not following this, there’s an outside chance you still have an analog life that unfolds beyond the glow of a screen. That you remember a time, not all that long ago, when the social-media contagion of FacebookTwitterPinterestInstagram hadn’t yet made us wonder how we used to talk to each other. A time when a phone was considered

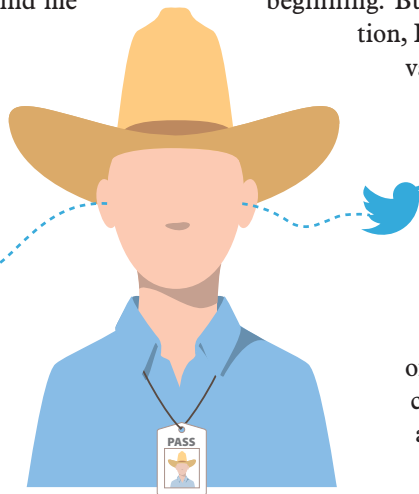
a communication device, not an extra limb. (A Stanford study found 75 percent of iPhone users fall asleep with their phones in their beds, only 2 percent less than the number of spouses who sleep with each other.) More likely, it just means you’ve been in a deep coma since Twitter’s birth in 2006. In which case, I envy you.

If you haven’t gathered by now, I’m not a Twitter fan. In fact, I outright despise the inescapable microblogging service, which nudges its users to leave no thought unexpressed, except for the fully formed ones (there’s a 140-characters-per-tweet limit). I hate it not just because the Twidiocracy constantly insists I should love it, though that certainly helps. Being in the media profession (if “profession” isn’t overstating things), where everyone flocked en masse to the technology out of curiosity or insecurity or both, I’ve hated it reflexively since its beginning. But with time’s passage and deliberation, I’ve come to hate it with deeper, more variegated richness. I hate the smug-

ness of it, the way the techno-triumphalists make everyone who hasn’t joined the Borg feel like they’ve been banished to an unpopulated island, when in fact the numbers don’t support that notion. Even after seven years of nonstop media hype, only 16 percent of Internet users tweet, the same as the percentage of 14-49-year-olds who have genital herpes. The difference being that the latter are not proud of their affliction, while the

former never shut up about theirs.

I hate the way Twitter transforms the written word into abbreviations and hieroglyphics, the staccato bursts of emptiness that occur when Twidiots who have no business writing for public consumption squeeze themselves into 140-character cement shoes. People used to write more intelligently than they speak. Now, a scary majority tend to speak more intelligently than they tweet. If that’s a concern—and all evidence suggests it isn’t—you can keep your tweets private, readable only by those you invite. But that reduces your number of “followers,” so almost



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nobody does it. A private Twitter account cuts against the whole spirit of the enterprise—a bit like showing up at a nude beach in a muumuu.

There are admittedly pockets of genius on Twitter, as anyone who's ever visited the Goldman Sachs Elevator Gossip page knows. (@GSElevator: "If you can only be good at one thing, be good at lying. . . . Because if you're good at lying, you're good at everything.") But most often, Twitter makes otherwise great writers good, and good writers bad. It's a format that encourages even the pros to locate the mediocrity within. From @salmanrushdie: "One year today since I joined Twitter. I'm amazed to have 400,000+ of you with me. Thanks for following, everyone. It has been fun."

I hate the way Twitter turns people into brand managers, their brands being themselves. It's nearly impossible now to watch television news without an anchor imploring you to "follow me on Twitter," even as you're already following him on television. You couldn't do this much following in the physical world without being slapped with a restraining order.

Though I've just catalogued much to hate about Twitter, there's plenty more to hate about Twitter. I hate that Twitter makes the personal public. That conversations between two intimates that formerly transpired in person or by email become conversations between two intimates for the benefit of their followers. I've actually been to lunch with people who have tweeted throughout, unbeknownst to me. (The fact that they only looked up from their iPhone twice in two hours might've been a tipoff. Though that's pretty much par for the course, even with untweeted lunches these days.)

I hate that formerly respectable adults now think it's okay to go at each other like spray-tanned girls on *Jersey Shore*, who start windmill-slapping each other after they've each had double-digit cherry vodkas and one calls the other "fat." None of which gives onlookers pause. After all, it's only a Twitter fight. The Pulitzer Prize-winning writer of *Friday Night Lights*, Buzz Bissinger, recently made headlines for penning a lengthy *GQ* article about his Gucci shopping addiction (75 pairs of boots! 41 pairs of leather pants!), which set him back over half a million dollars. But long before that, he'd humiliated himself on Twitter, machine-gunning all comers with one f-bomb tweet after another. Not only was Bissinger unabashed, he wrote a piece boasting about it for the *New Republic* (appropriately titled "Twidiot"). Buried deep in his *GQ* piece, however, was an admission more troubling than an addiction to overpriced

clothing that makes him look like the interior of a 1982 Crown Victoria. Once considered to be a fine long-form writer, Bissinger now found himself losing focus: "I f—ed around more and more—nasty guillotine rants on Twitter going after everything and everyone, Googling my name six or seven times a day, craving crumbs of attention."

Being driven to distraction by the steady dopamine-drip of attention on Twitter and other social-media sites is hardly unique to megalomaniacal leather enthusiasts. A recent survey by Boost Mobile found 16-25-year-olds so addicted that 31 percent of respondents admitted to servicing their social accounts while "on the toilet." And a Retrevo study found that 11 percent of those under age 25 allow themselves to be interrupted by "an electronic message during sex."

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**I hate the way Twitter transforms the written word into hieroglyphics. People used to write more intelligently than they speak. Now, a scary majority tend to speak more intelligently than they tweet. Twitter makes great writers good and good writers bad.**

Technology that incentivizes its status-conscious, attention-starved users to yearn for ever more followers and retweets, Twitter causes Twidiots to ask one fundamental question at all times: "How am I doing?" That's not a question most people can resist asking, even in their offline lives, but on Twitter, where tweeters are publicly judged by masses of acquaintances and strangers alike, the effect tends to be intensified. Even the most independent

spirit becomes a needy member of the bleating herd. It's the nerd incessantly repeating what the more popular kids say. It's the pretty girl, compulsively seeking compliments.

As a friend of mine says, "It's addictive and insidious. I see it even with smart people who ought to know better but can't help themselves. They give wildly disproportionate weight to the opinions they read on Twitter, mostly because they're always reading Twitter. Which fills them with anxiety, distorts their perceptions, and makes it almost impossible for them to take the long view on anything. Every crisis is huge, ominous, and growing. Every attack requires an immediate response."

A yearlong Pew study reinforces this. It found that Twitter users tend to be considerably younger and more liberal than the general public. But whether tweets tended to skew liberal or conservative was almost immaterial. Twitter reaction to current events was often at odds with overall public opinion, and it was "the overall negativity that stands out."

Another friend, who has seen her industry overrun by Twitter, puts it like this: "It's the constant mirror in front of your face. The only problem is that it's not just you and the mirror. You're waiting for the mirror to tell you what it

thinks. The more you check for a response, the more habituated you become to craving one. It's pathetic, because at the end of the day, a Twitter user is asking, 'Am I really here, and do you love me?' And there will always be someone else who gets more approbation for their 140 characters to make you feel like you're never quite good enough. The whole thing is like being in the worst years of one's adolescence."

Perhaps nowhere is Twidiot adolescence more pronounced than in the junior-high cafeteria that is the new media. Consider that the *Washington Post* recently ran a piece on the death of the metronome, which musicians are replacing with iPhone apps that perform the same function. Except that the entire story began as a series of 17 tweets, which the paper then republished verbatim. (And you wonder why print is dying.) Then there's Nick Bilton, the *New York Times* "Bits Blog" writer, who lives on the cutting-edge of connectedness. Or perhaps disconnectedness, as he recently proclaimed how rude it is to leave voicemails, which burden the recipient with picking up a phone and having—brace yourself—an actual conversation. He ignores the voicemails of his father, and communicates with his mother, he admitted without shame, mostly through Twitter.

How desperate are journos to prove how *au courant* they are? Well, look no further than *Mediate*'s media correspondent, Tommy Christopher. In 2010, he live-tweeted his own heart attack, while paramedics were working on him. Actual tweet: "I gotta be me. Livetweeting my heart attack. Beat that!"

Unfortunately, a lot of people are trying. Here's a short list of how pathological the Twitterfication of the world has become: A Houston hospital felt it necessary to live-tweet a brain surgery. A second-grade class in Buffalo corrected the misspelled tweets of NFL players as a grammar exercise. A Washington, D.C., hotel promised a "dedicated social media butler" as part of its \$47,000 Obama inaugural package, to chronicle the experience "so your friends and family can follow your adventures on Twitter." And real-life pimps and prostitutes are regularly found soliciting on Twitter, perhaps thinking it affords them cover among all the attention whores.

The British media announced the appointment by David Cameron of a "Twitter Tsar," to be paid nearly as much as the prime minister himself. (Cameron once considered temporarily shutting down Twitter, after mobs of looters used it to organize during the 2011 riots.) The Israeli

Defense Forces became the first military force to declare war on Twitter (against Hamas). Their declaration-of-war tweet earned 430 retweets, which wasn't as many as their "Happy #passover!" message (434 retweets). When Pope Benedict, for God only knows what reason, felt it necessary to join, he was given a typical warm Twitter welcome with "now let's hit this bitch up with some hate tweets."

Twitter celebrity death hoaxes are staples. Adam Sandler supposedly died four times in four months in the same snowboarding accident. Not to be confused with Twitter death threats, which are also hardy perennials. Twitter lynch mobs have threatened the lives of everyone from Wisconsin governor Scott Walker to NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

The state of Ohio toyed with announcing executions on Twitter. While the city of Chicago's "social media director" (yes, they have one) decided to get a handle on the city's out-of-control murder rate by asking followers to tweet recommendations tagged #whatifchicago. (Here's an idea: #whatifchicago hired more police instead of social-media directors?)

Don't think you have enough Twitter followers? Well apparently, neither did Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, and Newt Gingrich, all of whom have been accused of inflating the numbers with legions of fakes. A web tool called "Fake Fol-

lower Check" determined that nearly 70 percent of Obama's didn't actually exist. But if you're undeterred by being followed by people who aren't, technically speaking, people, you can buy them. In order to write about it, *Slate*'s Seth Stevenson bought 27,000 mass-produced fake zombie followers for a cool \$202 from sketchy Internet middlemen who procure them from suppliers in India. Even our fake people, sadly, are outsourced.

While Twitteristas love to champion Twitter as freedom's trainbearer, seldom mentioned is that the bad guys love Twitter too—as a tool of propaganda, surveillance, and intimidation. Al Qaeda and the Taliban are on Twitter. China launched a copycat "Red Twitter" service, to promote revolutionary spirit, though they still use regular ol' Twitter to spy on and punish their citizenry, sentencing a woman to a year in a labor camp for retweeting a post that mocked Chinese protesters who destroyed Japanese products.

Of course, most tweets don't land you in prison. Most of them, in fact, are just inconsequential crap. Don't take my word for it. Take science's. A Proceedings of the National

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**Don't think you have enough Twitter followers? Neither did Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, and Newt Gingrich, all of whom were accused of inflating the numbers with legions of fakes. 'Fake Follower Check' determined that nearly 70 percent of Obama's didn't actually exist.**

Academy of Sciences paper said upwards of 80 percent “of posts to social-media sites (such as Twitter) consist simply of announcements of one’s own immediate experiences.” Rutgers researchers found that 51 percent of mobile-posted Twitter messages were “me now” messages, and that 80 percent of tweets analyzed could be classified as “meformers” (informing about yourself). After Pear Analytics collected thousands of tweets over two weeks and broke them down into six categories, the leader at 40.5 percent was “pointless babble.” Even Twitter users, in a study conducted by MIT, Carnegie Mellon, and Georgia Tech researchers, said only a little over a third of the tweets they receive are worthwhile.

Though Twitter made about \$140 million in ad revenue in 2011, their most recent valuation was pegged at a whopping \$10 billion ahead of their expected 2014 IPO. Color me skeptical (see Facebook IPO crash, circa 2012), but the true value of Twitter might have best been captured by the Annenberg School for Communication. They polled 1,900 subjects, asking if they’d be willing to pay for Twitter. The result? There were 0.00 percent takers. As in NONE.

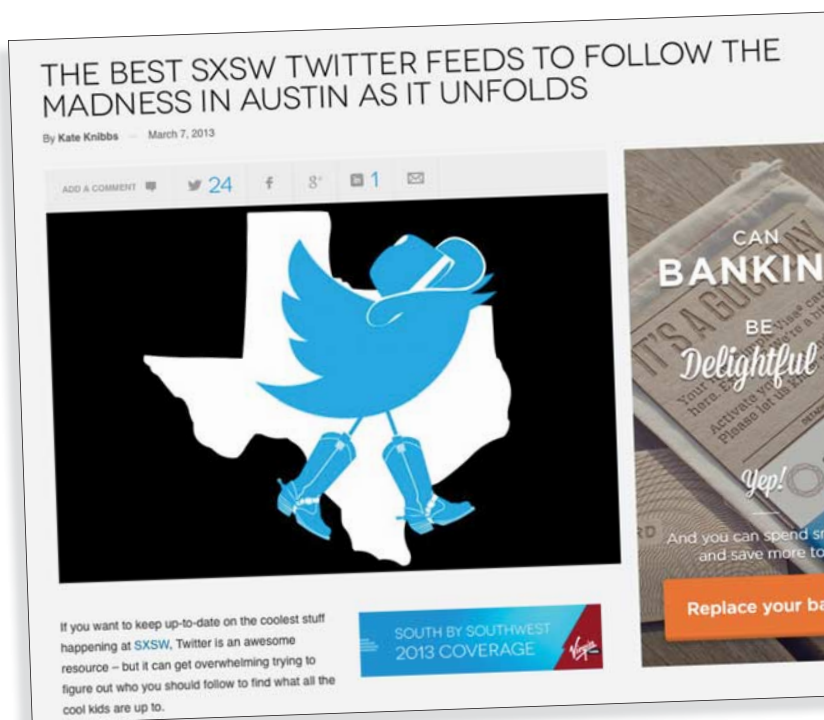
Not that this deters the Twitter triumphalists for a second. In fact, after all the Twitter-bashing I’ve just engaged in, I’m starting to feel unfair. Yes, researching Twidiots for too long can put you in mind of Thoreau, who said, “But lo! Men have become the tools of their tools.” Still, knocking the Twidiocracy from afar seems like the kind of behavior I condemn on Twitter. So I went to the one place where I knew I’d find the highest concentration of Twitter triumphalists. The place that gets credit for originally taking Twitter viral. The place where men and tools are indistinguishable from each other: Austin’s South by Southwest Interactive Festival.

In the ’90s, SXSW was known for the kind of kick-back atmosphere where hipster aesthetes in pearl-button hillbilly shirts could go eat’n’drink their weight in barbecue brisket and Lone Star beer, while checking out the sleeper independent film or unsigned band that would be launched as the next big thing. The old-timers tell me it was nice while it lasted.

SXSW is now gut-to-butt crowded and ultra-corporate. These days, a musical “discovery” is stumbling upon LL Cool J performing on “The Jacked Stage by Doritos”—an edifice literally made to look like a giant Doritos vending machine. But something else changed, too. Around the time the entire world decided, “Why pay directors and musicians for their work when we can just watch it on YouTube?” the Interactive portion of SXSW kicked into high gear. The music and film festivals are still a big draw, certainly. But the tech industry has pretty much taken over this world, just as they have all the others. Even the dinosaur rock stars of

yesteryear are instructed by the new rock stars of the tech industry, in special editions of the *Social Media Monthly*, that they should “curate and share content every day.”

This year, SXSW Interactive, with 25,000 attendees, ran during 5 of the 11 days of the larger festival. Local tourism boosters like to say “Keep Austin weird”—the inscription is on every T-shirt and shot-glass in hotel gift shops. And you will still see the occasional bohemian pushing a painted-pink tumbleweed down Sixth Street, or you’ll get a pedi-cab driver wheeling you around in a bike chariot shaped liked Darth Vader, complete with light saber and speakers in his helmet blasting Procol Harum’s “A Whiter Shade of Pale.”



*The SXSW tweet guide*

But the real weirdness is that everyone thronging the streets during this Geek Mardi Gras seems to be from Silicon Valley, or wants to meet a venture capitalist who is. Even a tattoo artist at True Blue Tattoos tells me how soulless Austin becomes during Interactive. Customers ask to be inked with their company logos or, worse, the little blue bird that serves as Twitter’s trademark.

Like any religious cult, it prizes its own inscrutable language (words like “optimization” and “curate our stories” are prominent). So to keep up, I consult a few online “Web 2.0 B.S. generators.” I figure if someone at a party asks what I do, I can earn a valuable status upgrade by saying that I digitize tag clouds to e-enable infomediaries and engage data-driven long-tail folksonomies which harness rss-capable platforms and envisioner cross-media functionalities.

Not that anyone would ask. They’re too busy peddling

their own Web 2.0 B.S. And a good thing too, since my lingo is probably badly dated. Things age fast, here. On a downtown convention center escalator, I actually hear a woman say, in regular conversation, “Last year’s innovation is this year’s old news.”

My mission is narrow. I’m not here to scope out 3-D printers or smart contact lenses or whatever the bleeding edge of tomorrow is. I’m here to attend every dopey social-media/Twitter event I can find. While social media arrived many innovation cycles ago in SXSW time, it’s clear that, like an inoperable tumor, it’s here to stay. You see every kind of app getting pushed here, from the “Hater” iPhone app (“share the things you hate with people you love”) to the “Bang with Friends” app, which lends “social” new meaning as it promises to “anonymously find SXSW’ers who are down for the night.”

The problem with selecting social-media panels is that there are so damn many. In four days of attending them from morning until night, I will get to about a fifth of the ones offered. Almost all of them have gas-baggish titles like “Black Twitter Activism, Bigger than Hip Hop” or “One Million Strong: Social Media and the U.S. Army.” I finally end up finding a great use for Twitter when I check out the cracks of a few techie wisenheimers who did not come to SXSW out of pure loathing, but who are hashtagging “#betterSXSWpanels” with made-up titles such as “How to Be Pretentious Without Being Smart” or “My Agency Just Did A Harlem Shake Video, Now What?”

Of course, I’m forced to keep up with the fake titles at night, on my laptop. After all, I wouldn’t dare bring my PC into the land of iGadgetry like some sort of philistine, and I can’t follow them on my dumbphone—or, as a horrified David Carr of the *New York Times* calls it when spying it during a party he throws at his hotel (the week’s finest, since he serves brisket from Franklin Barbecue), “Look at your mom phone!”

Nothing against moms. But Carr’s right—my phone isn’t sexy. It’s an old clamshell flip job that I’ve carried around since last decade, an eternity in phone world. I’ve resisted entreaties from our office manager to take a smartphone instead. Not only because I wish to avoid the electronic monitoring bracelet that I see everyone else wearing. But as a self-regulation mechanism, so that I stay mindful that there is still flesh-and-blood life outside of the Internet. At least for the moment.

As I walk through the convention center to attend my first panel, I see that exactly nobody else has my smartphone

reticence. Everybody is on theirs, pretty much full time. Entire hallways and lounges are silent as the inhabitants ignore each other, lost in their own iWorlds. Their heads are tucked and rocking like those of trance-induced madrassa students, their thumbs pistoning as fast as they think, tweeting and Foursquaring and iHate-ing and working any number of other apps that will go from being the World’s Greatest Innovation to MySpace (the universal term of derision for all things obsolete) before you’ve ever heard of them.

I arrive at one session five minutes early, but it turns out to be way too late. The cavernous conference room, which looks to hold about 500, is already packed. Several hundred others congregate outside the door. In front of a spill-over hallway speaker, they sit on the floor wordlessly and

in unison, all of the same hive-mind. They start thumb-clacking on their iPhones and iPads, live-tweeting the speaker, or maybe surfing for nerd porn or Googling themselves, who knows? To turn out a crowd of this number and intensity, you’d think the panel was titled “Finally: a Cure for Cancer” or “See this Sack of Money?—Take It!” But, no. It’s “How Twitter Has Changed How We Watch TV.”

I take a seat on the hallway floor with the rest of the hive to listen to Jenn Deering Davis, cofounder of Union Metrics. If you’re a committed Twidiot, you might still want to go back and read all the live-tweets from the session, so consider this a spoiler alert. It turns out, a lot of people tweet while they watch TV. What the pros call “the second screen experience.”

Davis is one of those people who say “that’s interesting,” whenever she doesn’t have anything interesting to say. So she finds it “interesting” that the teen drama *Pretty Little Liars* is the most-tweeted-about show on television. It’s also “interesting” that it’s harder for viewers to live-tweet *House of Cards*, because Netflix released all 13 episodes of its original series simultaneously. Likewise, it’s “interesting” that the voice-actors from animated shows like *Archer* actually maintain a Twitter presence in character, so that you feel like you’re “part of the conversation” by carrying out a “para-social relationship” with a TV character, even if that character doesn’t actually exist. When the new

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**You can share pictures on Twitter. And that may be the direction in which we need to head, since attention spans are shrinking and words are so wordy. Seventy percent of all social media activity now involves a photo.**



*Hawaii Five-O* asked its fans to vote on an ending via Twitter, showing one ending to the East Coast, while airing a different one on the West Coast? Well, that's almost too much for Davis, as far as revolutionizing television goes. "It's fascinating," she says, mixing things up.

After an hour of this, I feel depleted, as if brain cells have died and I've just shed 30 IQ points. I ask a perky Australian techie, sitting Indian-style on the floor next to me, if all the panels are this overpopulated. "Yeah," she says. "Anything that's got a good title, like 'Top 10 Ways to Go Viral,' that kind of shit, you've gotta get there real early."

"Hmm," I respond, applying my new knowledge. "That's interesting."

Evan Fitzmaurice, an Austin-based lawyer and longtime friend who until recently was the Texas Film Commissioner, has attended many a SXSW. He tells me one night over dinner that while he's wired to the hilt ("I've gotta connect to the Matrix"), he sees the downside of perpetual connectedness. "You're truncating natural thought. Things don't gestate anymore. It's instantaneous, without the benefit of reflection. And everything's said at volume 10. Nothing's graduated anymore. It's a clamor." Though not religious himself, he says what I witness at SXSW would be recognized by any religious person. "They're trying to supplant deliverance and redemption through religion with civil religion and technological redemption—the promise of a sublime life on a higher plane."

In one instance, the Twidiocracy tries to have it both ways. I attend a Sunday morning session called "Transcendent Tech: Is G-d Rebooting the World?" It's a discussion headed by a bearded Mordechai Lightstone, in full Hasidic regalia as the director of social media for the Lubavitch News Service, and Seth Cohen, director of network initiatives at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation. "God," Cohen says, "was a coder. She was a hacker. She saw a plan for the world." An element of those plans, he says, was the Ten Commandments. Though now, "we are in a 2.0 phase."

Our group then contemplates the 2.0ness of it all. Cohen, though Jewish, wonders what it would be like if the Catholic church "came out with a chief technology officer" who said "we're going to reboot the Catholic church. And we actually decided to have someone design apps and take a technological approach to changing the paradigm." A man sitting next to me would like to see "an Amazon of the Catholic church" since there's a "distribution of specialized services problem" and he wants to know how the church will be "brought to my front doorstep." A man in thick geek glasses says he sees the Bible as the "first great example of opensourcing." Cohen adds that he still thinks there are prophets, as he sees "the prophetic voice" when he reads friends' comments on his Facebook page. Another gent says his problem with the

Bible is there's no "error correction." Paul, for instance, was a homophobe, so he'd like to see more wiki-style group editing. One woman, who has 33,000 Twitter followers, says she writes Jewish tweets. She thinks that's the wave of the future, since "people aren't going to houses of worship anymore."

This kind of talk could send even a believer like me running into Richard Dawkins's arms. If God is indeed rebooting the world in this vein, here's hoping His hard drive crashes.

Not everybody at SXSW thinks 140 characters are the answer to everything. For some, that sort of sustained thought is heavy sledding. Oxford University Press lexicographers calculate that the average tweet is 14.98 words. If a picture is worth 1,000 words, that means that a picture is also worth 66.7 tweets.

Of course, you can share pictures on Twitter. And that may be the direction in which we need to head, since attention spans are shrinking and words are so wordy. Which is the reason for panels like "Smile: People Like Your Picture More than Words." Chas Edwards, the chief revenue officer at Luminare, gives us some mind-blowing numbers: With so many phone cameras, 10 percent of all the photos ever taken have been snapped in the last 12 months; 70 percent of all social-media activity involves a photo; people who read news in newspapers spend an average of 25 minutes reading, while people who read news online spend an average of 70 seconds.

Lesson: We've got to work fast. Words are slow. Pictures, fast. As Chas speaks, most of the room is looking down into their iAbyssees, thumb-pistoning away. He observes that "only 10 percent of you are actually consuming me. What I'm hoping is that the other 90 percent of you are online enjoying more fully this experience and tweeting it." There's no way for me to tell if they are, since I'm stuck in the lousy real world with my dumbphone. But I feel for Chas. Maybe he needs to think about talking faster. Or about streaming his presentation in little chunks the tweeters can post on Vine (Twitter's new six-second video clip-sharing app).

Some Twidiots have an easier time paying attention, especially if it's to themselves. Witness Cory Booker, a politician who is so baldly self-aggrandizing, so intent on "telling my truth to the world," so emblematic of our social-media age, that he will almost surely become president of the United States someday. When not tweeting, Booker is the mayor of Newark. (As of this writing, he's tweeted 27,319 times and has 1,382,151 followers.)

Booker, who has become a media darling (he'll end up being voted best speaker at SXSW), is smart, warm, and a shockingly effective suck-up (show me another politician in America who *follows* 71,529 people on Twitter). Even a decade ago, when Booker was a lowly city councilman,

I used to get press releases about his birthday party. But now, he's no longer confined by the straitjacket of a press release. He can tell the truth—his truth—sometimes 40 or 50 times a day on Twitter. And that truth isn't just between Cory Booker and his followers. No, that truth is between Cory Booker and his followers and whoever retweets them. We're talking multiples of truth, here.

Now, when Booker needs to plug a talk-show appearance or quote Oprah Winfrey ("True forgiveness is when you can say, 'Thank you for that experience'") or get a pothole fixed that he heard about from a constituent on Twitter (he might've heard it from his staff, if they could get a word in edgewise between his tweets), he just fires away with his 140-character truth cannon.

Booker tells us that we are "all syndicators of information. We are media outlets." Some more than others. He lets slip that he gets "more consumer impressions from one tweet than [does] my state newspaper." Which is why, he announces to a rapturous SXSW audience, he's cofounded #waywire, a social-video sharing service that features news that's important to you, as well as lots of Cory Booker videos.

"If you want to see my microblog identity, you could just go through my tweets—but now you can go see my video identity," Booker says, before reverting to talking about himself in the third person. "What music videos does Cory like? Go to the inspirational videos that really move him. This morning, I tweeted out a #waywire video of Nina Simone." (Not being a Booker follower, I missed it. But how great would it be if it were Simone's 1974 song "Funkier than a Mosquito's Tweeter." O sweet synergy!)

All over SXSW, Twidiots are thick on the ground. At a sports panel, "Integrating Digital Into the Live Game Experience," representatives of the NBA and NASCAR talk about everything from fans interactively posting messages on the arena Jumbotron to concession stand apps to tweeting from your car during a race (one NASCAR driver who tweeted from the cockpit after a Daytona 500 crash gained over 100,000 followers in two hours). They talk about just about everything except what you're purportedly there to do—watch a game or a race. Or, rather, "an experience," as the digerati call games and races.

As Jayne Bussman-Wise, the robotic digital director of the Brooklyn Nets/Barclays Center, puts it, "We're really monitoring analytics. We work closely with our research analytics team. Everything's worth pumping into our CRM system. . . . We're listening to the conversation on social and sort of reacting to that." The expression "it's not all fun and games" has never been more true.

At a session entitled "The Tangled Web We Leave: Digital Life after Death," we're warned to get our online affairs in order. (Give those passwords to your loved ones, because if you get electrocuted dropping your iPad in the

tub tomorrow, how will your family access your Instagram account?) But we're also told of a new app called LivesOn, the logical terminus of the Twidiocracy. It's a service that studies your pre-mortem Twitter feed for tastes and syntax, and then keeps tweeting in what it assumes is your voice after you expire. (Company slogan: "When your heart stops beating, you'll keep tweeting.")

But even that might not be the apex of strangeness. At a 90-minute session at Pete's Dueling Piano Bar, I listen to a stage full of advertising honchos blivate on the "Power of Microcontent and Marketing in the Moment." They boisterously joke and cajole, cut each other off, slap each other's backs, toss off profanities, and generally inflate themselves like pufferfish. And what is all the excitement over? A single tweet put out by Oreo during this year's 34-minute Super Bowl blackout in New Orleans's Superdome.

Featuring many of the people on the team that had a hand in it ("emerging media" types from places like Mondelez International and 360i), the panel provides all kinds of bluster about "authenticity" and "identifying all relevant streams" and "a snack conversation" and "real-time marketing" and "transformation" and "bellwether moments" and "eyes and ears . . . shifting at scale."

The content of the tweet, it should be noted, was never even spelled out. It didn't need to be explained to this insider crowd. The tweet is simply known as "the Dunk in the Dark." Explaining what it is to a roomful of "real-time marketers" is like explaining who L. Ron Hubbard is to a roomful of Scientologists, since it may be, quite possibly, the tweet that saved and/or relaunched an entire industry. A tweet that had the *Washington Post* asking, "Can Twitter replace the Super Bowl ad?" In case you missed it (and I did; like most Americans I was watching the Super Bowl, not Oreo's Twitter feed), here it is in its entirety: "Power out? No problem." A link is provided to a photo of a lighted Oreo in a dark room with the tagline: "You can still dunk in the dark."

A clever use of improvisational advertising during a freak occurrence? Sure. Though you would think, from the reaction both of this room and the media (the latter of which are always eager to sing hosannas to anything with the prefix "social"), that electricity had been discovered or the automobile had been invented. All except for one lonely columnist, that is. Mark Ritson, an associate professor of marketing at the Melbourne Business School, wrote a column for *BRW*, an Australian business magazine, in which he did some back-of-the-envelope calculations.

How much carry did the universally praised Oreo tweet actually have? Well, Ritson figured, Oreo had 65,000 followers on Twitter at the time of the tweet. The average click-through rate of followers on any tweet is a mere 2 percent. Crunching the click-through rates and adding the retweets

with their potential reach, he generously estimated that “the Dunk in the Dark” reached about 150,000 people, in a country where 80 million people were already eating Oreos this year, and where traditional Super Bowl ads (which Oreo also ran) would get approximately 250 views for every view garnered by Oreo’s tweet. That Twitter audience, I should add, is about the size of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram’s* circulation.

Granted, the tweet garnered all kinds of free media, and was free itself. But Ritson’s problem, he said, wasn’t with Oreo. It was with all the “lazy journalists” who failed to “look behind all the hype about social media for the numbers that tell the real story.” Of course Ritson’s column was only retweeted 125 times. In the land of the blind, the most retweeted are king.

With all the panel’s talk of creating a corporate culture at Oreo that allowed for this singular work of genius, I still wasn’t quite sure who wrote it. Afterwards, I cornered Steve Doan, a senior associate brand manager with Oreo. “Did you write it?” I asked him. “C’mon, don’t be modest.”

No, Doan replies. But he was “in the war room.” And how many people did it take in the war room to carry off the 11-word cultural and literary event of our era? “A good 15 people,” he says.



SXSW-ers pay homage at a phone-charging table.

While I’ve painted the Twidiocracy with a broad brush as cultists—mostly because they are—there are notes of dissent even among disciples. I attend a “Twitter for Tough Guys” panel featuring several of the skippers from *Deadliest Catch*, Discovery Channel’s long-running hit reality show about crab fishermen working the Bering Sea. Though all the captains tweet, to the approval of the network’s social-media team buzzing around them like digital babysitters at SXSW, you can smell the whiff of heresy. These are men who have one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, and who do something concrete for a living—pulling food from the ocean to feed people (albeit under the gaze of reality-show cameras)—who have been reeled into the company of social-media gurus, attention barnacles, and Information Economy grifters. As a gruff Johnathan Hillstrand, captain of the *Time Bandit*, says under his breath from the stage, he misses the days when his entire crew didn’t have smartphones. Now, he says, “they’re walking around . . . not looking where they’re at. I’d rather see them on drugs. At least look out the f—in’ window.”

When I catch up with Hillstrand and the other captains

later that night at a *Deadliest Catch* party, he declares his feelings for Twitter straightaway: “I f—in’ hate it. It takes all your time, and now people expect you to be doing it. I work my ass off, the last thing I need is another multimedia activity to do. . . . I see people who will go to lunch, and the four of them will be typing the whole time. And they probably leave and type, ‘that was the greatest lunch, let’s do this again.’ And they didn’t even f—in’ talk!”

One night, I run into an advocacy campaign strategist friend from back in D.C. at a hotel bar. In this eye of the hipsterville hurricane, it can be hard to find a simple Budweiser among the preciously named craft beers (“Saint Arnold’s Fancy Lawnmower”). Therefore, whiskey flows freely as we hash out our differences over the Twidiocracy.

Jake Brewer is a card-carrying member of the digerati, the chief strategy officer at Fission Strategy in Washington. He doesn’t take social media too seriously. Still, he takes them seriously enough to suggest I should perhaps be a tad more dispassionate about them. Social media, he says, are just a tool like any other, a chance “to have a shared experience at a scale never possible before.” There’s a dark side to that, he admits. “And it’s human beings. Period. . . . I can use a knife to cut bread and serve a great meal. I can also stab you with it.”

Jake, however, also admits that people are addicted to the dopamine-drip of *What Is Happening Now*. The pros, he says, call it “FOMO”—fear of missing out. Consequently, he says, people are always checking out “what else is going on versus just being where they are.” Or, as Douglas Rushkoff puts it in his book *Present Shock*: “Our culture becomes an entropic, static hum of everybody trying to capture the slipping moment. Narrativity and goals are surrendered to a skewed notion of the real and the immediate; the Tweet; the status update.”

As Jake and I talk, a man I mistake for a techie hipster in a sunken leather chair across from us fins his way in, uninvited. His name is Todd Butler, and I’m disabused of his annoyingness when he starts holding forth: “People judge success on social media not necessarily by the quality of the work, but by how many will follow. Which skews and diminishes the ability of people who actually want to put quality out there because they’re like, ‘Nobody cares if it’s quality.’ They care if they get ‘liked’ 5,000 times.” Jake has to excuse himself to make another appointment. But Todd now has my attention. He picks up the conversation,

apologizing for what he knows must look like his signifying hipster-wear, the slouch hat, the hoodie under the sports jacket: “Honestly, this isn’t even my normal attire,” he says, “I look like f—in’ Don Draper when I go to work every day. I just had to be hipster for this.”

A digital strategist in his day job, Todd has also just released an iPhone app called “GONO,” which he describes as a “social decision-making app.” It lets users put anything in their life up for a vote among their social network. “Five years ago,” Todd explains, “whether I should buy this purse or car or should I do this blonde or brunette—I wouldn’t care [what anybody thinks]. But now more than ever, people are attuned to putting it on Twitter and whatever else. So it allows people to have that layer of assurance that the world likes their decision.”

I tell him his app sounds cynical, like he’s preying on the insecurity of those who are constantly looking over their shoulder for approval. Guilty, he transparently admits. That’s reality, though it’s a reality he himself loathes. Todd seems different to me from the tech triumphalists, and he is. Nine years ago, he was the sole survivor of a small-plane crash that killed his girlfriend and his pilot father. When I express gape-mouthed sympathy, he shrugs it off matter-of-factly, mentioning his fake teeth and the rods in his limbs. Though he looks healthy and hearty, he says, “I’ve had more plastic surgery than any girl you’ll ever meet.”

He asks if I’d care to see the pictures of the wreckage, and before I can answer, he pulls out his tablet, nonchalantly paging through photos of crash-scene debris. “Shit happens,” he says, his emotions in check. The crash, it seems, has given him a sort of direction, an urgency that’s sped up his metabolism. A pilot himself, he decided to fly again. He backpacked through Australia. He’s climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro this summer. He went to Nepal, where his app developers work. They were grateful to see him, since “Kathmandu is not a big hub for a lot of business. So it was fun. I got blessed, they made me sit around the prayer wheel and all that.”

Todd himself plunges ahead wherever his impulses lead. “I really don’t question a lot of my decisions,” he says. But his social app targets a hive-minded generation which often doesn’t know how to live apart from the constant, shoulder-sitting echo of its social network. “You can polish it up and say whatever you want,” he admits. “But honestly, this app literally focuses on the fact that people nowadays don’t want to make decisions on their own. People go to Twitter [instead]. . . . Paralyzed is probably the best word: ‘I don’t want to make this decision until I know what 5,000 anonymous people think.’” Who needs to be secure in their own point of view? That’s why the tech gods invented “likes” and retweets.

Not that Todd has no idea what insecurity looks like.

He’s turning 30 during SXSW and says candidly that, while he’s good at his job and knows what he’s doing, in techie world, “I’m on the way out! I’m only 30 years old and feel like I’m having my midlife crisis now.” His world, the tech world and the world of the Twidocracy, is forever shifting. His 19-year-old interns have ideas about his social app that don’t occur to him. “It’s moving so fast,” he says. Sometimes, Todd hits pause by watching *Law & Order* marathons. Yes, it feels very 1990 to him. “But it’s static,” he says, “the one thing I can watch that doesn’t change.”

As the hour grows late, and the amber-induced maudlin sets in, we speak of the larger-than-life men who fully inhabited the present tense. Gary Cooper. Frank Sinatra. “They wouldn’t give a s— what you think. They would never go on this app!” Todd says. “And that’s the difference. Now we have Kim Kardashian,” who lives and dies by her social network. The 15th-most-followed woman on Twitter even asked her followers to pick a first-dance song at her wedding, the song lasting nearly as long as the marriage did.

It’s all pretty dumb, Todd says. But just wait—it’ll get dumber. His interns recently informed him that Facebook and Twitter are passé—probably because too many cool moms and middle-aged journalists are on them. They prefer the picture-based Instagram. 140 characters? “Whoa, that’s way too much,” Todd laughs. “We found a way to make it even easier. Before, you’d tweet, ‘I don’t like the way Justin Bieber wears his hair.’ Now, I can just take a picture of Justin Bieber’s hair and be like, ‘Justin Bieber sucks,’ hashtag it, and that’s it.”

“It really simplifies things,” he adds, sardonically. “You basically put Robert Frost on Twitter and put Forrest Gump on Instagram.”

After several days, I finally find a panel that poses an intriguing question: “Are Social Media Making Us Sick?” The verdict, handed down by a couple of social-media hands from the firm Abelson Taylor, is apparently: no. Social media amplify whatever mood we’re already in, they say. Happy people tend to stay happy, depressive people, depressed. There’s a lengthy slideshow of a poll they conducted to back this up. It has the feel of tobacco company “scientists” telling us smoking increases lung capacity. Never mind that when they ask who thinks social media are making us sick, three-fourths of this tech-savvy, uber-connected SXSW crowd raise their hands in the affirmative.

And never mind a Michigan State study that found excessive media use/media multitasking can lead to symptoms associated with depression and anxiety. An Oxford University scientist said Facebook and Twitter are leading to narcissism and an “identity crisis” in users, while a Nominet Trust study found four-fifths of U.K. parents

fear their children are getting addicted to social networking sites. A Western Illinois University study, as the *Atlantic* reported, “found a high correlation between Narcissistic Personality Inventory scores and Facebook activity.”

A Retrevo study showed 28 percent of iPhone users check/update Twitter before they get out of bed, while 48 percent do the same after they’ve gone to bed. A Chicago University study found that tweeting can be more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol, and that while sleep and sex can be stronger urges, people are more likely to give in to their urge to use social media. German university researchers found one out of three people who visited Facebook felt more dissatisfied with their lives afterwards, owing to feelings of envy and insecurity. And a study of 120,000 people by the media company Vuclip found 61 percent of men said their phone was the first thing people noticed about them (dire news for me and my mom phone).

In fact, a SXSW meetup that I attend on the back patio of an Austin bar—titled “I Am My Own Social Network”—proves just how acute the problem has become. Dave Hepp, the creative director at CreativeFeed in New York, has decided to conduct what these days passes for a brave and radical social experiment: He forces attendees to hand over their phones for 45 minutes and actually talk to each other. There are placards posted all over the patio with helpful conversation-starters for the human-interaction-impaired, such as “What is your earliest memory?” or “What did you want to be when you grew up?” Questionnaires are handed out, so that people can catalog their conversations, forcing them to listen.

People circle each other warily, their iThumbs twitching, yearning to make contact with their newly amputated digital appendages. But for most, the old muscle memory of analog life gradually returns. It becomes too much for one guy, who has to grab his iPhone and bolt—a pending dinner reservation swings in the balance—but he quickly returns, rechecking his phone at the confiscation desk. People introduce themselves, leaning into sometimes awkward small talk, tepidly feeling their way around each other, like accident victims learning to walk again. After about 15 minutes, they make what passes for real-live human connection. Nobody is looking over his shoulder for someone more important, since talking about your job is forbidden.

Many talk of their experiences at SXSW. How impossible it’s been to strike up conversations with the iDis-tracted. How at panels they’ve sat through, they’ve admired the live-tweets of people they know are sitting feet away from them, but how they wouldn’t think of introducing themselves afterwards.

Keith Kurson, who works for Agoge Inc. in San Francisco, tells me how he is never, ever disconnected. The other day, he used an app that allowed him to order McDonald’s and a bottle of Jack Daniels, and to have both delivered by the same guy on a bike. “I never had to leave my living room!” he says with astonished horror. His phone is forever on. “I take a lot of pride in my personal brand,” he allows. But a group of his friends

will leave a club, and at the end of the night, will stand on the sidewalk, hashtagging whether anyone wants to go to iHop, with their buddies only feet away. He has answered texts during sex, he says, ashamed. He pines for the 1980s, which he regards as a golden era, “a different world . . . when you left your job at your job.” Keith is 22 years old.

His buddy, who works for GaymerConnect (a company which puts on conventions for gay gamers), is even more nihilistic. He wears a straw hat, and a sign taped to his shirt that says, “I AM A DOUCHEBAG @MATTCONN.” I ask Matt why.

“Well,” he says, “I’ve been pimping my stuff out all week and have been feeling like a douchebag, so I decided I might as well be honest about it. . . . Everyone I meet at SXSW, no one actually hears what you’re saying. They’re pushing their own crap. And I’m pushing my crap on them. . . . I [tweeted] something today, but I think I’m all done with it. All I want to do is go get a job at a coffee shop or something.”

In a corner of the patio, I eavesdrop as a bubbly black woman from Brooklyn named Kerry Coddett, who runs a sketch comedy web series, makes contact with a mild-mannered country boy from Pennsylvania named Andrew. She asks him for his story, and whether it’s true what she’s heard—that everyone in the country has lots of babies and takes meth. “Not as a rule,” Andrew laughs.

Then she tells a story of her own, which could be the story of nearly everyone here. “You know, it’s funny,” she says. “I went to Costa Rica for my birthday. And I looked up, and I said, ‘What the f— is that? Oh s—, those are stars!’ I haven’t seen stars in a really long time. Like, it’s sad.” ♦



*Matt Conn: ‘I want to . . . get a job at a coffee shop.’*

# A Masterpiece of War

*The battle of Chancellorsville, 150 years on*

BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

**B**y April 1863, America's Civil War was two years old and there were two more years of fighting ahead though, of course, none could know this. What everyone did know was that the war was violent and bloody beyond what anyone had expected or would have believed the nation (or two nations) could endure. Neither side was at the point of exhaustion or surrender. The war would certainly go on until . . . what?

Nobody quite knew, though an insight of President Abraham Lincoln's pointed to the brutal truth. His Army of the Potomac, under the command of General Ambrose Burnside, had been defeated at Fredericksburg by Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in December 1862. It had been a one-sided affair, with Union soldiers making repeated assaults up a hill against Confederate infantry whose position afforded the protection of a stone wall with artillery behind in support. No Union soldier even reached the wall. The Army of the Potomac suffered more than 12,000 casualties. Lee's casualties were slightly more than 5,000. It was the most lopsided defeat so far, for an army that had seldom experienced victory. And yet . . .

The Army of the Potomac still existed, was still holding its positions in Virginia, and its losses were being made good. Which could not be said for Lee's army.

So, Lincoln noted, the "arithmetic" of slaughter worked in the Union's favor. His army could survive a week of Fredericksburgs and the Confederacy could not. Victory would come when he found a general who understood this.

He had named a new commander of the Army of the Potomac: General Joseph Hooker, sometimes known as "Fighting Joe." And, in truth, he was a fighter. He had commanded a corps at Antietam and led his men bravely

on the Union right, in the battles that raged back and forth through the cornfield where he took a bullet in the foot. He was back in action at Fredericksburg, in the failed assaults against the stone wall, which he called off, finally, saying, "Finding that I had lost as many men as my order required me to lose, I suspended the attack."

Hooker was rough goods. He liked a drink and his headquarters were frequented by ladies of the evening; hence the legend that his name gave rise to the slang term for prostitute. Lincoln was willing to overlook these flaws, among others, which included Hooker's disloyalty to his superiors. He had undermined Burnside and had been known to say that what the country needed was a dictator. Lincoln noted this in a letter appointing Hooker to command in which he wrote, "What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship."

Hooker seemed like he might actually deliver. He swore off drink and went energetically to work restoring the morale of his beaten army. He improved the furlough system, secured back pay, improved rations, cleaned up the camps, and instituted rigorous drills and reviews. An army that had been in despond in January was back in fighting spirit in April, which Lincoln saw and appreciated on a five-day review. Before returning to Washington,

he both cautioned Hooker against rashness and advised that when there was a fight he should be sure to "put in all your men." George McClellan had not done this at Antietam. Nor had Burnside at Fredericksburg.

All of his men, in Hooker's case, would amount to about 130,000 soldiers. His enemy, across the Rappahannock River, had less than half that number. And they were underfed, badly equipped, and poorly clothed. Their morale, however, was high and their confidence in themselves and their leader unshakable. Since Lee had taken over command, they had fought in 13 battles from the peninsula all the way up into Maryland. They had inflicted more than 70,000 casualties against 48,000. They had captured 75,000 small arms and 155 cannons. Since Fredericksburg, they



*Joseph Hooker*

*Geoffrey Norman, a writer in Vermont, is a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

had been in winter quarters, where their time had been taken up with regimental snowball fights and an army-wide religious revival. But they were ready to march and fight when the time came.

Soon, no doubt, after the roads dried out.

Their commander was, like Lincoln, aware of the “arithmetic” of this war, and he knew that it worked inexorably against him. He also knew that his army could be starved into submission. In March, he had detached some of his best troops under one of his senior and most-trusted generals, James Longstreet, on an expedition to procure supplies—hams, bacon, preserved fish, corn—for his hungry soldiers. This risked having fewer troops at hand when Hooker made his inevitable move. But Lee had no choice.

Which is not to say that he had no strategy. Lee’s insight was simple and clear. He could not last in a contest that came down to a series of battles like those he had fought already. To win, he needed a victory of annihilation. An American Cannae would demonstrate to the enemy the futility of continuing the fight. Bringing about such a battle and winning it would call for audacity and a willingness to take both the offensive and very long risks. He’d shown, already, that he was willing to take such risks, as, for instance, when he divided his army in the face of the enemy before Second Manassas. He was looking for a similar opportunity when he led his army into Maryland and was forced into a long-odds defensive battle at Antietam. In a letter to his secretary of war, after Fredericksburg, he made it clear that he wanted a rematch, on his own terms.

“Should Hooker’s army assume the defensive, the readiest method of relieving the pressure . . . would be for this army to cross into Maryland.”

It would mean giving Hooker the slip. And that maneuver would have to wait until Longstreet completed his resupply operation. But, in this rare case, Lee’s enemy got the jump on him.

**H**ooker had conceived a sound plan for the annihilation of Lee, by dividing his army as the Rebel commander had so often done. He marched more than half his army upstream on the Rappahannock, forded that river and its tributary, the Rapidan,

and put himself to Lee’s left and rear. He left the remainder of his army across from Fredericksburg but soon began moving those troops across the river on pontoon bridges under cover of artillery. Both wings of his divided army were larger than Lee’s forces on the hills above Fredericksburg, known as Marye’s Heights.

Once Hooker had all of his units in place, Lee would have to fight and be crushed between the two Union forces or retreat toward Richmond, moving into exposed and open ground where he could be destroyed.

It was very ably done. The troops had been well supplied; the marches had been brisk and orderly. These soldiers had been hardened by two years of war. They were not the naifs who had gone out from Washington to fight the

battle of First Manassas, strolling as though on their way to an afternoon picnic when, that is, they weren’t tying up the roads in knots of disorganized, badly led, rookie soldiers. Hooker’s army moved efficiently and professionally, and the general was well satisfied.

This was on April 30. Five days later: Hooker was back on the other side of the river, defeated—and in some instances, routed—by a force less than half the size of his.

Union troops, many of whom Hooker had *not* put into the fight, reacted with something like bewilderment. They did not understand how this could have happened. One wrote in a journal:

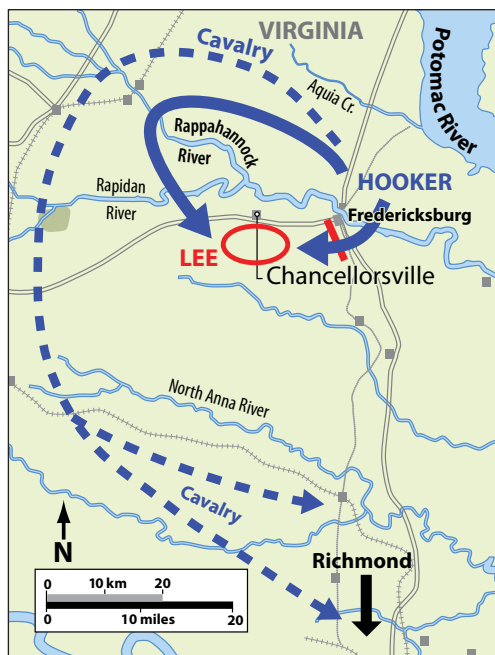
I have nothing to say about it in any way. I have no opinions to express about the Genl’s or the men nor do I wish to. I leave it in the hands of God. I don’t want to think of it at all.

The answer to their bewilderment was simple enough: They were not outfought, just outgeneraled.

Lee was asleep in his quarters when the first shots of the battle were fired. They came from downstream, where Union troops had crossed the river on pontoon bridges. He dozed for a while, then was awakened by Stonewall Jackson’s aide.

“You want me to send a message to your good general, Captain?” Lee said. “Tell him that I am sure he knows what to do. I will meet him at the front very soon.”

Lee might have retreated, and some students of the battle say that would have been the best course. He could have found a better place to fight a great Napoleonic battle



Hooker’s Plan, April 1863

of annihilation, closer to Richmond. On the North Anna River, perhaps.

But he did not retreat.

His subordinates were, at first, unsure whether the enemy's main effort would come from the troops upstream or those who had crossed below Fredericksburg. As his staff debated the issue, Lee studied the positions established by the troops who had crossed on pontoons, then closed his binoculars and said, "The main attack will come from above."

This ended the discussion, and with Jackson and his troops, Lee rode to meet that attack.

Union troops were in Chancellorsville, a crossroads of no consequence in country grown up in jack pine, scrub oak, and briars known, descriptively, as "the Wilderness" (where a year later a dreadful battle would be fought). Three or four miles further east, toward Fredericksburg and Lee's position, there was blessedly open ground. Hooker's divisions were moving toward it and were nearly there. Hooker's subordinates were impressed, for perhaps the first time in the war, by the way things were going according to plan.

In the afternoon, some federal columns ran into resistance of the sort that might be called "stiff." Their generals, however, felt confident they could handle it.

But they were ordered to turn back and take up defensive positions around Chancellorsville. Hooker's generals were stunned by the order and sent someone to the rear to protest it. The messenger returned saying the order stood. Fall back. One of Hooker's generals considered outright disobedience. They were so close. From the crest of the ridge to their front, they would be able to see open country.

"If he thinks he can't hold the top of a hill," said George Meade, "how does he expect to hold the bottom of it?"

Still, the various columns pulled back, as ordered, and set up a line of entrenchments around the clearing at Chancellorsville.

Hooker was still brimming with confidence. And he explained to one of his subordinates, "I've got Lee just where I want him."

The man listened and, as he later reported, "retired from his presence, with the belief that my commanding general was a whipped man."

Several times that day and into the evening, Hooker would say, as though reciting a mantra, "The Rebel army is now the legitimate property of the Army of the Potomac."

Meanwhile, to the east, in a clearing in the Wilderness, Lee and his most capable lieutenant, Stonewall Jackson,

sat on a log studying maps and working out a solution to what seemed an insoluble problem: how to first wrest the initiative from Hooker, then go on the offensive, and finally annihilate the Union Army around Chancellorsville before turning to deal with the forces around Fredericksburg, where Lee had left a skeleton force under General Jubal Early to bluster and make noise so as to convince the Federals—who numbered some 50,000—that there were many thousands of them. Early, in truth, had only 14,000 under his command.

Lee went to the nub of the problem, saying, "How can we get at those people?"

Lee wanted to attack, which was always Jackson's preferred course. They had done the necessary reconnaissance and knew that the attack could not come on their right, where the Union lines were anchored against the river. Or in the center, where the Union was dug in and improving an already strong position. So if it was to be at all, the attack would have to be on their left—the Union right—where it came to an end out in the Wilderness somewhere.

Lee's cavalry commander, General J.E.B. Stuart, had been scouting

the Union line and he knew where it ended. More important, he had learned that the Union flank was "in the air." That is, not attached to any defensible terrain feature and not anchored on a strong formation facing away to the west. The Federal line simply petered out.

The attack would be made there. The rest of the night was spent on coming up with a route the Confederate infantry could take that would put them on Hooker's flank without his troops being aware of the movement. Confederate cavalry, Jackson's cartographer, and a local man who knew the roads had accomplished this by the time the two commanders were awake. Again, they studied the map and Lee said, "General Jackson, what do you propose to do?"

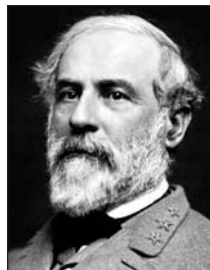
"Go around here," Jackson said, indicating the route.

"What do you propose to make this movement with?"

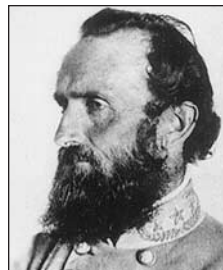
"With my whole corps."

This took even Lee, whose calm was legendary, up short. Jackson would be riding off with 30,000 men and leaving him with around half that number. One of the firmest maxims of military theory holds that a general must not divide his forces in the presence of the enemy. Lee had done that already. Now, Jackson was proposing that he do it again.

Stonewall, though, knew his man and shared his conviction that only a great and successful battle of annihilation could win the war for the South. More tidy, tactical victories would run up against what Lincoln called "the arithmetic."



Robert E. Lee



T.J. 'Stonewall' Jackson

“Well, go on,” Lee said.

The flank march took all day. It was late afternoon, going on evening, before Jackson had his men in formation as he wanted them, hidden by the thick, tangled growth of the Wilderness. The Union troops idling to their front had no idea. Their first hint came when quail, then deer, and then rabbits came boiling out of the scrub in alarm. The soldiers found this funny for a while. Then, Jackson’s men were on them, filling the air with the sound of the Rebel yell, which Jackson had once called “the sweetest music I ever heard.”

Hooker’s right crumbled. Panicked men ran past his headquarters in Chancellorsville, on their way to the river where they might find safety on the other side. Union officers attempted to rally them and reposition other units to stand up to the assault.

Jackson’s men pushed on with the fervor of soldiers who have beaten the enemy and are now in pursuit. The sun went down and a fat orange moon rose and threw its weak, gloomy light over the battlefield.

“Press them,” Jackson said, again and again, riding among the confused and increasingly disorganized troops, determined to finish what had been

so splendidly begun and to get to the river and cut off the enemy’s escape. Then, he and Lee would have their victory of annihilation. The arithmetic would be conquered.

In the confusion of the battle, perhaps four hours after Jackson had launched the attack, he became one of the battle’s many casualties. He was hit in the arm by musket fire from some of his own men.

He was taken to the rear and the battle died down. The firing slackened, and men slept, if they could, on the ground and in the open. One man later recalled the “weird, plaintive notes of the whippoorwills” floating over the battlefield.

Jackson had done his worst, but Hooker was not beaten. Not, anyway, in the sense that he had fled the battlefield. The divided elements of his army still outnumbered the entirety of Lee’s. He might still win this fight, and the war, if the troops around Fredericksburg could hit Lee in his rear and his new, shorter lines around Chancellorsville could hold. But he was, indeed, as his frustrated subordinate had surmised, “a whipped man.”

**H**ooker retreated too far, gave up too much vital, dominating ground, lost both the initiative and the determination to get it back. Lee and Stuart were maneuvering their separate commands and pushing back their enemies with the aim of uniting the divided

army at Chancellorsville and then destroying the remnants of Hooker’s army that would be backed up against the river.

The junction of the armies was accomplished near mid-morning, and Lee rode into the clearing at Chancellorsville on his big, splendid horse. As one staff man later wrote, “One long, unbroken cheer, in which the feeble cry of those who lay helpless on the earth blended with the strong voices of those who still fought, rose high above the roar of battle and hailed the presence of the victorious chief.”

Lee still had business to attend to. He chased the Union forces that had been at Fredericksburg and had moved to support Hooker back across the river. Then he prepared to do the same to Hooker.

But Hooker, once more, gave him the slip and got across the river before he could attack. Lee had another victory but not one that would invalidate the arithmetic. He had suffered 13,000 casualties to Hooker’s 17,000. And, as Lincoln had pointed out, the armies could fight that battle again and again and eventually only the men in blue would be left standing. That was the arithmetic.

Still, it was hard on the president, who was described by one visitor as pacing his office and saying, over and over, “My God, my God. What will the country say? What will the country say?”

But the arithmetic remained on his side. And while Lee had won an improbable victory, which historians have called his “masterpiece,” he also understood the arithmetic and was bitterly disappointed. By the missed opportunity, and even more by the fact that he no longer had the services of Stonewall Jackson, with whom it might be possible to defeat even arithmetic.

Jackson’s arm was amputated and he was moved to comfortable quarters and seemed to be recuperating before pneumonia struck. This was, often as not, a death sentence, and soon, Jackson’s doctors were telling him to prepare himself. In his last hours, he tried to comfort his wife. Then, he slipped into delirium and was calling to his adjutant to “send in and see if there is higher ground back of Chancellorsville.”

Sunday came and Jackson said, “It is the Lord’s day; my wish is fulfilled. I have always desired to die on Sunday.” A few hours later he called out, “Order A. P. Hill to prepare for action. . . . Pass the infantry to the front. Tell Major Hawks—”

Then he seemed to let go, at last, of all that and said, “Let us cross over the river and rest in the shade of the trees.” ♦



*Union soldiers at Chancellorsville awaiting orders*



Five Marine Corps privates and a noncommissioned officer, Washington, 1864

# Leatherneck Tales

*How the Marines have survived, and why.* BY MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS

In 1957, the commandant of the Marine Corps, General Randolph Pate, sent a brief note to the director of the Marine Corps Educational Center, Brig. Gen. Victor Krulak, in which he asked, “Why does the U.S. need a Marine Corps?” Krulak, already a legend in the Marines, penned a lengthy reply: “The United States does not need a Marine Corps mainly because she has a fine modern Army and a vigorous Air Force. . . . We [the Marine Corps]

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## Underdogs

*The Making of the Modern Marine Corps*

by Aaron B. O’Connell

Harvard, 400 pp., \$29.95

exist today—we flourish today—not because of what *we* know we are, or what *we* know we can do, but because of what the grassroots of our country *believes* we are and *believes* we can do.”

Krulak went on to say that the American people believe three things about the Marines: that they will be ready to fight on short notice; that they will turn in a dramatically and decisively successful performance; and that the “Corps is

downright good for the manhood of our country; that the Marines are masters of a form of unfailing alchemy which converts unoriented youths into proud, self-reliant stable citizens—citizens into whose hands the nation’s affairs may safely be entrusted.” Krulak concluded that as long as the American people “are convinced that we can really do the three things . . . we are going to *have* a Marine Corps. . . . And, likewise, should the people ever lose that conviction—as a result of our failure to meet their high—almost spiritual—standards, the Marine Corps will then quickly disappear.”

The connection between the Marine Corps and the American people is the topic of this fascinating social

history of the Marines from the end of World War II to Vietnam. Aaron B. O'Connell, an assistant professor of history at the Naval Academy and an officer in the Marine Corps Reserve, shows how the Marines themselves helped shape the perspective of the American people during this period—by means of gaining the support of newspaper reporters and publishers, Hollywood(!), and, especially, Congress. The result was a robust public relations infrastructure that successfully reinforced the perception of the Corps as America's most prestigious fighting force.

The title is, on one hand, a play on the appellation allegedly given to the Marines by the German defenders of Belleau Wood during World War I: *Teufel Hunden* or "Devil Dogs." On the other hand, "underdogs" also captures the "minority status, sense of persecution, and paranoia that have always been a dominant cognitive frame in Marine Corps culture." But as the old saying goes: Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean you don't have enemies. Throughout its history the Marine Corps has, indeed, been targeted for extinction by its adversaries. Between 1829 and 1932, there were four attempts to either merge the Marines with the Army or to abolish the service altogether. That experience led to a certain "hypervigilance" on the part of the Marines, which along with "the group cohesion that flowed from it were the engines of the Marines' cultural power and institutional success."

Before World War II, the Marines managed to fight off attempts to merge them with the Army, or to abolish them altogether, while also proving adept at conducting "small wars" in Latin America. Fatefully, the Marines also developed the doctrine for seizing defended islands for advanced naval bases, which they executed in the Pacific during World War II, cementing the reputation of the Marine Corps as an extraordinary fighting force. The war also established a Marine ethos of valor and sacrifice. This ethos was intensified by inter-service rivalry. According to O'Connell:

[T]he tremendous casualties of the Pacific reinforced the Corps' spirituality; interservice rivalry strengthened its insularity. . . . [Marine] culture's broad network of fictive kinship bound [Marines] together in a community of remembrance, one that kept them connected to those who did not survive the war. That sense of a Marine Corps "family" continued long after the war's end and was integral to the Marines' success in the postwar era.

O'Connell describes the way the Marines were able to portray themselves to the American public not only as a particularly effective military organization but also as "a deeply loyal community—more a family in some ways than an impersonal and bureaucratic military service." The "Toys for Tots" program that began in 1947 was only one, albeit one of the most successful, efforts toward this end.

Despite its success in World War II, the Marine Corps found itself fighting for institutional survival as the war ended. O'Connell examines how the cultural cohesion the Marines had created during the war contributed to the survival of the Corps during the nasty fight over "service unification" that characterized this era. The dominant unification plans threatened the survival of the Marine Corps as a separate service. More important, they would have led to the loss of the mission that the Marines performed. The advocates of unification, however, failed to make the case that what the Marines did wasn't necessary, or that another organization could have done it more efficiently and effectively. Employing "guerrilla warfare," the Marines fought against the 1947 unification bill and the 1949 amendments on two fronts—political and cultural—rallying a coalition of congressional supporters and influential journalists, veterans, and defense experts to their cause. "On the political front," writes O'Connell, "the Marines' strategy was one of deception, delay, and irregular warfare. On the cultural front, they launched a direct attack against the President and the Army. Both strategies succeeded."

The guerrillas came to be known as

the Little Men's Chowder and Marching Society, a loose affiliation of thinkers, lobbyists, and war heroes who shared the conviction that the Marine Corps was in danger of being reorganized out of existence. In the unification fight, the Marines were blessed with their enemies. Enemy Number One was President Harry Truman, who wrote, in a moment of ill-advised candor, that "the Marine Corps is the navy's police force as long as I am president. . . . They have a propaganda machine almost equal to Stalin's." Facing extraordinary public criticism, Truman publicly apologized.

Enemy Number Two was Louis Johnson, a political hack who became the second secretary of defense when Truman fired James Forrestal over disagreements about the defense budget. In December 1949, Johnson proclaimed that amphibious assaults were a thing of the past. Ten months later, the Marines landed at Inchon, breaking the back of the North Korean offensive that had almost defeated the unprepared Americans and their South Korean allies. Blamed for the lack of readiness of the troops initially sent to Korea, Johnson was pressured to resign as secretary. The Marines' problems continued during the Eisenhower administration, and it was not until Congress passed legislation in 1953 providing statutory protection for the Corps that the existential threat to its force structure and doctrine passed.

O'Connell examines the impact of the Korean War on both the Marine Corps and American society. He points out that, while the conflict is often called the "forgotten war"—an aberration or an anomaly—the Marines in fact celebrate it because it validated the virtues of the Corps. While the early performance of the Army was subpar, the Marines seemed to save the day: the Marine "Fire Brigade" that defended the Pusan perimeter when the North Koreans had nearly driven the Americans off the peninsula; the landing at Inchon that turned the tide of the war; and the epic fighting withdrawal of the First Marine Division from the Chosin Reservoir in the face of a massive Chinese intervention.

But O'Connell also looks at the negative impact of the Korean War

experience, especially as evinced in the alcohol abuse and domestic violence of veterans, which he attributes to what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). After Korea, the Marine Corps proved to be extraordinarily innovative, effectively adapting its strategic concept to the Cold War security environment, thus reinventing itself as an expeditionary “force in readiness,” capable of responding with tailored, task-organized forces to any crisis across the spectrum of conflict—including short-fuse contingencies that could arise at any time or place. The new strategic concept of the Marine Corps complemented that of the Army, which centered on the requirement to fight and win the nation’s land wars. In accordance with this strategic concept, the Army helped to deter major conflict by stationing units in or near the most likely theaters of war.

O’Connell focuses less on the strategic issues that shaped the Marine Corps during the 1950s and early ’60s, emphasizing, instead, the way in which the Marines continued to sell their virtues to the American people. They not only stressed military virtues of toughness, courage, and battlefield success, but also the intimate, nostalgic, and familial elements of Marine culture. Hollywood helped with such movies as *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) with John Wayne and *The D.I.* with Jack Webb (1957). But those who live by their public image can die by it as well. The Marines suffered a massive setback to their reputation as a result of the Ribbon Creek incident in the spring of 1956: A drill instructor who had been drinking on duty took his recruit platoon on a night march to punish poor performance. Six recruits drowned. O’Connell argues that Ribbon Creek was merely a microcosm of the broader problem of unauthorized violence in the Marine Corps of the 1950s.

This is, for the most part, an excellent book. O’Connell tells the Marines’ story, warts and all, but there are some shortcomings as well. First is a stylistic problem: O’Connell is a fine writer, but the reader is often jarred by his use of postmodern social science jargon. (Whoever derived the verb “to privilege” from a perfectly good noun did the English

language no favor.) Other issues are substantive. For instance, O’Connell takes the Marines to task for their tactics during the unification debate: stealing and then leaking classified Joint Chiefs of Staff papers to the press and to Congress; coming close to accusing the Army (and those who favored a more unified defense establishment) of favoring



Lt. Gen. Victor Krulak, 1965

Prussian-style militarism; and what O’Connell calls “fear mongering” about an overly centralized executive branch. O’Connell suggests that the Corps was more interested in its institutional survival than in the good of the nation.

But the Marines believed that they made a strategic contribution to the nation—one that would be lost were they marginalized. In essence, the Marines were advocates of “strategic pluralism,” the idea that national defense requires a broad array of capabilities. The unification proposals, in contrast, pushed “strategic monism,” which sought to impose a single vision on the defense establishment. The risks of strategic monism were illustrated by the strategy pursued by the Eisenhower administration. The centerpiece of the “New Look” was long-range strategic airpower, but this focus on strategic bombing to the exclusion of other capabilities resulted in strategic inflexibility. The only reason the United States could respond to threats

at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict was that the Marines had (in the face of much opposition) maintained the necessary capabilities.

Regarding the dark side of the Marine Corps of the 1950s—domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and the like—O’Connell makes a common mistake: He fails to compare the Marines with their civilian counterparts by cohort. (We saw this flawed approach after Vietnam, when veterans of that war were portrayed as ticking time bombs that could explode at any time, and whose rates of suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and incarceration were unusually high.)

Finally, the post-World War II Marines were not unusual in forging an alliance with Congress and Hollywood to get their story out to the public. The newly emerging Air Force mastered this approach as well with such movies as *Twelve O’Clock High* (1949) with Gregory Peck. In addition, James Stewart, an Army Air Forces bomber-pilot who flew numerous missions in Europe and served as a brigadier general in the Air Force Reserve, helped to push the airpower story with movies such as 1955’s *Strategic Air Command*. Today, of course, no organization has used Hollywood to tell its story more successfully than the Navy SEALs. In Congress, the Air Force was able to count on powerful members to advance that service’s interests. The actions by both the Marines and the Air Force illustrate an important element of U.S. civil-military relations: Rarely is the military per se pitted against the civilian per se; rather, civilian-military coalitions struggle for advantage in the corridors of the Pentagon, the halls of Congress, and in the press.

In his firsthand account of Marine Corps history, *First to Fight* (1984), General Krulak relates the story of his exchange with a Marine gunnery sergeant in 1935. Krulak, then a lieutenant, asked the venerable gunny how the Marines had gained their reputation as one of the world’s great fighting forces. “Well, lieutenant,” the gunny replied, “they started right out telling everybody how great they were. Pretty soon they got to believing themselves. And they have been busy ever since proving they were right.” ♦

# Safe at Home

*The rebirth of the national pastime after World War II.*

BY COLIN FLEMING



*Whitey Kurowski, Enos Slaughter, Marty Marion, Stan Musial*

In an American sports world where football is king, the notion of baseball as our country's national pastime is a quaint one, a sort of nostalgic throwback to a bygone era, like westerns in the 1940s or heroic literature in the century after the Crusades.

Ungoverned by time, with seemingly little urgency to get anything done with haste, baseball is often run down as boring, a sport one turns to when one can't pass muster on the hardwood or gridiron. A certain foreknowledge factors into baseball's appeal as well; much hangs in knowing the difference between a 2-1 and 3-1 count, and woe to the observer who doesn't grasp the salubrious effects of a well-timed hit and run over an ill-chosen moment to attempt a double steal. In short: One needs to know one's stuff, to a degree, with baseball.

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**The Victory Season**  
*The End of World War II  
and the Birth of Baseball's Golden Age*  
by Robert Weintraub  
Little, Brown, 464 pp., \$27.99

Baseball's great advantage over its team sports brethren, however, is how readily it lends itself to a timelessness that, while borne in memory, has a knack for becoming perpetually of the present as well. With baseball, the past is ever moving forward in a kind of literary consciousness, a Proustian force that would have given Jay Gatsby pause with how readily memory is able to become something active and influential.

As a result, baseball literature thrives. Abetting the cause is the sport's ability to dovetail with past iterations of a very American consciousness. In the case of *The Victory Season*, that consciousness is an especially restive one: that of a country, newly victorious in war,

faced with fresh battles of an entirely more insular nature—a nation divided by housing shortages, labor strife, train strikes, rampant black markets, and racism. The consensual salve? Baseball. Back from its war-years malaise, and with its core cadre of stars reassembled after their service, baseball was arguably never more palliative than it was in 1946. What the country needed was some epic baseball theater, and, thankfully, the game delivered.

Robert Weintraub charts the military careers of star hurlers and back-up second sackers, and it is almost incredible to believe that players could so quickly shift their perspective from not getting taken out on the double play to taking out the sniper on a hill—but so it goes, again and again. There are all kinds of gradations of military service, and we see them all—from erstwhile ballplayers flying bombing missions to bridge-based engineer work, with occasional time on the side for sandlot games in makeshift fields littered with rocks.

The meat of Weintraub's narrative, once we get back home, is the National League pennant race. But his thesis—that the 1946 season mattered more than most, with an importance that transcended sport—succeeds on the backs of three men: Stan Musial of the St. Louis Cardinals, Ted Williams of the Boston Red Sox, and Jackie Robinson—the man who would break baseball's color barrier in 1947—of the (minor league) Montreal Royals.

If you think you know Robinson's story, and you've seen his retired number hanging from the outfield façade of your local ballpark, you might want to double-check your sense of what Robinson achieved against Weintraub's account. Robinson is tested again and again. His racist manager hates him—at first, that is—and while racism is hardly melted away with each base Robinson swipes (his specialty being repeated thefts of home), it is beaten back a little, at least, through a kind of hard-won, grudging respect. Robinson's manager, Clay Hopper, watches as a friend of his, former major league pitcher Paul Derringer, fires a fastball at Robinson's head on two successive at-bats—leading, on both occasions,

to Robinson picking himself up and drilling a couple of hits. Weintraub's laconic reporting of the aftermath has a novelistic touch: "After the game, Derringer approached Hopper. 'He'll do,' was all he said."

Robinson's story here is as much a testament to marriage as it is to the civil rights movement or the human capacity to endure. As Weintraub states, Rachel Robinson was every bit the hero her husband was, and while one can't say with any certainty that Robinson would not have succeeded without her, there's little doubt that the challenge would have been more formidable were he on his own.

Conversely, Weintraub writes up Ted Williams as a loner, a sort of Paganini of the batter's box, the virtuoso whose legerdemain is beyond the bounds of comprehension of mere baseball mortals. Williams gets it in the neck a lot, mostly from the press. He won Most Valuable Player in 1946, his first, but no matter: Cleveland Indians player-manager Lou Boudreau opted to overturn baseball's traditional geometry and created the infamous Williams shift, in which the left side of his infield joined the first and second basemen on the right. Williams, a left-handed batter, believed (rightly, as it turned out) in this approach and acted as though no new strategy had been deployed against him at all.

His harshest critic, Dave "the Colonel" Egan, wrote in the *Boston Record* that the shift wasn't "a compliment to the hitting greatness of Williams. It is a sneer at his inability to hit successfully, except to one particular part of the lawn."

Stan Musial, like Williams, slumped in the World Series; but Weintraub makes the case that there may be no more underrated superstar and all-around good bloke in the game's history.

Weintraub excels at digging up quotes that capture the idiosyncratic vernacular of midcentury baseball. When an Irish player fails, leprechauns were said to "give him a bad steer." Fastballs are no more sneaked past fastball hitters than sun rays manage to get clear of roosters. But

what gives *The Victory Season* just that right touch of roguish merriment is its oddball characters, guys that you tend to meet only in locker rooms, as though they could exist in no other sector of society. A case in point is Leo Durocher, the manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, who, when not getting ejected from the latest ballgame or beating a man in a back corridor of Ebbets Field, hung out with actors, mobsters, and all manner of comely females. Durocher excelled at what we'll call baseball "saltiness," but his was a gruff, quasi-Romantic poetry that would tickle the likes of Ring Lardner. His admiration for Jackie Robinson is voiced in a metaphor involving a baseball bat and a posterior orifice.

Attendance boomed throughout that

1946 season, and the campaign essentially assured the sport's future—if not forevermore as America's pastime, then as the game that most easily moves about, free as you please, through time, literature, and our collective and personal memories: "The incredible twists and turns of the season and the Series, coming so soon after the end of the war and the subpar baseball on display, galvanized the next wave of fans," Weintraub concludes.

What he could just as easily have said was that a return to the events of that 1946 season could well galvanize the mind of someone who has no knowledge, let alone recollection, of Stan's Red Birds taking down Ted's Red Sox. For, while all of this is about that, it's also about everything else but. ♦



# Organizing Europe

*The key to continental 'unity' lies in its center.*

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

**E**arly in this book, author Brendan Simms, professor of history at Cambridge, quotes John Locke: "How fond soever I am of peace I think truth ought to accompany it, which cannot be preserved without Liberty. Nor that without the Balance of Europe kept up." As Simms indicates, for Locke, "truth" was defined as Protestantism and parliamentary government, while "the Balance of Europe" referred to the security of the German territories in its heartland.

The larger significance of Locke's comment is the basis of this sweeping and provocative volume. In Simms's reading, the peoples of Europe long required the preservation of "German liberty," meaning the autonomy of the German princes against the Habsburg Austrian rulers of the Holy

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**Europe**  
*The Struggle for Supremacy  
from 1453 to the Present*  
by Brendan Simms  
Basic Books, 720 pp., \$35

Roman Empire. Germany was therefore the recurring battleground—during the Renaissance as well as the "revolutionary age" that began in the 17th century—for, successively, the Habsburgs, England as a partner for the Habsburgs, the French, and Russia.

Simms argues that the foreign strategies of the powers were inextricable from their domestic policies. Linkages between peace or war and liberty extend, in his view, through every armed conflict and political upheaval since the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Moreover, Simms's attitude toward the relation between internal freedom and foreign affairs is relevant to the current ideo-



*'The Celebration of the Peace of Münster' by Bartholomeus van der Helst (1648)*

logical debate in the West, between the supporters of global intervention and its opponents.

In discussing the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648, Simms offers a novel interpretation of its lasting import: He affirms that it "has been seen by generations of international lawyers and international relations theorists as the breakthrough for the modern concepts of sovereignty and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states." But, he declares, "the whole purpose of the treaty was to guard against German princes exercising an untrammelled sovereignty" over their differing Catholic and Protestant believers, and "the Westphalian treaties were nothing less than a charter for intervention." Simms also justifies "strong central government with tax-raising powers," amplifying a common English argument, heard at the end of the 17th century, that "a free people require a strong and expensive state."

Simms discloses connections between wars that appear distant, but which were fought to achieve the same end. Issues joined far from Central Europe were, for Simms, extensions or reflections of the

challenges in the middle of the continent. To cite one instance, he explains that a Russian war against the Ottomans in 1736 "was intended in large part to create an alternative imperial legitimacy to that conferred by the Holy Roman Empire."

With the Habsburgs reigning over the Empire, none of the other European powers anticipated a new, major factor emerging in Prussia under Frederick II, who gained the throne in 1740. Prussia seized Habsburg territory in Silesia (today mainly in southern Poland), but the Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa summoned a defensive force, and her dominion survived, although she lost most of Silesia.

Four main European states—which remain such to the present—had by then assumed supremacy: Great Britain, France, Russia, and Prussia, the latter as a united Germany after 1871. German echoes were present in every succeeding world crisis. Once America achieved independence, European problems occupied the American Founders, and Simms presents the constitutional debates in *The Federalist* as deeply marked by the bad example of decentralized authority in the German states.

In France, hatred of the royal consort

Marie Antoinette, born a Habsburg princess, and rejection of a French alliance with Habsburg Austria contributed to the disintegration of the Bourbon monarchy. The French revolutionary regime turned against Austria and invaded the Holy Roman Empire; Napoleon, taking leadership of the French, fought against Austria, Prussia, and their protectors, Russia and Britain. Napoleon overcame Prussia and demanded that the Habsburgs surrender their claim over the Germans. He compelled the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, after nearly eight centuries, while Germany was reorganized and the process of its unification begun.

Ultimately, Napoleon was defeated in 1815, but, as Simms attests, a new European order had come into existence. The end of the Holy Roman Empire was a "third revolution," after those of America and France, in which the Central European equilibrium was overthrown.

The remainder of this encyclopedic account depicts the convoluted consequences of the long and innumerable battles for the European heartland. The Congress of Vienna curbed French radicalism, temporarily, by restoring the monarchy; the

Holy Roman Empire was replaced by a German Confederation. In 1866, Prussia expelled the Habsburgs from the confederated German territories, and the ground was laid for a single Germany—although by then America and czarist Russia had become the arbiters of world politics. In 1870-71, Prussian-led Germany administered a disastrous military defeat to France and proclaimed a German Empire. Germany had grown to be the de facto leading Western European power, acquiring colonies in Africa, the Pacific, and China. Germany built a navy intended to rival the Royal Navy, which had long “ruled the waves.”

In 1914, after numerous incidents of tension between Germany, on one side, and France, Britain, and Russia on the other, came the first of two world wars, in which Germany and its Austrian and Ottoman allies were routed. This outcome yielded the rise of Bolshevism and, subsequently, National Socialism. As Simms comments, “The war *against* Germany was over; the struggle *over* Germany now began.” Germany was prostrate, but was refashioned as a totalitarian state under Hitler. In the second round, Germany was again vanquished, along with its new allies, Italy and Japan; but the rest of the world had relearned that the stabilization of Germany was necessary, even absolutely necessary, for the peace of Europe. The United Nations, crucial to the process of German rehabilitation, was founded as an official international institution and, as Simms remarks, was “at its creation . . . a highly interventionist body. The fetishization of state sovereignty for which it later became known was a subsequent re-invention by Third Worldist dictators and unworldly international lawyers.”

Most significant, France and Germany were reconciled by economic agreements culminating in the establishment of the European Union. West Germany, occupied by the United States, Britain, and France, was inducted into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; East Germany, controlled by the Soviet Union, was exploited but not completely impov-

erished by Moscow. Still, in 1989, East Germany collapsed, soon followed by the rest of the Communist states in Europe. Germany was reunified, and its currency was eventually assimilated into the euro. As Simms recalls, “The German mark was to be sacrificed as the price for ending the partition of Germany.”

Simms previously published *Unfinest Hour* (2002), an outstanding critique of British passivity toward Serbian aggression in the Balkan wars of the 1990s. In discussing that decade in *Europe*, he also condemns, severely

but accurately, the EU’s failure to defend Bosnia-Herzegovina—though he acknowledges that NATO acted expeditiously in Kosovo. Today, Germany dominates EU fiscal policy amid the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s. As described by Simms, Germans are disillusioned with the common currency, and many favor an exit from the eurozone. Elsewhere in Europe, this has “provoked a popular anti-Germanism unknown since the late 1980s. . . . The German Question, eclipsed for more than a decade after unification, was back.” ♦



# God in the Details

*Is the decadent Baudelaire the answer to the bourgeoisie?* BY ALGIS VALIUNAS

What are we to God, and what is God to us? Hardly questions that men considered serious naturally turn their minds to these days. Most intellectuals got past such matters long ago, and treat them with derision, even hostility. Anti-abortion Christians and Jew-crazed *fellahin* alike are loathed as uncivilized; so-called decent liberal politics is stripped of any attachment to the supernatural. Social and political concerns strictly of this world consume the intelligentsia.

Roberto Calasso (born 1941), the Italian cultural critic and head of the Adelphi publishing house in Milan, has defied the prevailing trend, although he tends to write not of God but of the gods—making him at once more ancient and more modern than those who address a single deity. However, while he is no polytheistic true believer, neither is he a disinterested antiquarian scholar of comparative religion. For him, the gods continue to live in literature. Reading provides

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**La Folie Baudelaire**  
by Roberto Calasso  
translated by Alastair McEwen  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 352 pp., \$35

his approach to the sacred—the only approach that remains, to his mind. Religious orthodoxies seem to hold no appeal for him; in that respect, he appears to share the common modern irreligion that is even more prevalent in Europe than in the United States. But, at his best, Calasso is a writer of sufficient force and grace not only to summon the gods, but to make them come.

A brief biographical note to Calasso’s latest book describes the publication as “the sixth panel” of “a work in progress.” Calasso has been laboring at this project for 25 years, and his work to date, with allowances made for inevitable lapses, constitutes a major critical accomplishment.

The best book of his, the second in the series and a surprise international bestseller, is *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (1988), a beautiful narration of Greek myths with penetrating

commentary. His understanding of the Greek soul before philosophers undertook to define it cuts to the cruel and splendid heart of the matter. Homer's Achilles was the type of all humanity.

The aesthetic justification of existence [was] the tacit premise of life in Greece under the Olympians. Perfection of the outward appearance was indissolubly linked to the acceptance of a life without redemption, without salvation, without hope of repetition, circumscribed by the precarious wonder of its brief apparition.

Achilles was born of a goddess, but the gods granted him only a fleeting span on earth, both brutal and glorious. No Greek hero could hope for better, though his lot seems hard and terrible to modern men accustomed to relatively long and comfortable lives. The Olympians demanded far more of their human creatures than we tend to demand of ourselves. The life of a 21st-century soldier, in its rigor and peril, is the anomaly in our time; the life of a Greek warrior was the characteristic one in that ancient context. Calasso honors the strength of will that allowed the Greeks to submit heroically to a divine will incomparably stronger than their own. Such submission was the noblest assertion of human greatness. The afterlife was all murk and torpor, but until the hour of his death arrived, a man could resemble a god.

The next book in the series is *Ka* (1996), which sets out to do for the Hindu myths what *Cadmus and Harmony* did for the Greek. *Ka* means "Who?" in Sanskrit, and is the secret name of Prajapati, the Progenitor, the god from whom all the other gods issue. He is faceless, indistinct, indescribable. In the tales men told of the gods, Prajapati would become Brahma, who was the god of mind alone until his breast opened and

a beautiful daughter was born. His purely reasonable sons, conceived of his solitary mind, disapproved of their father's desire for Satarupa, but when she and Brahma touched fingertips, the world was transformed:

Brahma asked Satarupa to lie down on a lotus petal. Then he lay beside her. Slowly the petal closed around them. There they stayed, for a hundred years of the gods, loving each other the way common people do. Thus they conceived Manu, who founded the society of men.



Charles Baudelaire, Roberto Calasso

The creative force of sensuality as against that of unabettled intelligence is a key Calasso theme. Unlike the erotic ideal of Greek philosophy—which Plato describes as friends' thinking the same sublime thought at the same time—Hindu erotic perfection is the passionate entanglement of bodies overwhelmed by desire. The world here is too rich to be reduced to ideas.

In *Tiepolo Pink* (2006)—the title alludes to a chromatic effusion of Proust's—Calasso turns to an 18th-century Venetian painter, Giambattista Tiepolo, who is poised between ancient and modern. Among the modern features Calasso has in mind is "the variegated image of equivocal beauty" that Charles Baudelaire would rhapsodize in his contemporary, Constantin Guys: "The Painter of Modern Life," according to Baudelaire, must master the art of portraying courtesans, and even their less exclusive fellow professionals. A much finer artist than Guys, and bound

by the taste of his time to make a career of divinities, Tiepolo brought a louche, proto-modern touch to the goddesses he depicted: "Tiepolo's goddesses belong to the demimonde of the heavens—and this takes away none of their splendor." After all, the Greek sculptor Praxiteles reputedly modeled his nonpareil *Aphrodite of Cnidos* on the prostitute Cratina, for whom the lovelorn artist was mad.

So Tiepolo consummated the European artistic tradition that incorporated every conceivable being: "And it was the sky of Europe—the only sky capable of embracing, with impartial benevolence, all images, of gods and men, saints and Nymphs, Olympus and Bethlehem. Scepticism and mysticism: Tiepolo welcomed all . . ." Already, however, skepticism was driving out the mystical—and in the name of the earth's new master, who had recently discovered how eminently rational he could be.

The advancement of learning, to use Francis Bacon's 17th-century phrase, foretold the eclipse of the gods, and of God: As Calasso writes in *Tiepolo Pink*, "every kind of *humanism* is unsuited to grasp the divine, precisely because of its bias in favor of the human." Yet in *K.* (2002), his study of Franz Kafka, Calasso rejects the idea that the sacred has simply been dissolved "by some outside agent, by the light of the Enlightenment." Rather, religion has been absorbed by the "self-sufficient" behemoth that is "content to be described as *society*." And in *Literature and the Gods* (2001)—not one of his six panels, but based on his Weidenfeld Lectures at Oxford, and an important element of his oeuvre—Calasso indicts modern society for this ultimate moral perversion:

The power and impact of totalitarian regimes cannot be explained unless we accept that the very notion of society has appropriated an unprecedented power, one previously the

preserve of religion. The results were not long in coming: the liturgies in the stadiums, the positive heroes, the fecund women, the massacres. Being antisocial would become the equivalent of sinning against the Holy Ghost.

This is not entirely a novel observation, yet there is something new and subtle about it: Calasso sees totalitarianism not as an aberration but as an inevitable consequence of society's having engulfed sacred authority. Liberal society remains in peril of barbarism as long as it forgets traditional sanctity.

*La Folie Baudelaire* pits the poet's traditional Roman Catholic sense of sin, which hounded him throughout a profligate life that ended in syphilitic paresis at 46, against the popular belief in endless social progress. Baudelaire wound up having the better end of that argument, though it would take the unprecedented hecatombs of the 20th century to demonstrate how right he was—and he was dead by 1867. During his lifetime, respectable persons scorned him, as though his tortured religious sensibility were simply the spirochetes talking. Calasso takes his book's title from an article by Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the most influential mid-19th-century French critic, that explained why Baudelaire was quite unsuitable for the august *Académie française*: To the pedants and politicians convinced that their pursuits were the only serious ones—and to a timid critic anxious not to compromise his respectability—someone like Baudelaire was a freak who had constructed “a bizarre pavilion, a folly, highly decorated, highly tormented, but graceful and mysterious . . . toward the extreme part of the Romantic Kamchatka.”

Of course, society's freak has his own idea of what is bizarre. The French word *bête* means both “beast” and “foolish,” and it was one of Baudelaire's preferred terms of abuse for the bourgeois multitude, among whom the pudding-headed King Louis Philippe was *primus inter pares*. The bourgeoisie believed themselves to be the most extraordinary people

who had ever lived, and, to quote a Frenchman of another sort, they knew that every day, in every way, they were getting better and better.

Such extraordinary people required a top-heavy and sententious art. They wanted poetry rich with gods, the way they wanted massive silver plate on their sideboards. Writers like Alfred de Musset delivered the divine afflatus. But where the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin had genuinely felt the gods' terrible presence—a visitation from Apollo drove him mad—in post-revolutionary France, invoking the gods was sheer mummery.

The cleverest Parisians saw through the pretense, and sneered gaily. The operetta master Jacques Offenbach and his librettists Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy introduced a new artistic insouciance, which spread to drawing rooms and dinner parties: “‘a nimble spirit, stripped of commonplaces and stock sentiments,’ endowed with an ‘intentional dryness,’ elastic, scathing, intolerant of the ‘verbal sentimentalism of a previous epoch’ (as Proust was to describe it).” *Orphée aux enfers* (*Orpheus in the Underworld*) and *La Belle Hélène* (*The Beautiful Helen*) revel in the double-edged send-up of Greek myth and contemporary politics. In the words of the once-authoritative Jules Janin, fastidious critics huffed at the desecration of “holy and glorious Antiquity”; but the public filled the seats and ate it all up.

Calasso barely mentions the two operettas in passing—a strange reticence, given his lifelong preoccupations. Siegfried Kracauer, in the classic *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time* (1937), provides a full and illuminating account. Calasso leaves gaping questions here: Why did the gods so suddenly become funhouse caricatures? Why did the bourgeois audience go from demanding art of magniloquent solemnity to embracing the titillating and raffish? (For it is, of course, the titillating and raffish that have come to reign supreme in modern art.)

But then Calasso scatters his powers on all manner of subjects either

directly or tangentially or remotely associated with Baudelaire and his folly. Most notable are the artists Ingres, Delacroix, Manet, and Degas; Baudelaire wrote about the first two in his art criticism for the newspapers, while the latter appear in Calasso's book as Baudelairean epigoni, exemplars of the artistic modernity that opposed itself to bourgeois modernity—of decadence versus material progress.

The highlight of Calasso's own art criticism is his description of Ingres's *Jupiter and Thetis*, in which Achilles' mother implores the master of the universe to restore her son's tarnished honor: “Her white breast rests on the thigh of the sovereign of the gods with the familiarity of an old lover. And her right big toe brushes that of Zeus. Neoclassical eros had never gone so far.” Here, Ingres paints gods who possess the luscious erotic weight of mortal flesh.

Yet Calasso overlooks entirely a passage from Baudelaire's piece on the Universal Exposition of 1855 that faults Ingres for “total absence of sentiment and of supernaturalism” in his *Apotheosis of Emperor Napoleon I* and *Joan of Arc*. According to Baudelaire, Ingres's depiction of Joan fails to avenge “this noble virgin” for the “lewdnesses of Voltaire,” the supreme rationalist and archenemy of all that is holy, who had accused the martial saint of sluttishness. And Ingres's Napoleon appears not to be ascending into heaven, the “goal of all human aspirations and classic habitation of all great men,” but to be tumbling earthward with his chariot, “like a balloon without gas.”

One hates to say it, for Calasso is an outstanding critic and his new book does have dazzling moments, but *La Folie Baudelaire* represents a falling off. Too often it rehearses tired themes, misses opportunities to make telling points, passes off incoherence as learned virtuosity, and diffuses the effervescence of the author's own extraordinary mind so that a disappointing fizzle remains. Roberto Calasso is as good as they come, and one wants more and more from him. One just wants it to be better than this. ♦

# Jackie, Oh

*A great story yields a not-so-great film version.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The new movie about Jackie Robinson's entry into major league baseball paints its characters with such an unmitigatedly saintly brush that Parson Weems himself might come back from the grave to say, "Speaking as the man who invented the story about George Washington chopping down the cherry tree, fellas, that was a bit much." Writer-director Brian Helgeland, who seems to have studied Barry Levinson's fussy and romanticized direction of *The Natural* (1984) the way a forger studies a dollar bill, is a hamfisted scenarist whose didactic dialogue sounds like the script for one of those 15-minute plays they stage at history museums.

Helgeland also makes weird choices as he tells the story of the two years between Brooklyn Dodgers honcho Branch Rickey's decision to make Robinson the first black player in the majors and Robinson's landmark 1947 season. *42* is chock-full of historical elisions and inventions, all of them unnecessary since the actual story was so dramatic and intense it needed no melodramatic adornment. A few of the changes are actually egregious—in particular, the inclusion of a strange scene in which Jackie tells his newborn son he'll never walk out as his own father did when Jackie was 6 months old.

As Arnold Rampersad's exhaustive authorized biography explains, Robinson's mother chose to leave his father when Jackie was 5 years old because of his philandering. Why would Helgeland create a false moment between father and baby that never would have happened? I suspect he wanted to have his Robinson

42

Directed by Brian Helgeland



deliver a statement about fathers not running away from their sons, which is indeed an important message, especially for the African-American community. But it was already Jackie Robinson's burden to serve as one of the great role models of the 20th century; it's just wrong to falsify his life story to shoehorn him into yet another role-model mold.

A major aspect that is missing from *42* is any sense of just how huge a national cultural event Robinson's rookie season was. "He became the biggest attraction in baseball since Babe Ruth," said the Dodgers broadcaster Red Barber. Everywhere Robinson went, he attracted crowds of adoring fans. Dodgers attendance skyrocketed; he made the cover of *Time* when that was itself a colossal thing; the *Sporting News* invented the award called "rookie of the year" just to honor him.

"In November," Rampersad writes, "a nationwide contest placed him ahead in popularity of President Truman, General Eisenhower, General MacArthur, and the comedian Bob Hope, and second only to America's favorite crooner Bing Crosby."

Helgeland keeps the focus simply on the baseball diamond, although even here he misses the opportunity to capture the true drama of 1947—which featured Robinson struggling in his first few months, going into slumps, and then rallying along with his team to a brilliant finish that included winning the pennant. In *42*, Robinson plays masterfully from his first at-bat to his last.

In this respect, as in all others in this hagiography, Robinson is not granted the right to resemble the extraordinary and complicated person he was—because he must be without flaw, even as an athlete. (And, evidently, literally immortal; closing bits at the end of the movie describe what happened to everyone we've seen onscreen, including his wife Rachel, but never mention that Robinson himself died tragically young, at the age of 53, in 1972.)

I can't tell you whether Chadwick Boseman, who plays Robinson, is good or bad. I can tell you he is blown off the screen by Alan Tudyk, a great character actor who burrows himself into the role of Ben Chapman, the manager of the Philadelphia Phillies who taunts Robinson with vile racist epithets that nearly destroy the rookie's carefully crafted composure. Tudyk is a pleasure to watch, even as he plays a vile creep, because he comes across as a real person in contrast to Boseman's diorama stick-figure.

Still, *42* has its virtues. For one thing, it is beautiful to look at. Even though I was born four years after the Dodgers left Ebbets Field, seeing it re-created so meticulously brought nostalgic tears to my eyes. For another, playing the fabled Branch Rickey seems to have awakened Harrison Ford from an acting slumber that suggested he had moved to Brigadoon. Ford gives a hammy, twinkly sunbeam of a performance that makes you love him all over again. It was Rickey who had the great insight that the first black major leaguer would have to be a model of civil restraint and dignity in order to shame those who argued there could be no race-mixing in professional sports. And it was Robinson's greatness of spirit that made it possible for him to shoulder the responsibility of restraining himself in the face of intolerable pressure and ugliness.

It would be all but impossible to tell this story without provoking tears and wonderment at what these two remarkable men wrought together, and *42* does both. But it could have done much more. ♦

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

**“Boston is tough and sentimental, traditional and forward-looking, working-class and wealthy, parochial and global, warm and reserved, reform-minded and un-reformable, restrained and boisterous, superstitious and free-thinking, very new and very old. . . . Boston is forgiving but relishes grudges. It values loyalty, sometimes to a fault—and rejects the idea that there could be any fault in loyalty. History is everywhere, and Bostonians ignore history whenever they feel like it.”**  
—‘To Boston, with love’ by E.J. Dionne Jr., Washington Post, April 18

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To , With Love

[SELECTED CITY NAME] will always be a town of [ LOVE  RAGE] but the capital of [ KINDNESS  PIG IRON]. It's a place where the men are [ MEN  POETS] and the women are [ SENTIMENTAL  LEATHERY], the children are all [ GORGEOUS  A LITTLE NAUGHTY], and even the pets have a certain [ WISTFULNESS  SWAGGER]. It's the kind of community where everybody knows [ THE NAME OF THEIR MASSEUSE  THE UNDERTAKER], and when a [ PRIEST  PROSTITUTE] walks down the street, everybody [ WAVES  AVERTS THEIR EYES]. It's [ MY KIND OF TOWN  THE BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS], but I [ LOVE IT  WILL NEVER, EVER RETURN].

If you ask somebody in [SELECTED CITY NAME] for directions, they'll [ DRIVE YOU THERE  CALL THE COPS]. When you order [ RIBS  STEAK TARTARE] at the finest restaurant in town, the waiter will [ SNICKER  TELL YOU IT'S NOT VERY GOOD]. Scott Fitzgerald once said that there are no second acts in American lives, but tell that to a citizen of [SELECTED CITY NAME] and she'll [ SHAKE HER HEAD  TELL YOU ABOUT HER IMMIGRANT GRANDPA]. It's a special place where [ LOYALTY  SOCIAL STANDING] means more than [ MEDIAN INCOME  PIZZA], and everybody wept when [ THE HIGH SCHOOL WON THE STATE CHAMPIONSHIP  HARPER LEE SPOKE AT THE LIBRARY]. If I