the weekly
Standard

WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT JEWS?
JOSEPH EPSTEIN

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CHILD'S PLAY

JAMES KIRCHICK on the fairy-tale world of Model United Nations

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COVER BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

The Worshipful Coverage of Wendy

Ever since state senator Wendy Davis's unsuccessful filibuster of new late-term abortion regulations in Texas, the media have been, even by their own embarrassing standards, astonishingly obsequious towards her. The Associated Press actually tweeted out a link to their coverage of the story with the hashtag #standwithwendy. When Davis went on ABC's *This Week*, reporter Jeff Zeleny asked her three questions about her now-famous pink running shoes, three questions about using a catheter during her filibuster, and exactly zero substantive questions about abortion or Texas's new law. And the coverage in the *New York Times* was, well, *New York Times* coverage, with breathless encomiums to Davis's "feat of stamina and conviction."

Not surprisingly, the media are too busy discussing how fabulous Davis is to note that most Americans regard what she stands for as barbaric. The Texas legislation she opposed primarily did two things. One, it banned abortions after 20 weeks. Two, it classified abortion clinics as "ambulatory surgical centers." Basically, abortion clinics will now have to meet the same health and safety standards as nearly every other medical facility that does outpatient surgery.

On the first point, banning late-term abortion is hardly draconian. In Sweden, which isn't exactly run by Bible-thumpers, abortion is banned at 18 weeks. In fact, excepting the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, nearly every country in Europe has stricter gestational limits on abortion than Texas. And late-term abortion is widely opposed by the vast majority of Americans.

"One of the clearest messages from Gallup trends is that Americans oppose late-term abortion," notes the polling company. Texans supported the state's new limit by a whopping 32-point margin, according to a *Texas Tribune* poll. A recent Quinnipiac poll showed that 60 percent of women supported the 20-week limit on abortions, and three other recent polls show women more supportive of Texas's restrictions than men. It would seem, then, that in the War on Women, Wendy Davis is an army of one.

As for Texas's requiring higher safety standards for abortion clinics, several women have died at abortion clinics in recent years. Most notably, Philadelphia abortionist Kermit Gosnell's clinic of horrors was exposed because he killed a patient, and his murder trial highlighted a dramatic lack of oversight at abortion clinics. Why is Wendy Davis opposed to patient safety?

It's not hard to think of tough questions to ask Davis, though it took The Weekly Standard's John McCormack to finally ask her one. After her appearance at the National Press Club last week, he asked Davis the following: "The supporters [of late-term bans like Texas's] argue that there really isn't much of a difference between what happened in that Philadelphia case with abortion doctor Kermit Gosnell [killing born-alive infants] 23 weeks into pregnancy and legal late-term abortions at 23 weeks. What is the difference between those two, between legal abortion at 23 weeks and what Gosnell did? Do you see a distinction?"

Davis's response? "I don't know what happened in the Gosnell case. But I do know that it happened in an ambulatory surgical center. And in Texas changing our clinics to that standard obviously isn't going to make a difference." Davis's claim to have no knowledge of the much-discussed and searing Gosnell case—a major impetus for the Texas law she's famous for opposing—is not remotely credible. And the assertion that Gosnell's hellhole of a clinic was an ambulatory surgical center is bizarre and factually incorrect.

We now know why Wendy Davis doesn't get asked tough questions. The moment she has to answer them, a media darling is exposed as just another empty pair of sneakers. ♦

No Summit

The Scrapbook enjoyed what might charitably be called a warmhearted chuckle at the news that President Obama had abruptly canceled his planned "summit" meeting in Moscow with Russian president Vladimir Putin. Even the reliably turgid language of White House press secretary Jay Carney was unusually blunt in explaining the reasons why: "We have reached the conclusion that there is not enough recent progress in our bilateral agenda with Russia to hold a U.S.-Russia summit in early September."

Now, if The Scrapbook were a standard newspaper editorial page, and if Barack Obama were, say, a Republican and not a Democratic president, we would immediately swing into anger/despair mode: In the nuclear age, we would explain, mutual understanding between the United States and Russia is of paramount importance. Or: The president's unrealistic demands and expectations, coupled with his bellicose rhetoric, have poisoned the delicate atmosphere between Moscow and Washington. And finally: It will take years, and precious time we don't have, to undo the damage done by this calculated insult to Russia.

And on and on.

But of course, far from deploring Obama's decision, The Scrapbook is understanding—even sympathetic.

For despite his stated intention of meeting with the Russian president in anticipation of a G20 summit next month in St. Petersburg, Obama really had no good reason to see Putin. Relations between the Kremlin and the White House are deeply antagonistic, the two countries disagree on a host of critical issues, and of course, Russia's granting of political asylum to Edward Snowden was a calculated affront. Since it is our general view that summit meetings tend to cause more problems than they solve, we applaud Obama's decision to restrain himself.

But how times change! And in that respect, The Scrapbook has an especially pertinent memory of Walter Mondale, the former vice president and 1984 Democratic presidential candidate, who thought it made sense politically to criticize Ronald Reagan for being too tough on the Soviet Union. Reagan, he complained on September 25, 1984, was "the first president since Hoover not to meet with his Soviet counterpart."

You see, boys and girls, in those days Democrats tended to believe that the fault for the Cold War lay largely with the West, and so it was incumbent on presidents to apologize for defending freedom against communism, and to seek reconciliation, wherever and whenever possible, with the rulers in the Kremlin. So not only did Mondale condemn Reagan for avoiding the company of Soviet dictators, he resurrected the image of Herbert Hoover's presidency, a half-century in the past, to drive home his point.

Well, it is true that President Hoover never met with Marshal Stalin—and equally true that, if he had, Stalin would have gone on being Stalin, the greatest mass murderer of the 20th century. And to think that a Democratic candidate for national office would suggest that the Kremlin chieftain could fairly be described as the "counterpart" to the democratically elected American president!

Democrats, with all their talk of pushing the "reset" button with Russia, don't believe that anymore, right?♦

Attack of the Vapors

The Scrapbook neglected to follow its usual practice last week and had a look at the reader comments under an online *New York Times* article. The *Times* piece covered the growing popularity of so-called electronic cigarettes (which Ethan Epstein chronicled in these pages a few weeks back), noting that people are increasingly using the devices in public places like restaurants and bars. Unlike real cigarettes, e-cigs don't contain tobacco and don't emit carcinogenic smoke—they only expel water vapor—so they don't cause any harm to nonusers.

This point appeared to be lost on the ninnies in the comments section though. "There is no god-given right to pollute the air someone else in the immediate area will be breathing," fumed one. "I don't care what people do, just don't want any of their nasty vapors wafting my way," said another. "It's disappointing (not surprising) that these people are trying to glorify the use of nicotine," said another, as if nicotine itself—rather than tobacco—were a particularly harmful substance. Another reader shared this confusion, braying, "What about second hand 'smoke' or whatever's in the exhaled air? Unless 100% of the nicotine is absorbed by the user, some of it must become part of the ambient air. Surely this can't be good?"

The same could be said for the com-

ments on this article. Perusing them reminded The Scrapbook that while using e-cigarettes may not be, reading online comments is most definitely hazardous to your well-being. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Don Graham's decision to sell the *Washington Post* was his reverse *Sophie's Choice* moment. She had to decide which cherished child to save and which to send to the gas chamber. Don and the Graham family weren't forced to make an anguishing choice . . . " ("Selling the Post Was a Brave, Painful Choice," Ruth Marcus, *Washington Post*, August 6). ♦

More Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Our new owner is Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. No self-respecting journalist would shower the new boss with wet kisses, so I won't. Suffice it to say that he has good values and that he was among the first to figure out a way to make print content (books and newspapers) available in attractive, easy, digital form through the Kindle. And we have to think Bezos is a smart guy . . . " ("Post sale was Grahams' gift to journalism," David Ignatius, *Washington Post*, August 7). ♦

Still More Sentences We Didn't Finish

'I think I speak for more than myself when I say that the main reason I have high hopes for your stewardship is that Don Graham said it was the right thing for the paper. He said you are the right guy. That was enough for me. 'Great' is an overused term, and sports has rendered it almost meaningless, so I won't say you have just bought a 'great' newspaper. I'm not even sure you've bought a 'newspaper' in any understood sense. You have bought a place filled with enormously talented and dedicated journalists . . . " ("Open Letter to Jeff Bezos," Gene Weingarten, *Washington Post*, August 6). ♦

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The Ninja Party

Americans may be having fewer children, but we make a fetish of the ones we have. This is obvious to anyone unlucky enough to have attended a child's birthday party in recent years.

The great Alexis de Tocqueville did not broach this subject in *Democracy in America*, but were he to happen upon one of these affairs, I am certain he would say, "Americans have abandoned the mysteries of God-worship for a religion of man, staking their salvation on satisfying the mercurial whims of short, moody offspring who one day want a three-tiered basketball cake with LeBron James leaping from the frosting and the next insist on a Skylanders-themed party instead."

When I was a kid, my parents threw birthday parties for me and my brothers by taping a single balloon to the wall, making a tray of cupcakes, and inviting friends over to play hide-and-seek—outside. We were barely allowed in the house. When my kids have birthday parties, not only is our routine disrupted but our house is transformed into a set for their fantasies of life as a princess or a pirate or, not so long ago, a ninja.

I am of two minds on this. First, I vehemently disapprove. Second, because no one cares if I disapprove, which leaves me feeling isolated, I end up helping out.

For several days leading up to our most recent feast of the child-god, my wife Cynthia was cutting out decorations and making props. Copying the eyes of the Lego ninja, she created clever little fabric medallions that she hung around the house. She bought chopsticks for the food and devised ways of turning American staples like chicken nuggets and spaghetti into Japanese ninja fuel. Foam pool noodles were purchased and cut into non-lethal swords.

I did nothing. Nothing except go to work as usual and come home to complete my household chores (which, if you read the social science, is actually a very big deal)—but nothing special, nothing for the big event. The morning of the party, I appeared in the kitchen, legal pad in hand, jotting notes.

"I've got it."

"What's that?" Cynthia asked.

"My character. I am going to be the Insult Ninja. I'm writing down my lines."

"Now you're going to help?"

I had no line for that.

When my daughter Maddy had a princess tea party for her birthday, I donned a suit and played the butler, while the girls, wearing fancy dresses, sat in our dining room eating finger sandwiches and drinking punch out of disposable teacups. They realized that when they called for the butler, the butler came, bowing, nodding, and talking in a phony English accent. They couldn't get enough of him. Neighbors around the block later asked me about the squealing laughter and little-girl screams. They couldn't make out what the girls were saying.

Over and over it was, "BUTLER!" And I would come running. Once I appeared, however, the girls would say, "Oh, nothing."

The 7-year-old ninjas at my son Ben's party would be in the backyard fighting, so I planned to make my mark there with silly witticisms that would challenge the boys to fight harder. "You use that sword like a wet noodle!" I planned to say. Or, after a good defensive move on my part, "Your flying kick is grounded!" As the boys arrived, Cynthia dressed each one in a headband with fake Japanese writing, and I planned to say, "Let me read your headband. Ah, yes, it says, 'Silly Little Poodle Ninja.'"

When the time came, however, I delivered only a few lines before being swarmed by little boys all hitting me with their swords. Through the flying foam, I saw my assistant—10-year-old Maddy, eyes red and teary—running inside to escape.

Fortunately, Cynthia had other activities planned, including a ninja obstacle course built of backyard toys. I was the last obstacle, and I stood there looking villainous, vowing to cut little ninjas in half, top them with wasabi, and eat them over rice with chopsticks.

But, somehow, though I raised my foam sword very high and made very mean faces, fully intending to chop off their heads as I swung down as hard as I could, every single ninja escaped my wrath. As they got in line to do the obstacle course again and again, they looked back at me and spat, "You are the stupidest ninja ever!" or, "You are so lame! You couldn't kill a fly with that sword!"

They were learning to talk like the Insult Ninja, which I knew to be a good sign. Neighbors later asked about the screams. Parents told Cynthia that their boys had loved the party. And no one went around saying that I hadn't done my part.

David Skinner

FIGURE, SHUTTERSTOCK; PEDESTAL, VEER

the weekly Standard

Feebleness in the Executive

Sometimes politics is just "one damned thing after another." But sometimes not. Sometimes those damned things constitute a trend and form a pattern. So it is today, with President Barack Obama's foreign policy.

■ Our defense capabilities are being slashed. As the editors of the *Washington Post* pointed out two weeks ago, funding for the Pentagon "is on track to fall tens of billions short of what it needs to fulfill the strategic mission that President Obama has articulated for national defense." The *Post* noted that "Mr. Obama told congressional Democrats that the Pentagon should get no more attention than many other areas of the budget also subject to the punishing automatic spending cuts known as sequestration," and commented, "That can't be the final answer from the commander in chief." But it is. The *Post* further remarked, "Mr. Obama ultimately can't act as though the Defense Department's sequester cuts are the equivalent in consequence to every other item in the budget." But he can and he does.

GARY LOCKE

■ President Obama said, two years and a hundred thousand deaths ago, that Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad must go. He hasn't gone. President Obama said a year ago that if Assad crossed certain red lines there would be "enormous consequences." There have been no consequences.

■ Speaking in Berlin in July 2008, candidate Barack Obama affirmed his commitment to the mission in Afghanistan. "[W]e must renew our resolve to rout the terrorists who threaten our security in Afghanistan. . . . I recognize the enormous difficulties in Afghanistan. But my country and yours have a stake in seeing that NATO's first mission beyond Europe's borders is a success. For the people of Afghanistan, and for our shared security, the work must be done. America cannot do this alone. The Afghan people need our troops and your troops; our support and your support to defeat the Taliban and al Qaeda, to develop their economy, and to help them rebuild their nation. We have too much at stake to turn back now." We are now turning back. Indeed, President Obama undercut his own surge by announcing our intention to turn back, even as he sent tens of thousands of soldiers and Marines into the fight.

■ Also in Berlin, candidate Obama proclaimed that, "despite past differences, this is the moment when the world should support the millions of Iraqis who seek to rebuild their lives, even as we pass responsibility to the Iraqi government and finally bring this war to a close." In fact, the Bush administration effectively brought the war to a close with the success of the surge Senator Obama opposed. And by failing to secure an agreement to leave a residual force in Iraq, President Obama has allowed civil war to resume there and Al Qaeda in Iraq to come back to life.

■ President Obama said last year that al Qaeda is on the run. It's not. It's on the move. Any perceptive leader or sentient resident of the Middle East, watching last week as American embassies closed throughout the region, would judge that it's the United States that's on the run. Daniel Pipes spoke the harsh truth: As an American, one can't help but feel "this preemptive cringing unworthy of a great country, even humiliating."

■ President Obama has pursued a "reset" with Russia since he took office. For four and a half years, his repeated petitions have been answered by repeated injuries. Vladimir Putin has been conspicuously deaf to Barack Obama's entreaties. The president's response? To cancel a planned bilateral meeting with Putin. Putin's response? A shrug of the shoulders.

■ President Obama has said repeatedly that it is unacceptable for the Iranian regime to acquire nuclear weapons. It is increasingly clear that if serious action is taken to prevent this outcome, it won't be by the United States under the Obama administration.

As Alexander Hamilton put it in a different context, "There can be no need, however, to multiply arguments or examples on this head." Or maybe it's not so different a context. Hamilton continues in *Federalist* 70, "A feeble Executive implies a feeble execution of the government. A feeble execution is but another phrase for a bad execu-

tion; and a government ill executed, whatever it may be in theory, must be, in practice, a bad government."

President Obama's feeble execution of our foreign policy is made no better by the fact that it is based on bad theories: the limits of American power, the receding tide of war, the virtues of leading from behind. In fact, his attachment to his theories makes it harder for him to adjust to reality and correct course.

Decline, Charles Krauthammer wrote in these pages almost four years ago, is a choice. President Obama has made that choice. We need to resist it for the next three and a half years. We need to reverse it on January 20, 2017.

—William Kristol

Misjudging al Qaeda

Anyone following the news even casually last week surely noticed the long parade of Obama administration officials trotted out before the cameras to insist their boss, the president, has always understood the serious and ongoing threat presented by al Qaeda and its affiliates—emphasis on affiliates. The assurances came after intelligence about imminent and possibly large-scale attacks on U.S. and Western interests led the administration to shutter nearly two dozen U.S. embassies in the Middle East and South Asia for several days. These assurances were necessary because the president and those who speak for him have spent the better part of the last year—the better part of his time in office, really—telling the American people that the threat from al Qaeda, like its leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan, would soon be gone.

In his many campaign mentions of al Qaeda, the president noted that its leader, Osama bin Laden, had been killed and that the rest of the terror group was, in his favorite formulation, "on the path to defeat." Here's how he made that argument in his speech at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, on September 6, 2012:

> Four years ago, I promised to end the war in Iraq. We did. I promised to refocus on the terrorists who actually attacked us on 9/11, and we have. We've blunted the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan, and in 2014, our longest war will be over. A new tower rises above the New York skyline, al Qaeda is on the path to defeat, and Osama bin Laden is dead.

He used nearly identical wording during a presidential debate a month later, and it continued to appear in his stump speeches through his reelection on November 6.

Obama never claimed that al Qaeda had been vanquished. Indeed, his convention speech allowed that the terror group was still the top threat facing the country. But even top threats were not as scary as they'd once seemed, and there was no mistaking his broader message: Al Qaeda is on the verge of defeat.

This was not, apparently, just campaign season bluster. The president's top national security advisers were making similarly bold claims. In a speech on April 30, 2012, John Brennan made much the same argument. Brennan, then a top White House homeland security adviser and now the director of the CIA, told an audience at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington that the end of al Qaeda was imminent. "If the decade before 9/11 was the time of al Qaeda's rise and the decade after 9/11 was the time of its decline, then I believe this decade will be the one that sees its demise."

No one is talking about the demise of al Qaeda today. But having made such arguments in the past the administration is struggling to explain why a group nearing elimination has caused the world's greatest power to shutter and evacuate so many of its overseas facilities.

This dissonance has been a common feature of Obama's counterterror strategy. (It might be more accurate to say that it's been a defining characteristic of his actions in the absence of a strategy.) In late May, the president went to the National Defense University to announce the effective end of the war on terror. Within weeks, after the leaks of National Security Agency secrets by Edward Snowden, the president was explaining—hesitantly, grudgingly—why the U.S. government would continue to collect massive amounts of data on the electronic communications of Americans to help protect against a threat he had downplayed.

So it is with these latest revelations. In their public statements and background comments Obama administration officials are now insisting that their claims about an enfeebled al Qaeda applied only to "al Qaeda core," the senior leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that they had always warned about the rising threat from al Qaeda affiliates.

"Our view is that the core of al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan is on the path to defeat," said State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki, explaining the closures of diplomatic facilities. "We remain concerned about affiliates." Here's how White House press secretary Jay Carney put it on August 5:

> I think as most people who cover these issues understand, al Qaeda core is the Afghanistan/Pakistan-based central organizational core of al Qaeda, once headed by Osama bin Laden. And there is no question over the past several years al Qaeda core has been greatly diminished, not least

because of the elimination of Osama bin Laden.

What is also true is that al Qaeda and affiliated organizations represent a continued threat to the United States, to our allies, to Americans stationed abroad, as well as Americans here at home. And for that reason we have focused a great deal of attention on those affiliated organizations.

There are two problems with this new argument. First, it's a bit of revisionism that seeks to obscure the almost cavalier way the administration spoke about the coming death of al Qaeda. Second, and more important, the latest revelations make clear that the administration's understanding of al Qaeda was almost completely wrong.

It's certainly true that the administration made distinctions between al Qaeda core and its affiliates. They did so, however, not in order to emphasize the new, growing threat from the affiliates but because separating the core from the affiliates allowed them to argue that the weakening of al Qaeda core meant a weakening of al Qaeda more broadly. Thus, the elimination of many core al Qaeda leaders meant the coming demise of al Qaeda. Far from sounding alarms about the strengthening of the affiliates, administration officials frequently noted that the affiliates' ambitions were regional and their resources were minimal. Brennan made this case in his speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center. "As the al Qaeda core falters, it continues to look to its affiliates and adherents to carry on its murderous cause. Yet these affiliates continue to lose key commanders and capabilities as well." The al Qaeda brand was so badly tainted that bin Laden considered abandoning the name, Brennan argued. The ability of al Qaeda and its affiliates to rebuild, he said, had been badly damaged by their willingness to kill fellow Muslims.

One day after Brennan's speech, the administration authorized the release of 17 documents captured during the raid on the compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, that killed Osama bin Laden. In interviews, speeches, and background briefings, administration officials portrayed the al Qaeda leader as impotent and isolated, cut off from other core al Qaeda leaders and powerless over the group's affiliates. They emphasized parts of the released documents—themselves a tiny fraction of the several hundred thousand documents recovered—that seemed to bolster its case. The future for al Qaeda was bleak.

Eighteen months later, it's clear that this judgment was wrong. The al Qaeda affiliate in Syria—the al Nusra front—is taking over vast swaths of the country and adding new members at an alarming rate. Al Qaeda in Iraq is sending reinforcements into the Syrian battle and still managing to increase carnage in Iraq. Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia is operating more or less freely in its native country. Ansar al Sharia in Libya helped carry out the deadly attacks on U.S. facilities in Benghazi. In recent weeks, radicals affiliated with al Qaeda freed hundreds of jihadists imprisoned in Iraq, Pakistan, and Libya.

Obama administration officials badly misjudged the future trajectory of al Qaeda because they badly misunderstood its past. The president and his advisers believed the fate of "al Qaeda core" was *ipso facto* the fate of al Qaeda broadly. So the ability of the U.S. government to kill members of that core—the one in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the one Obama was briefed about before he took office—meant we were succeeding in our efforts to eliminate al Qaeda. We were succeeding, that is, in Obama's non-war on terror. But such assessments never reflected reality.

This latest series of threat warnings makes that clear. According to early reports attributed to U.S. intelligence officials, the warnings came as a result of intercepted communications between the leader of al Qaeda, Ayman al Zawahiri, and Nasir al Wuhayshi, the leader of al Qaeda's most effective affiliate, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The *Daily Beast* later reported that the communications were actually broader than that and included leaders of both core al Qaeda and its franchises. The communications included discussions of the structure of the organization and future operations. In the course of these communications, Zawahiri elevated Wuhayshi to the position of "general manager" of al Qaeda, a position whose responsibilities include managing the affiliates.

This was not a new job, and these were not new responsibilities. As reported by Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio at *Long War Journal*, a letter from bin Laden to one of Wuhayshi's predecessors in May 2010 laid out those duties, making clear that al Qaeda core would continue to be deeply involved in the management and leadership of its affiliates. The letter described a reporting structure for affiliate activities and emphasized the role al Qaeda core leadership would play in selecting and approving lines of succession for affiliate leadership. Even the appointment of deputy affiliate leaders, bin Laden wrote, "should be done in consultation with the central group."

The recent activities of bin Laden's successor—whether coordinating leadership and operations with affiliates, intervening to settle disputes among affiliates in Iraq and Syria, communicating with regional commanders before attacks, or elevating Wuhayshi—make clear that Zawahiri, too, is playing an active role in keeping the affiliates close.

In his speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center last year, the current CIA director waxed optimistic about the future. "For the first time since this fight began, we can look ahead and envision a world in which al Qaeda core is no longer relevant," said Brennan.

Better for him—and for the country—if he sticks to the world as it is, not as he'd like it to be. And in this world, al Qaeda core remains all too relevant, al Qaeda's affiliates are growing, and threats to the United States and our interests persist.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Leo Johnson at the entrance to the Family Research Council in Washington, D.C.

The Media's Double Standard

Some hate crimes are less hateful than others.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

On August 15, 2012, at 10:46 A.M.—one year ago this week—Floyd Lee Corkins entered the lobby of the Family Research Council in Washington, D.C. He was carrying a backpack that contained 15 Chick-fil-A sandwiches, a Sig Sauer 9mm pistol, and 100 rounds of ammunition. Corkins has since pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing for the crimes he proceeded to commit. He's set to spend decades in a prison cell and fade into obscurity.

But Leo Johnson deserves to be remembered for his heroism that day. The building manager for the Family Research Council was manning the front desk that morning and let Corkins enter the building under the pretense he was a new intern. The video of what happened after that is remarkable.

After Corkins takes a suspiciously long time rummaging through his bag to produce identification, Johnson cannily stands up and walks around the desk to get a closer look at what Corkins is doing. Corkins bolts upright, gun in hand. Without the slightest hesitation, Johnson rushes Corkins, who fires twice. A bullet shatters Johnson's left forearm. "And I just couldn't hear anything, my arm just kind of blew back. So at that point I was thinking: 'I have to get this gun,'" Johnson told THE WEEKLY STANDARD. "That was my sole focus—I have to get this gun—this guy's gonna kill me and kill everybody here."

From there, Johnson somehow manages to push Corkins across the lobby and pin him against the wall with his bad arm. "I just started punching him as hard as I could, until I could feel his grip loosen," recalled Johnson. Eventually he takes the gun from Corkins with his wounded arm. Before long, Corkins is subdued on the ground. Corkins now admits that it was his intention to shoot everyone in the building. There's no question Johnson saved a lot of lives.

Still, Johnson has been living with the consequences of that day ever since. "I had to have surgery right away to clear all of that shattered bone and remove the bullet fragments. Maybe about a week or so after that I developed blood clots in my right lung—five blood clots. So I had to go back in the hospital. I got put on blood-thinner so I was in about seven days. After a couple months of therapy there was about four inches of bone that didn't grow back so I had to have another surgery to remove about four inches of bone from my pelvis and have it put into my arm," he said. "This whole ordeal, it was tough on my family. My mom is 73 and she has health issues. My grandma is 103—she just turned 103. And I'm their primary caretaker, so it's been hard for me to get back on my feet and also take care of them so that they're okay."

In spite of the trauma, Johnson seems remarkably at peace and said he's never even lost sleep over what happened. "Other than getting shot, obviously, I wouldn't change a thing. I think God put me in that position to be there. Had [Corkins] not gained entrance here, he would've gone somewhere else and maybe carried out his plan," said Johnson, noting that the Family Research Council was just one of a number of targets Corkins selected. "God put me there. He protected me. He gave me the strength to do what I needed to do."

There's a lot that should be said about Johnson's heroism, starting with the fact that it hasn't been widely recognized. Over the last few years, thanks to events such as the

THE WEEKLY STANDARD / ISABEL KRET

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Gabrielle Giffords shooting and the George Zimmerman trial, the media have been subjecting us all to a constant and unavoidable national debate about the nexus of politics and violence. This has been unusually perplexing because the media persist in having this debate even when no connection between politics and violence exists.

The Family Research Council shooting is one of the few inarguable examples of politically motivated violence in recent years, yet looking back a year later, the incident has garnered comparatively little attention. Corkins openly admits he selected the Family Research Council because the Christian organization is one of the leading opponents of gay marriage in the country. He had Chick-fil-A sandwiches in his backpack because the CEO of the fast-food chain was under fire for publicly supporting a biblical definition of marriage. Corkins said he planned to "smother Chick-fil-A sandwiches in [the] faces" of his victims as a political statement. And in case that didn't make his motivations transparent, right before Corkins shot Leo Johnson, he told him, "I don't like your politics."

There are some illuminating contrasts between the media's handling of the political dimensions of the Family Research Council shooting and the shooting of Representative Giffords. In the latter case, the media rushed to assume political motivations and were quick to blame, of all people, Sarah Palin. The former Alaska governor and vice-presidential candidate had put out a map with crosshairs over Giffords's congressional district as part of a list of Democratic-held seats "targeted" for defeat. But Giffords's shooter, Jared Loughner, appears to have serious mental problems. And there is no evidence whatsoever Loughner saw this map or that allegedly violent political rhetoric—even "campaign" is a term borrowed from war—was in any way a cause of the Giffords shooting. That didn't stop serious news organizations from lending institutional credibility to the irresponsible allegations. The *Washington Post* ran a story headlined "Palin caught in crosshairs map controversy after Tucson shootings." And though Giffords was shot in January 2011, as recently as this year in an article on gun violence the *New York Times* saw fit to remind readers that "many criticized Sarah Palin, the former vice-presidential nominee, for using cross hairs on her Web site to identify Democrats like Ms. Giffords."

By contrast, the media handled awkwardly the revelation that Corkins admitted to plotting mass murder as a means of furthering a popular liberal cause. "A detail sure to reignite the culture wars that erupted around the shooting is the fact that Corkins told FBI agents that he identified the Family Research Council as anti-gay on the Web site of the Southern Poverty Law Center," wrote the *Washington Post* during Corkins's trial in February. It's a little unseemly for a newspaper, when finally forced to confront actual politically motivated violence, to worry about the shooting's impact on the metaphorical "culture war." Particularly when irresponsible actors in that culture war continue to get a free pass from the media.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) was once a laudable civil rights organization that sued racists and violent extremists. Now it regularly demonizes anyone who runs afoul of its knee-jerk liberal politics, and despite this it is still regularly cited by the media as a "nonpartisan" watchdog. Some of the SPLC's newly targeted "hate groups," such as pickup artists, are merely kooky or distasteful. Others singled out by the SPLC, including Catholics who go to Latin mass or Christian organizations similar to the Family Research Council, are well within the mainstream. Tellingly, the SPLC doesn't just name the Family Research Council on its website—it posts the council's address on a "hate map." That map is still on SPLC's website, and the organization refused calls to take it down after the Family Research Council shooting.

As recently as last week, SPLC cofounder Morris Dees defended the Family Research Council's inclusion on the "hate map." "Well, first of all, having a group on our hate map doesn't cause anybody to attack them any more than they attacked us for one thing or another," Dees told CNSNews.com on August 6. It takes quite a bit of hubris for Dees to defensively equate rhetorical attacks on his own organization with actual gun violence against an organization whose politics he dislikes. It also seems more than a little convenient that Dees now denies a connection between rhetoric and violence. In 2011, an SPLC blog post, "Expert: Political Rhetoric Likely a Factor in Arizona Shooting," concluded that Sarah Palin's rhetoric "could have provided a facilitating context" for the Giffords shooting, though, again, there is no evidence Loughner was exposed to it.

By the loose standard of "facilitating context," the unjust inclusion of the Family Research Council headquarters on a "hate map" otherwise filled with violent white nationalist organizations is a much more serious transgression—particularly when Corkins admits he used the map to learn about his target. And while Leo Johnson's defining characteristics are his courage and character, as long as we're talking about context, it's worth pondering why the founder of a celebrated civil rights organization is obdurately unreflective about the role his SPLC played in the shooting of a black man.

Dees's callous remarks only underscore the point that, unlike many of the more publicized incidents in recent years, the Family Research Council shooting actually warrants a discussion. If anyone is sincerely interested in frankly exploring politics and violence, Leo Johnson still works at the Family Research Council and walks past the bullet holes in the lobby every day. It might be worth asking him what he thinks. "I've worked here for 14 years. I know these people, I've worked closely with them, and I know what people they are," he says. "So to label them a hate group is absurd. It's absurd." ♦

Algeria and Its Islamists

A presidential succession fraught with peril.

BY OLIVIER GUITTA

In Algeria, officials celebrate the opening of a section of a Chinese-built east-west expressway.

Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika returned to Algiers on July 16 after three months in a hospital in Paris. His health will prevent him from running for reelection in April, and it's unclear whether he can run the country until then. As a result, the contest over his succession is already gearing up, and the Islamists are first out of the starting blocks. The United States and the European Union—along with China, a major presence in energy-rich Algeria—are closely monitoring this latest round in the continuing struggle over the Islamists' role in government and society.

Bouteflika is widely seen as the counter to the Islamists. In office since 1999 and reelected in 2009 with a Soviet-style 90 percent of the vote, he presided over the end of the bloody civil war unleashed by a military coup after the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won parliamentary elections in December 1991. The war killed as many as 200,000 people. Though the Islamists suffered a military defeat, the creeping Islamization of Algerian society has proceeded apace.

Oddly enough, the regime has regarded this trend with complacency. It has even courted conservative Muslim Brothers and named a prime minister sympathetic to the Islamists, Abdelaziz Belkhadem, who served from 2006 to 2008. Belkhadem closed down outlets selling alcoholic beverages, condemned those who broke the fast during Ramadan, hunted illicit couples, and supported restaurants that refused to serve unescorted females. He even called the Koran "the only constitution of Algerian society," echoing the motto of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Now, in the hope of a political comeback, the three main Islamist parties have united in a "Green Alliance" around a single presidential candidate. While some regard these groups as "Islamist in name only" because they are participating in the political process and are somewhat close to the elite, the powers that be are not ready to allow their candidate to become president.

The more dangerous Islamists are sitting out the election. They include the FIS and Salafist groups that do not control a large number of mosques around the country. Abassi Madani, a founder of the FIS who was imprisoned, then under house arrest, from 1991 to 2003, is stirring the pot from Qatar, where the emir gives him a monthly stipend of $15,000. Madani is calling for the legalization of the FIS. This probably won't happen, but agitating for it allows him to present himself as a victim of an anti-Muslim dictatorship.

Most likely, the army and the old guard will choose the next president. In an attempt to quell the anger of the street, the regime dispenses largesse. In 2011, for example, it provided some $23 billion in public grants and retroactive salary and benefit increases for public workers.

After the In Amenas terrorist attack in January—when al Qaeda-linked militants took some 800 workers and others hostage at a remote gas facility near the Tunisian border and some 70 people were killed before Algerian security forces had retaken the plant—Western governments realized that they needed to act to protect their interests in Algeria. This was even truer for China, which has a huge stake in Algeria's future.

In recent years, China has reaped the benefits of ties to Africa dating back to Mao's support for anti-colonial revolutionary movements in the middle of the last century. And

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Algeria hosts what may be the largest Chinese community on the continent, estimated at up to 100,000 people. According to the daily *El Khabar*, 567 Chinese-owned companies now operate in Algeria. While Chinese have invested in many sectors of the economy, construction surpasses them all: Close to $15 billion in construction contracts has been awarded to Chinese firms since 2000. Under a single contract for the construction of a huge mosque in Algiers, the China State Construction Engineering Corporation required that at least 10,000 workers be flown in from China.

The relationship also entails military cooperation. Algeria has commissioned the China Shipbuilding Trading Company to supply three light frigates, and in April for the first time, the Chinese fleet docked at an Algerian port and the two countries' navies took part in joint exercises.

The Chinese "invasion" has come at a cost. Anti-Chinese sentiment is common, and riots have targeted Chinese nationals; in 2009, dozens were injured and Chinese shops were looted in Algiers. In addition, some Algerians see China as anti-Muslim because of its harsh treatment of its Muslim Uighur community; Islamist parties have lodged protests with the Chinese embassy. Even Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the main terror outfit in the region, has warned China about potential attacks on its interests and citizens. Already in 2009, AQIM ambushed a convoy of Chinese workers being escorted to a job site 100 miles southeast of Algiers, and at least 24 police officers and one civilian were killed.

For the time being, Beijing has asked Algerian authorities to protect its nationals from both terrorism and rioting. But especially if Islamist influence continues to grow, it would be surprising if China did not also increase its own ability to project force in the region in the interests of its citizens and investments. That too is a development the West should be watching. ♦

Not Worth the Paper It's Printed On

The folly of OMB's annual cost-benefit report.

BY IKE BRANNON & SAM BATKINS

Every spring the Office of Management and Budget releases the president's proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year. While Congress invites senior administration figures to testify before various committees, and the media pore through the document to elucidate the administration's priorities, by the end of a week everyone agrees that most of what's in the budget has little chance of becoming enacted. Afterwards, Congress goes through the motions of passing a budget of its own, with scant regard to what the White House has proposed.

OMB director Sylvia Burwell

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At the same time it releases the budget, OMB produces another document, one that's a manifestation of the management half of its portfolio: *The Report to Congress on the Benefits and Costs of Federal Regulations*. While it garners much less attention than the president's budget, the cost-benefit report deserves much closer scrutiny—because it perennially misrepresents the activities of the regulatory agencies as being above reproach.

Since Ronald Reagan was in office all presidents have had an executive order in place mandating that "economically significant" regulations issued by executive agencies (i.e., those with an economic impact in excess of $100 million) be subject to a formal cost-benefit analysis showing that the benefits outweigh the costs.

The OMB report compiling these costs and benefits—which was begun by the previous administration—is in essence a league table that compiles the costs and benefits of a variety of regulations formally issued during the previous year. Every edition has reported that all is well with our regulatory world, with the benefits accruing to society from our government's regulatory activities far outweighing the costs imposed.

The problem is that the report is of little use in discerning whether this is, in fact, the truth. First, and most important, the report includes only a few regulations. While 3,700 regulations were issued in fiscal year 2012, with 80 of them being categorized as "major," only 14 regulations were included in OMB's analysis.

It is, of course, the case that the costs and benefits of some regulations (think of the one issued in late 2001

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to strengthen the doors to airline cockpits) can't be quantified. Also, as it currently stands, some entities that issue regulations don't bother, and are not required, to do cost-benefit analyses, and most regulations considered to be "non-major" never have their costs and benefits measured. Still, OMB is cherry-picking less than 1 percent of regulations issued in 2012 to present in its report.

Another problem is that the various executive branch agencies aren't all that good at measuring costs and benefits. When EPA tasks its economists to do a cost-benefit analysis on a regulation, it expects them to deliver an analysis that supports the regulation, and their economists have every incentive in the world to deliver the desired answer. The idea that an agency's economists would get in the way of its regulators is laughable: Any economist worth his salt can torture data until they justify whatever the agency wants to do.

One example: An important part of measuring the benefits of many regulations is the value of a life saved. If a new regulation were to save 10 lives a year, how should we value this gain? Economists have come up with several different ways to assess the value that people implicitly place on their lives: For instance, there are numerous studies that estimate the value of a "statistical life" by observing how much money people demand to take a slightly more dangerous job, or how much they are willing to pay for a safer bike helmet, or on safety accessories for a car.

About a decade ago two enterprising economists, Janusz Mrozek and Karen Taylor, compiled a comprehensive list of studies that tried to measure the value of a statistical life (VSL) and did a meta-analysis to see if they could reach a broad conclusion on the topic. The representative number they arrived at was $2.5 million, which happened to be much lower than what EPA used in its cost-benefit calculations. Adopting the lower figure would dramatically reduce the benefits for most EPA regulations, which would mean that fewer potential regulations could pass a cost-benefit test.

Rather than adjust its figure downward to reflect the state-of-the-art research (which EPA financed, incidentally), the agency responded to the widely heralded study by announcing that it would perform its own meta-analysis. A few months later the agency held a meeting to discuss its initial findings and invited nearly every economist who had published on the subject. While the research was not yet complete, EPA said it expected its VSL estimate would be three times higher than the Mrozek and Taylor figure—and almost precisely the figure EPA was already using. The pronouncement was met with mocking laughter from the audience, but EPA never budged. It didn't have to.

When EPA tasks its economists to do a cost-benefit analysis, it expects them to deliver an analysis that supports the regulation, and their economists have every incentive in the world to deliver the desired answer. The idea that an agency's economists would get in the way of its regulators is laughable: Any economist can torture data to justify what the agency wants to do.

Finally, the very practice of constructing a league table is a dubious exercise. There is no reason to aggregate the various costs and benefits for regulations—especially when the final number reflects only a small proportion of regulations, none of which had costs and benefits measured particularly well. With this much discretion, OMB can always declare that the combined benefits for its chosen set of regulations outweigh their aggregate costs for a given year. If, by some bureaucratic accident, OMB did not get this result, no one would insist that the government eliminate the new regulations. Critics would merely insist we reexamine the various regulations in the analysis.

And if there were one regulation with huge estimated benefits and low costs outweighing a number of smaller regulations that fail any cost-benefit test, we would still be dissatisfied with the government's regulatory activities, even if the net aggregate benefits were high.

Fixing the annual report so that it produces something informative is straightforward, although it would take the agencies a bit of work, which would pay off in the long run for all involved. First, all agencies should be subject to cost-benefit analyses for their major regulations. The notion that independent agencies like the SEC, FCC, or the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau should be above such accountability is absurd and should be fixed at once. The Administrative Conference of the United States, an independent agency in its own right, strongly recommends comprehensive analyses for all agencies.

Second, the agencies themselves should not be the ones determining whether a rule exceeds the $100 million threshold to merit a cost-benefit test, or whether it passes the test, for that matter. The solution to this is simple: OMB should use some of the agency budgets devoted to economic analysis to create an entity outside of their purview solely dedicated to doing cost-benefit analyses. In essence, the entity would do for regulations what CBO does when measuring the revenue impact of legislative proposals.

A relatively impartial government entity performing cost-benefit analyses would turn the annual report into something that allows the public to have a more complete picture of how well the government is doing at regulating the economy.

For an administration that likes to advertise itself as the most transparent in history, it's a logical step to take. ♦

Japan's Sun May Be Rising

A different cure for economic stagnation.

BY CHARLES WOLF JR.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addresses a street rally in Tokyo, July 4.

Tokyo

Whether by design or inadvertence, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's plans for reviving Japan's economy after two decades of stagnation differ sharply from the stimulus and austerity policies pursued by the United States and the European Union to recover from the deep recession of 2008-2009. These differences augur well for Japan's prospects.

"Abenomics" is metaphorically depicted as a quiver of "three arrows." The first is monetary policy; the second, fiscal policy; and the third—"creating wealth through growth"—is structural and reformist in character, although less clearly specified than the other two.

It's worth noting that there are a few elements it shares with the U.S. experience, and one element shared with EU practice. Abenomics's first arrow, aggressively easy monetary policies by the Bank of Japan, uses the same terminology—quantitative easing, or QE—adopted by the Federal Reserve during the past several years. Japan's QE is a simulacrum of QE in the United States.

Japan's QE is moving rapidly to double the economy's monetary base by 2014. By way of comparison, the Federal Reserve's QE boosted the U.S. monetary base by 40 percent between 2008 and mid-2013. In both countries, monetary policy aims at maintaining near-zero interest rates, although relaxation of this target is more likely in the United States than in Japan. And unlike the Fed's version, a declared objective of Japan's QE is to raise the yen/dollar exchange rate (that is, to depreciate Japan's currency) to a target rate between 100 and 110, and thereby to stimulate Japanese exports. At the start of Abe's tenure last December, the yen/dollar rate was 87; currently, it is 99.

Abenomics's second arrow—fiscal policy—can also be compared with stimulus policies in the United States, and has one element in common with austerity policies in the EU. Like U.S. fiscal policy, Japan's counterpart entails continued and large debt-financed government spending. The ratio of Japan's general government debt to gross domestic product was 214 percent when Abe became prime minister—by far the highest ratio among the world's developed economies, and about twice that of the United States. However, less than 10 percent of Japan's total debt is owed to foreign entities, while about one-third of U.S. debt is held by foreign creditors (mainly China, and to a lesser extent Japan). Abe's fiscal policy has raised the already-high ratio of government debt-to-GDP to 224 percent to stimulate demand and offset the chronic deflation plaguing Japan's economy in the past two decades.

To help finance this large-scale debt, Abenomics fiscal policy includes a page from the EU's austerity playbook: an added consumption tax intended to boost government revenues by 5 percent—the only instance where Japanese and EU policies overlap.

While there are thus a few similarities between Japan's current path and the efforts of the EU and the United States, the similarities are dwarfed by differences both qualitative and quantitative.

The qualitative differences were evident in a recent meeting between a visiting foreign economist and spokespersons of the cabinet secretariat, the Bank of Japan, and the Ministry of Finance. The meeting opened with an explicit statement that the

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new policies are intended to be "pro-business as well as pro-growth"—an eminently reasonable approach in an economy whose private sector accounts for approximately 80 percent of GDP. In the profusion of economic policy debates in the United States and EU, such a clear and sensible declaration of intent is rarely, if ever, encountered.

The content and intent of Abenomics's third arrow displays the sharpest differences from both the U.S. and EU precedents. While acknowledging the central role of Japan's world-class brands in such industries as automobiles, electronics, earth-moving equipment, and robotics, the third arrow aims at a more open, competitive Japanese economy: allowing freedom of entry for start-ups, welcoming and nurturing a more aggressive venture-capital industry, and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation. The relative scarcity of these qualities in Japan's economy is acknowledged by the spokespersons, and evidenced by the tenfold difference between annual new start-ups in the United States and Japan (though U.S. GDP is only about three times that of Japan).

Although Abe proposes legislation, funding, and regulatory action to advance these aims, a gap exists between means and ends. That said, the third arrow represents a striking contrast between the path Japan is taking, and that followed in the United States and EU. One token of intent is Abenomics's proposed 10-point reduction in Japan's corporate tax rate, currently the highest among the advanced economies. The U.S. corporate rate (35 percent) would then have that distinction, while Japan's rate would drop to 28 percent—incidentally, China's is 25 percent.

Although the three arrows are the core of Abenomics, there is another dimension that, while formally unrelated, may indirectly affect it. This dimension is Abe's declared aim of making Japan's military establishment "more normal"—that is, similar to the military establishments of other countries—by relaxing the unique restrictions imposed on Japan's self-defense forces by Article 5 of its constitution. Whether and how this issue is resolved, Japan's defense budget is likely to experience a slight increase. In past years, the defense budget has hovered slightly below 1 percent of GDP. Henceforth, it is likely to hover slightly above that threshold. This increase in spending and procurement will, of course, be only a small part of the fiscal stimulus embodied in the second arrow of Abenomics. As the increase occurs, however, Japan will be unique among America's major allies in increasing its defense budget, although as a share of GDP the Japanese figure will still be relatively low.

What are the chances that Abe's efforts will succeed in reviving Japan's economy from its torpor? In many ways, the obstacles facing Japan are even greater than those faced by the United States and EU. Japan's zero-growth stagnation has lasted much longer (since 1990) than the subprime crisis afflicting the United States and EU, to which Japan was much less exposed. Japan's protracted stagnation spawned chronic deflation, thereby imposing unique disincentives to consume or invest: When future prices are expected to decline, current spending tends to be postponed.

Japan's revival is further impeded by acutely unfavorable demographics: a declining and aging population, and a rising dependency ratio of the elderly relative to the working-age labor force. Mitigating these conditions will require measures beyond Abenomics. Japan's difficulties have been aggravated by the tsunami and nuclear disasters of 2011. And the ability of Japan's world-class companies to uplift and drive the economy has been eroded by aggressive competitors in the United States, Korea, Germany, and China.

Yet Japan also has significant advantages in responding to these challenges. Abe's political position has been strengthened and secured for at least three more years by the Liberal Democratic party's dominance in both the upper and lower houses of Japan's Diet. Furthermore, his ability to implement the three-arrows program is less constrained by special interests, lobbies, and labor (company unions are prevalent in Japan, rather than the national trade unions of the West). While business leaders profess strong support for Abenomics—especially some of its tax and structural reforms—their plans eschew any reliance on government subsidies or bailouts. The Nikkei's rise of 32 percent since Abe became prime minister in December is a bellwether of Japan's collective expectations about the economy.

If and as these expectations become reality—including evidence of military "normalcy"—Japan's prominence in the global arena will be enhanced. The sun that has been setting may rise again. Still, a realistically optimistic assessment of the chance of success is likely to hover slightly above fifty-fifty. ♦

Child's Play

The fairy-tale world of Model United Nations

By James Kirchick

Imagine a world in which the "international community" provides universal education for all girls. Or where countries that deploy children as soldiers cease to do so as a result of moral suasion. Or where the global scourge of malaria is stopped with the passing of a unanimous resolution. Indeed, where there is no problem or crisis, no matter how seemingly intractable, that cannot be solved over the course of a lively weekend in a hotel ballroom. Welcome to the world of Model United Nations.

From the age of 14 to 18, I was an enthusiastic member of my high school's Model United Nations (MUN) team. A lackluster athlete, I applied myself to MUN with the passion that most of my peers devoted to sports, rising to vice president by the time I was a senior. During that period, I attended at least three national conferences every year and devoted countless hours to the club. There was little I looked forward to more than an upcoming Model U.N. conference, a feeling shared by thousands of high school students across the country.

According to the United Nations, student simulations of international diplomacy began even before the world body itself was founded at the 1945 San Francisco Conference. Indeed, American high schools were mimicking the League of Nations, the U.N.'s doomed predecessor, in the 1920s. But it wasn't until the 1950s that MUN clubs—informally sponsored by the United Nations Association of the United States, a nonprofit group devoted to evangelizing Americans in the virtues of the U.N.—became widespread. What's more, Model U.N. isn't just an extracurricular activity for teenagers; it is a veritable "movement," worldwide in scope, like those calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons or protection of the whales. Though decentralized, it propounds an ideology that has shaped the worldviews of the millions who have taken part over the past half-century.

Today, most MUN conferences in the United States are organized by university undergraduates, who play the roles of U.N. officials, while the gatherings' intended beneficiaries—high school students—adopt the parts of delegates from the U.N.'s 193 member states. More than 90,000 high school and college students participate in over 100 American MUN conferences every year. Globally, the U.N. reports that 400,000 students take part annually in some 400 MUN conferences in 35 countries. Conferences run the gamut from AMUN, the Arkansas Model United Nations, hosted by the University of Central Arkansas, to ZABMUN, held at Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology in Karachi.

On the surface, it's hard to quarrel with earnest high school kids' convening for weekends of geopolitical role-playing. Much like the institution whose bureaucracy it aims to simulate, MUN appears at worst harmless. "Our goal is about how the world could be if everyone got along, had fun, and used their imagination," a student can be heard saying from the dais of a Montessori MUN Conference, in a video posted on the conference's homepage. Where's the danger in teaching teenagers regard for multilateralism, peace, and humanitarianism, the stated values of the U.N. Charter? In addition to the worthy ideals MUN is intended to impart, advocates say, MUN informs students about the structure and functions of international organizations and helps them develop skills like debating, public speaking, and negotiation.

If MUN were actually a straightforward simulation of the world body—warts and all—there would be no reasonable objection to the program. Yet Model U.N.'s do-gooder ideology obscures the real U.N.'s institutional limitations. By 12th grade, students ought to be capable of grasping that, while the General Assembly looks like a legislature, only some of its members practice the rule of law, much less hold free elections. Like the U.N. itself, which preaches democracy and self-determination while giving free rein to regimes that respect neither, MUN never asks its participants to wrestle with the contradiction that is a world body devoted to law, peace, and international comity made up of members representing the full spectrum from democracy to tyranny, only some of which actually feel bound by treaties they sign.

An accurate portrayal of the U.N. would demonstrate to young adults that, despite the occasionally valuable humanitarian work carried out by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a handful of other specialized

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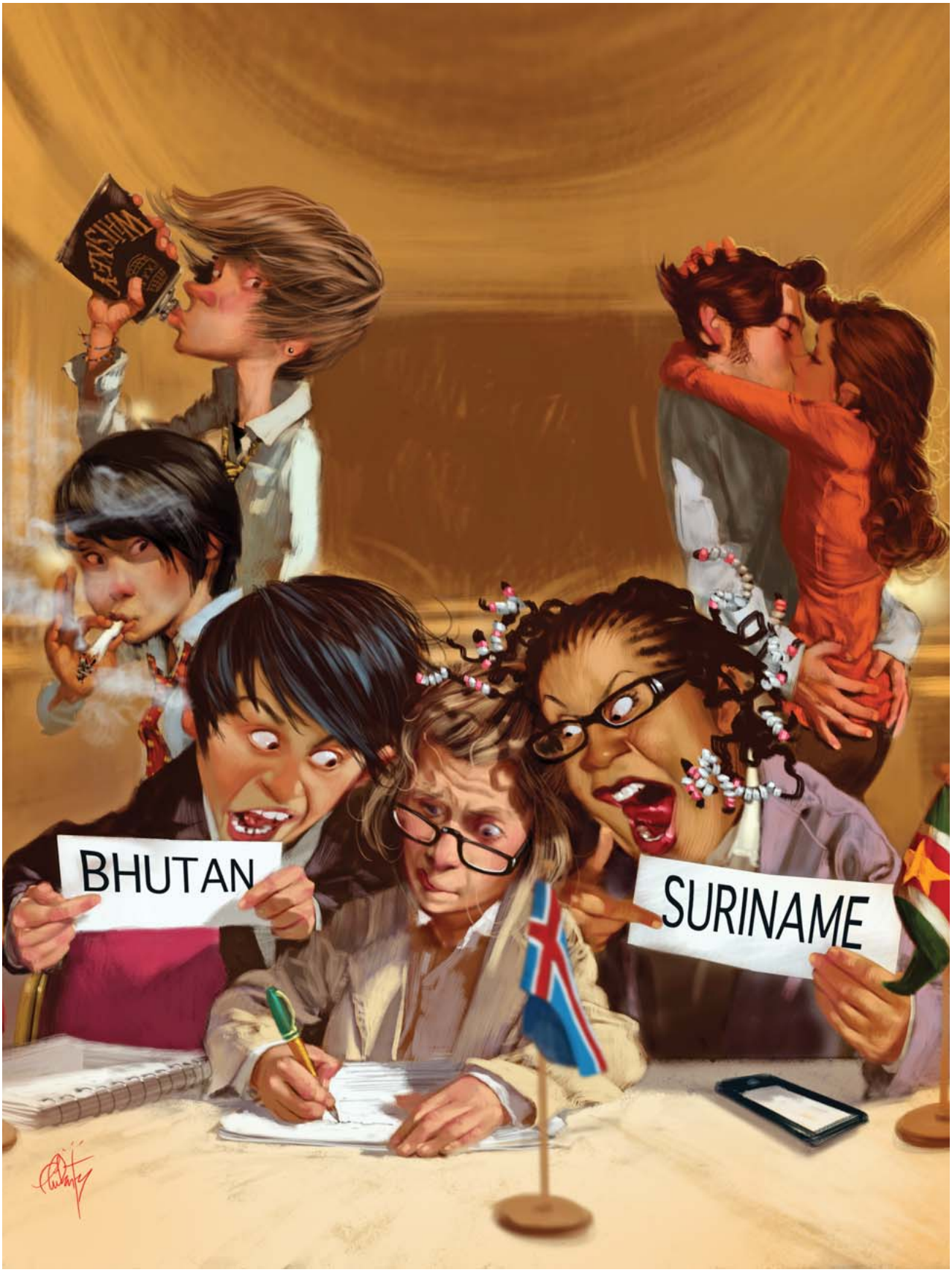

THOMAS FLUHARTY

bodies, the organization has a history of massive corruption, bureaucratic incompetence, and highfalutin gasbaggery. An accurate portrayal would not conceal the U.N.'s spectacular failures. Rather, it would teach students that it was former secretary general Kofi Annan who, as director of U.N. Peacekeeping, reportedly advised against the use of force to prevent the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It would inform students about the graft surrounding the oil-for-food program in Iraq; the theft of half a million dollars by a U.N. official, who used the proceeds to buy (among other things) first-class plane tickets to Las Vegas; and the sexual abuse of children entrusted to the care of U.N. peacekeepers on several continents. The simulated Human Rights Council—whose real-life members include the likes of Pakistan and Venezuela—would be exposed for the Orwellian joke that it is. An accurate Model U.N., in other words, would display the more numerous failures in addition to the meager successes.

Far from instilling an accurate understanding of the world body as it is, however, Model United Nations elevates the global debating club to a religion. It indoctrinates impressionable teenagers in the alleged merits of world government. It stigmatizes arguments in defense of America's freedom of action. ("No one cared about sovereignty," a high school friend recalls from his MUN experiences. "No one could spell sovereignty.") And for six decades, it has induced generations of Americans to view the United Nations as more than just a forum for discussion—as an unmitigated good.

To discover how the jargon, triteness, and impracticality of U.N. hyperbole take hold of young minds, I had to look no further than my own high school position papers. 'Throughout history, the African continent has had its share of violent conflict,' read one opening sentence.

A delegate's first step in preparing for any MUN conference is to draft his country's position paper. Every participating high school is assigned at least one country to represent, in a process generating furious competition. Typically, big, well-established schools receive the countries they request, invariably major powers, starting with the United States, Russia, and China, while newcomers and lesser schools get Slovenia and Gabon. After the countries have been doled out, students are placed on committees, ranging from the Security Council (most desirable, as the only U.N. body with any power) to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee, always an unwieldy monster as it boasts the most members and the most banal subjects ("Recognizing the Humanitarian Need for Clean Water," "Social and Cultural Rights of Refugees and Displaced People," and so on). The position paper is meant to state briefly the country's stand on issues before the committee. Once the conference convenes, delegates cooperate in small groups to draft mock resolutions to solve the problems of the world.

To discover how the jargon, triteness, and impracticality of U.N. hyperbole take hold of young minds, I had to look no further than my own high school position papers. "Throughout history, the African continent has had its share of violent conflict," read one opening sentence. "Ukraine believes that biological and chemical weapons pose a serious threat to every man, woman, and child who lives on this earth," I declared in another, before explaining that these weapons "are dangerous, with wide-reaching effects." In a paper about the militarization of space, I suggested one way to stymie it would be to make countries pursuing space technology "promise to use it only for peaceful purposes."

My position paper for the Disarmament and International Security Committee about the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention optimistically declared that "all nations which have already signed the treaty must reaffirm their allegiance to it. Without honesty, no worldwide resolution can be successful." While I was adamant that nations violating the convention must face "consequences," I did not specify any. Later in the paper about unconventional weapons, I recommended that the "international community," that nonexistent entity about which high school students and world leaders alike rhapsodize, "provide humanitarian aid to countries which agree to dismantle their biological weapons arsenals. . . . Food and other living supplies would be given to states which cooperate with the United Nations, and perhaps moneys from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund." This has been tried, of course, with North Korea, and the dismal results are well known.

Indeed, evidence of the organization's fecklessness is ever new—consider the violence in Syria two years into a civil war that has taken nearly 100,000 lives, despite daily cries for restraint by U.N. bodies and officials. Yet, year after year, students flock to MUN conferences; the growing global popularity of the program is in inverse relationship to the mounting evidence of U.N. impotence. "Cambodia encourages member states to pressure these uncooperative parties into signing treaties," I wrote in an airy position

paper for the Peacekeeping Committee. "How?" asked my long-suffering civics teacher in red pen. It was a good question—the kind of question that, if asked regularly of students, might turn MUN into a forum for useful learning. Most faculty advisers, however, having already embraced the U.N. gospel, steer clear of such awkward challenges to adolescent thinking.

According to the MUN mantra, no problem is beyond the world body's reach. A 2009 *Washington Post* story about an elementary school MUN team quoted a 9-year-old who spoke about "the global effort of total elimination of racism and racial discrimination," as if racism were something the U.N. had it in its power to eliminate—and as if racism weren't the official policy of numerous member states. Yet the sentiment was not merely the naïve wish of a fourth grader. The U.N. actually has an entire bureaucracy devoted to the "Elimination of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance," which has hosted two international conferences. The United States and its allies walked out of both in protest of the egregiously anti-Semitic nature of the proceedings. Reading my own MUN position papers of a decade ago, I see the starry-eyed musings of a teenage idealist. But I was only mimicking what I read in actual U.N. resolutions.

A decade has passed since I attended my last Model U.N. conference as a student participant. So to refresh my memory, I paid a visit to a recent Ivy League Model United Nations Conference—aka ILMUNC, one of the country's premier MUN conferences, which I myself attended while in high school—organized by students at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia every year since 1984.

I arrived at the Sheraton Philadelphia City Center shortly before the opening ceremonies. As over 2,000 high school students (the boys in ill-fitting suits, the girls nearly all wearing pantyhose) swarmed about, I was reminded of the main motivation (aside from a precocious interest in world affairs) for most kids' participation in Model U.N.: It's a great way to spend a long weekend. Essentially a four-day slumber party with your friends in a major city hundreds of miles from home, MUN gives you a school-sponsored opportunity to crash at a swanky hotel, mingle with members of the opposite sex (ILMUNC even set up its own rose-gram system for amorous delegates), and eat out three times a day, all with minimal adult supervision. And don't forget the Delegate Dance on Saturday night, a staple of every MUN conference. Even in their monkey business—passing silly notes to one another, slinking off at night to drink alcohol, and generally behaving as teenagers—the Model U.N.ers faithfully mimic the grown-up version. They unwittingly resemble the international diplomatic corps and high-priced hangers-on who descend upon Manhattan to carouse at overpriced restaurants, splurge on 5th Avenue, and neglect to pay parking tickets. Late in my weekend at ILMUNC, I encountered a bleary-eyed teacher who had sat awake in the hallway outside her students' rooms until 2 A.M. "If they're going to do anything bad, they're going to have to leave their room to do it," she muttered.

What could possibly possess the collegians running the conferences to undertake months of onerous preparation in order to spend a weekend overseeing a bunch of rowdy, overambitious, acne-afflicted high school students? Their motivation became clearer after I visited the conference "control room," the nerve center of ILMUNC operations, where various under secretaries general and deputy secretaries general noshed on potato chips and Red Bull. "My last conference, I just BS'd it," one Penn student confessed to a younger colleague. "NAIMUN sucks so badly," said another, referring to the North American International Model United Nations, a rival intercollegiate conference hosted by Georgetown University undergraduates.

As I partook of the free food, Penn students buzzed in and out, communicating on Secret Service-style earpiece walkie-talkies. Over the course of the weekend, I would watch these collegiate Tracy Flicks officiously roam the hallways enforcing curfew. And in committee meetings, I would see them bang their gavels above the din as they doled out speaking slots. In the mold of the U.N. bureaucrats they're impersonating, many of the college students who run MUN do it for the power trip. Of course, ego inflation and carnality are not mutually exclusive. The guidebook for the ILMUNC Secretariat lists reasons not to consume alcohol during the conference. Reason #9 is, "Because you don't want to hook up with a [sic] high schoolers at the conference. Right? *Right*?" Reason #1 is a joke that, in my experience, is uttered in some form at every MUN conference: "Because any pickup line involving Djibouti is totally unacceptable, drunk or not."

The opening ceremony about to begin, I ventured into the hotel's massive main ballroom. The delegates and their faculty advisers were assembled in row after long row of chairs, the Secretariat, made up of Penn students, facing them from behind a long desk on the dais. The whole set-up had the feel of a Chinese Communist party congress. Flipping through the glossy delegate guide, featuring Philadelphia restaurants alongside the conference schedule, I came across a full-page advertisement for a "Model U.N. Summer Program" run by Julian Krinsky Camps & Programs, long a popular organizer of tennis and golf camps. Lately, Krinsky has started running "leadership" programs ("great for building your

résumé") for upper-middle-class high school students frantic about getting into the college of their choice. For the most go-getting, Model U.N. is an excellent résumé builder, demonstrating interest in world affairs and extracurricular achievement, not to mention the opportunity to win awards, in the form of honorary gavels dispensed by committee chairmen at the end of the conference.

Another person hoping to profit off these ambitions is Ryan Villanueva, a recent Yale graduate who left his lucrative job with Goldman Sachs in 2010 to start "Best Delegate," described on its website as "an education company that helps students and teachers worldwide succeed at Model United Nations and beyond." Best Delegate runs seminars, summer camps, and other "institutional services" for high schools hoping to win more prizes on the Model U.N. circuit. To help schools and students achieve this, Best Delegate offers private Model U.N. classes for groups or individuals, on everything from the rules of procedure to "How to Win Awards." And if the tuition is prohibitive, the book *How to Win Awards in Model United Nations* can be purchased for just $19.99.

The sort of student whose parents will pay money to increase his chances of winning an award in Model U.N. doesn't just spend an inordinate amount of time preparing for each conference; he obsesses. In my day, one high school notorious for its cutthroat MUN team would provide each of its delegates a binder featuring the name and official seal of his country. And there were always a few delegates fitted out with formal stationery, entire pads headed "A Message from the Permanent Representative of St. Kitts and Nevis to the United Nations" (below which would inevitably be written, in chicken scratch handwriting, some insight such as "Pakistan is being such a douchebag"). Especially patriotic delegates sported flag pins.

Shortly after gaveling the opening ceremony to order, a member of the Secretariat reminded the delegates that they were to be dressed in "Western business attire" throughout the weekend. The decree was a rare departure from political correctness; such colonialist dress codes, after all, do not apply at the U.N. itself, where one expects to see Africans in dashikis and Iranian delegates sans ties. Delivering the keynote address was Peter Yeo, a vice president of the United Nations Foundation, a nongovernmental organization founded with a grant from Ted Turner that advocates for greater American deference to the U.N. "For the next four days," Yeo intoned, "you are real diplomats, dealing with real problems, coming up with real solutions." The U.N., he said, is "promoting America's national interest." Lest there be any doubt about the political agenda he was trying to convey, Yeo boasted that, under the Clinton administration, in which he had served as a deputy assistant secretary of state, the United States paid its U.N. dues "in full and without conditions," whereas by the end of the Bush administration, Washington was again in arrears. Fortunately, under President Obama, America has fully paid its debts, a statement that earned massive applause. At the end of his speech, Yeo received a standing ovation, and the secretary general presented him with an ILMUNC T-shirt.

The secretary general banged the gavel marking the official start to the conference. The students giddily dispersed throughout the Sheraton, where every conference room and banquet hall had been commandeered by a U.N. agency. I chose to attend the Disarmament and International Security Committee, or DISEC in MUN shorthand, the very first committee I ever served on as a freshman delegate to the Rutgers Model United Nations way back in 1998.

'Decorum!' the committee chair shouted over the chattering mass, banging her gavel on a conference table draped in pleated ballroom tablecloth. This is the favorite command of the MUN conference chairman and the word by which authority is exerted over the delegates.

About 150 students filled the room. The first order of business was the roll call, a process briefly rescued from its tediousness when the delegate from Niger, a French exchange student, interjected a "point of order" to insist that the chair pronounce the name of the former French colony correctly (it's *Nee-jayr*, not *Nigh-jer*). Following the roll, the delegates had to decide which of two topics the committee would discuss first, the illicit arms trade or nuclear-free zones. That these subjects were almost identical to the ones I debated 10 years ago—and a brief perusal of the ILMUNC delegate guide revealed the same about practically all the topics—is a small but telling indication of U.N. futility.

"Decorum!" the committee chair shouted over the chattering mass, banging her gavel on a conference table draped in pleated ballroom tablecloth. This is the favorite command of the MUN conference chairman and the word by which authority is exerted over the delegates. When the chair asked which countries would like to speak, nearly every hand shot up, each holding a placard bearing the name of a U.N. member state. The chair surveyed the floor and started reading off countries, while one of her vice chairmen frantically wrote them down on a dry erase board.

What followed was a series of 30-second speeches in which each delegate explained why one or the other of the topics was more pressing for the "international community" while also bearing some relation to his own country's national interest. Determining the national interest of one's country, however, was a highly subjective endeavor, reflecting the delegate's personal preferences rather than any informed assessment of real-world policies, allegiances, and so on. After the delegate from Lebanon expressed support for discussing the illicit arms trade as opposed to nuclear-free zones, the representative from Finland rose to speak, and, pointing his finger at his Lebanese counterpart, declared, "How can a person in the Middle East even sleep at night knowing they may be the victim of a nuclear attack?"

Bored, I took the elevator to the top floor, where the conference was hosting a wine and cheese reception for faculty advisers. Many knew each other from the Model U.N. circuit, and the grizzled veterans traded war stories. A recent Brown University MUN, one teacher told me, had featured a Security Council simulation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. "When Sunday came around, they had nuked each other," he chuckled. A youngish math teacher at the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies admitted that some of his students joined the club to buff their "transcripts for college." Others, however, "love the work. They want to make the world a better place. They actually have aspirations of being delegates to the U.N." I asked him if he thought Model U.N. offered students a reasonable picture of international relations. He admitted that it's "unrealistic that they pass all these resolutions," and recalled an "inexperienced Italian delegate who didn't realize she was part of NATO." He also noticed that some delegates, "newbies" primarily, "don't adhere" to their country's stated policies. All in all, though, he thought MUN a positive endeavor. "It's a learning experience."

Other advisers were more skeptical. I met one, a recent Ivy League graduate teaching at a tony New England private school, for a drink at the Sheraton bar. "Most of the kids do it to get into college," he explained, telling me that he had just come from a committee room where he'd watched one of his students doodling a cat. The previous year, his school had had the honor of representing Kazakhstan, and the students, predictably, "wanted to be Borat." (Cultural stereotyping is a regular occurrence at Model U.N.; a high school friend interviewed for this piece recalled how, representing Greece before the International Atomic Energy Agency, he and his partner had donned hotel bed sheets as togas and produced a Top 10 list of Greek achievements that included "Chest hair is the best hair," "Michael Dukakis," and "Stamos!") While my private school interlocutor conceded that the "conferences are like circuses," he insisted there is an upside, which is that "the kids are learning about modern history." Current events, maybe. But he conceded it lends itself to simplistic solutions. "I believe we solved malaria in four hours," he said of a recent MUN experience. "We sent out nets and antibiotics."

The next morning, I paid a visit to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), typically the largest at any Model U.N. By this time, the delegates were already writing resolutions. Competing groups draft formulaic documents offering solutions to the problems at hand and, through a process of diplomatic horse-trading and adolescent spitefulness, attempt to win the support of their fellow delegates. One high school friend recalled trying to form a "Bloc of the Attractive" to lure in wayward countries. "Sure, you could get resolutions drafted if you were smart and knew what you were talking about," he wrote me. "Or you could get a couple of hot girls to help draw attention to your cause/resolution/alliance." Whatever tactics they employ, delegates must follow official U.N. format and lingo. So, for instance, a group of nations "affirming"—or, better yet, "solemnly affirming"—the existence of water scarcity may be "fully alarmed" at the extent of the crisis and, "having examined" the issue, "deplore" its prevalence and "reaffirm" the committee's commitment to preventing such shortages in the future.

Often, the coalitions formed in support of resolutions bear little resemblance to actual geopolitical alliances. At ILMUNC, for instance, the delegates to SOCHUM were dealing with the grammatically challenged problem of "Poverty Reduction in Women." A motley crew including Italy, Kuwait, and Ethiopia put forth a resolution that encouraged "women to occupy positions of political power," a nice sentiment. The resolution called for the creation of "U.N.-supported community all-in-one centers" (paid for by?) that would teach women "skills . . . not limited to embroidery, basket-weaving, carpet weaving, handicraft painting, processing raw materials into commercial goods." These centers would also provide "sexual education" and "family planning." Somehow, this resolution was sponsored by Sudan, Armenia, the Palestinian Authority, North Korea, and, what the hell, South Korea.

"People don't act as their countries," a sophomore from a New York-area high school representing China complained to me during a break in his committee, UNICEF. They were discussing the plight of child soldiers, he said, and all of the countries on the committee rose up to decry it, in spite of the fact that "in real life half of these countries use kids in war." The willingness to ignore a nation's actual record, of course, could be seen as a taste of reality, a

dose of the disingenuousness of the U.N. enterprise itself. At the actual U.N, insincerity is king, and nations frequently denounce the very abuses they regularly perpetrate. Sitting in the back row of a small conference room hosting UNICEF, I listened as the delegate from the Russian Federation thundered on about how "the United States is one of two countries that have not signed the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child," a pleasant-sounding document that must be pointless considering all of the authoritarian, child soldier-employing, basket-case regimes that *have* signed it. In a moment of perhaps unintended honesty, the delegate representing the United States channeled Obama administration thinking when he responded, "We are a very bureaucratic government and it's taking a long time, but we do want to ratify it."

Concerned that the high drama of global politics is not sufficient to capture the interest of high schoolers, some MUN clubs are resorting to a desperate tactic: using scenarios based not on world events but on pop culture entertainment. A recent article in the *New York Times* discussed the prevalence of "crisis committees," fanciful simulations where students represent, say, gangsters in a Prohibition mafia war or characters from Harry Potter. While crisis or "historical" committees existed in my MUN salad days (I fondly recall representing the Soviet Union during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus), they usually dealt with actual events in which the U.N. played some role, not popular television series or films. The *Times* put a positive gloss on the phenomenon, attributing the shift in focus to the perception that "governments are no longer the only ones shaping the global order, while social-media tools provide individuals with wider platforms from which to mobilize." Another possibility is that a growing historical amnesia and mosquito-like attention spans are at fault.

Even in my day, the seeming intractability of the world's problems was no obstacle to their resolution at Model U.N. Rather than expose students to the rude fact that some challenges are, at best, slowly ameliorated, MUN has always encouraged fantasy remedies. I recall a delegate to UNICEF stating that "local celebrities," and "not just Brad Pitt and Angelina" (the latter of whom is an official U.N. goodwill ambassador), should hold seminars in villages teaching the rural poor about water purification. Another delegate, asked how some vast new program should be funded, replied that "in undeveloped countries where money is extremely scarce, morality is enough to provide incentives."

Another tried and true solution for any Model U.N. delegate is simply to call for the establishment of a new agency, committee, or working group to "address" a problem. A resolution I picked up from the Commission on Sustainable Development, for instance, opened with the nonsensical clause "Aware that the parameter of human activity is nature's capacity," before calling for the establishment of a "panel of experts" to "mediate between conflicting countries and regions as they assess, adjust, and improve their water practices." And if all else fails, a delegate can always insert the word "microfinance" into a position paper, speech, or resolution. This system of small-scale, low-interest loans pioneered in Bangladesh in the 1980s is the sacrosanct panacea of Model U.N.ers worldwide, regardless of its suitability. Want to forge ethnic harmony in the Balkans? Microfinance! End the dispute over the Falkland Islands? Microfinance! Finally achieve that two-state solution? Microfinance!

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As easy as it is to mock the students' silly solutions, it would be wrong to blame them. I did occasionally hear well-reasoned arguments; for instance, the delegate from Bulgaria professed skepticism of his colleagues' attempt to curb the illicit small-arms trade by registering every gun produced on earth: "This is the *illicit* arms trade," he pointed out. "There's a reason it's illicit." Yet most of what I heard at ILMUNC and throughout my own years of Model U.N. was meaningless, hopelessly earnest, and comically overwrought verbiage. What the students can't be blamed for is that their teachers tolerate this—and that those traits reflect the U.N. itself.

"The Model U.N. phenomenon has really clouded the minds of two or more generations of young people," Charles Hill tells me. "It just gets bigger and bigger and bigger." A former executive aide to secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, Hill held senior diplomatic postings in Israel and Taiwan during a long career in the Foreign Service. He's also intimately familiar with the inner workings of the U.N., having served as a special adviser to former secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In retirement, Hill settled down at Yale University, where he serves as a diplomat-in-residence (and I was his student).

What harm does MUN do students? "It creates in their minds the idea that international affairs are easy," Hill says. "We solved the Arab-Israeli conflict last

Saturday afternoon, and why can't other people do it? It must be because they're stupid or nefarious or in the pockets of some faction or lobbyists." Model U.N., Hill says, "has given young people in America a completely distorted idea of what the United Nations is."

To illustrate, he cites a Yale senior who once visited him during office hours. This individual, who Hill stresses is "very knowledgeable and mature" and has "high prospects for a terrific job in the U.S. government," started to talk about "the U.N. sending troops somewhere." The only problem, Hill explained, is that the U.N. cannot "send" troops anywhere. "This guy had done Model U.N. since sophomore year in high school and was simply conditioned to think of something that looks like near-world governance." He had been persuaded of the supposedly all-encompassing, mollifying powers of the U.N., and was thus "misled," Hill says. "It took 20 minutes to go through how the Security Council actually works, with Chapter 7" of the U.N. Charter, the article allowing the council to authorize a member state to take military action, a far cry from the U.N. deploying its own (nonexistent) army. Hill tells me that he frequently has such encounters with MUN veterans. "They look at me stunned."

Despite its fairy-tale depiction of foreign relations, encouragement of mediocre thinking, and indoctrination of students in the gospel of world government, Model U.N. continues to grow apace, with new clubs sprouting up across the country and around the world. Greater than a mere extracurricular activity, it is a reflection of our post-national, consensus-obsessed, and credential-crazed culture. The problem with Model U.N. is not that it teaches kids about international cooperation, but that it misleads them about how the world actually works. Some students who participate in MUN grow up to see beyond its inanities and clichés, nonetheless valuing the public speaking and debating skills it helped them acquire. For me, MUN was an excellent channel for an early interest in international affairs and a nerdy habit of reading the *Economist*.

Yet as I entered college and began to see international relations in a more sophisticated light, I also recognized the false pieties of the U.N. Unfortunately, many of the students who participate in MUN become zealously committed to the United Nations, forever viewing it as the arbiter of international politics, and one whose pronouncements have greater legitimacy than the prerogatives of democratic governments. Model U.N. offers more than esoteric debates and weekend fun. It propounds a jejune and deceptively comforting worldview—instead of doing the serious work of education, which is readying the young to put away childish things. ♦

The New Old Thing

Jeffersonian populism returns

By Jay Cost

In conservative circles of late there has been an ongoing conversation about a (seemingly) new approach to governance, "libertarian populism." Timothy P. Carney, a senior columnist for the *Washington Examiner*, argues that "conservatives need to turn to the working class as the swing population that can deliver elections," and to do that he suggests a kind of populism that "mesh[es] with free-market principles." He envisions an agenda of breaking up the big banks, eliminating the payroll tax, ending corporate welfare, cleaning up the tax code, doing away with political privileges, and more.

This libertarian populism would certainly be a fresh alternative to the decades-old battle between conservatives and liberals, but it nevertheless has deep historical roots in the body politic. An understanding of its (noble) intellectual pedigree would help sharpen and amplify the approach that Carney and others are suggesting.

Andrew Jackson takes on the Hydra of centralized power.

A good jumping-off point for this investigation is Ross Douthat's July 28 *New York Times* column, in which he links libertarian populism to the political battles of 18th-century Britain, in particular the clash between the "country party" and the "court party." The country party, led by Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, was "both conservative and populist at once: they regarded [their opponents'] centralization of power as a kind of organized conspiracy, in which the realm's political, business and military interests were colluding against the common good."

Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and their Democratic-Republican party borrowed heavily from Bolingbroke in their critique of Alexander Hamilton's financial centralization, a multipronged plan to assume state war debts, charter a private bank, use the tax code to support businesses, and generally establish a sound financial base for the new country's subsequent economic growth.

What the Jeffersonians feared—and indeed what connects them to the libertarian populists—is the centralization of *political power* by the ruling class. The British "court party," they believed, had undermined the public will by using royal prerogatives to buy off members of Parliament in a quest to unite the political and economic powers-that-be. This is precisely what they dreaded Hamilton was doing, especially by facilitating the "stock jobbing" that surrounded the First Bank of the United States. In a letter to George Washington, Thomas Jefferson worried that:

> [Hamilton's system is] calculated to undermine and demolish the republic, by creating an influence of his department over the members of the legislature. I saw this influence actually produced, & its first fruits to be the establishment of the great outlines of his project by the votes of the very persons who, having swallowed his bait were laying themselves out to profit by his plans: & that had these persons withdrawn, as those interested in a question ever should, the vote of the disinterested majority was clearly the reverse of what they made it. These were no longer the votes then of the representatives of the people, but of deserters from the rights & interests of the people: & it was impossible to consider their decisions, which had nothing in view but to enrich themselves, as the measures of the fair majority.

Madison added that the nexus between private wealth and the public good would ultimately lead holders of the bank shares to become "the praetorian band of the Government, at once its tool & its tyrant; bribed by its largesses & overawing it by clamours & combinations."

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Thus a core insight for understanding libertarian populism: The growth of government, when combined with the pursuit of private financial gain, runs the risk of undermining if not destroying the country's democratic institutions. The moneyed interests whose economic dominance depends upon government rents can purchase legislators, thereby subverting the public interest and giving us what these days we call crony capitalism.

This is why Jeffersonianism was a small-government, localist movement. They feared that the centralization of power would mean inevitably that average people—in that day the yeoman farmer class—would lose out to the commercial and financial elite. Insofar as economic inequality was a concern for the Jeffersonians, it had to do with the extent to which government facilitated it.

In a pseudonymous essay written for the *National Gazette* in 1792, Madison argued that the first goal of republicanism was to establish a "political equality among all." The second was to withhold "*unnecessary* opportunities from a few, to increase the inequality of property, by an immoderate, and especially an unmerited, accumulation of riches." The subtext, at least for readers in Madison's day, was pretty clear. His beef was not with economic inequality per se, but the inequality created by Hamilton's bank, which had showered riches upon a select few.

This brand of republicanism dominated the political landscape more or less until the Civil War, being reinvigorated by the Jacksonian Democrats in the 1820s and '30s. Indeed, Martin Van Buren hoped to use the celebrity of Andrew Jackson to unite the "planters of the South and the plain republicans of the North" under the old Jeffersonian principles. That is essentially what happened, and this "Democratic party" would basically dominate the political scene until Abraham Lincoln's Republican party supplanted it.

Unfortunately, the old Jeffersonian ideas were ultimately perverted by the slaveocracy, and later the perpetrators of Jim Crow. The essence of Jeffersonianism was that true republicanism could be protected only through local institutions, where the people were closest to their leaders. But the Southern plantation elite co-opted Jefferson's "states rights" ideas to ensure white supremacy over black slaves and sharecroppers, in the face of a federal government that had finally discovered the political will to enforce the constitutional requirement that every state establish a republican form of government.

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In the 20th century, progressivism replaced Jeffersonian republicanism as the premier leftist ideology in the United States. In *The Promise of American Life*, Herbert Croly called for a détente between Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians to combat the vast concentrations of wealth in the newly industrialized America. Croly proposed merging the two into the kind of democratic nationalism trumpeted by Teddy Roosevelt: a strong central government to promote the welfare of the common man. Of course, Hamiltonian big government had, in no small part, contributed to the vast discrepancies between the haves and have-nots in Croly's day. Just as when Jefferson and Madison railed against the Bank of the United States, profit-seeking elites combined with ambitious politicians to carve up the body politic for their mutual benefit. And while today's liberals are certainly loath to admit it, that kind of practice has arguably gotten worse, only today the moneyed interests have formed alliances with both the left and the right.

Nevertheless, 20th-century progressives were effective at uniting behind pols who could sing convincingly from the Jeffersonian hymnal—Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton (all of whom, not coincidentally, came from the South or a border state)—to sell the idea that an ever-larger federal government was in the average man's best interests. In so doing, they shifted the conversation away from a debate over imbalances in power relations between the elites and the population, and toward imbalances in wealth. Average people could vote for progressive Democrats and receive new federal benefits, but at a steep price, as more and more power drifted from their communities to Washington, D.C.

For generations, meanwhile, the GOP made very little hay over this, despite its strong opposition to the centralizing designs of the progressive left. The party has political roots tracing back through Henry Clay's Whig party and ultimately to Hamilton's Federalist coalition and has generally believed in the capacity of "big government" to facilitate the economic development of the country. A fairly straight ideological line can be drawn from Hamilton to Clay to William McKinley, and later to the postwar GOP. Republicans have long decried the Democrats' use of big government to redistribute wealth but have nevertheless been ready, willing, and able to use federal power to promote economic development.

Thus, for a hundred years, Jeffersonian republicanism has essentially been dormant, motivating neither political

coalition in any meaningful way. If it were to succeed as a mass-based political ideology, the "libertarian populism" of which Carney, Douthat, and others speak would essentially constitute a Jeffersonian revival.

But is this politically practical? Would today's Republican party be an appropriate vehicle for this sort of ideology, after generations of promoting precisely the policies that libertarian populists abhor? While there are no doubt structural barriers to reshaping the GOP in this way, there can also be no doubt that, on the grassroots level, the potential is there. After all, the Republican coalition of today looks strangely similar to the old Jeffersonian/Jacksonian alliance. The elite quarters of the country increasingly support Democrats, while Van Buren's "plain republicans of the north"—in the small towns and middle-income suburbs—support Republicans. Meanwhile, the South has moved substantially from the Democratic to the Republican column, including many areas that were most staunchly populist in the 19th century. Ditto the Mountain West, which was historically quite populist and is now solidly Republican. The votes in the Republican grassroots are most certainly there, even if much of the GOP establishment remains committed to Hamiltonian big government.

McKinley, a Hamiltonian Republican

But what about building a majority coalition around this system? That is easier said than done, as Americans nowadays *expect* a certain level of Hamiltonianism from their leaders. The government, so says the public, has a responsibility to grow the economy. Furthermore, it has a responsibility to manage and even expand the social safety net. This is a big reason why the two parties have ignored Jeffersonianism for so long: Both believe it is a loser.

Nevertheless, there remains an undoubted Jeffersonian current within society that today's libertarian populists could take advantage of. People are not going to react favorably if a Republican presidential nominee starts talking about eliminating this or that federal department from the U.S. Code, but there is a growing suspicion similar to the worries of Jefferson and Madison: Many people on the left and the right suspect a sort of "praetorian band" has taken control of the government and high finance, and in so doing compromises the democratic process. We the people can elect whomever we like, but when they go to Washington, they do the bidding of the powers that be.

A practical program for libertarian populism would address this frustration, above all using the word that Jefferson and Madison used: *corruption*. When somebody serves as a senator for 30 years, then heads over to K Street to lobby his former colleagues, that is a form of corruption, and it should be identified accordingly. Exceedingly tough antilobbying laws would be an obvious place for libertarian populists to start. Similarly, taking a page from Carney's playbook, there should be more focus on government programs that average Americans have little experience with that funnel resources to the well-connected. The Export-Import Bank is perhaps the best example, but there are countless others. The peculiar form taken by modern campaign finance reform, which empowered the Lois Lerners of Washington to go after groups they dislike, should also be on the list. Tax reform should play an important role, with an emphasis on rooting out special favors and exemptions, making the code treat people similarly, without regard to their political connections. Ditto genuine party reform, wresting control of the nominating process from the donors and campaign consultants back to average people.

In other words, an effective libertarian populist agenda would begin with a focus on power relations above all else, and might punt on questions of top marginal tax rates or federal provisions for broad-based social welfare, at least at the outset. That is not to deny that taxation levels, or food stamps, or the long-term sustainability of Medicare and Social Security are not pressing public policy problems. It is simply to suggest that, by focusing on power relations, libertarian populists can best avoid being captured by the established political centers. Historically speaking, this has been the downfall of populist movements: Entrenched forces capture them and co-opt their energy to secure the status quo. If libertarian populists can find and hold fast to their Jeffersonian roots, and understand that the animating principle has first of all to do with political power, they can have a chance of avoiding that trap.

It's hard to assess the chances for such a new political force to make headway. Certainly there is growing unhappiness with the level of corruption, broadly defined, in Washington. What we can say is that the broad contours of American politics are remarkably durable. And if there is to be a successful challenge to the entrenched centralizers and progressives, it is most likely to take the shape, at least in part, of a Jeffersonian revival. ♦

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Sam Levenson, Jack Benny, George S. Kaufman, Clifton Fadiman, 1952

You Could Die Laughing

What is the humor in Jewish jokes? BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

'Two Jews, each with a parrot on his shoulder, are in front of a synagogue," Hyman Ginsburg begins to tell his friend Irv Schwartz, when the latter interrupts.

"Hy, old pal, don't you have any jokes that aren't about Jews?"

Ginsburg replies that of course he does, and begins again: "Two samurai meet on a dark night on the outskirts of Kyoto. The next day is Yom Kippur . . ."

What is it about Jews and jokes, and what, especially, is it about Jewish jokes? The most put-upon people in the history of the world, Jews, and they're telling jokes: endless jokes, ironic jokes, silly jokes; jokes about czars and commissars, rabbis and mohels, widows and wives and mothers-in-law and matchmakers; and some jokes which, if told by Gentiles, might result in strong letters from the Anti-Defamation League.

No Joke
Making Jewish Humor
by Ruth R. Wisse
Princeton, 296 pp., $24.95

What happens when a Jew with an erection runs into a wall? Answer: He breaks his nose. One of the small perks of being Jewish is having the right to tell such anti-Semitic jokes.

Walking along the beach, Goldstein finds a bottle, picks it up, and—surprise! surprise!—a genie emerges. The genie instructs Goldstein that he will grant him one wish, and one wish only. Goldstein says he wishes for world peace. The genie tells him he gets that wish a lot, but it is impossible to fulfill, so, if he doesn't mind, please try another wish.

In that case, Goldstein says, he would like more respect from his wife, who maybe would spend less time and money on shopping and prepare a decent home-cooked meal for him every once in a while and possibly make some attempt to satisfy his sexual desires. The genie pauses, then says, "Goldstein, tell me what, exactly, it is you mean by world peace."

If I change the name in that joke to O'Connor or Pilsudski or Anderson,

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Joseph Epstein, a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, *is the author, with Frederic Raphael, of* Distant Intimacy: A Friendship in the Age of the Internet.

the joke dies. Why? Because it is based on certain stereotypical assumptions about Jews: about henpecked Jewish husbands, demanding Jewish wives, and even about liberal Jewish politics. Are these stereotypes true? Only, I should say, in that they tend to be less true (or so we are given to believe) of Irishmen or Italians or Poles.

Two Gentile jokes:

A Gentile goes into a men's clothing store, where he sees an elegant suede jacket. "How much is that jacket?" he asks the clerk. When the clerk tells him $1,200, the Gentile says, "I'll take it."

At the last minute, a Gentile calls his mother to announce that, owing to pressure at work, he will be two hours late for the family Thanksgiving dinner. "Of course," his mother says, "I understand."

Put Jews in both of those situations and you have the working premise for at least 50 possible jokes. Jews are rich material for jokes because they are so idiosyncratic, so argumentative, hair-splitting, self-deprecating, hopelessly commonsensical, often neurotic, and amusingly goofy. Not all Jews are, of course, but enough of them to have kept a vast number of Jewish comedians in business for decades.

Jewish history begins on a joke, of sorts. The Jews are designated God's Chosen People—chosen, it turns out, for endless tests and nearly relentless torment. ("How odd of God to choose the Jews," wrote the English journalist William Norman Ewer, to which some unknown wag, in attempting to come up with a reason, wrote: "Because the *goyim* annoy him.") Any Jew with his wits about him must assume that God loves a joke—silly, practical, cruel—and it too often seems His favorite butt or target is the Jews.

Still, Jews themselves keep joking. Too bad we've all missed out on what must have been some terrific one-liners during the 40-year exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Ruth R. Wisse claims that "Jewish humor obviously derives from Jewish civilization, but Jews became known for their humor only starting with the Enlightenment." A professor of Yiddish and comparative literature at Harvard, Wisse argues that "Jewish humor erupts at moments of epistemological and political crisis, and intensifies when Jews need new ways of responding to pressure." In *No Joke*, she demonstrates how this works, and successfully shows that "Jews joke differently in different languages and under different political conditions."

Wisse chronicles the humor of the European ghetto and *shtetl*, Talmudic humor, the humor of converts away from Judaism, humor during the Holocaust and in the Soviet Union, humor in Israel, and, above all, humor after the emigration of Jews to North America. Her book, as she writes,

> explores Jewish humor at the point that it becomes a modern phenomenon. . . . The ensuing rifts between the religious and agnostics, elites and masses, and especially warring impulses of loyalty and restiveness within individual Jews and their communities generates the humor that is the book's subject.

Wisse retells many good jokes along the way, and makes a number of provocative connections about Jewish humor and the fate of the Jews in the modern world. A serious scholar, she is also an intellectual much engaged in contemporary political life, and she has a political point to make about Jewish humor that she only emphasizes in her final chapter.

"You can have too much even of *kreplach*," says a character in an Isaac Bashevis Singer story. Wisse wonders if, perhaps, Jews can have too much even of humor, and many perfectly formulated sentences in *No Joke* both bring to mind and explain classic Jewish jokes: "Jewish humor at its best interprets the incongruities of the Jewish condition," suggesting, for example, the joke about the meat shipment from Odessa . . .

On a laceratingly cold and relentlessly snowy morning in Moscow, Soviet citizens are lined up for five blocks awaiting a shipment of meat from Odessa. After an hour, a loudspeaker announces that the shipment is rather smaller than expected, so all Jews are asked to leave the line. An hour later, there is an announcement that the meat shipment has been further curtailed, so anyone who is not a member of the Communist party must leave the line. Two hours later, there is a further announcement that a large quantity of the meat in the shipment turns out to have been spoiled, so everyone is asked to leave the line except members of the Politburo. Three hours after that, the snow falling continuously all this time, there is an announcement that the meat shipment from Odessa has been cancelled.

"Those Jews," says one member of the Politburo to another as they shuffle off toward home, "they always have it easy."

The Soviet Union, that great and useless bump in world history, in its wretched 69 years left in its wake nothing but suffering and organized murder and a dozen or so good jokes, perhaps half of them Jewish. "Jewish experience was never as contorted as under Soviet rule," Wisse writes.

The Holocaust, which she also combs for its dark jokes, surely the ultimate gallows humor, is finally tragic beyond joking. She does bring out the terrifying one-liner, said by Jews in the midst of Hitler's slaughter: "God forbid that this war should last as long as we are able to endure it." Her gloss on this sentence reads: "I take this expression as an acme of Jewish humor and recognition of its fatal potential."

Jewish jokes elide into literature, with Sholem Aleichem certainly the most beloved, and perhaps also the greatest, of Yiddish writers. Aleichem's comedy—turned into kitsch with the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, where most people come in contact with it—is, Wisse notes, often "called 'laughter through tears,' [but] is more accurately understood as laughter through fears." The fears were those of a people arbitrarily awarded pariah status, living under Russian and Polish despots and among brutish peasants.

In *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), powerless Eastern European Jews were accused of plotting to take over the world through their (nonexistent) international connections, they were libeled about using the blood of Gentile children to make matzos, and they met with murderous pogroms staged by Cossacks and drunken peasants—sometimes as official government

policy. One of the reasons so many Eastern-European Jewish families are unable to trace their lineage far back is that so many of the memories of their forefathers were thought best forgotten.

Wisse explains scholarly rabbinical and Talmudic jokes. She sets out a nice array of comic curses used by Eastern-European Jewish women: "May you grow so rich that your widow's second husband never has to work for a living," is one example. "May you lose all your teeth but the one that torments you" is another. Wisse's own mother, an emigré from Romania, was a dab hand at curses and at twisting proverbs into cynical yet sound advice, and Wisse supplies samples of her work in this line. Wisse suggests that Jewish women, provided less education than men, "developed more freewheeling oral aggression."

In America, meanwhile, with Jews settling into affluence, Jewish wives have been the target of enough jokes to warrant establishing a special branch of the Anti-Defamation League. What does a Jewish wife make for dinner? Answer: Reservations. "A thief stole my wife's purse with all her credit cards," Rodney Dangerfield (born Jacob Rodney Cohen) used to remark, "but I'm not going after him. He's spending less than she does." What does a French wife say when making love? "*Oui*, *oui*, *oui*!" What does an Italian wife say? "*Mamma mia*, *mamma mia*!" What does a Jewish wife say? "Harry, isn't it time we had the ceiling painted?"

One could go on, and I think I shall. Ira Silverberg, walking up the stairs of a nearby bordello, discovers his father coming down the stairs, and, in dismay, asks him what he is doing there. "For three dollars," his father says, "why should I bother your mother?"

Jewish humor in America became professionalized. From the 1920s through the 1970s, stand-up, radio, and television comedians were preponderantly Jewish. Wisse estimates that, by 1975, three-quarters of professional comedians in the United States were Jewish, many of them using mainly Jewish material. She recounts the rise of the Jewish stand-up comic from his origins in the Borscht Belt, as the conglomeration of resort hotels in the Catskill Mountains was called, where such young comics as Milton Berle, Jerry Lewis, Red Buttons, Mel Brooks, and Lenny Bruce worked as waiters, busboys, and lifeguards during the day, and entertained at night.

Initially, these Jewish comedians specialized in recounting Jewish failings to a largely Jewish audience. But some of the more successful Jewish comedians did not mine Jewish material. One thinks here of Danny Kaye (David Daniel Kaminsky), Sid Caesar (Isaac Sidney Caesar), and Jack Benny (Benjamin Kubelsky), none of whom featured his Jewishness, thus increasing the size of his audience.

Jack Benny, perhaps the most beloved comedian of them all, was, on his radio show and in life, married to Mary Livingstone, a non-Jew. At the center of Benny's act was his miserliness. ("Your money or your life," a robber demands of him. After a lengthy pause, Benny replies, "I'm thinking.") But so un-Jewish did Jack Benny come off that no one, so far as I know, thought, anti-Semitically, to chalk his extreme parsimony up to his Jewishness.

As the years passed, and Jews began to feel more secure in America, many Jewish comedians became more aggressive. Don Rickles and Jack E. Leonard did insult comedy, attacking their own audiences. Some went after other ethnic groups. One night in San Francisco I heard a second-line, obviously Jewish comedian named Bobby Slayton—why did so many Jewish comics call themselves Bobby or Jackie?—say that in high school he took Spanish as his required language: "I figured the Puerto Ricans can learn it, how tough could it be?" Toward the close of his brief career, its brevity induced by an overdose of drugs, Lenny Bruce used to ask that the lights be turned off in the clubs where he worked, after which he announced to the audience, "I'm pissing on you."

Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) is a work that Bruce, had he the literary skill, might have written himself. Wisse characterizes Roth's novel as the literary equivalent of stand-up humor: Like even the most superior stand-up, it does not have to be heard—or, in this instance, read—more than once. In its day, though, *Portnoy's Complaint* came with a shock value not since repeated. Most shocked of all were the Jews who were not of Roth's generation: The great scholar Gershom Scholem wrote that anti-Semites could not have done the Jews greater harm than Roth's novel. "*Portnoy's Complaint*," Wisse writes, "warns that the cure, laughter, may be worse than the disease. A strategy for survival may have become a recipe for defeat."

Roth is only one among the comic Jewish writers considered here. Wisse also discusses Sholem Aleichem, Israel Zangwill, Leo Rosten, S.Y. Agnon, Isaac Babel, Saul Bellow, and Howard Jacobson. She also takes up Israeli humor. Life in Israel, a country in perennial peril, might seem too serious to allot a place for humor. But the unfunny Israeli, Wisse reports, himself became a target for humor. The confident Zionist became another such target. Humor in Israel, there is—but it has a dark cast, with jokes playing off the Auschwitz generation and Arab bombings. "Political and social satire, censored or self-censored while Jews lived under hostile regimes," she writes, "acquired a thousand new targets once Jews began running a country of their own."

Wisse touches on Mel Brooks's musical *The Producers* in her chapter on Holocaust humor, but neglects to mention that Brooks's specialty as a comedian has always been bad taste in its Jewish variant (though Brooks's specialty has been to make bad taste amusing, even winning). Interviewed some years ago by Mike Wallace, Brooks averted Wallace's first earnest question by asking him what he had paid for his wristwatch. Before Wallace could formulate his second question, Brooks, feeling the lapel of Wallace's sports jacket, asked him how much such a jacket cost.

Larry David has taken Jewish bad taste a step further, playing on his television series *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-11) the Jewish boor, the small-advantage man with a flawless gift for always saying the wrong thing.

Of the current generation of Jewish comedians, the only one Wisse considers is Sarah Silverman. Silverman's act

is to play the faux-naïf while attacking political correctness. In one of her bits, a niece tells Silverman that she learned in school that, during the Holocaust, 60 million Jews were killed. Silverman corrects the girl, saying that the true number is not 60 but 6 million—adding, "60 million [would be] unforgivable."

Much of Jewish humor in America over the past few decades has been about assimilation. With the increase of intermarriage among Jews and Gentiles, and the lessening of overt anti-Semitism, the fear among Jews who value both their religion and their ethnicity is that Jewishness and Judaism are in danger of dwindling and, ultimately, disappearing.

One such assimilation joke is about the rabbi who has mice in his synagogue; to rid himself of them, he sets out on the *bima*, or altar, a large wheel of Chilton cheese. "Nearly 80 mice appeared," the rabbi reports, "so I bar mitzvahed them all, and they never returned." (The joke here is about American Jewish children who never return to the synagogue once they have completed their bar mitzvah at age 13.)

Another such joke is about a nouveau riche Jew who has recently acquired a Porsche. He drives it to the home of a nearby Orthodox rabbi, who he asks to say a *brocha*, or blessing, over it. The rabbi refuses, because he doesn't know what a Porsche is. So the man takes his car to a Reform rabbi, who also refuses—because he doesn't know what a *brocha* is.

Is all this—is Jewish humor generally—good for the Jews? Wisse is not so sure. She begins her final chapter with an epigraph from the English comic novelist Howard Jacobson: "This is not the place to examine why I, a Jew, feel more threatened by those who would wipe out ethnic jokes than by those who unthinkingly make them. But it may be the place simply to record that I do." Although scarcely without humor herself—she tells too many good jokes here ever to be accused of that—Wisse nonetheless finds that the general recourse on the part of Jews to humor in the face of serious adversity may be overdone.

Humor was no help to German writers and artists when up against Hitler. Wisse is confident that there are limitations to the Jewish response of humor when Jews today face murderous, humorless terrorists in the Middle East or the cowardly politicians of Europe seeking the votes of their increasingly Muslim electorates. She isn't asking Jews to stop joking; yet, more than humor, she knows, is required to fend off the strong anti-Semitic fervor that finds its initial target in Israel.

> If Jews truly consider humor to have restorative powers, they ought to encourage others to laugh at themselves as well. Let Muslims take up joking about Muhammad, Arabs satirize jihad, British elites mock their glib liberalism, and anti-Semites spoof their politics of blame.

Wisse is undoubtedly correct about this. But it is less than certain that any argument, no matter how cogent, is likely to squelch, or even reduce, the habit of Jewish joke-telling. The jokiness of Jews as a people is imperishable—a reflex of millennial duration—and can be found in odd places. To cite a personal example: Not long before reading *No Joke*, I learned that the solemn and serious Rabbi Benjamin Birnbaum of Ner Tamid Synagogue in Chicago, the man under whom I was bar mitzvahed, was the brother of the comedian George Burns.

What the Jews in a hostile world must do, Wisse argues, is back up the jokes with military and political power. To ring a slight change on the line of the heroes in the old Westerns and detective movies, they have to have behind them the might to be able to tell their enemies, "Smile when you hear me say that." ♦

B&A

Roger's Neighborhood

The world according to the Fox News maestro.

BY PETER WEHNER

Earlier this summer, Roger Ailes, president of the Fox News Channel, was honored by the Bradley Foundation. Ailes's speech, delivered to a right-leaning audience at the Kennedy Center, was rollicking and well received, filled with red meat and barbed humor, and proudly pro-American. Liberals didn't like it. And Ailes didn't care.

Roger Ailes
Off Camera
by Zev Chafets
Sentinel, 272 pp., $26.95

None of this will come as a surprise to anyone who reads Zev Chafets's engaging and sympathetic biography. When Roger Ailes was in second grade, he was hit by a car, his legs were badly injured—and his father took him out to a track and told him to start running. So a certain toughness was ingrained in Ailes at an early age: He is caustic, profane, and unafraid of controversy and conflict. He seems to relish it, in fact. As a kid, Ailes liked to get into fights, and he's been fighting one way or another ever since.

According to many on the left, Roger Ailes is the personification of evil, "the pallid, smirking, ultra-rich white guy who sits atop the unrepentant lie factory that is Fox News," in the words of the left-wing website *Gawker*. And yet, according to Chafets, Ailes is a far more complicated, multidimensional figure than most of the world—and perhaps even Ailes himself—would like to admit. He has been liked and admired by people who could easily have grievances against him, including his ex-wife (the former Marjorie White), journalists who were fired by Ailes (Jim Cramer), political consul-

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tants he has squared off against (Bob Squier), and cable news competitors (Rick Kaplan). Ailes is a good friend of Barbara Walters, and MSNBC's Rachel Maddow finds him charming and friendly. He is held in high regard by Jesse Jackson and the Kennedy family.

Douglas Kennedy, the youngest son of Robert Kennedy who was hired by Ailes at Fox, describes Ailes as an avuncular benefactor: "Roger always wants people to think he is worse than he is," Kennedy tells Chafets. "He hates admitting that he's softhearted." Chafets himself says that, in his conversations with the man, Ailes usually explains his motivations and behavior in the most cynical way. But underneath the cynical veneer is a fierce personal code of ethics, at the center of which is loyalty. Ailes is loyal to others and he expects it in return. "Ours is a perfidious business," CNN's Chris Cuomo tells Chafets, "but Roger stands up for his people."

"Roger thinks long and hard about hiring, but once you are in, he's got your back," according to Fox's Chris Wallace, who adds: "Loyalty is very important to him." In 2008, Wallace criticized *Fox & Friends* hosts, including Steve Doocy, on the air. Ailes was furious: "You shot inside the tent," he said to Wallace, whom he called a "jerk." Wallace sent Ailes a letter of apology, and all was forgiven.

The same can't be said about Jim Cramer. Cramer held a secret meeting with executives at CBS while under contract with Fox, and he didn't inform Ailes of the meeting in advance. "He fired me," Cramer says, and "we had worked together for two years." But, Cramer adds, "He was right to fire me. And, despite everything, I still like him. He delivered on what he promised. I just wish, in retrospect, that I had, too."

Of course, the fact that Ailes is a colorful, abrasive figure would be of little interest to anyone save the fact that he's been successful in every professional endeavor he's undertaken. In politics, Ailes has been a debate coach, an ad maker, and a strategist for presidents. By his count, in the more than 140 campaigns he has orchestrated, his victories outnumber his losses by about nine to one. Chafets recounts how Ailes was the one person in Ronald Reagan's inner circle who, before Reagan's second debate with Walter Mondale, raised the sensitive age issue.

Ailes was also a key figure in George H.W. Bush's victory over Michael Dukakis in 1988. He served as Bush's "morale officer," framing Dukakis as weak on national security and running some of the most effective advertisements in presidential campaign history, including "Revolving Door," which attacked the Massachusetts prison furlough (*without* showing a photo of Willie Horton) and another that showed

Roger Ailes

garbage and debris floating in Boston Harbor alongside a sign that read "Radiation Hazard: No Swimming" (thus effectively undercutting Dukakis's claim to be an environmentalist).

"It was Roger Ailes who created the dominant issues in that campaign," says Democratic consultant Paul Begala. "He did it by defining Dukakis. The campaign was incredibly impressive, and it was mostly because of Ailes. He has an intuitive grasp of what Bill Clinton calls walking around people."

But where Ailes has been a transformational figure, and the reason why Barack Obama called him "the most powerful man in America," is Fox News. He was present at its creation in 1996, having been hired by Rupert Murdoch after a successful run at CNBC, and in a remarkably short period Ailes built Fox News into America's top-rated cable news network, an honor it has maintained since 2002. (It's not unusual for 9 of the 10 top-rated cable news programs to be Fox shows.)

Make no mistake: It's not Fox's existence as much as its success that causes liberals to suffer paroxysms of rage, success they ascribe to its being a Republican propaganda machine that has developed bonds with the benighted. Yet the left's ideology has blinded it to an alternative, and much more plausible, explanation: Ailes is a "creative genius," in the words of Jack Welch, the former chairman of General Electric. It's certainly true that Fox offers a more conservative alternative to other news outlets, all of which are, to varying degrees, liberal-leaning. But in a nation in which 40 percent of people describe themselves as conservative—versus 20 percent who self-describe as liberal—there are certain openings and advantages for a network like Fox. And what keeps Fox successful is Ailes's great eye for talent.

In addition to its talent pool, Fox News is simply more interesting and entertaining to watch, according to journalism professor Mark Danner, who confesses to Chafets that "Fox, even now, is still more fun to watch" than CNN, MSNBC, and the others. "Ailes has proved cannier in seeing what attracts attention." Ailes also understands that, in his own words, "The first rule of media bias is selection. Most of the media bulls—t you about who they are. We don't. We're not programming to conservatives, we're just not eliminating their point of view."

I have a theory I call The Fox Effect: The elite media, in part because of the success of Fox, have become more open in their liberal advocacy than in previous decades. When liberal journalists had an ideological and institutional monopoly on the news, they felt no urgency to engage in open advocacy or propaganda. But Fox, by offering a different perspective and opening up the discussion, has caused them to become more transparent in their points of view. Which is, in general, preferable to the pretense of objectivity in pushing progressive causes. For people like the *New York Times*'s Bill Keller, who mock Fox's "fair and balanced" motto, the dirty little secret is that liberals hate to be reminded, as Brit Hume has remarked, that "there are more liberals on Fox than all the networks combined have conservatives."

NEWSCOM

When he worked on Mike Douglas's daytime talk show as a 23-year-old assistant producer, Ailes, intimidated by Bob Hope, was too scared to ask the comedian to stay longer on the program than planned. When Hope learned of the predicament, he told Ailes that he was a big enough star to refuse a request, but if he didn't even know about it, there's no way he could respond. Hope ended up staying for the full 90 minutes. On his way out, he turned to Ailes and said, "Next time, speak up."

Roger Ailes has been speaking up ever since. He has changed the trajectory of television news in a way that Walter Cronkite never did. And when the history of the first century of television news is written, Ailes will be among its most successful and consequential figures. Liberals won't like it. And Roger Ailes won't care. ♦

B&A

Wiseacre Latinas

A soap disturbs the ethnic hornets' nest.

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

Devious Maids is the Sunday-night soap on Lifetime about five Latina domestic servants who routinely outwit their wealthy, decadent, self-centered, materialistic, and generally evil Anglo employers in the Beverly Hills monster-mansions where the maids have been hired to do the cooking and dusting.

The show is based on a Spanish-language *telenovela*, and its pilot was produced by Eva Longoria, the 38-year-old actress-veteran of the long-running ABC Sunday-night soap *Desperate Housewives* (both shows have the same creator, Marc Cherry) and, more recently, Hispanic-outreach diva for Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign and assorted other pet causes of America's overwhelmingly Democratic Latino political bloc.

But what *Devious Maids* has actually turned into is the focus of a Hispanophone media catfight over what might be called Latina *yichus*—the bloodline and credentials that would allow someone to define herself as queen Latina and then feel entitled to tell other Latinas what they ought to be thinking, saying, and doing.

It would seem that every literate female in America with a Hispanic surname has added to the frenzy of digs at Ms. Longoria, and the consensus is that *Devious Maids* perpetuates a negative stereotype: that Latina women work as housemaids (even though nearly every household in America that can afford domestic help has at least one Latina on the employment roll).

The pile-on has proved embarrassing for Eva Longoria. Best known for her good looks (she's a former Miss Corpus Christi), her two tumultuous marriages, and several wardrobe malfunctions stemming from her off-and-on disdain for underwear, Longoria has been striving for years to cast herself as a Mexican-American power player. She has contributed lavishly to Latino causes, championed amnesty for illegal immigrants, and played up her part-time job at Wendy's in high school as evidence of her working-class solidarity in a speech to the Democratic National Convention last year. She even obtained a master's degree in Chicano studies at California State University, Northridge.

But she was shocked when a DNA test coupled with genealogical research conducted by PBS's *Faces of America* in 2010 revealed that far from "coming from the indigenous native people," as she once described herself, she is actually 70 percent European genetically and a direct descendant of the Spanish conquistadors who presumably slaughtered and oppressed the indigenous Mexicans.

I'm speaking freely about all of this because I'm a Latina myself. Or rather, I'm a Latina courtesy of the half-and-half rule of ethnicity that has made Barack Obama our first black president even though his late mother was a white Kansan distantly related to Wild Bill Hickok. In my case, it's my late father who had the paleface chops: He was South-Bronx Irish. My mother, however, is the granddaughter of a traveling jewelry salesman from Andalusia who married a young lady from Mexico City and sired a son (my maternal grandfather) who married into an upper-middle-class family in Lima, Peru. I may have my father's freckles, but hot Iberian *sangre* courses through my veins.

Mis hermanas in the Hispanic media elite have not been kind to Eva Longoria. In an open letter published by the *Huffington Post*, Michelle Herrera Mulligan, editor in chief of *Cosmopolitan for Latinas*, called the new show "a wasted opportunity" and "an insulting disgrace." On *Latina.com*, Damarys Ocaña Perez wrote: "For decades Hollywood has consistently and almost obsessively cast Latinos in stereotypically negative roles. Gangbangers. Drug dealers. Hypersexual Latin lovers. And of course, maids—slutty ones, saintly ones, subservient ones, sassy ones, ones with ridiculously heavy accents." Tanisha Ramirez, in yet another *HuffPo* piece, complained: "Aren't Latina teachers', doctors', CEOs', and entrepreneurs' stories worth telling as well?" *New York Times* reporter Tanzina Vega, assessing a scene in *Devious*'s premiere in which the lady of the house (Rebecca Wisocky) threatens to deport soon-to-be-murdered maid Flora (Paula Garcés) for having sex with her villainous husband (Tom Irwin), sniffed, "Most maids, however, don't sleep with their bosses."

Arnold Schwarzenegger, call your office.

The lengthiest and most sweeping denunciation of all came from a thoroughly expected source: Alisa Valdes, the mid-40s author of the bestselling *chica*-lit novel *The Dirty Girls Social Club* (2003), who is even better known,

Charlotte Allen is a frequent contributor to The Weekly Standard.

at least on the Internet, for her series of bridge-burning tirades against former bosses, former men in her life, and practically everybody who has ever tried to work with her during her decade-long (and so far unsuccessful) effort to bring *Dirty Girls* to a screen, large or small. Valdes's article, posted on *NBCLatino.com*, is a worthy addition to her already extensive online polemical *oeuvre*:

> [*Devious Maids*] is about the way the Latina maid stereotype beautifully cleaves to the time-honored imperialistic way this country has dealt with its Spanish-speaking neighbors in the Americas. . . . You cannot colonize or occupy the lands of human beings you respect or view as your equal; it is better to simplify them in order to dehumanize them.

Ironically, Valdes, for all her talk of American imperialism and dehumanization of the Spanish-speaking, is, like me, only half Latina. Her father, a retired sociology professor and self-proclaimed Marxist at the University of New Mexico, was born in Cuba; but her mother hailed from an Irish family that had lived in New Mexico for seven generations.

In 1999, Valdes, a graduate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, took a job covering Latin music for the *Los Angeles Times*. Two years later, she abruptly resigned from the *Times* via a 3,400-word email to her supervisors that flew from computer to computer among amused editors across the country, was excerpted in huge chunks on the *St. Petersburg Times* website, and lives on electronically to this day as a textbook example of how to torpedo your career.

In the email, Valdes belittled her fellow *Times* feature-writers (by name) as incompetent, overpaid hacks; she smeared herself with self-pity because she, an "excellent writer," brought home a smaller paycheck than another *Times* critic who hadn't even graduated from college; and she trashed the *Times* for using the word "Latino" to cover a range of different ethnicities, some with only a tangential relation to Spanish culture. "There is no such thing as a Latino," Valdes wrote, even though she herself had been hired at the *Times* as part of a "Latino Initiative" program.

Later, though, after Valdes returned to New Mexico, she decided it was all right to be a Latina after all, and started on *Dirty Girls*, a beach read about the love lives of a group of career women with south-of-the-border roots. The novel sold a half-million copies.

After that, Valdes's life took a downward turn. In 2005, she divorced her husband, a sometime student 10 years her junior whose main job had been taking care of their son while she supported the family. She subsequently described him online as her "sociopathic ex-husband" who was being "investigated" for "cyberstalking" her and "abusing" their son. She blasted through her $475,000 advance for *Dirty Girls*, plus a reported six-figure advance on a 2008 sequel, *Dirty Girls on Top*, that did not sell so well, plus royalties, plus sales of some young-adult titles.

Five little maids from school are we . . .

Her Lexus was repossessed, and she had to short-sell her half-million-dollar house. Meanwhile, she optioned out the rights to *The Dirty Girls Social Club* four times, including to Jennifer Lopez for a movie deal—and every option failed. By Christmas 2010, she had moved with her son back in with her father in Albuquerque and was sitting in front of her computer churning out blog entries, Facebook posts, and Twitter messages accusing Ann Lopez (the NBC producer of the fourth and final failed option) of racism, sexism, and lying for changing around the plot and characters in *Dirty Girls*—to the point that NBC sent Valdes a cease-and-desist letter on Christmas Eve.

Just in the nick of time, Valdes managed to swing yet another book deal: a quickie memoir, *The Feminist and the Cowboy*, about her budding romance with a six-foot-four, good-looking, politically conservative 53-year-old bachelor ranch manager she had met on an online dating site. The cowboy made it clear from the outset that he wasn't having any truck with Valdes's feminism, temper tantrums, progressive political views, indulgent child-rearing practices, or anything else she'd learned during her stints in high-end graduate school and journalism. He also made it clear that he was the one in charge.

I received an unsolicited review copy of *The Feminist and the Cowboy* in the mail, and I read it avidly, because Valdes really is an excellent writer, just as she claims. Though I must say I didn't much care for the cowboy. From the photos she posted online, he seemed to be overdoing the Marlboro Man shtick, looking as though he was modeling, not really wearing, his Western duds. And he also turned out to be romancing another Albuquerque woman on the side.

Still, it was impressive to take in how quickly Alisa Valdes melted in the presence of the first alpha male she had probably ever met in her life, and to savor her contempt for the "icky 'liberal' men, each icky in his own unique and decidedly hypocritical or terrifying way" whom she had dated before meeting Mr. Cowpoke. It was also fun to read the horrified reviews by feminists and the icky liberal men who love them when Valdes's memoir emerged from its publisher, Gotham Books, this past January. Typical was Noah Berlatsky at the *Atlantic*, who accused Valdes of indulging in "pseudo-science nonsense . . . boasting self-abnegation, and . . . simple-minded feminist-baiting."

But then Valdes dropped a blog-post bomb declaring that the dogie-wrangler of her dreams was actually "a domineering abuser"—um, sort of like her ex-husband. In April 2012, Valdes had discovered she was pregnant; the

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cowboy informed her that she could either abort the baby or never see him again. That would have been a deal-killer for me, and so it was for Valdes—until she suffered a miscarriage and jumped back into his arms. Later, the cowboy failed to exhibit appropriate sympathy for the injuries she suffered from jumping out of his moving truck during what proved to be their last fight.

The Feminist and the Cowboy duly tanked, and Valdes and Gotham Books are no longer on speaking terms. Valdes resumed robbing the cradle, and her latest flame is an Albuquerque volunteer coordinator named Michael Gandy (not the football player), who is at least 13 years younger than she. With no publisher and certainly no Hollywood entity willing to take her on for obvious reasons, Valdes is currently hunting for crowdfunding in order to make an indie film out of *The Dirty Girls Social Club*, done exactly the way she wants it. Indeed, the real gravamen of her beef with Eva Longoria was the fact that Lifetime, one of the four outfits to let its option lapse on *Dirty Girls*, is producing *Devious Maids* when it ought to be producing a series based on Valdes's novel, with its upscale "powerful Latina protagonists." Valdes pointed out that all the characters in the original *telenovela* were Latino, in contrast to the Anglo employers on *Maids*, "which allowed for class distinctions."

She wrote: "Longoria's argument conflates race/ethnicity with socioeconomic status." And actually, Valdes is right. The producers of *Devious Maids* (not to mention most Latino advocacy groups) tend to view "Latinos" as an undifferentiated mass of low-end and often-exploited laborers, ignoring the class distinctions that are self-evident to Latinos who live in the real world, whether north or south of the border. Still, she is only half-right: For Latinos, socioeconomic status is intimately bound up with race and ethnicity. Most Latinos, including me, have some indigenous blood; but in nearly all Latin-American countries, the upper socioeconomic levels of society—the ranks of the educated and successful professionals—are populated by lighter-skinned people with far more Spanish blood than the darker-skinned peasants and blue-collar workers at the bottom, who are often pure *indios*.

It is from the latter group that the recent tidal waves of legal and illegal Mexican and Central American immigration into the United States have come—and it's largely those immigrants who are the Latina domestics running their dry mops over the cherrywood floors of Bel Air property porn.

The real reason *Devious Maids* has raised so many hackles among the Latina literati is that they're seeing themselves portrayed as members of a social class, and even an ethnic group, that they wouldn't be caught dead belonging to. Indeed, the actresses who play the maids on *Devious Maids*, led by *Ugly Betty* veteran Ana Ortiz as maid Marisol, don't look the slightest bit like real-life Latina maids. They're willowy, toned-muscled ectomorphs with masses of exquisitely styled raven hair. They do their housework wearing skinny jeans and wedge peep-toes.

Real-life Latina maids tend to look more like Mildred Baena, the stocky, unphotogenic Guatemalan housekeeper who bore Arnold Schwarzenegger's love child. It wasn't so much outrage at Latina "stereotypes" as well-disguised snobbery that threw Alisa Valdes, Michelle Herrera Mulligan, and others into high dudgeon: Is *that* what they think we Hispanic holders of Ivy degrees are supposed to be? *Maids*?

Devious Maids, whose premiere episode drew an anemic two million viewers or so competing against AMC's *Mad Men*, is likely to collapse of its own light weight. It's hard to get interested in such cliffhangers as: Will maid Valentina (Edy Ganem) be seduced and abandoned by the frat-boy son (Drew van Acker) of her nymphomaniac employer (Susan Lucci)? Will maid Carmen (Roselyn Sánchez) get caught swimming naked in her boss's pool? Who killed Flora?

But it raises more interesting questions that ought to trouble the Republican policymakers who think that running, say, Cuban-descended Marco Rubio for president could attract the votes of the millions of Mexican Americans who have voted Democratic since anyone can remember. For example: What, exactly, is a Latino or a Latina? And what on earth do the numerous groups of people who bear the tag "Hispanic" really have in common? ♦

B&A

Canvas Battlefield

In the Civil War, art comes to terms with reality.

BY JAMES GARDNER

In one of his bolder poetic flourishes, General MacArthur once invoked "the sputter of musketry" to refer to burp guns and bazookas. His phrase had the élan of gallantry, even chivalry, to it, as it deftly sidestepped the new and very different realities of modern warfare. Some generations earlier, during the Civil War, humanity witnessed the birth of a form of industrialized violence that, by the very nature and degree of its escalation, vanquished the euphemisms that were still available to the generations who had lived through the Napoleonic campaigns and the Crimean War.

If language itself paled before this new reality, could painting be expected to do much better?

The Civil War and American Art
Metropolitan Museum of Art

James Gardner recently translated Vida's Christiad *(I Tatti Renaissance Library).*

Embedded in our nation's visual culture is a paradox that had not occurred to me before I saw this exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Although our painters were hardly at the forefront of art history in the 1860s, they were the first to try to make visual sense of what they had seen and lived through in the war between the states. They were the first to come to terms with those dismal engines whose consequences would define the 20th century. Many of the paintings on view—by Winslow Homer, Frederic Edwin Church, and Albert Bierstadt—are hardly unknown to seasoned museumgoers. But in the Met show, perhaps for the first time, these works are seen within the context of the great conflict that once divided the nation.

Among early modern artists, the question of how to respond to war was never explicitly raised. In Paolo Uccello's great series *The Battle of San Romano* (ca. 1438-40), and in Leonardo's *The Battle of Anghiari* (ca. 1505, known through later copies), one is struck by the pageantry of war rather than by its horror. This horror was not unknown to literature, but in painting there was neither the inclination nor even the formal vocabulary to do it justice.

Today, as well, the question of how to depict war is a simple equation—except that the contemporary artist's opposition to it is a foregone conclusion. Starting with the German Expressionists, through the antiwar movement of the 1960s, up to the present day, visual artists have clamored to outdo one another in conveying the harsh and sordid reality of human conflict in the most revolting terms imaginable.

But for the American artists of the 1860s, and roughly half a century thereafter, the depiction of war was suddenly no longer as obvious as it had been only a generation earlier. The difficulty they encountered had as much to do with the awful novelty of industrialized warfare as with the limitations of art itself—the sense among painters that art as they knew it, art as they had always practiced it, was unequal to this new reality. And so they experienced something like revulsion in addressing it at all.

In consequence, the most eloquent thing about the works included in this exhibition is their evasiveness. Indeed, the war and its immediate aftermath are almost never represented directly. Occasionally a landscape hints at a skirmish—but so subtly, so peaceably that, but for its title, we might never suspect that a battle had been waged in the first place. Then there are portraits of generals, either in repose or greeting one another before or after a battle. But the battle itself, with all its horror, is almost never directly engaged.

Most of the paintings here are landscapes, that essential American art form of the 19th century. From the arrival of Thomas Cole in America in 1818 to the death of Frederic Edwin Church in 1900, no other province of painting commanded the respect of landscapes, which answered to a patriotic impulse to extol the very terrain of the young republic. But the foremost masters of this genre, among them Church, Martin Johnson Heade, and Sanford Robinson Gifford, addressed the theme of the Civil War with as much metaphorical indirection as any other artists.

The period leading up to, and contemporary with, the war was dominated by the so-called Luminist movement, whose landscapes, characterized by brilliant and bizarre effects of lighting and atmosphere, united the pantheistic naturalism of Baron Humboldt with the Christian positivism of John Ruskin. These qualities are memorably enshrined in Heade's *Approaching Thunder Storm* of 1859 and in Sanford Robinson Gifford's *A Coming Storm* (1863). But can we be certain that either of them is really about the war?

'Guerrilla Warfare, Civil War' by Albert Bierstadt (1862)

In fact, Gifford, who fought in the war with the 7th Regiment of the New York Militia, made such worthy images of military life as *Camp of the Seventh Regiment near Frederick, Maryland* (1864) and *Fort Federal Hill at Sunset, Baltimore* (1862). But even these betray little trace of the actual conflict, let alone the horrors of that conflict.

If Gifford was an observer from and for the Union, Conrad Wise Chapman represented the Confederate side. He is not nearly as gifted an artist, but there is a powerful and persuasive prose to

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION, NEW YORK

his art. On numerous occasions, he depicts things that had never before appeared in a painting: One sees this in *White Point Battery Charleston, Dec. 24th 1863* as well as in *Submarine Torpedo Boat H.L. Hunley, Dec. 6 1863*. The latter depicts two men standing beside the gunmetal gray contraption of the title, which is being held together with decidedly unclassical screws and bolts.

The great Winslow Homer does somewhat better in capturing the excitement of an actual campaign. His *A Sharp-Shooter on Picket Duty* (1863) depicts a faceless Union soldier in a tree, firing off a rifle. *Skirmish in the Wilderness*, from one year later, unites the tones of the Barbizon School with the realism of Courbet. But the vividness of action eludes him in these paintings, and he is far better at depicting the tranquil intercourse of human beings in his magnificent *Brierwood Pipe*, also from 1864, in which two men, in the red and blue uniforms of the Zouaves, sit pensively and silently beside their tent.

Homer continued his efforts after the war in such memorable paintings as *The Veteran in a New Field* (1865) and *Dressing for the Carnival*, a depiction of a family of freed slaves, from 1877.

For a true and unadorned record of the war, one must go to photography, which is represented not only here but also in an even more focused and concurrent Met exhibition, "Photography and the American Civil War." Mechanized warfare met its match in this relatively new and equally technical record of reality. By virtue of its novelty, photography was unencumbered by those hoary traditions of composition and treatment—derived from antiquity and the paintings of the Old Masters—from which fine artists were only beginning to emancipate themselves.

Finally, in the photographic images taken by Mathew Brady, his assistants, and Alexander Gardner, we see, unadorned and mostly unedited, those mutilated human forms, living and dead, as well as those equally outraged landscapes, pitted and scarred and dredged, in a way that, until then, had been entirely unknown to visual art. ♦

B&A

At What Price?

The value of the Detroit Institute of Arts to Detroit is an open question. BY PHILIP TERZIAN

No doubt, the bankruptcy of Detroit will have unintended consequences. But one possibility, currently under discussion, is especially distressing: sale of the paintings in the Detroit Institute of Arts, which, unlike most municipal collections, is owned by the city, not a nonprofit trust.

Detroit's court-appointed guardian, and Michigan's attorney general Bill Schuette, seem determined to avoid the calamity: According to the *New York Times*, Schuette "issued a forcefully worded opinion saying that the artworks . . . were 'held in trust for the public' and could be sold only for the purpose of acquiring additional art, not for satisfying municipal debts." Under federal bankruptcy proceedings, however, Michigan law might well be superseded, and creditors have been invited to determine the value of the institute's "assets."

Selling off the paintings in the DIA, which was founded in 1885, would yield an estimated $2 billion—an amount that would quickly evaporate in the face of Detroit's $18-20 billion debt. And, of course, if most of the works ended up in private hands, one of the great collections of art in America—rich with Bruegels and van Goghs and Rembrandts—would henceforth be scattered and hidden from public view.

This is reminiscent, to some degree, of the problem posed not long ago by the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. A collection acquired by the deeply eccentric and disagreeable inventor of the antiseptic Argyrol, Dr. Albert Barnes, it was managed, under the terms of Barnes's will, by an institution (Lincoln University in Oxford, Pa.) ill-equipped for the task, and rigidly curated with limited public access, as a monument to Barnes's theories of connoisseurship. In due course, Lincoln University's mismanagement yielded a chronic financial crisis, and when its board began lending out paintings and threatening sales, a local philanthropic collective emerged to save the art—both for Philadelphia and from Barnes's dead hand. The collection is now housed in a handsome new museum, with normal visiting hours, adjacent to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

A happy ending for Detroit is not inevitable. In strictly legal, not to say political, terms, the financial claims of creditors might well have greater weight than the principle of a distinguished art collection in Motown. And while individual paintings would no doubt find appreciative owners, they would be lost to the institute's 600,000 annual visitors. It is hard to imagine the revival of a city that divested itself of its great art museum for cash.

Which leads, once again, to the Barnes Foundation. As Albert Barnes seems never to have comprehended, the possession of great art is a trust, not an emblem of possessiveness, and a civic responsibility. Certain values do transcend legal ownership. The crisis of Detroit is a political and financial failure, but the solution to the crisis has a moral element as well. A great city is the sum of its cultural institutions as well as its business climate. And the same irresponsibility and greed that bankrupted Detroit would counsel the sale of the institute's "assets" to pay off debtors and avoid a reckoning. ♦

Philip Terzian is literary editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

B&A

Improbable Dream

A Southern editor recalls his time and place.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

This is an age of mystifying book titles, including the one that adorns this memoir. But it should be no surprise, at least for Southern readers who have wrestled with their mixed heritage, that Brandt Ayers speaks of being "in love with defeat." He drops a clue by adopting an epigraph from William Faulkner: Quentin Compson's anguished response—"I don't hate it"—to his Canadian college roommate's questioning why he hates the South. "*I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*" repeats Quentin inwardly, as if to assure himself that the dark chronicles of miscegenation and murder he has recited are psychologically survivable. We know from other sources, alas, that Quentin soon drowned himself in the Charles River. He was, it seems, too much in love with defeat.

And what is the relevance of this prologue to the less maddening, if sometimes perilous, journalistic career of H. Brandt Ayers, editor and proprietor of the *Anniston* (Ala.) *Star*? He is neither Compson nor Thomas Sutpen, and his industrial city is a long way from Yoknapatawpha.

In fact, it is in some ways too bad that his subtitle stresses the political aspect of a tale of cultural upheaval and renewal in the Deep South. These titular stretches are a bit melodramatic for the chronicle of a Southern editor's energy, conviction, and distinction in doing his part to make the South—and his city and state—better places for both blacks and whites than they had been in his youth.

Yet, as the great historian C. Vann Woodward taught us, the South is incurably peculiar—"un-American" in the sense that its scarred history often negates the nation's positive myths of victory and optimism. Its collective identity is marked by atypical experiences of poverty, defeat, and racial evil.

Edwin M. Yoder Jr. is the author, most recently, of Vacancy: A Judicial Misadventure.

In Love with Defeat
The Making of a Southern Liberal
by H. Brandt Ayers
NewSouth, 350 pp., $29.95

H. Brandt Ayers

So what Ayers means by a love of defeat is that his political and cultural tribe of Southern liberals (impatient with Jim Crow and bent on overthrowing its evils) were born to incompleteness.

Here is an example: Ayers devotes many pages to the L.Q.C. Lamar Society, a typical enterprise of the 1970s, the decade when the logjam of racial discrimination was finally broken. The Lamar Society was a gathering of young Southerners determined to cure Southern ills without sacrificing regional virtues; it was named for a Mississippi statesman who won a place for himself by paying a famous tribute to that fiercest of Yankee scolds, Sen. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts.

Lamar pled, amid the ruins of the Civil War, for intersectional understanding. Those who assembled under the Lamar Society banner in 1973 had in mind that their newest of New Souths would preserve the best of its cultural legacy (pit-cooked barbecue and other delicacies; jazz and the blues; small-town friendliness; the beauties of the wild land; etc.) while luring investment southward and building model cities. It would shed racism and provincialism, while avoiding Yankee mistakes. No dark satanic mills or forelock-tugging industrial wage slaves, please!

Alas, the vision was, in part, thwarted by what befell Atlanta. Ayers has some sharp words for that city's engulfment by concrete, asphalt, and impersonal sprawl, much as he has words of nostalgia for the old charms of Charleston and Savannah.

Ayers has the gift of tongues and generosity, the latter being noteworthy in his search for the hidden best in even the worst of his foes. He is no innocent. He knows where the bodies are buried, but that tragic consciousness doesn't override his quixotic (in the best sense) optimism. Yes, he has been an occasional assailant of windmills, but he has clung to "impossible dreams."

I reserve for last one correction. Ayers refers, at least thrice, to racial segregation as "apartheid," the Boer term for "apartness." That was indeed the aspiration of the Afrikaners. But in the Southern American context, it is a treacherous misnomer. Segregation in the American South, for all its demeaning fetishes, never enforced "separation" of black and white. Quite to the contrary, the two races grew up in an enforced intimacy—propinquity without equality, it was sometimes called. It was lucky for us all that this was so, for when legal segregation collapsed, the barriers to be crossed were psychological, not physical.

But this is a blemish in a distinguished memoir full of wit, wisdom, and good reporting. Brandt Ayers is one of those notable heirs of the knight of La Mancha, resolved to better his world, heedless of cynicism. If this was in some ways an impossible dream, he stuck to his mission, and Anniston, Alabama, the South, and the nation are the better for it. ♦

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