the weekly
Standard

WHAT TO DO ABOUT SYRIA
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SEPTEMBER 16, 2013 $4.95

The Last 24 Notes

MATT LABASH
on Bugles Across America

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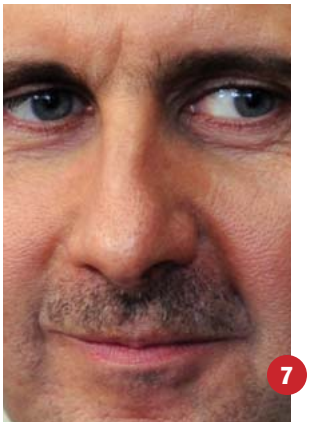
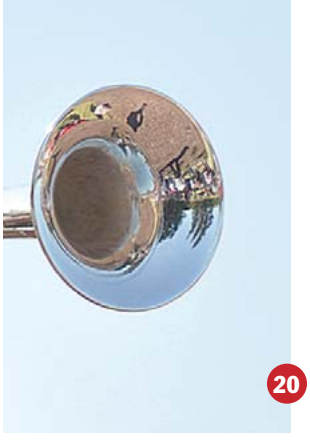
September 16, 2013 • Volume 19, Number 2





COVER: An honor guard bugler plays at the burial of U.S. Marine Cpl. Mark David Kidd of Milford, Michigan, at Arlington National Cemetery, August 14, 2007. (Mark Wilson / Getty Images)

We'll Take the Disposable *Post*

Readers will, we hope, forgive The Scrapbook for the undue pleasure we have taken in *Washington Post* stories about the impending sale of the *Post* to Amazon founder Jeffrey Bezos.

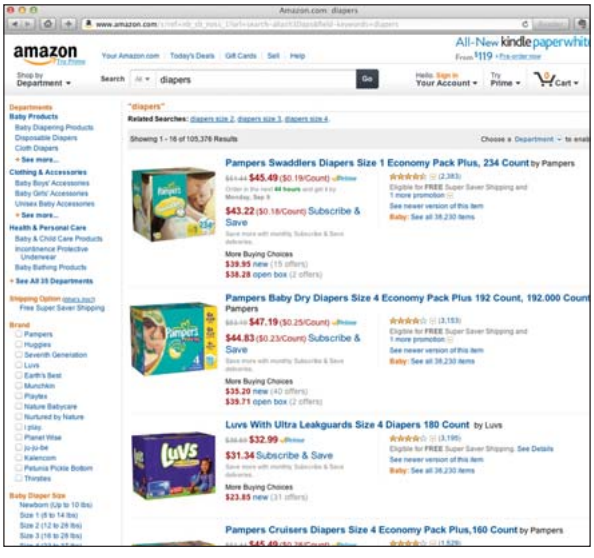
In one sense, it has been something of a relief for long-suffering *Post* readers. After decades of worshipful coverage of the Meyer/Graham family—which purchased the *Post* in 1933—the soon-to-be-ex-proprietors are already virtual nonpersons in the pages of the newspaper they bought at auction 80 years ago and seem to be abandoning at the edge of oblivion.

Instead of multiple (favorable) reviews of the late Katharine Graham's ghostwritten memoirs—which, believe it or not, won the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1998!—we have lately been reading a lot about Jeff Bezos.

Some of these essays have been thinly veiled warnings to the effect that Bezos has purchased a near-perfect institution, and that he tampers with its magical formula at his peril. But most have been friendly accounts of a successful businessman who, like most successful businessmen, has seldom been the subject of friendly accounts in the *Washington Post*.

Of course, most of the aforementioned malicious pleasure has been enjoyed at the expense of the *Post*. But last week we found ourselves indebted to the *New York Times*. For there, on the front page of the *Times* Business section, was the kind of nervously upbeat story ("Bezos Is a Hit in a Washington Post Newsroom Visit," Sept. 5) we've grown accustomed lately to reading in the *Post*.

To be sure, given the *New York Times*'s own financial peril and self-aggrandizing family-owner, this should come as no surprise. But back to the story. Jeff Bezos began his visit to the *Post* with an hourlong breakfast ("fruit plate, poached eggs, spinach, coffee and orange juice") with Bob Woodward himself, who later emailed colleagues, "I was struck by how wide-ranging and methodical [Bezos] is. He voiced strong, even intense, optimism about the future of the *Post*."



Subscribing to the Washington Post *should be this easy.*

This was followed by a question-and-answer session in the newsroom and, according to the *Times*, a private meeting "with about 20 reporters in a neighboring ninth-floor conference room [where Bezos] talked about how he defined success." This particular encounter was, undoubtedly, Bezos's greatest challenge, since those 20 reporters—"20 hard-bitten journalists," in the words of one *Post* editor—must have seemed especially formidable to the Amazon CEO.

For the *Post*, as its readers are frequently reminded, employs some of the toughest, most penetratingly incisive, ink-stained wretches in the news business, men and women of deep experience, and all races, creeds, and sexual orientations, who have covered Watergate, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, Watergate, the Kennedy Center, Watergate, the Washington Redskins, Watergate, the Arlington County (Va.) Board, and Watergate.

And yet, unexpectedly, Bezos "charmed the room," according to Jeffrey Leen, the *Post*'s investigations editor. Leen continued:

> He was a big supporter of investigative reporting, which warmed my heart. He already has a very good grasp of our business. It was, all in all, a very impressive performance.

Almost as impressive, in The Scrapbook's estimation, as Jeffrey Leen's spontaneous comments, which somehow failed to mention the other Jeffrey's good looks, exquisite wardrobe, wide-ranging intellect, and astonishing success as a visionary businessman. And how, by the way, does Jeff Bezos define success? "It should be as easy," he told his newsroom audience, "to get a subscription to the *Post* as it is to buy diapers on Amazon"—a curious analogy, in The Scrapbook's opinion, given the uses to which the *Post* is occasionally put. ♦

Unrehabilitated Bakers

As the debate over gay marriage began heating up, supporters of the idea insisted that it was a matter of basic libertarianism. "Don't like gay marriage? Don't have one," went the bumper-sticker-turned-rallying-cry. Of course, it was never going to be that simple with regard to something as foundational as marriage, and now we are starting to see there are real consequences to being publicly opposed to the practice. In last week's issue, Mark Hemingway wrote of Christian businesses around the country that have rankled state authorities for the crime of refus-

ing to participate in gay weddings ("The 'Human Rights' Juggernaut," Sept. 9, 2013).

The most high-profile case involves the seven-year legal battle of a New Mexico wedding photography business that was fined in excess of $6,000 for refusing to shoot a gay commitment ceremony. State and local authorities have also threatened or fined an inn in Vermont, a printer in Kentucky, a florist in Washington state, and a bakery in Oregon for declining to provide their services in gay weddings and commitment ceremonies. The legal issues involved are not a simple matter of public accommodation, as these businesses all willingly serve gay clients in every capacity other than matrimonial. They just don't want to be compelled to participate in events of religious significance that run counter to their faith.

Well, in the week since Hemingway's article appeared, we are sad to report, Sweet Cakes, the bakery in Gresham, Oregon, that was mentioned in the article, has closed its doors. Oregon labor commissioner Brad Avakian told the *Oregonian* that he hoped to "rehabilitate" Sweet Cakes as one outcome of the state investigation into the matter, but the family that owns the business had long been receiving threats, and activists were already pressuring local vendors not to do business with the bakery. After shuttering the premises, the owners hung a sign on the door that reads, "This fight is not over we will continue to stand strong. Your religious freedom is becoming not free anymore. This is ridiculous that we cannot practice our faith anymore. The LORD is good and we will continue to serve Him with all our heart."

Upon hearing that the bakery had shut its doors, The Scrapbook recalled an appearance by Andrew Sullivan on CNN this past June. Sullivan, who through his essays for the *New Republic* starting in the late 1980s arguably did more than any other individual to advance the cause of gay marriage, was asked about the inevitable clash between gay marriage and religious liberty:

> I don't want anybody's religious liberty—I want that to be defined as maximally as possible. We do not threaten and we should never threaten the conscientious beliefs of those who disagree with us, but we should welcome their freedom because it's our freedom too. And so I'm very concerned, actually, that we may become intolerant of people who believe homosexuality is still sinful.

We take Sullivan at his word that he's very concerned that gay marriage advocates "may become intolerant," so we hate to break it to him that that's already the case. For anyone who genuinely believes that people's beliefs should not be threatened and that religious liberty should be "defined as maximally as possible," the gay marriage movement has already gone off the rails. ♦

NEVER FORGET

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Could this Labor Day mark the comeback of movements for workers' rights and a turn toward innovation and a new militancy on behalf of wage-earners? Suggesting this is not the same as a foolish and romantic optimism that foresees an instant union revival. What's actually happening is more interesting. Precisely because no one in organized

labor expects the proportion of private-sector workers in their ranks to rise sharply anytime soon . . . " (E. J. Dionne Jr., *Washington Post*, September 2, 2013). ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'I'm so pissed off after reading these books I can hardly type. But my ire begins with baseball—and the same is true for Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army colonel who lost a son in Iraq. Been to a game lately? Try to grab just a few hours of peace and fun, and what do you get? A toxic brew of manufactured religious piety and tin-hat patriotism, served up in force-feedings of 'God Bless America' and coercive 'salutes' to 'wounded warriors' bused in for the game. Bacevich, a West Point graduate who now writes perceptive, bristling essays and books from his perch at Boston University . . . " (Jeff Stein, "The Worst Years of Our Lives," *Bookforum*, September-November 2013). ♦

Department of Low Expectations

'Japan PM Abe shakes hands with China's Xi at G20" (Reuters, September 5, 2013). ♦

The March of Science

Our friends at the *Free Beacon* report the news that, despite the sequester, the federal government continues to be able to support important scientific research. The National Institutes of Health has been able to fund for another year a $2.2 million inquiry, begun in the fall of 2011, into why "women of minority sexual orientation are disproportionately affected by the obesity epidemic." As reported at FreeBeacon.com, the study has already "yielded one report, published in January, which found that gay and bisexual males had a 'greater desire for toned muscles than completely and mostly heterosexual males.'" As a taxpayer, The Scrapbook is pleased to learn that we're getting our money's worth. ♦

the weekly Standard

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Waylaid in Malta

Early in 1659, a strong-willed woman named Sarah Chevers and an even stronger-willed woman named Katharine Evans arrived in Malta. By chance—or, as they insisted, Providence—they had been diverted, their Dutch ship chased into the port of Valletta by rumor of pirates and bad weather. And since Malta is where they found themselves, Malta is where they would stay, preaching God's true Protestant faith—the Knights Hospitaller who ruled the Catholic island be damned.

I'm not sure why I admire these women so. They seem, all in all, profoundly ignorant people—ignorant in that peculiarly British way that saw all other European cultures as willful and childish failures to be British. But maybe what draws me is what remains clearest in their story, for they were also brave beyond measure, with a strength of conviction that still takes the breath away.

They were Quakers, members of the Society of Friends, and they had already suffered for their evangelizing. Banned from the Isle of Wight as a public nuisance, Katharine was later "strip'd and ty'd to a whipping-post in the market of Salisbury" for her heterodox street-corner haranguing of passersby. How could they refuse their burden, when Malta was even more lost in sin than Salisbury? The British consul housed them, anxiously urging them to leave the island as Katharine and Sarah shouted prophecies into the streets from his windows. After 15 weeks, a reluctant Inquisition finally imprisoned them in response to a public outcry.

The three years it took to obtain their release was due mostly to their own recalcitrance, refusing several deals between the embarrassed Maltese and British—even while they continued to instruct their jailers on true doctrine and the errors of the Romish Church. Finally in July 1662, after the intervention of the Stuart family, they were ejected from prison and bundled onto a ship for home.

It's a great story, I think, but I know it only because I sat down the other morning to begin an essay on science and religion I had promised an editor weeks earlier. And while I stared at the blank screen, my daughter came in to ask about the English Civil War, which had come up in something she was reading.

DAVID CLARK

I told her, of course, that I had to work, but we could look up a few things online. An hour and a half later, I explained that enough was enough; she would have to continue on her own, since I had to write about science and religion. But we did go through the bookshelves first, to find my copy of C.V. Wedgwood's classic popular history of the era, *A Coffin for King Charles*. And while I was there, I pulled down *History and Hope*, a collection of Wedgwood's essays I hadn't looked at in years, to see if the book contained anything a little smaller, a kind of pocket guide to the civil war.

It didn't, but after my daughter wandered off with *A Coffin for King Charles*, I browsed through Wedgwood's short pieces—reminded again of how sane and balanced she was as a historian: her suspicions of useful history, her nuanced praise of Gibbon, her wonderful account of the trial of the dashing highwayman Captain Hind. Two hours later, just as I remembered that I really needed to start on science and religion, I came across "The Conversion of Malta," Wedgwood's small account of the strong-willed Sarah Chevers and the even stronger-willed Katharine Evans.

A little online browsing of an hour or so uncovered *A Brief Discovery of God's Eternal Truth and a Way Opened to the Simple Hearted Whereby They May Come to Know Christ and His Ministers, from Antichrist and His Ministers: With a Warning from the Lord to All People That Do Name the Name of Christ, to Depart from Iniquity—Written in the Inquisition of Malta by Katharine Evans*. The title was only a foretaste of the marvelously convoluted prose.

I did finally catch myself—just as I was wondering whether to follow up with *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, the great old 1563 account of Protestant suffering, or jump ahead to Quaker histories—and swear it was time to get to work. But then it occurred to me that the best parallel was probably *The Bible in Spain*, George Borrow's bestselling 1843 memoir of an eccentric English Protestant sent to do the Lord's work in what the British simply knew was a benighted Catholic country. I was deep in the third chapter when my daughter called me to dinner.

See? Easy to spend a productive day. Just start writing—on, say, science and religion—and never quite get back to it.

Joseph Bottum

the weekly Standard

The Right Vote

The statesmanlike case for voting Yes on the congressional resolution to use force against the Assad regime has been made widely and well by conservative foreign policy thinkers. At the end, the case boils down to this: As a policy matter, a Yes vote may be problematic in all kinds of ways. But a No vote would likely be disastrous for the nation in very clear ways. Statesmanship requires choosing the problematic over the disastrous.

It's true that Republicans on the Hill lack confidence in President Obama's execution of the military action they are being asked to vote to authorize. So do conservative foreign and military policy experts, and so do we. But voting Yes doesn't preclude criticizing—indeed, it makes it easier to constructively criticize—much of what President Obama has done and will do in Syria and in the Middle East. Indeed, if Republicans want to cast a broader vote of no confidence in President Obama's conduct of foreign policy, there are other ways to do so, and we'd support many of them. But using this resolution to cast a vote of no confidence against Obama would empower those abroad making the case against placing confidence in the United States. That would be damaging. And in the real world, a vote against Obama will be seen as a vote for Bashar al-Assad, and for Vladimir Putin, and for the regime in Iran.

The fact is that Obama is the only president we have. We can't abdicate our position in the world for the next three years. So Republicans will have to resist the temptation to weaken him when the cost is weakening the country. A party that for at least two generations has held high the banner of American leadership and strength should not cast a vote that obviously risks a damaging erosion of this country's stature and credibility abroad.

Republicans on the Hill know this. The vast majority are not followers of Pat Buchanan or of Ron and Rand Paul. They don't actually believe in abandoning our responsibilities, forsaking our allies, and trying to construct a Fortress America.

But they do believe the politics of this vote is awful. They believe, perhaps correctly, that President Obama has cynically thrown this ball into the lap of Congress in order to get Republican fingerprints on an action that may not succeed. They believe, correctly, that their constituents are against intervention. They believe, therefore, that the politically prudent vote is No.

A Yes vote is also a vote to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Syria is an Iranian proxy. Assad's ability to use chemical weapons is a proxy for Iran's ability to move ahead unimpeded in its acquisition of nuclear weapons.

They're wrong. Winston Churchill noted that "the Muse of History must not be fastidious." Likewise the Muse of editorialists. So we'll be forgiven, we trust, for briefly laying out the crass political reasons why Republicans should vote Yes.

A Yes vote is in fact the easy vote. It's actually close to risk-free. After all, it's President Obama who is seeking the authorization to use force and who will order and preside over the use of force. It's fundamentally his policy. Lots of Democrats voted in 2002 to authorize the Iraq war. When that war ran into trouble, it was President Bush and Republicans who paid the price. If the Syria effort goes badly, the public will blame President Obama, who dithered for two years, and who seems inclined to a halfhearted execution of any military campaign. If it goes well, Republicans can take credit for pushing him to act decisively, and for casting a tough vote supporting him when he asked for authorization to act.

A No vote is the risky vote. In fact, the risk is all on the side of voting No. The only thing that can get Obama off the hook now is for Republicans to deny him authorization for the use of force against the Assad regime. Then the GOP can be blamed for whatever goes wrong in Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East, over the next months and years. And plenty will go wrong. It's a Yes vote that gets Republicans in Congress off the hook.

A Yes vote seems to be statesmanlike. (Actually, it happens also to be statesmanlike, but we're now talking

politics.) Establishment foreign policy voices, including conservative ones, may not move voters—but they do have some pull in the media and with influentials across the country. Casting a "tough" political vote is a way for members of Congress to appear to be rising above mere party politics. In fact, many voters do like to think they're voting for someone who has at least a touch of statesmanship, and so casting what appears superficially to be a politically perilous vote could well help the stature of Republicans with many of their constituents back home.

It's true that a Yes vote will be temporarily unpopular with the base. To support Obama now may seem to invite primary opposition from challengers who would be more in tune with popular sentiment to stay out of the Syrian civil war. For a few weeks after the vote, Republicans will hear such rumblings. But at the end of the day, Republican primary voters are a pretty hawkish bunch. It's hard to believe they're going to end up removing otherwise conservative representatives or senators in favor of challengers who run on a platform whose key plank is that Republicans should have voted to let an Iran-supported, terror-backing dictator with American blood on his hands off the hook after he's used chemical weapons. What's more, primary elections are more than half a year away. Republican senators and congressmen will have plenty of time to reestablish their anti-Obama credentials by fighting Obama on Obamacare, immigration, the debt ceiling, and a host of other issues.

A Yes vote can also be explained as a vote to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Syria is an Iranian proxy. Assad's ability to use chemical weapons is a proxy for Iran's ability to move ahead unimpeded in its acquisition of nuclear weapons. To bring this point home, soon after voting to authorize the use of force against the Assad regime, Republicans might consider moving an authorization for the use of force against the Iranian nuclear weapons program. They can explain that Obama's dithering in the case of Syria shows the utility of unequivocally giving him the authority to act early with respect to Iran. An Iran debate would pretty much unite Republicans and conservatives and would help mitigate political problems arising from a Yes vote on Syria. The issue of Iran will most likely come to a head before Election Day 2014, probably even before primary elections earlier next year. An Iran resolution means the Syria vote won't be the most important vote Republicans cast in this session of Congress—it won't even be the most important foreign policy vote.

So, in the vote on the authorization to use force in Syria, Republicans' self-interest coincides with the national interest. For reasons both fastidiously statesmanlike and crassly political, Yes is the right vote.

—William Kristol

I Came, I Saw, I Skedaddled

Decisive moments in Barack Obama history.

BY P.J. O'ROURKE

Chief Executive of Sparta, Barack Leonidas Obama, at the Battle of Thermopylae

Stand down, men. The chairman of the Greek City States Alliance Joint Chiefs of Staff has indicated to me that our capacity to execute this mission against Xerxes is not time-sensitive.

Julius Barack Caesar Obama Crosses the Rubicon

I am crossing the Rubicon. Brrr, the water's chilly. Deep, too. I'm going for a walk along the riverbank to look for a bridge. And I will cross the Rubicon as soon as the weather warms up. The die has been cast. That is, the deck has been shuffled. Or the *Wheel of Fortune* has been spun. And I'll buy a vowel.

P.J. O'Rourke is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Pontius Barack Pilate Obama, Matthew 27:24

When he saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of these just persons, but I'll ask the Senate back in Rome for authority to do something-or-other, although it may have to wait until after Good Friday."

Christopher Barack Columbus Obama

Many prominent experts, including Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*, maintain that the earth is flat. This is a debate I would like to have. Meanwhile, I have discovered a new route to France.

Shakespeare's Henry Barack V, Act IV, Scene iii

That he which hath no stomach to this fight,

Let him depart. So I'm out of here.

[*exit muttering*]

We few, we very few, we hardly any . . .

The Midnight Ride of Paul Barack Revere Obama

One if by land, and two if by sea, and three if by air, and four if by drones . . . Or is it two if by land, and one if by sea? . . . However, there will be no deployment of Colonial ground forces. So it's two if by ship-launched cruise missiles . . . Or is it three if by airstrikes? . . . Anyway, the British aren't coming.

Col. William Barack Prescott Obama at the Battle of Bunker Capitol Hill

Don't fire until you see the whites . . . But we should not understand this as a racial issue. We should not understand this as a partisan political issue. We should not understand this as a national issue. This is an international issue. Don't fire at General Howe's troops until you see international support. And it doesn't count if it's just France.

Arthur Barack Wellesley Obama, Duke of Wellington and the Rose Garden

If there had been a battle, the Battle of Waterloo would have been won on the playing fields of Eton, if there had been a Waterloo.

Sir Winston Barack Churchill Obama

We shall fight on the beaches—mostly on Martha's Vineyard, where

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY LOCKE

everybody was over Labor Day weekend—we shall fight at the G-20 summit in St. Petersburg, we shall fight at the U.N. Security Council, we shall fight in the House of Representatives and the Senate when Congress is finally back in session; we shall never surrender unless we don't get enough votes or our poll ratings are low.

Franklin Barack Delano Hussein Roosevelt Obama

We, too, born to freedom, and believing in freedom, are willing to fight to maintain freedom. Sort of. We, and all others who believe as deeply as we do, would rather die on our feet than live on our knees. Sometimes. Unless we're busy doing yoga and are in the "downward dog" position.

F.B.D.H.R.O., Twitterside Chat

When you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, you do not wait until he has struck before you crush him. You go find other people to crush him for you. But first you try to talk him out of it.

John Barack Fitzgerald Kennedy Obama

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill—and since we're not engaged in nation-building, every nation should wish us well—that we shall pay any price if it's not too high, bear any burden unless it's burdensome, meet any hardship unless it's hard, support any friend if we have any, oppose any foe—although no nation should think of us as a foe because we're not that kind of country anymore—to assure the survival and success of liberty, unless it's a holiday weekend.

Apollo 11 Commander Neil Barack Armstrong Obama, July 20, 1969

That's one small step for . . . Nope. I think I'll go back up the ladder to the lunar module. Maybe Buzz Aldrin would like to go first.

Martin Barack Luther Hussein King Obama Jr.

I have a daydream. ♦

Do It for the Presidency

Congress, this time at least, shouldn't say no to Obama. BY GARY SCHMITT

There is little reason to believe that President Obama's decision to ask Congress for authorization to engage in military action in Syria is the result of a newfound fastidiousness when it comes to the Constitution and his constitutional obligation to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

Announcing the plan for a congressional vote, August 31

On the 2007 campaign trail, candidate Obama regularly blasted the Bush administration over its supposed "imperial presidency" pretensions and argued that a "president does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation."

But his own record shows a president ignoring laws when he finds them inconvenient, using administrative procedures to bypass Congress to create expansive new statutory regimes, and flouting an explicit provision in the Constitution regarding recess appointments. And perhaps most Orwellian of all, Obama turned the language of the War Powers Act on its head during the 2011 Libyan intervention by arguing that the six months of aerial and cruise missile strikes by American naval and air forces did not constitute actual "hostilities" and, hence, did not require any action by Congress.

It appears that for the former law school professor the "living Constitution" is indeed a living thing—living day to day, that is. Not surprisingly, then, the president's decision to go to Congress is seen by more than a few as a cynical ploy in which the president, already reluctant to take any action at all, is hoping an even more reluctant Congress will actually vote against a resolution to use force.

Whether that cynicism is warranted, or even whether President Obama himself fully understands the consequences of his decision to seek an authorization from Congress, it is a huge roll of the dice for his presidency. A failure to win a congressional authorization—when combined with existing scandals, the mess of Obamacare, and the country's general economic malaise—is likely to cement even further his lame duck status and leave the United States with a president whose credibility

Gary Schmitt is director of the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

NEWSCOM

with allies and enemies alike is at rock bottom.

Although Speaker of the House John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor now support military action, other Republicans may be tempted to use this as a political opportunity. After all, this is a president who has used the bully pulpit to be a partisan bully as much as any president in recent history. But Republicans should remember that this is an office they will one day inherit, and the hole they dig now for Obama and the country's strategic credibility will be a hole they might well be trying to climb out of in just a few years.

There are conservatives who believe the president does not have a constitutional obligation to seek a congressional okay when it comes to striking Syria, and there are conservatives who believe that he does. Regardless, that bridge has been crossed, and the question now is whether Congress will act as the world's most important deliberative body, which it claims to be, or the fractious, ineffective herd of 535 that the public has come to see it as.

As with most things offered up by the administration in the area of national security, the draft resolution was a mishmash of tactics and strategy and needed improving. Having delayed a military strike this long, and eliminated any chance of surprise, it is militarily impossible for a punishing, deterring blow against the Assad regime for its use of chemical weapons to be on the order of Obama's initial minimalist "shot across the bow." Congress must insist that any military campaign not be feckless, and that it be properly funded so as not to further hollow out an already sequestered-to-death military.

Such a campaign, if not so limited as to be pointless, will inevitably reduce the Assad regime's capacity against Syria's rebels. On this point, Senator John McCain, along with his colleagues on the Foreign Relations Committee who voted for an amended resolution on Wednes-

day, deserve high praise for understanding that fact and making it "the policy of the United States to change the momentum on the battlefield in Syria" and, in turn, urging the development of "a comprehensive U.S. strategy" to assist the "vetted elements of Syrian opposition forces" by providing lethal and nonlethal capabilities.

Moreover, none of this requires boots on the ground. Skepticism about the feasibility of an effective Syrian campaign reflects not an actual lack of American capacity, but rather self-inflicted doubts from pulling the plug on our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan prematurely. Nonjihadist opposition forces do exist and they do hold significant swaths of Syria. However, they will certainly fall by the wayside in the face of resolute and ruthless al Qaeda-aligned forces if not properly trained, armed, and guided.

No doubt, there are conservatives who, like the president, want simply to pivot away from the Middle East altogether and believe that's what the public wants as well. But what the public wants today and what it sees as important down the road will almost certainly not be the same. In 1999, John McCain went against the majority of his congressional GOP colleagues, supported a military intervention in Kosovo, and stole a march on his nomination opponents in appearing more presidential. He was joined by then-governor George W. Bush in support of the intervention, and soon enough the polls showed a majority of Americans in agreement.

On the other side of the coin, another senator with presidential aspirations, the relatively hawkish Democrat Sam Nunn, voted in 1991 against the congressional authorization for the first Gulf war and now admits it was the greatest mistake of his career.

In short, conservatives, especially those thinking that they could be sitting in the Oval Office one day, ought to think long and hard before they reject a sensible, if not perfect, authorization for the use of force. ♦

What to Do About Syria

Vital U.S. interests are at stake.

BY FREDERICK W. KAGAN

American interests in Syria are clear: preventing terrorists from acquiring chemical weapons; depriving Iran of its most important ally and staging-base in the Middle East; and preventing al Qaeda from establishing an uncontested safe haven in the Levant. Reasonable people can disagree about the extent to which President Obama's proposed "limited strike" will secure these interests, but not about whether the interests are real or vital. Bashar al-Assad has one of the largest chemical weapons arsenals in the world. Al Qaeda franchises control territory in Syria and have some of the most effective fighting forces on the ground. Iran's own military and security forces are active in Syria in defense of the Assad regime. The threat to Americans is very real.

Assad's expanding use of chemical weapons against his own people is more than an atrocity and an egregious violation of international law and norms. It also materially increases the risk that terrorists, whether al Qaeda or Hezbollah, will get hold of some warheads. When not in use, weapons of mass destruction are generally kept in heavily guarded and secured bunkers—regimes that possess them fear both that they might be stolen or smuggled away and that the enemy against whom the weapons are aimed might destroy them preemptively. Terrorists seeking to lay hands on the weapons, generally, would either have to penetrate those defenses (usually a task beyond their means), infiltrate the guarding force (not a very plausible option for al Qaeda facing an Alawite defense force loyal to Assad), or hope that the defense collapses, leaving the position open to plunder. Even in that last case, the United States or other concerned powers, seeing the departure of the guard force, could use bombs to prevent the terrorists from getting into the facility or removing materials from it or, in the worst case, insert troops into the facilities that were compromised, whose positions are presumably well known to us.

In order to use the weapons, however, Assad's forces must remove them from any such protective facilities, load them onto vehicles, drive them through the war-torn streets of a conflict zone, set them up, and fire them. Those activities make the weapons themselves considerably more vulnerable to terrorist seizure, especially as they are being transported. The terrorists' problem then shifts from one of breaching a heavily secured bunker to one of raiding a convoy—a tactic that insurgents in Syria and around the world perfected long ago. Manhandling the warheads and smuggling them out of the area or the country would present challenges to the terrorists depending on the size and characteristics of the weapons—but those challenges are by no means insurmountable.

Facing such a situation, the United States would find its own responses much more complex. To begin with, would it even be known that something was awry until after the fact? Recent media reporting suggests that the intelligence community was not tracking preparations for Assad's most recent use of chemical weapons in real

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time. Simply bombing the terrorists wrestling with the weapons risks setting off the weapons in a populated area. Inserting a small strike force into such an area (rather than onto a military facility separated by design from the population) would be much more dangerous and also significantly increase the risk of both American and civilian casualties. And there is the risk that the reaction wouldn't be fast enough in any case, potentially allowing terrorists to move the weapons away from the site of the attack and forcing the United States to start an aerial hunt for them.

In short, Syria's use of chemical weapons by itself dramatically increases the risk of those weapons falling into al Qaeda's hands. Any action the United States and its allies could take to dissuade Assad from continuing that use—thereby persuading him to keep the weapons locked up as securely as he can—is a step toward reducing that risk.

The best solution, of course, would be to destroy the weapons or remove them from Syria. Simply bombing them from the air poses unacceptable risks, unless they are about to be seized by terrorists. There is a risk of releasing clouds of toxic gas that could kill scores or hundreds of innocent civilians, even when using advanced bombs designed to incinerate chemical weapons. Using such advanced munitions, moreover, would require putting manned aircraft over Syrian airspace, which in turn means attacking the Syrian air defense system in advance. Bombing secured bunkers also makes it impossible to determine with certainty whether all of the weapons were destroyed, while simultaneously exposing the storage facility to plunder by scattering (at the very least) its guard force. One might advocate such action, again, as a last resort, but not as a first military option.

Removing the weapons would require ground forces in large numbers. It appears that Assad keeps his chemical weapons at a variety of sites around the country, which would make it necessary to insert many strike forces simultaneously. Each strike force would need to be able to overcome the guard forces at each facility very quickly and then hold it against regime counterattacks. The strike forces would have to be accompanied by specialists in rendering chemical weapons safe enough to be transported, and those specialists would need to be supported and guarded. The process of rendering an unfamiliar stockpile safe is not instant—the forces would need to be able to hold a facility for some time. Reserve forces and rapid-reaction troops would need to be available. All of these forces would need massive intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support; fixed-wing aircraft support; helicopters (including fueling stations); Medevac capabilities; and all the paraphernalia of modern ground warfare. This would be no raid on Entebbe. The U.S. military has indicated that such an option could require tens of thousands of troops, and this quick sketch bears out that calculation. Since no one in this debate is advocating sending a large ground force into Syria, we have effectively dismissed the option of seizing the weapons or destroying them and thereby entered the realm of high-risk options.

A survivor of the Damascus gas attack, resting in a mosque, August 21

REUTERS / LANDOV

Four military forces are operating on the ground in Syria today, and are thus the candidates for custody of the chemical weapons arsenal: Assad's military, his Hezbollah allies, al Qaeda affiliates, and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). If it were clear that Assad was going to win the war and reestablish control over Syria or that the current situation was stable and could be expected to endure, one might conclude that allowing Assad's forces to continue their custody over the arsenal was the safest option. Some administration officials, in fact, had been arguing just that until recently. But there is virtually no prospect that Assad will reestablish control over Syria (even if that were morally or geopolitically desirable), and the current situation is far from stable. In the space of a few weeks we have seen the regime go from a desperate fight to hold onto Homs to a blitzkrieg dash north to try to seize Aleppo, only to be forced back to Homs (where it has been gaining ground) and even Damascus (where it is losing ground) by rebel counterattacks. The large-scale chemical weapons attack was itself a regime reaction to the risk of losing a critical neighborhood in its capital. Persistent conflict breeds persistent instability that makes Assad's custody of his WMD unacceptable.

Since clearly neither Hezbollah nor al Qaeda is a trustworthy custodian, and since the United States has no desire to send the military force that would be necessary to destroy or remove the weapons, the only hope of managing Syria's chemical weapons threat lies with the success of the FSA. The United States and the international community should make it a condition of support for the FSA and for any government they might support after Assad's fall that it agree to abide by the chemical weapons bans (to which Assad's regime is not a party) and to hand over seized stockpiles at once to American or other international forces for destruction. There is no reason to think that the FSA would resist such a demand.

Offering more meaningful aid would make it more enticing.

In the meantime, deterring or preventing Assad from using his chemical weapons or dispersing them is of primary importance. A punitive strike would be unlikely in itself to accomplish this aim—unless it destroyed or otherwise incapacitated the weapons systems Assad needs to use his chemical stockpiles, such as his aircraft and his rocket and missile batteries. The chemical agents are not militarily meaningful without their launchers, and Assad has been using them thus far for tactical reasons as well as to sow terror. Such a strike, which might well need to be repeated several times to make it clear to Assad that he would not be able to use his weapons in any orderly fashion, could buy the opposition the time it needs to succeed—and to gain control over the arsenals themselves. Such strikes, moreover, would provide immediate and tangible benefits to the opposition by degrading Assad's ability to use the same aircraft, rocket, and missile systems to hit the rebels with conventional weapons, as his forces are now doing. It is hard, in fact, to conceive of a target set that might "degrade" Assad's ability to use his chemical weapons in any meaningful way without also helping the opposition materially.

Preventing Assad from using his chemical weapons while robustly supporting the FSA also offers the best hope of securing America's other two interests in Syria—depriving Iran of its forward staging area in the Levant and preventing al Qaeda from establishing a safe haven there. Unless Americans want to send a large army into Syria—which no one is advocating—this is, in fact, the only strategy that offers any hope. One can well argue about the scope and scale of the air campaign and the amount and kind of support the United States should provide to the opposition, and those arguments are important. But they should not be allowed to obscure the basic facts that the security of Americans is profoundly threatened by events in Syria and that inaction will only increase that threat. ♦

Sorting Out the Opposition to Assad

They're not all jihadist dead-enders.

BY LEE SMITH

Last week, Secretary of State John Kerry went against received wisdom—and against the assessment of the White House he works for—when he argued that Syrian opposition forces are not dominated by Islamic extremists. "I just don't agree that a majority are al Qaeda and the bad guys," Kerry argued in his congressional testimony. "There are about 70,000 to 100,000 oppositionists. . . . Maybe 15 percent to 25 percent might be in one group or another who are what we would deem to be bad guys."

"Probably less," says Major Issam Rayyes, a former Syrian Army communications officer who defected in June 2012 and now serves as a coordinator for the opposition's Supreme Military Council. "I was watching the hearing and one congressmen insisted the opposition was 50 percent al Qaeda, and Kerry was right to correct him," Rayyes told me by Skype from northern Syria. "I'm not saying they're not here. They have a presence, and they've captured some territory. But they're in the minority. Congress is making a mistake in thinking the opposition is al Qaeda."

According to the Syrian rebels, that's one of two huge popular misconceptions concerning the two-and-a-half-year conflict. The other is that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad is winning.

Ever since the regime, with help from Hezbollah, retook the town of Qusayr in June, we've heard that Assad's forces are on a roll. However, a number of analysts and journalists on the ground in Syria suggest more recent evidence argues otherwise. Indeed, the regime's brazen chemical attack last month in the Damascus suburb of East Ghouta suggests Assad may think his position is becoming increasingly vulnerable and that he's running out of options. Because regime troops proved unable to clear an area of vital importance that the rebels had held for over a year, Assad was willing to test Obama's red line and deploy, again, his unconventional arsenal.

Because Obama wanted no part of the Syrian conflict, the White House helped create the perception that it all came down to a choice between Assad and an al Qaeda project to turn Syria into an Islamic emirate. After the opposition took up arms to defend itself and some American policymakers like Senator John McCain argued for supporting the rebels, administration officials first claimed that they didn't know who was in the opposition. Later, the White House said they did know—that al Qaeda was in the ascendant.

Who in their right mind, after all, would argue for arming the engineers of 9/11? With the progeny of bin Laden on one side and Assad and the Iranian-led resistance bloc on the other, the only strategically sound course would be to let them fight each other until no one was left standing. The White House's information campaign had the added benefit of resonating in some Republican circles. For instance, where McCain wanted a victory in Syria to see American interests prevail over Iran's, his 2008 running mate agreed with the White House that a draw was preferable. "Let Allah sort it out," said Sarah Palin.

And indeed, in certain parts of Syria, especially near the Turkish border, Sunni extremists, including al Qaeda

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affiliates, have until recently been a significant part of the war against Assad. Without Western support, Syrian fighters flocked to the groups that could offer money and arms, much of it coming from private donors in the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Whether rebel fighters grew long beards and shouted Islamist slogans out of conviction, or simply because it convinced Kuwaiti billionaires to keep the spigot on, Islamist units like Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian Islamic Front, and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria were certainly a factor. They became much less significant when Saudi Arabia, or more specifically Saudi national security adviser Prince Bandar bin Sultan, took the reins.

Saudi policies, as Syria scholar and University of Edinburgh professor Thomas Pierret recently wrote, "translate into support for political forces that are inherently conservative or hostile to Islamist movements." As Riyadh has backed the Egyptian military against the Muslim Brotherhood, it has pursued an analogous course in Syria. Pierret explains that "the marked increase in Saudi involvement in the conflict over the last months has translated into a revival of the mainstream insurgency, and a decline in the relative weight of hardline Salafis."

So why is John Kerry the major figure pushing back against the White House's thesis that al Qaeda dominates the opposition? Why didn't the rebels speak up for themselves? Because they were busy with the reality on the ground, says Oubai Shabhandhar, the Syrian Support Group's vice president for Middle East operations, who works closely with the Syrian Military Council (SMC). "They were fighting a war, and what they heard didn't make sense. The notion that they are pawns of al Qaeda was so unbelievable that they thought it didn't warrant a response," says Shabhandhar, a former Pentagon official whose family is originally from Damascus. "Finally, we're starting to fight the message that the opposition is al Qaeda."

Then, too, as the administration argued, the opposition *is* fragmented—which is partly a result of petty rivalries, competition, and insufficient coordination between rebel groups inside the country, never mind with the political spokesmen and officials in exile. But the opposition's inability to push back against the White House's portrait of it also reflects the trauma of a people locked in a dark closet for more than 40 years. With two generations of Syrians raised under the Assad family's dictatorship, the opposition simply didn't have the sophistication to craft a PR campaign on its own behalf. Shabhandhar says that's starting to change. The SMC has a restructured media office focusing on outreach to Western journalists.

Kerry on the Hill: testifying to the House Foreign Affairs Committee

UPI / KEVIN DIETSCH / LANDOV

The White House's decision to conflate all Syrian opposition with al Qaeda also meant pretending that the United States had no interests at stake in Syria. Accordingly, the president neither forged coalitions among American allies to face down the Iran-Russia-Assad alliance, nor built up rebel units that would be accountable to Washington in the event that someday he might need one or the other or both. Thus, when Obama decided in the wake of last month's chemical weapons attack that there was indeed an American interest, he was left with one option—unilateralism. Only France, whose prospective contribution is uncertain, is willing to stand with the United States, and there are no rebel units that answer directly to Washington. What happens if the rebels win?

One rebel commander in Damascus I spoke with thinks it's a done deal. "If the regime's assets are hit in Damascus, rebel efforts will be focused on Damascus," says a fighter with a unit close to the target area of last month's gas attack. "When the regime falls, we'll capture the rest of Damascus. We've been working on a transition plan for nine months," he continues, "to prevent chaos when the regime falls. Our objectives are to secure liberated areas and to continue essential services, like providing water and food to civilians."

Why is he so certain the Assad regime is teetering? He explains that in spite of Assad's self-congratulatory bravado after Obama sought congressional authorization, "We still saw 700 defectors in the last week, including 50 from Assad's Republican guard."

Maj. Rayyes agrees. "If this strike is strong enough, if it targets airports and major sites, the regime might fall soon. Maybe 60 days. When the strikes start, lots of soldiers will run away. Mark my words—not defect, run away."

The rebels are almost certainly overstating the case for optimism. Nonetheless, with McCain pushing the White House to change the momentum on the ground, the balance of power will likely shift against a regime that may be much less sturdy than it lets on. The good news for the White House is that it still has time to arm and train rebel units, thereby making them dependent on and accountable to Washington. Provided, of course, that Obama comes to recognize that there are American interests at stake, besides enforcing a red line drawn in haste. ♦

Hesitation, Delay, and Unreliability

Not the qualities one looks for in a war president.

BY FRED BARNES

War presidents don't quibble. They don't leak. They don't go AWOL. They aren't dispirited or downbeat. They aren't ambivalent about the mission. And most important of all, war presidents are never irresolute.

These are a few of the rules for presidents before, during, and after the country goes to war. On Syria, President Obama disregards all of them. This should mean one of two things. Either Obama is a poor war president, at least in the current pre-war stage, or he's an altogether different kind of war president.

In his World War II memoirs, Winston Churchill offered this lesson: "In war, resolution; in defeat, defiance; in victory, magnanimity; in peace, good will." Being resolute—that is, steadfast and determined—comes first. It is normally regarded as a critical component of success.

Obama and resolve don't seem to mix. As the death toll in the Syrian civil war mounted, he opposed American intervention. Then, in an offhand remark a year ago, he said his policy would change if the Assad regime crossed a "red line" and used chemical weapons. Still, he ignored unsubstantiated reports of gas attacks that Secretary of State John Kerry said numbered in the "teens." He decided to act only when American intelligence confirmed an estimated 1,400 people had been killed in a gas attack by the Syrian military on August 21.

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A bombing assault was planned for Labor Day weekend to "deter" further use of chemical weapons and "degrade" Assad's arsenal. But Obama abruptly jettisoned that plan and announced he would seek the approval of Congress. An attack, if there is to be one, could be postponed for weeks, jeopardizing what's known as "peak" military readiness.

Obama contemplating a bust of Jimmy Carter

Earlier, in June, the White House announced it would send small arms and munitions to the Syrian rebels. By early September, however, no weapons had reached the rebels.

So hesitation, delay, and unreliability are the hallmarks of Obama's approach to Syria, for now. This amounts to presidential "fecklessness," says Steven F. Hayward, author of *Greatness: Reagan, Churchill, and the Making of Extraordinary Leaders*. "A strong war leader needs one quality above others," he says, "a ruthlessness to see it through, coupled with a touch of legerdemain to keep our enemies off balance and fearful of what the United States might do."

Obama certainly lacks that "touch" of cunning. There's a gulf between his mission and his military. His goal is the removal of Assad as Syrian leader—in other words, regime change. But Obama insists a bombing attack in Syria would be solely to stop further use of chemical weapons. He's publicly ruled out a wider assault aimed at regime change or deployment of ground troops.

"Calling for Assad's downfall and warning him not to use chemical weapons but being hesitant to back up his strong words with commensurate actions is not how successful commanders in chief behave in wartime," says Max Boot, author of *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*.

Hayward adds: "Reagan had one important rule that Obama has already flunked: Never say 'never.' Privately Reagan was adamant that he'd never put 'boots on the ground' in Nicaragua, but publicly he'd never admit this, on the sensible ground that it was better for our enemies to be worried that we might. That fear helped make our limited actions more effective."

One could argue that Obama had no choice but to disavow the use of ground troops. Otherwise the resolution authorizing force would lose in Congress. But this pitfall was avoidable. Obama believes, correctly, he has the authority, as president, to order the bombing and dispatch troops. Congressional consent is optional.

As Allied commander in World War II, Dwight Eisenhower felt he was obliged to be upbeat. If he appeared doubtful or downbeat in public, it would be interpreted as a sign of alarm about the war's progress. War presidents have the same

THOMAS FLUHARTY

obligation. Yet Obama talks about how "weary of war" he and the American people are.

"We've ended one war in Iraq," he said in his Rose Garden announcement about congressional authorization. "We're ending another in Afghanistan. And the American people have the good sense to know we cannot resolve the underlying conflict in Syria with our military." The message, whatever the president's intention, was: I'm tired and I can't achieve much in Syria anyway.

"Saying 'I am war-weary' is an appalling thing to do," says Eliot Cohen, whose book *Supreme Command* examines four successful wartime leaders (Lincoln, Clémenceau, Churchill, Ben-Gurion). "Number One has to look confident, self-assured, positive without conveying an impression of irrational optimism. Above all, he can never, ever feel sorry for himself—or, indeed, anyone else."

In Sweden last week, Obama couldn't stifle his self-pity. They don't understand him at home, he suggested. "If I were here in Europe, I'd probably be considered right in the middle, maybe center-left, maybe center-right, depending on the country. In the United States sometimes the names I'm called are quite different." At this point, the White House transcript noted "(laughter)."

Nor could the president resist a hairsplitting case that *he* hadn't drawn the "red line" in Syria. "The world set the red line," he claimed, citing the treaty banning chemical weapons. That wasn't all. Forget the notion his credibility is "on the line" in Syria. Nope, it's Congress and the "international community" whose credibility is, according to Obama.

What he gained from airing these distinctions is anyone's guess. It didn't improve the prospect of passage in Congress of his use-of-force resolution. And it's hard to imagine Franklin Roosevelt or Churchill, both models of wartime leadership, quibbling over such trivialities during World War II.

But what, one might ask, was the president doing in Sweden while his Syria resolution was being debated in Congress? Sweden wasn't likely to help. It was neutral in World War II. Thus it was no surprise that Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt declined to endorse Obama-style military intervention in Syria.

The visit to Sweden could have been rescheduled without diplomatic repercussion. And Obama's next stop, the G20 summit in Moscow, could have been abbreviated. Or skipped.

Instead, the president left to subordinates the task of lobbying antiwar Democrats in Congress, without whose votes the resolution may fail. And he's handed Kerry the lead role—the presidential role, I'd say—in promoting the resolution and defending "limited" bombing of Syria.

I've concluded Obama doesn't want to be a war president. But in his desire to bomb Syria—an act of war— he's become a war president. Now he needs to act like one. There's still time. ♦

The Louisiana GOP Gains a Convert

Elbert Lee Guillory, Cajun noir.

BY MICHAEL WARREN

New Orleans

"*Je suis un Cajun noir*," Elbert Lee Guillory, the 69-year-old state senator from Opelousas, Louisiana, tells me proudly. "I am a black Cajun." To which he might these days add, "*Je suis un Républicain noir*—I am a black Republican."

On May 31, Guillory became the first black Louisianan to serve at the state or federal level as a Republican since Reconstruction. In truth, he was a Republican before running for the statehouse in 2007, serving on the party's St. Landry Parish committee and the state committee. But when he decided to run for office in his majority black, majority Democratic district, having an "R" by his name would have done him no favors. Besides, he says, his goal was to take down what he considered the corrupt regime of the local Democratic family in power, headed by Don Cravins Sr.

"He left Opelousas driving a Chevrolet," Guillory says of his archrival. "Went to Baton Rouge and came back with his pockets stuffed with cash, driving a Cadillac." Guillory registered as a Democrat and won his first race for the statehouse in a special election. He went on to win reelection and two subsequent elections to the Louisiana senate.

But by his 2011 campaign, Guillory was the only sitting Democratic senator not to receive the standard financial contribution from the state party. Always among the most conservative members of the Democratic caucus, Guillory had been voting with the Republicans more often than with the Democrats, who had been following the national party's liberal lead on social issues like life, school choice, and gun ownership.

"All of the core values that I held and my community held, my family held," Guillory says. "As they moved farther and farther away, what was kind of a tenuous relationship anyway became tense and rancorous."

He won reelection and continued caucusing with the Democrats but says he felt increasingly alienated from what he now calls the "party

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of disappointment." Republicans had been trying to woo him back for years, and his defection was imminent by this spring, when the Louisiana Democratic party chairwoman, state senator Karen Carter Peterson, added the final straw while debating Republicans opposed to Obamacare's Medicaid expansion.

"It's not about how many federal dollars we can receive. It's not about that. You ready? It's about race," said Peterson, who is black, on the floor of the senate on May 28. "I know nobody wants to talk about that. It's about the race of this African-American president."

Peterson's remarks touched off a firestorm, with national papers and cable news picking up the story. But most pertinent for Guillory was the reaction of his centenarian mother. She was furious.

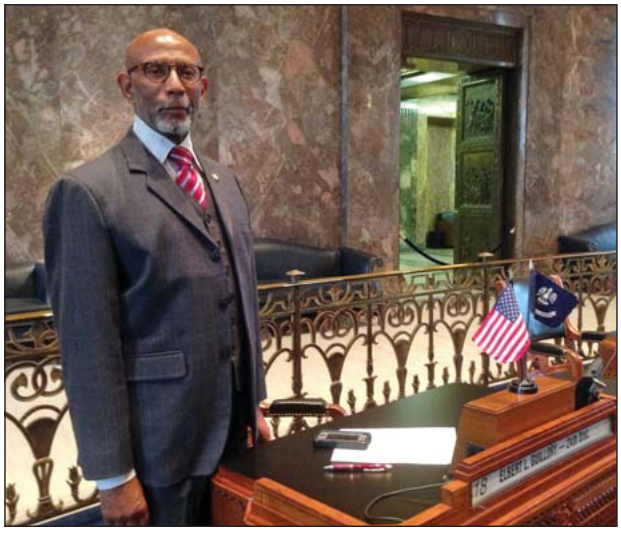
"My mom calls me and says, 'Elbert Lee, I heard this. You're not any part of that, are you? You're not saying anything like this, are you?'" Guillory says. "That was the last nudge that I needed."

A few days later, at a gathering of black conservatives in Baton Rouge, Guillory announced he had become a Republican. "We must educate our people and show them that there is an alternative to the direction that the nation is being led in today," Guillory told the crowd. "Today, the party of disappointment has moved away from the majority of Louisianans and away from the traditional values of America."

Guillory says Democrats were probably happy to see him leave, while the GOP welcomed him with open arms, mostly because they considered him one of their own already. Republican governor Bobby Jindal, who calls Guillory a friend and a "great leader," pushed to have him tapped as chairman of the senate committee on retirees when he was still a Democrat.

"I liked him as a Democrat. I like him as a Republican," says Jindal. "It didn't change who he was. It wasn't like he woke up one day and changed his positions on policies."

Jason Doré, the executive director of the Louisiana GOP, says Guillory's status as a prominent black elected official has benefited the party as it seeks to make inroads in the state's large African-American community (the highest percentage in the country after neighboring Mississippi). He's already done seven town hall events on behalf of the state party and is expected to participate in more throughout the fall.



Elbert Lee Guillory in the Louisiana senate chamber

But it's outside Louisiana that Guillory's star has risen most rapidly. A few days after his switch, he released a web video that he says was meant to explain to his constituents why he became a Republican, aptly titled "Why I Am a Republican." Filmed in the empty state senate chamber, the slick video features the well-dressed, soft-spoken Guillory speaking directly into the camera about his switch.

"It is the right decision, not only for me but for all my brothers and sisters in the black community," he says. "You see, in recent history, the Democrat party has created the illusion that their agenda and their policies are what's best for black people."

Guillory argues against what he calls the Democrats' agenda of dependency for blacks and touts the GOP's respect for freedom, praising the idea that "the individual must be free to pursue his or her own happiness, free from government dependence and free from government control."

The video went as viral as a four-minute-plus political manifesto can, getting more than 900,000 views on YouTube. Fox News personalities Sean Hannity and Neil Cavuto invited Guillory onto their programs. He made a trip to Washington, meeting with groups like the Heritage Foundation and the House's Republican Study Committee.

All the attention from conservatives in Louisiana and across the country has Guillory thinking about his political future. He won't be up for reelection until 2015, but it's unlikely his district will vote for a Republican, even a black one. Guillory might be better off running statewide, perhaps for lieutenant governor. He's indicated he may be interested in the job, but political observers close to him suggest he may consider jumping into the 2014 campaign for U.S. Senate. That seat's held by vulnerable Democrat Mary Landrieu, and Republican House member Bill Cassidy is already in the race. But a small number of Louisiana conservatives say they are unhappy with Cassidy and are seeking a more conservative alternative. Guillory could fit the bill, and besides, having him as one of two black Republicans running for Senate next year (along with South Carolina's Tim Scott) might not be bad for a national party looking to broaden its appeal.

Guillory won't say what he's thinking, though he says he hears from people asking him to run for either lieutenant governor or senator "every single day."

"If the coach calls me up," he says, pointing heavenward, "and says, 'Guillory, I'm putting you into this position or that position,' then I'll be ready to do that. But I'll wait for the coach to call." ♦

TIMES-PICAYUNE / LANDOV

The Last 24 Notes

Tom Day and the volunteer buglers who play 'Taps' at veterans' funerals across America

By Matt Labash

Berwyn, Ill.

Tom Day is not a man given to extravagance. He thinks he's living high on a reporter's nickel if he orders a beef sandwich to go at the local Buona sub shop. He shops at Goodwill every Sunday, hoping to pick up bargains, like his handsome $35 suits. But if there's one superfluity that Day especially can't abide, it is that of empty rhetoric.

There's been a lot of talk about "the troops" the last many years: Supporting The Troops. Hugging The Troops. Splitting A Malt With The Troops. (At least when not Forgetting The Troops, hurriedly paging past the "Faces of the Fallen" feature in your local paper to get to the movie listings.) The talk usually comes from helmet-haired cable anchors or men with soft hands who type things for a living. They use those who serve like polemical mascots, to run up the score either for or against the war of the moment. But to Tom Day, "duty . . . honor . . . sacrifice" aren't just Memorial Day buzzwords that trigger the Pavlovian anticipation of picnic foods and mattress-outlet sales.

A Bugles Across America volunteer

They are words that actually require something of him, the dwindling resource you can't buy more of: time. For the 73-year-old former Marine serves those who serve. Or rather, he serves those who have served. Day is the man who, both on his own and through the 7,500-plus volunteers in the organization he founded, Bugles Across America, has saved the tradition of playing live "Taps" at military funerals.

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When Day was a 10-year-old kid, steeped in the thriving drum and bugle corps culture of mid-century Chicago, he first volunteered to blow "Taps" for a returning Korean War casualty. Since then, he has personally played over 5,000 funerals. All on his own, with no recompense from the military or from the family for whom he is playing. On average, he estimates, it costs him about five hours for every funeral, from the time he turns the ignition in his driveway until the time he returns home.

He always arrives early to "find my echo" (sizing up the acoustics of the church or cemetery for desired effect), though "in 5,000 funerals," he says, "I think only four were on time." And then there's the additional time he spends practicing his bugle, getting a haircut, polishing his brass, shining his shoes, making sure there's no fingerprint smudges on the bill of his lid. It's essential to "be squared away," as he puts it, ever the Marine, in order to pay proper respect both to the deceased and their families. Doing the math, one figures Day has spent a good three solid years of his life standing at the gravesides of strangers, blowing the last 24 notes they'll ever have played for them above ground.

But what to some might seem like a nice gesture or a morbid hobby was transformed into high calling in 2000. It was then that federal legislation passed stipulating that every honorably discharged veteran had the right to at least two uniformed military personnel to fold and present the flag, and to sound "Taps" at their funeral. Day thought this was good. The bad news, the fine print added, was that if a bugler could not be found, a recording should be used.

Finding a live bugler proved a mathematical impossibility. With 1,800 vets dying every day (at one point, World

War II veterans were dying at the rate of one every two minutes), the military had only 500 buglers to share the load. Day estimates there's considerably fewer now, with general cutbacks and sequestration. Honor guards were thus initially directed to bring boom boxes to funerals, looking to stealthily place CD players behind tombstones, as they prayed the disc didn't skip or scratch, that the batteries didn't fail, or worst of all, that instead of "Taps," they hit the wrong track and accidentally played "Reveille." "Sounds funny, but it's happened," Day growls.

To add greater insult, the Defense Department then introduced what it calls "ceremonial bugles." In the venerable Pentagon procurement tradition of the $435 hammer or the $600 toilet seat, the digital bugles cost $530 a throw, and many purists/people-with-taste consider them abominations. Day's volunteers, when they call them anything printable, tend to refer to these as "fake bugles," while Day himself just calls it "The Device." As one Navy musician tells me, "This is it, it's the last song. Your veteran is dead. And it looks like you're playing him off with something from Toys'R'Us."

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The digital bugle allows a funeral detail to hold up what looks like a real instrument. But in its bell is a cone-shaped, battery-powered electronic insert that with the push of a button, plays a recorded version of "Taps" that sounds tinny with the reverb of a studio recording. "Buglers," who are often just the flag-folders or other honor guard personnel who can't play an instrument, are instructed to hold the device to their lips, in a pantomime of playing. Internet videos and photos abound of faux-buglers holding the instrument to their nose, upside down, or outstretched like a smelly fish. Often, "players" are not getting their mouthpiece to their lips in time after pushing the button. Or they might even put down the horn, mid-song, after the insert malfunctions. It's military funeral honors, Milli Vanilli-edition.

"God, that's kind of stupid," Day said to himself of the new policy. "So I called up the Pentagon and said, look, I'll find some horn players for you." The Pentagon's attitude, he says, was initially a humoring, "Okay, you go ahead and do that, bugle boy." To which Day said, "Yeah, that's what I am." And so, Day knew what he had to do.

Nearly 8,000 volunteer "Taps" players later, Day has done just that. To be sure, it's a drop in the bucket. At last count, there were 16,000 digital bugles in use throughout the military, and in 2010, they were responsible for "Taps" sounding at 185,000 of 236,000 requested military funerals. But to many vets' families, hearing human players on real horns is still important. And Day's friends at the Pentagon now tell him that his Bugles Across America (BAA) is covering around 35 percent of all live "Taps" playing throughout the nation, making BAA perhaps the most desirable subcontractor ever, as its service doesn't cost the military a penny.

Day originally recruited horn players through his national network of friends, from a life spent around drum and bugle corps, as well as in the military (Day pulled an eight-year hitch in the Marine Corps, and later did a stint with the Navy Reserve after the Marines said he was too old when, in his forties, he tried to reenlist). "Marching and music are my life," Day says. In his spare time, as a retired state lottery worker, Day still does everything from judging the music units of JROTC groups for Chicago schools to helping organize the city's Memorial Day parade.

BAA started attracting media attention shortly after 9/11. He was on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* and on the network news. The pieces helped swell his ranks. But the nonprofit operation, run on a donor-based shoestring budget out of Day's cramped basement in the Chicago suburb of Berwyn, turns mostly on word-of-mouth: from funeral directors, stretched-thin military honor guards, and with direct requests from families who want some momentousness lent to the last moments they'll spend with their loved one.

I meet Day one summer morning at his working-class burglar-barred bungalow. All silver-haired and square-angled, his fire-hydrant build is still gunnery-sergeant solid from the daily morning workouts he puts in on his ski machine and Ab Coaster. His house, however, seems an unlikely nerve-center for "Taps" HQ. The dining room is arrayed with American Girl dolls, which his third-grade-teacher wife collects. There's also an ever-growing mob of stuffed pandas, which they both find captivating. "I don't know what the hell to do with them all," says Day. "But I like pandas. They're black and white."

Descending into his wood-paneled basement office with a low drop-ceiling, every square inch seems to be competing with the next for justification. Everything is in its place. Still, it is wall-to-wall exercise equipment and military collectibles (toy soldiers, uniform hats on mannequin heads)

and musical paraphernalia (bugles and trumpets, bugle-shaped lamps, the lyrics to the old Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts" papering the wall), with gobs more random memorabilia (model cars, *Grease* posters and dolls, more pandas).

It is here where he oversees BAA, keeping in touch with his 50 state directors, all of whom are volunteers, arranging to send horns he buys off eBay to players in need, or to audition new players over the phone. Day is not dictatorial, and is even eager to spread the publicity around. "Do good things and tell people about it," he tells recruits. The more people know, the more will join, he figures.

But the one thing neither he nor his state directors will countenance is players who can't blow a clean "Taps." The performance is too high-stakes to gamble on. Day himself, ironically, doesn't even read music—perhaps one of the only people inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame who can't. But he puts a premium on musicianship. He has an eccentric Vietnam vet in Florida who calls about every month to audition. He fails every time. Day sent him a horn just to be nice, but he still won't let him play BAA funerals. "This is a onetime deal, and it'd better be good," says Day.

'Taps' by Tom Day

'Taps' by G.P. 'Chip' Stickler

The audio files embedded here are intended to be accessible to readers who have opened this document in Adobe Acrobat or Acrobat Reader. They also can be found at weeklystandard.com.

Once a player makes the cut, he or she is put in the BAA database. When an email request from BAA's website comes in—and they're constantly streaming in (50 or so do on the day that I'm at his house)—all horn players within a 100-mile radius of the request are informed, and someone usually steps up to play the funeral, sometimes driving hundreds of miles at his own expense. Day's players run the gamut. They are former military, as well as lifetime civilians. Ages have ranged from 11 to 102. They've been construction workers and chefs and songwriters for the Oak Ridge Boys. They play in all manner of conditions, from a scorching golf course in Mesa, Arizona, to a frigid cemetery in Erie, Pennsylvania, where 40 angry geese erupted from under a snow drift during a 21-gun salute.

Day himself has seen all manner of curiosities at funerals, and relates the grim particulars with the gallows smirk of a man who has spent much time around death. He respects it, but unlike the amateur, is not made overly reverential by its presence. There was the woman at the black church who, in a highly emotional state, tried to jump into the casket with her veteran uncle. "She jumped like a halfback would over the line into the end zone. They were taking the casket out, and she wanted to be in there," he says. A burly funeral director was standing beside it. "The big guy catches her in midflight," he marvels. "She's kicking her feet and everything. I thought, 'Holy God.' Luckily, I played before she did the jump."

Then there was the woman who approached the casket, looked at her deceased loved one, and started screaming, running frantically to and fro. "I thought she was going to fall," Day says. "I put my horn down, grabbed her, and said, 'What's the matter?'"

"That's not my mother," said the woman. "They've got the wrong person in the casket."

Another time, when Day was firing a three-shot salute in honor of the deceased (in addition to playing "Taps," he often brings his own World War II-era M-1 rifles for such purposes), the bayonet shot off, arced high into the air, then descended in what looked like slow-motion, impaling the ground just six inches from the priest's foot. The priest later congratulated Day for handling the mishap gracefully, saying, "I can't wait to get back to Aurora to tell the nuns how the bugle player tried to kill me."

Day tells these stories with lightness, but takes no vet's funeral lightly. Though most of the time he's playing for strangers, he writes down the name of each one of the deceased in a log that he keeps on his desk, as though attempting not to forget the people he's never known. Some funerals are easier to remember than others.

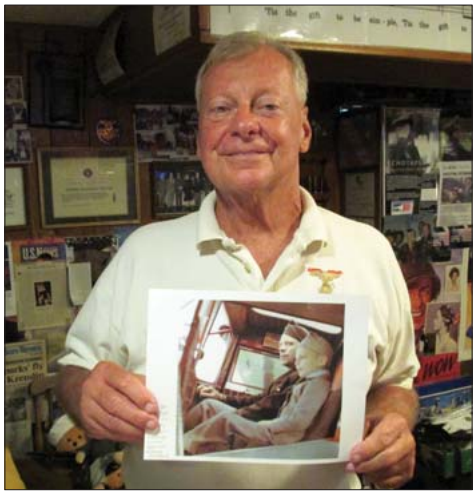
Day has spent the bulk of his adult life teaching kids the ins and outs of drum and bugle corps. (In the seventies, when living in California, he even helped cofound the Anaheim Kingsmen, who went on to win the first Drum Corps International world championship.) About a decade ago, Day coached a group of Boy Scouts in a drum and bugle corps in nearby River Forest. The Scouts aged out and moved on. Some even joined the military.

But one day, about five years ago, Day was about to play a funeral. One of his former Scouts, Joshua Harris, came to the funeral, and said, "Hey Gunny, can I play 'Echo Taps' with you?" He had learned "Taps" from Day, himself. They played together that day. Then played a couple more funerals together.

Six months later, Josh, now 21, shipped out for Afghanistan. "He was riding in his vehicle," says Day. "They blew the front end off. He and his buddy were killed. His parents called me to play. I thought, 'Holy mackerel.' But I've got to do it." Day told his wife, Donna, to stand graveside beside him with water, "in case I fall apart." While a military bugler

usually plays "Taps" in about 40 seconds, Day believes in playing slow, taking up to a minute and 10 seconds, wringing the sad, sweet melancholy out of every last note.

He was worried he'd chip a note, bugler-speak for screwing up, as John F. Kennedy's "Taps" bugler, Keith White, famously did, after standing in the drizzle for three hours at Arlington National Cemetery while waiting to play. Some called White's a mistake, but Day prefers to think of it as a "bugler's tear." With Josh's family and many of the former 14-year-olds from Josh's old Scout troop in attendance, Day tried with all his might to play "Taps" for the kid that he'd taught to play "Taps": "I got that first note out. A couple people started crying. The next phrase—more people. By the time I finished notes 22, 23, and 24, at least 100 people were crying. And me, too. That was something. That was really something. That was the worst funeral I've ever done. And that includes my mom's and dad's."



Tom Day and a photo of himself with his father in their Civil Air Patrol days

Generally speaking, Day is a glass-half-full kind of guy. He was introduced to music as a 7-year-old. His father Joe (whom Day still idolizes) was a swashbuckling Marine biplane gunner and pilot who died at 92. He did everything from sparring with Joe Louis to swimming with Johnny Weissmuller to helping start the Civil Air Patrol in Illinois in the forties. But his greatest feat, in Tom's eyes, might've been the time he safely landed his Luscombe Silvaire in the tractor furrows of a cornfield without even telling his son that they'd run out of gas.

When his father drove Day up to the Norwood Park Fieldhouse for his first round of drum and bugle corps practice, he eased the reluctant boy out of the car, then quickly drove away. Day was given a pair of decrepit cymbals. "They were the cruddiest things," he recalls, but "I thought, oh, this is great, because I liked to shine shoes." Day took the cymbals home and shined them up for hours with glass wax and brasso, playing them until his parents' ears bled.

"There's something about taking a piece of crap, and making it look good."

In one way or another, that's what Day's been doing his whole life. In the Marines, he arrived at Parris Island already knowing how to take apart and reassemble an M-1 with his eyes closed. His drill instructor wanted to know what gives. "I grew up in Chicago," he told him. "We all had M-1s." His DI said, "Okay, wiseguy." But from then on, says Day, it was: "If you have a job, give it to Tom."

Which is how it went in the corporate world as well. In a lengthy postmilitary career that involved a series of jobs in the financial sector, one of his first was working for a seedy small-loan company, where the former Marine was drafted to do collections in Cabrini-Green, once considered the city's most dangerous housing project. Figuring he could use some rosary beads while praying for his safety, he stopped in at a religious store. There, he noticed cleric's collars on sale for seven bucks. "Give me two," he told the clerk. After that, he did collections as "Father Tom." Not only did he never get roughed up. But some of the neighborhood toughs even guarded his car.

Each morning, after working out on the Ab Coaster, but before practicing his bugle, Day walks for three blocks around his neighborhood with his daughter, donning rubber gloves to pick up trash and the used prophylactics discarded by amorous visitors who'd parked there the night before. Most would curse God, or at least the local police. But Day counts it a blessing that at least such reckless people are using birth control.

The daughter, 31-year-old Julie, still lives with Day and his wife. She has cerebral palsy, autism, and an inoperable cyst on her brain. I spend several hours with her while I'm at Day's. She's funny and lively. She calls her dad "Uncle Tom," just because, he says, "it pisses me off." She's adopted his PG-13 gunny-sergeant language—every other exclamation taking the form of "What the hell?" And she's known, when riding down the road with Day, to flip an index finger instead of the bird, confusing passing motorists who look up to the sky, as though she's directing their attention to something that they're missing.

Julie is also a rich diet. She tries to finish Day's sentences and shoves papers at him, attempting fruitlessly to be helpful while he's being interviewed by me. She boosts a camera case out of my reporting bag, and it's not altogether clear she intends to give it back. Day says that at one point, a few years ago, she started shattering picture frames, using the glass to cut herself for whatever reason. When he took her to a doctor-recommended shrink, the shrink tossed them from his office, insisting brusquely that he couldn't treat people with "special needs."

"Come on, Julie," Day said. "We're doing this on our own."

Day adjusted her meds, with experimentation, and she

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is no longer cutting herself. She's even started coming to funerals with him again. He's brought her to 65 or so, over the years. By this point, he says, she knows how the flag should be folded, and corrects the honor guard if she thinks they're standing in the wrong place. He says it's important to take Julie to these places, to expose her to life.

I tell Tom that this sounds like a curious thing—exposing Julie to life by having her stand graveside as he plays "Taps." Day says it's not as strange as it sounds. She loves the ceremony and watching her dad play. She likes collecting pinecones in the cemetery for her mother's school projects. And it's essential to him that she see her old man bring comfort to others in their darkest hour by "putting warm breath through metal."

He wants her to understand that important things take time and real effort. Many choose push-button convenience. "You've got your phone, and your digital bugle, and you're all automated," he says. "Get the job done as quickly as you can with the least amount of problems," Day says, mocking the digital bugler. "'Oh, I did three funerals today and pressed a button, and by golly, I sure feel good at the end of the day.' Well, that's their feeling, not mine. I put some air through a horn. I show up in perfect uniform. And I help that family get through that final time with their veteran. You got your digital, you jumped in the car and drove off. But there's no feeling, there's no heart."

Day stays until the bitter end of each funeral, every single time. He stays until after the flag is presented, and friends and family head to their cars. Though when invited to a post-funeral meal by the family, he always declines. He wants their last memory to be of him playing perfectly, not of "me getting spaghetti down the front of my uniform." "Taps," he says, "is my 24-note prayer. The preacher can talk. But my prayer for this veteran is my music."

Day also wants Julie to see his "Taps"-playing life, because Day is afraid of death. Not of his own end, necessarily. But of how she'll cope once he's gone. Lately, at 73, he's feeling the ruthless reminder of the actuarial tables. "I'm scared every day, because what am I gonna do? How am I gonna have her squared away?" Day has made arrangements with the group Helping Hands, an organization that assists people with disabilities. So she'll have a place to live. But on a deeper level, he says, "You realize that, hey, not every cylinder is working in the right fashion. But she's my daughter, and I love her. And the only way I can show her that I love her is to accept her and have her help with certain projects. My theory is if I take her every place I go, and expose her to all kinds of people, that whatever sinks in is how I can educate her on survival when I'm gone."

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Day with daughter Julie in his memorabilia-filled basement

Julie already knows how Day wants to go. He wishes to be cremated, his ashes commingled with his father's, both of them "dumped over a wall down at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery. Not in the ground. Not in a container or anything. Just out. Because I've done a lot of funerals there. I want to be with all the guys I've buried."

The sound of this makes Julie strangely buoyant, as she's watched Day play away plenty of them. "You're going to be like coffee [grounds], Uncle Tom!" she cheers.

On a muggy August afternoon, I enter the grounds of Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Silver Spring, Maryland. Since Day didn't have any funerals scheduled while I was in Chicago, I've come to see BAA in action and am here to meet G.P. "Chip" Stickler, Day's Maryland state director. Chip, a former jazz studio musician, is the instrumental music instructor at Broadfording Christian Academy in Hagerstown. I get there an hour early. But Chip, crisply attired in BAA's dress uniform after driving 80 miles on his own dime, got there an hour earlier still, to warm up and find his echo, with the brass and nickel-silver of his custom-made Bach Stradivarius bugle gleaming in the sun.

We're joined by two of BAA's youngest comers, "the future," Chip calls them. Both bugle for their Boy Scout troops. There's 11-year-old Avi Chittum, who wears tzitzit under his Boy Scout uniform. He cut out early from his

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Hebrew academy on the first day of school to be here today. And there's 13-year-old Jonah Mittelstadt, also in his Scout uniform, who says, "I've always wanted to honor my country, and this is a great way to do that." When Jonah said he wanted to play "Taps" for vets at funerals, his parents took it seriously enough that they made him practice for a year before even letting him audition for Chip (which he passed). Though the boys bring their horns, they're just observing today. Chip dispenses all sorts of tricks of the trade to the boys: how to stand at parade rest, why you should rub dryer sheets all over your head before playing (to keep the gnats out of your nose). But he tells me he'll probably have the boys observing funerals for a good year before they're allowed to fly solo. With the task at hand, there's no such thing as too much preparation.

Before the funeral party arrives, a three-person Coast Guard honor team does. They look fresh-scrubbed and nearly as young as the Boy Scouts. They go through flag-folding dry runs, and coordinate with Chip on his cue to play. Chip and the boys then take their positions about 75 feet away, next to a cemetery border hedged with Leyland Cypresses, doing its best to blunt the busy indifference of a nearby office park and Taco Bell and Kohl's.

G. P. 'Chip' Stickler and apprentices

A group of 15 or so friends and family arrive. They have gathered today to bury Frank Scordato, who was a U.S. Coast Guard ensign. Since I'm asked by Chip to stay a fair distance away, out of respect for the family, and since it's bad form to interview funeral attendees when you aren't technically invited, I know no other details of the man's life, including the age at which he died. The *Washington Post* death notice was no help, and when I ask Chip for more biographical details, he says, "You know what I know."

Chip gets his cue, and with the Scouts by his side, he blows a clean, mournful "Taps." Like Day, he plays it slow, holding out a full eight-count between each bar. "As a piece of music," Chip tells me, "It's not hard. Yet it's the hardest possible thing to play. It's basically a chord. But when you're playing that as a trumpet player, you're not concentrating on the arpeggio but on the man in the casket. That makes it the hardest 24 notes."

The honor guard doesn't seem as emotionally freighted. After folding and presenting the flag, they're off to the car before the minister even does his part. I'm told military honors were uncharacteristically conducted at the beginning, so they wouldn't have to sit through the entire service. The world waits for no man, even at his own funeral.

After the service concludes, the pesky journalist in me is still itching to connect to Scordato's story, to hang his life on some sort of narrative hook. Who was he? What did his military hitch look like? What did it all add up to?

But putting his horn away, Chip doesn't seem as pressed. He often doesn't know much about who he's playing for. The important thing is that he plays for all of them. Chip himself has never served, so this is the covenant he keeps. He plays for young men who die on the battlefield, and old men who die in nursing homes. He plays for war heroes, and he plays for desk jockeys. "I have played funerals with 500 people there, and I have played where it's just the preacher and me," he says. "And I don't care if there's nobody there but me. I will be there to do that funeral. If we are requested, we are there."

When nobody shows, Chip says, "It's a very sad thing. I don't know if he wasn't well-liked, or if he simply had no one to grieve for him. Funerals are not a fun job. But they're a rewarding job. Because you are honoring something that was done for you whether you realize it or not. In this day and age, there are people who simply couldn't give a rat's patoot about the military. But let me tell you something—if it wasn't for the military, they wouldn't have the freedom not to care. And that's something we have to look at from an honor standpoint. Whether you like them, whether you hate them—they put it on the line. It's up to us to honor them."

With that, Chip starts up his Chevy Equinox with the "Bugler on Duty" decal on the door. He pulls out of Gate of Heaven, past the Kohl's and Taco Bell, to head 80 miles back home. As I watch him go, after witnessing him carry out the unique mission of the "Taps" player—one of removed intimacy, putting the final, perfect notes of punctuation on a story that he hasn't read—I'm reminded of the words of General Black Jack Logan, the father of Memorial Day, who in his 1868 order wrote:

If other eyes grow dull, and other hands slack, and other hearts cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well, as long as the light and warmth of life remain in us. ♦

The Muddle East

Every idea President Obama had about pacifying the Muslim world turned out to be wrong

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

If Congress refuses to support American military action against the Assad regime in Syria, and President Barack Obama declines to strike or strikes meekly, will American power—that marriage of will, resources, and perception—be diminished in the Middle East? If so, will the ramifications be severe? Could President Obama, like Iran-sanctions-supporting liberals and conservatives who don't want to intervene in Syria, skip this Levantine war and nevertheless come out swinging against the nuke-seeking mullahs of the Islamic Republic? Might the triumph of Sunni jihadists in Syria actually be worse than Bashar al-Assad's survival?

When it comes to the Middle East, Obama's presidency has largely been predicated on two ideas: A hegemonic America is a bad thing, and the second Iraq war was a serious mistake. We and Middle Eastern Muslims would coexist more harmoniously, so Obama has thought, if Washington were less bellicose. The fight against al Qaeda and support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process—once, and perhaps still, the epicenter of the president's understanding of the region—would both advance if Washington were more dovish and reticent in the Middle East. The president's vaunted 2009 Cairo speech, which was coolly received by secular Egyptian democratic dissidents, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, was the personal outreach of a man who really believed that he, with his mixed race and religious pedigree, was an ambassador to a new age of better relations between Islam and the West.

Time has been unkind to Obama. The American withdrawal from Iraq has not left that country better off. Political violence has risen as the United States' mitigating influence on internal politics, especially Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's authoritarian proclivities, evaporated. Sunni terrorism led by al Qaeda has skyrocketed. Iraq's Shiite community, recovering slowly from Saddam Hussein's depredations, no longer has an American buffer against Iran's far greater strength. If American airpower were still in Baghdad, Tehran could not resupply Syria and Lebanese Hezbollah by air, and the Assad regime would lose the two resources most critical to its survival. Al Qaeda and Islamic militancy in general seem to have grown stronger globally even though radical preachers can no longer denounce "American crusaders" along the Tigris and Euphrates. Al Qaeda now boasts, along with Iran and its militant Iraqi allies, that it drove the Americans out of the country.

And then there is the Great Arab Revolt, which has discombobulated the administration. Even in Libya, where the White House finally used some force "from behind" our European allies to down Muammar Qaddafi, it followed through with so discreet a footprint as to leave American facilities and personnel in Benghazi at the mercy of lightly armed Islamic radicals.

In Egypt, the administration's confused response—from the fall of Hosni Mubarak to the military coup against Mohammad Morsi—has left America seeming hapless, duplicitous, and weak. Any American president would have been in trouble in Egypt, but Obama's sensibilities—his early friendly outreach to Muslim despots and Iran, his reluctance to apply pressure to authoritarian Muslim rulers, and his obvious discomfort with the moral challenges of American power—made him particularly diffident. George W. Bush, the born-again American liberator who destroyed the Arab world's most savage tyrant and unleashed a tidal wave of conflicting emotions in the Middle East about imperialism, dictatorship, democracy, Arabism, and sectarian identity, is nearly forgotten in the region—except in Iraq. Barack Obama is now the American everyone in the region loves to hate.

But what the withdrawal from Iraq started and the Great Arab Revolt accelerated, the war in Syria has pushed into overdrive: the omnipresent perception in the Middle East of American listlessness. In part, this is what President Obama intended. He wanted Middle Eastern Muslims to stop viewing the United States as a looming hegemon maintaining a certain (unfriendly) order. He didn't envision, however, how messy things could become as the Great Arab Revolt worked its way through the region. The United States and

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Europe needed to lean in, to encourage patiently, with rhetoric, resources, and when necessary coercion, movement toward a basic democratic order, and not to fear the omnipresent Muslim complaint about Western intrusion. Ask an American, European, or Middle Easterner (including Israelis) to identify an American national-security interest from Morocco to Iran that President Obama would unhesitatingly fight for. The president probably would rally to Israel, yet it's not easy to pinpoint even that case with confidence.

The Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons certainly isn't one. Take away drones and substitute American Special Forces, and even the battle against al Qaeda wouldn't be a sure thing. Neither is stopping Iran's quest for an atomic bomb. And suppose Iran invaded a neighbor in a kind of reprise of the first Gulf war: Given the size of the continuing military cutbacks under Obama, it's not clear that the United States could successfully repel such an act of aggression, in the event it wanted to. Now imagine Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps with nukes. Keeping the Strait of Hormuz open—Washington's simplest task in the region—is probably the only sure bet under Obama.

The president's forward-leaning hollow rhetoric also hasn't helped. He told the Syrian dictator in August 2011 that he must go but failed to authorize the CIA, let alone the U.S. Air Force, to do anything untoward. He ignored his first self-imposed red line on the use of chemical weapons, then declared in June 2013 that in response to Assad's use of chemical weapons the United States would start delivering weaponry to the Syrian opposition—but didn't follow through. The president wants to diminish American power in the Middle East while making demands of a dictator who was weaned on *Machtpolitik*.

The denizens of the region have a much clearer understanding of what's at stake in Syria. This is not just a sectarian civil war between a heretical Shiite Alawite dictatorship and the country's Sunni majority (roughly 75 percent of the population). It's the frontline in a struggle between two blocs: conservative Sunni Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates) and Turkey (Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan sees himself as the godfather of a new Muslim Brotherhood-dominated order) versus Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah, and, somewhat reluctantly, Shiite Iraq.

Above all, it's the second great tug of war between the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia. The first occurred just after the Islamic Revolution and continued in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). Saudi Arabia, which backed Iraq, decisively won that engagement. The Great Arab Revolt has forced Tehran to fight the second round early, before its nuclear program produced a bomb.

If Iran loses Syria, it loses 34 years of westward-looking foreign policy that sought to make the Islamic Republic a player in the war against Israel and, more important, the war against the West's (read America's) "cancerous" intrusion into the Middle East. It loses its all-critical lifeline to Hezbollah, the only true child of the Islamic Revolution. Already, the dominant position of Hezbollah within Lebanese society is in question. Spiritually, it's impossible to overstate how important the Syrian dictatorship and Lebanese Hezbollah are to the Islamic regime's self-worth and unquestioned supremacy over Iranian society. When senior Revolutionary Guard commanders and clerical VIPs threaten the United States if it intercedes militarily against Assad, they are telling us how vital Alawite rule is to them. Russia, too, is there, uninhibited about interceding in someone else's internecine strife. Putin has comparatively little at stake in Syria: It's merely the last outpost of the Soviet Union's Arab client-states, and Russian aid to Assad diminishes the United States, something Putin acutely enjoys.

Until recently Obama appeared to have grasped only vaguely the regional dynamics at play in Syria, or to have grasped them but not to care. One has the impression that his concern about Iran's role in Syria has only become serious since Assad again flouted the White House's red line on chemical weapons. Since then, Secretary of State John Kerry—who as a senator, on behalf of President Obama, tried to make nice with Bashar al-Assad and his cosmopolitan wife—has much more sharply drawn the battle lines between the United States and Iran. It really shouldn't be that hard for the administration and the legion of Republicans and Democrats who utter the phrase "civil war" as if it were a talisman against American involvement to draw helpful historical parallels. The Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 pitted leftist Republicans against rightist Nationalists and was, as all schoolchildren were once taught, a testing ground for Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, which gave critical aid to Francisco Franco's ultimately victorious Nationalists. Spanish Republicans were often an ugly, vicious fighting force, with morally repellent backers (the USSR). And as fascist dictators go, Franco was certainly not in the same league as his German patron. But the overarching imperative should have been to deny Hitler and Mussolini a victory. It never

THOMAS FLUHARTY

gained traction. Instead, the United Kingdom and France showed complacency about a fascist triumph in Spain. It was a complicated struggle between unwholesome adversaries. Britain and France basically sat it out, to their later regret.

The Syrian civil war is as international as was the Spanish conflict. It started as a rebellion against a savage dictatorship, and the Assad regime successfully turned it into a battle between two religious communities. The Syrian Sunnis are strongly backed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, two Wahhabi states that have done untold damage to the modern Middle East with their well-funded Islamist missionary activity. In the Syrian conflict, they have backed cruel Islamic radicals, some of whom are affiliated with al Qaeda. Sunni jihadists will unquestionably be a big problem in post-Assad Syria since the Assad regime has done its best to destroy the Sunni social order. But Syria's 17 million Sunnis are not Afghan Pashtuns, whose village ethics mirror pretty closely the primitive mores of the Taliban. Syria's Sunnis culturally are much more cosmopolitan than Iraq's Shiites, and in most places even the Iraqi Shiites have successfully fought off the radical ethics of the Shiite Islamist hard core. Militarily, Sunni jihadists in Syria, especially those who are foreign, are likely to encounter extreme resistance and enmity from the vastly more numerous mainstream Sunnis the day after Alawite power is broken.

If Assad's regime falls, the bulk of the Sunni Syrian officer corps, currently held in check by the regime's security services, will enter powerfully into this equation. There is no evidence that these men are jihadist sympathizers. In Iraq jihadists have fed off minority Sunni grievances and revanchist sentiments. The opposite is going to happen in Syria, where the next government, whatever its shape, will be overwhelmingly Sunni in composition. The future for holy warriors in Syria isn't at all bright.

The overarching foreign issue in Syria is Iran's determination to maintain its strategic position in the Middle East while it develops its nuclear capacity. Anything the United States can do to upset the mullahs' plans while the Muslim Middle East remains nonnuclear is worth the effort. The odds are not great that a peaceful, diplomatic path exists to negotiate away the Iranian nuclear threat, but we do know that the only serious delay in Tehran's nuclear program occurred after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The display of American power has always made the clerics and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, who oversee the nuclear program, take notice. The best odds for countering Iran in the Levant without the Quds Force, the expeditionary branch of the Revolutionary Guards, resorting to terrorism against the United States come from a massive American strike against Assad. President Obama ignored the Quds Force's role in an attempted bombing operation against the Saudi ambassador in a Washington, D.C., restaurant in 2011—a serious mistake.

The United States has always had the capacity to recover from its bouts of listlessness and depression through its unrivaled capacity to bring pain to the enemy. But it certainly cannot signal Tehran, or other aggressive regimes, its serious intent by shooting cruise missiles at dispersed and buried chemical weapons. Given what happened in London when Prime Minister David Cameron lost a war vote in Parliament, both Syrian and Iranian leaders already view Obama's decision to go to Congress as confirmation of America's weakness. Assad apparently thinks he's already won. The ruling elites of both countries certainly don't appreciate the twists and turns of democratic politics, but they are probably not wrong to see Obama's caution as timidity.

It's possible, of course, that the president and Congress could stand down in Syria and then stand up against Iran's nuclear program, as some now argue. We could avoid a small war but commit ourselves to the possibility of a much bigger one. But does this pass the pinch test? The American desire to avoid war in Syria overlaps rather well with the desire to avoid any U.S. military threat against the Islamic Republic. The fear of the ripple effect, of quagmire, of terrorism, of years more of Middle Eastern Islamic messiness, of the unknowns that always accompany military conflict is certainly much greater with preemption of Tehran than intervention in Syria. The two issues are not analogous to the collapse of Vietnam and the defense of Western Europe in the 1970s (and many Democrats who turned away from Vietnam also became increasingly accommodationist with the Soviet Union everywhere else). Syria and Iran are near neighbors. As the late Samuel Huntington might have put it, it's the same *oikoumene*, for Allah's sake. If we cave on one, we will, in all probability, cave on the other.

Only one thing is crystal clear: Assad used chemical weapons because he needed to. They are the ideal terror weapon for a regime with limited manpower fighting a rebellious population. Conventional weapons have been deadly in Syria, but bombs, bullets, and artillery shells haven't quieted the opposition, which in some places (including the suburbs of Damascus) is still gaining ground. Chemical weapons could well do the trick. Terror weapons accomplish a lot with a little, and chemical weapons offer the possibility of graduated escalation—also ideal if a dictator is feeling out the resolve of outraged Westerners. The odds are excellent that Assad will use these weapons again and again until the opposition cracks. If we are to stop their use, then Assad must fall. That so many in the West don't see this, and are unwilling to go to war to stop such an atrocity—to send a clear signal to tyrants elsewhere—only shows how far we've come since 9/11. The Middle East's power politics have, again, hit us head on. We are, perhaps, too "fatigued" this time round for the challenge. ♦

Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, Yalta, February 1945

Winston in Focus

A great man gets a second look. BY ANDREW ROBERTS

"Oh, Winston, why?" Field Marshal Jan Smuts is said to have remonstrated with Churchill over his war memoirs, which Smuts considered too self-serving. "Why did you have to do that? You, more than anyone in the world, could have written as no one else could have written the true history of the war." Churchill's retort about his six volumes is characteristic, but also perfectly reasonable: "These are *my* story. If someone else likes to write *his* story, let him."

Churchill must have guessed that, with Roosevelt, Hitler, and Mussolini dead—and Stalin not a natural author—his only possible front-rank rival in the war memoir stakes would be Charles de Gaulle, who did indeed write excellent reminiscences but not ones that could touch Churchill's for massive, international bestsellerdom. More important, though, Churchill wanted to dominate the historiography of the conflict, to construct the intellectual prism through which subsequent historians viewed the events of 1939-45, and, in large part, he succeeded. For all Smuts's lamentations, we still tend to see the Second World War through the eyes of the author of *The Second World War*.

Churchill and Company
Allies and Rivals in War and Peace
by David Dilks
I.B. Tauris, 336 pp., $35

A scholar who has tried to break free of this Churchill-based narrative is Professor David Dilks, one of Britain's most distinguished historians. "Writing of Churchill with admiration," he states, "I have also tried to apply the critical scrutiny which he would have expected." There are few writers better qualified to do this: Dilks was research assistant to Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan and is the author of a two-volume account of Lord Curzon in India, as well as the first volume of an as-yet-unfinished life of Neville

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POPPERFOTO / GETTY IMAGES

Chamberlain. He has thus been steeped in Churchill studies at one remove for almost all of his intellectual life.

Churchill and Company comprises several unpublished papers delivered to conferences in addition to three lectures that have been recast due to the change of style "between the sobriety of the written word and the flourishes of the spoken." Overall, Dilks does indeed treat Churchill with admiration, while accepting that "he was neither by nature a good listener nor always sensitive to the thoughts of those around him." The only time, it seems, that Churchill fell silent was when he was behind an easel.

For those who savor British understatement and irony, this book will present a cornucopia of delight, as Churchill's own wit is reflected through the author's famously dry humor. "In old age," Dilks writes of Churchill, for example, "he did not feel called upon to deny with vigor the story that he had once described de Gaulle as resembling a female llama surprised in her bath." The first 16 words of that 31-word sentence might seem at first sight extraneous; but, in fact—along with the llama's gender—it renders it all the funnier. This book is studded with such lines of Churchill's, several of which I have not heard before, despite having written about him for a quarter of a century.

This book covers Churchill's love affair with France, the contribution of the British Commonwealth to the war effort, British-Polish relations from 1941 to 1945, "Operation Unthinkable" (i.e., war planning against Russia in 1945), Churchill's "solitary pilgrimage" towards a Cold War settlement with the Russians during his peacetime ministry, the relations between Churchill and Eden, and between him and Stalin, and much else besides. It puts up an argument with which some readers will be unfamiliar: that in dealing with Germany before the First World War, and with the Russians at Yalta and in the 1950s, Churchill used much the same appeasing language that has forever destroyed Chamberlain's reputation for having employed it towards Hitler.

The book concentrates on Churchill's relationships with rivals and allies, particularly Roosevelt, de Gaulle, and Stalin, but also Chamberlain, Eden, Attlee, Eisenhower, the chiefs of staff, his private secretaries, Poles such as Sikorski and Stanisław Mikołajczyk, Russians like Molotov and Malenkov and Khrushchev, and the commonwealth premiers Curtin, Menzies, Mackenzie King, Fraser, and Smuts.

However much some of them might have disliked and distrusted Churchill at different periods of their careers, Dilks noted how "almost all regarded him with awe." Those who didn't—such as Stalin—tended to have the kind of personalities that were deliberately calibrated never to regard other living beings with anything approaching awe. One who certainly didn't treat Churchill with awe—at least in the economics sphere—was John Maynard Keynes, who is put down by Dilks in this delightful formulation:

> Keynes' own remark that practical men of affairs are often the slaves of some defunct economist has not lost its piquancy now that the defunct economist is Keynes himself.

Dilks presents Churchill as a late-developer who didn't discover a love of learning until he was 22, possibly the result of his never having attended university. Nonetheless, Churchill "radiated a coiled energy" that, once unleashed, was impressive. He might have inherited some of it from his maternal grandfather, Leonard Jerome, whose wife once remarked to his mistress, "My dear, I understand what you feel. He is so irresistible."

Throughout his life, Churchill collected people at the head of their fields—"Nature's princes," in Dilks's words—such as the special forces warriors T.E. Lawrence and Orde Wingate, the painters Sir John Lavery and Paul Maze, the strategists Charles Portal and Harold Alexander, the orators John Morley and Joseph Chamberlain, the statesmen Arthur Balfour and Lord Rosebery, and the premiers Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George. Having known all the true greats of his day, the wilderness years of the thirties, when the midgets took over, were presumably less painful for him than they otherwise might have been.

Dilks posits a number of intriguing possibilities that are worthy of investigation: that Churchill's life was probably saved at the Battle of Omdurman because of a longstanding injury to his shoulder, which forced him to carry a pistol instead of a sword; that, in the words of his friend Desmond Morton, "physical danger . . . gave him a thrill almost of a sexual nature"; that Churchill did not, in fact, suffer from the depression so often attributed to him with minimal actual proof; and even that "there was no gulf of ideology between [Chamberlain] and Churchill in the realm of international affairs." Few will concur with every one of the author's conclusions, of course—not least that Britain nearly went to war with France in May 1945.

This book will certainly dispel forever the lazy assertion that Great Britain somehow "stood alone" in the year and five days between the fall of France in June 1940 and Hitler's invasion of Russia in June 1941. In perhaps his best essay, Dilks shows how the British Empire and Commonwealth "consistently had more divisions in fighting contact with the enemy than the U.S. until the summer of 1944, not only in Africa and Europe but also in Asia." Not until 1944 did the U.S. Army Air Forces drop more bombs on the enemy than did the empire and commonwealth forces.

The description of the contributions to victory made by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the West Indies, and India—which all fought from the start of the war in September 1939 to its finish in September 1945—is at times deeply moving. "On Churchill's own admission," records Dilks, "it was not until late in the war that he realized fully what a small country Britain is." The reason being that, all his life hitherto, the empire and commonwealth had allowed him to ignore that blatant geographical fact.

"Never in the field of human argument," states Dilks, "can the name of a single thinker have been prayed in aid by so many politicians . . . or advanced in support of so many propositions quite incompatible." It is true, and Churchill would undoubtedly react with contempt

at the way in which modern politicians attempt to squeeze his words into their ideologies, regardless of context. A classic case today is the way that Churchill is presented as having supported a European superstate in his great postwar speeches at Zurich and the Hague, which, when read carefully, clearly state that he wanted Britain to be "associated with" but certainly not part of such an endeavor. (Churchill had his own view of how contempt should be employed, saying in 1954, "As you know, contempt is not contempt if you have to take any trouble expressing it. It has got to be quite involuntary, and if possible unconscious.")

Apart from its dry wit, the best thing about *Churchill and Company* is the way it uses history to provoke renegade thoughts. "We have had nothing else but wars since Democracy took charge," wrote Churchill in November 1947. He had a point: Are democrats more inherently violent than the aristocrats—many of them Churchill's relations—who ran the British Empire in the 19th century (in which Churchill spent the first 25 years of his life) and who avoided all major wars for a full 60 years after the Crimea? I suspect so. Aristocrats had more to lose from global conflagration, after all. Another thought the book provokes is: For all that Churchill was denounced as a warmonger for wanting to intervene in the Russian civil war in 1919—"to strangle Bolshevism in its cradle," as he characteristically phrased it—imagine the traumas mankind would have been saved if his counsel had prevailed over the supposedly wiser heads around the cabinet table. Ditto if the Dardanelles campaign had been better executed. Or if Britain had aggressively taken on Hitler as soon as he came to power in 1933.

It is extraordinary how often Churchill's career was damaged by the things about which he was ultimately proved right—and yet, paradoxically, how it was enhanced by other things (such as the Norwegian expedition of 1940) about which he was wrong. By making us reflect on the preternatural unfairness of politics, in a way that has a happy ending, Professor Dilks has scored a palpable hit. ♦

B&A

Indivisible Man

Albert Murray, 1916-2013.

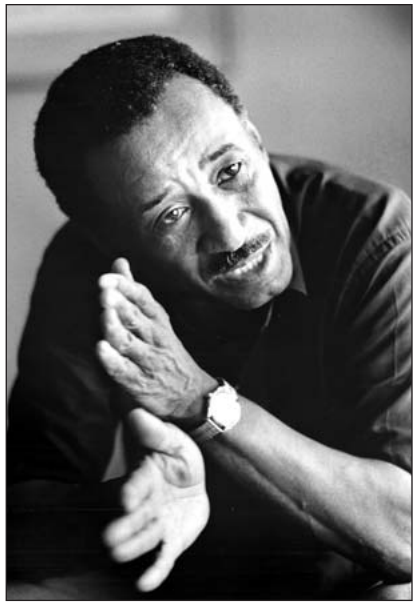
BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

Since mine is hardly a household name, I can count on a few fingers the occasions when I've been interviewed. But one encounter remains as clear as the day it happened.

To begin at the true beginning: It happens that, by a set of curious chances, I was taken one spring day in the 1960s to a party at Ralph Ellison's New York apartment. I knew him as the author of the much-lauded 1952 novel *Invisible Man* and through Allen Tate's slightly patronizing assurance that he was a "Southern gentleman." Ellison was expecting eminent company, including his guest of honor, Walker Percy. But he was gracious to an uninvited stranger and bade me to make myself at home.

As I wandered, probably spying on his bookshelves, I was suddenly accosted by Ellison's friend and fellow alumnus of the Tuskegee Institute Albert Murray—archivist, wit, novelist, polemicist, and retired Air Force major. He discarded the usual ceremonies of introduction and showered me with an impromptu mix of punning jazz-talk, spiced with allusions to Faulkner, Joyce, Uncle Remus tales, and Harlem street patois.

In my amused astonishment I could only stand mute, but that was no problem: He professed to find in my silent gestures of response a Southern "seed-store/feed-store" sensibility of which he greatly approved. And thus began a fascinating friendship that endured until recently, when Albert Murray died in his beloved Harlem at the age of 97. I say "beloved" because he loathed the lazy clichés of fashionable writers who, with no experience of everyday black life, labeled Harlem a "ghetto." For him, it was "the very stuff of romance . . . [like] Chaucer's England, Cervantes' Spain, Rabelais' France," where "musicians and athletes are far more numerous, more symbolic and influential . . . than criminals and addicts."



Albert Murray, 1974

THE WASHINGTON POST / GETTY IMAGES

Soon after our initial meeting, Albert visited Greensboro, where I was then a newspaper editor. He knew my native city as the scene of significant strides in the civil rights struggle, and North Carolina as a center of good newspapers. He was at work on a book that soon would be published as *South to a Very Old Place* (1971), and he was on a pilgrimage up and down the East Coast in search of the classic Southern sensibility, as he defined and ratified it. He had called on Robert Penn Warren and C. Vann Woodward in New Haven, and I was flattered to be included in

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the quest. But he was pretty vague about my qualifications, apart from my having "fair-haired North Carolina boy good looks [and] the twinkle which always lights up his expression whenever some topic engages him . . . that Uncle Remus-derived twinkle of humor and the absurd."

My mute responses to his unique interrogative monologues functioned, he said, as a "range finder, [so] that all you have to do is allude to some character and situation . . . and listen for the Remus overtones in the feedback."

I was embarrassed to confess that my last exposure to Uncle Remus had been in the third grade; and hadn't Joel Chandler Harris's version of slave idiom grown, over the years, grossly politically incorrect? No matter. Albert had gathered that I was a fellow devotee of fictitious characters like Uncle Remus that were, for him, classic reference points.

He identified me, too, as a sort of journalistic godson of Jonathan Daniels, the Raleigh editor who had written *A Southerner Discovers the South* (1938). In fact, Albert spoke more volubly about Daniels than about my own dubious qualifications as a repository of Southern sensibility. I offered to put him in touch with Daniels, but—"You remind Yoder," Albert wrote in his account, "that it is not really Jonathan Daniels himself in the flesh that you have come to make personal contact with . . . but rather (as metaphysical as it might sound), the idea . . . of Jonathan Daniels. 'The Jonathan Daniels fallout, man. Among the younger fellows. . . . Like yourself.'"

I was able to offer partial repayment for the honor of being Albert's sort-of subject in a review of his trademark treatise, *The Omni-Americans* (1970). He had guessed, probably during our first encounter in New York, that, having grown up in a world richly saturated by black idiom, habit, and culture—albeit paternalistically—I would affirm his impassioned conviction that the sensibility we shared was "incontestably mulatto," a complex blend of racial influences.

It deeply irked Albert that, at this yeasty time (the late sixties), "Negro life" (as it was then called) could be seen only as "a pathetic manifestation of black cowardice, self-hatred, escapism and self-destructiveness corroborating [white] notions of black inferiority." This, indeed, was an era when many phony voices were being heard and heeded—the era of Leonard Bernstein's fatuous radical-chic party for the Black Panthers and Tom Wolfe's memorable essay about white bureaucratic suck-ups. Albert had the guts to say what others silently thought.

Looking back, Albert Murray's signal service to the discussion of race was that he was bold and literate enough to distinguish stuff from shinola, to identify and damn patronizing claptrap. He was, I wrote in my review of *The Omni-Americans*, "so free of the defensive fetishes of contemporary black-think that he may indeed be the greatest chauvinist of Negro culture around."

Our last of many visits was typical. He came as a visiting professor to Lexington, Virginia, in the mid-1990s, as frisky and iconoclastic as ever. I mainly recall, from our evenings of talk, Albert's commentary on a Toni Morrison novel (*Beloved*, 1987) in which a slave woman murders her daughter to avoid the latter's enslavement. For Albert, the idea, though inspired by an actual event, was beyond silly. Whatever the evils of slavery, death was worse, and infanticide, after all, was a grave crime. I wish I had a transcript, for paraphrase does slight justice to Albert's superb riffs upon writerly foolishness and much else. He embodied as no other of my acquaintance the "omni-American," mixed culture he loved, championed, and greatly enriched. ♦

B&A

Classical Revival

Germany breaks from its past to embrace the past.

BY MARK FALCOFF

Berlin

Visitors wending their way down the Unter den Linden towards the river Spree are nowadays suddenly brought up short by an oddly shaped, bizarre-looking structure that seems completely out of place among the neoclassical palaces and the imposing Renaissance-style Protestant cathedral. It is the Humboldt Forum, which currently houses museums, foundations, and libraries. In some ways, it resembles nothing so much as a package hastily cobbled together with duct tape, clashing even with some of the modern structures nearby. But sometime late in the next decade, it will be completely disassembled and replaced by a version of the building that stood in its place for nearly 250 years, Berlin's old imperial palace, or Stadtschloss.

The German capital will thus join Potsdam, Dresden, Braunschweig, and Hanover in celebrating the country's reunification by re-creating historic city centers destroyed during World War II. In the case of the Berlin palace, however, the political and historical implications are even more poignant, because, for half a century, the same site was occupied by the East German Palace of the Republic. This was a relatively low-rise steel and glass monstrosity, a kind of socialist version of the International style that, apart from its unloveliness, was environmentally toxic. Nonetheless, to the extent that a true East German identity existed (and to some extent continues to exist), this building was its architectural signature.

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It is no secret that many people (though probably not many architects) hate "modern" buildings and long for the kinds of urban settings that make Rome, Florence, Paris, and St. Petersburg such rich destinations for visitors. In the case of Germany, however, the country's problematic relationship with its past, and particularly its recent past, has made the subject of reconstruction one of acute controversy. The unfortunate German addiction to ugly modern architecture (the rebuilt synagogue in Dresden, for example) makes it all the more remarkable that the Bundestag has appropriated more than half-a-billion dollars to bring the Stadtschloss back to life, thus restoring old sightlines and cityscapes. Even more reassuring is the fact that, in public opinion polls, the most enthusiastic supporters of reconstruction are young Germans in the 18-24 cohort.

The Berlin Stadtschloss, ca. 1900

Like most of Europe's great monuments, Berlin's town palace was built over a long period of time, involving several successive generations of architects and artisans. The building was begun by Andreas Schlüter (1664?-1714), the first important master of the late Baroque style in Germany; but the cupola, its most commanding feature, was completed only in 1853. With the founding of the Second Reich in 1871, it became the kaiser's capital residence, though, in fact, Wilhelm II was the only emperor to actually live there. During the revolutionary events of 1918 and after the fall of the monarchy, it was briefly put under the control of revolutionary sailors to prevent the plundering of its contents; during the Weimar Republic, some of its 1,000 rooms were rented out or used for public events. Part of the structure is housed in the Kunstgewerbemuseum collection.

The building remained relatively undamaged through much of the Second World War, but it was hit for the first time in May 1944, when daylight bombing of the German capital began. It was largely destroyed in early February 1945, in the biggest air attack of the war. Even so, the structure was so solidly built that the outer walls, and some of the interior ones, survived. Indeed, it was even possible, in 1946, to hold Berlin's first big postwar art exhibit in the building's White Room.

The founding of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 rang the death knell for the Stadtschloss. Walter Ulbricht had a somewhat morbid interest in architecture and ordered the surviving parts of the building completely demolished (along with Potsdam's town palace and the University Church in Leipzig). There were sotto voce protests at the time, notably from Hans Sharoun, one of the regime's favorite architects. As it was, Ulbricht compromised and allowed some of the more important sculptures to be saved and taken to an engineering site in Berlin-Heinersdorf (then an industrial suburb), where hundreds of fragments were meticulously arranged in huts. Unfortunately, the site was eventually bulldozed; only the best pieces were saved for museums. However, at the time of their removal, some 5,000 photographs were taken and have been preserved.

After the founding of the GDR, the site was cleared. In its place was a huge empty square for parades and demonstrations, flanked by the Palace of the Republic, the Ministerial Council building, and the Foreign Ministry (that last is still in use). But to expand the ceremonial spaces, all of the surrounding buildings, including private dwellings, were removed. As a consequence, architectural historian Rainer Haubrich points out in *Das neue Berliner Schloss* (2012), "many places have lost their bearings. Streets lead to nowhere; squares lack balance [*Fassung*], buildings lack a corresponding counterface. . . . Even passersby who do not know the history of the place can readily sense that at some time a huge building must have stood on the site."

Even if only preserved in old paintings and photographs, the Stadtschloss continued to exercise a fascination, one to which even leading members of the East German elite were not wholly immune. Returning from his first visit to Paris and Madrid in 1988 (where he was dazzled by the architectural grandeur), President Erich Honecker actually raised the question of Stadtschloss reconstruction. Two years later, the Palace of the Republic was closed as a result of environmental contamination. Since the GDR had already begun—rather fitfully, it is true—the reconstruction of Dresden, one can only speculate what might have eventually happened. In any case, the Palace of the Republic was unceremoniously dismantled by a unified German government during 2006-08.

Some years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, interest in the Stadtschloss was reviving in the Federal Republic. In 1982, a young German architect named Tischler Peschken published a book on the building, which caught the attention of Wilhelm von Boddien, a Frankfurt businessman and civic leader. Boddien proceeded to found an association to raise funds to build an architectural model, which can be seen today in one of the rooms of the restored Charlottenburg Palace in the city's Western sector. More important, Boddien's group began intensive lobbying and private fundraising—something fairly unusual for noncharitable causes in Germany—culminating in a vote of the Bundestag in 2002 to authorize reconstruction. Quite possibly one of the turning points was the full-size depiction on canvas of the Schloss's western façade by a French artist in 1993, which allowed politicians as well as the general public to see what they would be getting.

Once a decision was made to rebuild, architects from all over the world were invited to submit plans, and some 158 proposals were offered. To the surprise of many, the winner of the competition was Franco Stella, an architect in Vicenza, Italy, and former professor at the University of Genoa. Although he had previously been involved in some work in West Berlin, he was a virtual unknown in the German architectural scene. His victory was not graciously accepted by all the other competitors, one of whom even took him to court. The loudest critic of Stella's design was, not surprisingly, Philipp Oswalt, who today is the director of the Bauhaus Foundation in Dessau. Like many modernists, Oswalt objected to Stella's historicism, which (in his view) threatened an architectural counterrevolution in Germany. As one of his Bauhaus colleagues put it after the Bundestag vote, "How should we feel about replicas being forced upon us by the will of the people?"

How indeed.

Even after the affirmative vote, there were still differences of opinion as to just how historicist the building would be allowed to be. Perhaps not surprisingly, attitudes towards architecture corresponded roughly to points along the ideological spectrum, with the Christian Democrats/Christian Social Union and Free Democrats favoring a full restoration of the exterior, the Social Democrats wanting to reduce the Baroque façades by half, and the Greens by three-quarters.

Stella's plan is a compromise. It follows the spirit of Schlüter, but carries it through in more contemporary terms. A massive external stone wall about three feet thick will be constructed, to which decorative elements of natural stone will be attached. Three sides of the old Baroque façade will be reconstructed; the fourth side, facing east (as well as parts of the building facing the Spree), will be modern. The cupola will be rebuilt, but will not attempt to replicate the exact details of the original. No effort will be made to reproduce the prewar interior; it will be fully functional, with spaces for theater and musical performances, museum collections, and the Prussian State Library. But it is the exterior that counts, anyway: The main point is to restore what Rainer Haubrich calls "the turning point and anchor of Berlin's historic center."

The Franco Stella version

For some time, it was thought—and German advocates of modern architecture hoped—that rebuilding a Baroque Renaissance palace in Berlin would prove a practical impossibility. In fact, this has not proven to be the case: A collection of 20,000 photographs of Prussian buildings (1855-1920) survived the war, and the collection includes 40 DVDs containing digital images of the exterior and courtyard façades of the Stadtschloss in very high resolution. In addition, there are precise measurements, dating to 1879, that were discovered at the Berlin Land Registry Office as recently as a decade ago. All these findings have been creatively assembled and coordinated via computer, allowing 3,000 decorative motifs to be reproduced, stone by stone, to within a millimeter—a task never before attempted.

Although it was thought that carving Baroque figures in sandstone was a lost art, in Spandau, a workshop has been established under the leadership of two stone sculptors, Mathias Körner and Eckhart Boehm, who both trained in the classical tradition and are fully familiar with the stylistic peculiarities of Schlüter. Each element will first be done in plaster, and will then be approved by a committee of art historians before orders are given to produce it in sandstone. All the surviving fragments of the original Stadtschloss have been moved here as well.

The task ahead is certainly not an easy one, and the palace may not open on schedule (in 2019). There are nearly 500 windows, some as large as garage doors, and more than 2,000 feet of façade has to be reconstructed, complete with figures such as a cudgel-swinging Hercules. Forty-seven eagles with widespread wings will hang on the roof, the largest of which will have a wingspan of eight-and-a-half feet.

While some critics persist in calling the project "kitsch" and "counterfeit," the restoration project represents a turning point in Germany's postwar and post-Cold War normalization, as well as a reaffirmation of the more prideful aspects of its history and identity. At a time when civic beauty is under attack everywhere by trendy nihilists and intimidated arts commissions, the restoration of the Stadtschloss strikes a blow on behalf of beleaguered lovers of classical architecture—wherever they might be. ♦

NEWSCOM

B&A

Living in Vein

Remember the man who invented modern medicine.

BY JOSHUA GELERNTER

William Harvey explains the circulation of the blood to Charles I.

Science doesn't make a splash in the news too often. But a year or so ago, when the CERN labs announced that they might have observed the "God particle," everyone got very excited. A year of peer-review later, it appears they were right: After a 50-year search, the Higgs boson has been found.

"God particle" is a silly, press-hype sort of name; but finding the Higgs boson is, genuinely, a big deal. It confirms the existence of the Higgs field, the hitherto-theoretical field that imbues objects with mass. Understanding mass will help us understand gravity and time, and all the other sundry, interconnected pieces of physics. It's a big step towards understanding why the world works the way it does.

Finding the Higgs boson means that the knowledge-for-knowledge's-sake reservoir is filling up. And the reservoir's high-water mark is owed mostly to the accumulated work of a few dozen big minds belonging to men everyone's heard of: Newton and Einstein, Mendel and Darwin, Watson and Crick, and so forth. But none of their discoveries would have happened if controlled-experiment, cause-and-effect science hadn't taken over from the Aristotelian method of anecdotal deduction. That switch happened 300 years ago, when a man named William Harvey discovered that blood circulates—and accidentally invented hard science.

William Harvey
A Life in Circulation
by Thomas Wright
Oxford, 288 pp., $29.95

Harvey was born in 1578 to Thomas Harvey, a yeoman landowner in Kent, England. The elder Harvey's ambition in life was to have successful sons, so he packed his firstborn William off to Cambridge to become a physician. College life around the turn of the 17th century was no picnic: Harvey slept in an unheated attic with three other students and was roused by a bell at 4 A.M. so that he could be at church by 5, at class by 6, and in class till 10 at night.

Despite the conditions, Harvey thrived as a student and won the Matthew Parker Scholarship, the first medical scholarship ever awarded in England. It required its beneficiary be "able, learned, and worthy" and not be "deformed, dumb, lame, maimed, mutilated, sick, invalid, or Welsh." Harvey advanced rapidly, excelling in his studies and dominating the thesis-defense shows called "disputations." At disputations, teams of students would debate each other in "smooth, vivid, masculine" Latin. Harvey was the master arguer of his college and sometimes ended his matches by shouting *"Tuo gladio jugulabo!"* ("Now I will slit your throat with your own [rhetorical] sword!") The crowds that turned out to watch these disputations would cheer him like a king returning from victory. After a few terms embarrassing his Cambridge peers, he set off for Europe's finest school of medicine, the University of Padua.

Padua was a big change from the stringency of Cambridge. In the early 1600s, Englishmen regarded Italy as the world capital of atheism and debauchery; Padua worked hard to prove them right. Hordes of students waded through the manure-filled streets to duel each other, Tybalt-style. Drunken doctoral candidates would rampage through shops and monasteries, smashing things; monks and shopkeepers would riot and try to set the university and its students on fire. Even the anatomy lectures that had drawn Harvey from Cambridge were in on the chaos, featuring dissections of freshly killed Paduans pilfered from open-casket funerals.

Despite the anarchy, the university assembled a faculty featuring some of the generation's great minds (Galileo was head of the mathematics department), and the experience set Harvey down a path that would change the world

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NYPL / SCIENCE SOURCE / GETTY IMAGES

of science. And the world, generally.

In Harvey's time, all medicine was based on the work of the Greek philosopher Galen, who had been dead for 1,400 years. Galen believed that health depended on the balance of the four humors—yellow and black bile, blood, and phlegm—and that the heart's role was to keep the humors regulated. Blood, he thought, came from the liver. Doctors disputing Galen's work were rare: Contradicting Galen was a good way to get blacklisted, and inductees of the College of Physicians in London swore an oath never to speak disrespectfully of him. But at wild and crazy Padua, one of Harvey's teachers cut open a heart and observed that Galen had made a mistake in describing one of the chamber walls as porous. A small mistake, it appeared, and Galen's reputation at large remained untarnished. In Harvey's eyes, however, the veneer of infallibility had been cracked.

William Harvey, M.D., left Padua in 1602, returned to England, joined the College of Physicians, took the respect-for-Galen oath—and began to conduct private experiments in a home laboratory. His curiosity had been roused: It was time, he decided, to reexamine the heart's functions, through a series of impartial, Galen-free experiments.

According to Galen, the heart, after receiving blood from the liver, heated and distributed it throughout the body, where it was absorbed by muscle. But when Harvey began vivisecting animals, he noticed that the heart wasn't so much receiving blood as it was sucking it in with forceful expansions. And he noticed—in his *eureka!* moment—that the heart pumps out a whole lot of blood—much more, he was certain, than the body could possibly absorb. If the blood wasn't being absorbed, it was being recycled; so blood wasn't being distributed and used up, it was being circulated. Harvey was forced to conclude that the world of medicine—the entire philosophy of the humors—was based on a false premise.

Of course, since no one wanted to hear that every physician in Europe misunderstood the human body (and no one was willing to take Harvey's word over Galen's), Harvey had to make his conclusions undeniable. So, in effect, he went on tour, performing experiments for everyone to see. It took 10 years to perfect the demonstration, but he made his point, and changed medicine. He also made a bigger point that changed science: The way to prove something is to show it to be true. Reproducible, Harvey-style experimentation has been the standard ever since.

And for all his hard work, courage, and brilliance, which shaped the modern world and gave birth to the practice of medicine that has prolonged millions of lives, William Harvey is remembered today by just about no one. He is not revered, like Einstein and Darwin; he is never mentioned in high school curricula; and no one would credit him as the ancestor of the Higgs boson discovery. But *William Harvey: A Life in Circulation* is an important step towards setting this injustice straight. ♦

B&A

With a Grain of Salt

Who and what, exactly, is the chef du jour?

BY ELI LEHRER

The show's hero has huge muscles, wisecracking sidekicks, and a mysterious origin. In each episode, he performs feats beyond the abilities of mere mortals. He fights for values that just about everyone shares, and he dispenses common-sense wisdom in a way that seems profound. Each episode ends, satisfyingly, with him leaving the place he visits better than he found it. The hero, in short, is a superhero. In this case, his name is Robert Irvine, and he stars in a cooking show.

At a glance, the show in question, *Restaurant: Impossible* (Food Network, Wednesdays, 9 P.M.), doesn't seem that unusual. In fact, there are at least three other shows (the highest rated of which is Fox's *Kitchen Nightmares*, with Gordon Ramsay) with very similar premises involving turning around failing restaurants. The fix-a-failing-business format isn't new, either; it dates back to the 1990s BBC series *Troubleshooter*.

But if its form is anything but original, the way that *Restaurant: Impossible* combines superhero and reality television is at least worth noting. It's important not only for what the show does, but for what it says about the direction and transformation of reality programming in America.

Like every superhero show, *Restaurant: Impossible* focuses around its hero. And Irvine looks the part: At 48, he's a fantastic physical specimen—the Food Network's most prominent publicity shot has him in a T-shirt, holding a whisk and flexing his enormous bicep. Furthermore, like any good superhero, Irvine has a spectacular origin story—at least, as he tells it. In media accounts, the tale goes something like this: Born in humble circumstances and possessed of near-superhuman cooking skills, he was handpicked to design the wedding cake for Charles and Diana while in high school. He joined the Royal Navy at 15, and from there the culinary prodigy went on to another series of great adventures, serving on the royal yacht and cooking in the White House for the president. In the meantime, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth (not just any knighthood, he lets people know, but the highest kind) and was given a castle in recognition of his culinary achievements.

Eli Lehrer is president of the R Street Institute.

On the show, he accomplishes his superheroic feats with aplomb. Driving his Lexus to a variety of family-owned establishments of little culinary distinction, he quickly takes command. The visit typically starts with Irvine entering and expressing disgust with everything about the restaurant's physical environs. Then, of course, comes his time to watch a food service. His comments are always cutting: "This is awful" and "This is horrible" are pretty typical. (One recent episode drew giggles on Internet message boards when Irvine remarked that the food at a restaurant wasn't "that bad.")

Next, working with one of his rotating designer sidekicks—mostly attractive females with muscles nearly as impressive as Irvine's own—he devises a plan to remake the restaurant's interior, typically in a high cheap-chic fashion. (The total budget is $10,000.) Irvine next offers fast-paced common-sense lectures on kitchen cleanliness, the need for fresh ingredients, and the importance of careful food costing. He might also spool out a few tasty recipes that he promises will be hugely profitable for the proprietors.

Though harsh about food quality, Irvine offers a sympathetic ear: He'll help reconcile feuding couples, discipline wayward staff, and put the restaurant on the right track. Along the way, there are usually a few slip-ups in the interior remake—wrong carpet, broken mirrors—that the jack-of-all-trades Irvine solves with his typical brilliance.

The show ends with a huge crowd coming into the newly refreshed restaurant, *ooh*ing over the décor and showing appreciation of the dishes that Irvine has added to the menu. This makes for good drama, and Irvine's larger-than-life personality makes him a winning character.

But like all other superheroes, Robert Irvine is a fictional creation. Irvine, as a 2008 *St. Petersburg Times* investigation revealed, isn't a knight, didn't cook directly for the royal family, and had only a brief stint in a menial role in the White House Mess. The only two restaurants he has run himself (in South Carolina) both opened *after* he began to appear regularly on television and get middling reviews on TripAdvisor and Yelp. His cookbooks haven't been huge bestsellers, and a lot of the reviewers find his recipes unworkable. To a large extent, the "Robert Irvine" who has appeared on the Food Network during the past decade is a fictional character whose biography and abilities bear only a tangential relationship to the former Royal Navy cook with the same name.

Robert Irvine

And the show itself doesn't bear much more of a relationship to reality. As the *New York Times* has reported, the "48-hour" restaurant makeover actually takes months of planning, with boxes of materials shipped to the restaurant well in advance. Irvine, who wields a sledgehammer in the show's opening credits, has little or no involvement with this part of the process. And the $10,000 budget, apparently, refers to materials only: Labor, the biggest cost for most construction projects, isn't included.

Even Irvine's prepackaged advice, which sounds like common sense at first blush, is actually a vast oversimplification. In Irvine's world, restaurants can always make more money and turn themselves around by replacing frozen ingredients with tastier, cheaper-to-prepare, fresh ones. This sounds great in theory and probably works for some restaurants some of the time. But, in fact, almost all restaurants (probably including Irvine's own) serve some frozen food for a reason: While more expensive, it's less labor intensive to prepare, and can be kept frozen until needed. In some cases—fish purchased to be served inland, for example—it's arguably of better quality, too. Even in the best restaurants, items like brown sauce and bacon are almost always bought partly precooked and frozen.

The show's faults, however, are easy to overlook: *Restaurant: Impossible*'s satisfying, if formulaic, plots combined with Irvine's charisma make it compelling, if dumb, television. And for all its fictionalization, the combination of remodeling, publicity, and Irvine's recipes does seem to have saved a number of restaurants. The blog *Food Network Gossip* finds that 45 of the 65 restaurants the show has visited remain open, an impressive number given that all claimed to have been on the verge of closing their doors before Irvine arrived.

Furthermore, *Restaurant: Impossible*'s adaptation of nearly all the tropes of the superhero show provides another important data point about the way reality shows have come full circle. Although there are plenty of reality shows on television that follow typical themes, such as investigating unusual people (A&E's *Hoarders*) or providing a sort of "extreme game show" setting (CBS's long-running *Survivor*), reality television has already brought in any number of other genres. For example: a sitcom with a heavy dose of comedy (IFC's *Whisker Wars*); angsty, sometimes gripping, teen dramas (MTV's *Teen Mom* and its spinoffs); and, in the ultimate example of things coming full circle, a mostly scripted crime drama with professional actors in the cast (Discovery Channel's *Amish Mafia*).

Restaurant: Impossible adds a superhero to this mix. Yes, it's a fictional program, and a formulaic one at that. And no, it doesn't teach much about restaurant management. But as a superhero saga, it's pretty darn good. ♦

ASSOCIATED PRESS

B&A

Still Small Voice

Sundance gives birth to yet another meh-sterpiece.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Lake Bell

It is said that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king—and when it comes to American movies, the land of the blind is the Sundance Film Festival. Every January, independent filmmakers looking for distributors fight to get their films shown at the festival in Utah. Followers of cinema news are bombarded with reports of the Sundance attendees responding with standing ovations to this film or that film, only to find that when the movie is released months later, it's just, as the young people say these days, meh.

The latest such meh-sterpiece is *In a World...*, a movie written and directed by its fetching star, Lake Bell. She won best screenplay for it at Sundance, where it was received "jubilantly," according to Deadline.com.

In the film, Carol Solomon (Bell) makes an uncertain living as a voice coach in Los Angeles. She wanders around town recording weird accents so she can learn to duplicate them. Carol is the daughter of the reigning star of the voice-over business, an aged popinjay wonderfully played by Fred Melamed.

In a World...
Directed by Lake Bell

The movie begins when her father kicks Carol out of his house so he can shack up with a seemingly airheaded girlfriend younger than his own kids. One day, at the studio where she helps actors with their accents, Carol offhandedly records a voice-over herself. It's a business dominated by men with plummy voices, so her work is something new, and she begins to make a career of it as well.

This is all reasonably interesting, as is the stutter-step romance between Carol and the incredibly hesitant manager of the recording studio (Demetri Martin). Less good and less new are the plot developments centered around the recording of a big, new trailer and a wildly overserious subplot about the conjugal dissatisfaction of Carol's sister, an unpleasant hotel concierge married to a lovely guy (Rob Corddry).

In the end, *In a World...* is okay. I've seen better, I've seen worse—and that's only this week. So why did everybody in Utah go crazy for it?

Because it was the one-eyed man this year at Sundance. At film festivals, people watch four or five movies a day, and so many of them (most of which will never see the light of day) are so unimaginably wretched that anything even minimally competent or involving seems like Shakespeare. The same sense of overload clearly affected the market atmosphere at Sundance, where *In a World...* sparked a bidding war between distributors who battled each other for the multimillion-dollar rights to put it out into the marketplace.

The businessmen at Sundance are all panning for gold. Over the past quarter-century, Sundance has been the source of instant wealth and fame as small movies came out of nowhere and scored not only critical plaudits but huge box office numbers—from *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989) to *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) to *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004) to *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006).

But, as is the case with all gold rushes, some people begin to fantasize that there are riches trapped in a lump of coal. Ludicrous deals are struck every year. A horrible and drippy thing called *The Spitfire Grill* launched a feeding frenzy in 1996 and was eventually bought for $10 million, all of which was lost when the public got a chance to see it. The same happened with a dreadful comedy called *Hamlet 2* in 2008. These movies failed not only because they were bad, but because they were marketed as something special when they really were not.

The point here is that hype is not just a problem for studio blockbusters whose marketing divisions make you sick and tired of such movies long before they ever get to your local theater. A comparable sort of weariness can set in among those for whom moviegoing really is an ingrained cultural habit—the very people who go to the art houses and smaller theaters that are the natural homes for Sundance movies—when modest fare is overpraised and oversold. After all, a one-eyed man still only has one eye. ♦

ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

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

"On Monday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed evidence of the alleged chemical weapons use by the Syrian regime as 'absolutely unconvincing.'"

—Associated Press, September 2, 2013

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Russia 'unconvinced' of round Earth, gravity

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV SPEAKS

'Waiting for proof' from former Soviet scientists

BY ALLISON KLEIN

The rift between President Obama and Vladimir Putin continues to grow as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov today highlighted several issues on which his government does not see eye to eye with the United States. "They say to us, the Americans, 'Oh, yes, of course the Earth is round!' But where is the proof? It is not here in my hands!" Lavrov declared. "Yes, there are pictures and films, perhaps, but these can be made. My nephew, nine years old, he will make them on the Twitter for you, and you will say this is science?"

Lavrov, speaking to a crowd of reporters in Moscow, indicated that the government of President Vladimir Putin is also skeptical of the idea of gravity, a concept all U.S. administrations have accepted as fact. "This gravity, what is it? You throw a ball up in the air, it falls to the ground. This is what usually happens, I will admit it. But does it always happen? Who can be sure? Show me the man who is sure, and I will say, 'Who is this wizard?'" he said, before guffawing in an exaggerated manner several times in rapid succession.

BIG STOCK / NEWSCOM

At a Kremlin laboratory, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov shows reporters a 'clean' urine sample taken from Ryan Braun.

Lavrov's comments come in the wake of recent disputes between Russia and the Obama administration over the role Bashar al-Assad's regime played in a recent chemical weapons attack in Syria, a country whose existence Lavrov was not able to confirm. "Is this a real place, this Syria? Who says so? John Kerry? This guy has changed his mind more often than Mitt Romney trying to pick a tie at a tie store for rich Americans, am I right?" he asked, before shouting, "Zing!" and demanding high fives from several of the assembled reporters.

"You show me a map, it says Syria, perhaps, but I can draw a map for you, and nowhere will there be Syria on this map, you see? Maps are not gods. And another thing, I'm not so sure this Ryan Braun of the Milwaukees, that he did the steroids," Lavrov continued, referring to the American baseball player who tested positive for steroids multiple times and admitted publicly to taking

BRAUN CONTINUED ON A6