

**SPYING  
ON FRIENDS**  
REUEL MARC GERECHT

# the weekly Standard

NOVEMBER 11, 2013

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## THE MEDIA KOWTOW

MARK HEMINGWAY

on obsequious press coverage  
of China's government



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# How Sebelius Hangs On

As surely as the Obamacare rollout has been a disaster, the calls are now ringing throughout Washington, especially in conservative ranks, for Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius to resign. It won't happen. And if *THE SCRAPBOOK* has its way, it shouldn't happen, either.

Of course, in a more rational world, Sebelius would, at the very least, have offered her resignation to President Obama. The Affordable Care Act is the hallmark legislation of the Obama presidency, and it was Sebelius's job to make sure that its introduction went smoothly, with maximum political advantage to her boss. Instead, Obamacare's debut has been catastrophic—and worse, has revealed not just widespread incompetence but a systematic pattern of lying to the public as well. Logic demands that somebody's head should roll.

The problem, however, is that the United States does not have a parliamentary system of government, and the notion of cabinet secretaries coming and going as the winds blow—or

sacrificing themselves when things go haywire—is alien to our political culture. Kathleen Sebelius's resignation, or dismissal by the president, would be seen (correctly) as an admission of error, tacit recognition that the critics of Obamacare have a point. To President Obama and his fellow Demo-



Kathleen Sebelius

crats, this is unacceptable: Loss of face is taken as seriously in America as it is in the inscrutable Orient.

Indeed, so resistant is our system to resignation on principle that *National Journal* offered a series of fascinating reasons last week why Obama won't

fire Sebelius: because she endorsed him for president, over Hillary Clinton, early in 2008; because the fight to confirm her successor would be politically debilitating; because Sebelius and Obama share an affection for basketball. These “reasons” would be meaningless—in fact, incomprehensible—in, say, London or Paris; but they make sense in Washington. Even the one about basketball.

And from *THE SCRAPBOOK*'s point of view, it's probably just as well. Yes, in a democratic system, there must be accountability when things go wrong. But the best argument against Obamacare has been Obamacare itself. And so long as Kathleen Sebelius and a string of lesser officials keep presenting themselves to Congress to apologize, to make excuses, to take the blame, to dismiss criticism, to acknowledge error, above all to shield Barack Obama, and generally to present as sorry a spectacle as we've seen in the executive branch in recent decades, *THE SCRAPBOOK* is content for now. Pass the popcorn. ♦

## Don't Know Much About History

*THE SCRAPBOOK* was understandably intrigued when Cass Sunstein, a former Obama White House official and former Harvard law professor, published a Bloomberg.com column headlined “How the Alger Hiss Case Explains the Tea Party.” If you know anything about the famous perjury trial of the high-ranking State Department official and Soviet spy, the headline might seem to suggest that Sunstein is admitting the Tea Party has correctly identified insidious political threats.

Needless to say, that is not Sun-

stein's point. He spends most of the column recapping the saga of how *Time* magazine writer Whittaker Chambers accused Hiss, who was one of Washington's most dashing and well-regarded figures in the late 1940s, of having been part of the Communist underground. Chambers had experienced a powerful religious conversion that convinced him, quite correctly, that communism was a force for evil. Sunstein recounts how the initial skepticism of Chambers gave way to a preponderance of damning evi-



Whittaker Chambers

dence proving Hiss was a traitor. He concedes Chambers's beloved autobiography *Witness* is “moving, poetic, an unforgettable mixture of pessimism, spirituality and hope.” In fact, the column is basically a testament to Chambers's courage and conviction,

right up until the last two bizarre paragraphs:

Chambers' broader charge—that liberalism was a species of socialism, “inching its ice cap over the nation”—polarized the nation. His attack on the patriotism of the Ivy

League elite reflected an important strand in American culture, and it helped to initiate suspicions that persist to this day.

Liberals are no longer much interested in Hiss's conviction, yet they are puzzled, and rightly object, when they are accused of holding positions that they abhor. We can't easily understand those accusations, contemporary conservative thought or the influence of the Tea Party without appreciating the enduring impact of the Hiss case.

To sum up, even though Chambers was correct to point out that influential American liberals were hiding their true intentions to seize the levers of power and undermine constitutional government, Chambers is responsible for poisoning the well. And this is somehow the genesis of the bitter partisan divide we're saddled with today.

We suppose we should be grateful that Sunstein at least acknowledges Hiss's guilt—as recently as 2007, holdouts such as the *Nation's* Victor Navasky were insisting the accusations against him “had never really been proved.”

Still, Hiss's betrayal is decades old. He was sentenced to a five-year prison term for perjury in 1950. Just do the arithmetic: A putative 20-year-old who was riveted by the trial would be 83 years old today.

Perhaps it would be more helpful for Sunstein to think about how Alger Hiss explains Obama. When Obama ran for president in 2008, there were questions about his relationship with left-wing terrorist Bill Ayers. The Obama campaign responded to these accusations with the appalling tactic of asking the Justice Department to intervene against a conservative group running ads questioning the relationship between the two men. Once Obama was elected, *New Yorker* editor David Remnick wrote a book acknowledging Obama lied about the extent of his relationship to Ayers.

When Obama ran for president, he insisted that his primary opponent Hillary Clinton's health care plan, which required an individual mandate to purchase health insurance,

was too extreme, and this helped endear him to voters.

Once elected, he needed the individual mandate to make his own Rube Goldberg health plan work, so the mandate was included in Obamacare. When it was pointed out that the mandate was a huge and unpopular tax, he insisted it wasn't—right up until it was decided this was the best legal argument in favor of the mandate's constitutional validity.

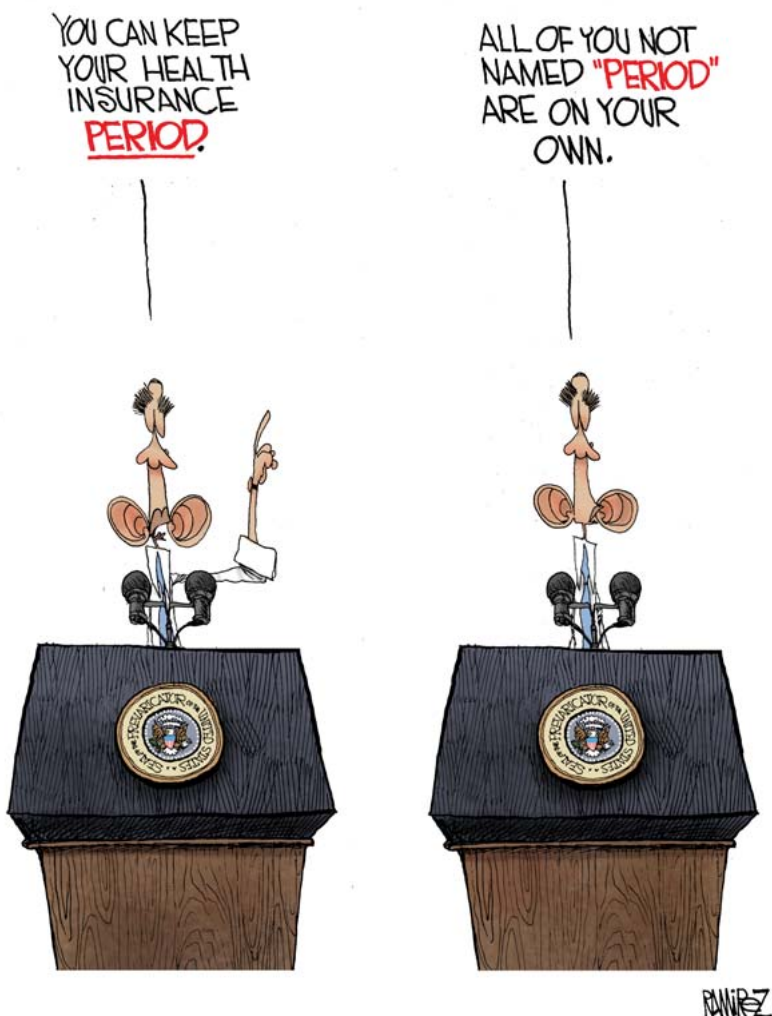
And when Obama's health care plan was explicitly designed to cancel the insurance policies of 1 out of every 20 Americans and dump them into a kludgy government insurance system, Obama tried (and

failed) to drum up support for the law by repeatedly claiming, “If you like your health insurance, you can keep your health insurance. Period.”

If Sunstein thinks it's damaging for the Tea Party to accuse liberals of having secret agendas, then he should tell his fellow liberals to stop harboring secret agendas. ♦

## Dr. Kim, We Presume

It's no secret that the value of an honorary degree—not to mention the value of an actual degree—has declined in recent years. Recently minted “Doctors” include Ben Affleck (Brown University), Jon Bon Jovi



(Monmouth University), and Morgan Freeman (Boston University). Tufts University, meanwhile, gave one to Lance Armstrong in 2006 . . . only to rescind it last year after the cyclist copped to doping.

But THE SCRAPBOOK can safely say that the honorary degree reached its nadir late last month when North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un, who presides over what is arguably the world's poorest and most mismanaged economy, was awarded an honorary doctorate in economics by Malaysia's improbably named HELP University. The president of the university, one Paul Chan, said he hoped that the degree would "build a bridge" with the North Korean people. (It's not clear how honoring their unspeakably cruel ruler would further this goal.) But, if nothing else, THE SCRAPBOOK is pleased that it can now accurately refer to Kim Jong-un as Doctor Evil. ♦

## Edward Clarke, 1939-2013

Believers in limited government and privatization lost one of their unsung heroes with the death of distinguished economist Ed Clarke on October 10. Clarke conceived of an idea he called revealed demand, a notion that helped make the case for having the market allocate goods and services formerly

thought to be the sole province of governments. Across the globe, governments have come to use its precepts, creating markets to finance such things as roads, bridges, and runway landing and takeoff slots, with the people using the assets, rather than taxpayers, to pay for such investments.

While taxpayers around the world ultimately saved money thanks to Clarke's innovation, it didn't do much for his career. His adviser at the University of Chicago, George Stigler, initially rejected his dissertation, in which he spelled out this idea, forcing Clarke to abandon any hope of an academic career. Instead, he landed a job in the White House just in time to watch Watergate destroy the Nixon administration.

Chicago eventually saw the error of its ways and gave Clarke his Ph.D., but he remained in government for his entire career. He ended up at the Office of Management and Budget, where he worked on the deregulatory efforts of the 1970s and 1980s and later did yeoman's work fighting the regulatory overreach of executive branch agencies.

Clarke never won the Nobel, although the prize committee did acknowledge his work when giving the 1996 award to William Vickrey for his work on auction markets, and 1986 winner James Buchanan would tell anyone who asked that Clarke should have won it with him.

But unlike most other economists, Clarke had the satisfaction of seeing his ideas make a real impact on the world, nudging the government out of an area of the economy that had been previously thought to be its sole province. ♦

## Must-see TV!

THE SCRAPBOOK is not a watcher of the NBC drama *The Blacklist*, but we note with amusement that the episode set to air on November 4 is titled "Frederick Barnes," and the promotional materials describe "Barnes" as "quite literally the most dangerous man in the world." We're programming our DVR right now. ♦

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## While My Guitar Gently Weeps

The other day, I picked up my guitar and didn't know what to play. This is happening more and more, and I guess it's because I pick up the guitar less and less. When I was 15, I could strum my way through the entire Beatles catalogue, half the songs on classic rock radio, and any number of self-penned blues jams before I ever had to stop and think about what to play next.

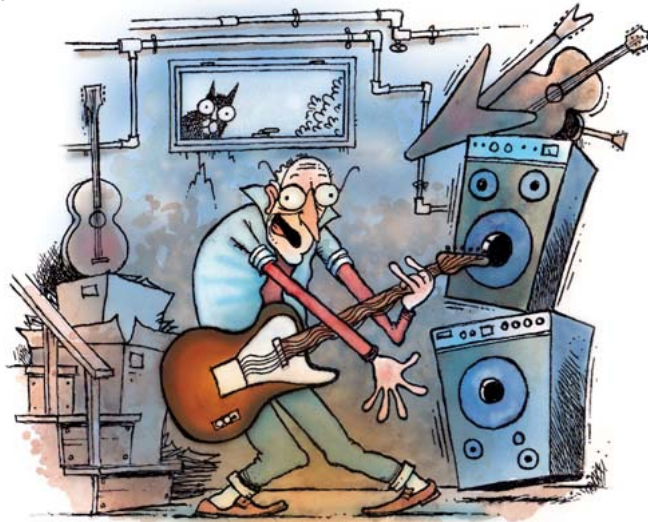
Even in college, when playing time was precious, I always had a song in my head—usually some loud, obnoxious punk-blues rocker—ready to go when I had the chance to plug in and turn up the distortion on my Fender amplifier. From there, I'd rip through a suite of loud crunchy rock songs. Some days I'd practice an intricate solo, trying to get it to sound exactly the way it did on the recording. Others, I would unplug and fingerpick some country ballads. I wasn't great, or even very good. I played every day, though, and on certain songs and techniques, I did okay.

These days, I'm lucky if I play once a month, usually on a weekend. Most of the time, my guitar sits in the corner of the living room gathering dust. When I do get the chance, I'll spend several minutes strumming chords aimlessly. My fingers slip or stick along the fretboard. I haven't learned a new solo in years. Chalk it up to life as a young adult: work, marriage, obligations, and weekends spent carpet shopping. I should appreciate the free time I have, I'm told. My friends warn, "Wait until you have kids!"

They're probably right. If the mid-twenties are a time of decline

for a man's hobbies, the child-rearing years are the Dark Ages. So as far as my guitar-playing is concerned, I'm holding out for the Renaissance, when I expect to have the time to play and the disposable income to buy bigger and better equipment. I'm waiting for middle age.

Two men in my family have blazed this trail, becoming expert hobbyists



since their nests emptied. My father-in-law is a train enthusiast, and may even be considered a "foamer," as train crews used to call those buffs who seemed to foam at the mouth on sighting a particularly rare engine or car model. I've never seen him react that way, but my father-in-law is definitely all about things locomotive.

He subscribes to train magazines and reads train websites and goes to train conventions. He's fascinated by a new online tool from Amtrak that allows users to track a train in real time by name, number, or station. Each Friday night, he gets together with other train guys for model train operating sessions. They often meet in

his basement (the natural habitat of an expert hobbyist), where he has a continually expanding model train scene. When I first saw it nine years ago, the track wasn't more than an oval loop. Now, there are tunnels, bridges, road crossings, switchyards, towns, and landscape details. He wired the entire scene himself. Even to a nonfoamer like me, it's impressive.

My father is more of a jack-of-all-hobbies. Over the years, he's been into stained glass window-making, hiking, grilling and smoking meat, golfing, collecting bar paraphernalia, and kayak fishing. He's always been an excellent woodworker. Lately, he's started brewing beer (an idea he picked up from my brother-in-law, an expert hobbyist in the making).

And then there are the guitars. Like me, my dad's been playing since he was a kid, but in the last few years it's grown into an obsession. For a while, it seemed he was buying a new guitar or piece of equipment every week. Some were fixer-uppers, like an old amp that needed rewiring. Others were fun items my dad has always wanted, like a Fender Telecaster and a looper pedal. In his basement (where else?), he's got the whole setup, amps and foot pedals and a keyboard and enough guitars to rival Keith Richards's home studio.

He plays all the time, maybe more than he ever has. He watches instructional videos online to improve his technique. On the phone, I hear about the latest picking style he's tried to master. When I visit and we inevitably retreat to the basement to play, he's always ready to jam on an Eric Clapton tune he's figured out, with some complicated lick that he's spent hours perfecting. I can't keep up.

But I'll get there. Just give me a couple decades.

**MICHAEL WARREN**

# Labor Republicanism

Mike Lee, the senator from Utah, gave a speech at the Heritage Foundation last week that demands attention. The takeaway: Candidates need policy ideas that address the concerns of ordinary voters—and they have to campaign, and win, on those ideas. Lee noted that conservative scholars have a number of imaginative proposals that try to address the breakdown of the family, the rising cost of health insurance and higher education, the lengthening suburban commute, and out-of-control entitlement spending. Read an issue of *National Affairs* (or THE WEEKLY STANDARD!) if you doubt him. But Republican officeholders haven't picked up the torch. The GOP elite is stuck in the policy thinking of the Reagan Revolution. "Instead of emulating that generation," Lee said, "too many Republicans today mimic them—still advocating policies from a bygone age."

What made the speech compelling was that Lee didn't limit himself to a critique. He announced four specific proposals—to aid families raising kids, facing the challenge of balancing work life and home life, spending too much time sitting in gridlock, and struggling to afford a college education. All four are worthy of consideration. His tax plan would simplify and reduce rates and offer a \$2,500 per-child credit (up from \$1,000 today) that would offset both income and payroll taxes. His reform of labor laws would allow employees who work overtime to take comp time or flex time in lieu of pay—an option currently available to federal workers but not to the rest of us. His transportation bill would lower the federal gas tax and devolve power to the states and localities. And his education proposal would create a new optional system of accreditation: "States could accredit online courses, or hybrid models with elements on and off campus." Parents and students would have more flexibility. They'd also have more choices.

Lee is just one of several Republican politicians rethinking the GOP economic agenda. Along with former senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, and Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama, he's

giving renewed attention to the interests of the American middle class, of the families who struggle in the Obama economy but see the national GOP as equally out of touch. These labor Republicans want to apply conservative principles to the economic crisis of our time: low growth, stagnant wages, and social immobility. They may not be numerous enough to form a caucus. But give them time.

What the labor Republicans share is a respect for work. "Work for able-bodied adults is not a necessary evil," Lee said, "but an essential pathway to personal happiness." A labor Republican opposes the Senate immigration bill not only because it's a bureaucratic monstrosity, but also because an influx of cheap labor would decrease low-skilled wages. A labor Republican is well disposed to cuts in the payroll tax rate, or to an expanded child tax credit, because he thinks the GOP ought to do something for married couples with children. A labor Republican is not reluctant to embrace proposals to reduce



*Mike Lee: champion of the working class?*

the size and power of the Wall Street banks. Nor is he reluctant to discuss the social and cultural background—disintegrating families, radical abortion laws, legitimization of drugs and pornography—to economic malaise.

If those views sound opposite to the views of Republican party officials, D.C. operatives, and donors along the coasts—well, they are. Back in March, when the Republican National Committee released its "autopsy report" on the 2012 presidential election, the establishment consensus was that the GOP needed to embrace comprehensive immigration reform and reject the social issues in order to compete on economics. But, as the conservative group American Principles in Action (APIA) demonstrates in its own new report, "Building a Winning GOP Coalition," the party leadership got it backwards. It's not the social issues that hurt Republicans. It's the economic ones.

American Principles in Action hired a research firm, Design4, to analyze the ads run by the Romney campaign and affiliated groups in 2012. Out of more than \$400 million in ad spending, Design4 found only five ads that could be broadly interpreted as dealing with social issues: one

defending Israel, two attacking the HHS contraceptive mandate, one attacking administrative changes to welfare reform, and one defending Romney from the charge that he was a pro-life extremist. Not a single ad directed at Latinos mentioned a social issue. On the issues closest to the hearts of his electoral base, Mitt Romney was silent.

This “self-mute” strategy, replicated by Ken Cuccinelli in the Virginia governor’s race, has four negative consequences. It allows Democrats to frame the debate—and, as APIA observes, “In a country deeply conflicted by the issue of abortion, the party that aggressively frames the debate stands to win.” The self-mute strategy also prevents the GOP from attracting new voters who may not agree with the party on economics but do agree on social and cultural matters. It lets Democrats pay no price for pro-choice extremism. And it gives social conservatives hardly any reason to pull the lever for Republicans. Why vote when neither candidate speaks your language?

The self-mute strategy is intended to create more space for the Republican economic message. But that message can be unpleasant to the ear. The success of past GOP tax policy has led to a situation in which reductions in marginal income tax rates no longer have widespread appeal. The Republican celebration of the heroic entrepreneur and job creator falls flat in a country where *Horrible Bosses* is a box-office hit. One of the top concerns of voters, prices rising faster than one might gather from the official statistics, is hardly addressed by either party. Working families with kids want to hear politicians speak to their concerns: increasing health and tuition costs and a moribund job market. What they often hear from Republicans are prophetic warnings about debt and deficits, and the necessity of cuts in entitlements and in the corporate income tax. No wonder they tune out.

Labor Republicans can do better. They can link Obamacare to Americans’ declining standard of living. They can champion innovative education reforms like changes to accreditation or a Texas-style \$10,000 bachelor’s degree. They can reintroduce monetary policy to the national debate and frame their economic policies in terms of making the dollar go further. They can speak the language of the family man in exurban Ohio rather than the language of the mogul in midtown Manhattan. They can take lessons from Mike Lee and propose future-oriented, positive legislation designed to benefit working Americans. Not every piece of legislation will satisfy small-government conservatives and fervent libertarians, who more often want to discuss cutting government than making it work for the people. But in fact a middle-class agenda—a working Americans agenda, a labor agenda—would help shape the kind of America almost all conservatives would like to see. “By 1980,” Lee said, “the movement had forged an agenda for its time—and only then did it succeed.” It can again.

—Matthew Continetti

# A Dangerous Game



*John Kerry, man of talk*

There’s a Washington think-tank variation on the board game Risk, and here’s how it goes: I give you a short statement about Obama policy in the Middle East, and you have to say who it’s from. For example:

“The Persians are taking over Iraq and Syria and building a nuclear weapon. Are you Americans crazy? You think you will outsmart them in Geneva? They send Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah troops to fight in Syria and you do nothing? You draw a red line over chemical weapons and let Putin erase it?”

So who said it: Saudi foreign minister Saud al-Faisal? King Abdullah of Jordan? The Israelis? The Emiratis? The Moroccans? The Kuwaitis? Lebanese Christians? The list of candidates is long.

It’s hard to win this game, because in private, all these players are saying pretty much the same thing. At this point they are less angry than astonished by American policy, though the Saudis have been coming out of the closet in recent weeks with real resentment about the way Obama is changing the rules. In the game Risk, there are no teams, and alliances are temporary and often disregarded. Our Middle Eastern friends see Obama as playing by those rules rather than the ones that have governed American policy for decades, where alliances are real and lasting, and behavior is predictable. In real life they did not expect to see an America desperate

for a deal with Iran. None of these American friends likes the new rules much because it is they who face the risks: For them, what are mere guessing games in Washington can mean life or death. While Secretary of State John Kerry has been making fine speeches and signing op-eds about what is acceptable and unacceptable in world politics, deaths in Syria rise each day (perhaps to 125,000 or even 200,000 now), there are 6 million persons displaced all over Syria and crowding into Jordan and Lebanon, and reports are coming out of cholera and polio.

The actions of the State Department have rarely seemed as disconnected from reality as they are today. The *New York Times's* October 26 story about Obama's new "modest" Middle East policy was based on interviews with Susan Rice. According to the story, and to Rice, we now have these goals in the region: a successful negotiation with Iran, a successful negotiation of Israeli-Palestinian peace, and a successful negotiation of the Syrian conflict. Gone, it seems, are bad old habits like the assertion of American power or the preference for defeating one's enemies. The Iranians send troops to Syria, so we send John Kerry to talk with the Russians in a suite overlooking Lake Geneva. The only thing multiplying faster than Iranian centrifuges are talking points. But centrifuges produce enriched uranium, while talking points produce only position papers and Memoranda of Conversations.

Israel's former minister of defense and head of the Israel Defense Forces Ehud Barak once said that Israel survives in the Middle East not because Israelis can quote the Bible, but because they have the best army around—and that's a view their neighbors all share. Until recently, the top gun in the neighborhood was the Americans. Only they had the ability to send hundreds of thousands of troops to stop aggression like Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. They had the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, the Fifth Fleet in the Gulf, a red line against chemical weapons use, and dozens of flat statements promising to prevent Iran from getting to a nuclear weapon. But Susan Rice's list of American priorities—presumably also Barack Obama's—might be Belgium's: all talk, all conferences, all Brussels and Geneva and the Security Council.

What's missing? Any American friend in the Middle East can give you the list: Punishing Assad for using chemical weapons after the American president drew a red line. Giving the Syrian nationalist rebels what they need to drive Assad from power and thereby weaken both Iran and Syria. Letting the ayatollahs know they will give up their nuclear weapons program or see it destroyed. Giving democrats, liberals, and religious minorities the moral and political support they need to survive against the twin pressures of Islamism and military dictatorship. What's missing, in other words, is the use of power. The new "modest" policy eschews American power as if it were a malign inheritance from the

past, like sexism: That's the way we were in the bad old days, but we've worked our way through to a new and more mature approach now. This explains the astonishment of our Middle Eastern friends and allies who find themselves facing Lavrov and Putin, Khamenei and Soleimani, Assad and Nasrallah. Our allies have not attained the same level of enlightenment about world politics as the Obama team, among whom terms like "victory" and "enemy" are thought outmoded. What our friends know is that our enemies aren't playing Risk, they're playing for keeps. Everyone from Morocco to Iran gets that, but no one in the White House seems to.

It is only four years since Barack Obama went to Cairo to say "*as-salamu alaykum*" and "seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world." This was the task for which he claimed to be especially, indeed uniquely, qualified: In that speech he said, "As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the *azaan* at the break of dawn and the fall of dusk." And, he noted, "I have known Islam on three continents before coming to the region where it was first revealed."

Oh well. Four years is a long time in politics. In Arabia, where Islam began, Obama is now reviled by leaders who believe he is either dangerously naïve or indifferent to the risks they face. In Egypt his policies have managed the neat trick of alienating everyone from the Muslim Brotherhood to the army to the liberals and democrats. In Israel there is dread about an administration that appears to view drone strikes as the apex of America's assertion of power—and all else as morally ambiguous.

Addressing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee last spring, Ehud Barak said this: "It is no secret, and I'll repeat it again, that we live in a tough neighborhood, where there is no mercy for the weak. And no second chance for those who cannot defend themselves." That's another line that could easily have come from the Saudis, Emiratis, Jordanians, and so on: That's how they all see the Hobbesian world in which they live. For a while, for some decades, the "war of all against all" was limited by a Pax Americana that imposed some rules.

Now those rules can be broken in the face of official American indifference—disguised, to be sure, in briefings, speeches, and spin as a new strategic approach. "We have to be humble," Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes told the columnist David Ignatius last week. Ignatius, a reliable Obama apologist, called it "strategic humility," but even he acknowledged that it is "quite dangerous."

To those whose futures are put in peril by it, the Americans appear to be imposing huge new risks on nations that have been their friends for decades. The *New York Times* called that a more "modest" Middle East policy, but the only thing "modest" here is the vision and ability of those in charge in the White House.

—Elliott Abrams

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# A Debacle for Liberalism



'Saturday Night Live' mocks Obamacare

The president's signature legislative achievement, the Affordable Care Act, is in serious trouble. As a result, so is modern liberalism. The problems with Obamacare are increasingly obvious, beginning with the administration unilaterally delaying the employer mandate. But that turned out to be merely one link in a long and troublesome chain.

The other difficulties include the disastrous rollout of the federal health care exchange website, causing (for now) a six-week extension for Americans to sign up for coverage next year in order to avoid new tax penalties. There are millions of insurance cancellations. Then there's the sticker shock caused by higher premiums and deductibles and the danger of what insurers call a "death spiral," in which not enough young and healthy people sign up in the exchanges, leading to rising prices, further declines in enrollment, and a destabilized market.

Not to be overlooked is the mountain of broken Obama promises, including the president's repeated assurances, which we now know to be false, that you can keep your health plan if you like it. Restive Democrats are now calling for a delay in the individual mandate, and Obamacare is being mocked on such reliably liberal shows as *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. All for a program that will, at best, still leave 30 million people uninsured, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Now if you believe, as we do, that Obamacare was incoherently designed and suffers from massive structural flaws, there's no reason to think things are about to get better. Quite the opposite. The warnings issued

by conservatives during the health care debate are in the process of being vindicated. And the president looks increasingly helpless to fix what's amiss.

As for those who believe that once the exchanges and subsidies kick in, "it's going to prove almost impossible to undo Obamacare" because people will react like sugar addicts, it's important to realize that the entitlement portion of the Affordable Care Act will be enjoyed by only a small slice of Americans. For most, choice and access will be restricted and prices will go up. The downside of Obamacare will end up affecting many more Americans than the upside. That's because the Affordable Care Act isn't a program that just gives people money; it's one that tries to manage the health insurance sector and looks likely to manage it in a very unpopular way.

The political ramifications could be enormous. Precisely because the Affordable Care Act is the realization of a half-century long liberal dream, if it fails, it will be a crushing blow not just to Barack Obama but to American liberalism itself. Why? Because

Obamacare is in many ways the avatar, the archetype, of modern liberalism. That's true in terms of its coercive elements, its soaring confidence in technocratic solutions, its ambition to centralize decisionmaking, and its belief that government knows best. You may like your health care plan, but the role of the benevolent nanny state is to impose its will on you. And we see the zealous aspirations of liberalism in using a discrete problem, in this case the uninsured, to remake our entire health care system.

Critics of the president may be wrong. Obamacare may turn out to be one of the most successful and popular programs in the history of man. But whether they are right or wrong, there is at least no confusion as to who has ownership of the Affordable Care Act. We all know who stood where, when; who supported it and who opposed it; and we are now in the process of being able to judge the claims of Obamacare against the reality of Obamacare. An abstract debate can now be measured by its true effects on the nation as a whole.

It looks to us that liberalism, in getting what it wanted, will end up doing significant and sustained damage to itself, to public confidence in government (which is already near historic lows), and to its conception of the welfare state.

It would be quite an historical irony if Obama, who raised such extravagant hopes among progressives when he ran for office, turns out to have a shattering effect on contemporary liberalism. But that may be just where we are heading. Barack Obama may turn out to be the best thing to happen to conservatism since Ronald Reagan.

—Peter Wehner

# Churchill Returns to the Capitol

Congress's tribute to the wartime leader.

BY FRED BARNES



Congress has rebuked President Obama. It may have come in a subtle or backhanded way and thus was ignored by the media. It may not have been intentional. But it was a rebuke nonetheless.

The issue was a bust of Winston Churchill, the great British prime minister and ally of America. When Obama became president in 2009, a bust of Churchill was removed from the Oval Office and dispatched to the British embassy. This was regarded as a slap at Britain, signaling that Obama doesn't regard the U.S.-U.K. relationship as special. Or he detests Churchill's colonialist attitude as a defender of the British Empire.

The rebuke came last week in a ceremony in the Capitol at which a bronze bust of Churchill—not the one Obama spurned—was dedicated. It now resides in a section of the Capitol known as the Freedom Foyer, near what's called "the British steps."

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Recalling Churchill's speech to Congress in 1941 three weeks after Pearl Harbor, House speaker John Boehner said: "With peace, justice, and a touch of majesty, Winston Churchill returns to the United States Capitol. Just as a statue of Lincoln stands outside Parliament, this bust renews the ties between our peoples."

It was Boehner who arranged to acquire the bust. His resolution "that the Architect of the Capitol place an appropriate statue or bust of Sir Winston Churchill" in the Capitol passed Congress in 2011. The Churchill Center at George Washington University contributed the bust, sculpted by Oscar Nemon, and enlisted Roger Daltrey of the British band the Who to perform at the ceremony. He chose to sing "Stand by Me."

Boehner aides insist there was no intention to chide Obama, though the fate of the Churchill likeness is still a sensitive issue, especially at the White House itself. Last year, communications director Dan Pfeiffer criticized columnist Charles Krauthammer for

claiming the bust had been returned to the embassy. Pfeiffer called the claim "patently false," but later retreated and apologized to Krauthammer.

According to a congressional aide, Boehner discovered when he became House speaker in 2011 that the Freedom Foyer "had room for at least two more busts." For months, "we had a running conversation about who we should place there. We kept coming back to Churchill."

Boehner has been "a big fan his entire life, reading biography after biography," the aide said. "Late one December evening, during a lull in legislative activity, we started researching a resolution to authorize the placement of the bust in the Capitol, and realized we were on the cusp of the 70th anniversary of Churchill's address to Congress right after Pearl Harbor. We wrote the resolution and we rushed it to the floor to commemorate the occasion."

Since Churchill is enormously popular in this country—among other things, his mother was American—the

DAVE MALAN

resolution was quickly approved with bipartisan support. Opposing it would have been politically awkward for Democrats, even if Obama might be irked. Churchill was made an honorary American citizen by President Kennedy in 1963 and given the first and only honorary U.S. passport.

Three Democrats spoke at the dedication in the Capitol's Statuary Hall last week. They did not distinguish themselves. Secretary of State John Kerry insinuated that Churchill wouldn't have condoned Republican tactics today. "This bust will remind us . . . progress comes only when we pursue it together," Kerry said.

He told a Churchill story that many regard as apocryphal. "When he was invited to the White House to stay for a week, he stayed for months," Kerry said. "He felt free to use President Roosevelt's private bathtub, but no need to wear his bathrobe or any bathrobe when he was done." The suggestion here is that Churchill exposed himself to FDR. Churchill denied the story.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid and House minority leader Nancy Pelosi talked about themselves. "Before I tell you about this hero, this hero to the world," Reid said, "I should tell you he's also one of my personal heroes. I've read every word of Churchill's four-volume *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, one of my prized possessions, given to me by one of my dear friends many years ago."

Not only that, Reid said, "His 125 hours of his speeches and his readings . . . I've listened to all 125 hours. I've read all the volumes of William Manchester's biography of Churchill, as well as a number of other single-volume histories of the British war hero and political leader. I even had dinner with one of his grandsons in Las Vegas a number of years ago."

Pelosi said it was "quite emotional" to hear an audio of a portion of Churchill's December 1941 address that was played at the dedication. "I have a picture in my office I've had for 26 years both in my leadership office—wherever that may be—and in my personal office of Sir Winston

making that speech. He's addressing the joint meeting of Congress, and my father is in that picture as a member of Congress at the time."

Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell was more pointed and not at all self-referential. "One of his greatest preoccupations throughout his very long life was . . . us," he said. He quoted Churchill's words "just before leaving 10 Downing Street for the very last time. . . . He turned to various noncabinet officials that he had summoned to see him off and told them simply, 'Never be separated from the Americans.'"

To Churchill scholar Michael Makovsky, the Capitol event "illustrated how we are living in an un-Churchillian age, and how we need a leader to rise above what Churchill called in 1931 a 'disease of the will' and advance the interests of national and global security as well as Western ideals. Today that means preventing a nuclear Iran at all costs, the most pressing security threat facing the United States and our allies. Our leaders who participated in the event should imbibe what Churchill stood for."

Were they to, another rebuke of Obama would surely follow. ♦

## Questions They Won't Answer

Benghazi isn't going away.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES & THOMAS JOSCELYN

When South Carolina's Lindsey Graham threatened last week to place a hold in the Senate on all Obama administration nominations until the president and his advisers cooperate fully with investigations into the attacks in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012, White House press secretary Jay Carney responded with a familiar accusation.

"Let's be clear that some Republicans are choosing to play politics with this for partisan purposes, and we find that unfortunate," he said at a White House press briefing on October 28. Carney, in a we've-been-over-this-before tone of annoyance, ticked off numbers meant to show administration cooperation: 13 congressional hearings, 40 staff briefings, and "providing over 25,000 pages of documents."

It's been more than a year since four

Americans were killed in Libya and more than six months since Carney dismissively declared that Benghazi "happened a long time ago." Is he simply doing his job or does he really believe that Benghazi is a "phony scandal" trumped up by Republicans? Whatever the answer, Benghazi is not going away.

Why? "The most explosive stuff is still in front of us," says Rep. Jason Chaffetz, a Utah Republican who serves on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and who knows the details of Benghazi as well as any member of Congress.

Too many basic questions about that night remain unanswered. Too many of the administration's answers are inadequate or misleading. Too many of those who know what happened have not yet spoken. And if White House officials think that the continued interest in Benghazi is attributable to Republicans seeking a political issue, too many others disagree with them.

On October 27, CBS's *60 Minutes* aired a story they'd been reporting for

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nearly a year and concluded that Benghazi “was a planned, sophisticated attack by al Qaeda against a barely protected American outpost.” Although security officials on the ground “saw it coming,” they were powerless to prevent it because no one in Washington would listen to their warnings.

The following day, MSNBC’s Chris Matthews, perhaps the most slavish

happened. I just want to know, as an American, what happened? Did everybody do what they were supposed to do? Did everybody make a really good desperate effort to save the lives of our people over there or didn’t they? If they didn’t, that’s a problem, but I want an answer.

It wasn’t just CBS and MSNBC. Reporters covering the White House

both with long al Qaeda ties, have not been listed on the department’s “Rewards for Justice” program, which offers money for information that leads to the capture of terrorists.

“I will say, you know, the question has always been who, exactly, the attackers were, what their motivations were and how they—the attack evolved,” Psaki said. “We’ve always said that there were extremists that we felt were involved. There’s an ongoing criminal investigation, as you are very familiar with, that you just referred to, so I’d refer other questions to them.”

In a follow-up, Psaki was asked: “When you call them ‘extremists,’ will you not say ‘al Qaeda’ from that podium?”

She would not. “It’s an ongoing FBI investigation,” she said.

The reticence is odd. Reporting by THE WEEKLY STANDARD, as well as by Lara Logan of *60 Minutes* and Fox News’s Catherine Herridge, has uncovered multiple al Qaeda ties. The chief Benghazi suspects include men who not only have been involved with al Qaeda for years but also have direct ties to al Qaeda’s founding leaders: Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri. According to U.S. officials familiar with the investigation, they include an Egyptian who was trained by al Qaeda in the late 1980s, served as a terrorist commander under Zawahiri in the 1990s, and was in direct contact with Zawahiri in the months leading up to the Benghazi attack. Another is a Libyan who served as one of Osama bin Laden’s bodyguards and is suspected of delivering materials taken from the Benghazi compound after the attack to al Qaeda’s senior leadership in Pakistan. Still another is a former Guantánamo detainee who worked for bin Laden as a driver during the 1990s, and whose alias was found on the laptop of one of the 9/11 conspirators. In addition, intelligence officials tell THE WEEKLY STANDARD that a trusted al Qaeda courier was involved in the attacks.

On October 7, the State Department designated Muhammad Jamal, an Egyptian who long served as Zawahiri’s subordinate, as an

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*Benghazi, September 11, 2012: the U.S. compound in flames*

Obama defender in the media, excoriated the administration for its failure to respond during the attacks and its failure to answer the many reasonable questions since then. The president and others, Matthews said, were “getting an instantaneous report of what’s going on there. What weren’t they looking at in terms of assets that could have been sent? Where was the U.S. cavalry, to use an American image? Where were the people that could have come or that tried to get there within however many hours it took to save the lives of the people still living? Where were they? And why couldn’t they do it? I’m going to ask that question until I get an answer.” He went on:

And the president and the national security adviser and everybody sitting in that Situation Room. We had lots of coverage of people when we killed bin Laden, we had a lot of coverage of that. There’s a lot of photographers around during that. How come this is shrouded in mystery? What I can’t understand is all these months later we’re still trying to figure out what

and the State Department quizzed administration spokesmen last week about the attacks and the subsequent investigations. CNN disclosed that a raid targeting one of the ringleaders of the Benghazi attacks had been called off. A few days earlier, Fox News aired an in-depth report on the jihadist background of some of the attackers. Big questions remain:

■ Where was the president that night?

■ Why didn’t we send reinforcements during the fighting?

■ What was the primary mission of the more than two dozen CIA-affiliated personnel in Benghazi?

■ Why haven’t we captured or killed any of the attackers?

■ And who were they?

The Obama administration isn’t doing much to answer any of these questions and in some cases is going to great lengths to avoid them. At a State Department briefing last week, Lucas Tomlinson, a producer for Fox News, asked spokeswoman Jen Psaki why two chief suspects in the Benghazi attacks,

al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist. Jamal had been imprisoned under Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak only to be released in the wake of the Egyptian revolution in 2011. The State Department recognized Jamal's relationship with Zawahiri and "AQ senior leadership," as well as two al Qaeda affiliates: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

State's designation also noted that Jamal's "confiscated computer contained letters to al Zawahiri in which Jamal asked for assistance and described [his network's] activities, including acquiring weapons, conducting terrorist training, and establishing terrorist groups in the Sinai."

But there was a curious omission from the State Department's designation: Benghazi. It has been widely reported—by the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and others—that some of Jamal's trainees took part in the attack. Indeed, two weeks after the State Department's announcement, the U.N.'s own terrorist designation of

Jamal included this line: "Reported to be involved in the attack on the United States Mission in Benghazi, Libya, on 11 Sep. 2012." Jamal is in custody in Egypt, where he is awaiting trial, according to the U.N.

Faraj al Chalabi, the Libyan who once served as Osama bin Laden's bodyguard, fled Libya for Pakistan shortly after the Benghazi attack. According to several sources, Chalabi is suspected of delivering sensitive materials from the compound in Benghazi to al Qaeda's senior leadership in Pakistan. He was detained and returned to Libya, where he was questioned and then inexplicably released.

Chalabi has a long rap sheet. Interpol issued an arrest warrant for him in March 1998. That same warrant targeted bin Laden as well—the very first one issued by Interpol for the late al Qaeda leader. Under Muammar Qaddafi, the Libyan government repeatedly accused Chalabi of being responsible for the murder of a German couple in 1994. "It is worth noting that

the elements that carried out that act and Osama bin Laden's arrangements are still wanted and that their organizational connection to the Al Qaeda organization has been confirmed," Qaddafi's regime claimed in a June 2004 U.N. filing.

There's more. U.S. intelligence officials believe that Sufian Ben Qumu, a Libyan ex-Guantánamo detainee, trained some of the jihadists who carried out the attacks in Benghazi. He, too, has longstanding connections with al Qaeda leadership.

Ben Qumu is one of the original "Arab Afghans" who traveled to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets in the 1980s. In the years that followed the end of the anti-Soviet jihad, Ben Qumu followed al Qaeda to the Sudan and then, in the mid-to-late 1990s, back to Afghanistan and Pakistan. He was eventually arrested in Pakistan after the 9/11 attacks and transferred to the American detention facility at Guantánamo Bay.

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Guantánamo (JTF-GTMO) threat assessment describes Ben Qumu as an “associate” of Osama bin Laden. JTF-GTMO found that Ben Qumu worked as a driver for a company owned by bin Laden in the Sudan, fought alongside al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and maintained ties to several other well-known al Qaeda leaders. Ben Qumu’s alias was found on the laptop of an al Qaeda operative responsible for overseeing the finances for the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The information on the laptop indicated that Ben Qumu was an al Qaeda “member receiving family support.”

Ben Qumu was transferred from Guantánamo to Libyan custody on September 28, 2007. He was released from prison in 2010 as part of a deal Qaddafi cut with militants. He then became the leader of Ansar al Sharia in Derna and trained some of the rebels who helped overthrow Qaddafi’s regime.

The authors of “Al Qaeda in Libya: a Profile,” a report published by the Library of Congress in conjunction with the Defense Department in August 2012—a month before the Benghazi attacks—identified Ben Qumu as the possible “new face of al Qaeda in Libya despite” his denial of an ongoing al Qaeda role. The report also noted that Ben Qumu and his Ansar al Sharia fighters are “believed to be close to the al Qaeda clandestine network” in Libya. According to the report’s authors, that same network is headed by al Qaeda operatives who report to al Qaeda’s senior leadership in Pakistan, including Ayman al Zawahiri.

Jamal, Chalabi, and Ben Qumu are well known in the counterterrorism world. They have been part of the al Qaeda network for decades. Yet in the context of Benghazi, the Obama administration seeks to define them as something other than al Qaeda operatives. Obama and the State Department (as in the exchange above) consistently refer to the Benghazi attackers as generic “extremists.”

Obama used that descriptor when discussing Benghazi during his speech at the National Defense University (NDU) in May. He referred to

“extremists” operating in Libya and Syria as “simply collections of local militias or extremists interested in seizing territory.” He did not identify them as a part of al Qaeda’s international network. “While we are vigilant for signs that these groups may pose a transnational threat,” Obama argued, “most are focused on operating in the countries and regions where they are based.”

Obama’s bottom line is that these “local” terrorists are not as worrisome as the al Qaeda that attacked us on September 11, 2001. They are, in the president’s view, a distinct, lower-level threat that can be managed.

Obama elaborated: “We’ll face more localized threats like what we saw in Benghazi, or the BP oil facility in Algeria, in which local operatives—perhaps in loose affiliation with regional networks—launch periodic attacks against Western diplomats, companies, and other soft targets, or resort to kidnapping and other criminal enterprises to fund their operations.”

The president’s description of the Benghazi attack network does not match the evidence collected by the U.S. intelligence community. Jamal, for instance, was hardly a “local” actor. The Egyptian operated training camps in the north Sinai and eastern Libya. He received support from al Qaeda’s affiliates in Yemen and North Africa and, according to the State Department, had “established links with terrorists in Europe.” All of this was in addition to his ongoing communications with Ayman al Zawahiri in South Asia. Chalabi traveled to Pakistan to share the documents he captured with al Qaeda senior leadership. And the presence of Egyptians, Libyans, and Tunisians, as well as possibly Algerians, Iraqis, and Yemenis among the attackers suggests Benghazi was far more than a “local” effort.

Still more al Qaeda ties have been unearthed during the investigation. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a longtime al Qaeda commander, reportedly received a call from members of Ansar al Sharia in Libya on the night of the attack. “*Mabruk, mabruk!*” (congratulations!),

one of the callers said to Belmokhtar, according to CNN.

Belmokhtar was first designated an al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist by the U.N. in 2003. He served as a top commander in Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a group that formally merged with al Qaeda’s parent organization in 2007. Belmokhtar was an AQIM commander on the night of September 11, 2012. Three months later he decided to establish his own fighting group outside AQIM’s chain-of-command. Belmokhtar’s spokesman confirmed at the time, however, that the group (the “Those Who Sign with Blood” brigade) was still loyal to al Qaeda’s senior leadership in Pakistan.

The following month, in January 2013, Belmokhtar’s group laid siege to the In Amenas natural gas facility in Algeria. “We in al Qaeda announce that we carried out the blessed commando operation,” Belmokhtar said in a video claiming responsibility. The Algerian government subsequently said that a group of Egyptians who took part in the attack in Benghazi were also involved in the siege of In Amenas, which left dozens of Westerners dead.

In his speech at NDU, the president claimed that “the core of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan is on the path to defeat. Their remaining operatives spend more time thinking about their own safety than plotting against us. They did not direct the attacks in Benghazi or Boston.”

How could Obama know that al Qaeda’s senior leaders did not order the attack in Benghazi? Behind closed doors, some U.S. intelligence officials found such certitude troubling. None of the chief suspects is in U.S. custody. Intelligence officials have had very limited access to the alleged attackers held abroad, and many have been released.

So what role did al Qaeda senior leadership play in the Benghazi attacks of September 11, 2012? It’s a question we can add to the many others that remain unanswered.

And those questions, more than anything, are why Benghazi is not going away. ♦

# No, You Can't Keep It

Nice plan you had there. Shame you had to lose it.

BY JOHN McCORMACK

For five years, Barack Obama repeatedly, emphatically, and unequivocally promised that under his health care scheme, “if you like your plan, you can keep your plan.” That promise has now been proven to be blatantly untrue. Multiple reports during the last 10 days of October made it clear that hundreds of thousands of Americans across the country were losing their health insurance plans because the plans didn’t comply with Obamacare.

During an October 30 speech in Boston, the president tried two tactics to spin his way out of the problem. First, he rewrote history. Obama revised his “if you like it, you can keep it” pledge to: “For the vast majority of people who have health insurance that works, you can keep it.” Second, he cast blame on others. He said the cancellations were the fault of “bad apple insurers” who had “decided to downgrade or cancel these substandard plans” and therefore forfeited the right to sell them under Obamacare’s regulations. In fact, the regulations were written so narrowly that even a minor change to a noncompliant plan required its cancellation. Now, Obama promised, “for the fewer than 5 percent of Americans who buy insurance on your own, you will be getting a better deal.”

Will the president’s pushback tamp down the anger among Americans losing their insurance plans? More likely, the uproar will grow louder over the coming year as more and more Americans realize they’ll actually be paying more money for worse plans.

CBS reported last week that two

million Americans have received cancellation letters so far. But many insurers haven’t publicly announced their cancellations, and by the end of 2014 the total number of cancellations is likely to hit 16 million, according to health policy analyst Bob Laszewski. That’s more than twice the number of Americans projected by the Congressional Budget Office to receive Obamacare subsidies in 2014.

Cancellation letters go out 30 to 60 days before a plan expires, and plans will continue to expire each month throughout the year. “A lot of companies are allowing these early renewal deals that let you keep your plan until December of 2014. So next December’s going to be a huge month,” Laszewski told *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*. One industry executive told him that by a ratio of 15 to 1, policyholders are opting to extend their coverage to December 2014. Laszewski pointed out that policyholders with plans expiring next December will receive their cancellation notices at a very inopportune time for Obamacare’s supporters. “What’s 30 to 60 days before December 1?” he asked. “The November election.”

During his speech in Boston, the president said that because the health-care.gov website isn’t working, “a lot of people haven’t had a chance to see just how good the prices for quality health insurance through these marketplaces really are.” But by keeping people in 36 states that are reliant on the website in the dark about how much plans will cost and what they will offer, the administration’s fumbles have delayed the rate shock that millions of Americans will experience.

You can’t browse prices or plans on the Obamacare website or by calling its

1-800 number. When I called the number on October 30, I was told it would take “four to six weeks” to process an application and determine eligibility. Until then, a call center worker told me, he couldn’t say how much plans would cost or what they had to offer. But you can browse plans on a private site called [eHealthInsurance.com](http://eHealthInsurance.com), and there you can see that many middle-class Americans will be worse off under Obamacare.

Take, for example, the case of a 31-year-old woman in Arlington, Virginia. Prior to Obamacare, she could purchase a plan from Blue Cross for \$96 a month with a \$2,500 deductible and a \$5,000 annual out-of-pocket maximum. The cheapest Obamacare “bronze” plan that same 31-year-old can buy in Virginia costs \$160 per month, with a \$6,000 deductible and a \$6,000 annual out-of-pocket maximum. That’s a 77 percent increase in the premium and a 140 percent increase in the deductible.

If she wanted to keep comparable coverage and purchase a “silver” plan with a \$2,500 deductible, her monthly premium would cost \$260 a month—nearly three times what she paid prior to Obamacare.

But what about Obamacare’s subsidies? Won’t they bring the cost down? According to Obama, there’s just “a fraction of Americans with higher incomes who will pay more on the front end for better insurance with better benefits.” But according to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 52 percent of Americans who now purchase insurance on the individual market won’t qualify for any subsidies at all.

Subsidies will certainly help people with low incomes, but they will be of little help for most of the middle class. If our hypothetical 31-year-old Virginian were working full-time at the minimum wage (that’s \$15,000 a year), she could purchase a silver plan for \$25 per month. But if she earned just \$21,000 a year, the cost would jump to \$96 per month—the exact same price at which she could buy a plan without subsidies before Obamacare. The subsidies continue to diminish and would phase out

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altogether for this 31-year-old if her salary were \$31,500—274 percent of the federal poverty level.

But won't the plans be better under Obamacare? Not really. The president frequently says that all plans sold on the Obamacare exchange will "cover" 10 "essential health" benefits. Some "preventive services," like contraception and mammograms, are covered at no cost to the policyholder. But many essential benefits, like hospitalizations and prescription drugs, aren't covered at all until one pays a deductible of thousands of dollars on many silver and bronze plans.

In response to the news that millions of Americans are being dropped from their current plans and forced to buy more expensive ones from a website that doesn't work, Senator Ron Johnson, a Republican from Wisconsin, has introduced the If You Like Your Health Plan, You Can Keep It Act. The bill would allow any plan sold in 2013 to be sold in 2014.

Johnson's measure is gaining traction among some Democrats. On October 29, Senator Mary Landrieu, a Democrat from Louisiana, told *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* that Democrats had only promised that Americans could keep "good insurance." But two days later, she announced she would introduce her own bill to let people keep their current plans.

Bob Laszewski points out that now, however, it would be difficult for insurers to get their old plans back online. "They've already sent out cancellation notices, changed their computer programs, and filed their new products and rates," he said.

"You can't sell an individual health insurance plan without it being filed and approved in a state," Laszewski told me. "That takes a year," he noted. "I can't imagine how technically and operationally they can straighten this out."

"Hypothetically, I think it's a brilliant idea," he said. "Operationally, holy s—!"

It's possible, though, that compared with implementing Obamacare, working to let people keep their plans might seem like a cakewalk. ♦

# When to Spy on Our Friends

## The NSA in Europe.

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

It is often remarked that espionage is the second-oldest profession. Written records from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Iran suggest that spying and civilization sprang up together. In antiquity, spies could be the hidden bureaucrats of tyranny or good governance (a ruler needed to know whether a satrap was cheating the crown and

and successful and wanton criminals.

America's digital and human snoops have operated under a long-accepted rule that all foreigners—excluding our Anglophone mates—were potentially acceptable targets. When I entered the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Operations in 1985, senior case officers prided themselves on the

organization's global reach and the expectation that junior officers, who do the lion's share of the clandestine service's agent recruiting, would proselytize like Mormons no matter where Langley sent them. We were not supposed to be morally squeamish about our "developmentals" so long as attempts to recruit them matched headquarters's requirements, which followed a wish-list of information areas from CIA analysts, the military, Foggy Bottom,

the White House, Congress, and many other government agencies.

And here's the Edward Snowden/National Security Agency rub: Because of advances in technology, and its greater discreetness, Fort Meade, home of the NSA, has probably replaced Langley as the primary clandestine collector of intelligence in Europe. CIA operations, if detected, might be truly annoying to Europeans, but such operations have been sufficiently small-scale, familiar, and usually unsuccessful that they could either be ignored or forgotten quickly (except by European counterespionage services). Because of its potential range and the inadequacy of European defense, the NSA has become scarier and more infuriating even though it is vastly more



*Russian spies captured by Romanians, 1877*

its subjects) or, less often, camouflaged itinerants writing home about the machinations of rival city-states, empires, or barbarian tribes. In modern times, espionage went Orwellian, becoming primarily a tool to buttress police states. In the heartland of the West—Mother England and all her Lockean children—spying mostly has been aimed overseas and seldom has been lethal except to recruited agents in blown operations. Among the common-law-loving English-speaking nations, domestic spying has overwhelmingly targeted only nefarious foreigners, their local recruits,

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polite—with the NSA no one gets suborned—than CIA-run agent affairs.

The United States has a decent record over the years of spying the infidelities, peccadilloes, and odd passions of European officials and guarding them most faithfully. It wouldn't be surprising to discover that the agency has never once run a recruitment operation against a European official utilizing even the mildest form of blackmail. Calmer heads among Europe's intelligence professionals, and certainly among the folks at GCHQ, the United Kingdom's NSA, which has an extraordinarily close relationship with Fort Meade, know how well-behaved the Americans have been. The Americans and the British had the legal authority in West Germany to surveil basically whomever they wished; they used that authority with the greatest discretion. Today, Frenchmen and Italians, for example, are far better off having the NSA intercept their telephone or Internet conversations than having their own internal-security services nab them, which those services can do with considerable exuberance and secrecy. Americans are far nicer and less likely to abuse such information than are European internal-security services and political elites. French president François Mitterrand was notorious for unlawfully bugging hundreds, if not thousands, of his citizens. Unlike the NSA with its data-collection projects, Mitterrand's men kept detailed files. The Parisian elite's reaction to this scandal was a case study in national character. When a book, *Les Oreilles du Président* (*The President's Ears*), revealed who of the country's VIPs had been monitored, there was bugging-envy among those not illegally tapped.

But national pride has always been alive and well in the European Union, especially when Americans are involved. European leaders can, of course, use nearly-impossible-to-break encrypted cell phones, as American officials do, to carry on official business. If the Americans are nabbing European state secrets through the NSA, then the real story is European leaders' and their security services' profound sloppiness—

not untoward American behavior.

But the Snowden-produced brouhaha appears to be much less about Washington's ability to snatch official secrets than its capacity to monitor the personal conversations of Europeans, especially Europe's leaders. Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy's mercurial temperament and eventful private life, and Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's reckless hunger for young women, probably were tempting targets for NSA technicians and senior American officials. The former's boldness dragged Barack Obama into the Libyan war; the latter's lust may have played out in the company of Russia's Vladimir Putin, who is capable of blackmailing and even assassinating his enemies at home and abroad.

Former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder certainly wouldn't have wanted American officials to listen to his private conversations (by 1997, he was on his fourth wife); nor would he have wanted Washington to hear his strenuous efforts to back-stab the Americans in the run-up to the Iraq war or his close association with Putin and Russian business interests. The same might be said for former French president Jacques Chirac, who reportedly had many affairs and arduously worked to save Saddam Hussein from the Anglo-American invasion in 2003. A British or Canadian prime minister might engage in scandalous behavior that could have severe national-security repercussions for the United States. But with the British and the Canadians, Americans enjoy vastly greater openness, from top to bottom of their political systems and their diplomatic, intelligence, and security establishments (American, Canadian, and British diplomats sometimes sit down at the same desk and write each other's classified cables). And aggressive media are there to check the refractory behavior of wayward leaders. More or less, the United States can trust the national reflexes of its closest allies. That is just not true of France and Germany.

Some European states now and then have run operations against American citizens, especially American businessmen. The French, owing to their

commercial *étatisme*, were once particularly naughty in this regard. (Note to the Europeans: The CIA and the NSA do not do industrial espionage. Most big European businesses have lots of American employees and stockholders. American government lawyers would go on the warpath against any intelligence operative dumb enough to suggest that an Airbus "secret" be given to Boeing.)

But European means, if not European will, are wanting beyond traditional espionage. It costs a lot of money to run the NSA. Dollar for dollar, it's been a much better investment for America's national security than spending money on the CIA's clandestine service. The Europeans traded away their intercept capacity long ago, during the Cold War, when they downsized their militaries in favor of welfare states and allowed the United States to carry the primary defense burden for the West. In part, what we are witnessing in this current uproar is another attempt by weak Europeans to gain leverage over

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stronger Americans by expressing their moral displeasure. Americans, who love company, are always subject to moral suasion from our friends. Understandably, Europeans don't like being dependent upon the United States even though they have freely chosen to be so. Understandably, they want to have a veto over American actions, which always have repercussions far beyond the United States. Americans, especially Washington's foreign-policy establishment, rightly care a lot about transatlantic harmony—a point not lost on Europeans. The French and the Germans, who are undoubtedly America's friends on most issues, want to have the same status in our eyes as our Anglophone cousins. Their expression of shock at the NSA's capabilities is a sincere compliment: They would expect the Russians to bug them up the wazoo if Moscow had the means to do so.

Giving the French and the Germans equal standing with the British isn't, in theory, a bad idea. The ultimate objective of American foreign policy, even under Barack Obama, our first post-Western president (to borrow from the *New York Times's* Roger Cohen), always ought to be to strengthen the West. Europe is family and an indispensable line of defense. Yet neither the president nor Congress can possibly promise Paris and Berlin that Washington will permanently turn off the NSA's ears. Another Gerhard Schröder could rise to power in Berlin; another Middle Eastern war could divide alliances and nations. And as long as Islamic holy warriors or sanctions-busting Iranian operatives or Putin-backed Russian thugs and criminals are operating in Europe, the NSA is going to be monitoring lots of communications, with or without the permission of the locals.

That said, the direction ought to be towards making the American-British relationship the model for all other Europeans, provided the Europeans really want what that implies. Even before the Iron Curtain fell, the CIA was losing steam in operations aimed at Europeans. Shared democratic culture matters a lot, even with CIA spooks who are paid to recruit foreigners.

When I was in the service, most young case officers really couldn't get that excited about running recruitment operations against European targets who openly provided, either through the local press or through contacts with American diplomats, essentially the same information that could be had clandestinely. Senior case officers at Langley knew, even if they didn't put it into tasking cables, that serious European operations usually weren't worth the risk of compromising far more important diplomatic ties among allies. This disposition has probably intensified. September 11 has brought American and European intelligence and security services much closer together. We should always recall that even when Chirac and his zealously anti-American, Napoleon-loving foreign minister Dominique de Villepin took the pulpit against the United States, the relationship between the Americans and the French foreign intelligence and internal-security services blossomed.

A good rule for Langley's human-intelligence-collection operations is that if CIA human-intelligence reports basically mirror State Department telegrams, then the CIA station in that country should probably be shut down or minimized into a liaison office if such contact with the local intelligence or security service is valuable. With more flexibility, the same rule should be applied to NSA collection operations against individual European targets. Using that criterion, targeting German chancellor Angela Merkel would most probably end. (President Obama, if he's not done it already, should review her file.)

NSA metadata-collection efforts in Europe are a different issue. Washington must demonstrate convincingly, at least to our elected representatives, that these programs, which probably touch Americans at least as much as Europeans, work. The NSA has not yet publicly presented a compelling case that sucking up data on billions of telephone calls makes American counterterrorism appreciably more effective. If one examined individual counterterrorist cases closely, it wouldn't be surprising to discover

that the counterterrorism algorithms beloved by the NSA were less decisive in thwarting holy warriors than the director of national intelligence and the head of the NSA have claimed. Americans love their technology for cause: Using gadgets, whether it be drones or eavesdropping dishes on the roofs of American embassies and consulates, is much less disruptive and vulnerable than their human alternatives.

If metadata collection is a valuable counterterrorist tool, then it ought to be fairly straightforward to demonstrate its efficacy to French and German intelligence and security services, and through them to French and German elected officials. Serious European politicians think a lot about Islamic radicalism (the French internal-security service, the DST, has been unrivaled in thwarting potentially lethal plots). French public opinion is certainly winnable on this issue if the French elite is won. The Germans—who are more goosey because of their history, and in whom anti-Americanism runs deeper than among the French—will be tougher to assuage. But the Snowden-produced public-relations disaster of metadata collection may be far easier to solve than it presently appears—provided the NSA is more forthcoming about its methods.

Washington should resist much of the European and American criticism of the NSA, which is an updated version of Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson's criticism of America's first attempt at communications intelligence (the U.S. Army's "Black Chamber" outfit after World War I): "Gentlemen do not read each other's mail." Democratic elections in Europe don't necessarily place in office gentlemen or gentlewomen who agree with America on really big issues. Gentlemen can also be surrounded by rogues. Gentlemen can also be stupid. Despite its possible excesses, which should be rigorously checked by our elected representatives, the NSA is a national treasure built at great expense. We should not allow envy, fraternity, or paranoia to turn off its ears. Our enemies are out there. Some of them intend us great harm. ♦

# How Many Chinas Are There?

A question that continues to roil Taiwan.

BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

**W**hen is an international flight not just an international flight? That's what the Taiwanese are wondering, as President Ma Ying-jeou finds himself in hot water for characterizing flights between Taiwan (officially, the Republic of China, or ROC) and mainland China as domestic routes. It appears to have been an offhand remark; at a meeting of the Central Standing Committee of his Chinese Nationalist party (better known as the Kuomintang, or KMT) last month, President Ma, while discussing the aviation industry, tossed off a line likening cross-strait flights to domestic flights in the United States. But it fits a long-established pattern. Indeed, his comments came on the heels of a speech Ma gave a few days earlier in which he said that relations between China and Taiwan are "not international relations."

The opposition Democratic Progressive party (DPP), Taiwan's center-left party, has reacted with opprobrium. A prominent DPP legislator said Ma's remarks show that he is "no longer qualified as a decision-maker on cross-strait relations." More generally, the DPP criticizes what it takes to be Ma's disconcertingly pro-mainland attitude and policies. "Ma takes orders from China," a former DPP legislator charged in the *Taipei Times* last week. That wasn't meant as a compliment.

The DPP may be on to something. Since being elected president in a landslide in 2008 (he was reelected in 2012 in a much closer contest), Ma

has undeniably taken a conciliatory approach towards Taiwan's erstwhile enemies in Beijing. The contrast is especially sharp with his immediate



*Unify with China? Hear my three 'No's!*

predecessor, the DPP's Chen Shui-bian, who flirted with declaring independence from the mainland. (To this day, under its constitution, the ROC government in Taipei officially remains the government in exile of the whole of China.)

Under Ma's leadership, Taiwan opened itself to tourists from the mainland in 2008, and, even more significantly, it inked the Economic Cooperation Framework in 2010, which opened up some 200 sectors of the Taiwanese economy to Chinese investment. Ma also oversaw the advent of those aforementioned cross-strait flights, which have done much to boost Taiwan-mainland ties. (Previously, those wishing to travel between Taiwan and the mainland had to go through a "neutral" territory, typically Hong Kong, adding hours to what should be a short flight.) And he's not finished. Ma is currently pursuing

a free trade pact with Beijing that, polling shows, is opposed by some 70 percent of the Taiwanese public. The DPP—and a large percentage of the Taiwanese public as a whole—opposes the level of economic integration with China that Ma has pursued. The theory is that Ma has so closely aligned Taiwan's economy with the mainland's that should China sneeze, Taiwan would end up in intensive care.

All this may seem mystifying. After all, President Ma is the standard-bearer of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang, the sworn enemy of the Chinese Communist party. And now he's seemingly turned the KMT into the more "pro-China" of Taiwan's two main political parties. Indeed, when Ma was reelected last year, Beijing made no secret that it was pleased. Taiwan's center-left party, meanwhile, is apparently more hostile to Beijing's Communist government than the KMT, another puzzlement.

What's going on here? This isn't, as some might guess, a simple case of the old "Nixon (or, er, Ma) goes to China" narrative. Rather, to untangle these questions, one needs to take into account Taiwan's unique status as a kind-of/sort-of nation-state.

Simply put, the KMT, and President Ma in particular, remains loyal to the "one China" philosophy—that someday Taiwan and the mainland should be reunited. According to Sean King, a senior vice president at the consulting firm Park Strategies and a widely quoted expert on Asian politics, "That doesn't mean KMT leaders approve of Beijing's undemocratic ways, but I do believe many of them, including Ma, see Taiwan as part of a larger Chinese story." Hence, Ma's contention that he did not have international relations with that country, China.

The sense of a shared national identity may be even more visceral for Ma, who was born in Hong Kong, not Taiwan. King also points out that Ma's father was a member of the Chinese Nationalist Army fighting Japan, a cause dear to the hearts of Chinese nationalists. Moreover, on his deathbed, Ma's father supposedly urged unification. Today,

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some of Ma's opponents accuse of him being on a mission to fulfill his dying father's wishes. Ma, however, says his guiding policy towards China is the "three 'No's": no independence from China, no immediate unification with China, and no war with China. Elsewhere, he's said that he supports unification "eventually."

The point, though, which many willfully obscure, is that being pro-unification does not mean being pro-unification on Beijing's terms. And so the paradox is that while Ma, at a superficial level, looks like he's cozying up to the Communists in Beijing, his actions may represent just the opposite: His policies imply that the government in Taipei still considers all of China its territory. Cooperation with the mainland, in this case, represents expansive—and tacitly aggressive—territorial claims.

The DPP, meanwhile, which was founded in 1986 as Taiwan began its transition to democracy, has embraced the idea that the island should be independent. Indeed, as Alan Romberg, a distinguished fellow at the Stimson Center, explains, when the opposition was legalized, "an important part of its reason for being was to oppose the mainlander KMT and the notion that Taiwan had anything to do with the [mainland], historically or otherwise." Consequently, some in the DPP have frequently suggested amending the ROC constitution.

Remarkably, given that fundamental questions over its status as a nation remain unresolved, the rest of Taiwanese politics looks a lot like that of Western Europe or the United States. There's plenty of fighting over environmental issues, sluggish economic growth, and income inequality. That's an achievement in itself, given the 1,600 mainland missiles pointed directly across the strait at this small island of 23 million. It also stands as a rejoinder to those who say that the Chinese aren't "suited" to democracy. In many important ways, Taiwan is just another normal prosperous, democratic country—even if it's still not sure that in the long run it wants to be an independent country at all. ♦

# Presidential Fantasies

Bring the 'clerkship' back to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. BY JAY COST

At the start of last month's government shutdown, a mostly overlooked message emanated from the Twitter account of Michelle Obama, informing her followers: "Due to Congress's failure to pass legislation to fund the government, updates to this account will be limited." The conventions of American governance typically exclude the first lady from the rough-and-tumble of politics, yet it does raise an important question: Why is America paying a staffer good money to publish Tweets under Michelle Obama's name?

Today, the White House employs over 400 people with a payroll of nearly \$40 million. Compare that to the 45 employees under Franklin Roosevelt and one can appreciate just how enormous the operation is today at the White House—large enough to pay somebody to tweet for the first lady.

The enormous expenditure on the White House staff reflects the growth of the modern presidency, which has been remarkably transformed from the original vision proffered by the Founders. Presidential adviser Richard Neustadt famously called the old presidency a "clerkship"; the tasks were to wield the veto pen, prepare a State of the Union address (usually delivered in writing), manage foreign affairs and war-making, issue pardons, and, of course, "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." This limited vision held the country in good stead for over a century, and its responsibilities and powers were flexible enough that excellent men like George Washington and

Abraham Lincoln could still make of it what their extraordinary capacities enabled them to.

But it was not enough for the Progressives. Woodrow Wilson in particular sought a revision of the presidential office. He thought the Framers had made a grave mistake in dispersing power as they did. Their outdated views of the danger of concentrated power kept the government from acting with responsibility and energy. Early in his academic career, Wilson praised the British parliamentary model, in which the executive and legislative functions were combined in the House of Commons. But after he witnessed the vigor of Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt, he changed his mind on how the government should be "fixed." He thought an active and vigorous president could inspire and mobilize the public behind his program, and thus unify what the Framers had separated.

Most presidents ever since have seen their role in a similar light. Ditto the people at large. According to Cato Institute scholar Gene Healy, just about everybody sees the president simultaneously as "world leader," "protector of the peace," "chief legislator," "manager of prosperity," and "voice of the people." This is why nobody much complains that Mrs. Obama is paying somebody good money to tweet on her behalf.

Yet in pursuing this "modern president," the people have in fact been chasing a fiction. The president simply lacks the capacities that Wilson envisioned. The vision of the modern president was never amended into the Constitution, meaning that the formal powers of the office are the same

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as they ever were. The power of the modern president is informal, mostly wrapped up in his power of persuasion. But as political scientist George C. Edwards III demonstrates in *The Strategic President*, there really is no evidence that the president persuades in the way that Wilson thought he could. He cannot move public opinion by fiat; at best, he can mobilize existing opinions into a coalition for action. But even those efforts are inevitably constrained by a host of factors, like the partisan makeup of the legislature. Wilson learned this lesson the hard way as his efforts to pressure the Senate to ratify membership in the League of Nations failed.

Yet the public still looks for a man who can be the voice of the people, and this fruitless quest has created a great deal of harm along the way. Every president feels compelled to “spin” the news in as favorable a light as possible to create the (often false) impression that he is the master of events. Always and everywhere, the modern president must give the impression that he has everything under control, and is sure to iron out whatever problems he may encounter. Yet quite often the president is a victim of circumstance or his own ineptitude, and has no power to do anything about it. As a result, the president comes, sooner or later, to be perceived as a liar by all but his most diehard supporters.

Furthermore, the modern presidency can be a deeply alienating institution. The Framers understood that ours is a diverse country. In *Federalist* 10, James Madison argued that this diversity would be its saving grace, as no faction or interest could hope to dominate all the others. Keen students of history, the drafters of the Constitution were well aware of the concept of strong executive authority, of kings in particular. They consciously excluded such an instrument from the Constitution, via the Congress and the federal structure. It was Wilson and the Progressives who rejected this ideal, arguing that the country was becoming unified, and would continue to do so with strong national leadership.

While there is certainly much truth

to the idea that the United States has become a more unified nation since the Founding—when it was easier to travel from Boston to London than from Boston to Charleston—ours remains a strikingly diverse nation. No president can hope to unify our many factions, which means that a large segment of the public will invariably find the chief executive extolling values antithetical to their own. Is it any wonder that liberals chafed under the George W. Bush presidency as conservatives have under Obama’s?

Worse still, the modern presidency distracts the citizenry from its paramount civic duty of monitoring Congress. Despite the pretensions of the White House to omnipotence, the fact remains that Congress is—as Morris Fiorina once put it—the “keystone of the Washington establishment.” Domestic power flows from Congress, not the White House, and yet Americans pay little attention to the doings of the legislature. Instead, for generations, the best proxy for predicting congressional elections has been the standing of the president. If Congress today comes across like a spoiled, undisciplined child, maybe it is because the people have been distracted by the bells and whistles of the modern presidency.

Finally, Americans spend too much time looking for a superman to sit in the Oval Office, rather than a decent administrator who can actually do the jobs assigned him by the Constitution. It is here that we can see Barack Obama as the apotheosis of the Wilsonian ideal. He campaigned self-consciously as a national shaman, whose mere presence could make the government function “properly.” Meanwhile, he never exhibited the slightest aptitude for or interest in the humdrum skill-set that the Framers envisioned the chief executive should possess. Taking care that the laws be faithfully executed, negotiating treaties with foreign powers, using the veto as a check on legislative overreach—all of this is insufferable tedium for a personage as special as Barack Obama thinks he is. As Valerie Jarrett told Obama biographer David Remnick: “He’s been bored to death

his whole life. He’s just too talented to do what ordinary people do.”

And so in Obama we can see that the Wilsonian model has the tendency to produce the worst of both worlds. Here is a man who cannot realize the ideal of the modern presidency, because it is simply unrealizable. But he lacks the facility to attend to the basic tasks of the chief executive. He spends his days planning “inspiring” speeches that predictably fail to move public opinion, and is AWOL on the uninspiring tasks set forth for him in the Constitution. For instance, when it came to figuring out what the United States should do in Syria—according to the *New York Times*—he “often appeared impatient or disengaged while listening to the debate, sometimes scrolling through messages on his BlackBerry or slouching and chewing gum.”

It is fair to suppose that such executive torpor has contributed to the various fiascos of this administration—from policy drift in Syria to the murders in Benghazi to the disastrous implementation of Obamacare to the 2011 budget crisis. In all of them, it is a reasonable bet that things turned out as poorly as they did because the country has a chief executive who sees himself more as a soothsayer than an executive.

“Democracy,” H. L. Mencken once quipped, “is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.” For over a century, the United States has been deluded by an erroneous and costly understanding of the presidency. In searching for a superhuman leader who does not actually exist, the nation has repeatedly selected leaders who are not up to the decidedly human tasks the Constitution requires. And this misguided pursuit facilitates executive mendacity, division, and misbehavior in Congress. Unless we correct our faulty notions about the potential power of the president, we are bound to be saddled time and again with incompetent administrators like Barack Obama, who, in his efforts to “save” the country, will leave it worse off than when he found it. ♦

# The Media Kowtow

*Why is the coverage of China's government so obsequious?*

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

For about a decade now, Jeff Bezos has been swallowing an ever larger percentage of my household's income. In addition to our buying everything from dish soap to movies online, the billionaire founder of Amazon.com will no doubt be pleased to learn that my wife and I recently started receiving the *Washington Post*—the first newspaper subscription we've ordered in six years. When Bezos bought the *Post* this past summer, there was the usual handwringing over whether he harbored some surreptitious agenda, but I was optimistic. The flailing newspaper industry presents unique challenges, and if there's one thing Bezos knows how to do, it's deliver a good product at the right price.

Besides, the *Washington Post* desperately needs to make some changes. On the morning of September 25, en route to dropping my kids off at school, I grabbed the *Post* off the front steps. I pulled it out of the bag only to find it wrapped in the latest edition of *China Watch*. Apparently the *Post* has been carrying *China Watch* as a special advertising section for some time now. Underneath the masthead, in barely legible letters, it reads: "This supplement, prepared by *China Daily*, People's Republic of China, did not involve the news or editorial departments of the *Washington Post*." If you are blessedly unfamiliar with *China Daily*, it disseminates the news that the Communist government of China thinks is vital for Thought Leaders Inside the Beltway. The editors of this publication believe that life in contemporary China is full of sunshine and, better yet, business opportunities. This is far from an accurate portrayal, but if running headlines such as "From China with Love" is wrong, *China Daily* doesn't want to be right.

For the last several years, a hugely influential portion of the American media has vacillated between openly

admiring the Chinese government and providing a forum for its apologists. The *Washington Post* isn't the worst offender, but they deserve at least a dishonorable mention for cutting out the middleman and delivering Communist Chinese propaganda straight to one's doorstep.

As a measure of how bad the kowtowing has gotten, recall that in March 2011, the *New York Times* reported that President Obama had been telling those around him that "it would be so much easier to be the president of China. As one

official put it, 'No one is scrutinizing Hu Jintao's words in Tahrir Square.'"

In the bowels of China's propaganda-industrial complex, the apparatchiks must have read this and smiled: Not only did America's decadent leader fail to speak critically of the Chinese government, he was openly envious of it. It seems not to have occurred to Obama that no one scrutinizes the president of China because he's the leader of a Communist party that rules over a country of 1.3 billion people. In China, the government scrutinizes its critics, sometimes brutally, not the other way round.

So how could we arrive at a point where Chinese propaganda is so pervasive that even the president of the United States gets taken in? Well, maybe he reads the *New York Times*. Thomas Friedman, the *Times*'s noted purveyor of mixed metaphors and Third World taxi-driver anecdotes, is generally acknowledged as the head cheerleader for the People's Republic in the Western media. Friedman had previously expressed a fantasy similar to Obama's: for the United States "to be China for a day," so that American leaders could "authorize the right solutions." He's gone so far as to argue that China is "led by a reasonably enlightened group of people" (even though the ruling party slaughtered as many as 50 million people in living memory and atrocities continue to this day). While praising Chinese autocracy, Friedman bemoans the supposed inability of U.S. democracy to do anything "serious to fix its structural problems: a ballooning deficit, declining educational performance, crumbling infrastructure and diminished immigration of



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new talent.” In a column suggesting that the Chinese government views the American people as gullible and stupid, Friedman mocked U.S. citizens for complaining about the invasive fondling of the Transportation Security Administration. Never mind that China dragoons people into labor camps for making sarcastic jokes about the government on the Chinese version of Twitter. Friedman has claimed that China has better phone service than the United States (vast expanses of the country don’t have electricity or running water). And as sure as the sun rises through the smog in the Far East, Friedman has praised China’s clean energy efforts time and again. Meanwhile, only about 1 percent of China’s 560 million city dwellers breathe air that would be deemed safe according to EU pollution standards.

Of course, there’s a cottage industry of commentators dedicated to complaining about Friedman. And it’s tempting to dismiss him as a lone bloviator, but he’s not exactly a voice in the wilderness. Last year the *Times* published a baffling op-ed from a self-described “overeducated” Ivy Leaguer who left a dead-end job to move to Beijing and teach English and, bizarrely, used the experience to appeal to the supporters of the then-popular Occupy Wall Street movement:

To the Occupiers and their sympathizers, I say vote—not with the ballot, but with your feet. Now that your encampment has disbanded, don’t just leave Zuccotti Park: leave America. For China. . . . China wants you. Job prospects [for English speakers] are abundant. The effects of the Great Recession of 2008 may be felt in the United States for years, but they barely scratched China.

Maybe this was a humor column. It’s certainly grimly amusing to picture Occupy Wall Street sympathizers packing up en masse and heading to China. There they could express disgust with income inequality in America by watching Chinese peasants do things such as collect and save their own excrement to use as fertilizer in their gardens, lest they go hungry.

Of course, one of the reasons for the kid-gloves treatment of China by the American punditry is that Western visitors are largely confined to the modern cities, and never see how the vast majority of the Chinese population scrapes by. That’s not really a worry, though, because if you want to know how the other 99 percent live—or at least the 95 percent or so that do not belong to the Communist party—the Chinese government is eager to tell our *Times*-approved tour guide from Beijing what to think:

There are problems here, of course. China is a nation that unapologetically rejects Western democracy—and yet I am surprised to find that Chinese citizens and the news media have as much freedom as they do. For my money, CCTV News English, a channel offered by China’s major state television broadcaster, is more fair and balanced than Fox News.

Saying “There are problems here, of course” in describing a country that has a brisk market in organs harvested from executed political prisoners might be understating things a bit.

Perhaps the overeducated columnist was unaware that, outside of whatever’s being pumped into televisions in Beijing’s English classrooms, the Chinese journalistic establishment has a unique feature known as “internal reference publications.” In China, the state media pump out so much propaganda that the country’s rulers found it impossible to govern effectively without accurate information. So the party set up its own shadow news media that are held to much more rigorous standards, and the reports they produce are not available to the general public. Perhaps a similar arrangement would benefit the readers of the *New York Times* opinion pages.

Credit where credit is due: *Times* readers do have an internal reference publication—it’s called the news section. On Christmas Day 2011, a few weeks before the *Times* op-ed columnist suggested that economically frustrated Americans should regard China as a giant temp agency with exotic food, the following story appeared in the news pages:

China’s state-run media have had a field day this autumn with Occupy Wall Street, spinning an almost daily morality play about capitalism gone amok and an American government unable or unwilling to aid the victims of a rapacious elite. Occupy Wukan is another matter entirely. The state press has been all but mute on why 13,000 Chinese citizens, furious over repeated rip-offs by their village elite, sent their leaders fleeing to safety and repulsed efforts by the police to retake Wukan. But the village takeover can be ignored only at Beijing’s peril: There are at least 625,000 potential Wukans across China, all small, locally run villages that frequently suffer the sorts of injustices that prompted the outburst this month in Wukan.

Indeed, once you venture away from the opinion pages, the *Times*’s reporting on China is pretty good. This is not just the situation at the *Times*, either. It’s generally true that while oppression and human rights abuses remain undercovered by pundits and talking heads, the correspondents concerned with who, what, where, and when are giving a far more reliable and accurate assessment of China.

This disconnect reflects the fact that the pundits at the top of the media food chain regurgitate a consensus among political elites who are either in denial or actively covering up the human rights horrors of modern-day China.

**T**he problem of China and Western intellectuals is hardly new. “Four hundred years ago, when Italian and French Jesuits went to China, they saw all that was trivial and missed all that was essential,” writes French author Guy Sorman in *Empire of Lies: The Truth About China*

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in the *Twenty-First Century*. “In *Les Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, a 1702 bestseller written by French Jesuits, the Chinese people were portrayed as an amorphous superstitious mass, whereas the Confucian mandarins were deemed by our great travelers to be delightful men of letters. So deep was the imprint they left on the Enlightenment philosophers, Leibniz and Voltaire in particular, that Voltaire lived in the hope of Europe being ruled by an enlightened despot and enjoying a godless morality.”

If the mystique that China is culturally ill-suited for democracy can rook the guy who helped invent differential calculus, Tom Friedman has to be a comparatively easy mark. But unlike today’s amateur Sinologists, Leibniz and Voltaire weren’t around to watch a group of supposedly enlightened mandarins turn their country into a giant graveyard, as Mao and his acolytes did.

For much of that time, the Cold War provided at least a fig leaf of justification for ignoring horrific events such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Engagement with China by the West was seen almost exclusively through the lens of containing the Soviets. The human costs of looking the other way regarding China’s misdeeds could be balanced against the potential costs of failing to counterbalance the Soviets in Asia.

But 40 years later in a different geopolitical context, the image of Nixon and Kissinger going to China and winning over the inscrutable Maoists has been fetishized as the platonic ideal of foreign policy genius. Thus the odd legacy of undue reverence surrounding U.S.-China relations. One telling example of this is that the China specialists in our foreign policy-industrial complex are known as “China hands.” If you opened a newspaper and read of official concern that “Norwegian hands will be displeased with the Export-Import Bank’s decision,” you’d laugh yourself silly at the notion of a body of experts on Norway whose opinion must be heeded. But with the China hands, we’re expected to acknowledge that the country’s complexities are beyond the understanding of all but a select few and to follow their lead in obfuscating the Chinese government’s oppression and cruelty.

James Mann, the *Los Angeles Times*’s former Beijing bureau chief, was so bothered by this state of affairs that a few years ago he wrote *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression*. The book is a taxonomy of all the transparently misleading buzz words, tropes, and justifications that brought us to the point where we “assume repression as a baseline,” says Mann. The argument is skillfully presented and damning, which perhaps explains its lack of impact. The book has, however, made navigating the sidewalks of Washington, D.C., a little easier for Mann. “There are now people that cross the street when they see me,” he says.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about the pervasively optimistic view of modern-day China is that most of us can remember the brief-but-revelatory moment when there was widespread clarity about the essential nature of the regime. Tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. The world watched as the People’s Liberation Army fired indiscriminately into a crowd of unarmed protesters. Rickshaws carried away body after body, but still thousands refused to leave. The government eventually succeeded in clearing and blockading the square, in part by entering the crowd with tanks and crushing people under the treads. When protesters tried to reenter the area on June 5, many were shot in the back as they were driven away. Later that same day, one brave man stood alone in the middle of Beijing’s Chang’an Boulevard, bringing a line of tanks to a complete stop, and the image almost instantly became part of the iconography of freedom.

Throughout most of the 1980s, economic liberalization in China had been encouraged. But with Tiananmen Square, the fiction that China was on its way to transforming into something other than a party-run state evaporated. Network news devoted 25 percent of its airtime for 20 days to the situation in China. American political leaders were unanimous in their disapproval, filling the Congressional Record with 3,000 pages of condemnation.

Then in a rather tragic bit of irony, the protesters in Tiananmen Square found interest in their cause overtaken by the failure of communism elsewhere. In August, Poland acquired the first noncommunist government in the East Bloc. In September, massive protests broke out in East Germany, the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union and its empire. The courageous Chinese democracy activists probably even played a role in bringing down the Iron Curtain, though they rarely get credit for it. When the kommissars in East Germany began debating whether to violently put down the gathering crowds at the Berlin Wall, no doubt the swift and universal condemnation of the Tiananmen Square crackdown a few months earlier weighed on their minds. The Berlin Wall came down on November 9.

The Bush administration was soon preoccupied with the unwinding of the Soviet empire, and China took a backseat. In his book *Ideal Illusions: How the U.S. Government Co-Opted Human Rights*, James Peck lays out a disturbing narrative showing how quickly concerns about China dissipated following Tiananmen Square. He quotes Douglas Paal, a China specialist on the Bush administration’s National Security Council staff: “We were not interested in adding China to the list of basket cases. We had no interest in pushing them over the edge.” Still, Tiananmen Square was not completely forgotten by Congress. The Bush administration had extended Most Favored Nation status to China, and Democrats twice proposed legislation

that would tie China's trade benefits to improvements in human rights. Both bills attracted significant support from Republicans, and both were vetoed by Bush.

But to the extent there was bipartisan agreement about China's human rights abuses, that comity was definitively wrecked by Bill Clinton. As a candidate, Clinton had attacked Bush for not supporting the human rights legislation and decried the "bloody butchers of Beijing." In his 1992 acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, Clinton promised "an America that will not coddle tyrants, from Baghdad to Beijing."

Once president, though, he found that China's cheap labor force and huge consumer market were of increasing importance to American business. Clinton initially convinced Democratic leaders to shelve their China legislation by promising an executive order to link trade and human rights. The order was revoked within a year as business interests grew skittish over the looming deadline. In the early 1990s, the U.S. government had regularly issued statements in defense of Chinese dissidents. By the end of Clinton's presidency, the practice had been curbed substantially.

U.S. rhetoric turned positively triumphal, as if Communist China would be swept away any day now. The Congressional Record was no longer full of denunciations of Chinese human rights abuses, but assurances that continued economic engagement would usher in a free China. Naturally, Clinton was a major proponent of this argument. In 1997, he told Jiang Zemin, "You're on the wrong side of history," confident that economic engagement would "increase the spirit of liberty over time . . . just as inevitably as the Berlin Wall fell."

By 1999, there was already almost no daylight on China between Clinton and soon-to-be President George W. Bush. "The case for trade is not just monetary, but moral," Bush said in one of his first foreign policy speeches. "Economic freedom creates habits of liberty. And habits of liberty create expectations of democracy." He added, "Trade freely with China, and time is on our side."

But 24 years after Tiananmen Square and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Communist party in China is still thriving. It looks increasingly like China isn't necessarily on the wrong side of history, so much as critics of China are on the wrong side of the American business and foreign policy establishment.

**T**here's a strong case to be made in favor of economic engagement with China. To the extent that China has awkwardly embraced capitalism in the last 30 years or so, economic conditions have undeniably improved

as a result. In a country with a billion people whose living standards are deplorable, that's not something to dismiss lightly. But at the very least this progress must be weighed against the high cost of American business interests going out of their way to silence criticism of China's human rights record in order to curry favor with the Chinese government.

When America's post-Tiananmen China policy was being hashed out, the rapid emergence of the Internet was frequently cited as a reason for optimism about China. Not only would the Chinese government no longer be able to control the free flow of information within their borders—American technology companies would get rich selling them technology that would ultimately be the Communists' undoing. In 2000, Senator Kent Conrad argued for "increas[ing] the presence of American and other Western firms in China. It will open China to the Internet and other advanced telecommunications technologies that, over time, will expose average Chinese to our thoughts, values, and ideals on human rights, workers' rights, and democracy."

This Internet-fueled optimism about China still runs rampant. But so far there's little reason to think the Internet will be the country's salvation. The government claims it employs some two million people to monitor and censor the Internet, and goes to extraordinary lengths to make sure that the Great Firewall remains intact. In

2006, suspected Chinese government agents broke into the home of Yuan Li, a Falun Gong practitioner who helps Chinese dissidents circumvent the government's Internet controls, and beat him. They stole his computers, cell phone, hard drive, and briefcase. This is business as usual in China, but the Princeton-educated Li happened to live in Atlanta.

Meanwhile, not only does it appear American technology companies have done little if anything to help the Chinese people—in some cases they've actively aided government oppression. In September 2005, Hunan journalist Shi Tao was sentenced to 10 years in prison for sending the Chinese Propaganda Department's directives to a website that advocates democracy. Specifically, it was a memo warning journalists not to publish anything relating to Chinese dissidents marking the 15th anniversary of Tiananmen Square. It emerged that Shi Tao had sent the directives using a Yahoo email address, and that Yahoo ceded to the demands of Chinese police and revealed his identity. When Yahoo's CEO was asked about his company's complicity, he responded, "We respect the customs of the countries where we do business."

And indeed, Yahoo's doing a lot of business in China. Thanks to its respect for China's customary repression of



*Hunan journalist Shi Tao*

free speech, less than a year after Shi Tao was arrested, the Chinese government allowed the company to purchase a hefty stake in the Chinese e-commerce site Alibaba, known as the “Amazon.com of China.” To celebrate the purchase, Yahoo threw an expensive party. The guest of honor was none other than Bill Clinton.

The former president was surely aware of Yahoo’s collusion in the arrest of Shi Tao, which had made international news, but he chose not to exercise any moral leadership in defense of the imprisoned journalist. In 2011, Yahoo donated \$50,000 to Clinton’s foundation and webcast the foundation’s benefit concert, “A Decade of Difference: A Concert Celebrating 10 Years of the William J. Clinton Foundation,” featuring Lady Gaga, Usher, Kenny Chesney, and Bono. As for Yahoo, it still owns about a quarter of Alibaba. The company is expected to file an IPO next year valuing Alibaba at as much as \$100 billion, which should prove extremely profitable for Yahoo.

Yahoo is far from alone. U.S. business leaders have been less than subtle in their attempts to encourage the political establishment to espouse pro-business positions, even when they conflict with human rights concerns. Insurance magnate Maurice “Hank” Greenberg, who oversees the multibillion-dollar C. V. Starr Foundation, has a history of being involved with and funding many of the biggest institutions in Washington’s foreign policy establishment—including the Council on Foreign Relations, the Nixon Center, and the Brookings Institution.

In 2000, the *Washington Post* reported that Greenberg wrote a letter threatening to cut funding to the Heritage Foundation—the Starr Foundation had given the conservative think tank at least \$100,000 a year during the previous decade—over a report Heritage had produced that questioned the rush to lower trade barriers with China. “It is critical that Congress not allow the [Clinton] administration’s haste in this matter to hinder its own consideration of other priority interests with China, such as national security and human rights,” read the report. The *Washington Post* dryly noted Greenberg’s firm “would benefit from a trade deal with China.”

Greenberg is no longer as active in the business world. He stepped down from running American International Group (AIG) in 2005. But he still heads the influential Starr Foundation, and his opinions of China do not appear to have softened. Mann observes that Greenberg “has repeatedly belittled the idea that the United States government should give emphasis to human rights or democracy in its

policy toward China.” In 2007, he wrote in the *National Interest*, “The histories and cultures of countries are vastly different, so it is unrealistic to expect China to have a political system that parallels any other.” It’s also unrealistic to expect Chinese political culture to change when foreign governments and businesses take Beijing’s side as it oppresses beleaguered dissidents.

Of course, whitewashing China’s abuses of power isn’t just about money. Some people do these things for free. There are still plenty of ideologues willing to rationalize the failure of communism or deny it outright.

If you want a near-perfect mélange of all the credulous pieties tossed around whenever China is discussed, it would be hard to top Andy Stern’s December 2011 op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal*. Stern is the former head of the Service Employees International Union, arguably America’s most politically influential union. After driving the SEIU deep into debt and spending \$80 million on Democratic campaigns in 2008, Stern was the second-most frequent visitor to the White House during Barack Obama’s first year in office behind then-SEIU treasurer Anna Burger. It would be

hard to find a better weather vane than Stern for what the American left thinks about any given topic.

To witness China’s “people-oriented development,” Stern made a short visit to Chongqing, “a city of 32 million in Western China, which is led by an aggressive and popular Communist Party leader” (i.e., the now-imprisoned Bo Xilai). He was impressed enough to write an op-ed titled “China’s Superior Economic Model.” Suffice it to say, Stern is easily impressed:

Last month, the *China Daily* quoted Orville Schell, who directs the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the Asia Society, as saying: “I think we have come to realize the ability to plan is exactly what is missing in America.” The article also noted that Robert Engle, who won a Nobel Prize in 2003 for economics, has said that while China is making five-year plans for the next generation, Americans are planning only for the next election. . . .

The conservative-preferred, free-market fundamentalist, shareholder-only model—so successful in the 20th century—is being thrown onto the trash heap of history in the 21st century. In an era when countries need to become economic teams, Team USA’s results—a jobless decade, 30 years of flat median wages, a trade deficit, a shrinking middle class and phenomenal gains in wealth but only for the top 1%—are pathetic.



Maurice “Hank” Greenberg, left; Andy Stern

GREENBERG, NEWS.COM; STERN, JOI

So there you have it—one of America’s best-known labor leaders approvingly cites an official propaganda outlet of the Chinese government, which in turn cites a famous “China hand” lamenting America’s unwillingness to centrally plan our economy. Stern then trots out the Occupy Wall Street talking points. For reasons both obvious and dishonest, he doesn’t bother explicitly discussing how America stacks up to China when it comes to income inequality and other economic benchmarks. Stern rounds out his op-ed by quoting an American executive with substantial business interests in China—Intel chairman Andy Grove—praising government economic planning and making an explicit reference to Thomas Friedman’s bestseller *The World Is Flat*.

But while the Chinese government may tell gullible foreigners that it values “people-oriented development,” the people themselves tell a different story. Like most Americans, Stern probably isn’t familiar with Wei Jingsheng, even though he might be China’s best-known dissident. Wei’s story is recounted in Sorman’s *Empire of Lies*. As a teenager, Wei traveled across China as part of the Red Guard and was deeply and permanently affected by the poverty he encountered. As an adult, Wei flouted authorities by living with a Tibetan girl—at the time, Chinese marriages had to be sanctioned by the workplace. When Wei was 29 years old in 1978, Deng Xiaoping was trying to drum up support for his economic modernization plans and asked supporters to put up posters on a wall in Xidan. Wei decided to put up a poster in support of “political modernization.”

“History shows that there must be a limit to the power conferred on any one individual. Those who ask for the unreserved trust of the people are consumed by unrestrained ambition,” read Wei’s poster. “We must choose people whom we can trust and, more importantly, make them accountable to ensure that the will of the majority is carried out. We can only trust such representatives as those we elect ourselves and who are accountable to us.”

Not only did Wei publicly call for democracy, he signed his name at the bottom of his poster. Soon people were gathering around the wall in Xidan every day, and his poster was being read out loud to the crowds. Deng had the wall razed and Wei arrested. As a result of his newfound notoriety, Wei had given an interview to a foreign journalist. That was enough to accuse him of selling state secrets. Wei was convicted and sentenced to 15 years in a labor camp. We know Wei’s conviction was a sham because a courageous journalist—Liu Qing—smuggled out an audio recording of the trial. For that, Qing earned his own 10-year stint in prison.

By all accounts, the conditions in China’s so-called *laogai* facilities are horrific. Wei was not a cooperative prisoner. “I

was happier than [my jailers] because I lived out my conviction, whereas the others just did what they were told,” he told Sorman. Still, Wei suffered greatly—among other things, he lost all his teeth from malnutrition. But even after serving out his 15-year sentence, Wei decided he was not done sending a message to the government. Here’s the part of the story where Andy Stern might want to pay attention: Wei was arrested again and sent back to a labor camp for the crime of trying to form a union.

After nearly 18 years, the Chinese government realized they weren’t going to break Wei, and he’s now been exiled to the United States. Looking back on his experience, Wei told Sorman, “At that time, I hadn’t read Western philosophers like Montesquieu or John Locke; but I was sufficiently informed to know that democracy was better than communism.” It’s more than a little troubling to reflect on how many influential Americans can’t say the same.



Wei Jingsheng

Stern’s left-wing politics aside, there was another disconcerting aspect of his op-ed: “I was part of a U.S.-China dialogue,” he explained, “a trip organized by the China-United States Exchange Foundation and the Center for American Progress—with high-ranking Chinese government officials, both past and present.”

Owing to its close association with the Obama administration, the Center for American Progress has emerged as the most influential liberal think tank in the country. The China-United States Exchange Foundation, which was established in 2008, is a more curious organization. The chairman is Tung Chee Hwa, who following Hong Kong’s transfer of sovereignty in 1997 became the titular head of the newly minted Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China. As chief executive and president of the executive council of Hong Kong, Tung Chee Hwa was not exactly beloved—in 2003, 500,000 protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong demanding his resignation. He resigned in 2005 before finishing his second term. While Tung Chee Hwa was technically an elected official, his family owes its incredibly successful shipping business to its close relationship with the Chinese government. A quick perusal of the other Chinese leaders involved in the organization reveals a great many ties to the Chinese government.

Stern’s op-ed was not the first time this alliance between America’s institutional left and the Chinese government resulted in favorable press. In the years before Stern’s trip to China, junkets sponsored by the China-United States Exchange Foundation and the Center for American Progress brought a slew of young liberal pundits to China. The resulting spate of publicity had to be

read to be believed, or in this case, not believed. The *New Republic* filed dispatches about China building an “ecotopia.” MSNBC host Chris Hayes’s article in the *Nation* appeared, with no apparent sense of irony, under the headline: “The Great Leap.”

But for sheer credulousness, it would be hard to top the dispatch from the *Washington Post*’s Ezra Klein. As part of his trip in May 2010, Klein and his fellow junketeers were brought to a new condo development on the outskirts of the city of Dalian. The condo development was built on the site of an existing village, so Klein asked what had happened to those who previously inhabited the land where the new condos now stood:

The obvious question with this sort of rapid development is what happens to the people who had the shack that sat on the land where the government wanted to put condos? The answer, at least in Dalian, was that they bought the previous inhabitants off. A conversation with some residents revealed that they didn’t just get one free apartment in the new building. They got four free apartments, three of which they were now renting out. And medical coverage. And money for furnishings. And a food stipend. And—I’m not kidding, by the way—birthday cakes on their birthdays. Sweet deal.

Now, the fact of the matter is that many of the massive development projects in China are enabled by forced relocation and seizure of property—the Chinese government displaced some 1.5 million people just to build the facilities used to host the 2008 Olympics. Even if the details Klein reported were true of the particular development he toured, living conditions in China are decidedly not a “sweet deal.” There are dozens of villages in China where AIDS infection rates top 70 percent. That’s because the government denied the existence of the disease for years, while an underground blood donor trade flourished among poor Chinese who were desperate to earn extra money to pay off the country’s corrupt tax collectors and one-child policy enforcers. But villages like that were not part of the tour. Instead, Klein and his fellow travelers were taken to a condo development, and left believing the Chinese government gives people medical care, housing, rental properties, and—no kidding—birthday cakes.

Clearly, more skepticism of Chinese authorities is in order. The opening of China’s economy may have done a lot to improve living standards, but despite what you may have read, there’s little evidence this automatically correlates with more political liberty. One place the money has gone is into a surge in public security spending, which comes as so-called mass incidents, everything from strikes to riots and demonstrations, are on the rise. There were at least 180,000 such

incidents in 2010, twice as many as in 2006, Sun Liping, a professor of sociology at Beijing’s Tsinghua University, said in a February 25 article in the *Economic Observer*.

As bad as that sounds, the good news is that there’s plenty of evidence to suggest China is responsive to global opinion and can be nudged in the right direction. It was international outrage that caused China to finally admit it had an AIDS epidemic. It was international pressure that saved many of its famous dissidents, such as Wei Jingsheng. Most recently, the Chinese government grudgingly allowed Chen Guangcheng, the blind lawyer who fought to protect thousands of Chinese women from the horrors of forced abortion, to travel to the United States last year after his escape from house arrest. The Chinese government was also forced by global denunciations to release celebrated artist and social critic Ai Weiwei after his 2011 arrest.

Despite these success stories, the China debate is still largely governed by those who insist that applying too much political pressure will undermine China’s economic progress. But Dan Blumenthal, a member of the congressional United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission and one of the few China experts in Washington who makes a genuine effort to be appropriately critical, observes that economic progress actually makes the Chinese government more susceptible to international political pressure.

“The growing middle and upper classes want to be accepted by the West and thought of as cosmopolitan and law-abiding,” he writes. “There is an increasing divergence between the parochial party cadre who run China’s government and the country’s vibrant populace. But the Communist Party is . . . beholden to a more cosmopolitan elite who are embarrassed by their leadership’s policies. This development is one lesson of Ai Weiwei’s release.”

Unfortunately, just as the opportunity to apply additional pressure on China is presenting itself, influential American opinion shapers, ranging from Yahoo to the *Washington Post*, increasingly have vested interests in appeasing the Chinese government. But the cause of a free China is a worthy one, and a good first step toward achieving it is to build a consensus that it’s unacceptable for major media outlets to routinely insist on the glories of China’s leadership.

Perhaps the only way to do that is to confront those at the very top of the media food chain. Somebody’s going to have to start somewhere, and Jeff Bezos assumed control of the *Washington Post* on October 1. Maybe the threat of losing one newspaper subscription doesn’t mean much to a guy who’s worth \$27 billion, but I don’t think demanding that the *Washington Post* stop taking money from the Chinese government and distributing its propaganda is too much to ask. ♦



Springtime at the University of Washington, 2007

# College Daze

*Reforms are nice, but will they happen?* BY MARK BAUERLEIN

Everyone's angry at American colleges. Parents groan about tuition, students pile up debt and can't find work, employers gripe that graduates lack job skills, conservatives decry liberal bias, Ph.D.s without a regular post become bitter transient adjuncts, and politicians suspect that tax dollars pay for useless majors

*Mark Bauerlein, professor of English at Emory University, is the author, most recently, of The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future.*

## Higher Education in America

by Derek Bok  
Princeton, 496 pp., \$35

and cushy schedules for professors.

Scandals pop up every week, such as the Michigan State English professor who opened his fall class with a rant against Republicans, calling them "dying white people" who "raped" our country. Heated testimonies of binge drinking, sexual assault, and cheating circulate, and bizarre shenanigans surface, such as the Oberlin incident in

which racist messages and a Ku Klux Klan sighting paralyzed the campus and drew national media coverage—though the original acts turned out to be a hoax, and the hooded Klansman was just someone in a blanket.

Campus events needn't be extreme to count as wacky, either: for instance, this magazine's Andrew Ferguson facing the selective college admissions process with his child and appropriately titling his chronicle *Crazy U*.

*Higher Education in America* is the contrary to it all, a sober, copious study with not a single impolitic or unfair assertion. As befits the monumental

title, it has 412 pages of text, 40 pages of 710 footnotes, and an extensive index. The study is divided into five sections, each with several chapters, plus a foreword and afterword—except for Part V, “The Final Reckoning,” which ends with “The Last Word.” The chapters encompass sweeping topics—“The American System of Higher Education,” “What to Learn,” “How to Teach,” “Medical Schools,” “Law Schools”—ranging from the sciences to the humanities, general education to doctoral programs, the college readiness of students to the job conditions of teachers.

Such a comprehensive review needs an experienced teacher, administrator, and researcher to carry it off, and it would be difficult to find one more qualified than Derek Bok. Educated at Stanford and Harvard, he joined the Harvard Law School faculty in 1958, became dean 10 years later, and then president of Harvard University twice—a 20-year term starting in 1971 and a one-year interim in 2006, after Lawrence Summers’s tenure exploded in the aftermath of his “women-and-science” remarks.

Along the way, Bok chaired the American Council on Education, Common Cause, the Association of American Universities, and the Spencer Foundation. His seven books on higher education include *Our Underachieving Colleges* (2005) and *The Shape of the River* (1998), a defense of affirmative action coauthored with William Bowen, ex-president of Princeton. As Michael Roth, president of Wesleyan, put it in a recent review of this volume, “Thank goodness Derek Bok, a two-time president of Harvard and a judicious, learned analyst of education, has taken on this undertaking.”

Bok’s prestige justifies the ambitious scope of the book, and it also arms him to face the problematic condition of higher education in 2013. His method develops consistently, chapter by chapter:

First, select a general topic, such as Chapter Four’s “Going to College and Earning a Degree.”

Next, identify a subtopic that is currently disputed, such as “How Many

Young People Should Go to College?”

On one side, studies show the income value of a college degree and the necessity of college training for jobs in the knowledge economy. On the other side, Andrew Hacker and Charles Murray argue that many students shouldn’t go to college at all, because the economy doesn’t need “overeducated” workers and not everyone can handle authentic college-level work.

Next, review the empirical evidence for both camps. On the positive, Bok cites data on the income boost of a college degree and on certain skill shortages a tailored curriculum would meet, as well as better health and higher voting percentages among college graduates. On the negative looms the enormous portion of students who need remediation (25 percent of four-year college students, 58 percent for two-years), along with the fact that fewer than half of students ever graduate.

Finally, offer solutions: “What Colleges Can Do.” Bok advocates placing high schools and colleges in closer curricular alignment, improving remedial education, and devising interventions for slipping students before they drop out.

The assessment is measured and clear, and we may confidently refer young academics and administrators to *Higher Education in America* as a primer on current affairs: not as the thorough summation it aspires to be, but as a handy introduction to pressing issues.

American higher education is simply too heterogeneous and fluctuating to be absorbed into a single trade volume, and sometimes the discussion fails to be exhaustive or invokes dated research. In a brief commentary on racial preferences, for example, Bok states that “several other arguments against racial preferences have now been refuted quite convincingly.” But his source for that proof comes from his own 1998 book! Bok never mentions the work in recent years on “mismatch,” showing that students admitted to college with records inferior to their peers end up hurt by the experience, not helped.

In the “Publish or Perish” chapter, Bok rightly wonders whether much academic research merits funding and publication. But his footnotes date from 1972, 1990, 1991, 2004, and 2011. When Bok addresses the topic of curriculums in “What to Learn,” he doesn’t dive into specific disciplines and ponder, say, what an English major should know; rather, he sticks to generalities about a vocational versus a liberal arts education and the meager learning gains from freshman to senior year.

To underscore these drawbacks, however, is to ask too much. Better to take the work as the wisdom of a knowledgeable professional at the heights of the system.

We should also appreciate another motif here, this one unintended by Bok. It is a pointed, overarching question that rises each time he offers his sensible solutions: Why do so many problems persist when obvious answers are available?

If students in remedial courses aren’t being helped by them—well, then, improve the instruction. If professors publish pointless research, then stop requiring so much research as a condition of promotion. If general education is an inconsistent experience for first-year students, then make requirements more prescriptive. These reforms are obvious, but ignored. Researchers find that students often don’t work hard enough—at the University of California at Berkeley, they average only 13 hours of homework per week—but “college officials seem curiously complacent about these trends,” explains Bok.

This is the real upshot: We shouldn’t be asking what we ought to do, but why it isn’t being done. For all the admirable reasonableness of the former Harvard president’s final word, a disconcerting irrationality runs beneath it. The oddity, though, lies not in this book but in the system itself, a mammoth enterprise crucial to American prosperity and flourishing, but shot through with needless costs, poor performance, falling standards, and routine corruptions that nobody can seem to do anything about. ♦

# The Vulgar Games

*Pondering the Honey Boo Booization of America.*

BY JUDY BACHRACH

**T**he tragedy of Paula Deen, I believe, is not her heart-rending choice of pink liquid cosmetics on the occasion of her famously damp *sua culpa* (my term for blaming current shortcomings on one's social origins). Nor is it her provocative defense against accusations of racism: "I is what I is" plays as badly on the electronic media as it does in ESL classes. Well, maybe years ago it would have gone down passably on *Mayberry R.F.D.*, but morning television doesn't coddle tautological idiots.

No, what I really hold against America's least talented cooking show host is the fact that the revelations concerning her views on minorities emerged too late to appear in Charlotte Hays's delightful new book.

Stop your sniveling. Yes, you are allowed to use the term "white trash" in a title, especially since the author doesn't confine her attacks to the color-challenged or to those without the means to defend themselves. Kim Kardashian, for example, gets it in the Chiclet teeth for "expecting a little bundle" with rap star Kanye West while her 72-day, highly lucrative marriage to a previous hunk was still unraveling. In Hays-speak, in other words, "white trash" is simply a synonym for "vulgar," a boundless source of democratically discourteous, tacky offensiveness available to all Americans of all classes, genders, and races. We should be proud.

A word about the author herself: In the interest of full disclosure (a matter which I prefer to leave to the very last line of any article), I have to concede that Charlotte Hays is a good friend. She is also a Southerner, her Mississippi

*Judy Bachrach is a contributing editor to Vanity Fair.*

## When Did White Trash Become the New Normal?

*A Southern Lady Asks the Impertinent Question*  
by Charlotte Hays  
Regnery, 256 pp., \$21.95



*Kanye West, Kim Kardashian, 2013*

accent having, since her trek northward a few decades ago, inexplicably deepened, essentially paralyzing all syllables. She retains—as in her previous bestselling books, these with recipes—a sentimental, deeply unreconstructed passion (in print, anyway) for the kind of food that, when ingested, generally fattens the incomes of cardiologists. This probably explains why chapter three of her new book begins:

If the potential demise of the Hostess Twinkie sent you into a deep depression, chances are you are White Trash. As Steve Berger observed in his essay collection, *Raised By White Trash*, "There's a close correlation between white trash, family love, and diabetes."

The last affliction appears to be of special interest to the author: "Diabetes is the talismanic New White Trash disease, having replaced pellagra, the Old White Trash disease," she writes. And, in fact, much of this book compares Ur-Trash ("Owning cows and being too lazy to make butter") to the more self-destructive New Trash ("Eating butter to the point where you look like a cow").

But a great deal of Hays's plaintive tract—and it is melancholy underneath its bright coat of humor; and it is a tract, a serious political one, in fact—is devoted to a series of questions which she never chooses to formalize: Who are we? What have we become? And, above all: What the hell is wrong with us?

To illustrate, the author ventures into territory that is, while not exactly virginal, always fertile: television shows. It's not good enough anymore to insist, as we once did, that *Hey, these dumb shows are fictional, stuffed with incredibly flawed imaginary characters*. They are more than fictional, more than flawed, more than reflections of a changing culture in changing times. They are, in fact, as Hays indicates, tragically inspirational, featuring, as they do, "predatory female doctors . . . always on the prowl for sex," "a hotshot reporter with a child born out of wedlock," and a character on *Two and a Half Men* who declares to his onscreen uncle (played at the time by Charlie Sheen, naturally): "You drink, you gamble, you have different women here practically every night. You're the best role model a guy could want!"

Hays views all these characters, all their doings and their repartee, as trashy to the nth. And, of course, they are that. But underneath the merriment at the expense of the fictional is some true despair about those who exist in reality, children especially. The author's antecedent (actually the step-grandmother of her mother) used to say, "When children turn 12 they become very silly and you must send them away until they get over it."

For her part, Hays seems to feel that a lot of that silliness has actually been actively transmitted to offspring by their

negligent parents, the ones who allow their children to watch Charlie Sheen and Kim Kardashian. And it clearly eats at her. After all, Hays insists, there are plenty of ways—easy ones, classic and time-tested ones—to clean up the trash:

A friend of mine who is otherwise quite modern in her outlook raised two delightful sons, now attractive young men, by the simple expedient of threatening to send them to bed without dessert whenever they got the least bit out of line at the dinner table. Okay, I'm oversimplifying. There were other childrearing techniques involved. But the threat, which, by the way, was not idle, was magic. Moreover it pre-supposed two conditions not inevitably present nowadays: 1) family dinner; and 2) that parents, not children, ruled the roost. In other words, the parents civilized their offspring.

Well, I have just three things to say about that. Four, really.

*One:* Yes, I did used to threaten both Noah and Sam, my attractive sons, with no dessert and also an order to leave the table whenever they got out of line as children. *Two:* I'm not so sure "ruled the roost" quite covers the way we were perceived by those who were thus deprived of our company. *Three:* Threats of banishment or deprivation weren't invariably successful civilizing instruments. *Four:* There was, for example, that time during a very long Rosh Hashanah service when the boys started punching each other, and I said, "You two do that again and I'm taking you both home in a heartbeat! And that's a promise."

All I am saying is, and I am certain Paula Deen would understand this part: Civilization ain't easy. ♦

He "stumbled across" the central mystery of this book while researching the Casa della Pietà, a home for abandoned girls founded in 1554. At the time, such homes were something new, even in a city famous for the civic activism of its confraternities. The homes sprang up in an effort to prevent orphaned or abandoned pubescent girls from being forced into prostitution. They were often called "conservatories" because they were devoted to conserving their charges' virginity until they could be safely married off.

In a turbulent period of famine, plague, the new disease of syphilis, and constant warfare between city-states, there were many girls who found themselves on the streets, or living in perilous conditions with distant relatives, neighbors, or those who took them in as servants. Such girls were vulnerable to sexual assault and to being pimped out by their families or caretakers.

The mystery Terpstra unravels is the fearful loss of life among the girls of the Casa della Pietà in its early decades. Three "conservatories" opened in the first half of the 1550s: In two of them, the girls died at the high rates common to all Florentines of the time. But the death rate of the girls in Casa della Pietà was appalling: "Well over half of the 52 girls registered on the day the Pietà first opened died under its care," Terpstra notes. Three hundred and twenty-four of the 526 girls who entered the Pietà between 1554 and 1568 died there—a death rate of 62 percent, far surpassing the usual 20 percent of other institutions at the time. Such death rates were characteristic of orphanages for abandoned infants, not homes for adolescents.

What's more, the Casa della Pietà was a special place: It was much closer to a utopian social experiment than to a Dickensian orphanage. Terpstra calls it the "most distinctive charitable shelter established anywhere in 16th-century Italy."

First, it was started by a large group of laywomen that included not only the high aristocracy and rich, but (more or less) middle-class women as well. Most of its donors gave small amounts. Second, it allowed its charges



# House of Hope

*The quest to save the vulnerable of Florence.*

BY ANN MARLOWE

It's become nearly dogmatic in academic history that the writer ought to focus as much as he can on the disenfranchised, the "marginalized," to avoid "privileging" the viewpoints of the upper classes, of men, and of white people. And so anxious are the historians not to perpetuate injustice that there is little or no room for constructing a book that is also a work of art. Often the only pleasure for the reader is in cheering on the revelation of some forgotten unfairness, or the voices of some "oppressed" group—if that's what rocks your boat.

*Lost Girls* is a welcome exception, a smart and highly calculated exhibition of the archival historian's art that entertains the general reader—and checks all the PC boxes the author presumably

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## Lost Girls

*Sex and Death in Renaissance Florence*  
by Nicholas Terpstra  
Johns Hopkins, 264 pp., \$30

needs to keep in mind as professor of history at the University of Toronto.

Nicholas Terpstra set out to crack a mystery in his field, the social history of Renaissance Italy. He designed his book as cunningly as a thriller, and with considerably better prose; but because Terpstra is a scholar, not a commercial novelist, he leaves us with multiple answers rather than a neat resolution. *Lost Girls* has the advantages of a sexy topic—saving teenaged girls from prostitution—and the always-seductive setting of 16th-century Florence. But what makes it shine is Terpstra's determination to create a work of art.

a considerable degree of freedom and individuality. The girls wore their own clothes rather than uniforms, they could visit with family and friends, and they could work as domestics or apprentices in the neighborhood.

Most intriguingly, the Pietà appears to have had an ideological agenda drawn from Savonarola's politics: not the bonfire of the vanities with which his name is mainly identified today, or the drive to purify the church, but the embrace of democratic self-government.

Florence had been a republic in the antique model, governed by citizens chosen partly by lot from 1328 to 1434, and then again intermittently in the early 1500s. The Medicis appointed themselves dukes in 1537 and consolidated their power in the decades immediately prior to the establishment of the Casa della Pietà. But there was resistance to their power throughout the 16th century, and the Pietà began as a bastion of the republican faction. The author goes through the roster of hundreds of donors to explore their connections with Savonarola's followers.

Terpstra emphasizes that the Pietà not only allowed its charges unusual freedom and autonomy, but that it was governed in an unusually informal and responsive manner as well—by a circle of women donors, together with the warden. This changed when the Medicis took over and the directors became male. The once-rapid and informal admissions practice became protracted and difficult—and with fascinating consequences for the mortality of the girls.

What was killing these children and adolescents? Terpstra suggests several good answers, including one with which he skillfully shocks us. In the course of describing the mystery, Terpstra gives us only as many clues as he wants us to have at any given time, so the reader experiences the impact of progressive revelations much as a researcher would. While explaining his discoveries, Terpstra also takes us on a tour of a time and place many readers know something about. But readers who haven't focused on 16th-century Italy are in for some surprises.

I had no idea, for example, that medieval and Renaissance theologians didn't

agree that life begins at conception, and that abortion, even fairly late-term abortion, was an open secret that might take place scarcely a day's journey from the Vatican. Nor did I know that silk and wool were already being produced under factory-like conditions in Renaissance Florence. Or that girls could hire themselves out as apprentices in weaving, sometimes to female master weavers. Or that Florence had cheap, city-run brothels to keep young unmarried men from assaulting respectable girls.

The poignant subtext to Terpstra's mystery is one he never mentions: the slow decline of Florence. The Medicis were great patrons, but as the 16th century wore on, the city, like the Casa

della Pietà, became more organized, more secure—and less creative. During 1553-55, Michelangelo was working on the Pietà sculptures that are now in the Accademia and Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence. But he would be dead 10 years later, and no one filled his shoes: Raphael and Leonardo had died decades earlier—as had, for that matter, Machiavelli. By the time the Casa della Pietà faded out in the 17th century, Florence was becoming a backwater.

It would be interesting to know how many of the women who contributed to the Pietà had an inkling that their city would be famous centuries later not for its power, or its social organization, or its riches, or even its piety, but for its art. ♦

BCA

# Upgrowing

*Wisdom for would-be Special Snowflakes.*

BY ZACK MUNSON

Let's face it, we millennials need all the help we can get. We've spent our 20s either engaged in Apatow-ian bromances or trying to figure out if we're Mirandas or Samanthas. We invented Facebook and insist on using it at all hours of the day, for no earthly reason whatsoever. Heck, we even believed that we were, indeed, the ones we had been waiting for.

But it's not our fault; it really isn't! Raised as we were on hours of Super Mario Bros. and gallons of Hi-C Ecto-Cooler, having lived through the trauma of the early 1990s ("Can't touch this!") and come of age in the post-9/11 world, it's no wonder that we've had a hard time adjusting to grown-up life. But, fortunately for us—and even more so for those who are not "us"—Kelly Williams Brown, a former advice columnist for the *Statesman Journal* (Salem, Ore.) has the answer. Or, rather, she's got the *answers*. Four

*Zack Munson is a writer in Los Angeles.*

## Adulting

*How to Become a Grown-Up  
in 468 Easy(ish) Steps*

by Kelly Williams Brown  
Grand Central, 288 pp., \$15



*Kelly Williams Brown*

hundred and sixty-eight of them, to be exact, which she has graciously compiled into this humorous book.

Remember books? No? Well, it's available on Kindle, too.

While the title, *Adulting*, is fairly groan-inducing, furthering as it does the obnoxious trend of turning nouns that should remain nouns into verbs, Brown can be forgiven somewhat, since at least she provides a rationale: “Adult isn’t a noun, it’s a verb. It’s the act of making correctly those small decisions that fill our day.” And she can be forgiven even more when she starts by taking dead aim at millennials’ worst impulse: “Step 1: Accept that you are not that special. This is the most difficult thing to accept if you wish to be a grown-up: You are not a Special Snowflake.”

Brown, who is 28, insists that she’s not attacking her generation. As she recently told the *New York Times*: “The people I know in my age group are not aimless man-child caricatures.” But as anyone who’s been on a college campus in the last decade, or seen an episode of *Girls*, or spent 18 seconds on the Internet can attest, this type of straight-talk is long overdue.

Step 1 is, without a doubt, the most useful of Brown’s several hundred steps; but she’s got a few more well worth any twentysomething’s time. Some of them, like Step 1, are bigger-picture advice, such as when she counsels, “Don’t get hurt when the world doesn’t care about you” (Step 5). And her explanation of Step 17 (“Get used to giving more than you get”) is good advice for anyone, really, not just benighted millennials: “When we’re little, all this love flows to us, and none is expected back. This ratio has now changed, and if you don’t acknowledge it, you will not be a pleasant person to be around.” Other steps are more practical in nature: “Replace things when they become disgusting. . . . Buy toilet paper in bulk. . . . Make non-bullshit potatoes.”

“Master oatmeal,” she declares in Step 74, because “[i]t gives you an amazing amount of energy, like cocaine, if cocaine were really good for your digestion and didn’t ruin lives.” And her comment on moving is amusing and particularly true-to-life: “If you’ve ever moved anywhere, which obviously you have, you know that moving is the second worst process in the world (ethnic cleansing is the first).”

Brown’s funny, chirpy, rat-a-tat-tat style initially makes *Adulting* easy and pleasant reading, and the book has enough F-bombs and Young Jeezy quotes to retain the attention of twentysomethings who may be skittish at the sight of complete sentences. But, ultimately, there are just too many steps, and Brown’s chipper patter starts, at times, to feel like nagging: “When you get a prescription, read all the enclosed information. . . . Keep hydrated, especially on airplanes. . . . Never start smoking, and if you have, quit.” Some of her advice trends toward the downright obsessive-compulsive, such as instructing the reader to “put on sunscreen daily,” or offering Howard Hughesian hand-washing instructions:

A reminder that good hand-washing involves at least thirty seconds and vigorous scrubbing—that’s what breaks down the cell walls of the bacteria. Also, if you can avoid touching things that a million other people have touched—if you can open the door with your hip, for example—you’ll be better off.

Right. Anyway, *Adulting* is, on the whole, good-spirited, well-intentioned, entertaining, well-written, and useful—a combination that makes Brown’s overzealous moments easy to forgive. And while we millennials may still have a lot of growing up to do, at least now there’s some help that even underemployed, Nintendo-addled, bullshit-potato-making narcissists can handle. ♦

# BCA Sacred Topography

*Jerusalem and the cityscape of faith(s).*

BY BENJAMIN BALINT

In “The Eternal City,” the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai observes that his native city has rebuffed most of those who would project onto her their own ambitions, imperial or religious or otherwise. Neither Jerusalem’s conquerors nor its miracle-seeking glorifiers, he wrote, *stopped to wonder why / She hid herself behind a wall within a wall. / The eternal city like a brown fist / Clenched in stone.*

Among those who have tried to unclench this stubborn fist, Jerusalem’s archaeologists figure as the most persistent and most successful. In their erudite new book, Katharina Galor, a professor at Brown, and Hanswulf Bloedhorn, a German expert on Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine architecture, note that more than 1,700 excavations have been conducted in Jerusalem in the

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## The Archaeology of Jerusalem

*From the Origins to the Ottomans*

by Katharina Galor and

Hanswulf Bloedhorn

Yale, 368 pp., \$50

last century-and-a-half. The excavators have ranged from pioneers like the American biblical scholar Edward Robinson and the Royal Engineers’ Captain Charles Warren, to European explorers who sought to discover the treasures of Solomon’s Temple, to the more scientific efforts of Israeli archaeologists since 1967.

Their discoveries, comprehensively surveyed here, have brought to light nearly 4,000 years of human settlement and building. *The Archaeology of Jerusalem*, amply illustrated with photographs and drawings, details the distinctive finds for each period and uses them to illuminate the historical context: fortifications from biblical times (the Bronze and Iron

Ages); silver amulets from the seventh century B.C. inscribed with biblical verses; Hellenistic tombs and ossuaries inscribed in both Greek and Hebrew; Roman statuary and civic architecture; Byzantine churches and mosaics; illuminated Crusader manuscripts from the scriptorium of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; Mamluk minarets still standing after more than seven centuries; and elaborate Ottoman public fountains.

Galor and Bloedhorn show that, taken together, these physical remnants tell the story of Jerusalem from prehistoric times through the end of the Ottoman period in 1917. The authors begin their story with a Canaanite town encircled by limestone hills and ravines and sustained by a single perennial spring, the Gihon. King David made the hill above the Gihon the political and religious capital of the Jews in about 1000 B.C. The city, where heaven and earth were said to meet, is mentioned nearly 2,000 times in the Hebrew Bible.

As the city expanded uphill, the colonization of the region by the Greeks and Romans (who renamed the city Aelia Capitolina) inaugurated an era of monumental building projects. None surpassed those of Herod (a megalomaniac often said to have suffered from an edifice complex), including the magnificent Second Temple and the esplanade on which it stood, the largest of its kind in antiquity. Two millennia later, Herod's platform, now graced by the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aksa Mosque, remains intact. Its Western Wall is today venerated by Jewish worshippers.

But little else from that time remains. In the year 70 A.D., the Roman 10th Legion besieged and then sacked Jerusalem, a place Pliny the Elder had only recently called "by far the most famous city of the East." Prosperity was followed by desolation.

A thousand years after David, a new faith emerged from Jerusalem, a city now hallowed by the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. In the fourth century, Constantine identified and enshrined sites associated with the life of Jesus, places that were soon woven into Christian liturgy and pilgrimage. (Although nowhere does the New Testament require such

gence yearn towards her." From now on, the Dome of the Rock, a perfectly proportioned octagonal masterpiece of Umayyad architecture, would dominate the skyline. And although Jerusalem would never serve as a Muslim capital, neither between 638 and 1099, nor between 1187 and 1917, Islam left an indelible mark on the city's increasingly multifaceted appearance.

So did the Crusaders, who, driven to "liberate Jerusalem from the Mohammadan yoke," conquered the city in 1099 and made it the capital of the independent Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. And so, in a more muted way, did Saladin, who conquered the city in 1187. Mosques that had become churches became mosques again. Until they were replaced by the Ottomans, the Mamluks from Egypt—whom F.E. Peters calls "veritable Carnegies and Rockefellers of piety"—enriched and embellished Jerusalem. Finally, the Ottoman conquest in the 16th century gave Jerusalem the distinctive wall built by Suleiman the Magnificent, which surrounds the turrets and domes and enclosed courtyards of the Old City to this day.

The story of Jerusalem, a city so long convulsed by ancient angers and competing pieties, is excessively well worn. The dates are already familiar. In another of his poems, Amichai writes that, here, numbers designate not bus routes but dates: *70 after, 1917, 500 B.C., '48. These are the lines you really travel on.*

This book, too, is thick with dates. Its style is necessarily dry. Yet, in transposing the story of Jerusalem into a different key, in telling it for the first time not as history but as a loving examination of the detritus of history, Galor and Bloedhorn shed light on how tactile things can act as batteries and conductors of memory. Archaeology at its best is the study of how excavated objects and buildings carry the currents of memory between then and now.



pilgrimage—John Calvin went so far as to call it "counterfeit worship"—the practice flourished.) Under Byzantine rule, Jerusalem, where Jewish residence would be banned for 500 years, became a major Christian city, one of the most celebrated in the empire. In the year 451, Jerusalem became one of the five patriarchates, beside Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome.

Following the path of Muhammad's Night Journey, Islam arrived with the Caliph Omar in the seventh century, and al-Quds (The Holy), as the city became known in Arabic, became increasingly prominent. The great medieval Arab geographer (and Jerusalem native) al-Muqaddasi wrote: "The hearts of men of intelli-

But the more basic originality of this book lies in the way Galor and Bloedhorn persuasively demonstrate the virtues of reading Jerusalem as a kind of archaeological palimpsest of material culture. Much as the three Abrahamic faiths inscribed them-

selves on earlier faiths, erasing some features and embellishing others, so too can Jerusalem be seen as layer upon layer of sacred topography, a physical record of longings for a redemptive future and of mourning destructions past. ♦

B&A

# A Complete Maestro

*The Indian summer of the Great Conductor*  
on 85 discs. BY WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

**T**he convergence of two events has shaped my life as a music listener over the past few months. The first was a significant birthday, after which I decided to reacquaint myself with the classical records—many of them long-playing vinyl—that I’ve lived with over the decades. I resolved to spend less time listening to Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, and the songs Frank Sinatra recorded with Tommy Dorsey in the early 1940s, and celebrate, instead, Haydn and Brahms and Debussy.

As if somebody up there took heed of my resolution, I was made aware that RCA Victor had recently released its archive of Arturo Toscanini recordings, previously available on individual compact discs. Now gathered together were 17 years of his performances with the NBC Symphony Orchestra, from 1937 until his retirement in 1954, plus a number of those previously made with the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and the BBC Orchestra. For 85 discs in all, plus a video of Toscanini conducting, the selling price is an amazingly low \$120. (Purchased as they appeared individually in the early 1990s, the price tag would have been more like \$1,200.)

A day or so after I placed the order,

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**Arturo Toscanini**  
*The Complete RCA Collection*  
RCA Red Seal, \$120.05

the discs appeared in a large shoe box—along with a pocket-sized, elegantly produced handbook containing a discography, short essays by critics, and photos of the great man at work. I was in business.

I heard Toscanini conduct just once, when I was 15, at an NBC Symphony Sunday afternoon program consisting of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. (What I mainly remember of it was my shameful tendency to doze off after too many activities during a short New York vacation.) Toscanini had begun to conduct the symphony at the invitation of David Sarnoff, head of RCA, for a series of weekly broadcasts; some were later televised. He would have full authority over the repertory, the soloists (a number of operas were sung), and whether the performance merited a thumbs-up for release on record.

Toscanini was then 70 years old, time for a lesser man to have retired, after concluding 12 years with the New York Philharmonic. Before that, in the early years of the 20th century, he spent decades as a conductor at the Metropolitan Opera, as well as with various orchestras in Europe and America. Here was a man who, if

it can be believed, conducted Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* Symphony only four years after it was written and Brahms’s *Tragic* Overture in 1896, when Brahms was still alive. So to begin a new operation in 1937, and continue with it for 17 years, retiring when he was 87, is one of the great heroic stories of artistic achievement.

I began listening to the discs in a serendipitous manner. Deferring the operas till later on, I let fancy and impulse direct me where they would, with one performance suggesting another. My point of entry, for no good reason, was Schubert’s Fifth Symphony, an early work not much performed and not listened to by me in years—but absolutely delightful to hear under the crisp forcefulness of Toscanini’s direction. This was followed by an even more brilliant work: Mendelssohn’s incidental music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Then came Mendelssohn’s Octet, a teenage work with a brilliant Scherzo that was expanded in Toscanini’s recording by many added fiddles and articulated with breathtaking intensity.

The stereo in my living room consists of, among other components, a new, powerful amplifier and two ancient, large KLH speakers—top of the market in their day, now looking a bit like old elephants. One of them has mysteriously died, but the other is sufficient to play the monaural recordings from a time when stereo was but a dream on the horizon. The sound, as Toscanini and my equipment deliver it, is on the harsh side, shrill at times, but absolutely electric in its tension, detail, and forward impulsion.

Many critics, along with some of the musicians who played under Toscanini, have put words to the propulsive excitement of his performances. A member of the NBC Symphony’s bass section, David Walter, spoke of the large, sweeping movements of the right arm as one of the means for getting the orchestra intensely involved. Walter’s teacher, Fred Zinneman, onetime member of the Philadelphia Orchestra, said that Toscanini’s beat was very clear and precise and very beautiful; he had

the most elegant way of holding and moving that stick. So it was almost impossible to make a mistake if one watched him.

Another musician, William Carboni, testified to how much Toscanini's terrifying demeanor on the stand elicited from the musicians: "That red face—that violence—it could kill anyone. It was like nature—like a raging sea or a

may decide which is preferable, which clarifies the most details. One of the liveliest books on the conductor is *The Toscanini Legacy* (1970) by the English critic Spike Hughes, who is very stern about moments when this or that performance shows Toscanini at less than his best. (Toscanini's own attitude toward his performances was one of "relentless self-dissatisfaction.") This



Toscanini in action, 1944

thunderstorm: it's bigger than you, and you don't buck it—you have to go along with it." These and other testimonies are from *The Toscanini Musicians Knew* (1967) by B.H. Haggin, who himself had a try at describing Toscanini's conducting, writing that it exhibited "cohesive tension from one sound to the next . . . changes of sonority and pace that were always in right proportion to what preceded and followed," an effect Haggin called "plastic continuity." The result was an ideal view of the work based on the composer's score and on its performance markings.

One of the listening activities this collection tempts one to engage in is comparing different performances of the same work. For example, we are given three different recordings of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony—from 1939, 1949, and 1952—and the scrupulous listener

comparative activity is probably not essential for a nonprofessional listener intent on refreshing his or her ear, not just in bringing to life relatively unfamiliar pieces like Mozart's early Divertimento (K. 287) but, more significantly, in taking the measure once more of the 19th century composers—Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Berlioz, Wagner, Verdi—whose work the conductor invariably makes new.

During the vinyl era, I purchased at modest prices many Toscanini albums, often unfortunately souped up with stereo sound that made for unnecessary racket. These LPs have moldered on the shelf, particularly the ones that include performances of lighter classics such as *The Skater's Waltz* (Waldteufel), *The Moldau* (Smetana), Rossini's overture to *William Tell*, and Sibelius's *Finlandia*—not

to speak of triumphant renditions of Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever" and *El Capitan*. (It has been noted that when Toscanini toured the South with his orchestra, they played "Dixie," something that, however politically incorrect it now seems, I would like to have heard.)

One of the musicians interviewed by Haggin referred affectionately to such lighter pieces as "junk stuff," but tags *The Skater's Waltz* as standing out in his memory of great moments. Something like that happened to me on hearing *Finlandia* for the first time in many years. The piece takes about nine minutes to perform, seven of which are junk indeed: Sibelius at his windiest and most pretentious. Then, suddenly, a break—and the great, beautiful theme announces itself, as pure and ice-cold as one imagines things are in Finland. I would expect to be stirred by this or that second subject in a symphonic movement of Beethoven or Brahms, but was unprepared for this burst of noble utterance.

Toscanini can sometimes be heard singing along with the orchestra or singers, especially in rehearsals (none of which, unfortunately, are included in this collection). One of these instances occurred in the third act of *La Bohème*, when, as one of his favorite singers, Jan Peerce, noted, Toscanini sang along with him. Peerce observed that some people said it spoiled the record; for him, it *made* the record:

Imagine hearing Toscanini—not planning it, just naturally singing faintly in the background . . . knowing the guy's blood is on that record, and some shmo says, "That spoils it." They don't know what inspires people.

In "The American Scholar," Emerson says, with students in mind, that great books are for nothing except to inspire. I feel sorry for my own students who, not brought up with classical music, will never hear these performances. For me, there is no better word than "inspire" to name the way they can fill someone, perhaps listening from a comfortable chair in the living room, with a sense of heroic possibilities. ♦

GETTY IMAGES

# Breaking Badly

*An instant classic—for all the wrong reasons.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**C**ormac McCarthy's script for *The Counselor* offers a new twist on the immortal George Orwell crack that some ideas are so stupid only an intellectual would believe them. Only a truly gifted writer could have written something quite as awful as this jaw-dropping fiasco, simultaneously so overwrought and so undercooked that it qualifies as an immediate camp classic.

*The Counselor* is nominally a thriller about a self-satisfied El Paso lawyer (known only as "the counselor") who gets involved in a get-rich-quick drug deal that immediately goes south. But even though heads literally roll—three get lopped off in the course of the movie—there's almost no action. The major events mostly take place off-camera; what we do see is people talking. The opening is a love scene between the counselor (Michael Fassbender) and his girlfriend Laura (Penélope Cruz), in which the 80-year-old McCarthy makes a fool of himself attempting to capture the sexual banter of two thirtysomethings:

SHE: I want you to touch me. . . .

HE: You really do.

SHE: I really do.

HE: Say it more sexy. . . . How did you get to be such a bad girl?

This dialogue is Oscar Wilde-quality compared with the nonsense that comes later. The counselor goes to buy Laura an engagement ring. The diamond merchant tells him:

It is not a small thing to wish for, however unattainable. To partake of the stone's endless destiny. Is that not the meaning of adornment? To

## The Counselor

Directed by Ridley Scott



enhance the beauty of the beloved is to acknowledge both her frailty and the nobility of that frailty. At our noblest we announce to the darkness that we will not be diminished by the brevity of our lives. That we will not thereby be made less.

I'm not kidding.

Later, the counselor discusses his involvement in the drug scheme with his friend, a fixer named Westray (Brad Pitt, in the movie's only good performance). Though he sports a ponytail and Fat-Elvis sunglasses, Westray is a Heideggerian: "Time is not going to stop, Counselor. It's forever. And everything that exists will one day vanish. Forever. And it will take with it every explanation of it that was ever contrived."

He's nothing next to the head of the Mexican drug cartel, played by the musician/politician Rubén Blades, whom the counselor later calls in desperation after his girlfriend is kidnapped. When this fellow is not making snuff films, it appears he is reading Schopenhauer.

"I have no wish to paint the world in colors more somber than those it wears," says this nonnative English speaker, "but as the world gives way to darkness it becomes more and more difficult to dismiss the understanding that the world is in fact oneself. It is a thing which you have created, no more, no less. And when you cease to be, so will the world. . . . The extinction of all reality is a concept no resignation can encompass."

When the counselor needs to find a

safe place for him and Laura to meet in secret, their conversation follows thus:

SHE: How about Boise?

HE: Boise?

SHE: Boise.

HE: Why Boise?

SHE: What's wrong with Boise?

HE: Have you ever been to Boise?

SHE: No.

No, this is not a skit.

At its core, *The Counselor* is an astonishingly simple ethical pageant. The counselor, for reasons that are never made clear, decides to cross the line into criminality. Everybody advises him not to do so. He does it. And he gets punished.

McCarthy's novels teem with the lurid imaginings of an Old Testament moralist living in a truly fallen world, dominated not by good but by evil. The fable-like nature of his narratives always places them at a slight remove from reality; when his characters talk to each other in an exaggeratedly formal and overly philosophical manner, the reader can make allowances. But in a grubby thriller set in a Texas border town with a diabolical villain played by a slinky Cameron Diaz, it's risible.

What McCarthy doesn't understand is that screenplays aren't really pieces of writing; they're more like stage directions for moving pictures, with dialogue to move the story along and make you care about the characters you're watching. "Screenplays are structure," according to the peerless student-practitioner of the form, William Goldman. *The Counselor* has a structure; the problem is that it's a bad structure, one in which we don't see the action that makes a movie interesting. Instead, we're held captive while a didactic existentialist fills the mouths of his characters with portentous twaddle.

How, you have to wonder, did this thing get made? Well, it was relatively cheap (\$25 million), and the A-list director Ridley Scott was evidently thrilled to be working with a script by one of the country's most distinguished writers. Alas for Scott, *The Counselor* will do nothing to enhance his reputation, and it will likely do quite a lot to damage McCarthy's. Deservedly so. ♦

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

**"As a practical matter, no president can be aware of everything going on in the sprawling government he theoretically manages. But as a matter of politics, Mr. Obama's plea of ignorance may do less to deflect blame than to prompt new questions about just how much in charge he really is."**

**—New York Times, October 29, 2013**

**PARODY**

AY, NOVEMBER 4, 2013

# **PRESIDENT DISCOVERS HEALTH CARE LAW WAS SIGNED BY PRESIDENT**

*'I Read the News Today, Oh Boy'*

By **PETER BAKER**

WASHINGTON — At a White House press conference, President Obama said he was disappointed to learn of the technical glitches plaguing healthcare.gov and of the National Security Agency's apparent monitoring of European allies. Obama then explained he became aware of both situations from media reports.

"Like many hard-working Americans, I found out about the website's problems while scanning this morning's paper," said the commander in chief. "A sports columnist made a joke about the slowness of the site, and this got me wondering, 'What on earth is this guy talking about?'" He added, "I was outraged. How could this happen? Who signed the Affordable Care Act, making it a law that doesn't seem to be all that popular right now? And by reading the paper, I learned it was me."

Regarding the NSA surveillance scandal, the president admitted he didn't know the agency was listening in on the phone calls of German chancellor Angela Merkel until he watched NBC Nightly News. "I had a few minutes to kill before Access Hollywood, and in those few minutes I was saddened to hear what was happening. There was also a passing reference to Syria, so I might look into that as well."

Mr. Obama also said he was concerned about the congressional testimony of the Health and Human Services secretary, Kathleen Sebelius. "Who is she? How



Mike Matus

President Obama gets briefed by reporters.

did she come to such prominence?" wondered the president. "According to Wikipedia, I nominated Ms. Sebelius and the Senate confirmed her. Who knew?" As for the hundreds of thousands of Americans receiving cancellation notices from their insurers, the president expressed his frustration.

"Weren't we told that if we like our insurance, we can keep it? So why is this happening?" he asked reporters. "Seriously, guys, will someone

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## **Liechtenstein Angry It Wasn't Spied On**

*'We Got Secrets, Too, You Know!'*

the weekly  
**Standard**

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