

**OBAMACARE  
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# Standard

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## SILICON CHASM

The class divide  
on America's cutting edge

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN



# Contents

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8

- 2 The Scrapbook *For whom the toll tolls, Harry Reid (D-Hypocrisy), & more*
- 5 Casual *Philip Terzian remembers November 1963*
- 6 Editorials  
*No Deal* **BY WILLIAM KRISTOL**  
*The Party Line* **BY ELLEN BORK**

## Articles

- 8 Obamacare in 2014 **BY MICHAEL WARREN**  
*Republicans will run on it. Democrats will run away from it.*
- 9 The Man and the Myth **BY FRED BARNES**  
*Why prudent politicians embrace the JFK legacy*
- 11 Iran's Chief Negotiator **BY CLAUDIA ROSETT**  
*Surprise, surprise: He has a long record of double-dealing*
- 12 The Other Assassination **BY WILLIAM PIERESON**  
*Saigon, November 1963*
- 14 Where Is It Good to Be a Woman? **BY DAVID ADESNIK**  
*Don't ask the Davos forum*

## Features

- 16 Silicon Chasm **BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN**  
*The class divide on America's cutting edge*
- 25 A Rare Specimen **BY TERRY EASTLAND**  
*Rob Astorino, successful New York Republican*
- 28 The Real Price of Politics **BY JAY COST**  
*Obamacare is not an aberration*

## Books & Arts

- 30 Ms. Private Eye **BY SARA LODGE**  
*Victorian women detectives in life and literature*
- 33 The Cost of Big Aid **BY BARTLE B. BULL**  
*Sometimes the cure is as bad as the disease*
- 34 Doing Harm **BY TEMMA EHRENFELD**  
*The alternatives to medicine can be sickening*
- 36 Captain Bly **BY ELI LEHRER**  
*The skipper of the good ship 'Bestselling Poetry'*
- 37 'Post' Modernist **BY PETER TONGUETTE**  
*The overinterpretation of a great American illustrator*
- 39 Star in Reserve **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**  
*Robert Redford and the power of understatement*
- 40 Parody *I can haz health care?*

**COVER BY THOMAS FLUHARTY**



16



37

# Dear Harvard . . . Sincerely, JFK

The *Washington Post*, like many publications, has been observing the 50th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination in considerable detail. No, make that lurid detail. No day has gone by in recent weeks without extended lists, recycled photographs, old reminiscences, new theories, and the sort of relentless politico-journalistic navel-gazing that has turned the reading public, in the Internet age, against the mainstream media.

But THE SCRAPBOOK gives the *Post* credit for the occasional nugget, and last week that came in the form of a story, by reporter Valerie Strauss, about the Kennedy Library's selective release of JFK's academic records: his prep school transcripts, his College Board scores, and his 1935 application for admission to Harvard. Since Kennedy graduated from Harvard five years later, in 1940, having spent two freshman months at Princeton before withdrawing for unspecified health reasons, THE SCRAPBOOK is assuming that, initially, Harvard rejected him.

Reading the 78-year-old documents today, it is not hard to see why. This is the application of a self-entitled rich man's son with poor grades whose own father (Harvard 1912), in a letter to the dean of freshmen, explains that his boy "has a very brilliant mind for the things in which he

is interested, but is careless and lacks application in those in which he is not interested," and who cannot even be troubled to get the names of his references right. (One of them, his father's New Deal colleague Harry Hopkins, is referred to as "Harold Hopkins.")

And in answer to the classic college-application question—"Why do you wish to come to Harvard?"—here is John F. Kennedy's answer, in full.

The reasons that I have for wishing to go to Harvard are several. I feel that Harvard can give me a better background and a better Liberal education than any other university. I have always wanted to go there, as I have felt that it is not just another college, but is a university with something definite to offer. Then too, I would like to go to the same college as my father. To be a "Harvard man" is an enviable distinction, and one that I would sincerely hope I shall attain.

Now, THE SCRAPBOOK would be the last to say that adults should be judged on their adolescent selves, and history is full of impressive minds with atrocious transcripts (Winston Churchill, F. Scott Fitzgerald). But the ambitious college applicant of today must read this ludicrous essay—especially since Harvard warned Kennedy that "the Committee will expect a careful answer to this question"—with a certain envy: JFK, in addition to being a

mediocre student, seems barely troubled to answer Harvard's questions with care, much less distinction.

Of course, American society and higher education have changed in three-quarters of a century, and today, an applicant like John F. Kennedy would have trouble getting into considerably less exalted institutions than Harvard. On the other hand, Kennedy applied to Harvard in the middle of the Depression, and Harvard was probably happy to admit a student whose father could pay the tuition bills in full. In any case, the gamble paid off. Kennedy was perfectly adequate as an undergraduate, graduated on time, and later, as president, quipped on receiving an honorary degree in New Haven that he now had "the best of both worlds: a Harvard education and a Yale degree."

Still, the details of JFK's academic record, and the flaccid arrogance of his application essay, suggest to us that when journalists and historians write condescendingly, even abusively, about the brainpower of contemporary Republican presidents (Ronald Reagan, the two Bushes, Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, Dwight D. Eisenhower) they should keep JFK's immortal words—"[Harvard] is not just another college, but a university with something definite to offer"—in mind. ♦

## For Whom the Toll Tolls

THE SCRAPBOOK will readily confess to avoiding toll roads when possible. Sure, they are usually convenient, faster than other routes, and less crowded, but paying for the privilege makes the "open road" seem, well, less open. But when we have to, we grudgingly reach in our change tray like everyone else. Well, maybe not everyone else.

In THE SCRAPBOOK's backyard, Virginia resident and toll scofflaw Jason Bourcier was taken to court recently by the state's department of transportation, seeking to recover an astonishing \$202,000. The sum was the outstanding debt owed on \$440 of unpaid tolls on the Dulles airport access road. On the face of it, the sum sounds outrageous, but it's not arbitrary.

If every Dick and Jane knew they could cheat the tollbooths with impunity, then nobody would pay tolls

and the system would cease to work. And Mr. Bourcier, it turned out, had skipped on tolls for three and a half years. Each incident carries, besides the toll itself, a \$25 administrative fee, which makes sense. The cameras aren't going to watch themselves, and the paperwork must be completed by a human. Virginia law also stipulates an escalating penalty scheme to discourage noncompliance: \$50 for the first offense, rising to \$500 per incident for the fourth

and future offenses, provided they occur within three years of the second offense.

Even so, *THE SCRAPBOOK*'s inner anarchist still felt a twinge of sympathy—until we read an interview of the scofflaw in *USA Today*:

After a month, he says he got a bill for \$50 in unpaid tolls, plus \$1,200 in administrative fees. "I went to . . . try to negotiate that [fee] down. They would only come down to \$800. I didn't want to pay \$800."

Ordering an E-ZPass transponder and tying it to a credit card would have been far cheaper. Even more astonishing: Bourcier is a financial adviser, so we were surprised at his logic for continuing to skirt the law:

"I thought I had to push them to the point where they're going to come to some kind of agreement with me to fix this."

Bourcier's lawyer was able to negotiate a settlement. Instead of \$202,000, he has agreed to pay \$96,498. Roughly \$150 a month for the next 54 years.

As more and more communities consider using toll roads in lieu of traditional freeways, *THE SCRAPBOOK* shares this tale as a reminder that when it comes to toll roads, you always have to pay the piper. ♦

## Harry Reid (D-Hypocrisy)

Setting aside the flaming dirigible that is Obamacare, the big news out of Washington heading into the Thanksgiving holiday is that Democrats have finally made good on their threat to eliminate the filibuster for judicial and executive branch appointments. For the last few years, Senate majority leader Harry Reid, with enthusiastic support from the liberal base, had been threatening to strip the minority party in the upper chamber of this important power. Senator John McCain led a valiant and unsuccessful last-ditch effort to preserve the rule and is now worried that the change will "strain relations enormously." He's not wrong about that.

Essentially, the Senate is evolving from a legislative body of traditions and rules to one where the exercise of raw political power reigns.

There are many reasons why the change is problematic. But let's take a moment to examine the extent of the hypocrisy involved in this decision, which even by the standards of Swamp City is exceptional. As a historical matter, it's generally acknowledged that judicial and executive appointments were, with few exceptions, a matter of relative comity until Democrats definitively embraced scorched-earth tactics to torpedo Robert Bork's 1987 Supreme Court appointment and hold up

AND WE ARE MOST  
THANKFUL WE DON'T  
HAVE OBAMACARE.



Clarence Thomas's appointment.

Things went downhill from there until 2005, when Republicans were so fed up with the Senate minority's holding up George W. Bush's appointments that the GOP actually proposed ending the filibuster. Reid, who was then the Senate minority leader, called the attempt to eliminate the filibuster at that time "un-American" and "illegal." His office issued at least seven press releases decrying the move.

Of course, the GOP never followed through with their threat to eliminate the filibuster. Democrats seized control of the Senate in the 2006 election, at which point Reid only

ramped up obstructionist tactics. He even took the unusual move of holding 30-second “pro-forma” sessions through the Thanksgiving holiday in 2007 to prevent the president from making recess appointments. At that point, the Democrat-controlled Senate hadn’t moved on approving a backlog of some 190 Bush nominees. In 2009, Reid actually wrote in his autobiography, “A filibuster is the minority’s way of not allowing the majority to shut off debate, and without robust debate, the Senate is crippled.” If the Senate has now been crippled, Reid has only himself to blame.

Despite all of this, we’re supposed to believe that Republican filibustering in recent years is somehow unprecedented and that Republicans alone are abusing Senate rules and procedures.

The real motivation for this filibuster maneuvering seems to be one of simple timing. Democrats are currently desperate for anything that will move the conversation away from Obamacare’s spectacular failures. Enabling Obama’s attempts at packing the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, which is responsible for ruling on federal regulation, is an added bonus.

While Republicans aren’t happy about the move, so far they haven’t taken the Democrats’ bait. Reid was likely hoping angry Republicans would drag the press corps into covering an arcane intraparty spat about congressional rules with little immediate relevance outside the Beltway. This would be a needed respite for Democrats who don’t want to talk about Obamacare. But so far, the GOP has—for once—displayed impressive message discipline.

“[Reid] may just as well have said, ‘If you like the rules of the Senate, you can keep them,’” Republican leader Mitch McConnell remarked. “Just the way so many Democrats in the administration and Congress now believe that Obamacare is good enough for their constituents, but then when it comes to them, their political allies, their staff, well, of course, that’s different.” ♦

## We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Markets

Last week one of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac’s major shareholders proposed dismantling the government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs) and replacing them with two new private-sector entities that would offer the same services, namely buying and guaranteeing home mortgages. Perhaps more interesting than the plan itself was the knee-jerk, statist reaction from the Obama administration, which suggests that we’re likely stuck with the status quo for a while longer.

The Treasury Department assumed a 79.9 percent stake in Fannie and Freddie when it placed the two under conservatorship in 2008, leaving stockholders with the remaining 20.1 percent. It also gave itself a 10 percent dividend on the \$188 billion it invested in the entities to prop them up, to ensure it recouped the government’s money that went into the bailout.

Last year President Obama and his henchmen unilaterally altered the terms of its ownership to lay claim to every dime of profit generated by the GSEs above and beyond its dividend. Their justification for abrogating the previous arrangement? Essentially, that private shareholders are rich plutocrats who deserve nothing, whereas the administration is looking out for the people. Never mind that for years before the financial crisis, regulators steered community banks to invest in Fannie and Freddie to keep their balance sheets strong, let alone the quaint notion of the rule of law.

One Treasury official scoffed at the very idea that the housing market could exist without the federal government. The need for affordable mortgages is too important, he opined, to be settled by profit-seeking firms.

The administration’s reflexive response to privatizing a market that the government made an utter hash of . . . is to assert the importance of government intervention. While this may not qualify as newsworthy, it’s surely worthy of mockery, and makes us wonder what else the current regime has in store for us. ♦

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## Now, Where Was I?

Everyone of a certain age, it is said, remembers the moment when they heard that John F. Kennedy had been shot. Yet even though I was 13 years old at the time, and recall quite a lot from 1963, I do not remember this, though for a technical reason.

I was a beleaguered freshman at the Sidwell Friends School in Washington, sitting in French class. A classmate who had been excused to go to the bathroom returned with a quizzical expression on her face to announce (in a strained voice, as I recall) that she had heard a radio in the hall, and that “Mrs. Kennedy has been shot.”

Undoubtedly, at some point soon thereafter, that misinformation was corrected; but I have no recollection of it. I do remember, however, that our teacher—a testy gargoyle with slicked-back hair—peremptorily insisted that French class continue. And sometime later in the afternoon, when the freshman class was assembled together in one room, a delightfully pompous science teacher announced, “I regret to inform you that the president of the United States is dead”—which, by that time, we all knew.

Fifty years is a long time in anybody’s life, and the anniversary of Kennedy’s assassination reminds me that 1963 means to us now what 1913 meant to me on that day—a mysterious moment fixed in the distant past. I remember that, over the weekend, local television stations sent reporters off to nursing homes to interview people who recalled the last presidential murder—of William McKinley, in 1901. That event, at the time, seemed immeasurably antique; but McKinley had been shot in Buffalo 62 years earlier—or in 1951, from our present perspective, just within my lifetime.

Nowadays, when catastrophe

occurs, people swiftly resort to their smartphones and instantly learn everything anyone needs to know, and much else besides. This was not the case a half-century ago, needless to say. I do remember some slight adolescent embarrassment at the sight of one prominent senator’s daughter weeping as she crossed the campus. I also recall hanging around school



after hours to discuss what little we knew, aided by nothing more than speculation and rumor. And seeing a box on the street with an Extra edition of the old *Evening Star* bearing the news.

My homeward trek, in those days, was a slow, infinitely laborious journey by city bus, with one change, out to the National Naval Medical Center (now the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center) in Bethesda, Maryland, followed by a mile-and-a-half hike, over two steep hills, to my home in neighboring Kensington.

By the time I left Sidwell, it was starting to get dark, and the bus’s harsh interior light illuminated a handful of subdued passengers. I recall no conversation—and of course, there were no cell phones, or iPods, or even transistor radios, in

use. Changing buses at the station in Chevy Chase, I recall seeing one driver I recognized, standing on the sidewalk sadly shaking his head, and noted that the customarily aggressive salesman for *Muhammad Speaks*, the Black Muslim newspaper, were not to be seen. Had they sold out, or were they lying low?

As it happens, the death of the president caused a personal inconvenience unimaginable today. As the bus approached the naval hospital in Bethesda, I could see that the familiar art deco skyscraper was surrounded by dozens of vehicles, streets and sidewalks were closed, and flashing lights lined the roadway to the hospital entrance. We were informed that Kennedy’s body, not yet arrived from Dallas, was expected for autopsy, and the bus was forbidden to drive onto the grounds. The driver opened the door, and out I went.

To where? So far as I could tell, the usual path home was effectively blocked, and to circumnavigate the hospital grounds on foot, and approach my destination from the other direction, was a very long detour. I decided I should try to call home and see if my father, who was seldom inclined to offer taxi service, could retrieve me somewhere in Bethesda.

But there were no nearby businesses with pay phones, I was much too shy to approach a residence—and I remember realizing that I might have had a dollar in my wallet, but no dime for a telephone call. This was not a trivial matter in the prehistoric era before cell phones and credit cards.

In fact, I cannot recall precisely how the problem was solved, although I do remember entering the first restaurant I reached, and must have managed a “collect” call. To my surprise, my father was not visibly annoyed when he came for me. Or perhaps he was distressed by the day’s events, which might explain the silence as we drove home in the dark.

PHILIP TERZIAN

# No Deal

As we go to press, the Obama administration seems to be hurtling towards a bad deal with Iran. The administration will claim the agreement freezes and indeed sets back the Iranian nuclear program. But even the *New York Times* acknowledges that “only some elements are frozen, and rollbacks in the initial agreement are relatively minor” and can be easily reversed. Furthermore, the “deal” would mean the United States would retreat from its previous clear red line—one embodied in repeated U.N. Security Council resolutions—of requiring that Iran stop enrichment. It would allow Iran to move ever closer to nuclear weapons while getting significant sanctions relief. Some deal! In truth, it’s not a deal in the usual meaning of the term. It’s an accommodation. It’s a way for the Obama administration to avoid confronting Iran, and to buy time to acclimate the world to accepting a nuclear Iran.

What will the Obama administration’s leading lights say when this becomes obvious? When he sees his grand diplomatic achievement crumbling around him, will Secretary of State John Kerry join his counterpart, Health and Human Services secretary Kathleen Sebelius, in sighing and exclaiming with pithy eloquence, “Uh-oh”? Will President Barack Obama offer the same apology to the Israelis that he has to Americans who held insurance policies they liked: “I am sorry that they are finding themselves in this situation based on assurances they got from me”? As the implementation of the Iran agreement goes the way of the implementation of Obamacare, will his reaction be to say, “We’re going to have to, obviously, re-market and re-brand”?

The president and his colleagues will presumably say these sorts of things. But of course it will be too late. Congress can legislate to try to make up for the failure of Obama’s assurances about health insurance, and to try to help Americans get their old policies back. But Congress won’t be able to legislate to undo a nuclear Iran. The American people can ignore Obama’s efforts to re-market and re-brand Obamacare, and instead insist on its repeal. But the American people won’t be able to repeal Iran’s nuclear weapons once Iran has them.

That’s why serious people, in Congress and outside, will do their utmost to expose and scuttle Obama’s bad Iran deal. They can expect to be smeared by the Obama administration

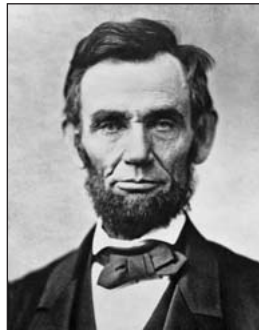
as reckless warmongers and slandered by Obama’s media epigones as tools of the Israel lobby. One trusts at least some members of Congress and some political leaders are made of stern enough stuff to resist the attempted intimidation.

But one can’t be optimistic about their chances for success in scuttling the deal. And one can’t be optimistic that the Obama administration will reverse course at the eleventh hour. Which means the last, best hope for stopping the Iranian regime from having nuclear weapons may well lie in a *deus ex machina* (if one may be permitted to use a pagan phrase for a Jewish state). It is Israel, not the great American superpower, that may well have to act to thwart Iran’s nuclear ambitions. And so the democratically elected leader of Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will have to weigh his choices, with the burden of history on his mind and the judgment of future generations in his thoughts.

Last week was the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Many commentators mentioned the irony of Lincoln’s saying that his brief remarks would soon be forgotten. There was indeed irony, an intended irony, in the statement. But Lincoln’s tribute to those who fought, and his elevation of their deeds above his speech, isn’t ironic:

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be here dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

Lincoln’s speech at Gettysburg will be studied as long as people care about the American experiment in self-government, or about political greatness. But Lincoln knew as well as anyone that speech has to be supported by deeds. It was the soldiers’ hard-won victory in the battle of Gettysburg that was the precondition for Lincoln’s remarks, and for America’s “new birth of freedom.” So Lincoln was telling the plain but deep truth when he emphasized, and gave priority to, “what they did here.” In politics, deeds matter. Speech, even the most eloquent and thoughtful speech, is not enough.



Benjamin Netanyahu understands this. Jewish history, and not just Jewish history, teaches this lesson. Netanyahu may well judge that he has to act to stop the Iranian regime from getting nuclear weapons. If he does, then Israel will fight. And Israel will be right.

—William Kristol

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# The Party Line

China's Communist party leadership concluded an important agenda-setting meeting in Beijing on November 12. At this point much remains unclear about the decisions made at the Third Plenum of the 18th Communist Party Central Committee conclave, including changes to the One China policy, market reforms, and the abolition of the practice of Reeducation Through Labor. Independent media have no access to the proceedings, and even analysts able to read official party documents weren't completely sure of what they meant. "Native Chinese language speakers like us with years of intensive training in Chinese . . . found it very difficult" to say whether the party's statement on market reforms represented a meaningful change, a top Chinese executive of Bank of America Merrill Lynch wrote in an internal note, *Business Insider* reported.

The actions taken by senior Communist leaders at the party conclave should be viewed skeptically in light of Communist party general secretary Xi Jinping's consolidation of power, and with the understanding that Chinese leaders are motivated by the desire to maintain control rather than the desire to liberalize. The announcement of the end of the system of Reeducation Through Labor is a good example.

First, and contrary to the impression given by some major international media, China has not abolished prison labor. Reeducation Through Labor (RTL) is separate from the much larger Chinese prison system. RTL is an administrative rather than judicial practice officials use to sentence people for up to four years without a trial. Its targets include petty criminals and drug addicts as well as people considered political threats, such as "petitioners," ordinary citizens who go to Beijing seeking redress from the central government for abuses that their local authorities either ignore or commit. Estimates of the number of inmates incarcerated in RTL facilities range from 160,000 to 190,000. In its Human Rights Country Report on China for 2012, the U.S. State Department cited the official Chinese figure of 1.64 million for the number of inmates in the vast prison system, which also uses forced labor, while acknowledging that the actual number is unknown.

China's Communist leaders have been under pressure from the public to rein in abuses of the RTL system. Stories like that of Tang Hui, a mother sentenced to 18 months

in RTL after alleging official inaction and cover-up of her 11-year-old daughter's rape and forced prostitution, have ignited outrage throughout the country thanks to social media. Responding to popular dissatisfaction by ending RTL does not necessarily signal reform. It is more likely that Chinese leaders are experimenting with ways to defuse unrest while maintaining control.

Furthermore, what the party takes away with one hand, it often puts back with the other. After the party stopped criminalizing "counterrevolution," it began relying on charges of "endangering state security" and "subversion" to prosecute dissidents instead. Liu Xiaobo, the writer and 2010 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, is serving an 11-year jail sentence for "incitement to state subversion." In recent years, says Renee Xia of China Human Rights Defenders, "Chinese authorities have increased the use of other tools, such as criminal detention and black jails, and the CCP wants to replace RTL with 'community correction of unlawful behaviors,' giving a green light to local authorities to punish those under their jurisdiction, including dissidents and whistle-blowers." Turning the matter over to the National People's Congress may also be a dead end. The National People's Congress, like other state institutions, is subordinate to the party. Its failure to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Beijing signed in 1998, reflects not so much parliamentary inaction as the party line.

Another sign of the plenum's real impact is reflected in the announcement that General Secretary Xi is setting up a committee on state security that will give him greater control over not only foreign and defense policy but also internal security matters. While Xi's personal power is bound to increase, there is no indication that his "hands-on" approach is intended to advance the rule of law or political pluralism. An anticorruption campaign he unleashed earlier this year appears designed more to sideline political rivals than to tackle abuses. In fact, over the past several months, leading members of the New Citizens' Movement, which seeks disclosure of officials' assets, among other things, have been targeted for persecution. Such independent anticorruption initiatives were explicitly mentioned in a secret party memorandum, known as "Document Number 9," rallying party cadres against "Western forces hostile to the country and dissidents within the country."

A few months before he was detained by Chinese authorities in late 2008, Liu Xiaobo wrote an essay arguing that the 1980s political reforms for which the Communist party took credit were brought about by pressure "from the bottom up" rather than a desire from China's top leaders to change the system. That vital observation about what has brought about "reform" from China's Communist leaders in the past should be kept in mind while assessing the initiatives announced last week. Misunderstanding developments in an opaque, one-party dictatorship can lead to misplaced hopes for the country's future and blindness to the real force for change.

—Ellen Bork

# Obamacare in 2014

Republicans will run on it.  
Democrats will run away from it.

BY MICHAEL WARREN



**D**ebbie Wasserman Schultz, the Florida congresswoman and chair of the Democratic National Committee, is nothing if not dedicated to the cause. “You’re darn right our candidates are going to run on the advantage that Obamacare will be going into the 2014 election,” she recently told CNN.

But as the news about the president’s health care law goes from bad to worse—a faulty website and low enrollment gave way to higher premiums and a steady stream of cancellation letters—congressional Democrats will likely want to talk about anything but Obamacare on the trail. In fact, it’s a number of Republican challengers who say Obamacare will work to their advantage next November.

One of them is Elise Stefanik, a 29-year-old Republican from upstate New York’s North Country region trying to unseat Democratic congressman Bill Owens. Owens, who won his seat in a 2009 special election, voted for Obamacare in 2010. The district is large and rural, mostly white and

middle- or working-class, traditionally Republican but now split evenly between the parties. Stefanik says nearly 90 percent of questions she receives from voters at town halls these days concern their uncertainty about the status of their health insurance under Obamacare. In St. Lawrence County, one of the most reliably Democratic in the district, people took the microphone one after another to tell their personal stories. “Each one would say, ‘This is what I was paying, this is what I’m paying now,’” Stefanik says.

Polls reflect this growing anxiety over the effects of the law. A new survey from the *Washington Post* and ABC News found 39 percent of registered voters say a candidate’s support of Obamacare would make them more likely to oppose that candidate, while just 23 percent say it would make them more likely to support that candidate.

“Obamacare is unpopular, it’s too expensive, and many Americans will be forced out of their health plans over the next 11 months. It’s ‘bad medicine’ for many voters,” says Republican pollster Neil Newhouse. If the adage is that a rising tide lifts all boats, he adds, the

corollary that sailors aboard a sinking ship are all at risk is also true.

“Right now, that sinking ship is Obamacare,” Newhouse says. “And that has to worry House Democrats.”

If Stefanik’s experience is an indication of the attitude in swing districts across the country, House Democrats on the electoral margins may be running, not walking, away from Obamacare as the 2014 elections approach.

The exodus has already begun. On November 15, the day after Wasserman Schultz predicted her party would win on Obamacare, the House held a vote on Michigan Republican Fred Upton’s bill, which would allow insurers to continue selling plans they currently offer through next year. President Obama threatened to veto the Upton bill if it came to his desk, since the proposal would have gutted a critical element of the law. Bill Owens and 38 other House Democrats voted for it anyway.

Bobby Schilling of Rock Island, Illinois, has seen all this before. In 2010, he defeated a sitting Democratic congressman, as many Republicans did that year, by running against the passage of Obamacare. Schilling lost two years later to Democrat Cheri Bustos in

Michael Warren is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

GARY LOCKE

a redrawn district that put the Republican at a significant disadvantage. But next year, he's running for his old seat, and once again, the health care law is at the center of his pitch.

"This is going to be the number one issue in the campaign," says Schilling.

When he first ran, Schilling says, voters were angry at Democrats because of the way the bill passed the House: the backroom dealing, arm-twisting, and special favors. But now, the consequences of the law are starting to hit home. "Because people are seeing it come to their mailbox, it's become real," he says. One voter told Schilling his \$435 premium is shooting up to nearly \$1,400 next year, while his deductible will go from \$10,000 to \$12,000. No wonder Bustos, who wasn't in the House to vote for Obamacare in 2010 but has supported it since her 2012 campaign, was among those who voted for the Upton bill.

"She's a little too late," says Schilling.

"There's a lot of uncertainty," says Evan Jenkins of Cabell County in West Virginia. The Democrat-turned-Republican is running to beat longtime congressman Nick Rahall, the lone remaining Democrat in West Virginia's House delegation. Rahall voted for Obamacare, but capturing the district has eluded Republicans in recent years. His vote for the Upton bill signals that Rahall sees trouble on the horizon.

Jenkins calls Obamacare a "red-hot issue" for the older, rural population of West Virginia, and he anticipates that more sticker shock and a decrease in access to care will only make voters angrier at Democrats supporting the law. "The next wave is going to be significant," says Jenkins.

Rahall has, for the most part, continued to embrace the law he helped pass, saying in a recent radio interview that those who have received insurance cancellation letters may find it's "in their best interest in the long term." But his opponent says Rahall's vote to allow Americans to keep their current plans shouldn't fool anyone.

"The public recognizes when someone is trying to blur their record," Jenkins says.

Nowhere are the consequences of Obamacare being felt more than in California, where the new state insurance exchange has not had the technical difficulties faced by the federal website. Covered California, the state exchange, boasted 31,000 enrollees in the month of October, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. But the *Times* also reported that one million Californians will lose their existing health insurance coverage next year. So while Obamacare is "working" in the Golden State, not all California Democrats are celebrating it. Seven voted for the Upton bill, including four who ran behind President Obama in their districts in 2012.

One of those Democrats is John Garamendi from Walnut Grove near Sacramento. Garamendi's Republican opponent, assemblyman Dan Logue, says making an issue of Obamacare is a "cornerstone" of his campaign.

"This has been a big issue to voters here," Logue says. "They're absolutely stunned that it's been this bad."

"I think people are frustrated," says

Carl DeMaio, another Republican in California, who is challenging San Diego-area Democrat (and Upton bill supporter) Scott Peters by running against Obamacare. "They just want to see the problem solved."

With the 2014 midterms a little less than a year away, can public discontent over Obamacare carry Republicans in these swing districts? Schilling predicts that with companies making decisions a few months before the employer mandate takes effect January 1, 2015, Democrats will be dealing with an even bigger mess as more people lose their health insurance on the eve of the election. "There's no way around this," he says. Stefanik, meanwhile, believes the real issue with Obamacare is the "lack of trust" among voters toward the Democrats who sold the law under false pretenses.

The game changer, Logue asserts, is that Democrats finally will have to answer to real, live human beings who have been negatively affected by their signature law. He says, "We have the sob stories now." ♦

## The Man and the Myth

Why prudent politicians embrace the JFK legacy.

BY FRED BARNES

**T**he legacy of President John F. Kennedy is a wondrous thing. Any president compared with Kennedy comes up short, even if his actual accomplishments were greater than JFK's. Presidents in the modern era can never measure up to JFK in the public's mind, period. Today, 50 years after JFK's death, it's still unwise to tangle with the Kennedy clan. The Kennedys usually win. Kennedy's legacy also means that

referring to him as anything but a liberal is sure to provoke an argument.

Kennedy spent only 1,036 days in the White House, yet a Gallup poll in early November found he has the highest rating of any president from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Barack Obama. Seventy-four percent said JFK would go down in history as an outstanding or above average president. Ronald Reagan came in second (61 percent), followed by Bill Clinton (55) and Eisenhower (49). Far behind was Lyndon Johnson (20), who not only pushed JFK's leftover agenda through

*Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

Congress but also enacted his own historic package of Great Society bills.

“No flesh-and-blood politician can compete with the larger-than-life monument that is John Kennedy,” writes politics professor Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia in his book *The Kennedy Half-Century: The Presidency, Assassination, and Lasting Legacy of John F. Kennedy*. “For Democrats, he was long ago elevated to Mount Rushmore. For Democratic and Republican presidents, Kennedy has presented a different challenge. They cannot vie with an apparition.”

That’s not all. “Presidents are boxed in today in ways Kennedy was not,” Sabato said in an interview. “It



Bobby, Ted, and Jack

isn’t just much tougher press coverage of an officeholder’s private life. In JFK’s time, presidents were placed on a pedestal. We never do that anymore. Maybe we’ve learned too much about their foibles and mistakes . . . the magisterial cloak has been stripped from them. Also, partisan polarization makes it difficult for a president to win the support of the other party’s voters for very long.”

Kennedy has still another advantage. “In part because of [his] assassination, Americans are not inclined to focus on his shortcomings,” according to Sabato. “The public’s tolerant view of Kennedy’s extramarital affairs while president is noteworthy.” Indeed it is. In a survey conducted for Sabato’s book, many respondents made a distinction between JFK the president and JFK the man to explain why his womanizing hadn’t affected their lofty view of him as president.

For subsequent presidents, getting along with the Kennedy family

and political clique is fairly simple but requires discipline. Those who refer favorably to JFK in speeches, quote him often, and embrace his widow, children, and relatives—they fare quite well. Presidents who don’t, especially those who get in squabbles with the Kennedy tribe, suffer.

Reagan and Clinton kept the Kennedys close to them. “Reagan enthusiastically sought to forge a legacy partnership, using selective policies and a warm bond with President Kennedy’s surviving family,” Sabato writes. “Never in modern times . . . has a president of one party utilized the words and policies of a president of the other party so much as Reagan did with Kennedy.” It made the policies linked to JFK harder for Democrats to attack.

Clinton idolized Kennedy, having met him as a 16-year-old visitor to the JFK White House. He “stayed close to Ted Kennedy and the Kennedy family throughout his presidency,” Sabato writes. He copied Kennedy, and his “mainly popular two-term presidency is a measure of his success in capitalizing on JFK’s style and rhetoric.”

President Jimmy Carter clashed with Senator Ted Kennedy and paid a price for it. Kennedy challenged Carter for the Democratic nomination in 1980. “Ted Kennedy was a pain in my ass the last two years I was in office—the worst problem I had [during] the last two years,” Carter told Sabato.

Was Ted Kennedy a legitimate surrogate for his brother? Sabato believes he was. “In the general population Ted was seen as having inherited JFK’s and [brother] Bobby’s mantle,” Sabato told me. “Ted was clearly much more liberal than Jack, and back in the 1970s and ’80s, when Ted had hoped to win the White House, a left-wing ideological profile didn’t fit the times.”

In his book, Sabato makes a strong case for JFK as a pragmatist, “partly left and partly right.” Liberalism “had little to do with John Kennedy’s motives. The long view of JFK’s career reveals that he was eager to define himself as more anticommunist, pro-defense, anticrime, pro-business, and cautious on civil rights than many of his contemporaries in both

parties. John Kennedy was no leftist.”

And that is part of his appeal. “Unlike many former presidents, and almost all current top politicians, Kennedy is not seen as a particularly partisan or ideological figure; he has transcended the liberal label applied to most Democrats,” Sabato insists, “not least because his policies were defined by the Cold War and conservative economics.”

Some liberals reject this view of JFK. David Greenberg, a professor at Rutgers University, says Kennedy’s enduring appeal can’t be explained solely by the “Camelot mystique or Kennedy’s premature death.” Rather, he says, “Kennedy’s hold on us stems also from the way he used the presidency, his commitment to exercising his power to address social needs, his belief that government could harness expert knowledge to solve problems—in short, from his liberalism.”

Greenberg, by the way, reviewed Sabato’s book unfavorably in the *Washington Post*, prompting Sabato to complain in a letter the *Post* published. Objecting to a review may be bad form, but *The Kennedy Half-Century* deserved better. I’ve read few of the current crop of Kennedy books, but I can’t imagine a more scintillating take on JFK and his legacy than Sabato’s.

Why do liberals feel compelled to claim Kennedy as ideological kin? “Because they know John F. Kennedy is a powerful symbol and can be used to sanctify causes across the ideological spectrum,” Sabato said. “Liberals want to reclaim Kennedy as uniquely their own. Maybe they also remember how effectively President Reagan used JFK’s words and deeds to fortify his anti-Evil Empire policies as well as his successful quest for a big across-the-board tax cut.”

Liberals particularly want to deny “another GOP president . . . the chance to seize Kennedy’s banner.”

But at least in Reagan’s case, one high-profile liberal demurred. “I was not one of those ‘irritated Democrats’ when you quoted my father,” John Kennedy Jr. wrote in a note to Reagan in 1985. “I thought it was great! Please quote him all you want!” ♦

# Iran's Chief Negotiator

Surprise, surprise: He has a long record of double-dealing. BY CLAUDIA ROSETT

Along with President Hassan Rouhani, Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is yet another arrow in the quiver of the Islamic Republic's charm offensive. The chief negotiator at Geneva over Iran's nuclear weapons program, Zarif was schooled in the United States, is fluent in English, and exudes a polished manner befitting a veteran diplomat who served from 2002-2007 as U.N. ambassador. During his posting in New York, he met with a number of senior U.S. politicians, including future vice president Joe Biden and future secretary of defense Chuck Hagel (both then senators), and impressed them as someone they could do business with. He's "pragmatic," said Biden, "not dogmatic." The courtship continues. After meeting with Zarif in September, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, told *Time* magazine last month, "He doesn't play games."

U.S. federal court documents say otherwise. While Zarif was beguiling lawmakers, he was violating U.S. sanctions and funneling millions of dollars into Iran's state-owned Bank Melli, designated by the Treasury Department for its role in Iranian nuclear proliferation. Known as the Alavi case, this scheme ranks as the biggest

*Claudia Rosett is journalist-in-residence with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and heads its investigative reporting project.*



650 Fifth Avenue; Mohammad Javad Zarif

money-laundering operation involving U.N. diplomats since Saddam Hussein's oil-for-food program, and Zarif is in the middle of it.

The Alavi case attracted the serious attention of U.S. authorities while Zarif was serving in New York. The Manhattan district attorney's office dug into it, then federal authorities took over. After almost five years of court proceedings, a ruling issued in September in the United States District Court for the southern district of New York paved the way for what U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara described

as "the largest-ever terrorism-related forfeiture," including a 36-story office tower in midtown Manhattan, at 650 Fifth Avenue. Referred to in court documents as "the Building," the skyscraper was constructed in the 1970s by the shah of Iran's Pahlavi Foundation and financed by Bank Melli. Follow-

ing the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the new government in Tehran took control of the building and the bank, hiding its role behind a nest of front corporations.

The public face of the operation was a Manhattan-based tax-exempt foundation now known

as the Alavi Foundation. Officially dedicated to spreading Persian culture and Islamic teachings, Alavi collected millions annually in office rents from the building, and doled out money across the United States and Canada. Funds were distributed to Islamic community centers and Farsi-language schools; grants were given to universities, including Harvard and McGill, and interest-free loans to deserving students. However, investigators also discovered "money going overseas to suspect people," as former Manhattan district attorney Robert Morgenthau testified in 2009 at a Senate hearing chaired by

then-senator, now secretary of state, John Kerry.

The Alavi Foundation claims no wrongdoing, and is filing to appeal the forfeiture of 650 Fifth Avenue and some related properties. The court alleges that Alavi was managing the building for the Iranian government and transferring funds to Bank Melli. The court also found that the co-owner of the Alavi building, the Assa Corporation, "was (and is) a front for Bank Melli, and thus a front for the Government of Iran."

Indeed, Treasury had already

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designated the Assa Corporation a front for Bank Melli in 2008. Treasury's then undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence Stuart Levey described Assa's funneling money to Bank Melli as a "dangerous mix of proliferation and deception." And Bank Melli itself, Treasury's statement read, had been designated for "its role in Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs" and for providing "banking services to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Qods Force"—the IRGC's external operations unit and behind many of Iran's most notorious terrorist operations.

Court documents show that the entire Alavi laundering scheme was run, in accordance with the direct orders of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, by the ambassador at the Iranian mission to the U.N. This arrangement involved four successive U.N. ambassadors, including Zarif. According to documents, Iran's chief negotiator at Geneva went to expensive lengths to hide Alavi's illicit ties when he was at the U.N. In 2004, a New York outfit called the Hanif Partnership filed a lawsuit against Alavi, Assa Corp., and Assa's offshore mother company—another front for Bank Melli—for breach of contract. The principal of the Hanif Partnership was a former president of the Alavi Foundation, Hossein Mahallati, who, according to federal prosecutors, "threatened to reveal in open court what he knew about Assa Corp.'s true ownership." Zarif "told the Foundation to settle the lawsuit for \$4 million."

If Zarif's role in the Alavi saga has so far gone largely unnoticed, it is perhaps because the southern district court, in its press release on the forfeiture, did not mention Zarif by name. Unfortunately, U.S. policymakers, including Congress, have failed to look into the exploits of this pragmatic diplomat during his years on U.S. soil. However, given Zarif's current incarnation as Iran's man at the nuclear bargaining table, perhaps it's time someone in Washington did. ♦

# The Other Assassination

Saigon, November 1963.

BY WILLIAM PIERESON

As Americans pause to mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, they should not overlook the other fateful assassination that took place that same month. On November 2, 1963, South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem was murdered in Saigon in a coup carried out by a group of generals operating with the tacit approval of the U.S. government.

Historians agree that the coup marked a turning point in America's involvement in Vietnam. The coup was the hinge by which U.S. policy swung from nation building to military intervention, from limited support for the Diem regime to a new role of propping up weak military governments, and from an advisory role to a more active one that eventually led to a U.S. takeover of the war.

The importance of the coup as a turning point in Vietnam has provoked a long-running debate about who on the American side was responsible for it and why U.S. leaders thought it was a risk worth taking to topple the established government in that country. Some still view it as a standard Cold War coup undertaken independently by the CIA. Others blame President Kennedy for allowing it to go forward, while still others place the blame on subordinates in Saigon who pressed the military to eliminate Diem without consulting the White House. Like other important events of that era, the assassination of Diem remains shrouded in controversy.

Tapes of White House conversations now available through the

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*William Piereson works as a private consultant in foreign affairs in Washington.*

Kennedy library in Boston and recently released documents from the State Department provide the information needed to answer most of these questions. The assassination and overthrow of Diem was the culmination of a two-year clash within the Kennedy administration between officials who thought the war could be won with conventional tactics (supporters of Diem) and those who advocated a coup as an opening for a new strategy of counterinsurgency. Kennedy followed developments in Saigon until the eleventh hour and chose not to oppose the coup. The episode foreshadowed a strategic debate that would continue within the U.S. government throughout the Vietnam conflict and in some respects continues to this day.

In 1961, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department, led by Roger Hilsman with the support of senior officials George Ball and Averell Harriman, began to issue reports that called Diem's leadership into question. These reports claimed that Diem was too unpopular and autocratic to head a government whose mission was to win the support of the people of South Vietnam. By early 1962, these advisers were pressing for a counterinsurgency strategy in opposition to the conventional strategy supported by the Pentagon.

The conventional strategy focused on blocking infiltration routes and supply lines and protecting key assets, such as major cities, military bases, and transportation routes. The counterinsurgency strategy emphasized intelligence operations to identify Communist infrastructure and the use of American advisers to help the Diem

government win support among the peasants through “strategic hamlets,” a program designed to deliver services to peasants while isolating them from Communist insurgents.

The clash between the two approaches was rooted in different conceptions of the war. The proponents of conventional tactics, including Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and head of the CIA John McCone, saw it as an invasion supported and supplied by North Vietnam. Diem, agreeing with this assessment, wanted to attack North Vietnam while delaying political reform until the war was won. The proponents of counterinsurgency saw the conflict as a domestic insurrection caused by the unpopularity and lack of inclusiveness of the Diem government. The only way to defeat the insurgency, they argued, was to win the “hearts and minds” of the peasants by creating a government they could support. Diem was both ineffective and unpopular—and thus they concluded that he had to go.

Kennedy supported the alliance with Diem because he saw no popular alternative. Vice President Lyndon Johnson, though reluctant to join the debate, was also in this camp. Diem had been something of a hero to the nationalist cause in South Vietnam because of his role in opposing the French and establishing an independent national government. Though corrupt and authoritarian in his methods and a Catholic in a country with a majority Buddhist population, Diem had standing that no other potential leader could claim. For this reason, Kennedy was reluctant to throw him over for an untested alternative.

The situation changed markedly in 1963 with a series of military reverses in the Mekong Delta early in the year and an uprising by Buddhist opponents of the regime beginning in April and May and continuing through the summer months. The military reverses showed the Army of the Republic of Vietnam to be ineffective, even with the aid of U.S. advisers and equipment, while the Buddhist uprising indicated

that support for the Diem government was collapsing. The crisis fed into the political debate within the Kennedy administration and led to a succession of reports about what might happen in the case of resignation, assassination, or a coup against the Diem government. In June, Kennedy appointed Henry Cabot Lodge, his old political adversary from Massachusetts, as the new U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, with instructions to take a tougher line with the Diem regime.

Diem may have sealed his fate by launching a series of brutal raids on Buddhist pagodas on August 21, just before Lodge’s arrival. Those raids



*Diem greeted in Washington by Eisenhower, 1957*

resulted in the arrests of more than 1,400 Buddhist opponents of the regime, with several score more missing or presumed dead. The raids coincided with new reports pointing to a deteriorating military situation.

At this point, the lines were drawn between Hilsman, Ball, and Harriman (with Lodge on the ground in Saigon) urging removal of Diem and McNamara, McCone, and Gen. Maxwell Taylor (chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) doubting the wisdom of a coup and the ability of the generals in Saigon to pull it off. Kennedy, seeking to break the impasse, sent McNamara and Taylor to Saigon. The two men returned with a gloomy assessment of the war and a recommendation to exert pressure on Diem through gradual reductions in U.S. aid. As Lodge began to impose these cuts, word spread in Vietnam that the U.S. support for the

Diem government was being withdrawn. With these steps the United States moved into the final phase of its nine-year partnership with Diem.

Kennedy loyalists over the years have claimed that the president was unaware of plans for a coup and never authorized it. But the documentary sources and tapes of White House conversations show that the president was informed about plans for the coup and participated in discussions and debates with advisers until the last minute. At a White House meeting on October 29, with all key advisers present, Kennedy said, “We have been rather more negative for a coup, but it is clear from [Lodge’s] answers that he is for a coup for what he thinks are very good reasons. He is playing a stronger part there than we are playing here, and I admire his nerve but not his prudence.” Later in that meeting, when discussing last-minute instructions for Lodge, the president said, “Let’s see what we can get [from Lodge]. Let’s put it all on Cabot.” Kennedy seemed willing to let Lodge make the call, which the ambassador was more than willing to do.

On November 1, the South Vietnamese Army moved; Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were shot the next morning after surrendering. Though dismayed by the deaths of Diem and Nhu and no doubt harboring doubts about the wisdom of the coup, Kennedy nevertheless sent a congratulatory cable to Lodge: “Your own leadership in pulling together and directing the whole American operation in South Vietnam in recent months has been of the greatest importance, and you should know that this achievement is recognized here throughout the Government.”

The overthrow of Diem did not work out as planned. The anti-Diem coup was the first of many, as one military faction replaced another. Between 1963 and 1965, there were 12 different military governments in Saigon. If the purpose

was to create a popular government capable of implementing a counterinsurgency strategy, then the coup was a manifest failure.

No one could have foreseen on November 1 that President Kennedy would be assassinated three weeks later and replaced by a vice president who had been outspoken in opposition to the coup. Johnson saw it as the outcome of an undisciplined decision-making process in which junior figures in the administration maneuvered to bring about a change in policy. As president, he moved quickly to centralize in the White House all decisions about the war; the State Department faction was immediately cut out of that process. Johnson placed his trust in senior figures, like McNamara and McCone, who had opposed the coup and viewed the conflict within a conventional framework.

The weakness of successive military governments in South Vietnam was a key factor that led to the introduction of 500,000 U.S. ground troops, and the sustained air campaign against North Vietnam. The United States would go on to wage a conventional war, relying on firepower and ground operations, the interdiction of infiltration routes and supply lines, the attrition of Communist manpower, body counts, air raids against the North, and other measures inherited from campaigns on battlefields in Europe.

It is impossible to know how Kennedy would have handled the deteriorating situation. One point is certain: Diem, had he not been overthrown, would not have permitted a U.S. intervention on the scale it eventually reached by 1967. In that sense, Diem's death may have been a more important factor in the broadening U.S. involvement than Kennedy's.

The advocates of counterinsurgency in the Kennedy administration failed to consider whether the U.S. Army was capable of implementing such a strategy in the conditions that then prevailed. As Andrew Krepinevich Jr. argues in *The Army and Vietnam*, conventional modes of military strategy were embedded in Army operations by virtue of the types of wars the United

States had waged previously. The U.S. Army fought a conventional war in Vietnam because it was the kind of war it knew how to fight. The advocates of the coup were wrong to think that toppling Diem was the key to implementing a counterinsurgency strategy.

The overthrow of Diem was a prelude to America's large-scale intervention in Vietnam. The episode was a primer containing lessons that U.S. policymakers would relearn

in the decades to follow: that toppling governments in the developing world breeds instability, revolution, and civil war; that it is difficult to promote democratic reform using the carrots and sticks of U.S. aid; and that counterinsurgency, even if it could be capably implemented, is not a sure recipe for military success. After five decades, the "other assassination" in 1963 still contains lessons well worth remembering. ♦

## Where Is It Good to Be a Woman?

Don't ask the Davos forum.

BY DAVID ADESNIK

For just a moment, let's pretend the GOP really were waging a "war on women." Where would you go to find less inequality and chauvinism? According to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, three of the best options for women seeking greater equality are Cuba, Nicaragua, and Burundi.

Best known for its annual meeting, where the wealthy hobnob with the famous and the powerful, the forum is also a think tank of sorts, publishing reports on a wide range of subjects ranging from intellectual property to foreign investment and "entrepreneurial ecosystems."

Since 2006, the Davos forum has also published an annual report on the "Global Gender Gap," which now ranks 136 countries on how close they have come to achieving true equality between the sexes. The rankings are based on 14 types of data, collected from official sources such as the World Health Organization, the International Labor Organization,

and even the CIA World Factbook. The authors include Laura D'Andrea Tyson, former chair of President Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers, and Ricardo Hausmann, director of the Center for International Development at Harvard.

The question is, with such a wealth of data and intellectual prowess at their disposal, how did the authors arrive at the conclusion that the United States ranks 23rd in terms of closing the gender gap, whereas Nicaragua is 10th, Cuba 15th, and Burundi just edges us out, coming in 22nd? I contacted both Tyson and Hausmann to inquire about the study's counterintuitive results. Both of them referred me to Saadia Zahidi, a senior director at the Forum as well as coauthor of the gender gap report. Zahidi committed to providing additional information, although none has yet arrived. Thus, I had to figure out for myself why advanced statistical analysis might indicate that the women of Cuba, Nicaragua and Burundi face less discrimination than those in the United States.

The short answer is that the forum employed an indefensible

*David Adesnik is a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute's Ware Center for Security Studies.*

methodology, although its shortcomings have eluded almost every journalist who has reported on the results. In the *New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof labeled the report “embarrassing.” *Forbes* called it “alarming.” *USA Today* duly reported that we have fallen behind South Africa, Cuba, and the Philippines. The *Huffington Post* ran several columns on the report, one of which praised the authors’ credibility and blamed “deeply rooted gender stereotypes” for America’s low ranking.

As it turns out, the greatest source of distortion in the index is the inordinate weight given to the number of women in legislatures and cabinets as an indicator of “political empowerment.” This weighting is peculiar, especially given that there is no differentiation between democracies such as Canada (ranked 20th) and dictatorships such as Cuba, where one man decides how many women will serve in the National Assembly of People’s Power. As it turns out, 49 percent of deputies in the assembly are women, as well as 23 percent of Cuba’s ministers. If not for Raul Castro’s personal interest in the appearance of equality, Cuba’s overall ranking would likely be in the mid-60s, where it ranks in terms of economic opportunities for women. In Nicaragua, which has become progressively less free under President Daniel Ortega (formerly its unelected dictator), the ruling Sandinista party has also made a point of ensuring that women are well represented in the National Assembly and the cabinet. Discounting this fact, Nicaragua’s overall ranking would likely be closer to 91st, where it ranks in terms of economic opportunity for women. By contrast, the United States ranks 6th in terms of economic opportunity, outpacing every wealthy country except Norway.

In contrast to Cuba and Nicaragua, Burundi would improve its ranking if politics were taken out of the equation, but this just highlights yet another way in which the ranking system is a farce. Impressively, Burundi ranks 3rd overall in economic opportunity for women. Also in the top 10 are Malawi (4th) and Laos (8th). As the report observes in its text, there are a substantial number of very poor countries where women have little access to education but often take on low-skill jobs to make ends meet. Since a country’s economic opportunity score

positions and the percentage of technical and professional workers who are female. Instead of assuming that Burundi scored at the median in these two categories—already a generous assumption—the report does Burundi the tremendous favor of simply adding weight to the indicators where data exist, such as the gender ratio of the labor force and the opinion of executives.

Only thanks to such methodological legerdemain is it possible to conjure the conclusion that Burundi provides more economic equality to women than 133 of 136 countries accounted for. Malawi, Laos, Mozambique, and Ghana should be equally grateful to the report’s authors, because the same combination of misleading indicators, absent data, and favorable assumptions propelled them far higher in the rankings than they deserved.

For a very different perspective on gender inequality, an invaluable source is the series of annual *Freedom in the World* reports by Freedom House. Regarding Nicaragua, it says, “Violence against women and children, including sexual and domestic abuse, remains widespread and underreported; few cases are ever prosecuted. Additionally, the murder rate among females increased significantly in recent years. . . . Nicaragua is a source country for women and children trafficked for prostitution.” As for Burundi, “Women have limited opportunities for advancement in the economic and political spheres, especially in rural areas. Burundi continues to have a serious problem with sexual and domestic violence, and these crimes are rarely reported.” These few sentences demonstrate that the facts on the ground have a lot more to say about inequality than the most impressive collection of statistics and algorithms. ♦



*Cuban widow at home: At least she isn't suffering in the United States.*

rests in part on the gender ratio in the labor force, the surfeit of low-skilled female labor creates the impression of equality. Burundi’s opportunity score also benefits from a survey of 110 Burundian executives by the forum, who were asked, “In your country, for similar work, to what extent are wages for women equal to those of men?” These executives—there is no indication of how many were women—gave their country a generous score. Executives from Oman, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Uganda, and Zambia gave themselves even higher scores. Executives from Iceland, Denmark, Belgium, and the United States evaluated their own egalitarianism less generously.

Burundi also benefited from the absence of data for two of the five factors that contribute to a country’s economic opportunity score: the percentage of women in leadership

positions and the percentage of technical and professional workers who are female. Instead of assuming that Burundi scored at the median in these two categories—already a generous assumption—the report does Burundi the tremendous favor of simply adding weight to the indicators where data exist, such as the gender ratio of the labor force and the opinion of executives.

# Silicon Chasm

*The class divide on America's cutting edge*

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

*Atherton, Calif.*

“If you live here, you’ve made it,” David Berkey said to me as I rode shotgun in his car two months ago through the Silicon Valley’s wealth belt. The massive house toward which he was pointing belongs to Sergey Brin, cofounder of Google. With a net worth of \$24 billion, Brin is Silicon Valley’s third-richest denizen and the fourteenth-richest man in America, according to *Forbes*. Berkey was chauffeuring me down Atherton Avenue, a wide, straight, completely tree-lined boulevard nicely bifurcating the city of Atherton (population 7,200), located 29 miles south of San Francisco, boasting no commercial real estate, and with a zip code (94027) that was recently listed by *Forbes* as America’s most expensive.

You couldn’t really see Brin’s house from the car, though—just a swatch of rooftop, maybe a chimney—because the point of the trees lining Atherton Avenue and nearly every other street in Atherton is to hide the dwellings behind them. Where the screens of trees happen to thin, property owners have constructed high hedges, high wooden fences, and high brick walls, so that when you look down Atherton Avenue from the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west toward the commuter railroad station to the east, you see only the *allée* of trees—pine, palms, eucalyptus, sycamore, and juniper—shades of gray-green and brown-green shimmering placidly in the early autumn sun. “This is the Champs-Élysées of Atherton,” Berkey explained. The other thing we didn’t see from Berkey’s car is people, except for the occasional driver on the road.

*Charlotte Allen, a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, last wrote on surrogate mothers. She is a graduate of Stanford.*

Turning corners, we drove past other fancy and half-hidden real estate owned by other Silicon Valley grantees; Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook, and her husband David Goldberg, the CEO of SurveyMonkey, have a 7,200-square-foot house somewhere in the hedge maze. Before there was such a thing as Silicon Valley—that is to say, 40 years ago—Atherton was an affluent bedroom town for white-shoe law-firm partners and Old Economy executives who liked to ride the Southern Pacific Peninsula to their jobs in San Francisco, imitating their East Coast counterparts who rolled on the Hartford-New Haven line from

the Southern Connecticut Gold Coast into Manhattan. That was before today’s hiding-the-house custom, and the executives’ front lawns surged out like green carpets to Atherton Avenue and its side streets. Now, Atherton is mostly teardowns and brand new mega-mansions—or at least as mega as their owners can get away with, given Atherton’s highly restrictive zoning laws that mandate enormous lot-to-footprint ratios. To increase their



*Humble dwelling in Atherton*

overall square footage, Atherton’s new breed of homeowners typically tunnel out vast underground extra space—wine cellars and home theaters—beneath their dwellings. The dominant style these days is a fanciful mix of Palladian Neoclassic, Loire Valley château, and Mediterranean villa, spreading out manor-house-style to cover as much ground as the zoning laws allow.

“This was a vacant lot five years ago,” said Berkey as we cruised by one of the spanking new stone-faced Atherton domiciles with its multiple dormers, chimneys, tile-roofed turrets, and columned porticos. “Now it’s worth \$5 or \$6 million. And this house here—it recently sold for \$7 million, \$4.4 million more than the asking price.” We passed the Menlo School, tuition \$38,000 a year, where the parents pick up their kids in Range Rovers and fly them in private

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jets to exotic foreign locations for birthday parties. Down the road lay the Sacred Heart School, the Menlo School's Catholic opposite number, where the tuition is only \$34,000 a year. Their feeder is Atherton's Las Lomas School, rated among the top elementary schools in the state of California.

Las Lomas is technically a public school, although its main support comes from a lavish parent-funded foundation that last year alone raised \$2.8 million. "It's going for \$3 million this year," Berkey said. "For the parents, it's an attractive tax write-off. We can do good and feel good at the same time, because it benefits our own children." Also not to be missed was the Menlo Circus Club (initiation fee: \$250,000), featuring daily tennis, Friday polo matches, and state-of-the-art stables for horse people who can't afford or don't want to be bothered with the ranch-size spreads of owners who stable their own horses, farther up into the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Berkey himself doesn't live in Atherton. He can't afford to. He's a research fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution, and his wife, Eleanor Lacey, is general counsel at SurveyMonkey, which occupies Facebook's old startup quarters in downtown Palo Alto. That makes them part of what is known as the "middle class" of Silicon Valley: two-career couples with family incomes in the low-to-mid six-figure-range. They and their two daughters live in neighboring Menlo Park, in what is essentially a modest 1950s tract house, the kind of flat-roofed, three-bedroom, two-bath, sliding-glass-patio-door, under-2,000-square-foot residences, pleasant but not pretentious, that were built en masse well into the 1970s as cheap starter homes, because back then it was conceivable that there could be such a thing as a cheap starter home in the valley. Berkey says his own house is currently valued at \$1.2 million.

That's par for the course. Open on any random day the *Daily Post*, the throwaway newspaper serving the mid-peninsula, and there will be a full-page ad for a "charming updated contemporary home" in Menlo Park or Palo Alto or Mountain View or Sunnyvale, with its single story, its gravel-topped roof, its living-room picture window, its teensy garden strip running alongside the jutting two-car garage that plugs into the kitchen, its pocket-size but grassy front lawn reminiscent of *The Wonder Years*—and its 1,216 square feet of living space—all "offered at \$949,000." That's a bargain for the valley.

Berkey drove us out of Atherton, across El Camino

Real, the peninsula's main commercial highway, and across the railroad tracks past the tiny Atherton station, now part of California's state-run Caltrain system and a commuter stop only on weekends. We were now in the featureless, nearly treeless, semi-industrial flatlands of Menlo Park stretching eastward to the bay. The demographic change was instant: *iNo se habla inglés!* There were suddenly plenty of people on the sidewalks—and nearly every single one of them was Latino. There were suddenly plenty of commercial establishments—ramshackle, brightly painted, graffiti-adorned storefronts with hand-painted business signs mostly in Spanish: "Comida Nicaraguense," "Restaurante Guatemalteco," "Carnicería" (pork chops and steaks crudely painted on the walls), "Pescadería" (fish and crustaceans crudely painted on the walls), "Panadería," "Check Cashing," "Gonzalez Auto Sales," "Sanchez Jewelry," "Check Cashing," "Arturo's Shoe Repair," "99¢ and Over," "Check Cashing."

Menlo Park is actually only about 20 percent Hispanic and is unabashedly affluent in its own right, but its Hispanic population concentrated next door to the hedgy scrim of Atherton makes for a startling study in contrasts. No one pretends that the gravel-roofed, shack-size houses in this particular neighborhood are "charming" midcentury modern gems. That would be hard to do, what with the weeds, the peeling paint, the chain-link fences, the chained-up guard dogs, and the front lawns

paved over to accommodate multiple vehicles for multiple dwellers. The phrase "the other side of the tracks" has vivid meaning. "Look at the newspaper police blotters, and you'll see that in Atherton the main reported crime is identity theft," said Berkey. "Here, it's break-ins."

You can laud this underbelly *barrio* as vibrant immigrant culture or you can decry it as an instant-slum product of untrammelled illegal border-crossing, but it represents an important fact on the ground: These are the people who earn their livings tending to the needs of the high-tech "creative class" that has made Silicon Valley famous. I could see them on Atherton Avenue, the amanuensis class heading up from Menlo Park in their wee panel trucks and Dodge minivans and their Ford flatbeds fitted out with racks for garden tools among the Bentleys, BMWs, Audis, and Lexuses that are the standard Atherton vehicles. They tend the meticulously clipped lawns, flower beds, hedges,

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**No one pretends that the gravel-roofed, shack-size houses in this particular neighborhood are 'charming' midcentury modern gems. That would be hard to do, what with the peeling paint, the chain-link fences, and the front lawns paved over to accommodate multiple vehicles for multiple dwellers.**

and trees of Atherton (Berkey said that it's not uncommon for an Atherton sentence to begin, "My arborist . . ."). They clean the houses and the swimming pools, they deliver the catering, they watch the children, and they repair the roofs, the plumbing, the balconies, and the wine cellars of the very affluent and the very busy. You might say that across-the-tracks Menlo Park, along with down-market Latino neighborhoods just like it up and down the peninsula—East Palo Alto, parts of Redwood City, the southern end of San Jose—functions as a kind of oversize servants' wing. It's safe to say that almost every hotel maid, restaurant busboy, cashier, janitor, retail stocker, and fast-food worker in the valley is Latino.

Master and servant. Cornucopian wealth for a few tech oligarchs plus relatively steady but relatively low-paying work for their lucky retainers. No middle class, unless the top 5 percent U.S. income bracket counts as middle class. Silicon Valley is a *tableau vivant* of what many economists and professional futurologists say is the coming fate of America itself, a fate to which Americans, if they can't embrace it as some futurologists hope, should at least resign themselves.

While I was driving with Berkey around Atherton, Tyler Cowen, economics professor at George Mason University and author of *The Great Stagnation* (2011), published a new book, *Average Is Over: Powering America Beyond the Age of the Great Stagnation*. There, Cowen bluntly predicted what he called "wage polarization." The increasing ability of computers to perform ordinary tasks will inexorably transform America into an income oligarchy in which the top 15 percent of people—with skills "that are a complement to the computer"—will enjoy "cheery" labor-market prospects and soaring incomes, while the bottom 85 percent, that is to say, 267 million out of America's 315 million people, will be lucky to find Walmart-level jobs or scrape together marginal "freelance" livings running \$25-a-pop errands for their betters via TaskRabbit (say, picking up and delivering a pair of designer shoes from Nordstrom) or renting out their spare bedrooms (if they have any) to overnight lodgers via Airbnb. That is, if they'll be working at all. "There are many other historical periods, including medieval times, where inequality is high, upward mobility is fairly low, and the social order is fairly stable, even if we as moderns find some aspects of that order objectionable," Cowen writes in his new book.

In other words, what is coming is the "new feudalism," a phrase coined by Chapman University urban studies professor Joel Kotkin, a prolific media presence whose *New Geography* website is an outlet for the trend's most vocal critics. "It's a weird *Upstairs, Downstairs* world in which

there's the gentry, and the role for everybody else is to be their servants," Kotkin said in a telephone interview. "The agenda of the gentry is to force the working class to live in apartments for the rest of their lives and be serfs. But there's a weird cognitive dissonance. Everyone who says people ought to be living in apartments actually lives in gigantic houses or has multiple houses."

It's hard to travel anywhere in the valley and not see what Kotkin is talking about. I took a walk on the Stanford campus, which occupies more than 8,000 acres, including a golf course, rustic Santa Cruz Mountain foothills, and an artificial lake, all bordering Atherton-Menlo Park. Stanford's most photogenic structure is its historic Main Quad, a handsome sandstone-colonnaded, red tile-roofed exemplar of early 20th-century California Mission Revival architecture built soon after Stanford opened its doors in 1885. The Main Quad is the Stanford of illusion-based public relations, in place for camera-clicking tourists and prospective students, hordes of whom crowded the quad's palm-decorated courtyard during my visit, and also for sentimental alumni in fundraising material. The real Stanford is a second quad, the 20-year-old and ever-expanding Science and Engineering Quad, whose massive, corporate-headquarters-looking buildings dwarf the original quad in bulk and classroom space. And also in academic significance: Computer science is Stanford's most popular major. Only 15 percent of Stanford undergraduates major in the humanities these days, according to a recent article in the *New York Times*. During the 1950s and 1960s, by contrast, the most popular undergraduate major at Stanford was history.

Beyond the Science and Engineering Quad lies Sand Hill Road, Stanford's northern and western boundary. And on the other side of Sand Hill, strategically sited close to Interstate 280, a pristine and scenic freeway that runs along the foothills to San Francisco, are the offices of the venture capitalists on whose investor money the Silicon Valley's tech-empire has been built. The VC guys, well-known names such as Marc Andreessen of Andreessen Horowitz and John Doerr of Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, controlling about one-third of America's venture funds, their offices conveniently close to their estates in Atherton, Woodside, Portola Valley, and Los Altos, occupy the very apex of the peninsula's socioeconomic pyramid. With a pneumatic money-tube running from the Science and Engineering Quad straight up Sand Hill, it's not surprising that Stanford's computer classrooms have a reputation as Silicon Valley's farm team. It's a reputation that Stanford seems desperate to dispel by hastily constructing a brand-new campus arts center and touting its high-culture amenities.

Across El Camino from Stanford is Palo Alto, a

once-sleepy college town whose poky bookstores and musical-instrument shops along University Avenue long ago gave way to Restoration Hardware, Lululemon, Whole Foods, the Apple Store, Starbucks, and dozens upon dozens of trendy restaurants. (A similar transformation has occurred in Mountain View, a formerly working-class town just below Palo Alto whose main drag, Castro Street, is now a nearly 100 percent foodie destination.) A charming Victorian neighborhood around the corner from downtown Palo Alto, nicknamed Professorville because so many Stanford faculty members lived there at the turn of the 20th century, houses hardly any professors nowadays—few of them can afford to buy a house in the \$2 million range. (Stanford now supplies much of its faculty housing on its own campus.)

The same west-to-east trickle-down demographic prevails up and down the peninsula: tree-shaded property porn for tycoons in the foothills closest to the Pacific Ocean and million-dollar tract houses on modest-size lots in the sprawling valley center.

San Francisco itself, although 30 miles north of the valley, has turned into yet another pricey valley outpost, spawning an entire literature of protest written by earlier generations of San Francisco gentrifiers against the “Google buses,” the white-painted free shuttles that daily cart youthful San Franciscans down the peninsula to the social-media campuses where they work. The price-pressure is exacerbated by the valley’s vise-like physical geography that crowds its residents onto the shoreline of the bay. The Santa Cruz Mountains, gorgeous with their shield of redwoods, Douglas firs, and California live oaks but mostly uninhabitable, occupy the bulk of the peninsula, so that the valley itself, technically speaking, consists only of the heart-shaped plain south of the bay between the Santa Cruz Mountains and their arid opposite number, the Diablo Range, which snakes up the bay’s east side.

In the industrial-zoned flatlands along the bay and along the truck-route Bayshore Freeway that runs alongside it are ethnic poverty pockets, mostly Hispanic and reputedly so crime-infested that few residents of other parts of the peninsula venture away from the through-traffic arteries transporting them to the Bayshore or to the Dumbarton Bridge that connects the peninsula to the East Bay. I

discovered while gassing up my rental car one day that the Chevron station on University Avenue, just off the Bayshore in East Palo Alto and only a couple of miles from the Stanford campus, is a well-known haunt of squeegee artists and wraithlike crack beggars, even though it’s just across the road from an ultra-deluxe Four Seasons hotel.

Also along the Bayshore, strung like amber lumps on a statement necklace, are the high-tech behemoths of Silicon Valley, the biggest and most glamorous employers, and the names everyone knows: Oracle in Redwood City and, moving south, Facebook in Menlo Park; then Stan-

ford the mother ship and, in Palo Alto, Tesla Motors and Hewlett-Packard, the latter founded by Stanford graduates Bill Hewlett and David Packard; and farther south, Google in Mountain View, LinkedIn and Yahoo in Sunnyvale, and Apple in Cupertino just below Sunnyvale. At both ends of this chain are startups: in San Francisco because hipsters like urban-scapes and group houses, and in San Jose because the living there is relatively cheap. But since



*Vans and camping trailers used as homes in East Palo Alto*

three-fourths of startups fail, and the aim of nearly every startup entrepreneur is to be acquired by, say, Google, the “campuses,” as they call themselves, of the tech behemoths along the Bayshore dominate the valley’s economic and social landscape. It is that handful of companies that constitute Silicon Valley’s seemingly permanent tech oligarchy. They have also produced the valley’s celebrity billionaires on the *Forbes* list: Oracle founder Larry Ellison (\$41 billion), Google cofounder Larry Page (\$25 billion), Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg (\$19 billion), Apple founder Steve Jobs’s widow, Laurene (\$12 billion), Tesla founder Elon Musk (\$7 billion).

This was not always so. In the 1970s, the decade during which Silicon Valley got its name (its previous moniker had been the Santa Clara Valley and its chief product stone fruits), the area was an economically wide-open mecca that held out a graspable lure of middle-class prosperity to the middle-class engineers, often hailing from no-name schools, not Stanford, who flocked in to raise their families under the California sun in those then-affordable tract houses. The dominant companies of that era—Hewlett-Packard (Palo Alto), Advanced Micro

JERZY DABROWSKI / PICTURE-ALLIANCE / DPA / AP

Devices (Sunnyvale), Intel (Santa Clara), and later, Apple—were essentially manufacturing companies that built things (hardware and chips), so there were factory jobs for the working class. There was a democratic ethos. “During those 10 or 15 years, all you had to be was in the right place at the right time,” Samuel Abrams, a political science professor at Sarah Lawrence College, told me in a telephone interview. “It was a free-for-all, and the barriers to entry were very low.” Myths of origin, such as Hewlett-Packard starting out in the Palo Alto garage of David Packard, or Google starting out in 1998 in the Menlo Park garage of Google executive Susan Wojcicki, were grounded in reality. During the 1990s most of the manufacturing jobs disappeared, primarily to China, with the lowering of trade barriers, but the software revolution, generating startups all over the valley, kept the economy booming until the dotcom bust of 2000.

Over the past decade, there has been another sea-change. The valley’s economic base has shifted from hardware and software to social media, where the profits come from advertising and the selling of users’ data. The Facebook campus, for example, occupies the former headquarters of the defunct components manufacturer Sun Microsystems, bought out by and merged with Oracle in 2010. Google occupies the former headquarters of the defunct Silicon Graphics, which made high-end computers and displays. The other shift has been to a venture-capital financing regime for startups that is “much more structured,” said Abrams. “There used to be a Wild West atmosphere, but now you’ve got angel investors and big players, and the small players all want to be bought by the big players. But still, if you can code, you can still do very well. People can still create new programs sitting in a coffee shop.”

The Google campus in Mountain View—because it’s the only one of the high-tech campuses where visitors are free to walk around (Facebook and Yahoo are barred by gates and security guards)—has become a required stop on the Silicon Valley tourist circuit. So I explored at noontime, taking in the huffing and puffing on Google-supplied bicycles painted in Google-signature primary colors, the posters for the Google-supplied free Thursday movies, the “Electric Car Lot” (Teslas, Volts, and Leafs), the parking-lot vans that offer everything from free dental checkups to free clothes-cleaning (today, it was a turquoise-blue “Pretty Palace” for female hair-styling), the Google Garden, a largely symbolic display of a handful of corn and tomato plants (who at Google has time to cook the stuff?), the similarly symbolic locavore Google recipe posted on the Google Garden fence (quinoa, scallops, and snow peas—who has time to make that?), and above all, the Google employees, cycling, walking with their baby strollers (Google offers free day care), eating under white outdoor umbrellas their Google-supplied free lunches

catered by at least four different Google cafeterias. The Google male uniform (there aren’t many females in tech): a T-shirt or polo worn outside the pants with a clipped-on Google ID dangling from the hem. It was no country for old men. Males over age 50—make that age 40—who want a Silicon Valley job are advised to shave their heads, pull out their shirttails, and lose the watch (young people tell time exclusively from their iPhones).

Google is visually impressive, but this frenzy of energy and hipness hasn’t generated large numbers of jobs, much less what we think of as middle-class jobs, the kinds of unglamorous but solid employment that generates annual household incomes between \$44,000 and \$155,000. The state of California (according to a 2011 study by the Public Policy Institute of California) could boast in 1980 that some 60 percent of its families were middle-income as measured in today’s dollars, but by 2010 only 48 percent of California families fell into that category, and the income gap between the state’s highest and lowest earners had doubled. In Silicon Valley there has actually been a net job loss in tech-related industries over the past decade. According to figures collected by Joel Kotkin, the dotcom crash wiped out 70,000 jobs in the valley in a little over a single year, and since then the tech industry has added only 30,000 new ones, leaving the bay region with a net 40,000 *fewer* jobs than existed in 2001.

**T**he big names in tech might be awash in capital and might have made their founders billionaires (New Economy founders typically retain large blocks of their own stock), but they employ surprisingly small numbers of U.S. workers. Google, the valley’s largest employer, has 46,000 people on its payroll. Facebook employs only 4,600, and Twitter, in San Francisco, fewer than 2,000. Apple claims 400,000 people putting together components and creating apps and other extras for its iPhones, iPads, iPods, MacBooks, and desktop computers. Yet only 16,000 of those are on the payroll in Cupertino. Another 31,000 work at Apple operations in Texas and other states, but the vast bulk of manufacturing is outsourced abroad via contractors to China and other cheap-labor purgatories. Yet those 16,000 in Cupertino make Apple the second-largest employer in the valley. Kotkin compares those numbers to the 212,000 employed by GM, the 170,000 employed by Ford, and the more than 100,000 employed by Exxon Mobil, all three presumably Old Economy dinosaurs. The New Economy generates prosperity all right, prosperity that mostly flows to those in the upper echelons.

Furthermore, the oligarchs of Silicon Valley seem intent on keeping the social pyramid stacked in exactly the same layers in which it’s stacked right now. After decades of political quietism during which Silicon Valley

entrepreneurs expressed libertarian sentiments but mostly voted Democratic and funded Democratic candidates who shared their elite-class social and political views, Silicon Valley has finally mobilized—for immigration expansion. In April Mark Zuckerberg, with help from Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, LinkedIn cofounder Reid Hoffman, and venture capitalist John Doerr, launched FWD.us, a \$25 million-and-counting lobbying group aimed at lawmakers in both political parties. FWD.us, unlike other pro-immigration groups, isn't much interested in amnesty for illegal immigrants or easier border-crossing for lettuce-pickers. Its chief interest is in expanding the H-1B work visa program for "highly skilled" workers that's mostly used by tech employers to hire temporary guest-workers from foreign countries, usually from East and South Asia. Valley executives have been calling for decades for H-1B expansion (the current cap is 65,000 visas annually, although thanks to loopholes and related programs, it's actually about double that). During the 1990s the argument was that native-born U.S. programmers were set-in-their-ways oldsters (translation: men and women in their forties) whose brain cells couldn't make the transition from, say, COBOL

to more up-to-date coding languages. The new argument is that tech workers are in dangerously short supply, especially "the best, brightest, and hardest workers," as New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, an H-1B expansion advocate, testified before Congress in February.

FWD.us certainly has allies in the bay area's substantial Indian community. At a gym in Fremont, a middle-income suburb directly across the bay from East Palo Alto that counts 40,000 Indians among its 222,000 residents, I interviewed 38-year-old Nikesh Kalma, Santa Clara-born of Indian immigrant parents, who, with an MBA from Oxford, is an executive for Equinix, a cloud-storage landlord headquartered in Redwood City. "The perception is that Indians are taking away good American jobs," Kalma said. "The reality is that you Americans can't turn out engineers fast enough."

The anti-H-1B faction has a response to that: statistics. One of them, from an April 24 briefing paper produced by the liberal Economic Policy Institute, is that only one out of every two U.S. college graduates with a degree in engineering or computer and information science is

hired into those fields, despite a doubling of the number of homegrown computer-science graduates between 1998 and 2004. Others argue that employers mostly don't use H-1B workers to fill "best and brightest" jobs, but, rather, relatively low-paying routine programming positions, and that the most avid users of the visas are India-based outsourcing companies that use the visas to provide a few months of U.S. training for their employees, who then return to India.

Most damning of all is that, despite persistent claims of tech-worker shortages, programmer salaries overall have inched only slightly higher from what they were 20 years ago: from \$60,000 a year to about \$75,000 a year in 2012 dollars, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Engineers fare somewhat better: The average annual starting salary at top valley employers such as Google is about \$100,000, with the median for experienced engineers at about \$150,000. Even with the stock options many employers offer, that doesn't go far toward buying even the smallest million-dollar valley house. A group of software engineers has a pending lawsuit alleging that four of the biggest employers—Apple, Google, Intel, and Adobe Sys-

tems in San Jose—violated federal antitrust laws between 2005 and 2009 by agreeing not to "poach" each other's employees with offers of higher pay.

On top of those perhaps deliberately depressed salaries and the high cost of existing housing are a raft of California "green" laws—enthusiastically supported, as one might expect, by the valley's tech elite in a post-manufacturing economy—that make life there even more expensive, and family-friendly housing even less attainable. Renewable-energy mandates drive up utility costs, and environmentally driven land-use restrictions and "smart growth" plans have made the construction of new single-family homes in the valley all but impossible for everyone except those affluent enough to own a large-lot teardown.

Not surprisingly, the lower-echelon tech employees and midskill workers cram themselves into the enormous apartment complexes that line El Camino and some of its side-arteries, many of which are attractive enough for singles although not especially hospitable to raising children. Then they give up and move to Utah or Texas or some other state with lower taxes and cheaper housing, or they



Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg pitches immigration reform in Washington, D.C., September 2013.

resign themselves to hours-long, traffic-clogged commutes to Fremont and other less expensive, less pretty suburbs across the bay in Alameda County, where housing prices are also rising but not quite so rapidly.

If you can manage to hoist yourself precariously—most likely via a high-earning spouse—into the valley “middle class,” you can lead a fairly comfortable, if extremely expensive life. You are, after all, living in one of the most beautiful parts of California, with the mountains and the Pacific Ocean at your back door, and, not far away, the luscious Napa Valley wine country and Sierra Nevada hiking and skiing. “The climate here is great, and the food is really good,” a midlevel tech executive told me over the telephone. “People talk about all the luxury cars that you see on the Bayshore Freeway, but if you’ve got a long commute, and your house isn’t all that big, spending money on a car that’s comfortable and makes you happy makes perfect sense. Fifty-thousand dollars, \$75,000 for a car is nothing compared with your housing costs. That’s why people do it. And it’s not like Hollywood here, where if you don’t succeed, it’s winner take all, and you’ve got to go wait on tables for the rest of your life. Here, you might go to work for a startup, and if it fails, you’ve at least made a comfortable salary you can live on—and you can go to work for another startup. There’s a sense of community here. Everybody knows everybody, and you can make connections.”

**T**he extreme economic and social inequality that characterizes Silicon Valley is not exactly the way it was supposed to be. Globalization and deindustrialization were supposed to free up Americans for better-paying, more interesting work; all they had to do was retrain themselves for the information age. The 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, by Richard Florida, then an urban studies professor at Carnegie Mellon University (he is now at the University of Toronto), urged Americans to embrace what Florida called “the knowledge economy” and touted high-tech entrepreneurs as massive job-creators. Florida launched a lucrative side-career for himself advising Northeastern cities ravaged by deindustrialization on how to attract some of those entrepreneurs and other affluent young professionals by reinventing themselves as hip, gay-friendly, arts-promoting hubs where the cool people would want to hang. As recently as late October of this year, Florida, in a blog entry for the *Atlantic*, was promoting Silicon Valley and its environs as America’s number-one jobs-generator. Florida wrote: “[H]igh-paying, high-tech jobs are key factors in economic growth and prosperity.”

The current long-running recession, together with the fact that most of the jobs that have been created recently are at the low-wage bottom, has led the futurists to adjust their rhetoric radically. They have switched from the

manic-phase optimism of the 1990s and early 2000s to a combination of putting a happy face on middle-class disappearance and telling Americans to get used to it. Florida, for example, candidly admitted in one of his recent *Atlantic* posts that what he called the “talent clustering process,” the agglomeration of “highly skilled knowledge, professional, and creative workers” in “knowledge-based metros” such as Silicon Valley “provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits” to those lower on the scale of brains and education.

The bright-side-of-life school argues, *au contraire*, that the benefits will continue to trickle, if not exactly as palatably as the 1990s optimists envisioned them. That school includes Enrico Moretti, a labor economist at the University of California, Berkeley, writing for the *Wall Street Journal* last September: “For each new software designer hired at Twitter in San Francisco, there are five new job openings for baristas, personal trainers, therapists and taxi drivers.” Michael Mandel and Judith Scherer of South Mountain Economics, in a 2012 paper titled “The Geography of the App Economy,” arrived at a similar ratio, as long as you count pizza-deliveryman as a tech-economy spinoff job. Ray Fisman, a Columbia Business School professor writing in *Slate*, advised victims of deindustrialization to move to tech centers, where they could collect “more than a few crumbs” working as manicurists and lawn cutters for their more creative overlords.

Tyler Cowen in *Average Is Over* is more forthright. He advises the construction of Rio de Janeiro-style shantytowns for the 85 percent of Americans whose livelihoods will be swept away by the New Knowledge Economy he touts—although no shantytowns, please, in Cowen’s own neighborhood in upscale Fairfax County, Virginia! And also, says Cowen:

There is one final way in which we will adjust to uneven wage patterns and that is with our tastes. Many of society’s lower earners will reshape their tastes—will *have to* reshape their tastes—toward cheaper desires. Caviar is an expensive desire and Goya canned beans is a relatively cheap desire. Don’t scoff at the beans: With an income above the national average, I receive more pleasure from the beans, which I cook with freshly ground cumin and rehydrated pureed chilies.

Yes! Let them eat beans! Master and servant. Oligarchs and serfs. Two years ago the Occupy movement of progressives raised a battle cry against the “1 percent,” who were supposed to be striped-pants, Republican-voting tycoons lifted from the Monopoly board. What they didn’t know was that the 1 percent actually wear rubber shower sandals, ride bicycles—\$20,000 bicycles—and vote Democratic and green, green, green. It was them. It was the future, and it has already arrived in the Silicon Valley. ♦

# A Rare Specimen

*Rob Astorino, successful New York Republican*

BY TERRY EASTLAND

**O**n November 5, Republican Rob Astorino was reelected executive of upscale Westchester County, which lies directly north of New York City, between the Hudson River and Long Island Sound. Back from a week of postelection beachifying in Puerto Rico, Astorino is already thinking about running for office again—next year, for governor, against the incumbent Democrat, Andrew Cuomo, who intends to seek a second term.

Astorino will decide whether to run, he told me, by the middle of March. And he will run, it appears, if he thinks he can raise the \$28 million he believes is needed to mount a campaign with “a real shot of winning.”

Astorino is relatively unknown in a state in which Democrats have twice as many registered voters as Republicans. Yet Astorino, who is 46, would bring some important assets to a race for governor.

For one, he has evident media skills, having worked in radio and television since graduating from Fordham University, where he majored in communications. In 2001, he helped found ESPN Radio, and later he directed the conversion of WEVD-AM in New York City from a Disney to an all-sports format. He concedes, by the way, that he is a “big sports fan.”

Also, Astorino is “likable,” as Ari Fleischer puts it. “He’s a good-natured, friendly guy,” says Fleischer, who served as White House press secretary for President George W. Bush and now lives in Westchester County. “In a business where there’s a lot of small-mindedness . . . [Astorino] is naturally nice.”

Another asset is that Astorino is a Republican who has succeeded in a county (population one million) whose political make-up is the same as the state’s, 2-to-1 Democratic. Astorino is a conservative focused on basic economic issues, on taxes and spending. But in his heavily Democratic county, he has reached out to Democrats and independents. The point, he says, is to build the coalitions necessary

to win elections. And that is precisely how he has won.

Interestingly, for Astorino there is a moral argument for reaching beyond the party base to what he calls “non-traditional Republican areas.” As he explains, “people need a choice.” And “people have to *know*,” he says with emphasis, “that there is a choice.” The candidate must reach out and make this clear to them.

“Rob draws people in,” observes Fleischer, meaning people who are unlikely Republican voters. In the recent election, Astorino won the support of the presidents of two

local chapters of the NAACP. According to his campaign’s internal polls, he received significant levels of support in the county’s black and Hispanic communities, which typically vote for Democrats by large margins. Indeed, the campaign’s last internal poll showed that 61 percent of the voters in Hispanic areas favored Astorino. It helps that he speaks fluent Spanish. In New York state, according to Pew Research, Hispanics make up one-fifth of the population (in Westchester, 22 percent).

Suffice it to say, Astorino is a proven vote getter. Born and raised in the county, he won his first race for local office (a seat on the Mount Pleasant Board of Education) when

he was 21 and his second (a seat on the Mount Pleasant Town Board) when he was 24. He was twice reelected and subsequently won a seat on the Westchester Board of Legislators. He has lost only once, in 2005, when, in a bid for county executive, he challenged the two-term Democratic incumbent, Andy Spano, who raised four times as much money for the race as he did. In 2009 Astorino again challenged Spano, but this time he pulled off the upset, winning by 58 to 42 percent. Last month, in fending off Democratic challenger Noam Bramson, mayor of New Rochelle, Astorino won 56 percent of the vote.

“The message didn’t change,” says Astorino. “We were defending what we had done, [and] it turned out that people agreed.” A Marist poll taken four weeks before the election found that 64 percent of county voters thought Westchester was going in the “right direction.” Meanwhile, a Siena College poll released in late October found that 44 percent of New York voters thought the Empire State was going in the right direction, and the same



*Rob Astorino*

*Terry Eastland is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

percentage thought it was going in the wrong direction.

That Astorino holds the job he does could also prove an asset in a race for the executive office at the next level of government. The jurisdictions and the issues before a county executive and a governor are different in many respects. But certain things are expected of executives (including presidents) regardless of where they sit. They craft budgets and seek to enact them (as Astorino has every year, working with Democratic legislative majorities). And they may use the veto power against bad bills (as Astorino did so often early in his first term that he named his pen “Veto”). If Astorino runs for governor, Cuomo won’t be the only experienced executive in the race.

As county executive, Astorino has shown, as one campaign consultant says, “a spine of titanium”—the sort of spine a leader is expected to have. Most arresting is his refusal to yield to the federal housing department’s now four-year-old demand for changes in local zoning laws to accommodate construction of more affordable housing units for low-income people. Sticking to his position has cost the county \$7.4 million in housing grants that would otherwise have come to Westchester.

“This is a federalism issue,” says Astorino. If the Department of Housing and Urban Development “is permitted to wander into Westchester County and basically blow away local zoning and seize control over [housing] issues,” he tells me, “then it can and will [do that] everywhere.”

It is on the strength of his core message that Astorino has succeeded in politics in Westchester. In 2009 he ran for county executive promising to “stop the tax madness” that had made Westchester’s property taxes among the highest in the country. Since 2004, Astorino told voters, the county’s property tax levy had gone up 17 percent. Upon taking office, he cut the levy 2 percent, and it has remained flat ever since.

As for his promise to get spending under control, Astorino describes a process by which his new administration reviewed every department and chose priorities. He started cutting spending in his own office. In the first year, he reduced his own staff by 19 percent. He then looked at the entire county work force, and by the end of the term he had cut it by 15 percent.

The biggest savings have come in health care. When Astorino was elected, the county paid the full cost of it, for all employees. Astorino started contributing to his own health care, and members of his staff started doing so as well. So did others in management positions. The remaining 90 percent of the county workforce are members of eight unions.

Through negotiations with seven of the unions, Astorino secured an employee contribution to health care. The

eighth union—the Civil Service Employees Association—will meet soon with Astorino. In 2014, Westchester will save \$4 million on health care. That sum may increase substantially if the CSEA follows the other unions’ lead. “It was not acceptable to me that taxpayers were paying 100 percent of government employees’ health care,” says Astorino. “That wasn’t sustainable, and it wasn’t fair.”

None of the reductions in staff affected programs for the least well-off, says an aide to Astorino. Structural changes, he says, were introduced, designed to make the programs more efficient and include more people in them. “We have to make sure that as Republicans we do care for people,” says Astorino. “There’s not an endless supply of money. But that doesn’t mean there’s not a different way to do things.”

Astorino describes his approach to fiscal policy as an effort to find “a healthy balance” between what taxpayers can afford and what people justifiably need in terms of services and programs. “We took our medicine,” he says, “made choices, and we are a much better, financially healthier county today than we were four years ago.” The county budget was \$1.8 billion when Astorino took office in 2009 and is now \$1.7 billion. Only four counties in the state have lower budgets in real dollars today than they did four years ago, he notes, adding, “We cut \$172 million” during that time, and “the other three counties combined didn’t get near that.”

On his first day as county executive, Astorino wrote down three P’s that would guide him: Protect the taxpayers, preserve essential services, and promote economic growth. The first two would bear on the third, he thought. The county has added 27,000 private-sector jobs in the past four years. And while he knows better than to take full credit for that development, he thinks protecting the taxpayers and preserving essential services has communicated that “we are serious about changing the business climate.”

And that climate does seem to be changing. PepsiCo was preparing to leave Westchester four years ago but has stayed and is now building new headquarters and making new hires. And Regeneron, the biotech company located in Tarrytown, is planning to hire hundreds of new workers.

Noam Bramson, Astorino’s recent challenger, went to Harvard, where he earned a B.A. and then an M.A. in public policy. He is a smart liberal Democrat, and, like Astorino, he has won multiple elections in Westchester County. Endorsed by local resident Bill Clinton, he ran a spirited race, spending more than \$2 million. But he proved unable effectively to counter Astorino’s message on taxes and spending, expressed in those three P’s and put into practice over four years.

Neither did Bramson succeed in persuading voters that Astorino does not share “our” values, meaning liberal ones. In 2012 Astorino, who is pro-life, vetoed a bill limiting protesters’ access to abortion clinics that was legally

problematic; the veto was sustained, supported by two pro-abortion-rights legislators who agreed that the bill was bad law. Despite Bramson's best efforts to paint Astorino as hostile to abortion rights, that didn't become an issue for many voters. As for "marriage equality," Astorino supports marriage as traditionally defined. But Albany settled the matter for New York two years ago when it defined marriage as the union of two people regardless of sex. "It's a done issue," Astorino told me, and Bramson was unable to activate it against him.

Bramson also criticized Astorino for allowing gun shows to return to the county convention center. After the Columbine shootings in 1999, then county executive Spano decided to bar gun shows from the center. In 2010, after an 11-year absence, Astorino decided to reverse Spano's decision. He let the shows return, with the necessary protocols, among them that for every sale there would be a background check and that no sales would occur outside the county center. Bramson, says an Astorino aide, "thought he had a good issue," but it may have backfired on him. "Every time Bramson talked about the gun show decision, Astorino said it was time to stop demonizing gun owners."

Equally unsuccessful were Bramson's efforts to tie Astorino to the Tea Party, whose presence is less substantial in

Westchester, and the Northeast generally, than in other parts of the country. Voters weren't moved. Astorino aides recall waking up one morning about a week before the election and seeing lawn signs identifying "Rob Astorino" as a "Tea Party Republican." Those five words were the only ones on the signs. Nor was there any small print indicating who had sponsored the signs. "They were littered everywhere," says one aide, and it seemed to have happened "literally overnight." It was a desperate effort.

Astorino's campaign aides say that Bramson drew from the Democrats' "national playbook," using "divisive issues in an effort to play to the Democratic base." If Astorino decides to run, that playbook may be opened once again. If it is, it may prove as ineffectual as it did in the race for Westchester executive.

Yet could Astorino actually win? It might come down to whether New York voters see their statewide economic condition the same way Westchester voters came to see theirs—as bad enough to demand fresh leadership, the kind that will get them more value for their tax dollars.

"The state is going in the wrong direction," Astorino told me. "There needs to be fundamental change in Albany. . . . There is another way."

A message, perhaps, to be continued. ♦

## Reducing Poverty and Raising Prosperity

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

This week American families will gather around the Thanksgiving Day table and celebrate the bounty and prosperity that our nation has been blessed with. But for many people in other parts of the world, there's much less to give thanks for. What we consider fundamental necessities—nourishing food, working infrastructure, safe drinking water, basic health care, and electricity—are luxuries for some.

Though tremendous strides have been made in reducing global poverty, the World Bank estimates that 1 billion people will be living in extreme deprivation by 2015. It's a challenge that the Bank—a leading global source of financial resources and experience for developing countries—is determined to tackle. And we shouldn't simply aspire to end poverty; we should resolve to spread prosperity.

The private sector—led by the U.S.

business community—plays an essential role in those efforts by investing resources and capital into developing parts of the world. It's not just an opportunity to create new markets for our products and services, but an opportunity to ensure that millions of people are lifted out of poverty, can live up to their full potential, and contribute to global growth, which we badly need.

American business wants to be part of that success story. And we've done it before—we've helped many countries build infrastructure, purify water, power up, and engage in world trade. We have the technical know-how and the can-do spirit. Business can get things done, and it can do so on a sustainable basis.

And the fact is—it can't be done *without* the private sector. The World Bank Group President, Dr. Jim Yong Kim, recently visited the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and said that the Bank's resources and official bilateral development assistance from world governments only stretch so far. The World Bank Group alone lends more than

\$35 billion a year to developing nations, with more than half of the funds going to sanitation, power, agriculture, transport, communications, and health projects in Africa. To use those resources wisely and effectively and to expand their reach, the expertise and advice of the private sector must also be leveraged. Business is eager to help the Bank's loans and financing generate the best possible outcomes for communities in the developing world.

If organizations like the World Bank and the Chamber work together, we can turn private capital into public good. If we unleash the power of free enterprise across the globe, we can reduce poverty and raise prosperity. We can create opportunity and restore hope. And that would give millions of the world's citizens a lot to be thankful for.



**U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
Comment at [FreeEnterprise.com](http://FreeEnterprise.com).

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# The Real Price of Politics

*Obamacare is not an aberration*

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BY JAY COST

In *The Price of Politics*, journalist Bob Woodward describes the toll that politics took on the presidency and public image of Barack Obama during the budget battle of 2011. Elected as an outsider with little experience in governing and none in executive leadership, Woodward's Obama is ill-equipped to handle the byzantine ways of Washington. The result is a tarnished president, a nation brought needlessly to the brink of credit default, and a sharp diminution of public trust.

While valuable as a fly-on-the-wall account of a momentous battle, Woodward's book overlooks the real price of politics in Washington. By focusing on personalities rather than enduring power relations, it obscures the fact that in America, we regularly burden our politicians by requiring a government built for limited purposes to tackle an endless array of modern demands. Our government's chronic failure to meet our expectations is the price we pay.

A case in point is Obamacare. It is tempting to write off the disaster that is the Affordable Care Act as a product of congressional and presidential malpractice, but that would be facile. The reality is that the terrible defects of the president's health care bill are the sorts of excesses you would expect to see under our system as it has evolved.

Despite the intense ideological and partisan divisions that characterize our politics, there is considerable agreement on the broad contours of policy. Just about everybody believes that the federal government has some responsibility for the public welfare. The differences between the two sides are primarily a matter of degree: Liberals have much more faith than conservatives in the government's ability to secure the public good.

Too often, debate over what government should do takes place in the abstract. But the particulars of the American system are relevant. Our government was never meant to accomplish the grand, bold tasks that both sides today believe it should. There is a reason why Congress and the courts, for instance, have had to expand the meaning of the interstate commerce clause almost to the point of absurdity: This is the only way around what was intended

to be, and was sold to skeptical citizens at the time as, a limited grant of power. And the institutional structure of the government—a president, the courts, two chambers of Congress, all connected via checks and balances—was designed to manage only those limited powers.

What we the people have done over and over since ratifying the Constitution is expand the power of the federal government without revising its structure. Americans started doing this all the way back in 1790, when Alexander Hamilton read the Constitution as granting Congress the power to charter a bank, even though the Constitutional Convention had voted down that very idea. As Washington's reach has been extended, instead of overhauling the structure, we have merely tinkered at the margins, modifying the Electoral College, instituting direct election of senators, limiting presidential terms, and so on.

The result is a profound mismatch. We expect an essentially pluralistic government to behave as a national one. It cannot do this, and so public policy is characterized by inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and even at times injustice.

James Madison thought factionalism was inevitable, and he feared some groups would dominate at the expense of the public good or private rights. So he offset a vast array of competing interests via a structure that is inherently defensive. Under Madisonian pluralism, power is distributed so that all factions have a seat at the table of government, and the likelihood of abuse by an aggressive majority is curbed. But today we expect our government to be not pluralistic and defensive, but national and active; Uncle Sam is somehow supposed to cut through parochial interests and advance the interests of the country. That is unreasonable.

In reality, bold federal endeavors require costly side deals with well-positioned factions, which must be bought off, regardless of whether their positions are good for the country or their exacting ransom is bad for the country. Our system gives them a veto, leverage to exact a fee from Uncle Sam. That is the real price of politics. Sometimes these fees simply make programs cost more than they otherwise would. Sometimes they undermine the original goals of an initiative. And sometimes they harm innocent citizens who should be the beneficiaries of public policy.

From an electoral perspective, not a single member of Congress is responsible for the good of the nation, though many are happy to indulge groups that dominate their states

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*Jay Cost is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

or districts. Only the president is accountable to everyone, but even he is also answerable to his party—and his formal powers are limited by the Constitution. If the government were asked to do only what a fair reading of the Constitution authorizes it to do, this design would not be a problem. In its time, the arrangement of powers and branches was a brilliant innovation to ensure that all sides were treated fairly. A government, however, that is expected to generate economic growth, build highways and bridges, support farmers, make sure families have food on the table, provide access to health care, fund scientific research, ensure food, drug, and product safety, help kids afford college, maintain expansive and unmatched armed forces—even put a man on the moon—invites special treatment for well-positioned interest groups. In a word, it breeds *corruption*.

Worse, the more authority the government claims for itself, the more parts of society it affects. This rouses otherwise dormant factions to defend their interests. Thus, the price of politics rises higher and higher. More federal power means more interest groups and therefore still more side deals. If you want to know why the population of metropolitan Washington has skyrocketed, in numbers and wealth, over a generation, this is the answer. An ever-more ambitious government has drawn more and more interest groups to the capital to make sure they get their cut of the federal pie.



This helps account for the disaster of Obamacare. There are, of course, vigorous debates to be had about whether government should be responsible for everyone's health care. But for our government to accomplish this goal, Obama and congressional Democrats had to buy off a motley crew of factions. Indeed, this was one of their principal concerns: luring on board the "stakeholders" who had stymied reforms before.

The result is a socially indefensible law. Even if we grant that the government should insure all Americans, Obamacare's distributional effects are perverse. An unstated rule of politics is that policy should leave middle-class families better off, or at least no worse off. Obamacare tramples on this principle, sticking it to families who buy insurance on the private market. Millions of Americans are seeing their insurance rates go up while their coverage networks shrink.

Why did they lose out? Not because they are wealthy and privileged, and so can bear the cost. Rather, it is because of the bill's political design. These people had the misfortune of being unorganized politically at the time the bill was passed; most of those receiving cancellation letters had no idea they would suffer this way. Well-organized interests, meanwhile—doctors, hospitals, drug manufacturers,

insurance providers, the AARP, labor unions—all were cutting deals so they could walk away winners. Similarly, a straightforward tax on the American people to pay for expanding health coverage was avoided for fear that people would organize in opposition. So President Obama and congressional Democrats shifted the burdens of the bill onto an unorganized group in a hard-to-detect manner. Political brilliance perhaps, but social perversity.

This is not the only example of the toll of politics. Take Medicare. It is an obscenely wasteful program that has cost substantially more than anyone initially imagined and still leaves gaps in health coverage for seniors while straining the resources of doctors and hospitals. Yet it remains essentially unreformed, because altering it would offend too many entrenched groups. Besides, who notices its gross inefficiencies? We never experience what it would be like to have the money that Medicare wastes. The loudest voices clamor to protect the inefficient status quo.

It is not just liberal sacred cows that have this effect, either. Those who champion the tax code as a tool for promoting economic development or social improvement must answer for its chronic wastefulness. The noble goal of spurring the economy is hindered in our system; you have to purchase well-positioned groups by burying hard-to-find payoffs in the tax code. Again, who suffers? The government collects less revenue than it would otherwise, but nobody personally feels a loss. The tax code, however, becomes so weighed down with special deals that it must be reformed once a generation.

All of this signals a profound irony of American civic history. A careful reading of the Founders, especially Madison, suggests that they were deeply concerned about the danger of corruption, a cancer they feared could rot the body politic from within. Their system carefully balanced structures and powers to prevent that. Subsequent leaders had less regard for balance and blithely expanded government's powers without revisiting the structure. The result? A government so riddled with corruption that its people no longer trust it—and are right to doubt it at every turn.

For generations, Americans have prided ourselves on our Constitution, though we choose neither to follow it dutifully nor to revise it thoughtfully. Obamacare is the bitter fruit of our civic recklessness. It rewards or punishes factions in society according to their political prominence. Republicans may eventually manage to repeal it, but as long as the country retains a disjointed view of what our government can do, we are bound to repeat its mistakes time and again. ♦



Emblematic scene from 'Jack the Ripper' (1959)

# Ms. Private Eye

*Victorian women detectives in life and literature.* BY SARA LODGE

**T**he investigator is chasing a suspect, who has just disappeared through a secret trapdoor. Breathlessly, the private dick follows the masked figure down a ladder into a dark passageway: It turns out to lead from the Belgravia mansion into the vault of a nearby bank. Our hero can see the thief in the act of grabbing the gold and making off—but the trapdoor closes behind the crook, leaving the detective unable to leave the crime scene and about to be apprehended by security guards.

*Sara Lodge, a senior lecturer in English at the University of St Andrews, is the author of Thomas Hood and Nineteenth-Century Poetry: Work, Play, and Politics.*

## Revelations of a Lady Detective

by William Stephens Hayward  
British Library, 278 pp., \$15

## The Female Detective

by Andrew Forrester  
British Library, 316 pp., \$15

Nothing, perhaps, seems very unusual about this heist thriller—until you realize that it was published in 1864, and that both the thief and the detective are women. The first is a countess who has cross-dressed in order to perform her daring robbery. The second is a professional female

detective who, in order to pursue her quarry underground, has quickly jet-tisoned her crinoline.

This year, the British Library has republished two rare and striking Victorian books, *Revelations of a Lady Detective* by William Stephens Hayward and *The Female Detective* by Andrew Forrester (a pseudonym for James Redding Ware). Both were published in 1864, and they make intriguing reading for anyone interested in the history of crime fiction. They introduce something categorically new for the 19th century: the woman who makes a profession of solving murders and cracking cases that foil less flexible minds, nabbing offenders ranging from ruthless Italian political conspirators to

GETTY IMAGES

daring impersonators to mail robbers to female bigamists.

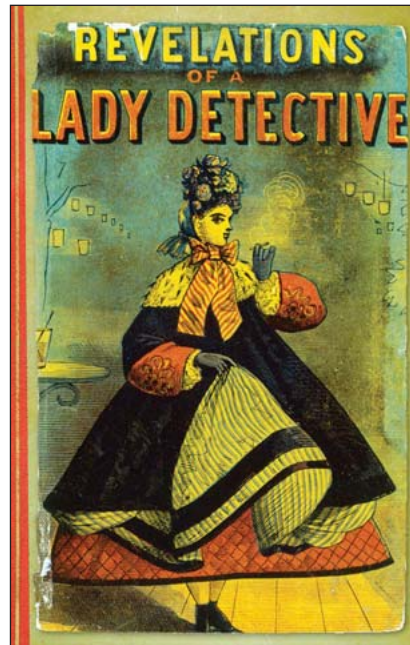
Twenty years before Sherlock Holmes first puffed his pipe along the seedy streets of London, Mrs. Paschal was enjoying a quiet cigarette, confident that her unconventional methods would succeed where those of the male members of the Metropolitan Police failed. Neither of these books belongs to the politer realms of high Victorian fiction. William Stephens Hayward was the prolific author of titles that include *Skittles*, describing the racy life of a high-class London prostitute, and *Skittles in Paris*. Readers glimpsing the cover picture of Mrs. Paschal lifting her skirts and showing her ankles may well have hoped that *Revelations of a Lady Detective* would prove to take place in the bedroom. If so, they were disappointed. This isn't a book about sex; but it is a book that blows gender conventions out of the water.

Mrs. Paschal, a widow "verging on forty" whose husband left her without much money, confronts torturers and murderers without blinking: She regrets not having brought a Colt revolver to one crime scene. Equally at home in the low drinking dens of Vinegar Yard in London's notorious St. Giles, in an aristocratic household impersonating a lady's maid, and in a convent impersonating a nun, she orders about the six plainclothes policemen she sometimes handpicks to help her bust a joint. In the grand tradition of gumshoes, she is taciturn about her personal life: The thrill of the chase is her chief passion.

Similarly, Mrs. Gladden in *The Lady Detective*—known to her police colleagues merely as "G"—teases us by making a mystery of her own character. Is she a detective because she has no other way of making a living or because she had an insurmountable "longing" for the business? Is she supporting her children or is she a single woman whose "only care is herself"? She won't tell. Instead, her "memoirs" inform us that she wants to rescue detectives—and in particular, lady detectives—from the opprobrium that surrounds their trade: "The profession

to which I belong is so useful that it should not be despised."

"Detective" was still a relatively new job title in mid-Victorian Britain. In 1842, the Metropolitan Police (themselves only professionalized in 1829) appointed its first detective branch, at Scotland Yard. They were immediately an object of intense public interest. Charles Dickens reported on their activities in his magazine *Household Words*, and Inspector Bucket became a sympathetic character in *Bleak House* (1853).



Not everyone, however, felt so positive. Some found the idea of a man who might belong to an inferior social class entering the domestic sanctum and prying into its dirty laundry extremely distasteful. Snoops were suspect. Their activities, and the kind of criminal behavior they uncovered in apparently respectable homes, fed Victorian anxieties about the slipperiness of class distinctions. Sensational novels of the 1860s—such as Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), featuring detective Sergeant Cuff—were thrilling precisely because you never knew whether the crime was an outside or an inside job: Was it the Indian thugs, the suicidal servant, the scientific houseguest, or the debt-ridden daughter of the family

who was responsible for the theft of the eponymous jewel?

The writing in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* and *The Female Detective* (the weaker of the two books) lacks the finesse of that in Collins's novels, but they offer similar pleasures. Mrs. Paschal, often posing as a servant, is able to discover her wealthy employers' guilty secrets. The doubles, impostors, and outwardly respectable deceivers who people her memoirs highlight the potential fraudulence of all social appearances.

Along the way, she introduces us to various elements that will become staples of the detective genre: There is the police lineup, which identifies the wrong man as a con man. There is also the morgue visit, where Mrs. Paschal uses forensic evidence (bruising on the wrists, torn clothing) to conclude that a young woman found drowned was a murder victim rather than a suicide. And there is the principle, which Sherlock Holmes would popularize, of coolly deductive reasoning based on factual evidence. Often, initial suspicion falls on the wrong person. The detective, like a magician working in reverse, shows that all is not what it seems.

This is a social truth, too. Both lady detectives reveal hidden injustices below the surface of the legal system. Frequently these involve women, property, and inheritance. In *Revelations of a Lady Detective's* "The Lost Diamonds," for example, we learn that the duke of Rustenburgh, obsessed with collecting sparklers, marries his wife only for her dowry and to make her a "butcher's block" on which to display his jewels. When she inherits more money, he immediately spends it on new gems. It comes, thus, as no surprise to the astute reader to discover that the thief of his most costly rock is actually the neglected duchess. When Mrs. Paschal solves the mystery, she administers an implicit female rebuke—and tells us that the duke, henceforth, treated his wife more kindly.

In these stories, it isn't the law court but the undercover detective who enables the narrative justice

that society so often fails to deliver. Although these “female detective” books were written by men, it isn’t an accident that both were produced during the period in which divorce became possible for ordinary middle-class couples—the first British civil divorce courts opened in 1858—when there was heated public debate about married women’s lack of legal power and their vulnerability to husbands who controlled their property and children’s custody. The characters of Mrs. Paschal and Mrs. Gladden exhibit a drive to right wrongs that might motivate any middle-aged matron.

Until recently, it has been widely accepted that these British female private detectives were purely fictional—and that London had to wait until nearer the turn of the century for real female gumshoes. Michael Sims in *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime* (2011) claims that “not even Captain Nemo’s electrical submarine in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* was more futuristic than the representation of ‘lady detectives’ in 1864.” But my own investigation tells a different story.

Donning my deerstalker to peruse the *London Times* for January 1875, I discovered two advertisements in the “small ads” section that make it clear that female private detectives were working in London at this time. The first advertisement, for the “Confidential Agency” of Leslie and Graham in Holborn, notes that they are assisted by “men of 20 years’ experience, and female detectives.” The second, for confidential agents Arthur, Cleveland, Montagu, and Company in Cornhill, offers “a large staff of experienced detectives, male and female.” These back-to-back advertisements suggest that women private detectives had been around for a while (if they were “experienced”) and that their services added value to the firms that could boast them.

The police, too, may not officially have employed women, but unofficial liaisons certainly occurred. In 1865, the *Glasgow Herald* carried a story of “A Woman Employed as a Detective.” She was Mrs. Lawton, the wife

of a police constable, who proved both cool and effective in conducting a sting operation designed to catch thieves who had stolen clothes and jewelry. Mrs. Lawton found the suspects at the Hop Pole Inn and posed as a “fence,” a broker from Bolton looking to buy cloth. She paid a deposit on the stolen goods and accompanied the crooks, promising to deliver the rest of the money at the railway station—where the police arrested the gang. She must have been a brave woman, for the three suspects were armed with a pistol.

America was ahead of the game when it came to employing women to crack crimes. Kate Warne joined the Pinkerton Detective Agency in the 1850s and soon became its female superintendent. Allan Pinkerton described her as “a commanding person, with clear-cut, expressive features, and with an ease of manner that was quite captivating at times,” and a “brilliant conversationalist” who also understood the rarer “art of being silent.” Warne became famous for solving the Adams Express Robbery and for reputedly saving President Lincoln from an assassination attempt during the Civil War. After her death in 1868, admiring obituaries were published in Britain, ranking her as “the best female detective in the United States, if not in the world.” This doubtless helped to alert the public to the strengths a woman might bring to the role.

Indeed, the case of Jack the Ripper, the serial killer who convulsed London in 1888, might have been solved if the police had employed female detectives. So argued Frances Power Cobbe in a letter to the *Times* that year:

A clever woman of unobtrusive dress and appearance . . . would possess over masculine rivals not a few advantages. She would pass unsuspected where a man would be instantly noticed; she could extract gossip from other women much more freely; she would move through the streets and courts without waking the echoes of the pavement . . . and, lastly, she would be in a position to employ . . . that gift

of intuitive quickness and “mother wit” with which her sex is commonly credited.

In the absence of actual women, the police employed some male officers *dressed as women* to stake out areas of East London where the Ripper might strike again. Newspaper reports show that such transvestism didn’t necessarily succeed in preventing violence: One cop disguised in this way was stabbed.

Therefore, when *Revelations of a Lady Detective* and *The Female Detective* were first published, they were fanciful ripping yarns; but the new female profession they described was not as farfetched as later critics have often assumed. By the 1890s, women detectives had firmly established themselves both in fact and in fiction. Indeed, a musical farce from 1898 called *Bilberry of Tilbury* imagined a detective agency entirely run by and composed of women. Its director sings:

*I’m the lady in command  
Of this most distinguished band,  
Whose experience has never come a  
cropper.*  
Chorus: *Come a cropper!  
I can tell you if your hub  
Spends his evenings at the Club,  
Or another kind of place that’s not so  
proper.*  
Chorus: *Not so proper!  
If you fancy that your wife  
Has grown tired of married life,  
And begin to wonder where on earth  
she’s stopping—*  
Chorus: *Oh!  
I can tell you to a shade  
All the visits she has paid,  
And if she’s really spent her time in  
shopping.*  
Chorus: *Ah!*

We often still think of the 19th century as a period of poker-faced prudishness when ladies were confined to domestic duties. But in fact, Victorian women paved the path to modern professional life—through the factory, the office, and (sometimes) the secret passageway. These books are an enjoyable reminder that, beneath the petticoats, there might lurk a notebook, a Colt, and a cigar. ♦

# The Cost of Big Aid

*Sometimes the cure is as bad as the disease.*

BY BARTLE B. BULL

In early 1997, Dertu was a barely mapped speck on the parched landscape of the Somali nomads of Kenya's North Eastern Province. The place's misfortune was to possess just enough groundwater to attract a UNICEF borehole. By late 2009, Dertu was a picture-perfect dystopia of 5,000 souls. Its cardboard shanties, shingled in aid-agency food bags, were separated only by winding channels of waste. The 15 overflowing pit latrines that had been built with foreign help in the previous few years collapsed in upon themselves. The broken windows of the half-built school opened into graffiti-covered rooms where the waterless plumbing had been ripped from the walls.

Three years earlier, the Millennium Villages Project of an American economist called Jeffrey Sachs had arrived. Sachs would quickly spend over \$2 million turning the village into a new paradigm for the transformative power of Big Aid. By 2009, Dertu's Somali inhabitants—formerly herdsmen of the arid plains, now “pastoralist dropouts” in the tender idiom of the Western gods busily creating them—had found new ways to quarrel with themselves, and to abuse their imported Bantu laborers. The new town had gained not one real road or job; but Coca-Cola had come, and a cell phone tower, and murders and prostitutes, and dingy cafés to serve the aid boom.

Nina Munk digs deep into Sachs's work in Dertu, and in another of his African model villages, Ruhiira in southwest Uganda. Munk is a veteran of the higher ranks of American monthly

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

**The Idealist**  
*Jeffrey Sachs and the Quest to End Poverty*  
by Nina Munk  
Doubleday, 272 pp., \$26.95



*Drawing water in Dertu, Kenya (2010)*

magazine journalism: She brings to this book the deep, well-resourced reporting that can be a hallmark of that world. As America's foremost chronicler of the follies of the dotcom boom, she understands hubris well. Munk originally went to Africa to cover the Millennium Villages Project—\$120 million for 10 African villages over 5 years, meant to demonstrate how Sachs could defeat extreme poverty cheaply and quickly—for *Vanity Fair* in 2006. She kept going back through 2011, covering the span of Sachs's five-year economic plan.

In a 2004 Brookings Institution paper, Sachs had elucidated his theory of African poverty. It was all about something he calls the “poverty trap.” Some places are so poor that they will never be able to reach the “first rung” of the ladder. Extremely poor Africa, said Sachs, is “simply too poor to grow at all.” Might better government help? No. “More policy or governance reform, by itself, is not sufficient to

overcome this trap.” Foreign investment? No. Such places are eternally condemned by their “poor infrastructure and weak human capital” to never attract external funds.

What about the normal ways in which cultures leave poverty? Learning from neighbors, doing things better, saving a little here and there, making, growing, and herding things that others want, and (if they so desire) generally bootstrapping their way up like so many others? God forbid. In the poverty-trap religion, this is the scariest heresy of all. For Jeffrey Sachs and Big Aid, the one idea that is essential to the entire business is that Africans are not like the rest of us. For the poverty trapper, a basic racism is the fundamental meal ticket.

As self-serving theories go, the poverty claptrap is brilliant. It is a perfect circle. Africa is so poor, and so African, that none of the normal historical ways to become less poor can work there. This leaves only one fix: more money. And someone must “input” the money, and do it correctly. Now, there is a job for the poverty trapper—and power and virtue too.

One pleasant way to understand that the poverty trap makes no sense would be to visit the Spartan former quarters of the cavemen at Lascaux, in southern France, and then to enjoy a nicely chilled *pression* amongst their descendants in a café on a tidy nearby village square. Poverty, clearly, is not destiny. A less beguiling way to learn the same obvious lesson is to spend a few minutes looking at economic facts about Africa during the Sachs years. When Sachs, then at the United Nations, wrote about “Africa's crisis” in 2004, sub-Saharan Africa happened to be in the midst of one of the more impressive growth decades achieved by any continent in recent centuries. Sub-Saharan GDP expanded at a 5.7 percent rate throughout the years 2000-10. This was 78 percent higher than economic growth in the world as a whole during that decade. Yet in the poverty trappers' theory, the lower the base, the less the growth. Meanwhile, black Africa's spectacular growth continues and will continue for many years to come.

In absolute terms, too, the poverty story in Africa is not nearly as bad as Sachs and the Big Aid industry require us to believe. An example is Ghana, one of the original 10 countries selected for Sachs's Millennium Villages. The 2010 International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook shows the country's GDP rising from \$10.7 billion in 2005 to \$29 billion in 2013. This near-tripling of an economy in eight years is impressive enough. Then, later in 2010, the IMF revised its 2009-13 estimates of the size—not the growth, but the baseline size—of Ghana's economy upwards by 66 percent on average. Meanwhile, the actual Ghanaian economy is, in fact, far larger than even these revised numbers say. This is true across Africa. Almost none of the continent's quotidian economic activity—daily trading, most farming, small-scale resource activities, local lending, medicine, law, vehicle maintenance, services of any kind—is officially measured. IMF-type GDP numbers heavily overstate the continent's poverty.

Kenya and its neighbor Ethiopia, another of Sachs's Millennium Villages targets, are favorite playgrounds for Big Aid. Seventy-five percent of residents of Kenya possess cell phones, and economic growth in Ethiopia, which exports nothing significant but coffee, has outpaced China's over the last decade. Such cases abound across the continent.

Nina Munk writes well about Africa. But we sense that, for her, Africa is really a portal, the literary wardrobe or looking-glass through which she bravely ventures into a stranger and more frightening place. This is Sachsland, a nightmarish realm where the fevered natives, chanting acronyms, conquer Africa in pressed khaki trousers for their zombie empire.

The doughty Ms. Munk ventures courageously into the darkest reaches of this phantasmagorical hell: the canteen at U.N. headquarters, forward cabins on intercontinental flights, the Upper West Side of Manhattan. These people are malarial. They are stupid and lazy and cannot help themselves. They gorge dementedly

on the funds and misery of others. Leprous with arrogance and defensiveness, they have lost the facility of normal language. Outwardly well-meaning and clean, they are infected with a virulent creed of sociopathic condescension that causes them to inflict terrible harm on millions of innocent people far, far away. They are snared in the comfortable trap of the poverty of others.

Munk writes with notable modesty for someone able to turn this dreary material into not only an important book, but a truly enjoyable read. She does not boast, but the reader cannot avoid the impression that her intrepid years in Sachsland have demanded all the inner steel of the most hardened explorer or war correspondent.

Presiding over Sachsland's well-heeled global empire is the figure of the Great Professor himself. He

received tenure from Harvard at 28. At 48, another university gave him the keys to his first multimillion-dollar townhouse. Now, since Africans are too African to get anything done, the Great Professor must act for them. *Deus ex machina* requires a deity. Munk mercilessly allows Sachs's own words and behavior to show just how much he revels in the role. Well-known Irish entertainers call him guru; macabre Hollywood sex kittens make videos with him. No matter that Africa has long been emerging boisterously from precisely the Sachsisit *dirigisme* that got postcolonial Africa into its 1980-2000 hole in the first place: The neo-colonial has managed to combine the worst of imperialism and the worst of post-imperialism.

King Leopold and the Five-Year Plan are back—at the same time. Africa will see them off. ♦

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## Doing Harm

*The alternatives to medicine can be sickening.*

BY TEMMA EHRENFELD

**M**y mother, who admired Linus Pauling, kept three rows of bottles filled with vitamins and herbs in her kitchen, as well as stacks of newsletters with advice about “natural” remedies. She maintained an admirable figure on a low-fat, low-meat diet and enjoyed a full, happy life. So when she died of a rare cancer at 78, people were especially surprised. “It was all that chlo-rine at the pool,” one griever surmised.

Despite my mother's wide reading, I doubt that she knew about the many studies concluding that high doses of vitamins increase the risk of cancer. More than half of all Americans take vitamins—a \$28 billion industry in 2010—and even unbelievers tend to think they are harmless.

*Temma Ehrenfeld is a writer in New York.*

### Do You Believe in Magic?

*The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine*

by Paul A. Offit, M.D.

Harper, 336 pp., \$26.99

*Do You Believe in Magic?*—the charming title of which comes, of course, from the 1965 Lovin' Spoonful song—is a fun read, a fast tour through stories about villains and crackpots. Linus Pauling is among them. Author Paul Offit, chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, seems to subscribe to the Great Man theory of history, at least on this subject: He blames the American affection for mega-vitamins on Pauling and the craze for alternative can-

cer treatments on the Polish doctor Stanislaw Burzynski, aided by Gary Null. He also likes to follow the lobbyists (and the money), excoriating the supplements industry for winning exemption from regulation.

By his lights, supplement-pushers are akin to the hucksters who sold Curry's Cancer Cure (hydrogen peroxide, iodine, laxatives, and cocaine) or the Radio-Sulpho Cancer Cure (Epsom salts and Limburger cheese), not to mention John D. Rockefeller's father, who sold "bogus cancer cures at county fairs with the help of magicians, hypnotists and ventriloquists."

Medical history is fascinating, even funny, when you're not on the operating table. The author's accounts of the origins and core principles of chiropractic, acupuncture, and homeopathy made me chortle; but this is serious business. The hint of agnosticism in the subtitle—nicely balancing "sense" and "nonsense"—is misleading: Offit is more like an angry atheist. Though he never sounds hostile, his true and persuasive message is that nonsense can be deadly and its purveyors need more policing.

They feed on distrust of modern medicine, which leads even rich, clever people like the late Steve Jobs to put off, or reject, conventional medical treatments. Jobs opted for nine months of acupuncture, herbs, bowel cleansings, and fruit juice rather than early surgery for his tumor and thus "died of a treatable disease," as Offit puts it. Distrust leads us into the arms of gurus who betray their profession while touting its credentials.

Pauling is a sad case of brilliance succumbing to irrational belief in an ever-crazier spiral that led to his ultimate claims, despite much evidence, that high doses of vitamin C, combined with other supplements, could cure colds, treat cancer, and address just about any problem—including AIDS—without side-effects. How human it is to love cure-alls. Daniel Palmer, founder of chiropractic, believed that he had cured a man's deafness by pushing down on the back of his neck to "realign his spine." The nerve that conducts impulses from

the ear to the brain doesn't travel through the neck, but Palmer argued that misaligned spines cause all diseases. Bizarre as that sounds, chiropractic is covered by Obamacare.

Dr. Offit offers six reasons for the appeal of unproven remedies. None of them is novel, but they are neatly summarized. The gurus of alternative medicine are definitive and comforting—they tell us how to live. In a world of doctors pressed for time, "healers" offer care that feels more



*Jenny McCarthy at war with vaccination*

sympathetic and individualized. Today's gurus and healers claim to represent ancient wisdom from cultures that seem fuzzily superior to our own. (In China, for example, acupuncture "is embraced almost solely by the rural poor.") By contrast, modern medicine is ever-changing, hence scary. Alternative medicine offers the sense that *you* can take control, that you don't need scientists or doctors to tell you what to do. Finally, many Americans think that modern medicine has "rejected nature."

The "sense" of alternative medicine comes down to the power of the placebo effect and the attractive idea that we can use it to our advantage. My mom's tiny white homeopathic pills for "calm" did appear to make her calmer, and if you asked her why she took them, she didn't invoke homeopathic theory. "They work," she said.

Homeopathic remedies, Offit says, are safe because they are actually sugar or water. One popular product (I'll confess that I've used it) is *oscillococinum*, for colds and flu. Offit argues that it's a better choice than cough-and-cold preparations with pseudoephedrin, which, according to the Centers for Disease Control, can cause hallucinations, seizures, and heart problems in young children.

The best news here is a paragraph on scientific research showing that people can be taught to suppress and enhance their immune responses. We also hear from Norman Cousins, the man who told us to laugh when we're sick. Offit concludes with Cousins's account of his meeting with Albert Schweitzer, whose clinic in West Africa brought, in 1912, quinine for malaria, digitalis for heart disease, and salvarsan (the first antibiotic) for syphilis. Schweitzer took Cousins to a jungle clearing to see an elderly witch doctor at work. The witch doctor gave some patients herbs; for others, he gave no herbs but filled the air with incantations. For a third group, he pointed to Schweitzer.

Later, Schweitzer interpreted for Cousins what had occurred. The first group had problems that could be resolved without treatment, or couldn't be treated. People in the second group were receiving "African psychotherapy," according to Schweitzer. And the people in the third group, the witch doctor knew, had problems that Dr. Schweitzer could treat better than he could.

Similarly, today's mainstream and alternative healers both have their place, Offit writes.

The problem comes when mainstream healers dismiss the placebo response as trivial or when alternative healers offer placebos instead of lifesaving medicines or charge an exorbitant price for their remedies or promote therapies as harmless when they're not or encourage magical thinking and scientific denialism at a time when we can least afford it.

I would like to have heard more from Offit on how our society can humanize medicine and make better

use of the placebo effect. Although he doesn't mention this, deception and denial of scientific evidence may not be necessary. In a 2010 pilot study, a Harvard team studying the placebo effect compared two groups of people suffering from irritable-bowel syndrome, a chronic gastrointestinal disorder accompanied by pain and constipation. One group received no treatment. The patients in the other group were told they'd be taking fake, inert drugs—delivered in bottles labeled “placebo pills”—but that placebos often have healing effects.

The results surprised everyone: Patients who *knew* they were taking placebos reported twice as much relief as people in the no-treatment group.

But a later study, with asthma patients, found that although people perceived improvement while on a placebo, the benefit couldn't be measured objectively. Seeing improvement that doesn't exist is a problem if it leads someone to not take an effective treatment. So there's help to be had in a harmless placebo, but only when there's no better option.

The witch doctor had it right. ♦

as a “poet.” And *Iron John*, written entirely in prose, served as a founding document for his “mythopoetic men's movement,” which argued that a white-collar, buttoned-down society needs myths and fairy tales in order to confront the problems that men face. Although the book is a sometimes flakey, if highly readable, synthesis of Carl Jung, Bruno Bettelheim, and others, it struck a chord with readers. By all accounts, it makes some legitimate points that conservatives might easily embrace in addressing the problems of “fatherless families” and a feminized culture.

But his sometimes old-fashioned sensibilities about masculinity aside, Bly's sympathies in the political realm, where he first built his reputation, clearly lean towards the academic left. In interviews (of which he gives many), he comes across as a mildly eccentric humanities department liberal who is happy to repeat canards about how Republicans are the party of greed and to regurgitate (almost verbatim) half-knowledgeable arguments from the likes of Thomas Frank.

Indeed, throughout his career, Bly's politics have been so uninteresting and typical of what one might hear in a faculty lounge that it's almost pointless to criticize them. For example, his well-known, long-form 1968 poem “The Teeth Mother Naked at Last” (written the same year he won the National Book Award) recounts how the Vietnam war involved the United States in mustering its massive financial resources to do violent things in Southeast Asia for purposes that may have been dubious.

Seriously, that's it. But Bly sees himself as more than a simple antiwar bard; he wants to be a transcendentalist, and, in his admiration for nature and his belief in a fundamental “goodness in people,” he technically fits the bill. But if he's philosophically the comrade of the likes of Walt Whitman or even William Channing, Bly's actual verse can't hold a candle to theirs. Take Bly's 1968 prose poem “Looking at a Dead Wren in My Hand”: Here, Bly observes a dead bird, apologizes for his own faults, and concludes, *your bill is brown, with the*

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# Captain Bly

*The skipper of the good ship ‘Bestselling Poetry.’*

BY ELI LEHRER

In order to possess literary merit, poetry must do at least one of three things adequately: condense emotion, embody truths about the human condition, or enrapture readers with the poet's ability to put words together in a beautiful way. Great poems can do all of these things. Adequate poetry manages at least one; bad poetry does none. And Robert Bly, a selection of whose works are collected here, is a bad poet.

But lack of poetic talent doesn't make Bly unsuccessful, or even untalented, in all respects. Indeed, Bly is a fine translator and promoter of non-English-language poets, and he is a clear, if self-indulgent, prose writer. On stage and television, even at 86, he projects a charismatic presence. His career as a known figure in American letters, likewise, ranks among the longest of people still producing new work: He first rose to prominence in 1965, when he cofounded American Writers Against the Vietnam War, and has remained a literary figure ever since.

*Eli Lehrer is president of the R Street Institute.*

## Stealing Sugar from the Castle

*New and Selected Poems 1950-2013*

by Robert Bly

W.W. Norton, 400 pp., \$35



Robert Bly

But Bly's modern public fame stems from his *Iron John: A Book About Men* (1990). The book, a *New York Times* best-seller for over a year, likely makes Bly the bestselling living author identified

sorrow of a rabbi whose daughter has married an athlete. The black spot on your head is your own mourning cap.

After just a second of reflection, it's easy to see that this doesn't make sense even as a natural observation. Birds' bills do not generally change color when they die, and a rabbi's sorrow at his daughter marrying a (Jewish) athlete would not necessarily be all that great. The final metaphor—"your own mourning cap"—is simply Bly's opinion: There's nothing in the setting or Bly's description that suggests it's anything other than a passing fancy of the speaker. Maybe Whitman could get away with something like this; Bly's writing isn't nearly good enough to do so.

In dealing with emotions, Bly likewise shows all the insight of a middle schooler: In "Keeping Our Small Boat Afloat" (2011), he reflects on the fallibility of humanity and concludes that *Each*

*of us deserves to be forgiven, if only for / Our persistence in keeping our small boat afloat / When so many have gone down in the storm.* This is not exactly deep.

By sheer volume of production, Bly can sometimes turn out a decent poem, mostly when he turns to psychological topics. For example, *Dealing with Parents* (2011) discusses the fact that many famous children have done questionable, even terrible, things at least in part because of parental influences. It concludes: *Another man tied his parents all one day / And night in a rocking chair. And they / Died all right. . . . But by the end, they / Knew for certain that they'd had children.* That's pretty chilling, memorable—and at least halfway decent.

Robert Bly may have a germ of poetic talent somewhere in his body. As a political agitator, self-promoter, translator, and prose author, he can even point to some real successes. But all in all, Robert Bly just isn't much of a poet. ♦

That is not good enough, however, for Deborah Solomon, the author of a maddening new biography of Rockwell. Solomon handles Rockwell's life and career well enough—nimble chronicling his three marriages as well as the dynamics of the midcentury magazine business—but her critical takes on his work leave much to be desired. As the author of previous books on Jackson Pollock and Joseph Cornell, Solomon writes intelligently about Rockwell's gently realistic style, but she cannot conceal her embarrassment when it comes to the subjects he so fussily molded after real life (using models as well as photographs).

In the case of *Saying Grace*, Solomon starts off on a sure footing, praising the way the God-fearing lunchers invite a "ballet of gazes" from onlookers, and nicely describing the grandmother's "daisy-bedecked straw hat." But she won't leave well enough alone. In the upper-right-hand corner of the picture is the tail end of a "RESTAURANT" sign, affixed to a window and with the letters reversed. To Solomon, these letters are of great significance: "A smattering of backward, Cubist-style lettering on the window—'TNARU'—spells the end of the word *restaurant* while containing the anagram UN-ART and suggesting the self-mocking message U R an ANT."

It gets worse. To most observers, Rockwell's popular *Post* cover *Girl at Mirror* (1954) depicts a preteen perched before a mirror, her eyes presumably darting back and forth—comparing and contrasting—between her image and that of Jane Russell, whose likeness appears in a movie magazine. But to Solomon, there are strange, unseen depths to this witty portrait of youthful star-gazing: "Deploying the kind of self-referential cleverness today known as meta, Rockwell has given us a magazine image about a magazine image." But hasn't Solomon suggested earlier that Rockwell is the very opposite of clever? "He is a maker of clear pictures that require no antenna," she writes—riffing on *The New Television Set* (1949)—but apparently they *are* in need of explication, courtesy of Deborah Solomon.



## 'Post' Modernist

*The overinterpretation of a great American illustrator.*

BY PETER TONGUETTE

Like the music of Virgil Thomson and the dances of George Balanchine, the paintings of Norman Rockwell are enlivened by a conspicuously transparent species of Americana. They also had the good fortune to make their debuts before irony was turned loose on the land. There was no mocking impulse behind Thomson tossing a dash of the hymn "How Firm a Foundation" into *The River*, and Balanchine was dead serious when he used a flag as part of the set design in *Stars and Stripes*.

Similarly, Norman Rockwell's "vivid and affectionate portraits of our country and ourselves" (as Gerald Ford put it upon honoring him with the

**American Mirror**  
*The Life and Art of Norman Rockwell*  
by Deborah Solomon  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 512 pp., \$28

Presidential Medal of Freedom) were plain in their veneration of the cardinal virtues. Consider his splendid *Saturday Evening Post* cover *Saying Grace* (1951), in which a little boy takes the lead from his grandmother in bowing his head and interlocking his fingers, before they treat themselves to lunch. Since the pair is seated in a bustling diner, the picture's point is the simultaneously modest and proud character of their piety: modest because they are praying at all, and proud because they do it in front of a watchful crowd.

*Peter Tonguette is at work on a book about Peter Bogdanovich.*

The trouble is that many of Solomon's observations, however well-intended, read like strained attempts to make Rockwell appear less old-fashioned than he really was. For example, Solomon laments that the betrothed couple in the lovely *Post* cover *Marriage License* (1955) look "happy to be playing their assigned gender roles"

1942—but who would ponder this paean to the dignity of self-expression and wonder about the man's marital status? At least Solomon does not suggest he log onto Match.com after saying his piece.

A few of the pictures discussed prove resistant to Solomon's interpretations. She cannot muster any enthusiasm for the "didactic" *Freedom of Worship*

Rockwell without tarting him up: "I did not grow up with a Norman Rockwell poster hanging in my bedroom," she confesses in the introduction. "I grew up gazing at a Helen Frankenthaler poster, with bright, runny rivulets of orange and yellow bordering a rectangle whose center remained daringly blank."

Is it any wonder that Solomon makes much of the inconsequential fact that Andy Warhol purchased two Rockwell paintings and a print? She is too eager to yoke Rockwell to figures who might appeal to her sensibilities but who had little to do with the subject of her book. Absentmindedly, Rockwell misremembered the name of one of his dogs in an interview with Edward R. Murrow, a meaningless anecdote that Solomon goes to town with. "We call her Lolito—Lolita," Rockwell tells Murrow, to which Solomon brusquely adds: "None of his children recall a dog named Lolita." Naturally, two full paragraphs are devoted to the heretofore unrecognized connection between Norman Rockwell and Vladimir Nabokov; but the best she can offer in the way of evidence (since the men did not know each other) is a minuscule reference to Rockwell in Nabokov's novel *Pnin*, which, she speculates optimistically, Rockwell was "surely" familiar with. (And what of the phantom dog? Solomon concludes, lamely, that "surely he had read *Lolita*, or read about it.")

By the time we reach a late chapter that feebly links Norman Rockwell with Arlo Guthrie, of all people, we have realized that Solomon is trying too hard. So what if they "met at least a few times," or if a police officer who tormented Guthrie posed for a few of Rockwell's pictures? When Solomon writes that Rockwell's stunning view of the town where he and Guthrie both resided, in *Stockbridge Main Street at Christmas* (1967), "is as much a symbol of the sixties as *Alice's Restaurant*, if only because it captures an America on the brink of vanishing," she is straining for a connection where there is none. The excision of such superfluous asides not only would have made for a brisker read, but it would have brought the book's cliché count down. ♦

ASSOCIATED PRESS



'Saying Grace' (1951)

as they appear opposite a disheveled clerk to begin their life together. Such language is disorienting when applied to this sweet evocation of a time before no-fault divorce: Would the couple in the picture even know what a "gender role" is? As the book goes on, the distance widens between what Rockwell's pictures show and what Solomon says they show. When she writes that the suede-jacket-wearing man at the center of *Freedom of Speech* (1942) is "unattached and sexually available, unbuttoned and unzipped," she sounds as though she is free-associating. True, she bases her inference on the fact that he wears no wedding band—most men did not in

(1942)—another painting in Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* series—because its tightly bunched profiles of a cluster of religiously observant people makes its point too clearly for her, "leav[ing] no place for your eye or your imagination to wander." Throughout, there is ample proof of Solomon's own meandering imagination. This has to be the first biography of Norman Rockwell to quote Susan Sontag on the subject of photography and Samuel Beckett on the subject of the duties of contemporary artists. These extraneous, distracting references do not come as a surprise, however, since it is evident from the first page that Solomon will have a hard time writing about

# Star in Reserve

*Robert Redford and the power of understatement.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

There is only one person on screen. We hear him in a brief voiceover at the beginning of the movie, after which he speaks a total of 40 words during the 106-minute running time. What we do is watch this man as he copes with a disaster at sea. The movie is called *All Is Lost*, and it's nothing short of amazing.

Robert Redford plays the man. He had his first hit 46 years ago in *Barefoot in the Park*, and what was true of him playing a young newlywed in that romantic comedy, and the cooler-than-cool Sundance Kid, and a con man in *The Sting*, and a British adventurer in *Out of Africa*, and a storefront lawyer in *Legal Eagles* is true of him at 77 in *All Is Lost*: His power as an actor comes from withholding.

Indeed, Redford is the foremost exemplar in Hollywood history of a great truth about movie stars: They capture the public imagination by keeping some fundamental part of themselves inaccessible. If movie actors are too open, too friendly, too desirous of the love of their audience, no matter how attractive they are, they will eventually come to seem overbearing. After all, they are being projected on a screen that is 30-feet tall and 70-feet wide. They are objects of infatuation, and everyone who has ever experienced a crush knows how infatuation can become more intense when the love object stays out of reach.

Redford played that part in *The Way We Were* (1973), when he served as the cinema's ultimate male love object—the morally ambiguous golden boy for whom everything has come

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

**All Is Lost**  
Directed by J.C. Chandor



Robert Redford

too easily—paired off with the over-intense Communist girl, played by Barbra Streisand, who had to have him no matter what. And even when she gets him, she doesn't really have him, because no one can.

Redford came to fame in the midst of the Method-acting histrionics of the 1970s, but represented the very opposite—always keeping it in reserve, keeping himself at a remove. He had, and has, such economy that he does his acting mostly with his wildly expressive blue eyes.

This means that at the few moments when he does let loose, it feels like a jolt of pure energy. There's a great example at the end of a cute caper film called *The Hot Rock*, from 1972, in which the dominant emotion Redford expresses is quiet irritation with his manic brother-in-law (played by George Segal, who is wonderful but

exactly the kind of overly needy performer whose time as a star was therefore shortened). Redford exits a bank, having pulled off the perfect heist. He is on Park Avenue in New York. He has to meet his brother-in-law a few blocks uptown. He starts to walk. Then a little faster. Then he begins to break out into a run. He gambols up the street. He's suddenly full of joy, and so are we.

There is no joy in *All Is Lost*; this is a movie about purpose, concentration, focus. Redford's character is (I surmise) on a solo voyage around the world. He's in the Indian Ocean on a sailboat called *Victoria Jean*. He's asleep in the cabin when there's an odd noise, and water begins rushing in. A shipping container that must have fallen off a huge cargo vessel has slammed into the side of his boat and torn a hole in the worst possible spot—disabling his communications equipment.

For the next hour and 40 minutes, this man does everything he can to save his boat and to save himself. He does not talk aloud, so we can only watch him as he moves about. It almost seems as though Redford is doing nothing in this movie, but of course that's another aspect of the power of the withheld performer. This movie is gripping from first to last, and we see almost nothing but his face and body. Nothing is anthropomorphized here; the boat does not become a character, and there is no volleyball-turned-best-friend (as was the case with Tom Hanks's solo turn in *Cast Away*). There is only Redford, and he's awe-inspiring.

Indeed, the man Redford plays is himself a character only to the extent that he is the embodiment of a profoundly admirable and very prosaic quality: competency. Redford's character is skilled, careful, and knowledgeable, and doesn't waste his time with excess emotion. Redford's peerless ability to remain self-contained on screen is the perfect match for writer-director J.C. Chandor's vision for this extraordinary piece of cinema—a story of a man keeping his wits about him in the most desperate of circumstances.

**"We are going to have to fix the website so everybody feels confident about that. We're going to have to, obviously, re-market and re-brand, and that will be challenging in this political environment."**

**—President Obama, November 19, 2013**

**PARODY**

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NOVEMBER 26, 2013

ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

# PRESIDENT OBAMA TO UNVEIL REVAMPED HEALTH CARE SITE

## Homepage to Feature Lots and Lots of Cats

By **ROBERT PEAR**

WASHINGTON — On November 30, President Obama will personally reintroduce the country to a new and improved health care website, [www.HealthCare.gov](http://www.HealthCare.gov). "We believe this new address will renew the trust of the American people," explained the White House press secretary, Jay Carney. "Of course when users type in that web address, they will simply be rerouted to [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov)."

What users will find is a homepage filled with compressed image files, or GIFs, of adorable cats. "We've got cats napping, cats at play, cats falling off television sets—you can watch it for hours," said Carney. "Our research indicates that images of cats have a soothing effect on users and will relieve the stress of experiencing time-outs and disconnections. Did you really just waste three hours of your night trying to log on? Or did you spend three rollicking hours laughing at a calico going crazy over a toy mouse?"

The cats, however, are just one part of the revamped website. According to a White House official who asked to remain nameless, the homepage will also feature lists, including "Top 10 Things Vice President Biden Has Said That Almost Got



The new version of [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov) replaces frustration with furry felines.

Him Booted" and "Ten Varieties of Kale Growing in the White House Garden." Advertisements will also appear on the site for everything from mortgage relief to warnings about "foods that cause cancer" and "the unspoken danger of açai berries."

The president will address the nation on Saturday night, going step-by-step over the application process, beginning at 7 p.m. and lasting until approximate mid-

*Continued on Page A18*

## Firm That Built ACA Website Advised Blockbuster

the weekly  
**Standard**

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