the weekly Standard

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'ENCHANTÉ, MON AMI'

The Obama Administration's Iran Delusions

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif of Iran and Secretary of State John Kerry in Geneva.

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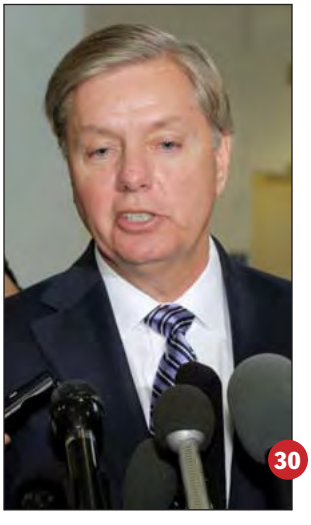

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The Eliot Ness Monstrosity

Among the many topics of discussion that do not keep The Scrapbook awake at night, the naming of federal buildings is high on the list. The Department of Justice building, for example, was recently named for Bobby Kennedy—not the most distinguished attorney general in American history—and the U.S. Senate office buildings on Capitol Hill are named for senators (Richard Russell, Philip Hart, Everett Dirksen) of slightly lesser historic resonance than, say, Daniel Webster or Henry Cabot Lodge or Robert Taft.

That's life, and politics. Indeed, there is a recurring debate about whether the name of J. Edgar Hoover should be removed from the ghastly FBI headquarters building, which will probably be settled when the FBI moves, as it is scheduled to do. (For what it's worth, we tend to think that Hoover gets an undeservedly bad rap.) Our favorite story involves the Edward A. Garmatz Federal Courthouse in Baltimore, named in 1972 for a local Democratic congressman, whose 1978 bribery trial took place in the Edward A. Garmatz Federal Courthouse. (In fairness, charges were dropped when it was learned that the state's key witness had lied to a grand jury.)

Even the world-weary Scrapbook, however, must draw the line somewhere, and we find that line in a proposal from the two Illinois senators, Republican Mark Kirk and Democrat Dick Durbin, to name the headquarters of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in Washington after the onetime Prohibition agent Eliot Ness.

ATF headquarters: the Eliot Ness building?

Ness was by no means a villain—he seems to have been a perfectly adequate Treasury agent, although his subsequent record as Cleveland's "safety director" was decidedly mixed—but his fame rests almost entirely on *The Untouchables* (1957), a ghostwritten, highly unreliable, and thoroughly self-aggrandizing account of his career, later made into a popular television series (1959-63) and movie (1987). All three give the distinct impression that Eliot Ness was Al Capone's nemesis during the Roaring Twenties and brought him to justice in 1931. He was not, and he didn't.

But that's not the point. The point is that Eliot Ness's undeserved fame is entirely a product of Hollywood, and that naming a federal building for him is the bureaucratic equivalent of a celebrity product endorsement. On that basis, the next FBI headquarters should be named for Herbert (*I Led Three Lives*) Philbrick, or failing that, perhaps the Efrem (*The F.B.I.*) Zimbalist Jr. building. The U.S. Marshals Service headquarters might be named for Wyatt Earp—or better yet, actor Hugh O'Brian who, as every baby boomer knows, played Wyatt Earp on television (1955-61), and was "brave, courageous, and bold." ♦

Kmiec's Progress

Doug Kmiec has had an amazing political journey. Today a chaired professor at Pepperdine Law School, Kmiec has traveled nearly the full gamut of public life: He worked in the Office of Legal Counsel under both Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and pursued an active career teaching law, at Notre Dame and Catholic University. He was thought, for a time, to be one of the leading lights in conservative Catholic legal circles.

Of course, conservative Catholic legal circles being what they are, you probably never heard of Kmiec, and if you did, it's because, in 2008, Kmiec very ostentatiously endorsed Barack Obama for president. At the time, this was taken as yet one more example of Obama's bipartisan appeal. In retrospect, it was probably a sign of something else.

Last week, Kmiec took to his Facebook page (where all the old folks go on the Internet these days) and announced that he's running for Congress. Kmiec has targeted California's 26th district, where freshman Democrat Julia Brownley won a reasonably narrow victory in 2012. The district had been represented by David Dreier for the preceeding decade, so it's not crazy for Kmiec to think a Republican might have a shot to unseat her. But Kmiec isn't running as a Republican. He's running as an independent. Still, not entirely crazy. This is California, after all. Stranger things have happened.

No, the crazy comes when Kmiec explained to the Pepperdine student newspaper exactly why he's running. He was inspired to run, he said, by Pope Francis. But don't worry, his candidacy won't make him some kind of congressional holy roller. Because, as he further explained, he merely sees the House of Representa-

tives as a stepping stone to, well, let's let Kmiec explain:

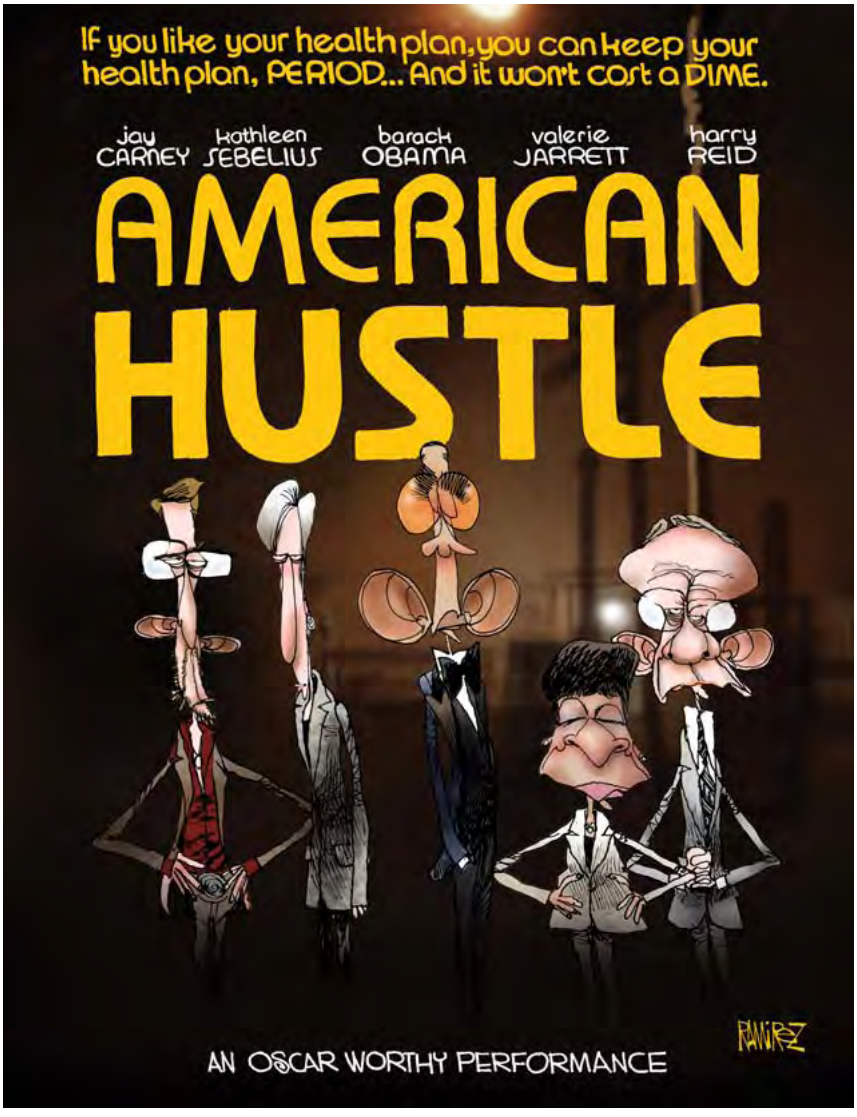
> Kmiec said that if he wins the election, he would hope to be considered as an option to become the vice-president in Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. "I see it as an outside possibility. . . . The idea of running for Congress is to put myself in a position where I'm able to both lead in the interim while she's running for president and be ready for greater responsibility should that be God's blessing and his wisdom," he said. Kmiec's blog further explains how the U.S., in his opinion, is "Ready for Hillary."

But is it ready for Kmiec, a Reagan Republican turned Obama booster who's running for Congress as an independent so he can be Hillary Clinton's running mate and then—*fiat voluntas tua*!—be ready for even greater responsibility should, you know, anything happen to Madam President?

The full scale of Kmiec's ambitions suddenly comes clear. And they also cast into new light some of his other political decisions.

For instance, in 2007 and early 2008, Kmiec was actually on board the Mitt Romney campaign, serving as a member of Romney's advisory committee. But that didn't work out—Romney dropped out of the race on February 14, 2008, turning his delegates over to the more moderate John McCain. Five weeks later, on March 23, Kmiec endorsed . . . Obama. A year later, in April 2009, Kmiec re-endorsed Obama. Or, as he put it, "Today I reaffirm my endorsement of Barack Obama as president of the United States." Which was a little strange, since there was no election and Obama had been in the White House for 12 weeks already. But a few weeks later, Kmiec's re-endorsement paid off, and Obama appointed him ambassador to Malta. (Kmiec was a prodigious blogger then at *Slate*, and now at the *Huffington Post*, so it's easy to keep track of these things.)

Alas, the relationship was fated to end poorly. In 2011, an inspector general's report suggested that Kmiec was shirking the grueling ambassadorial duties in Valletta and instead spending his time writing and giving speeches. He resigned. And in 2012 he lamented that he could not re-re-endorse Obama because of the HHS contraceptive/abortifacient mandate, which had left him "without a candidate." Obama somehow muddled through without him. ♦



The IRS Blacklist

The Scrapbook's attention was drawn last week to a front-page story in the *New York Times* about a small organization, based in Los Angeles, that is applying for tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service. Called the Friends of Abe, it is a loose association of about 1,500 "players in the entertainment industry" who gather periodically to dine together and listen to invited speakers.

Their meetings are not publicized, members are discreet about their membership, cameras aren't allowed—and with good reason, according to the *Times*: "Friends of Abe keeps a low profile and fiercely protects its membership list, to avoid what it presumes would result in a sort of 21st-century blacklist."

Worse, the IRS is on their case. The approval process for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status has been unusually protracted (two years), decidedly hos-

tile, and recently included demands that Friends of Abe comply with a "10-point request for detailed information about its meetings" and reveal its membership roster. Once again, according to the *Times*, "Tax experts [say] that an organization's membership list is information that would not typically be required" by the IRS.

All of this sounds awfully familiar to The Scrapbook, the stuff of novels, movies, documentary films, chilling memoirs, and college courses on the Cold War: the harassment of progressives, union activists, even the occasional Communist, in Hollywood—followed by blacklists, unemployment, poverty, sometimes suicide.

The problem is that, to the extent that there was ever a blacklist for leftists, it was over in a handful of years, and the vast majority of victims spent the subsequent half-century working in Hollywood, submitting to friendly interviews, accepting awards, and appearing as talking heads in films about the McCarthy Era.

The Friends of Abe, as readers might have guessed, is an informal association of conservatives, not leftists, in Hollywood, which explains why they meet discreetly, are reluctant to divulge their members' names, and fear (in the words of the *New York Times*, no less) "a sort of 21st-century blacklist." It also explains, of course, why the Internal Revenue Service has singled them out for what might euphemistically be called special treatment. The IRS has a recent history of abusing its power by mistreating conservatives, and Hollywood has an older history of punishing dissenters. The names change, and the blacklists are drawn up by the left, not the right. But the story remains the same. ♦

Novak Fellowship Alert

The Scrapbook is a grizzled veteran of the groves of journalism and so can't compete, but his fellow print and online journalists with less than 10 years of professional experience should be aware of the looming deadline (February 11) for the annual Robert Novak Journalism Fellowships. Both full-time ($50,000) and part-time ($25,000) awards will be conferred on winners, who undertake a yearlong writing project of their choosing, focusing on stories supportive of American culture, free-market competition, and a free society. The fellowships begin on September 1. Applicants must be U.S. citizens. For complete information, visit novakfellowships.org. ♦

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Alexandros Petersen, 1984-2014

The last time I heard from Alex, he emailed from Kabul. "Our lengthy discussions about your trip to St. Petersburg were apt, because you are like Russia: a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." As was not uncommon with an email from Alex, I didn't quite know what to say, so I didn't respond right away. Then I lost the chance. Two days after he sent the note, Alex was dead. And I soon realized that Churchill's famous words applied quite aptly to the man who'd quoted them.

On Friday, January 17, a Taliban suicide bomber detonated himself at the entrance to a restaurant in the Afghan capital popular with foreign civilians. Then two men with AK-47s entered and methodically killed every foreigner inside, along with some locals. Alex hadn't been in Kabul a week; he'd flown out of Washington the previous Saturday to take a post at the American University of Afghanistan.

Alexandros Petersen might be a name you know. This magazine published a piece of his last fall on a topic virtually no one else was writing about: the flowering friendship between Israel and Azerbaijan. He was a student of global geopolitics, with a special interest in energy policy in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and published prolifically, over the years, from perches at the Council on Foreign Relations, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Atlantic Council, and the Wilson Center for International Scholars. He earned a first-class bachelor's degree in War Studies from King's College London and a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics. But his scholarship was only part of what makes him worth remembering.

You've heard of The Most Interesting Man in the World, the debonair but fictitious spokesman for Dos Equis beer. Alex Petersen was The Most Interesting Man in D.C. Like his fictional counterpart, Alex was brains and brawn, intensely charming, an irresistible conversationalist—and always more than a little mysterious. You never knew exactly where you'd see Alex next, or when you might get a missive from London, Baku, or Tbilisi.

I met him at a raucous party at the Yemeni embassy. He was tall, thin, dashing, but his poise really made him stand out in a room crowded with the capital's beautiful and bright. At our first lunch together, we debated who was the superior thinker, the early George Kennan or the later George Kennan. Alex was then working on his first book. Published in 2011, *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West* argued that the independence of Eurasia—which China and Russia are fighting to dominate—was also essential to American interests. The more accomplished he grew, the more modest he became. I asked him last summer about the book he was then writing, about China's influence in Central Asia. "You don't want to hear about that," he insisted. I did, but he soon changed the subject to his off-time in the region, exploring the mountains of Azerbaijan on horseback, alone with a guide who spoke little English.

Alexandros Petersen in Kyrgyzstan, 2011

SUE ANNE TAY

To be honest, it was difficult to picture Alex on horseback in the Caucasus. I had never once gone out with him when he wasn't sporting a jacket with a pocket square carefully poking out. He wasn't pretentious, but to many, he looked a fop, with his well-fitting clothes and well-placed hair. But Alex never failed to surprise those who might judge him from his appearance. I was amazed when, listening to music at my apartment late one night, we started talking about some of my favorite bands. How did this young and serious guy know so much about Pink Floyd, Genesis, and Jethro Tull? It turned out he'd sung in a hardcore punk band he formed in high school.

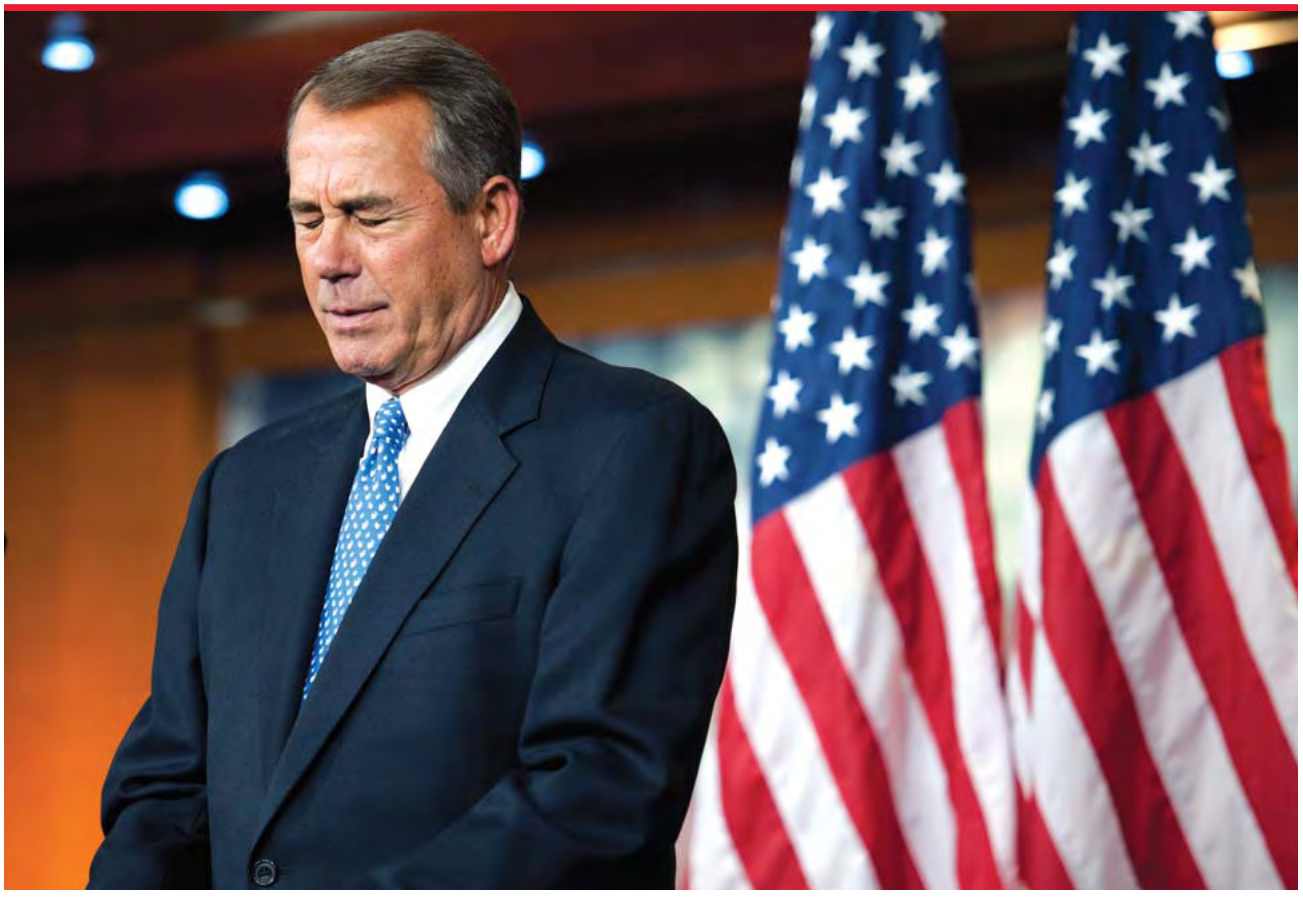
That same night, I learned he used to knit, taught by a European grandparent. We talked for a while about the differences in yarns.

Alex partly cultivated his enigmatic side. He always refused to tell me his age; he said he told no one. He felt it was better, both professionally and romantically, not to be judged by it. I knew he was precocious, but I was taken aback when, after his death, I learned he was just 29.

Of course it was Alex, this American with Danish and Greek parents, who introduced me to a songwriter from my hometown of Edmonton, Canada. Corb Lund's "Horse Soldier, Horse Soldier" is a country tune recounting the history of warhorses, and Alex loved a YouTube video that added the appropriate historical paintings and photographs to the music. He always got teary-eyed at the end of the song. The narrator thinks the modern world has made the warhorse extinct but learns it's not so: *Today I ride with Special Forces on those wily Afghan horses / Dostum's Northern Alliance give their thanks / And no matter defeat or victory, in battle it occurs to me / That we may see a swelling in our ranks*. The West has lost one of its soldiers—and the world one of its most interesting men.

Kelly Jane Torrance

the weekly Standard



NEWSCOM

Memo to House GOP

Election Day is almost nine months off. But right now Republicans seem almost certain to hold the House of Representatives and are likely to take the Senate. Which raises the inevitable question: How might the GOP seize defeat from the jaws of victory?

Two occasions stand out, two obvious obstacles ahead that could lead to disastrous Republican stumbles, two pitfalls on the path to a happy GOP Election Day. Republicans are pretty good at falling into such pits. One is the increase in the debt limit, which Congress will have to deal with in the next month or two. The other is immigration reform, which the Senate has passed and which awaits a decision from the House leadership on how to proceed.

Conservative activists tend to get excited at the prospect of a debt ceiling increase, since it allegedly gives them a rare moment of leverage over the president. There is already a conservative wish list of items that could be attached to the coming debt limit legislation. But as we saw in the somewhat analogous situation of the government shutdown in October, such leverage is often more theoretical than real, especially when you only control one house of Congress and are divided among yourselves in that chamber. With the country and the markets, egged on by the media, spooked by the threat of default, it's not clear how much "leverage" House Republicans will really have.

So conservative activists should give up their fond hopes of a debt ceiling bonanza and more or less let the hike go through unscathed (they can still vote against it, of course). Conservatives will have plenty of opportunities to try to attach their favorite proposals to must-pass legislation in 2015, if they want to, under more politically favorable circumstances. Meanwhile, during 2014, conservatives certainly can and should aggressively advance freestanding legislative proposals, to repeal and delay parts of Obamacare, for instance, and they'll be better off with a clean debate on such legislation free of the specter of default.

In return for making life easier on the debt ceiling for the House leadership, Speaker Boehner should make

his own concession: He should announce that he will not bring any immigration legislation to the floor this session. If there's one thing that could blow up GOP chances for a good 2014, it would be an explosive debate over immigration in the House. The only sure way to avoid such a debate is not to let anything onto the floor in the first place. Once even an innocuous-sounding measure gets passed, then the pressure to go to conference with the loathed Senate bill will be great. And whatever ultimately were to happen, activists would spend months worrying about and agitating against a betrayal by the leadership, business interests would spend months urging such a betrayal, and Republicans would be consumed by infighting and recriminations on an issue that does them no short-term political good. Bringing immigration to the floor insures a circular GOP firing squad, instead of a nicely lined-up one shooting together and in unison at Obamacare and other horrors of big government liberalism. Since there really is no need to act this year on immigration, don't. Don't even try.

In sum: With respect to the must-pass debt ceiling legislation, the House conservatives should let it pass. With respect to immigration reform, which isn't must-pass, leadership should let it die. The guiding principle should be do no harm. This year, doing no harm requires both conservative activists and the GOP establishment to sacrifice something. So they should make a deal: No default in return for no amnesty. Such a deal should mean no GOP tears this November.

—William Kristol

Obama's Fantasy World

Aleppo, January 22

So what if the sectarian conflict raging from Beirut to Baghdad claimed yet more lives last week? From the Obama administration's perspective, all's well with its Middle East policy. Not a bombing in the Lebanese capital, nor clashes throughout Iraq, nor even reports that Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime systematically tortured and executed 11,000 detainees can shake the White House's confidence in its strategic vision. For Obama envisages, as he told the *New Yorker* last week, a "new geopolitical equilibrium" emerging in the Middle East. And as the White House measures progress—diplomatic frequent flyer miles, not body counts on the ground—all the relevant signs from last week pointed to a region moving in the right direction.

On Monday, the interim deal over Iran's nuclear weapons program that was agreed to in Geneva in November was officially implemented. On Wednesday, the much-anticipated Geneva II talks, bringing together representatives from Assad's regime and the opposition it has slaughtered for nearly three years, finally kicked off. The former, the White House argues, will prevent a war with Iran—provided Congress doesn't pass new sanctions legislation. The latter will end the bloodshed in Syria—eventually. As U.S. officials have explained, it's the beginning of a long process.

Sure, there will be some hiccups along the way. Assad's representatives leveled threats at Geneva, while pro-regime thugs beat up anti-Assad protesters outside the conference. With even more at stake in Iran, it's hardly surprising the clerical regime is also acting out—but that's just to placate Tehran's hardliners, say Obama aides. Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, Tehran's point man for nuclear talks, said that, contrary to the White House's talking points, Iran hadn't agreed to dismantle anything under the interim agreement. That's right, said Hassan Rouhani. The Iranian president told CNN's Fareed Zakaria that Iran won't destroy any of its centrifuges under any circumstances and will continue work on its heavy-water plutonium reactor.

Why isn't the White House worried? After all, it's invested a great deal of American diplomatic and political prestige—conferences, negotiations, agreements—in these two manifestly intransigent regimes only to be repeatedly shown up on the world stage.

The sanctions relief that the administration provided with the interim agreement has boosted Iranian oil sales and brought about what Foundation for Defense

NEWSCOM

of Democracies analysts Mark Dubowitz and Emanuele Ottolenghi describe as a "gold rush" in Tehran. Investors, corporations, and markets have gotten the message that Iran is open for business once again. What's good news for Tehran should be bad news for the White House because the recovery of the Iranian economy means that the White House has all but lost the financial leverage that drove the clerical regime to the negotiating table in the first place.

But none of this seems to matter to Obama. No, he has a vision. In Obama's new Middle East, the Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf and Iran will balance each other out. "I think each individual piece of the puzzle," Obama told the *New Yorker*, "is meant to paint a picture in which conflicts and competition still exist in the region but that it is contained, it is expressed in ways that don't exact such an enormous toll on the countries involved, and that allow us to work with functioning states to prevent extremists from emerging there."

Obama's "picture" of the Middle East is apparently not a landscape drawn from real life.

President Rouhani and his aides have been able to keep the "moderate" charade going for only so long. Two weeks ago Zarif placed a wreath on the grave of Imad Mughniyeh, a notorious Hezbollah commander responsible for, among other operations, the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks at the Beirut airport, which killed 241 American servicemen. Just so there was no mistaking the foreign minister's gesture, a week later the Iranian press featured photos of Mughniyeh's son Jihad at the right hand of Qassem Suleimani when the head of the Revolutionary Guards' external operations unit, the Quds Force, buried his mother. The Iranian regime was thereby celebrating a continuity of terrorism and extremism, from legendary father to exalted son.

The Obama White House, in short, has tied American interests to a regime that boasts of sponsoring terror. Which is to say, Obama's strategy for a new Middle East has nothing to do with facts on the ground. Rather, it's based on a concept derived from international relations seminars. On this view, because Iran is a "functioning state," it is susceptible to the various diplomatic, political, and military instruments that other states can deploy to engage or deter it. From the White House's point of view, Sunni extremists are especially dangerous because, not being "functioning states," they're difficult to "engage"—except with drone strikes.

This concept, unfortunately, cannot account for the differing belief systems and ideological structures that motivate states. If Sunni extremism is often a result of the weakness of Sunni states incapable of controlling their jihadist hordes, Iranian-backed extremism is an index of the strength and coherence of a ruling regime that uses terror to advance its interests. Contrary to Obama's vision of a new Middle East, the violence won't be contained by our embracing Iran. What is likely to follow in the region is more bloodshed, not just for Middle Easterners, from Jerusalem to Damascus to Baghdad, but also for Americans.

—Lee Smith

Privacy or Security: a False Choice

In the wake of all the "leaks" by Edward Snowden of the National Security Agency's collection programs and the resulting debate over those programs, one constantly hears from elected officials and the commentariat about the need to strike the right balance between privacy and security. More often than not, this is followed by a suggestion that, as a country, since 9/11, we haven't. Putting aside for the moment that no one has come up with evidence that the NSA, in spite of all the powerful capabilities it has at hand, has done anything untoward, the common refrain is that we are only a step away from the era of "Big Brother."

Yet anyone who knows anything about the modern American intelligence community knows that it is virtually impossible for any of its major components to carry out a program significantly impinging on American privacy and get away with it for any extended period. Between the agencies' own inspector generals, the oversight provided by the courts, Congress, and the executive departments and agencies themselves, any effort to stray outside the lines is not likely to go undetected or unreported for very long.

A telling example is the FBI's expansive use of "national security letters," administrative subpoenas used by the bureau to obtain transactional information from third parties—such as credit card information, travel history, etc. Under the Patriot Act, the FBI was given more discretion to employ NSLs in connection with counterterrorism investigations. In short order, having been blamed in part for not preventing 9/11, the bureau took advantage of the new provisions and greatly expanded its NSL requests. But this hardly went unnoticed. Congress, the courts, and internal FBI and Justice Department auditors all weighed in to impose greater rigor on how this investigative tool was used, with the result that the number of NSLs has decreased, oversight has been beefed up and, with the president's most recent

directive, greater transparency ordered in their use.

Moreover, the worry that the intelligence community will become a "rogue" entity ignores the undeniable fact that there are intelligence community employees who would probably not hesitate to go public if they really thought American liberties were being threatened. While there are always "go along, get along" individuals in any bureaucracy, since the mid-'70s, intelligence officials know crossing such lines will almost certainly lead to more trouble than it's worth, either to them or their agencies.

Part of the problem—indeed, a key problem in the debate—is that we have subsumed civil liberties under the expansive banner of "privacy" and ignored just how complex the notion of privacy is in today's world. When talking about civil liberties, it is well to remind ourselves that the kind of judicially authorized telephony data that NSA collects and that we are arguing about (numbers dialed and time stamps, but not content) has long been held by the courts not to violate the 4th Amendment's proscription against "unreasonable searches" by the government. Nor have any of our other core liberties—such as, freedom of the press, religion, conscience and association, the right to vote, the right to move from state to state, and, yes, the right to bear arms—been undermined in any real way by the government or its intelligence agencies since 9/11. If anything, other than the aggravation of airport screening and tightened border controls, Americans are just as free today as they were on September 10, 2001.

Privacy is a different matter. Americans want privacy in theory but give it away to all kinds of entities on a daily basis when they use the Internet for buying books or movie tickets, search the Internet for this or that, post their daily affairs on social media, or even commute to work using an EZPass which, while it allows John Doe the convenience of bypassing long lines at the toll plaza, records precisely when his car was on a certain stretch of highway and can be preserved in a searchable form, *ad infinitum*. If anything, the intelligence community is far more careful with the data it collects about Americans than are Google, Amazon, and Facebook.

Because we've lost sight of what our core civil liberties are, we tend to forget those periods in American history where getting the balance between safety and liberty was far more difficult and problematic than it is today. During previous wars, American presidents have suspended the writ of habeas corpus, ignored the authority of the courts, censored publications, compromised mail, and interned over a hundred thousand Japanese immigrants and Japanese-American citizens in "war relocation camps." We're nowhere near that state today.

It was all well and good that in his speech on January 17, the president said that "throughout American history, intelligence has helped secure our country and freedom." That's certainly true. But when President Obama then went on to offer up the "cautionary tale" of East Germany, where "vast unchecked surveillance turned citizens into informers and persecuted people for what they said in the privacy of their own homes," he fed a fear among the American public that is neither responsible nor warranted by reality.

—Gary Schmitt

Cuomo's Place

NEWSCOM

At the 1992 Democratic National Convention, the pro-life Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, Robert Casey, was barred from speaking. The message was if you are pro-life, you have no place in the Democratic party.

The new attitude of the Democratic party, at least as represented by New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo, is if you are pro-life, you have no place in a blue state.

During a January 17 interview with Susan Arbetter of WCNY's "The Capitol Pressroom," Cuomo, angry at Republican opposition to his agenda, offered his critique of the GOP.

"Who are they?" Cuomo demanded to know. Are they wise, reasonable, and enlightened Republicans who happen to agree with him? That's one possibility. Here's the other:

> Are they these extreme conservatives who are right-to-life, pro-assault-weapon, anti-gay? Is that who they are? Because if that's who they are and they're the extreme conservatives, they have no place in the state of New York, because that's not who New Yorkers are.

This statement was jarring enough that Governor Cuomo's office later complained that his statements had been "distorted." (They had not.) In fact, Cuomo revealed rather more about the philosophy and attitudes of modern liberalism than he intended.

What was on display was another example of the tendency, compulsively indulged in by the president, to characterize the views of one's opponents as so extreme and benighted that they are unworthy of refuting. What makes the charge of extremism so risible in this instance is that according to Gallup, more Americans consider themselves to be pro-life than pro-choice—and by huge margins, Americans favor restrictions on the kind of late-term abortions Cuomo has been advocating (in a state whose abortion rates already lead the nation).

But there is an even more pernicious mindset among many on the left, including those holding high public office. It is that those who are pro-life, oppose certain restrictions on guns, and believe (as President Obama did for most of his first term) in the traditional view of marriage hold views that are so offensive they should take up residence elsewhere. Their views not only don't need to be refuted; they should be treated as indecent and illegitimate.

Governor Cuomo's comments are all the more extraordinary given that they come less than a year after the abortionist Kermit Gosnell was convicted of three counts of first-degree murder for the death of three babies that prosecutors said were delivered alive and subsequently killed. If Gosnell's "shop of horrors" troubled Cuomo even one bit, he has yet to say so. In the World According to Andrew Cuomo, the extremists are those who want to save newly born children rather than those who sever their necks.

It is quite a road modern liberalism has traveled. A political movement that once took seriously the term "social justice" and professed its solidarity with the weakest and most vulnerable members of the human community not only has made abortion its moral litmus test; it wants to treat those who have taken up the cause of protecting unborn and newly born children as unwelcome persons. In fact, those who seek to expand the circle of protection and concern for the most innocent and defenseless among us deserve more than a place in New York state; they deserve a place of honor.

—Peter Wehner

The Obamacare Bailout

Big government in bed with big insurance.

BY JAY COST

Obamacare is like an onion: The more layers you peel back, the worse it smells. The latest revelation about this horrible law is the presence of a "risk corridor," a euphemism for an insurance industry bailout that will occur sometime in the next year.

The law depends upon the voluntary participation of insurers. Private citizens are compelled to purchase insurance, but insurers are free to walk away from Obamacare. To prevent that from happening, congressional Democrats put in place guarantees to cover insurance industry losses for the first few years of the program. The total cost of this bailout could feasibly run into the tens of billions of dollars.

Conservative thought leaders have begun to sound the alarm. In a *Washington Post* column in early January, Charles Krauthammer argued that ending the bailout should be the "first order of business" for conservatives in 2014. Similarly, James Capretta, Yuval Levin, Ramesh Ponnuru, and others have argued that the bailout should be a focus of conservatives looking to stop Obamacare.

This is all to the good. Yet the impending bailout of Obamacare insurers is part of a much larger story about the growing entanglement of business and the federal government. To attack Obamacare as effectively as possible, conservatives must understand this story better, and situate the bailout within the broader narrative of how businesses' rent-seeking—their manipulation of the political process to increase their wealth—has come to dominate public policy.

Conservatives have made common cause with business groups for well over a century, as the two have overlapping interests in limiting the ability of organized labor, consumer advocates, and the environmentalist left to use government to regulate the economy. For conservatives, the goal is to limit Washington's power; for businesses, it is to protect the bottom line. Buttressing this strategic alliance has long been a shared belief that America's free enterprise system is the surest means to generate broad-based prosperity and encourage the flourishing of individual initiative.

Tight as this relationship may be, it remains a coalition, not a union. It is contingent upon shared goals and values, but conservatism and business are not coterminous. This is why conservatives should be troubled by the rise of rent-seeking behavior among businesses. Ideologically speaking, this should be as anathema to conservatives as any capricious exercise of federal power. A tax carve-out to General Electric is no different from a politically motivated exemption for the United Auto Workers from the National Labor Relations Board; in both cases, politicians use the government's power for personal or political ends.

Worse, conservatives inevitably get the blame for business rent-seeking because of their longstanding alliance with the business community. Professional Democrats since the 1980s have been well aware of this problem for Republicans, and accordingly have played a double-game. While bemoaning corporate fat cats, they

DAVE MALAN

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rake in corporate donations hand over fist. Nobody perfected this hypocrisy quite like Bill Clinton. For instance, he funded the 1996 Democratic National Convention via enormous donations from corporations like Seagram's and MCI, while his partisans bemoaned the grip that big business had on the Republicans.

This problem has gotten worse in the last half-century. During the 1960s, the New Left joined organized labor in demanding governmental regulation of the economy in general, and business in particular. This pushed business into an advocacy role that it had not so prominently occupied since the age of John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and the giant trusts of the late 19th century. But what else was it to do? If Ralph Nader was liable to show up on any given day in 1967 to warn some congressional subcommittee about the danger your product posed, you better have a lobbyist of your own on hand to warn about the dangers of Nader.

As it turned out, business was simply better at influencing politicians than anybody else. History on this subject is replete with irony. Worried that the federal courts would declare their political action committee illegal under the Taft-Hartley Act, organized labor leaned heavily on its Democratic allies in Congress to pass the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, which legalized labor PAC activity. Long hesitant to join the fray because of the dubious legality of PACs, businesses subsequently jumped in with gusto. Today, contributions from business and professional association PACs dwarf those from organized labor.

Not only was business very good at playing defense, it grew quite adept at playing offense as well, using expert lobbying and smartly placed campaign contributions to tilt the public policy needle in its favor. Moreover, businesses are happy to play both sides of the aisle in this effort. It is not really about defending the free enterprise system against the radical New Left, which is what initially induced businesses to get into the lobbying game so aggressively in the 1960s. It is now about padding the bottom line. Thus, a quasi-socialist Democrat can be a friend of business, provided he is willing to fight for a special carve-out during an obscure subcommittee markup of a complicated, 1,000-plus-page bill about which the public knows nothing.

Political scientists used to speak of "iron triangles" connecting lobbyists, bureaucrats, and legislators. Today, the old triangles have morphed into vast networks of embedded, interconnected interests that depend upon and support one another. Politicians, bureaucrats, lobbyists from all sorts of factions—very much including labor, consumer, and environmental groups—can all coordinate to channel public funds for private plunder. To borrow a phrase from political scientist Theodore Lowi, this is "interest group liberalism" run amok, with businesses now playing a dominant role in the dispensing of goodies by Uncle Sam. Indeed, the surest sign that Obamacare was going to be bad for America was the announcement that Walmart and the Service Employees International Union had joined with the left-wing Center for American Progress to push for the business mandate.

Cleaning out this hornet's nest of access and favoritism should be the policy priority of conservatives, for three reasons. First, it is an obvious political winner. Politicians are always in search of "valence" issues that split the public 80-20. Inappropriate access to government largesse is such an issue. Ordinary Americans, whether liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, hate it. Second, leadership from conservatives on this issue would help rebrand their movement, or at least make it harder for Democrats to have their cake and eat it, too.

Third, it is necessary to deal with this problem in order to peel back Obamacare, the quintessential product of today's venomous policy-making process. So much of the debate about Obamacare overlooks the fact that the Democrats effectively purchased private sector buy-in through such policies as this "risk corridor." In fact, Obamacare is festooned with payouts to every imaginable business and trade group that has a stake in American health care. These were important not merely in securing passage of the law in the first place, but also in sustaining it over time because they give these groups a vested interest in its "success."

Conservatives are right to acknowledge that to repeal Obamacare they must highlight how the law is hurting people, develop feasible policy alternatives, and generally keep the issue front and center before the public. Fine. But in addition it is necessary to expose the perverted method by which bills become laws in 21st-century America. The federal register is chock-full of laws that the public does not like or that unjustly hurt people, but that persist because some well-placed interest group draws some sort of rent from them. So it is with Obamacare. Until conservatives assault this quid pro quo system, Obamacare will never go away.

One place to start this project is the impending insurance industry bailout. Conservatives can hoist liberals on their own petard: The demagogues who railed against greedy insurance companies are now set to bail those companies out, even as average people have to pay increasingly onerous tax penalties to guarantee perpetual profits for the industry. As valence issues go, this one probably breaks 99.9-0.1, with only President Obama, congressional Democrats, and insurance industry CEOs and their immediate dependents opposed.

Yet such a campaign need not end with an attack on this Obamacare bailout. For half a century, government and business have become more and more entangled, with bureaucrats, congressmen, congressional staffs, and lobbyists trading rents not just, crudely, for campaign contributions, but also for information, job opportunities for themselves and their protégés, favors of all kinds. Far too often, the public good is considered last. This is big government at its worst—and one of the best places for conservatives to take a stand. ♦

A Modesty Proposal

New York City's half-baked inquisition.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

A few of Williamsburg's Hasidim

Brooklyn

In recent years, the Brooklyn neighborhood of Williamsburg has acquired a reputation as one of America's most progressive hipster outposts. In addition to the waves of Manhattan refugees who have relocated here, the area gets no shortage of visitors. Most of the visitors, however, don't venture down Lee Avenue—main street for the Satmar Hasidic Jewish enclave.

At first glance, it appears as if nothing has changed on Lee Avenue in at least 50 years. According to Allan Nadler, the director of the program in Jewish studies at Drew University, "no other post-Holocaust community has more faithfully and effectively preserved its old religious and cultural traditions and folkways, to say nothing of the Yiddish language." Certainly, it's hard to miss the ubiquitous black hats and distinctively modest attire of the Orthodox Jews strolling by. It's a drastic contrast to the sartorially outrageous trendsters nearby.

Differing opinions about what you think is appropriate to wear might seem an unlikely source of legal trouble, but in contemporary New York, no one is left unscathed by the left-wing municipal bureaucracy. Herman Sanders's father founded Sander's Kosher Bakery on Lee Avenue in 1959. Sanders hadn't even heard of the New York City Commission on Human Rights prior to being accused by it of violating the city's discrimination laws and threatened with thousands of dollars in fines. Sander's Kosher Bakery is one of seven Hasidic businesses in Williamsburg accused by the city of religious and gender discrimination. Their alleged crime? Posting a dress code in their storefront windows.

The offending signs read "Dress Code For Store. No Shorts, No Barefoot, No Sleeveless, No Low Cut Neckline" with the message repeated in Spanish. According to Sanders, he doesn't even know who put the sign there—a not implausible suggestion considering storefront windows up and down the street serve as informal community bulletin boards and are populated with flyers. But as an observant Jew who values modesty, Sanders admits he doesn't disagree with the message, either.

"It didn't offend me. And I don't think it would offend the customers," he told me. It was only after the *New York Post* wrote a characteristically cheeky item about the signs—"Brooklyn has lost its right to bare arms"—that the city's human rights commission came calling. Specifically, the stores were accused of violating Section 8-107(4)(1) of the Administrative Code of New York, which disallows stores from denying service to customers based on "actual or perceived age, race, creed, color, national origin, gender, disability, marital status, partnership status, sexual orientation or alienage or citizenship status."

There's one major problem with the city's claim that the stores violated New York's antidiscrimination law. Since the signs first appeared in July 2012, the New York human rights commission has produced a flurry of documents and held administrative hearings about the matter. Not once has the commission presented evidence or complaints that anyone was denied service as a result of the signs. Sanders insists every customer was served. "[The signs] didn't help, actually. People still came in with shorts," he shrugs.

Moreover, the human rights commission has never claimed that there's anything wrong with private establishments imposing a dress code. The Four Seasons and courtrooms in New York enforce similar dress codes. The human rights commission's stated objection to these particular dress code signs was an affront to logic and religious freedom. Last summer, the

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commission argued before an administrative judge that the dress code signs in the Williamsburg stores may be similar to dress codes at establishments elsewhere in the city. But because the signs were in Hasidic stores, they should be viewed as an attempt to force Orthodox Jewish beliefs on others. In other words, the commission argued that dress codes are permissible as a matter of taste or decorum, but not acceptable if they are an expression of religious conviction.

The administrative judge dismissed this line of reasoning from the commission out-of-hand, but gave the agency another chance to make its case. The judge essentially told the commission that the only way to prove the signs were discriminatory was to demonstrate that they were an attempt to use "code words" to keep those outside the tight-knit Jewish community from patronizing the stores. So the city returned to the drawing board, and ordered up a survey designed to show that the broader Brooklyn community found the signs offensive and discriminatory.

The results of the commission's survey are suspect for a number of reasons. But even though the survey was conducted with the intent of proving the commission's dubious case against the Jewish business owners, the results aren't exactly damning. The commission's own survey found that a plurality did not think the sign would make anyone feel discriminated against on the basis of religion. The survey did find higher numbers of people who felt the sign was unwelcoming based on gender. As absurd as this survey sounds, it was the central piece of evidence the human rights commission was slated to present at another administrative trial that was supposed to take place last week. The defense team for the Jewish businesses, meanwhile, conducted its own survey about reactions to the sign and produced markedly different results—87 percent of respondents thought the sign wasn't unwelcoming to either men or women.

However, the human rights commission's already weak case fell apart before last week's trial even began. The trial was shaping up to be a matter of dueling witnesses and dueling surveys. The defense team representing the Jewish business owners—headed by Jay Lefkowitz, who served as general counsel in the Office of Management and Budget in George W. Bush's administration—was to present the head of the research firm that conducted its survey to testify to its scientific validity. For its part, the human rights commission offered no expert to testify on behalf of its survey.

With no attempt to demonstrate the scientific validity of its survey, the commission would likely be laughed out of a real court of law. But the problem of activist human rights commissions enforcing politically correct orthodoxy is metastasizing precisely because such commissions have broad powers to impose penalties through proceedings outside the actual legal system. Even though these "trials" involve basic constitutional questions, can result in significant fines, require legal representation, and often drag on for years, administrative proceedings don't provide the accused many of the standard protections one would find in a real courtroom. In fact, human rights commissions around the country are often responsible for both prosecuting and rendering judgment on those accused of violating discrimination ordinances.

The problem of activist human rights commissions enforcing politically correct orthodoxy is metastasizing precisely because they have broad powers to impose penalties outside the actual legal system.

It's telling who the human rights commission did select to testify to the results of its survey. Out of more than 600 New Yorkers interviewed for its survey, the commission selected Joshua Wiles, a public school teacher in nearby Bedford-Stuyvesant, to testify to the fact that Brooklyn residents found the dress code signs discriminatory.

On January 20—the day before the trial was to begin—The Weekly Standard revealed online that Wiles had previously been arrested as part of an Occupy Wall Street demonstration, and in keeping with his left-wing beliefs, Wiles's Facebook page was littered with items expressing a deep anti-Israel sentiment. According to Wiles, the creation of the state of Israel is "The Biggest Robbery of World" (sic). He accused the Israeli government of practicing apartheid on multiple occasions. And he accused the Israeli government of targeting innocent civilians and assassinating children. It's reasonable to wonder if Wiles had his own irrational prejudices against the Hasidic community in Brooklyn, and the exposure of Wiles's anti-Israel bias quickly made news in New York's Jewish community.

The next day, the administrative judge informed the human rights commission that its case was remarkably weak and that it might want to settle. The human rights commission was no doubt surprised by this turn of events—it had hoped to raise the potential fines involved from $2,500 to $75,000. But with the judge disinclined to even hear the case, the commission agreed to a settlement—though it didn't get much. After more than a year of doggedly pursuing the case and wasting considerable resources on the matter, the city capitulated. It would drop the case against the businesses in Williamsburg and impose no fines. For their part, the businesses agreed that any future dress code signs "will make clear that everybody is welcome, which was the reality," Lefkowitz told the *Daily News*.

It's clear that the case had become an embarrassment to the city. Bill de Blasio, the new mayor, was asked about the matter at a press conference a few hours before the aborted trial was to begin. His Honor ducked the question, saying, "We want to respect every community in everything we do." If New York's new mayor is sincere about that sentiment, he can start by reining in the city's out-of-control "human rights" bureaucracy. ♦

The Ellison Elision

A congressman rewrites his own history.

BY SCOTT W. JOHNSON

Keith Ellison at a protest by fast-food workers in Washington, D.C., 2013

Minnesota's Keith Ellison made history as the first Muslim elected to Congress. He is a former member and local leader of the Nation of Islam who first ran for office as a Democrat in 1998 under the pseudonym Keith Ellison-Muhammad. He's a voluble striver and a hustler emitting Marxist claptrap with an Islamic twist. He now puts these qualities on display in his engaging new memoir-cum-manifesto, *My Country, 'Tis of Thee: My Faith, My Family, Our Future* (Karen Hunter Publishing/Gallery Books, $25.00).

The real drama in the book plays out under the surface, out of the reader's view. Ellison baldly revises his life to remove his most dramatic transformation, from a local leader and advocate of the Nation of Islam to a relentless critic of it (as he appears in the book, as though it were ever thus). Moreover, Ellison's political manifesto has all the charms of a compilation of *New York Times* editorials. If you want to understand where the Democratic party is headed, however, Ellison's manifesto warrants a look all by itself. Holding positions of leadership in the Congressional Progressive Caucus (he is co-chair) and in the House Democratic Caucus (he is chief deputy whip), Ellison embodies the strange alliance of radical Islam and the American left.

Fortunately, the book is not all politics. It comes to life when Ellison turns to his family background and his conversion to Islam. The third of five brothers, Ellison was born and raised in a relatively affluent family on the northwest side of Detroit. He radiates justified pride in his family. His parents raised no losers. Of the five brothers, Ellison relates that four have law degrees and one is a doctor. "My parents are five for five: all of their sons have graduate degrees and are gainfully employed," he says.

His father, a hardworking psychiatrist, comes across as a dour skeptic in matters religious (he "had had no time for religion"). Ellison describes his father as "less than pleased" when his next-oldest brother, Brian, announced at age 18 that he'd found Jesus (Brian not only attended law school, he went on to become a Baptist minister). Ellison's mother is a faithful ("Mass-attending, candle-lighting, genuflecting, rosary-bead-praying") Catholic, and she seems to have prevailed in Ellison's education, if not in his attitude. Attending high school at the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy, Ellison never felt the attractions of the faith. "The religion never spoke to me," he says.

Ellison discovered Islam as a 19-year-old college student attending Wayne State University in Detroit. Accompanying a college friend to Jummah prayer at the student center, Ellison found a Muslim preacher talking "about universal brotherhood, the evils of racism and the common origins of all of humanity." He liked what he heard, and he converted to Islam later that year.

What kind of Muslim is he? Ellison expressly addresses the question. He depicts himself as a live-and-let-live kind of Muslim. "If I were Jewish, I would probably be a reform Jew. If I were Christian, I would be one of those come-as-you-are nondenominational Christians," he confides. "Faith is not about expressing what I believe so that the world can see I'm faithful. I don't believe in following a strict set of rules to prove my love for God or to prove my faith." According to Ellison, "In Islam, your religion is what *you* make of it."

As for the vexed question of gay marriage, Ellison concedes that "I get Muslims who come up to me and ask, 'Brother Keith, how can you be in favor of gay marriage?'" Brother Keith explains: "I'm in favor of civil rights for all. I'm in favor of freedom."

Those of us wondering about the

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reconciliation of his faith with his politics now have the answer. Which branch of Islam comports with the agenda of the Democratic party on social issues? Ellison reveals it to be the Ellison branch of Islam.

With one mystery solved, Ellison silently introduces another. How does his adherence to Islam square with his long involvement with the Nation of Islam? After graduation from Wayne State, Ellison moved to Minneapolis to attend the University of Minnesota Law School. As a third-year law student, writing under the name Keith E. Hakim, Ellison took up the cause of "Minister Louis Farrakhan" and the Nation of Islam in the *Minnesota Daily*.

Making a name for himself in Minneapolis as an attorney activist in the 1990s, Ellison emerged as a local leader of the Nation of Islam under the names Keith X Ellison and Keith Ellison-Muhammad. He first ran, unsuccessfully, for public office seeking the DFL (Democratic) endorsement for state representative as Keith Ellison-Muhammad, a self-identified member of the Nation of Islam. On the threshold of Ellison's election to Congress, I wrote about his record of support for the Nation of Islam in the article "Louis Farrakhan's First Congressman" (The Weekly Standard, October 9, 2006).

Ellison was still toeing the Nation of Islam line in February 2000, this time in a speech at a local National Lawyers Guild meeting in support of Symbionese Liberation Army member Sara Jane Olson (formerly Kathleen Soliah), who had recently been apprehended at her home in St. Paul. In the course of remarks supporting Soliah/Olson, Ellison complained about the charges previously brought against "Qubiliah Shabazz, the daughter of Malcolm X, in retribution against Minister Farrakhan," by the Office of the United States Attorney in Minneapolis.

By the time Ellison was elected a Minnesota state representative in 2002, he had shed his pseudonyms and his affiliation with the Nation of Islam. In May 2006, when he secured the endorsement of the Fifth District DFL convention, Ellison's long public record as a leader of, and apologist for, Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam created a problem for him. In the context of a competitive Democratic primary the following September, Ellison's past threatened to undermine his support from segments of the Democratic base including, but not limited to, the district's Jewish community.

Writing about Ellison on the blog *Power Line* during the spring and summer of 2006, I discovered this personally when prominent local Democrats sought me out to share information about Ellison's background. They were not pleased by the prospect of a former local leader of the Nation of Islam serving as the face of the Democratic party in Minneapolis, or by the failure of Minneapolis's *Star Tribune* to retrieve information in its own archives for a glimpse of Ellison's public doings on behalf of the Nation of Islam.

Ellison dealt with the problem of his past by submitting an extremely misleading letter to the Minnesota chapter of the Jewish Community Relations Council. In the letter Ellison artfully minimized his involvement with the Nation of Islam while he nevertheless acknowledged his role "work[ing] with local members of the Nation of Islam." In light of his past "connections" to the Nation of Islam, Ellison stated in his 2006 letter: "I have long since distanced myself from and rejected the Nation of Islam due to its propagation of bigoted and anti-Semitic ideas and statements, as well as other issues." In mitigation he pleaded ignorance, claiming: "I did not adequately scrutinize [their] positions and statements."

Ellison makes no such acknowledgment or plea in *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*. Rather, he rewrites history to eliminate his long involvement with Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, dispatching his activities down the memory hole. Looking back on his career in Minnesota, Ellison has erased Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam from the picture. Ellison has expunged his own record.

Ellison does not simply airbrush the picture. He presents himself as a critic of Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. He writes disparagingly that

> the organization wasn't set up to take on the establishment. It was designed to avoid racism—not confront it. The NOI preached separation, which was the same message preached by the Ku Klux Klan. . . . The NOI posed no threat to the status quo; it posed no threat to the system of racism.

Ellison pours it on, criticizing Farrakhan's performance at the Million Man March (which Ellison attended) and after: "He could only wax eloquent while scapegoating other groups."

Ellison goes out of his way to note: "I didn't come to [Islam] through the Nation of Islam, as some African Americans have done." Although he must be drawing on his own experience, Ellison conceals the starkly autobiographical element in his observation: "In the NOI, if you're not angry in opposition to some group of people (whites, Jews, so-called 'sellout' blacks), you don't have religion." I doubt whether leaving the Nation of Islam has helped Ellison much in the anger management department, but it can't have hurt.

What's going on? As he notes in the acknowledgments, Ellison wrote the book with Karen Hunter, of Karen Hunter Publishing, part of the Suitt-Hunter Media Group. Suitt-Hunter "works with celebrities and emerging artists, identifying opportunities to expand the individual's brand into ancillary markets." Life as a representative in the House minority doesn't suit Ellison, and he obviously senses the opportunity to take his radicalism to a mainstream left-wing audience. With a sure feel for the main chance, he finds that his faith provides a means of ascent.

Ellison begins the book with his attendance at President Obama's inauguration in 2009. Obama, suffice it to say, seems to have inspired him to certain "dreams" and to an "audacity" that goes well beyond hope. ♦

The Presidency Goes to Pot

Irresponsible Obama.

BY JOHN P. WALTERS

With his unique appeal to the young, President Obama has suddenly transformed the "experiments" in Colorado and Washington state into an experiment involving every kid in America.

First, the administration made a unilateral decision to curtail enforcement of the Controlled Substances Act in states where smoked marijuana has been defined as medicine (the only "medicine" that cannot meet modern medical standards). Next, the administration announced it would not enforce the federal law when the states of Colorado and Washington sought to permit the open sale of marijuana. Now, asked to comment on marijuana legalization by the *New Yorker*'s David Remnick, President Obama tells the country that "it's important" that legalization experiments "go forward."

Obamacare is in disarray, and Syria is on fire, but marijuana is important? Obama offers the presidential version of a shrug. "As has been well documented, I smoked pot as a kid, and I view it as a bad habit and a vice, not very different from the cigarettes that I smoked as a young person up through a big chunk of my adult life. I don't think it is more dangerous than alcohol."

While he calls smoking and toking "a bad habit and a vice," this doesn't seem to mean much of anything—certainly nothing serious. But it is serious. The president is cutting the legs out from under every parent and schoolteacher and clergyman across the country who is trying to steer kids away from illegal drugs. Our "coolest president" ever has made drug education into a punch line.

As it stands, the law will not be enforced (by executive directive) and the criminal drug market will be augmented by the open production and sale of marijuana. Moreover, Obama speculated that legalizing "hard" drugs, including cocaine and meth, might ultimately be a matter of creating a "negotiated" or "calibrated" dose for safer use. From a policy perspective, that leaves you with treating the wounded through programs now consolidated under the Obamacare banner. The result is appalling. Allow more and more poison to harm more and more families, destroy the respectable basis for prevention education that deters the use of these poisons, and just treat the victims, again and again and again.

As absurd as the administration's policy has become, it is even more striking that *no* serving national leader, Democrat or Republican, has called the administration to task. Where is the tradition of President Reagan and the bipartisan work against the drug problem that was led for years by senators Biden, Leahy, Feinstein, Hatch, Grassley, and Sessions and representatives Rangel, Cummings, Hoyer, Issa, Ros-Lehtinen, and Wolf? Why don't the dedicated public servants at such places as the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Drug Enforcement Administration—those who know the truth, have dedicated their professional lives to protecting Americans from substance abuse, and even risk their lives daily—speak up?

Obama's remarks to Remnick point to the powerful role of ignorance and distortion. Obama simply ignores the known magnitude of marijuana addiction and the growing list of dangers associated with regular and frequent use, especially by young people. Even the national self-report surveys, known for undercounting, show that 79 percent of America's 23.9 million illegal drug users in 2012 used marijuana.

Worse, over a fifth of pot smokers needed treatment according to current diagnostic criteria; that is, 4.3 million users of marijuana need treatment, more than all other illegal drugs combined. Marijuana is a much wider health problem than what Obama called the "hard" drugs of cocaine and meth (or heroin, for that matter).

And there is a reason for that. Today's marijuana has many times the potency (as the dealers and retailers tout regularly) of the weed that Obama and his contemporaries smoked in the 1970s. This contributes to the danger of addiction, but also increases other serious risks reported by researchers over the last 10 to 15 years. These include worsening or even triggering serious mental illness (including depression and psychosis) and permanent loss of up to eight IQ points. In addition, there are the well-known risks of short-term memory loss, inhibited concentration, and impaired motor function. These are the known dangers facing the low estimate of 18.9 million users. And the best available figures show that marijuana users have jumped almost 24 percent under President Obama—from 15.3 million in 2008 to 18.9 million in 2012.

What if we did simply treat marijuana like alcohol or cigarettes? Despite all the anticigarette measures, there are still over 57 million smokers, and there are 135 million drinkers. Can we expect marijuana use to approach these magnitudes? Such questions do not seem to occur to the president.

Instead, Obama makes two moral arguments that get to the heart of the distortion in today's attitudes about illegal drugs. First, Remnick says,

> What clearly does trouble him is the radically disproportionate arrests and incarcerations for marijuana among minorities. "Middle-class kids don't get locked up for smoking pot, and

John P. Walters, director of drug control policy for President George W. Bush, is chief operating officer of the Hudson Institute.

> poor kids do," he said. "And African-American kids and Latino kids are more likely to be poor and less likely to have the resources and the support to avoid unduly harsh penalties."

The charge is ludicrous. No one gets "locked up for smoking pot"—federal mandatory minimums don't even kick in below 220 pounds, and only 9 percent of federal marijuana convictions involve African Americans. No part of law enforcement in America targets pot-smoking kids or simple users of any age. No one is being frisked on the streets for the purpose of finding marijuana users.

There are two major causes of drug possession charges in our criminal justice system. The first is trafficking, which may well be pled down to a lesser charge. The second is the commission of violent or property crime, when the individual at the time of apprehension and arrest for that crime is found to have drugs in their possession. In a significant portion of these cases, the offender may be charged with the lesser drug possession rather than the more serious underlying crime. If such possession laws were repealed, the probable effect would actually be *longer* sentences based on charges for the original offense.

What Obama evades is the fact that there are inequities in the demography of criminal offenders, which are also reflected in the demographics of their victims. He implies this is a matter of racism, but, while all the possible causes are not understood with certainty, the most probable is the breakdown of family structure and related institutions, which are especially important in the formation of healthy young men.

Obama also seems to have missed one of the most promising public policy developments of the past two decades—drug courts, which drive tens of thousands of users into treatment every year. Law enforcement has become the single greatest source of referral to treatment of any institution in America. Our justice system, including more than 2,600 drug courts, now sorts out criminals who are not violent threats but engage in crimes because they are addicted and tries to get them clean and sober. It does this with considerable success, given the challenges of addiction. Instead of expressing pride in this achievement, Obama utterly misrepresents the reality. Inmates in state prisons make up the largest single segment of the prison population, and fewer than one-half of 1 percent are sentenced for possession of marijuana. In fact, drug offenses of all types have been declining as a percentage of arrests and sentences at both the federal and state levels.

Obama's second moral argument may be an even more powerful force in suppressing debate than his false charge of racism. The Remnick interview includes this comment from the president:

> "[W]e should not be locking up kids or individual users for long stretches of jail time when some of the folks who are writing those laws have probably done the same thing." Accordingly, he said of the legalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington that "it's important for it to go forward because it's important for society not to have a situation in which a large portion of people have at one time or another broken the law and only a select few get punished."

This is an absurd but politically powerful argument with baby boomers, since the subtext is that people who have smoked pot are hypocrites if they disagree. Legalization is an act of justice, and those who oppose it want to perpetuate injustice. For a political official especially (although Obama's argument includes all of us), if you got away with marijuana use and oppose legalization, you are supporting the arbitrary victimization of those who are just like you. Even if you did not use drugs, you are unjust to support laws that punish a few when many offend. This seems to be necessarily linked to Obama's initial claim that marijuana (and maybe other illegal drugs) is not really harmful. If illegal drugs are harmful, it would seem that not being able to stop or deter that harm in even a majority of the cases would still make it moral to protect and bring justice where possible. Most laws and principles of morality exist in this condition because human justice, even at its best, is far from perfect.

On the other hand, Obama clearly suggests that the racial and socioeconomic disparity in enforcement discredits drug laws and those who defend them. He has not faced the fact that there are racial and socioeconomic disparities in crime and punishment, but they are not caused by drug laws, and they will almost certainly get worse as drug use expands. The pervasive, willful denial of all this is a powerful driver of the moral argument for legalization.

An even stronger driver of legalization may be the simple inability of former users to admit to themselves and to others that what they did was wrong and dangerous, even if they were lucky to avoid serious harm. It is just not cool to say such things, and certainly from the point of view of the many users who were not harmed, marijuana seems harmless. To speak of the harms as a public figure is to criticize many who are just like you and who feel the risks are really not so great. This is a tricky business of denial, however. Virtually everyone has a loved one who has been a victim of substance abuse. We have all watched celebrities and public figures destroy themselves and pass in and out of treatment. We also know of or live in parts of our country that have been devastated by drugs and crime.

Antidrug liberalism has been based on protecting the vulnerable from victimization, but it has lost its way in substituting demographics for moral principle and character. Antidrug conservatism also sought to protect the vulnerable and to preserve individual freedom from addiction and self-destruction. Today some conservatives confuse the institutions and laws needed to preserve freedom with the threats to freedom—they equate willfulness with freedom.

American democracy has always needed leaders who know the truth and have the courage and skill to bring the truth to our public deliberations. That need is greater today than it has been in some time. ♦

Negotiating with Ourselves

Obama's diplomatic march to an Iranian bomb

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

Analyzing the Islamic Republic isn't a guessing game—at least it shouldn't be. Iranian Islamists' words and deeds are pretty consistent. Memoirs, speeches, and biographies have poured forth from those who made and sustain the regime. The *New York Times* and Senator Edward Kennedy may have called Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini an "enigma" and "the George Washington" of his country, respectively, but that was surely because no one at the newspaper or in the senator's office had read the lectures that the mullah gave in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, in 1970. To be fair to the *Times* and Kennedy, most scholars, spooks, intelligence analysts, and foreign-service officers hadn't paid much attention to the clerics, either. They were too primitive for the secular set.

Benjamin Rhodes, deputy national security adviser, in the Oval Office, 2010

Like Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), Khomeini's 1970 lectures, published as *Islamic Government*, give a good picture of a new vanguard leading a purged and transformed society. Later, if more Iran experts had paid attention to Ali Khamenei—Khomeini's successor, who may be even more ideological in his world view, and less to the liking of the Westernized leftists who'd rallied around the reformist president Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005)—fewer would have made so gross an error as to predict the evanescing of Iranian theocracy in the 1990s. "Realists" like Secretary of State John Kerry always want to apply Jacques Derrida to foreign policy: Ideas reified on the page, let alone in speech, just can't compete with the supposedly overwhelming interest any state has in seeing geopolitical and economic challenges in a "rational" manner. Some Democratic congressmen and senior administration officials appear to be giving the Iranian regime a strange benefit of the doubt. They apparently conjecture that what Iranians say in Persian at home is *less* reliable than what they say in private in English in salons in New York, hotel rooms in Europe, or palaces in Oman hosting "secret" rendezvous. Lying less in English to foreign non-Muslims would be a first for the Middle East.

So what can one say when officials at the White House, Democratic congressmen, newspaper editors, heavyweight columnists, think tankers, and academics describe the "interim" nuclear deal struck on November 24 in Geneva—athletically titled the "Joint Plan of Action"—as a serious diplomatic first step that could lead us away from an Iranian nuke and an American "march to war"? Khamenei and the leaders of the Revolutionary Guard Corps have never been taciturn in describing how attached they are to their nuclear program and how much they loathe the United States. The U.S. government knows—beyond a shadow of a doubt—that the clerical regime has been importing and building the means to construct nuclear weapons for more than 20 years. It has tracked Tehran's progress in long-range ballistic missiles, weapons that wouldn't be worth the investment if the Revolutionary Guards only wanted to deploy conventional or chemical warheads. It knows that newly elected Iranian president Hassan Rouhani and foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif—the Batman and Robin of regime "pragmatism" who are supposedly keeping the hardliners in Tehran barely at bay—are lying through their

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luminous teeth when they say that the Islamic Republic has never had any design to build atomic weapons.

One has to ask what in the world deputy national security adviser Benjamin J. Rhodes meant when he confessed, "It just stands to reason if you close the diplomatic option, you're left with a difficult choice of waiting to see if sanctions cause Iran to capitulate, which we don't think will happen, or considering military action." Rarely has a senior official so succinctly revealed the bankruptcy of a president's approach (former defense secretary Robert Gates and United Nations ambassador Samantha Power, who recently gutted Barack Obama's "neo-realist" foreign policy in a speech to the National Democratic Institute, took many more words).

Let us parse Rhodes's statement. First, the White House believes diplomacy will end if the Joint Plan of Action is abandoned or altered. This is odd since the administration also says that the interim deal is just the beginning of a process, which could take up to one year, to dismantle (the White House really means diminish) the Islamic Republic's nuclear-weapons capability. Even if the administration only intends to retard the program, the supreme leader will have to make vastly greater concessions in the next 12 months than he did in the opening round. A recent report from the Institute for Science and International Security, headed by the former U.N. weapons inspector David Albright, estimates that in order to ensure that the program serves only civilian purposes, Tehran would have to disable approximately 15,000 centrifuges from its uranium enrichment plants at Natanz and Fordow, close down the Fordow facility, where the most advanced centrifuges are being installed, and convert the heavy-water reactor at Arak to a light-water facility incapable of producing plutonium for a bomb. The ISIS projection would still leave Tehran with an enrichment capacity—it would still have 4,000 spinning first-generation centrifuges. Yet these steps would severely impede the regime from using the known facilities in a rapid or surreptitious way.

Zarif's deputy, Abbas Araghchi, has flatly stated this will not happen. "As far as we are concerned, the heavy-water reactor at Arak is clear: It must remain as a heavy-water reactor. Iran's nuclear program has not been set back at all—its expansion has only been stopped for a little while. Under [the interim] agreement, the system of Iran's nuclear program is absolutely preserved, but in the sanctions system, there are cracks."

Ali Akbar Salehi, the current head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization and former foreign minister, echoes Araghchi: "We are not halting any nuclear activity, but only voluntarily reducing enrichment for six months, so that there can be comprehensive negotiations to determine what will happen with enrichment above 5 percent. If they see any concession [on our part], it is voluntary. The activity at Arak, the enrichment to 5 percent, all the activity to discover [uranium ore deposits], the research, and the development will continue. No activity will be halted."

As Salehi, a Ph.D. in nuclear engineering from M.I.T., must know well, neutralizing Iran's nuclear weapons quest would also require Tehran to make available its paperwork and engineers involved with centrifuge-manufacturing and the importation of centrifuge parts and open Iran to unchallenged spot inspections by the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency. Khamenei's foreign-affairs adviser, former foreign minister Ali Velayati, has stated flatly that the Islamic Republic will not allow inspections of undeclared sites. And Salehi would be among the first to be rigorously questioned since he has quite likely had a major hand in overseeing the evasion of sanctions against nuclear-related technology since the 1980s. The regime's centrifuge research, untouched by the interim deal, will give it the capacity to construct ever-more advanced centrifuges in larger numbers, provided Tehran has no supply problems. And why should it have supply problems? So far, U.N., U.S., and EU sanctions against nuclear-related machinery have not seriously impeded the regime's impressive growth in centrifuge production since 2006 (134 spinning centrifuges then; around 9,000 spinning with an additional 10,000 installed today). Industrial-scale manufacturing of advanced centrifuges would make buried and heavily protected facilities like Natanz and Fordow unnecessary since defense against bombardment would become less critical.

The interim deal allows the Iranians to keep their current 5 percent enriched uranium stockpile, which is sufficient to produce half-a-dozen bombs.

According to nuclear experts at ISIS and the University of Virginia, the U.S. government has no satellite or aerial means of detecting an enrichment facility hidden in a warehouse. Unless we had truly exceptional human intelligence, the Iranian regime could deploy lots of smaller cascades in place of the larger facilities, and the Pentagon and Langley would have no idea where to strike. Low-enriched, 5 percent uranium could be produced and refined further at clandestine facilities. The interim deal allows the Iranians to keep their current 5 percent enriched uranium stockpile, which is sufficient to produce half-a-dozen bombs. Clandestine facilities loaded with advanced centrifuges could easily be started from scratch and rapidly developed. According to CIA officers, Langley has been unable to penetrate either Iran's ruling elite or the nuclear-weapons research establishment.

There is no reason to believe our luck will improve. It is inconceivable to the Iranian elite that Khamenei, the Revolutionary Guards, and Rouhani—who proudly boasts in his memoirs that Iran's nuclear progress is part of his legacy—would allow foreigners to destroy centrifuges, downgrade Arak, have access to the classified paperwork of the nuclear program, and debrief Salehi on how the Islamic Republic has cheated for more than two decades.

The only (barely) conceivable circumstances under which the supreme leader would make dramatic concessions setting back the nuclear program are if (1) the pain of sanctions is so intense that he fears for the regime's survival, (2) the military threat from the Obama administration is tangible and regime-threatening, or (3) Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards, who dominate a big slice of the Iranian economy, get hooked on sanctions relief and become avaricious and avuncular capitalists, caring more about money and the common folk than they do about nukes.

After the Syrian debacle, (2) seems surreal. Hardly a day goes by that senior Revolutionary Guard officers don't mock the military will of an America that they see in a headlong retreat from the Middle East. When White House officials castigate Democratic senators who want to pass new sanctions legislation, which would only come into effect if Iran failed to dismantle its nuclear-weapons program, as hell-bent or careless warmongers, it clearly signals to Tehran that the Syrian retreat, even more than the withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, is the administration's defining moment.

Barack Obama might still be obliged to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, but surely this would only happen if Khamenei or the Revolutionary Guards, who have direct control of the nuclear-weapons program, did something monumentally stupid—like organize another big terrorist strike against Americans. Given the president's allergic reaction to having Congress stipulate that any terrorist strike by Iran would trigger new sanctions, and given the reasonable conjecture that an American military response to Iranian terrorism could possibly lead to a war with, even an American invasion of, the Islamic Republic, an Iranian act of terrorism might have to be *really* big to force Obama to take out Tehran's nuclear sites. That leaves either (1) or (3).

Although (3) is probably what the administration is banking on, and is certainly where the president's men will rhetorically slide if sanctions relief proves to be worth much more to Iran than the $7 billion claimed by the White House, this reasoning makes no historical sense. The Iranian regime has already lost at least $100 billion because of nuke-related sanctions. And freer, easier trade would have an explosive effect on the entire economy. If the regime had at any time been as pragmatic as American "realists" have thought (and hope of a new pragmatism has flowered in Washington after every Iranian presidential election since Khomeini died in 1989), the Islamic Republic would already be hundreds of billions of dollars richer. A simple "Hi!" from Khamenei to an American president, let alone the restoration of diplomatic relations, would have led to a tidal wave of Western investment. This did not happen because the supreme leader, Revolutionary Guard commanders (like Qasem Suleimani, who heads the Quds Force, the terrorist-nurturing, insurgent-supporting expeditionary unit), and the ordinary hard-core revolutionary faithful believe the United States really is, as Khamenei puts it, "Satan Incarnate."

Ali Akbar Salehi, right, attending a pro-nuclear demonstration in Qom, November 2013

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From 1992 until 2005, Europeans embraced an invest-and-moderate strategy with the Islamic Republic. Although it's certainly possible that increasing European trade helped to improve Iran's economy in the mid-1990s, perhaps strengthening the college-educated and middle-class contempt for the regime, which in turn led to the unexpected presidential landslide in 1997 for the reformist cleric Mohammad Khatami, there's no evidence whatsoever that increasing Western trade lessened Khamenei's and the Revolutionary Guards' attachment to revolutionary principles, especially implacable hostility towards the United States. Then, of course, in 2005, the populist, Holocaust-denying Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president, and the supreme leader decided to advance an "in-your-face" acceleration of the nuclear program.

The Islamic Republic is caught in a perverse evolution. The country's youth is Westernizing. First-rate sociological studies by French scholars show that Westernization, aka "globalization," among the children of the Iranian elite continues, undermining the "Islamic" values of first-generation revolutionaries. The supreme leader and his guards, meanwhile, have become internally more oppressive and externally no less aggressive. The brutality that Khamenei used to crush the pro-democracy Green Movement in 2009 harks back to the nastiness unleashed in the early revolutionary years when the regime's guiding lights—Khamenei, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, and Rouhani prominent among them—feared for the revolution's future.

The "realist" dream of an Iranian version of the Chinese model, where private and state-sanctioned capitalism annihilates the revolutionary ideology, doesn't appear to be imminent, for one simple, obvious reason: The Islamic revolution has at its white-hot core Islam as a religion and as a 1,400-year-old civilization at odds with the West. Iran's revolutionaries have so far been able to overlay their creed onto the faith and culture, most successfully among the non-college-educated. Iran's revolution is still fairly young: The Soviet Union's ideology didn't start to crack apart in Mother Russia until the 1970s, more than 50 years after it was born. And Allah in Iran is likely to outlast Marx in Europe.

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If President Rouhani can actually reform Iran's centrally planned, corrupt economy (and the tepid free-enterprise efforts of his mentor Rafsanjani in the early 1990s suggest that he will fail), the regime will likely become even more paranoid and unstable, not less, as more wealth allows more Iranians again to feed their Western desires. President Rouhani's lack of interest in pushing any internal political reform suggests that he doesn't believe that political and economic reforms are organically tied; rather, that the Islamic Republic's fundamental fusion of church and state can remain the same so long as the regime is better at economics and diplomacy.

For anyone who can remember Rafsanjani's two presidential terms (1989-97), Rouhani's actions are not unexpected or innovative or reformist. It's no coincidence that Iran's improving economy under Rafsanjani also saw the launch of the regime's nuclear-weapons quest and a much more aggressive, terrorism-fond foreign policy. In the Islamic Republic, among the pragmatic revolutionary set, there is no contradiction between avarice and the quest for nuclear weapons, or between less socialism and more terrorism against God's enemies.

Benjamin Rhodes and his boss may actually believe that the supreme leader and the Revolutionary Guards are willing to forsake the nuclear program for trade, that their enmity for the United States is just the product of misunderstandings and really bad American foreign policy (George W. Bush, the CIA-aided 1953 coup d'état against Mohammad Mossadegh, and all the other things that Bill Clinton once apologized for when Washington thought Khatami might transform U.S.-Iranian relations). Candidate Obama's speeches and radio interviews from 2007 and 2008 displayed his ignorance of Islamic and Iranian history. But for the last five years, President Obama has had access to all the classified material on the clerical regime's nefariousness and mendacity about the nuclear program, most glaringly about the Fordow site, which the regime didn't fess up to until September 2009, and he has had the opportunity to learn from unfolding events—his two unrequited, let's-make-up presidential entreaties to Khamenei; the crushing of the Green Movement; Iran's lethal actions against American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan; the thwarted terrorist strike in a Georgetown restaurant in 2011, which was approved by Quds Force officers; Tehran's all-in support to the Assad regime in Damascus; and, last but not least, all the speeches, interviews, and books by Iran's ruling VIPs since 2008. Yet all this may not be enough to overwhelm the president's ideology telling him how the world ought to work and what his own historic possibilities are.

It's hard to know, since senior administration officials give the impression that all the president wants is to escape the "binary choice" between accepting the unacceptable and launching a preemptive strike. Seeing a chance for détente between Washington and Tehran, which senior White House officials now cautiously confide might lie just beyond a successful nuclear deal, is just a "realist" reflex that ticks up when the administration runs away from hard choices and Rouhani and Zarif smilingly beckon.

Which takes us back to (1), the possibility that the economic pain from sanctions could be so intense that Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards would relent on the nuclear program. This is a highly dubious proposition—Rhodes is undoubtedly correct about

Hysterical mourners grab at the body of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during his funeral in Tehran, June 6, 1989.

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Khamenei's willingness to walk away from nuclear talks. Except economic pain is the only proposition now open to us that has any chance of convincing the supreme leader to cease and desist.

In all probability, Khamenei will walk as soon as the Western powers insist that Tehran actually make concessions that enfeeble the nuclear program—regardless of what sanctions the West piles on the regime. The Joint Plan of Action was acceptable to the supreme leader because it didn't demand anything from Tehran that wasn't quickly reversible. Deputy foreign minister Araghchi, an unanimated, mainstream, process-oriented, revolution-loyal diplomat, was thoughtful and precise in his description of the interim deal.

In a recent speech in the clerical headquarters city of Qom, Khamenei himself made it clear that sanctions will not break him, that the economic pain Iran is now suffering is a "joke" compared with the "crime" that "all of the great powers of the world . . . perpetrated against our nation" in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). Iranian society today may be more volatile than during the war years; certainly the regime's revolutionary base is smaller, and Khamenei knows that he is less loved, and less feared, than his predecessor. Economics has gained ground on revolutionary passion. The supreme leader assented to Rouhani's new diplomatic offensive against the West because Rouhani argued, as he had in his nuclear memoirs: I can get you what you want with less pain; the United States and its European allies can be divided and defeated through clever diplomacy. The supreme leader wasn't lying when he said in Qom that he hadn't been forced to the negotiating table in Geneva; he came "to negotiate with the Devil to eliminate its evil," to beat the Devil at his own diplomatic game.

The Obama administration will eventually have to test the proposition that Khamenei's and the Revolutionary Guards' will cannot be broken by economic means since the Iranian regime will give the Americans no other choice. The current nuclear negotiations will fail. The White House, which is obviously willing to bend a lot in the direction of Tehran, will most likely be unable to bend far enough to satisfy the supreme leader and his men. Even the most acquiescent of American administrations has its limits. So, too, Congress. So, too, the French, who have been trying to tell Washington that concessions now are more likely to shatter the Western alliance than are new sanctions.

We will soon see how many hawks and doves there are in Washington. Odds are, the doves are much more numerous. They're certainly much more powerful in Obama's Washington. ♦

The Go-to Senator

Lindsey Graham's recipe for success

By Michael Warren

Duncan, S.C.

The pungent scent of sauerkraut permeates the room, but Lindsey Graham doesn't have time to try it, or the pretzels, bratwurst, and schnitzel at the buffet. Each one of the few dozen business types gathered to celebrate the opening of a local chapter of the German-American Chamber of Commerce wants a chance to meet the senator, and Graham is more than eager to chat. An aide brings him a Coke Zero (his favorite), which he sips intermittently.

Graham is unassuming in his ordinary gray suit and dusty black shoes. The businessmen mostly look a little sharper. That doesn't matter, though. They all want to shake the powerful senator's hand, have their picture taken with him, and get in their word or two. He smiles at them all and asks, in his nasal twang, "How's business?"

Graham, with Sen. Kelly Ayotte, meets reporters after discussing Benghazi with administration officials.

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In an interview on our way to the reception, Graham says he sees himself as the "go-to guy" for South Carolina. That's why he pushed for federal funding to deepen the Port of Charleston and fought against the National Labor Relations Board's objection to Boeing's relocation to South Carolina, a right-to-work state. If BMW, the German luxury auto giant that located its only American plant in South Carolina in 1994, has concerns about new federal seatbelt regulations, Graham wants to fix it. If immigration reform will make it easier for BMW to bring in high-skilled engineers from overseas, well, Graham will fight for it. "What I try to offer back home is to be the guy that will go to bat effectively in Washington," Graham tells me. "We're a service industry, and I try to create a service mentality around the job."

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In his brief remarks before the gathered suits, Graham says he is a strong ally of the business community, "without apology, without hesitation," and promises to help make government work for businesses. "As long as I'm the senator from South Carolina, I will boldly and clearly stand with the chamber of commerce," he says.

Graham, a 58-year-old Republican running for reelection this year, is likely to keep his job for as long as he likes. For many conservatives, this may be a difficult pill to swallow. In the realms of talk radio and the right-wing blogosphere, Graham's name is a joke. He's known to Rush Limbaugh's listeners and Michelle Malkin's readers as "Lindsey Grahamnesty." Mark Levin, another conservative radio host, calls him "Goober" and the "Arlen Specter of South Carolina." Will Folks, a South Carolina-based blogger and political troublemaker, refers to him as "Senator Lindsey Graham (RINO-S.C.)" and says his politics appeal to a "center-left base."

Some smell blood. So far, four Republicans have declared themselves candidates in the 2014 primary against Graham, including a state senator and the first female graduate of the Citadel, the state's military college. What's more, some say Republican support for Graham in South Carolina is crumbling. Republican party committees in seven counties, including Graham's native Pickens County, have voted to censure the senator. Sounds remarkable, except that in Pickens just 23 party members showed up for the vote. The language they adopted is harsh, accusing Graham of having committed "a long series of actions that we strongly disapprove of and hold to be fundamentally inconsistent with the principles of the South Carolina Republican Party."

The censure goes on to list 30 points on which Graham has been "fundamentally inconsistent" with the GOP platform. He supports amnesty for illegal immigrants

without closing the southern border. He voted for Obama's nominees to the Supreme Court and to head up the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. He worked with Democrats on a cap and trade bill. Graham, according to the censure, has also supported "NSA spying on private American citizens," "Obama's drone program against American citizens," and "subordinating American sovereignty to the United Nations." Republicans have lost primaries for lesser sins, but even Pickens County Republican chairman Philip Bowers is skeptical Graham will lose in 2014.

"Senator Graham will be extremely difficult to unseat," Bowers says. "Most people understand that, but we are still ready to start the journey. Whether it takes 1 election or 10, we have to start somewhere."

Extremely difficult? Ten elections? Toppling Graham ought to be a slam dunk for South Carolina conservatives. After his close friend and ally John McCain, he may be the most reviled Republican among the base. It's not just that he's been a high-profile supporter of comprehensive immigration reform and willing to give Obama a pass on liberal judges. On national security issues the famously hawkish Graham is a resolute opponent of the libertarian wing, which seeks less engagement. Last year when emerging Senate leaders like Marco Rubio, Mike Lee, and Ted Cruz joined Rand Paul's talking filibuster in protest of the president's drone program—the first galvanizing moment for conservatives since Obama's reelection—Graham took to the Senate floor to argue against his Republican colleagues' position.

It wasn't the first time he had spoiled the GOP's party. During the George W. Bush administration, Graham joined the bipartisan Gang of 14 that agreed to break a Democratic filibuster over Bush's judicial nominees while staving off a Republican majority's effort to change the Senate rules to weaken the minority. That cemented Graham's image as someone more eager to compromise with Democrats than fight them. In short, he's what right-wingers call a squish, and in deep-red South Carolina, no less. So why is it so hard for true conservatives to get the senator they deserve?

Graham protests that, for all his unorthodoxies, he is in line with the mainstream of South Carolina voters. What about the charge that he's a Republican in name only, not a true believer? "If you look at my voting record and my approach to fiscal and social conservative issues, I'm, by any reasonable definition, conservative," he says. "What I'm not is a person that rejects the idea of trying to solve the problem. And for some, it's not enough to agree with them on the issue. You have to hate the other side. I'm not going to live my life hating. I don't have to. To some, the only way to prove you're conservative is just to tear the other people limb from limb. I can throw a punch, but I also can get something done."

Graham's lifetime rating by the American Conservative Union is 89 out of 100. He is one of the pro-life movement's strongest allies in Congress, most recently as the author of a bill that would ban abortions after 20 weeks' gestation with certain exceptions. In the Obama era, Graham has voted against all of the major legislative efforts of the Democratic agenda, including the stimulus, the Dodd-Frank financial reform package, and Obamacare. When Graham was in the House of Representatives, he made a name for himself on C-SPAN as an incisive interrogator during the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton. More than a decade later, Graham has pushed forward the investigation into the Benghazi scandal. In October, he said he would use his privilege as a senator to hold up all of Obama's nominations until the administration allowed witnesses to the fatal attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi in 2012 to testify before Congress.

'If you look at my voting record and my approach to fiscal and social conservative issues, I'm, by any reasonable definition, conservative,' says Graham. 'To some, the only way to prove you're conservative is just to tear the other people limb from limb. I can throw a punch, but I also can get something done.'

On national security, Graham agrees there's a lot of energy behind libertarianism in the GOP, but he sees that as all the more reason to stand firm on the idea that America ought to engage—sometimes militarily—in the Middle East and the broader world. "I still think the vast majority of us are in the Ronald Reagan camp of peace through strength," he says. "But there's this debate going on in the party, and I want to be part of that debate. It's not bad to have an alternative view. I just want to make sure my side wins." It helps that he's one of the Senate's authorities on national security issues, regularly briefing the Republican conference alongside John McCain.

That's another part of the story. Graham is also seen as a go-to guy around Congress. While known for his willingness to work with Democrats, he's one of the most popular senators among Republicans. "He's always stood out, and I think a lot of people appreciate that," says McCain. Besides McCain, some of Graham's closest friends in the Senate are Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, Richard Burr of North Carolina, and Saxby Chambliss of Georgia.

Members of South Carolina's House Republican delegation, all considerably more conservative than Graham, are fond of their senior senator, too. One of them is Trey Gowdy, who was first elected to the House in the Tea Party wave of 2010 after defeating a Republican incumbent whom Graham had supported. Gowdy is effusive with praise for Graham.

"He and his staff went beyond the call of duty to help the four freshmen of 2010," Gowdy says. "He offers to help with no conditions. He doesn't carry grudges."

Graham's also known as a cutup with a great sense of humor and comedic timing. During a recent meeting of a group of GOP senators, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin began talking passionately about the need to stop Obamacare from hurting more Americans. They would need to work with the House, Johnson was saying, because things were only going to get worse. It was a serious discussion, but Graham could see it needed some levity, so he broke in. "If you like your Ron Johnson, you can keep your Ron Johnson," he said. The group burst into laughter.

Graham, in jacket, with a bipartisan group of senators that meets to discuss tax reform over lunch

He also knows how to poke fun at himself. A frequent guest on Greta van Susteren's Fox News program, Graham has taken to joking with colleagues that it should be renamed the "Lindsey van Graham Show." Gowdy remembers the first time he met Graham, in 2002, when Graham was running for the Senate for the first time. Gowdy was a state solicitor in Spartanburg, and Graham, a lifelong bachelor, asked how he could win Gowdy's hometown. "I told him, 'You need to get married.' And he laughed and laughed at that," said Gowdy.

Graham's personal life is just about the only thing he doesn't talk about much. He was born in 1955 in Central, a town in South Carolina's upstate. The state was different back then—segregated, poor, and reliant on a dying textile industry. Graham grew up in the Sanitary Café, the combination pool hall-liquor store-restaurant his parents owned in Central.

"When you're raised by a family that owns their own business, you don't go on many vacations," Graham tells me. "You've got to go to work no matter how you feel."

Central is just down the road from Clemson University, but Graham opted to attend the University of South Carolina in Columbia, where he became the first in his family to graduate from college. In 1976, when he was 21 years old and in his senior year, his mother died from Hodgkin's lymphoma. Soon after, Graham began law school at the University of South Carolina, but tragedy struck again 15 months later when his father died from a stroke.

Suddenly, Graham was an orphaned law student with a 14-year-old sister, Darline, and a large stack of medical bills. It would take him more than 10 years to pay them all off, though he had help from his parents' Social Security benefits. While in law school, he would come home on the weekends and summers to help his uncle run his parents' business, both paying his way through school and acting as a surrogate father to his sister. After graduating, Graham joined the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Corps. He also adopted Darline so she could receive his military benefits while she was still a minor.

Bart Daniel, a former U.S. attorney and a lawyer in Charleston, befriended Graham in law school. He says he remembers Graham's calm, workmanlike demeanor, in contrast with some of their freewheeling classmates.

"While all the other guys were out having a good time, Lindsey was taking care of his little sister," Daniel says.

Graham served six years as an active duty Air Force JAG, four of them stationed in Germany, which he calls "some of the best days of my life." It was during his time in the service that he says he became a Reagan Republican. "You know why I became a Ronald Reagan fan? I came on active duty in 1982, and he increased pay 25 percent that year," he says, chuckling. "I came in as a new captain with a 25 percent pay raise. I said, 'I like this guy.'"

With an average net worth of less than $700,000, Graham's not rich by the standards of the increasingly millionaire-studded Congress. His car is an unremarkable Ford Crown Victoria that looks like something a cop or a grandmother might drive. Graham lives alone in Seneca, a town near Central that borders the manmade Lake Keowee, a popular vacation and retirement spot. When I ask his longtime aide Kevin Bishop if Graham's house is on the lake, Bishop just laughs. "No, he's not fancy," he says.

In 1988, Graham left active duty to join South Carolina's Air National Guard and the Air Force reserve. (Now a colonel in the reserves, Graham still periodically serves overseas in war zones. He was in Afghanistan at the beginning of this year, for example, spending five days

NEWSCOM

on reserve duty and two days as a senator, meeting with Afghan president Hamid Karzai.)

After serving a term as a state house member, Graham was elected to the U.S. House in 1994, the first Republican from his district since Reconstruction. He'd won reelection to the House three times when the centenarian Strom Thurmond announced he would not be running for a ninth term in the Senate in 2002. Graham was unopposed in the primary and went on to win what became a very competitive race for the first open Senate seat in South Carolina in 36 years. Six years later, Graham trounced his primary opponent and took home more than a million votes in the general election. That's still the record for the most votes received by a Republican running statewide in South Carolina—including presidential candidates.

"Never underestimate the tenacity and complete alligator political hide of Lindsey Graham," says Katon Dawson, the former chairman of the South Carolina Republican party. Republicans around the state say Graham is always ready to turn up for fundraisers or campaign events for other Republicans. It's noteworthy that not one of the six GOP congressmen from South Carolina is challenging Graham. "His political instincts are as good as anyone's," says Trey Gowdy.

If there's a political game Lindsey Graham is playing, it's the long one. He says he's learned in his years in Congress how hard it is to change an institution, and that change in the right direction takes a lot of time and effort. I ask him how long he'd like to stay a senator, and he pauses. He doesn't really know, though he thinks the next decade will be critical for two of his most important issues: foreign policy and entitlement reform. The latter will require, he thinks, significant support from a prominent Democrat, just as welfare reform did in the 1990s.

"I try to push the envelope on reform and be a solid conservative, but also create space where I can do something," Graham says. "I guess the biggest thing I've learned is, when you build up political capital, use it."

Graham still thinks immigration reform is important for the future of the country and the Republican party. He recognizes that Americans are weary of war and fears that it will take another domestic terrorist attack to remind the country that radical Islam has declared war on freedom and the West. He knows these positions and many others put him at odds with elements of his base, and, despite a weak primary field, they could cost him reelection. He shrugs it off.

"I know what to do or say to keep this job for 100 years," Graham insists. "But I want my time to matter." ♦

Editorial board of the Book-of-the-Month Club, by Joseph Hirsch (ca. 1950). Left to right: Henry Seidel Canby, Harry Scherman, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, John P. Marquand, Clifton Fadiman, Christopher Morely, Meredith Wood

The Good(?) Old Days

The postwar cultural consensus was not so stable. BY JAMES SEATON

The indisputable achievement of American society in the second half of the 20th century was surely the ending of legally authorized discrimination against African Americans. Among the overwhelming majority of Americans who glory in this achievement, however, there is a not-inconsiderable number who feel a curious nostalgia for the 1950s, a time when the modern civil rights movement was just beginning.

James Seaton, professor of English at Michigan State, is the editor of George Santayana's The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States.

The Twilight of the American Enlightenment
The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief
by George Marsden
Basic, 264 pp., $26.99

Looking back from the 21st century, the 1950s can be seen as a time when religion was respected, good manners were the rule rather than the exception in public life, and there was a shared agreement about fundamentals. George Marsden emphasizes the special appeal of the 1950s for cultural conservatives: It was, after all, not so long ago when "traditional Judeo-Christian standards, such as monogamous, heterosexual marriage, were the dominant public norms."

In this thoughtful new book, however, Marsden warns, "There is no going back to the 1950s, when a widely shared inclusivist faith was supposed to be a contributing factor in supporting a cultural consensus." His careful analyses of the thought of such fifties eminences as Walter Lippmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, and David Riesman make it clear that the apparent "cultural consensus" of the fifties was unstable from the beginning.

Lippmann called for the revival of a "public philosophy" but was unwilling to return to the strong conception of

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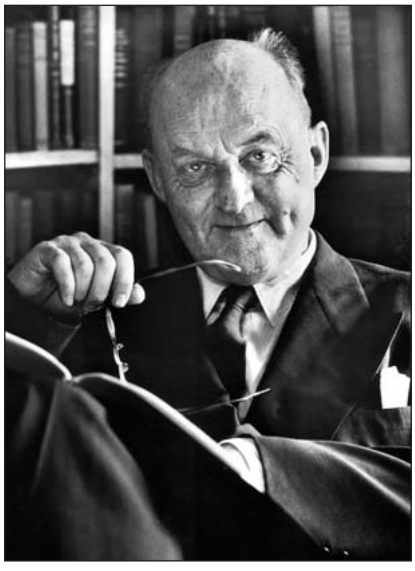
natural law that was the only possible basis for such a revival. Niebuhr contrasted the shallow optimism of John Dewey's pragmatism with the realistic view of human nature expressed by the Christian concept of original sin. But Marsden points out that "the intensity of Niebuhr's disagreement with Dewey and pragmatic social scientists is best understood as, in a sense, a family quarrel. Niebuhr, too, was an avowed pragmatist." It was not difficult for "atheists for Niebuhr" to adopt his realism in foreign policy while entirely ignoring his Christian faith. David Riesman's notion of the contemporary "other-directed" individual, as opposed to the more autonomous "inner-directed" person of earlier times, became famous. But the cultural effect of the concern for individuality led to a new consensus.

As Marsden points out: "Everyone, it seemed, agreed that one should not be a conformist." The belief that conformity was the greatest social evil was so pervasive, Marsden avers, that "the authority of the autonomous individual" was recognized as the ultimate court of appeal on any issue—political, cultural, and moral—that could not be settled by the era's other supreme authority, "the scientific method."

Marsden does not discuss Lionel Trilling, probably the most influential literary critic of the 1950s, but Trilling's very attempt to subject fashionable cultural trends to analysis proves Marsden's point. When Trilling, looking back in 1965, criticized with prophetic insight what he called "the adversary culture" for its relentless insistence that the "primary function of art and thought is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of his culture . . . and to permit him to stand beyond it in an autonomy of perception of judgment," he was unable to find any other basis for his critique than autonomy itself. "We cannot count upon the adversary culture to sustain us in such efforts toward autonomy of perception and judgment as we might be impelled to make."

George Marsden, with the advantage of a half-century of experience, shrewdly notes the limitations of the ideal of autonomy, observing that its unqualified affirmation implied "that one should leave the petty constraints of one's community of origin, and become a law onto oneself." Yet it is precisely "subcommunities, often ethnic and/or religious in nature," that (argues Marsden persuasively) provide the moral grounding that might enable an individual to stand apart from the national consensus about the supremacy of the scientific method, or even, paradoxically, the celebration of individuality itself.



Reinhold Niebuhr (1956)

TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

Neither the authority of the scientific method nor the cult of autonomy provided the grounding for the most impressive moral force of the era, the civil rights movement led by (among others) Martin Luther King. Although the intellectual leaders of the fifties were almost unanimous in applauding the goals of the movement, they were also of one mind in rejecting the notion of objective, God-given standards for distinguishing right from wrong. Yet, as Marsden observes, it was precisely King's "bedrock conviction that moral law was built into the universe" that "gave such widely compelling force to [his] leadership and oratory." Marsden notes that, although later movements—"particularly [those for] women's rights, gay rights, and rights for other minorities"—have echoed King's "rhetoric of justice and equality," they have dropped King's commitment to universal standards of right and wrong in favor of "the frameworks of identity politics."

If it is impossible to return to the 1950s, and if a return would in any case fail to solve our contemporary problems, then what are we to do? In particular, what role can religion play in the culture of the 21st century? Marsden rejects the "polarizing dichotomies" utilized by culture warriors on both the secular left and the Christian right: The goal, he argues, should be "a more fully inclusive pluralism," in which there will no longer be "prejudice against religiously based views simply because of their religious nature."

Noting approvingly that "during the past few decades, there has been increasing recognition of the need to address the problem of religious pluralism in relation to the public domain," Marsden comes to the conclusion that "the message here . . . is simply that such discussions need to continue." And if some voices are unfairly silenced or stigmatized, Marsden nominates "university administrators and academic departments" to serve as "referees, ensuring that all responsible voices . . . get a hearing."

Marsden rightly notes that a careful study of prominent intellectuals of the 1950s reveals a "contrast between the perceptiveness of their diagnoses and the inadequacies of their prescriptions." Unfortunately, the same could be said of *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*, with its acute analyses and its underwhelming conclusion.

It is hard to believe that the same author could provide such thoughtful analyses of the cultural past and then, as part of his proposed solution, call upon "university administrators and academic departments" to act as "referees" to ensure that all "responsible voices" are able to speak.

Academic administrators and professors have been "refereeing" speech for some time now, but the result has not been a renewed cultural pluralism but rather the reign of political correctness using the slogans of multiculturalism and diversity. ♦

B&A

Casualties of War

Medicine as metaphor for the Western Front.

BY JAMES BOWMAN

'Gassed' (detail) by John Singer Sargent (1919)

Wounded
A New History of the Western Front in World War I
by Emily Mayhew
Oxford, 288 pp., $29.95

If you read only one book this year to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, let me suggest *Wounded* rather than one of the more conventional histories.

The virtue of this choice is that it is likely to give you a better idea both of what the war was actually like for those who experienced it—hint: somewhere in between the great and glorious adventure we all now know it wasn't and the unremitting horror we all now know it was—and of why it still looms so large in the culture and the moral consciousness of the Western world a century later. In some ways, it marks even more of a watershed than World War II, whose moral import in the popular mind has been reduced to something it hardly seemed at all to be at the time, namely a sort of Armageddon for cultures based on racism and ethnocentrism, and a beginning of the world anew.

Both wars now appear in hindsight through the lens of the pacifist culture of the academy and the media, who are, like President Obama, opposed in theory not to all wars but only to "dumb" ones (yet they tend to have a hard time thinking of any wars that are *not* dumb). It is surely not an insignificant datum that hardly anybody in the combatant nations during World War I thought that the war, now the very model of the dumb war, was dumb at all. They who actually experienced the horror of it, bar a few now well-known names, seem to have thought it less horrible than we do at a century's distance in time.

Not the least of the virtues of this fascinating volume is that it suggests some of the reasons why this may be so. Emily Mayhew, a research associate at Imperial College, London, only set out to tell the story of the British Royal Army Medical Corps and ancillary operations in the 1914-18 war—something not often treated in secondary material up until now. She pulls together, in one place, accounts of the wounded and those who tended to them that are not always readily available to readers, supplemented with archival research into primary sources: letters, memoirs, and journals. The results are inspiring and often deeply moving.

Perhaps her most surprising finding is that, in a war now famous for military blunders, particularly British ones—the phrase attributed to Erich Ludendorff, "lions led by donkeys," may be the most quoted judgment on the British effort in Britain itself, as well as the most unjust—the treatment of the wounded should be seen as a great success, at least as it compared with anything known in previous wars. This was the result of "an unconventional yet crucial medical breakthrough: the discovery that surgery could be done in a forward medical unit close to the actual place of wounding, and that by doing so survival rates would be radically improved." Referring to the new Casualty Clearing Stations, where such surgery was performed, Mayhew writes, "By 1918 the CCS system in France had been refined into an extraordinary medical machine. During battle its doctors and surgeons did work of unprecedented complexity and effectiveness. Every medic in the country wanted to be part of it."

A case could be made that the postwar predisposition, lingering on into the present day, to see the war as uniquely horrifying was, in part, a product of that success, since more of the wounded survived than in any previous war to serve as living reminders of its terrible cost, often for decades after it ended. One such survivor was John Glubb—later to become Glubb Pasha, founder of the Arab Legion—whose wound to

James Bowman, the author of Honor: A History *and* Media Madness: The Corruption of Our Political Culture, *is a resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.*

the jaw and face led to his becoming known in Jordan as *abu Hunaik*, or the one with the little jaw, and the treatment of his wound is described here. Glubb was particularly well-qualified to note that "the real horrors of war were to be seen in the hospitals, not on the battlefield."

Wounded also makes clear the extent to which the Great War was a war of the middle class and of what used to be called the respectable working class—again, by comparison with previous wars. Wellington's "scum of the earth" had been gentrified in the course of the 19th century, and, like their doctors, they knew the virtues of respectability, including cleanliness. Nurses were employed to do endless amounts of laundry, among their many other duties at the front.

> There was so much laundry to do, with some men needing a change of bedclothes several times a day, that it could be disheartening. But then the nurses remembered how much their patients appreciated the luxury of clean linen—a fresh sheet, a white pillow case, fluffed blankets—so they scrubbed and pegged and folded, understanding that this too was an act of nursing and healing.

Their dedication and, indeed, heroism adds a new dimension to the more familiar story of the bravery and sacrifice of the combatants.

Many will find the best things about this book to be its stories of courage, devotion to duty, and self-sacrifice on the part of the doctors, nurses, orderlies, stretcher-bearers, ambulance drivers, and others—most notably chaplains, who very often threw themselves into assisting with the medical tasks of hospitals and dressing stations as well as attending to spiritual tasks. One such, a Roman Catholic priest, took it upon himself to, in addition to his normal duties, go out into no-man's-land at night to bury the dead who had fallen in the field, all while under fire himself. Those who noted the absence of God from the trenches were presumably not looking in the right places.

We also learn of the new interest of doctors in mental casualties—though these were always kept separate from the rest at the Casualty Clearing Stations and hospitals, and even on the ambulance trains, where they were kept in separate carriages for the sake of morale: "All over the front RMOs [Royal Medical Officers] were coming to find this class of patient increasingly interesting. For some of them the treatment was quite simple: when the sound of the guns drew nearer and the patients became increasingly upset, the staff went round the ward putting cotton wool in their ears to muffle the noise and restore calm."

There were also moments of humor, as there were in the trenches. Major Alfred Hardwick of the 59th Field Ambulance unit took advantage of a two-week leave in England to bring back a couple of ferrets from his home in the West Country. They were brilliantly successful at killing trench rats, with which his section of the front had been plagued, and the men were very grateful.

> On Hardwick's birthday they celebrated with red wine, games of poker and organized ratting, with each kill being celebrated with increasingly drunken cheers and songs about the only two creatures who really enjoyed themselves on the Western Front. What would the ferrets do, the men wondered, if the war ever ended? How could they ever go back to a Cornish farm, now that they had hunted for trench rats in France?

In the words of the old song: *How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm?* In the case of the men, if not the ferrets, the answer was that you wouldn't. A new world—recognizably our world—emerged from the Great War. And *Wounded* goes a long way toward explaining why it did. ♦

B&A

Imaginary Novelist

Has reality rendered Thomas Pynchon obsolete?

BY STEFAN BECK

"Thomas Pynchon is up to his usual business," promised a blurb written by Pynchon himself for his previous novel *Against the Day* (2006). Promised, that is, or warned, depending on whether the reader is a free and accepted 33rd-degree Pynchonian or a hopeless "normal" who finds the author's "usual business" a bit predictable, even tiresome. Early on in *Bleeding Edge*, a character remarks that "paranoia's the garlic in life's kitchen . . . you can never have too much." And since paranoia is a major ingredient in Pynchon's kitchen, this is to reassure the regulars that the menu hasn't changed, and never will.

Stefan Beck writes about fiction for the New Criterion *and elsewhere.*

Bleeding Edge
by Thomas Pynchon
Penguin, 496 pp., $28.95

Well, there are those of us who believe that variety is the spice of life. Yet that is not to suggest that one must either revere Pynchon or reject him: Even his most exacting critics allow that his novels offer historical and cultural erudition, inventive plots, and crackling (if campy) dialogue and humor. Still, the more Pynchon one reads, the more one is inclined to pick a side, and a skeptic may find in *Bleeding Edge* proof that the recipe has lost much of its savor. This is, in part, because the manner and matter here are so awkwardly matched. One need hardly be hidebound by propriety to feel that if a

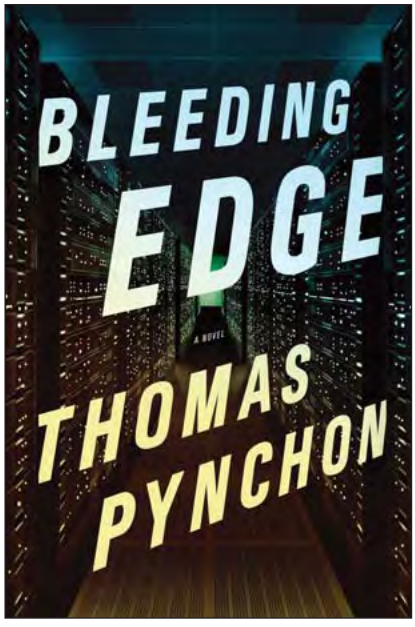
9/11 novel (which is what we have here) can be described as a madcap romp, it will have to demonstrate a clear and worthwhile purpose to earn its audacity and questionable taste.

Does it? *Bleeding Edge*, which opens in Manhattan in the spring of 2001, is, insofar as it belongs to any recognizable genre, a detective or spy novel. Its dizzying proliferation of characters, connections, and conspiracies amounts to a wilderness of mirrors, to borrow James Angleton's description of espionage. The reader ought to take notes.

There is, first and foremost, Pynchon's heroine, Maxine Tarnow, a fraud investigator and suitably hard-boiled, wisecracking Jewish gal. She has been asked by one Reg Despard, a movie-pirate-cum-documentarian, to look into a dotcom called "hashslingerz," which seems to be booming while others bust. The company's head is Gabriel Ice, the novel's villain, who also owns a luxury apartment building named (oddly after a Mormon word for "honeybee") the Deseret. Fans of *Rosemary's Baby* may wonder if this malign monolith is a nod to the Bramford; fans of 9/11 trutherism will be more interested in the footage that Maxine receives, filmed on the Deseret's roof, of men practicing shooting down a passenger jet with a Stinger missile.

Assisting and impeding Maxine's investigation, though that word suggests something more methodical than what transpires here, are Rocky Slagiatt, an investor who is, it seems, also a mobster; March Kelleher, Gabriel Ice's mother-in-law; Nicholas Windust, a government spook with whom Maxine has an affair; and some forgettable extras who exist primarily to have Pynchonian names (Vip Epperdew, Conkling Speedwell). Maxine dabbles in something called DeepArcher, a sort of immersive parallel Internet. There is a reference to the fabled Montauk Project, but it is never developed or even followed up on. References are also made, incessantly, to late-'90s dross: Beanie Babies, for example, and "All your base are belong to us."

Unlike Oedipa Maas, heroine of Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Maxine is a mother, which makes her notionally more human than many of Pynchon's cartoonish characters. Yet she is also a type, the consummate New Yorker. (To a line-jumper in a crowded deli: "You must be from out of town . . . here in New York, the way you're acting? It's considered a felony.") Her snappish impatience with "yups," tourists, and the less-than-wised-up—all of which one suspects



Pynchon shares, and is proud of—is suggestive less of a seasoned badass than of an NYU student who just discovered *Annie Hall* or ate at Katz's for the first time. It greatly diminishes Maxine's appeal, leaving nobody, really, to root for.

The novels that *Bleeding Edge* most resembles in its perambulations around New York are Martin Amis's *Money* (1984) and Todd McEwan's *Who Sleeps With Katz* (2003). The city is, in each of those books, a character as much as a setting. Pynchon's epigraph, taken from Donald Westlake, reveals his ambition to give Manhattan such flesh-and-blood life: "New York as a character in a mystery . . . would be the enigmatic suspect who knows the real story but isn't going to tell it." Pynchon's New York is vibrant—downright effervescent—but it possesses little depth or mystery.

For his part, Pynchon believes he knows the real story and is never shy about telling it. *Bleeding Edge* evokes the post-9/11 zeitgeist most accurately when it does so by accident: It perfectly embodies the knowing and superior quality that 9/11 brought out in the intellectual class. There is its pedantry: "This was nowhere near a Soviet nuclear strike on downtown Manhattan, yet those who repeat 'Ground Zero' over and over do so without shame or concern for etymology." There is its juvenile snark: "Demand for bagpipers was brisk." There is its sneering reference to the "quaint belief . . . that evil never comes roaring out of the sky to explode into anyone's towering delusions about being exempt," as if the fact that terrorism tends to happen elsewhere makes it a species of naïveté or bad manners to be outraged when it happens at home.

That *Bleeding Edge* flirts with 9/11 conspiracy theories is far from its most galling or disappointing quality. The trouble with the novel is that, even though Pynchon may have a hyperactive imagination, and even though he may have the paranoid style down cold, a faithful retelling of the events leading up to 9/11 would still have been stranger, more complex, and more frightening than Pynchon's fantasy could ever hope to be—and everybody knows it. Real life, that evil roaring out of the sky, has rendered his abstract preoccupations banal. Human beings making sense of real life, alternately enduring it or failing to endure it—*that* is never banal. But human beings are absent from *Bleeding Edge*, as from most of Pynchon's novels.

That brings us, finally, to the real nonhuman star of *Bleeding Edge*: not New York City, but the Internet. Indeed, it is the Internet that may render a writer like Thomas Pynchon obsolete. "Someday there'll be a Napster for videos," one character prophesies, and "it'll be routine to post anything and share it with anybody." But never mind YouTube: There will also be Google and Wikipedia; and, in their wake, the ability to string together the history,

THE PENGUIN PRESS

ephemera, and esoterica of a former time will be about as exciting as a head for baseball statistics.

This may be bad news for Pynchon, whose seemingly encyclopedic knowledge accounts for much of his cult appeal. Even subjects like *hawala* and the Deep Web, which may have been obscure when Pynchon began writing *Bleeding Edge*, are now the stuff of *Time* cover stories. Will Pynchon notice that the world's paranoia and curiosity have caught up with his own? And will he take note of the ingredient his fiction has been lacking—people we can believe in and care about—and apply his talent to serving up something altogether new? ♦

B&A

Virtue Rewarded?

The origins of the 'Human Rights Revolution' are more complicated than this. **BY JEREMY RABKIN**

When President Obama addressed the U.N. General Assembly last September, he spoke about the importance of removing chemical weapons from Syria and emphasized that President Assad must give way to a more broadly accepted government. He did not mention human rights. He also spoke about his hopes for negotiating a settlement to the ongoing dispute over Iran's nuclear program. But he insisted that he had no aim to change Iran's "regime." Again, he made no mention of human rights. Even when voicing concerns about transitional governments in the wake of the Arab Spring, he called in vague terms for greater inclusiveness, but did not invoke the term "human rights." The Obama administration has other priorities.

Perhaps this is not surprising. When tens of thousands of civilians are killed in Syria, and thousands more are killed or threatened in terrorist attacks or sectarian violence in neighboring countries, it would seem rather out of place to complain that regimes in the region are not providing adequate guarantees for the right to a paid vacation—one of the "human rights" famously proclaimed in the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which deliberately offers no ranking or priority among the many rights it includes.

Reclaiming American Virtue
The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s
by Barbara J. Keys
Harvard, 368 pp., $29.95

From our current vantage point, Obama's omissions are much easier to understand than is the very different rhetoric of the late 1970s. Why did leaders at that time imagine that human rights declarations—nice words on paper—could solve real-world challenges? What were they thinking?

Samuel Moyn, professor of history at Columbia, offered one answer in a well-regarded study published four years ago by Harvard University Press. The title sums it up: *The Last Utopia*. In Moyn's account, "human rights" emerged as a powerful slogan only in the 1970s, as disappointment engulfed earlier utopian hopes for socialism or Third World liberation movements. The human rights movement was "the god that did not fail while other political ideologies did." Moyn celebrated the idealism of human rights activists, but acknowledged the core of utopian thinking that existed in their "yearning to transcend politics," their talking and acting "as if humanity were not still confused and divided about how to bring about individual and collective freedom in a deeply unjust world."

Now, Harvard has offered a new account. Barbara J. Keys agrees with Samuel Moyn that talk about human rights had little resonance before the 1970s. Though she teaches at the University of Melbourne in Australia, Keys focuses almost exclusively on developments in America. Where Moyn devoted much attention to the evolving views of prominent legal scholars and other academics, Keys devotes almost all of her attention to political debates in Washington. But her account does restore an important dimension of the story.

Keys interviewed a number of participants in Washington policy debates of the Ford and Carter years. She has dutifully scoured congressional hearings and archival collections from that era. Her account is somewhat starry-eyed in its depiction of Amnesty International's American branch and its contribution to larger debates about human rights. But she also offers a sympathetic, or at least respectful, account of the different aims of hawkish Democrats like Senators Henry Jackson and Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

She even provides a respectful recounting of Henry Kissinger's resistance to the human rights agenda. She quotes his complaints to State Department staffers, which include protesting that the department could not become "a reform school for allies" and wondering how "other countries can in any way deal with us" if we were to indulge in "public humiliation of other countries."

What is new and valuable in Keys's account, especially compared with Moyn's treatment, is her emphasis on the distinct aims of Cold War liberals—advocates like Jackson and Moynihan—and their staff aides, such as Elliott Abrams and Richard Perle, in the late 1970s. For them, emphasis on human rights was a way to maintain ideological pressure on the Soviet Union. They were prepared to criticize dictators elsewhere, even some who were aligned with the United States, for the sake

Jeremy Rabkin is professor of law at George Mason University.

of expanding the coalition prepared to condemn enduring oppression in the Soviet empire. As Moynihan famously put it at the 1976 Democratic National Convention, "We'll be against the dictators you don't like the most . . . if you'll be against the dictators we don't like the most."

What is least persuasive in Keys's version of events is her effort to attribute great explanatory power to the aftermath of the Vietnam war. "Human rights promotion was an antidote to shame and guilt," she writes; it shifted "attention and blame away from the trauma of the Vietnam War." There may be something to this. But it would be hard to disprove any claim about the dreams and fears coursing through American politics in the mid-1970s, after military defeat abroad and the resignation of a disgraced president at home.

Still, quite a few big developments are missing in Keys's account. Perhaps this was not deliberate, but it did not occur by happenstance. It is only by obscuring—or forgetting about—these developments that Keys can make her emphasis on the recoil from Vietnam sound like the central explanation for what happened in the 1970s.

The first thing that drops out of this account is the international setting. Keys does mention Henry Kissinger's determination to improve relations with the Soviet Union through a policy of accommodation he called "détente." She also mentions the sympathy for Soviet dissidents, championed by human rights activists on the left as well as the right by the mid-1970s. And she describes the efforts of American-Jewish groups to mobilize support for persecuted Jews in the Soviet Union, culminating in Henry Jackson's legislation denying trade concessions to the Soviets unless they relaxed restrictions on Jewish emigration.

But all of these background trends required a prior relaxation of the Soviet government's totalitarian grip at home and belligerent posture toward outsiders. No one talked about helping Soviet dissidents or Soviet Jews under Stalin. There were no open dissidents in the darkest era of Communist tyranny. Outside protests in that era would have brought swift retribution on the intended beneficiaries.

Even in the Khrushchev era, it would have seemed pointless to talk about human rights in the Soviet Union. The priority was averting nuclear war. Instead of heralding universal rights, political leaders—Democrats and Republicans in America, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats in Europe—talked about "the Free World," seeking to rally all governments opposed to communism. Universal rights would only look plausible as a serious program when the world was less fiercely divided between East and West.

But terrible things could still happen in that world. In 1975, shortly after the American withdrawal from Vietnam, Communist guerrillas seized power in neighboring Cambodia. Some two million people—a quarter of the population—were butchered by Khmer Rouge forces. Keys does not discuss this episode. Her book emphasizes that liberal human rights advocates were motivated by feelings of "shame and guilt" over American actions in Vietnam. She does not inquire into their reactions to the horrors that ensued after America's departure from the region. Even Amnesty International failed to condemn Khmer Rouge butchery while it was ongoing. That also goes unmentioned in Keys's book. It's much easier to embrace international human rights guarantees if you don't feel any commitment to enforcing them.

So it is also revealing that Keys says almost nothing about the actual U.N. infrastructure that is supposed to provide international protection for human rights. The rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration (1948) were understood at the time as "a standard of achievement"—that is, not immediately binding. To give them legal effect, the United Nations spent nearly two decades refining legal provisions in two treaties meant to be legally binding on signatory states: the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic and Social Rights. They finally gained enough signatories to take effect in 1976.

President Carter signed these treaties, but could not get the Senate to ratify them. It took nearly two decades more for President George H.W. Bush to win Senate confirmation for the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1992. But the Senate then added limiting reservations to prevent the treaty from having domestic legal effect. There is not much in the way of international enforcement in U.N. organs. Still, we have, in principle, agreed to explain and defend our compliance record before international forums, at least for the Covenant and a few later human rights treaties.

For those who view international human rights as legal rights, it is logical to conclude (as many legal scholars do) that the United States should welcome international supervision of its own domestic policies. The argument is that we cannot expect others to take human rights norms seriously unless we demonstrate our willingness to be bound by them, even to treaty provisions extending "human rights" to the guarantee of free higher education and state programs to suppress "cultural stereotypes" of gender roles in private life.

Of course, committing to that program would also constrain democratic self-government and personal freedom in America, perhaps yielding a net decrease in actual human rights. That quandary does not evoke any comment from Keys. It may not have engaged the attention of American human rights advocates in the period she covers.

Keys does take some pains to emphasize that American human rights advocacy in the 1970s did not emerge from the domestic civil rights movement of the 1960s. The civil rights movement was about Americans. When human rights advocates looked outward, they didn't give much consideration to actual challenges and actual consequences. Congressional liberals sought to cut off aid to American clients who abused human rights, whether or not such punitive measures were well-calculated to promote long-term reform in those countries, or in the wider world. Jimmy Carter explained that human rights must be the "cornerstone of foreign policy"—for domestic reasons:

> We've been through some sordid and embarrassing years recently. . . . I felt like it was time for our country to hold a beacon light of something pure and decent and right and proper that would rally our citizens to a cause.

The Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations sought to channel demands for "human rights" into support for democratic transitions, with considerable success in Latin America and spectacular success in Eastern Europe, after the collapse of communism. The Clinton administration achieved some success in pressing for democracy in Africa. But after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein devolved into a brutal counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq, American leaders lost their appetite for grand rhetoric about protecting human rights around the world, even for supporting democracy. Barack Obama has decided to inspire Americans by negotiating with Russia to remove chemical weapons from Syria, and with Israeli and Palestinian leaders to resolve permanent borders between them.

A reading of this book makes that trajectory easier to understand. Among liberals, Keys reports, almost all prominent human rights advocates of the late 1970s had embraced the antiwar candidacy of George McGovern in 1972. The slogan of that campaign was "Come home, America." The advocates were for human rights around the world, especially in countries aligned with America in the Cold War. But they were also for peace—or at least for avoiding American military intervention abroad.

Perhaps Barbara J. Keys is not wrong to characterize this aim as "reclaiming America's virtue." But only if you understand "virtue" to be the outcome of self-esteem therapy. There was a time, as Harvey Mansfield reminds us, when virtue was associated with manliness—and that required discipline, resolution, and effectiveness. ♦

B&A

East to West

The Byzantine bridge from the classical to the modern world. BY CATESBY LEIGH

Heaven and Earth
Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections
National Gallery of Art
Through March 2

The place to begin a visit to this important exhibition is with a sculptural work it doesn't include: the *Dying Gaul*, on loan to the gallery from the Capitoline Museum in Rome. This fallen warrior's powerful presence results from a masterful integration of spatial design with the complex structure of the human body. He represents the best of the Hellenistic period inaugurated by the conquests of Alexander the Great.

"Heaven and Earth" shows what followed. It spans the entire period from Constantinople's establishment as the new capital of the Roman Empire by Constantine I in 330 A.D. until its fall to the Ottomans in 1453. It displays not just Byzantine icons and illustrated manuscripts but also architectural fragments, coinage, jewelry, ceramics, and even dining forks. It also includes late antique art that helps us better understand the stylistic transformation that shaped Byzantine culture.

Two mosaics encapsulate this transformation. A portion of a third-century floor mosaic from Sparta exhibits a portrait bust of the Sun, dramatically personified with his head, from which an aureole and rays emanate, turned upward to provide a three-quarter view. The massive shoulder, draped and foreshortened, projects on a bold diagonal into the picture plane and serves to focus our gaze on the finely proportioned head. This dynamic figure, whose monumentality is informed by the sculptural ideal the *Dying Gaul* epitomizes, is ornamentally framed with a braided guilloche motif whose polychromy gives it perceptual relief.

Created in Asia Minor a thousand years later, the exceptionally large (three-and-a-half by two feet) portable mosaic icon of the Virgin Episkepsis holding the Christ child in her arm also shows the figures in three-quarter view. Christ gazes up at his mother and she looks out at us, but the two show no emotion. They are modeled in light and shade to a degree; more so the folds of their vestments, which are replete with golden highlights. But they are nonetheless flattened into the picture plane and Byzantine sacred art's familiar gold background, symbolizing a realm beyond time and space. Rather than projecting into our perceptual space, like the Sun figure, mother and child are ensconced in another world.

The Byzantines called themselves and their unwieldy empire "Roman," but they spoke Greek and played an invaluable role in transmitting masterworks of ancient Greek literature to the modern world. Their art developed as a distinctly Christian alternative to the classicism they regarded as intrinsically pagan. Amidst the inexorable decline of Hellenistic artistic standards in late antiquity, the sculptural presence of the classical figure was supplanted by the icon's pictorial transcendence, while countless vaulted ceilings of Byzantine churches became the celestial domain of Christ Pantocrator, the Theotokos or Mother of God, saints, prophets, and angels—all arrayed in hieratic splendor in fresco or mosaic.

But there was a paradox to the Byzantine focus on transcendence. Icons could be portable or static, employed in personal devotions or liturgical processions, but it was precisely the iconic *presence* of a holy personage that was widely believed to ward off evil (or subdue the enemy in battle). Endless theological

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disputation culminated in the iconoclastic conflict of the eighth and ninth centuries. Though it was supported by more than one emperor, scholars have questioned iconoclasm's impact and severity. There's no doubt that the veneration of images remained a defining trait of religious life within the empire.

Conventional and hieratic though it was, there was stylistic variety in Byzantine sacred art, and classicism was a major factor. A wall mosaic fragment from a Macedonian church showing the gray-haired and -bearded Saint Andrew in side view (ca. 1100) makes a stronger impression of physical presence than the Virgin Episkepsis. The saint bends in humility as he strides forward, hands extended, to receive communion from his savior. His drapery is elaborately designed to give us a volumetric sense of the body underneath—a vestigial classical trait that accompanies the saint's decidedly unclassical anatomical construction.

'Icon of the Hospitality of Abraham' (late 14th century)

Classical influence, evidently based on the artist's familiarity with ancient statuary, is much more obvious in a 10th-century portrait in tempera and gold of a seated St. Matthew. Painted for a parchment codex of the four gospels, the evangelist is portrayed in a pensive moment, in three-quarter view, while at work on his gospel. The lustrous, nonspatial gold background is there; the perspective for lectern, table, and footstool is skewed; and the portrait retains distinctly Byzantine traits in the schematic rendering of anatomical forms such as the hands. But here again, the man wears the drapery rather than vice versa, and the smallness of the head in proportion to the figure as a whole makes him more monumental, as with the mosaic Sun figure. And the evangelist's foreshortened right shoulder is given the projection we also encountered in the Hellenistic mosaic.

A possible example in this same vein is the central, very white recumbent figure of Christ's dead body in an extremely elaborate (and extremely expensive) liturgical textile, or *epitaphios*, which was embroidered with polychromatic silk thread and gold and silver wire on a linen substrate. A Thessalonica workshop produced the tapestry, which is six-and-a-half feet long and over two feet wide, around 1300. Though hardly classical, the central Christ figure is also modeled more volumetrically than is typical of Byzantine art, with the linear treatment of the exposed torso calling to mind ancient Greek vase painting.

A portable Macedonian icon from the late 12th century, with the Virgin Hodegetria on one side and the dead Christ portrayed as the Man of Sorrows on the other, hews much more closely to the Byzantine norm than the codex and tapestry portraits. The figures on the two-sided icon, painted in tempera on wood, do not project from the picture plane. But the furrowed brow of the Virgin, frontally posed with the Christ child in her arm, and looking off to her side rather than at us, is full of foreboding. The rendering of the haloed Man of Sorrows is strikingly linear, especially in the patternized hair and beard. He appears with his upper arms at his side, head tilted sideways and down to his chest. The end of Christ's agony is powerfully portrayed here, and the inscription on the cross behind him—"The King of Glory"—deepens the pathos.

The pose, notes the National Gallery's Susan M. Arensberg, is deliberately composite: The figure may be read as upright, still on the cross or being taken down from it, or recumbent for lamentation and burial. "Many icons after iconoclasm have a heightened emotional tenor," Arensberg adds. "This emphasis comes out of changes in the liturgy and is found in sermons and hymns of the time."

The frontal, static, unemotional portrayal of holy figures persisted. A painted St. Athanasius icon from Macedonia, dating to around 1400, thus conforms to his iconographic type: bald, pear-shaped head with a halo; thick, gray patternized beard reminiscent of the guilloche ornament in the Sun mosaic; forehead and cheeks modeled with schematic bulbous protuberances; and bishop's vestments. He holds a gospel in one hand and makes the sign of blessing with the other. By this time such strict conventionalism coexisted with a greater pictorial complexity and naturalism that only emerged in later Byzantine art. In the *Icon of the Hospitality of Abraham*, probably painted in Constantinople around the same time as the Athanasius icon, remarkably animated figures of the patriarch and his spouse serve three angel-like strangers, Old Testament antitypes of the Trinity, in a symmetrical composition including an elaborate table setting and an urban background in the familiar skewed perspective.

The art of Byzantium was, of course, a point of departure rather than a destination for Renaissance art. Michelangelo opted for the aesthetic ideal that gave us the *Dying Gaul*. And even before he was born, the Florentine Desiderio da Settignano produced the National Gallery's enchanting bust of a little boy with rotund features, which brilliantly manifests the classical idea of sculptural presence. It dates to the 1450s, right around the time Constantinople fell. ♦

BENAKI MUSEUM, ATHENS

B&A

Crazy for It

Boy meets machine. Boy falls in love. No, really . . .

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The writer-director Spike Jonze made a television commercial in 2002 about a lamp that gets thrown away when a new one is purchased. The commercial turns the lamp into a tragic character, deposited on the curb in the rain, sitting forlornly outside the window of its former owner.

Then a man with a Swedish accent appears. "Many of you feel bad for this lamp," he says. "That is because you are crazy. It has no feelings, and the new one is much better." At which point the Ikea logo appears, and the commercial cuts off. This minute-long work is a peerless critical commentary on cinematic trickery—a masterly exposé of the way moviemakers use music and light and shadow and editing to induce emotions in us.

Now Jonze has written and directed an Oscar-nominated movie called *Her*, in which a man named Ted falls for his computer's and smartphone's operating system, called Samantha. In one sense, *Her* is the perfect sequel to the lamp commercial, because Jonze uses every bit of cinematic trickery he knows to make you believe the man is in love with the phone and the phone is in love with him. Many people are entranced by *Her*; they have told me they found it moving and were fascinated by its portrait of a world only a few years from now in which people are more attached to intelligent machines than to others.

Jonze makes ruthless and effective use of music, camera angles, lens flares, romantic settings, and quiet conversation—all evoking the styles of older, utterly delirious romantic movies like *A Man and a Woman* and *Love Story*, not to mention television commercials for diamonds and cars and hotels and cruise ships.

Her
Directed by Spike Jonze

Joaquin Phoenix

The oddity, though, is that this time Jonze seems to mean it. He's not sending up romantic film clichés the way he sent up film language in the lamp commercial. *Her* is not a parody, and it never shifts tone. This really *is* a movie about a man and a phone falling in love, about how love is wonderful but fleeting, and about how lovers grow and change and pull away from one another. Thematically, it's *Annie Hall* in the future, without jokes—if Annie Hall were only Scarlett Johansson's disembodied voice and Woody Allen were a mustachioed, withdrawn child-man played by the surpassingly strange Joaquin Phoenix.

Skilled though Jonze is at evoking the outbreak of love, you're still just watching Joaquin Phoenix dancing around by himself and having conversations with nobody. And we are meant to take it straight, to go with it, to accept his love for this disembodied voice, in part because we are supposed to like Phoenix's character and feel empathy for him.

Phoenix tries to play a sweet and repressed fellow who is grieving over his divorce, but the actor cannot really hide the go-for-broke intensity he showed in his best-known parts as the parricidal Roman in *Gladiator* and the shell-shocked deviant in *The Master*. He is supposed to be an everyman for the digital age, but due to Phoenix's limitations, he seems more like a lunatic desperately trying to mask his psychopathy.

Now, as for the operating system: Scarlett Johannson has an attractive voice, and it is certainly true that people can and do fall in love with others they have never met but have heard on the phone, or with whom they have had correspondence. But we are supposed to take it that Samantha is a full-blown character with her own wants and needs and interests and desires. But she's just a plot device, loving when Jonze needs her to be loving, distant when Jonze needs her to be distant, and developing extracurricular interests when he wants the plot to go that way.

You keep waiting for *Her* to develop a satiric punch, to say something about people and technology and soullessness and the like, but instead what you get is Spike Jonze furiously trying to keep you in the thrall of his peculiar obsession. The movie just goes on and on and on, with the emo music and the lens flares. Meanwhile, conveniently, there's the charming and winsome Amy Adams, who lives in an apartment in the same building as Phoenix, and who breaks up with her husband just as Phoenix broke up with his wife.

In the end, the story of this tiresome and pointless conceit is this: "He was a man who had to have sex with his cellphone in order to find the girl next door." I feel like the man at the end of Jonze's Ikea commercial: "You were probably upset when Ted and Samantha broke up. That is because you are crazy." ♦

WARNER BROS.

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

PARODY

"The reason New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie has begun to punch back more forcefully against accusations of bullying and cronyism is suggested in a new poll showing the road-closure scandal surrounding the governor has cut into what once was his chief asset: a perception of blunt honesty."
—Los Angeles Times, January 20, 2014

have voted for him?—but wh
is the deal with not plowing Park Slope?

ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

GOV. CHRISTIE HIRES RICHARD SHERMAN AS SPECIAL ADVISER

Governor Tells Hoboken Mayor, 'Don't You Ever Talk About Me!'

By ALAN FEUER

TRENTON — During a high-intensity press conference, New Jersey governor Chris Christie launched a tirade against his critics while heaping praise on himself. "I'm the best governor in the game!" yelled Christie. Standing next to the governor was his newly hired special adviser Richard Sherman, a cornerback for the Seattle Seahawks football team.

After watching Mr. Sherman's fiery interview following the Seahawks' victory over the San Francisco 49ers, Mr. Christie said he was "duly inspired" and asked the NFL player to serve as a part-time image consultant: "I just loved his blunt honesty. But I understand Richard has other commitments, including playing the Super Bowl in our fine state, which is why the position is part-time. Oh, and, by the way, if I hear one more person say the Super Bowl is taking place in New York, I'm gonna settle it for you real quick!"

The governor was also perturbed by the mayor of Hoboken, who claims that hurricane funds were withheld until she agreed on a Christie-backed redevelopment project. "Don't you open your mouth about the best," yelled the governor. "When you try me with a sorry mayor like Dawn Zimmer, that's the result you gonna get!" It was unclear what Mr. Christie meant, but Mr. Sherman kept nodding and smiling at him in approval.

Luigi Novi

'Shut up!': Governor Chris Christie greets the media in Trenton Monday.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Christie had been spotted by reporters at the Golden Bell diner mimicking Mr. Sherman's choking taunt, which the cornerback had directed toward 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick. Had the governor spotted Ms. Zimmer or Fort Lee mayor Mark Sokolich? "No, no—not at all," said Mr. Christie. "A piece of my gyro had gone down the wrong

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