the weekly standard

NOT READY FOR HILLARY
JAY COST

MON DIEU!

France's strange new politics

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

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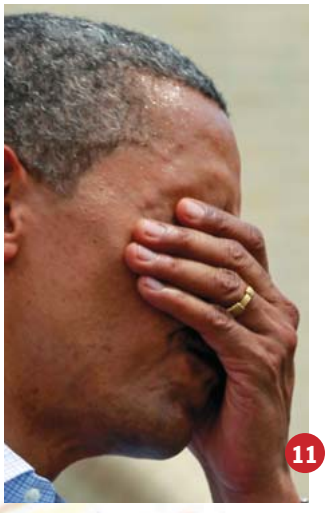

COVER BY GARY LOCKE

The Selling of Joe McGinnis

In 1968, so the story goes, a 25-year-old aspiring journalist named Joe McGinnis overheard an advertising executive on a train report that his firm had acquired "the Humphrey account" for the forthcoming presidential election. "Until that moment," wrote the *Washington Post* decades later, "Mr. McGinnis had not realized that presidential campaigns hired . . . advertisers to sell their candidates like a brand of soap."

And the rest is history. Hubert Humphrey's staff brushed him off, but the campaign of Humphrey's rival, Richard Nixon, allowed McGinnis to tag along. The result was *The Selling of the President 1968* (1969), an indignant account of the marketing of candidate Nixon, featuring candid observations from not-yet-famous names (Leonard Garment, Roger Ailes, etc.), which nicely played into the growing certitude, among journalists, that Republicans win elections not on issues but by deception. *The Selling of the President 1968* became a huge bestseller and, three years later, a Broadway flop.

Which is one way of saying that, along with the legend of Joe McGinnis, who died last week at 71, there was an equal amount of mythology as well. The first myth, of course, is that if McGinnis overheard an ad man on a train, and if the ad man actually said what McGinnis reported ("In six weeks we'll have him looking better than Abraham Lincoln"), then Joe McGinnis was a little less than he appeared to be to admirers and rather more like a typical twentysomething who sees the obvious ("advertisers . . . sell their candidates like a brand of soap") and thinks he's made a discovery.

Journalists seldom have greater admirers than their fellow journalists, and McGinnis certainly benefited from this all-too-human vocational quirk. *Selling* was greeted in the press as an instant classic, and at a tender age, McGinnis became accustomed to hyperbole ("Author of one of the best nonfiction books ever written"—Gene Weingarten, *Washington Post*) that would embarrass a James Boswell or Henry Adams. In fact, in assessing his career, it might be argued that McGinnis was more typical than not, since he never repeated the success of that first splash, although his attempt to reproduce Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*—a first-person account of a famous murder case, entitled *Fatal Vision*, based on interviews with the murderer—has its admirers ("As rigorous a work of nonfiction as there is"—Gene Weingarten, *Washington Post*).

The Scrapbook might even argue that McGinnis, for all the postmortem overpraise, is a case study in the pitfalls of premature fame, especially in journalism. *The Selling of the President 1968* struck a nerve among his ink-stained colleagues because it spelled out, in humorous detail, what they didn't like about Republicans in general, and Nixon in particular. McGinnis learned to translate newsroom sentiment into books. This might explain the embarrassing circumstances of his final work, *The Rogue: Searching for the Real Sarah Palin* (2011), in which he sought to capture the conventional wisdom on the subject by retailing jokes and old gossip, and in an act of supreme creepiness, renting the house next door to Palin's family home in Alaska. It didn't work, as even McGinnis's admirers concede ("Thin and crappy and lazy"—Gene Weingarten, *Washington Post*).

Moreover, McGinnis's middle phase yielded a judgment that proved as devastating as it was unexpected, and is probably final. The conceit of *Fatal Vision* (1983) had been that McGinnis, in order to gain the confidence of his protagonist, had professed belief in his innocence. Indeed, even though he was convinced that Jeffrey MacDonald had, in fact, killed his wife and two daughters, McGinnis persistently ingratiated himself with MacDonald throughout the process of researching and writing his book. When *Fatal Vision* was published, to extravagant notices, MacDonald felt betrayed, and McGinnis vindicated.

Six years later, however, Janet Malcolm reviewed the affair in the *New Yorker*, and in an essay entitled "The Journalist and the Murderer," began with a famous observation:

> Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse.

You don't have to agree with Janet Malcolm about everything, or believe in the guilt or innocence of Jeffrey MacDonald, to perceive that she captured something of the essence of Joe McGinnis in those words, and by inference, what the public deplores in journalism. This does not apply to every journalist, of course, nor to journalism generally. But it might explain the appeal of Joe McGinnis to some journalists, and is probably what most of us will remember about him. ♦

MSNBC Dud

The carousel of failure at MSNBC has been spinning a little faster the last couple weeks. First Alec Baldwin blasted the network in *New York* magazine. And then the network's latest savior, Ronan Farrow, experienced some . . . difficulties during the launch of his show, *Ronan Farrow Daily*.

You know there's trouble when places like the *Huffington Post* and the gossip site *Gawker* gleefully take shots at a fellow-traveler, which is exactly what happened when Farrow's show debuted. Live-tweeting the event, *HuffPo* observed derisively that one of the word clouds appearing on the

screen behind Farrow included the phrase "spokesperson for youth." The word clouds—a staple of blog navigation a decade ago—are supposed to subliminally educate viewers about Farrow. *Gawker* noted caustically that one of the show's early word clouds derived almost entirely from Farrow's résumé, with "diplomat," "activist," "Yale Law School," and "Rhodes Scholar" prominently displayed. *Variety*'s Brian Lowry quipped that "Farrow has been given an MSNBC show partly to appeal to those people who find Chris Hayes [age 35] too old."

For those who haven't followed Farrow's career, the word clouds pretty much say it all. The relevant facts omitted are that he's Mia Farrow's son and, if you believe the gossip, possibly the offspring of Frank Sinatra (and not Woody Allen). He's also a whiz on Twitter, according to people on Twitter.

Last week, *Variety* swooped in again, this time to deliver a verdict on *Ronan Farrow Daily* in the form of a review by the trade publication's digital editor in chief, Andrew Wallenstein. It was an uncomfortable essay. Unlike the pack of liberal critics, Wallenstein had nothing but praise for Farrow as a person—he mentioned both Yale and the Rhodes Scholarship before the third sentence of his review. He proclaimed Farrow "awesome on Twitter" while calling him "too damned handsome," with "limpid pools he calls eyes" that are "so mesmerizing it's easy to lose track of what he's saying." Which was all by way of throat-clearing before declaring the show a "dud."

For its part, The Scrapbook is marginally pro-Farrow. Unlike most of Hollywood, he's good on the Woody Allen issue. And compared with the rest of the MSNBC lineup, he's well above the median in intelligence and likability. But it's worth noting the lunacy of trying to build a TV audience around Twitter followers.

In assessing MSNBC's decision to cast Farrow, Wallenstein wrote, "The logic behind making such a conversion seems as sound as it is simple: Bringing over someone with a powerful direct connection to 238,000 [Twitter] followers gives a TV show a running start in the ratings." But of course, that's insane. Following someone on Twitter is an incredibly weak connection. Recall the Twitter phenomenon "S— My Dad Says," which was turned into a CBS sitcom on the strength of its 2 million followers. It was canceled after 18 episodes. ♦

Satan and the AP

Liberal media bias is such a fact of life The Scrapbook can't get exercised about it every day. But there are two subjects in the news a lot in which the fourth estate's inability to play fair is never less than appalling: Senator Ted Cruz and abortion. Last week, the Associated Press tried to cover both at the same time, and the results were spectacular. Here is the opening paragraph of Philip Elliott's dispatch:

> Calling their opponents Satan worshippers and savages, anti-abortion lawmakers on Wednesday insisted that Republican contenders keep an intense focus on social issues in the upcoming midterm elections and the 2016 presidential race.

Satan worshippers? Zounds! Where did that come from? The AP attempts to explain:

> Sen. Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican who is a favorite of the tea party, said supporters of abortion rights chant "Hail, Satan" to silence their enemies.

> . . . "Arm-in-arm, chanting 'Hail, Satan,' embracing the right to take the life of a late-term child," Cruz said of supporters of abortion rights.

If you're one of those cynical types who doesn't believe everything you read, you might suspect that there's more to this story than the AP is letting on. And you would be correct. Senator Cruz was referencing protests in Austin last year where pro-lifers were in fact shouted down by protesters yelling, "Hail, Satan!" This happened multiple times. It's on YouTube. It's not Cruz's fault that those actions happened to make abortion supporters look cartoonishly repugnant. We can only assume that reporter Philip Elliott was so invested in the caricature of the Harvard-educated, former Supreme Court clerk as daft and unhinged that he didn't bother verifying whether Cruz was telling the truth.

The AP further characterized the comments of Cruz and other GOP leaders as "unflinching rhetoric" and an "attempt to make inroads with the GOP's socially conservative wing," despite the fact that the pro-life cause cuts across political boundaries. Notably, Cruz was defending his home state's ban on late-term abortion—like the majority of Americans, Texas legislators find it morally objectionable.

The AP later corrected the story. Instead of "Calling their opponents Satan worshippers and savages," it now begins, "Invoking fiery references to Satan, 'savagery' and a 'culture of death.'" It notes that abortion supporters in fact chanted "Hail, Satan." The story was once risible, and it's now slightly less so. How do such stories manage to get written, let alone past editors? Andrew Stiles of the *Washington Free Beacon* walks us through the professional standards at work here:

1. Pro-choice activists chant "Hail, Satan" at a protest.
2. GOP Senator says pro-choice activists chanted "Hail, Satan" at a protest.
3. AP reports: Republicans call opponents "Satan worshippers."

Just another day at the office for the mainstream media. ◆

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BPA WORLDWIDE

The Tale and the Teller

My earliest memory of being spellbound by a piece of writing is of being read to as a small child from a book of Georgian (as in Caucasian) folk tales, the *Yes and No Stories*. For a time, I used to ask for "The Fox, the Bear and the Butter Jar" every night.

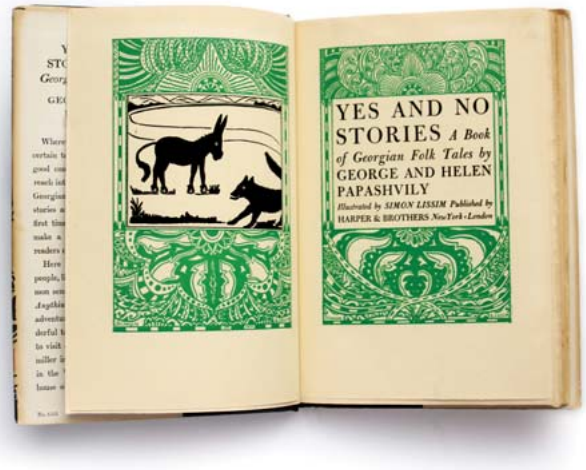
I was embarrassed about this. My older sister, quite reasonably, wanted to hear something new—usually a fresh chapter from one of the numerous *Dotty Dimple* and *Little Prudy* volumes that had belonged to our grandmother. But the attraction of my story was stronger than my reluctance to look foolish. I would beg, and many nights my mother and sister let me have my way.

Actually, now that I think about it, it was mostly the *first page* of the story that gripped me.

For one thing, the initial "T" of the title was gorgeously decorated with a bright red design. (The illustrator, one Simon Lissim, I now know thanks to Google, was born in Kiev in 1900, the son of a banker; was part of the circle of émigré artists around Diaghilev and Bakst in Paris in the 1920s; joined the French Army in 1939 and drove a munitions truck until the fall of France; then crossed the Atlantic and became an American, teaching art at City College for over 25 years.)

But more important, the perfection of the text itself held me transfixed. Here is that first page:

> There was, there was, and yet there was not a fox who went out walking.
>
> As he walked he chanced to pass a deserted house set back from the road in an overgrown garden.
>
> "Perhaps," said the fox to himself when he saw this, "perhaps some small piece of bacon or an end of cheese has been left in there."
>
> He went up the path, pushed open the door with his nose and stepped inside. To his surprise, who was sitting in a chair by the kitchen table but a bear.
>
> The fox bowed politely. "Be victorious, Bear," he said. "And if I may ask a personal question, how do you happen to be in here?"



> "For the same reason you are," answered the bear. "To see what I can find."
>
> The fox sat down on the other side of the table and they talked over their situation. Finally they agreed to live there in the house and make a home together.

It seemed to me uncanny. How could the writers (George and Helen Papashvily, a Georgian immigrant and his American wife, presumably retelling a much older tale) have known how intensely a deserted house would appeal to *me*—and not just any deserted house, but one *set back from the road in an overgrown garden*? And how could they have divined the reason: the hope of finding something there, especially something to eat—what better than a *small piece of bacon or an end of cheese*? The courtesy of the fox, the thrilling panache of his salutation, his flowery yet bold move to a direct question, set up the bear's deadpan answer. And then it's clinched: These two share a *situation*. They talk it over, and they set up house.

The exquisite pacing and unity of this first scene are never matched in the rest of the story, though it has nice moments. The bear finds "a big clay jar full of melted butter" in the storeroom and sets it aside for Easter morning. When the appointed day comes, he puts "grass bouquets here and there to make the rooms look happy." Then, "clacking his claws together with joy," he calls the fox to the feast.

Of course it turns out the fox, behind an elaborate ruse, has snuck the butter ("He licked and licked and licked with his long pink tongue until the skin over his stomach was tighter than a drum head"). The rest of the story exposes the fox's greedy and unscrupulous nature while leading, through perilous twists and turns, to his final comeuppance and the slightly lame moral: "So whenever you eat melted butter, remember it's easy to be smarter than anybody once. But not twice."

Years later, reading this story to my children, I discovered that my mother used to edit the beginning when she read it aloud—and in doing so improved it. Her first sentence is the one quoted above, obviously better than the Papashvilys' awkward "There was, there was, and yet there was not, there was once a fox who went out walking."

What so captivated me long ago turns out to have been a collaboration, across cultures and over time, of many minds. Soon, I expect to be reading "The Fox, the Bear and the Butter Jar" to my new granddaughter—the edited version, that is. I wonder how she'll like it, and whether she has inherited the editing gene.

Claudia Anderson

the weekly Standard

Not Ready for Hillary

"Ready for Hillary" is the rather ominous name given to the super-PAC working on behalf of Hillary Clinton's putative presidential campaign. One group that appears to be ready for Hillary, according to the *Hill*, is the vast array of lobbyists known as K Street:

> With Democrats in Congress already anointing Clinton as the party's standard-bearer, lobbyists are pledging their allegiance and making clear they will do whatever they can to help the former first lady become first in command. . . .
>
> Clinton has not yet revealed her plans for 2016. But after more than two decades in national politics as first lady, senator and secretary of State, she has a virtual army of Washington hands standing ready to serve as foot soldiers in a presidential campaign.

Meanwhile, Republicans seem to be less than ready for Hillary's money. Consider that in 2008, she raised about $230 million for the primary battle alone, where she had to split the left's big donors with Barack Obama. Four years later, Mitt Romney raised $450 million for the primary and the general. Those are numbers that should trouble Republicans now, for if Clinton runs again, it stands to reason that she will outraise the GOP nominee, who will probably have been burdened with an expensive primary battle.

The GOP has another problem with Hillary: In the last quarter-century, it has exhibited no facility for countering Clintonism in the public mind. This failure is arguably worse than any cash crunch; it does not matter how much money you spend making a bad argument if it is still a bad argument. And that is all the GOP ever seems to have against the Clintons.

Republicans have had three at-bats against the Clintons—the elections of 1992 and 1996 and the impeachment proceedings of 1998-99—and struck out every time. To date, there is little evidence they have learned from their defeats. Rand Paul has been raising Bill Clinton's sexual misconduct, something that backfired while Clinton was president. Meanwhile, some Republican pundits are saying that Hillary Clinton has never really accomplished anything, a line that got George H.W. Bush nowhere in 1992.

Almost certain to be outraised and lacking any compelling case against the Clintons, the Republican party, it is fair to say, is not ready for Hillary. If anything, the classic Clinton shtick—"I feel your pain"—should play particularly well in this age of seemingly permanent economic anxiety.

Context is still important. In 1992, when Bill and Hillary Clinton waxed eloquent about the middle-class squeeze, they were flanked by an unemployed steelworker and a single mother working two jobs. Nowadays, they are more likely to have Warren Buffett on one side and Mick Jagger on the other. That's the price you pay for being at the top of the world's political, social, and economic hierarchy for a quarter-century: You are bound to lose touch with the "folks" (a Clintonian classic) who elevated you to those heights in the first place. In 1992 George H.W. Bush was the out-of-touch elitist who (supposedly) did not understand how a grocery scanner worked. In 2016, Hillary Clinton will not have driven her own car for 25 years.

And therein lies the GOP's best opportunity.

Put simply, the party should try to occupy the same political space the Clintons seized in 1992, and cast the Clintons in the role of the out-of-touch elitist. Bill's appetite for the rock-star lifestyle—hobnobbing with the gilded elite in Davos rather than the diner crowd in Little Rock—facilitates this effort. So does Hillary's presumably endless grasping for campaign contributions, which unmistakably connects her to the elite (and reviled) quarters of this country. Goldman Sachs's Lloyd Blankfein is already on board for Hillary, which tells you all you need to know. It should, in theory, be possible for the GOP to expose the hypocrisy of the Clintons' pitch to the "forgotten middle class," given that they seemingly have forgotten all about their own middle-class backgrounds.

That's the theory, at any rate. In practice, success depends upon the nominee. Some candidates are well equipped to make a populist pitch to the middle class, others not. Republicans tend to nominate the latter type, whether longtime Washington insiders (Gerald Ford, Bob Dole, John McCain) or political scions (George W. Bush, Mitt Romney) or both (George H.W. Bush). The seemingly narrow caste of eligible GOP nominees has a lot to do with the party's own addiction to special-interest money; these are, after all, the sorts of people who can raise the cash needed to run the ads to sway primary voters in Ohio and Florida.

This time, Republicans would be well advised to cast against type. They should consider a candidate who has not spent much time in Washington, somebody whose parents struggled to reach the middle class, someone who has had to work hard in the last 20 years to retain that status, somebody who is, if not hip, at least relatively young (the younger candidate has won the popular vote in the last six presidential elections). In general, one cannot overstate the power of symbolism in a presidential election. The vast array of issues that confront the electorate is bewildering, and an easy heuristic

to deal with the messy questions of policy is: Which candidate has more empathy for people of my social and economic status? The Republicans should find a candidate who seems more empathetic than Hillary Clinton.

Beyond that, Republicans need a "Sister Souljah moment." That is a reference to the time that presidential candidate Bill Clinton, in the presence of Jesse Jackson, publicly decried obscene lyrics in the music of rapper Sister Souljah. That sent a powerful signal, for the Democratic party of the 1980s had seemed in hock to the identity-politics hucksters of the professional left, Jackson in particular. Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis had given Jackson prominent roles at their conventions, reinforcing the impression that the Democratic party was angrier at America than anything else. Clinton expanded upon his rebuke of Sister Souljah with some tough words for his own party at his 1992 convention:

> But, my fellow Democrats, it's time for us to realize we've got some changing to do too. There is not a program in government for every problem, and if we want to use government to help people, we have got to make it work again.

Meanwhile Clinton mentioned "work," "working," or "hard work" 29 times in his 1992 address, and in so doing produced a lasting shift in the party's image. No longer would it be the party of the radicals, the grievance mongers, or those blindly pushing government for its own sake. It would be the party that wields government to help those who are already working hard. That was the essence of the "New Democrat" label.

Republicans need to do something similar for 2016. Elite quarters of the party will aver that the GOP's Sister Souljah moment should be about gay marriage or immigration, but they are wrong. Looking at the 2012 exit polls provides a clue as to the party's real problem. At its core, the electorate in 2012 was conservative in important respects. By a 51-43 margin, voters said that government was doing too much, as opposed to not enough. A plurality also said that Obamacare should be repealed, at least in part. And a plurality narrowly favored Romney over Obama on who could better handle the economy and the deficit. But there was a peculiar twist: When asked which issue "mattered most to people like you," a plurality identified unemployment as the number one problem, and a decisive majority of those voters favored Obama, despite the fact that jobs were the centerpiece of the Romney campaign. Similarly, voters overwhelmingly said that Obama was "more in touch with people like you." They also claimed that Obama's policy favored the middle class over the rich, while Romney's policies favored the rich over the middle class. Finally, a 55 percent majority of voters said that the "U.S. economic system favors the wealthy." Obama won more than 70 percent of these voters.

Since the 1880s, the Republican party has been joined at the hip with business interests in the public mind. When times are good, that is a boon for the GOP, but when times are bad, it is a serious political handicap, as it was in 1992, 2008, and 2012, and as it may be in 2016. Romney hoped to use his background in business to his advantage, but the exit polling indicates that it worked against him. This gave Obama enormous political cover to sidle up to his elite supporters, who enjoyed tremendous payoffs via the stimulus, Obamacare, and Dodd-Frank. The Clintons will probably do likewise. They will spend money donated by Goldman Sachs executives to run television ads decrying the influence of corporations like Goldman Sachs, all the while assuming that the GOP's psychological connection with business will mask their blatant hypocrisy.

This is the place for the Sister Souljah moment. The party has to find a way to signal to voters that, contrary to their expectations, the GOP will not govern as though it is in the pocket of corporate interests. That does not mean Republicans should embrace the Democratic party's regulatory regime or buy into the false idea that one's attitude to business is revealed exclusively by how many government agencies one creates to boss it around. After all, the Democrats do not simply regulate business, they subsidize it as well. Look at Obamacare's individual mandate, a boon to insurers, or Dodd-Frank's maintenance of "too big to fail," a boon to big banks. Washington Democrats may spend half their time regulating business, but they spend the other half providing rents to businesses, at least those with high-powered lobbyists once employed by the Clinton administration.

The Republican party, unfortunately, is just as guilty of this sin as the Democratic party. What is called for, then, is an admission of the GOP's past wrongs, a full-throated renunciation of the old practices, an unequivocal promise that a Republican administration will treat people equally, regardless of how much money they spend on lobbyists, and a reform agenda that seeks to embed these virtues in the law. All of this could be combined with an attack on the faux-populism of the Clintons; their folksy rhetoric has stood them in good stead for a generation, during which they have amassed an impressive record of clientelism that will make it difficult for them to counter a GOP assault on this front.

Of course, this might not be enough to secure the Republicans' prospects. An economic calamity would sink the standing of Barack Obama, the Democratic party, and the Clintons as well, in which case any reasonably qualified GOP nominee could probably win. Similarly, an economic boom might restore Obama's reputation and render moot the entire GOP campaign, wafting Clinton into office on her predecessor's coattails. But if the current state of affairs prevails—Obama is unpopular, but Democrats are united and Clinton remains detached from the incumbent in the public's mind—the GOP should worry. This could produce something close to a 50-50 race, making the party's message to the electorate of crucial importance.

This is where a GOP reform agenda, proffered by the

right sort of candidate, would be advantageous. The Clintons are formidable foes, and by 2016 they will have survived GOP attacks for 25 years. They know the Republican playbook inside out and have an answer for just about every attack the GOP is likely to launch. If the party wants to defeat them, it needs to throw the old strategies out the window and come up with something new.

—Jay Cost

War-Weariness As an Excuse

Are Americans today war-weary? Sure. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been frustrating and tiring. Are Americans today unusually war-weary? No. They were wearier after the much larger and even more frustrating conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. And even though the two world wars of the last century had more satisfactory outcomes, their magnitude was such that they couldn't help but induce a significant sense of war-weariness. And history shows that they did.

So American war-weariness isn't new. Using it as an excuse to avoid maintaining our defenses or shouldering our responsibilities isn't new, either. But that doesn't make it admirable.

The March 5 *Wall Street Journal* featured a letter from Heidi Szrom of Valparaiso, Indiana. She was responding to an earlier letter defending President Obama's foreign policies against a powerful critique in the *Journal* by the historian Niall Ferguson ("America's Global Retreat"). The first letter writer noted Ferguson's statement that more people may have died violent deaths in the Greater Middle East in the Obama years than under Bush, but excused Obama:

> True, but it is also equally certain that fewer Americans have died violent deaths in the Greater Middle East during this presidency than during the previous one, and this is what matters more now to a war-weary American public.

To which Ms. Szrom responded:

> According to pundits, the president and letter writers, America is "war weary." Every time I hear this, I wonder: Did you serve? Did you volunteer to fight oppression in foreign lands? Did your son or brother or husband? If so, then I understand and sympathize with your complaint . . . unlike most of those who utter this shopworn phrase.
>
> Perhaps the country's weariness stems from a reluctance to face unpleasant truths—one of which is that power, like nature, abhors a vacuum. . . . History tells us it will only be a temporary reprieve. Our current defense cuts ensure that we will be woefully unprepared to face the next test. We are so weary that we are falling asleep.

Well said. If only Republican elected officials were half as clear-minded and nearly as courageous as Ms. Szrom in taking on the claim that we all need to defer to, to bow down to, our own war-weariness. In fact, the idol of war-weariness can be challenged. A war-weary public can be awakened and rallied. Indeed, events are right now doing the awakening. All that's needed is the rallying. And the turnaround can be fast. Only 5 years after the end of the Vietnam war, and 15 years after our involvement there began in a big way, Ronald Reagan ran against both Democratic dovishness and Republican détente. He proposed confronting the Soviet Union and rebuilding our military. It was said that the country was too war-weary, that it was too soon after Vietnam, for Reagan's stern and challenging message. Yet Reagan won the election in 1980. And by 1990 an awakened America had won the Cold War.

The next president will be elected in 2016, 15 years after 9/11 and 5 years after our abandonment of Iraq and the beginning of the drawdown in Afghanistan. Pundits will say that it would be politically foolish to try to awaken Americans rather than cater to their alleged war-weariness. We can't prove them wrong. Perhaps it would be easier for a Republican to win in 2016 running after the fashion of Warren Gamaliel Harding in 1920 rather than that of Ronald Wilson Reagan in 1980.

But what would such a victory be worth? The term "war-weary" (actually "war-wearied") may have first appeared in Shakespeare. In *Henry VI, Part 1* (Act IV, Scene 4), the Earl of Somerset, for reasons of domestic political calculation, resists the entreaty of Sir William Lucy to go to the aid of his fellow English lord, "the over-daring Talbot,"

> *Who, ring'd about with bold adversity,*
> *Cries out for noble York and Somerset,*
> *To beat assailing death from his weak legions:*
> *And whiles the honourable captain there*
> *Drops bloody sweat from his war-wearied limbs,*
> *And, in advantage lingering, looks for rescue,*
> *You, his false hopes, the trust of England's honour,*
> *Keep off aloof with worthless emulation.*

Somerset fails to rescue Talbot, but grandly states,

> *If he be dead, brave Talbot, then adieu!*

To which Lucy replies,

> *His fame lives in the world, his shame in you.*

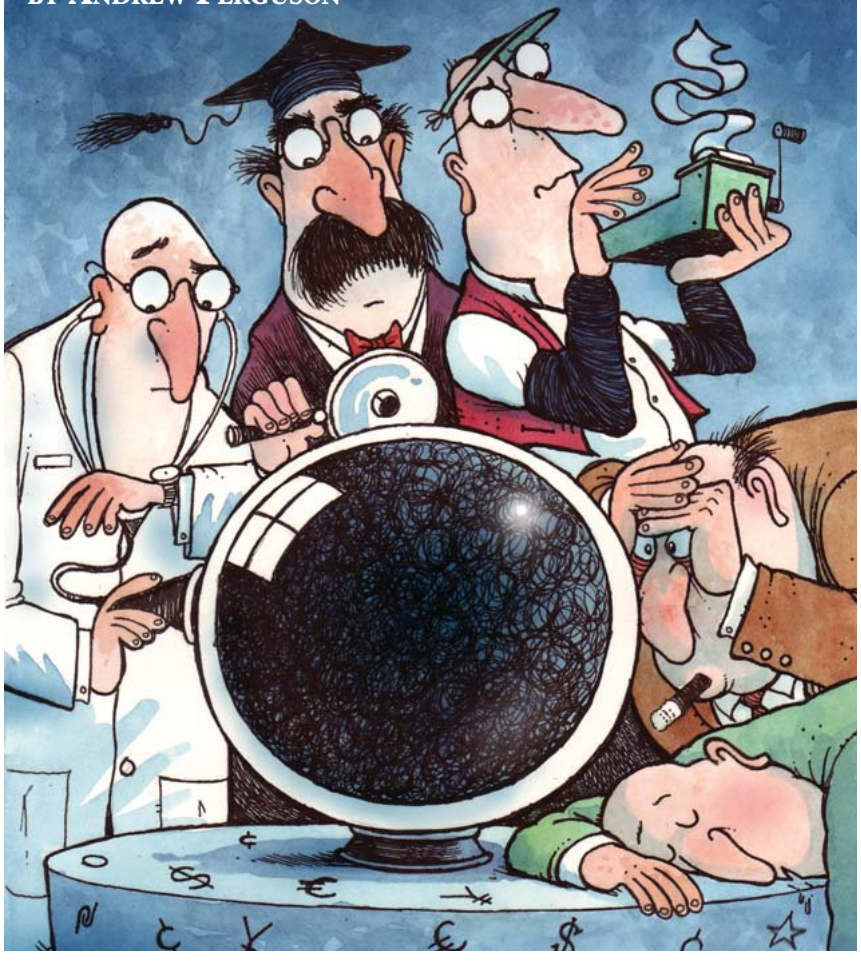
Can Republicans do no better than shamefully to emulate Somerset and Obama ("I assure you nobody ends up being more war-weary than me")? Will no brave leader step forward to honorably awaken us from our unworthy sleep?

—William Kristol

Wrong Again

The economists' confession.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



It's hard to find nice things to say about economists. Their detachment from the real world of human activity is matched only by their enormous influence over it, and by their unearned assumption that this arrangement is well deserved. That all changed last month, however. Now we can say something nice about at least some of the economists at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and it is this: They may not be very good at what they do, but they're not afraid to admit it.

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Last month they released a report, "OECD Forecasts During & After the Financial Crisis: A Post-Mortem." It is not beach reading, unless you're the sort of person who works for the OECD or THE WEEKLY STANDARD. The report's watery tone and obscure nomenclature are common to the literature of professional economists—and are indispensable when it comes time to hide an unflattering conclusion from the prying eyes of laymen. The unflattering conclusion here, though, is straightforward, if understated. The OECD economists looked at their own work forecasting the direction of the world economy over the last several years and admitted: "GDP growth was overestimated on average across 2007-12, reflecting not only errors at the height of the financial crisis but also errors in the subsequent recovery."

The passive voice in the first clause of that sentence is squirmy; a flat assertion in the first person plural would be more seemly and more accurate. But give them credit for the rest of the sentence. How big were the errors? Pretty big.

In May 2010, for example, with one-third of the calendar year already over, the OECD economists predicted the U.S. economy would grow 3.2 percent for the year. As it happened, gross domestic product grew 1.7 percent. Note that this is not a small error. That 1.5 percentage point spread between the two numbers means the original projection was off by nearly half. It's as if you thought you saw a car go by at 60 miles per hour while it was actually going 30.

The new report is not solely an admission of error. It is also a catalogue of errors by type. The biggest mistakes, the economists point out, occurred when they forecast growth rates in countries with a relatively high level of government regulation. This surprises the economists, though it won't surprise anyone who takes a dim view of government regulation generally. The forecasters, good statists all, assumed that the regulations "would help to cushion financial shocks" in the highly regulated countries and would therefore aid recovery.

The economists now say they failed to consider the damaging effects of regulation. In the real world, regulations "delay[ed] necessary reallocations across [economic] sectors in the recovery phase"—which, translated from the Economese, means that government was retarding the ability of businesses to do what they do best: find a way to create value and make money even in calamitous circumstances. The concession is implied, but it's clear the economists regret letting an ideological assumption in favor of government intervention overwhelm their forecasts as the recession swept the globe, raining on

DAVID CLARK

the regulated and unregulated alike.

Failures of foresight are common among experts—commoner among them, probably, than among the rest of us, who are unburdened by the expertise that tends to bind rather than liberate habits of mind. The OECD economists are happy to point out that their failures in figuring out the economy from one country to the next are no greater than those of the profession as a whole, especially in the years before and after the recession. Yet no amount of publicity about such spectacular failures deters their clients, whether in government or business, from asking economists for more.

In late 2009 the economist William McEachern impishly looked back at the previous year's forecasts by the *Wall Street Journal*'s panel of economic experts. The *Journal* surveyed its experts in September 2008 when U.S. unemployment was at 6.2 percent; the average prediction among the economists was for the rate to stay more or less flat. By the following September the unemployment rate was 9.8 percent. At the same time, the average prediction among *Journal* economists was that growth for the last quarter of 2008—the quarter, you'll note, that was just about to commence—would be 1.2 percent. Instead it was -2.7 percent.

Economists, in other words, not only fail to predict the future, they can't even predict the present. The OECD offered various reasons for its abysmal record. "The OECD forecasts," the report says, "are conditional projections rather than pure forecasts." Why this should let them off the hook is unexplained. The conditional projections, they go on, "rest on a specific set of assumptions about policies and underlying economic and financial conditions." Oil prices, fiscal policy, the course of the euro crisis—all of these, they say, are beyond an economist's control and bound to throw him off his game.

And we shouldn't doubt it. The oft-cited (by Democrats or Republicans, depending) Congressional Budget Office makes similar demurrals when it owns up to its forecasting failures, which are regular and very large. "Sources of large forecasting errors," one CBO report says, "have included the difficulty of predicting: Turning points in the business cycle—the beginning and end of recessions; changes in trends in productivity; and changes in crude oil prices."

The world is a crazy place, no doubt about it. Most events that occur—even the actions of governments, sometimes—are beyond the control of economists, much as they might like to daydream otherwise. But isn't that the point? This admission just begs the question of why anyone should pay attention to their wizardry to begin with. The forecaster's chief conceit is that by feeding numbers into one end of a statistical model he can see the future come out the other side. The conceit touches off a phantasmagoria of argument in Washington, where politicians and policymakers sift the numbers from one set of econometricians or another, and then use their favorite figures to determine how they will orchestrate the activities of the folks back home. In thrall to economists, government policy-making is a fantasy based on a fantasy.

Perhaps I'm wrong to say the OECD economists aren't very good at what they do. They may be champs, for all I know. It's just that what they are trying to do is worse than worthless. The fault, if that's the word, lies with the people who are soliciting their forecasts, and why.

In an autobiographical essay published 20 years ago, the left-leaning economist Kenneth Arrow recalled entering the Army as a statistician and weather specialist during World War II. "Some of my colleagues had the responsibility of preparing long-range weather forecasts, i.e., for the following month," Arrow wrote. "The statisticians among us subjected these forecasts to verification and found they differed in no way from chance."

Alarmed, Arrow and his colleagues tried to bring this important discovery to the attention of the commanding officer. At last the word came down from a high-ranking aide.

"The Commanding General is well aware that the forecasts are no good," the aide said haughtily. "However, he needs them for planning purposes." ♦

The Luck of the Republicans

They owe it all to Obama.

BY FRED BARNES

President Obama is a gift to Republicans. His policies, his partisanship, his allegiance to liberal interest groups, his indecisiveness—they all have served Republicans well. Without Obama's self-destructive presidency, Republicans would probably be somber today. Instead they are bursting with optimism about the November midterm election.

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at The Weekly Standard.

It didn't have to be this way. And it wouldn't be, had the president shown more foresight and less insistence on getting whatever he wanted, pretty much in the form he wanted. Congressional Democrats had a hand in this. But the policies were his. Obama was in charge. He's responsible.

For starters, the political impact of Obamacare could have been different. It was never popular, but the president made it less so by violating a rule of thumb in enacting an entitlement: It must have popular support and pass

with a bipartisan majority. Obamacare had neither. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Medicare prescription drug benefit had both.

In 1935, FDR's original Social Security Act drew Republican majorities in the House (81-15) and Senate (16-5). In 1965, Medicare and Medicaid attracted nearly all Democrats and half the Republicans. In 2003, the GOP-sponsored drug benefit got the votes of only 9 Democrats in the House but 35 of 48 in the Senate.

With large Democratic majorities in Congress in his first two years in office, Obama made no serious effort to bring Republicans on board his health care bill. That would have meant negotiation and compromise, which he spurned. In 2010, Republicans in the House and Senate voted unanimously against it. The result: The president and Democrats own Obamacare, totally.

Last week, the health care law, its calamitous rollout, and Obama's broken promises claimed their first electoral victim. The special election for a House seat in Florida was primed for a Democratic takeover. Obama had won the district twice, and Democrats had their best possible candidate, Alex Sink. When she narrowly lost the race for governor in 2010, she got 49 percent in the district. Yet she lost 49-47 percent to Republican David Jolly in the House race.

The reason was Obamacare. Jolly wasn't an ideal candidate. Three other Republicans had been recruited but declined to run. Jolly was attacked for being a Washington lobbyist. He was a poor fundraiser, and Sink outspent him 4-1 on advertising. A week before the election, Republican officials in Washington disassociated themselves (anonymously) from Jolly in *Politico*. They expected him to lose.

All Jolly had was an issue, Obamacare. Sink hadn't voted for it since she wasn't in Congress. But in the campaign she embraced the Democratic mantra of "mend it, don't end it." That failed to connect with voters.

If Sink's defeat didn't strike fear in the hearts of vulnerable Democrats, it was only because they were already fearful. Democratic senators like Kay Hagan in North Carolina, Mary Landrieu in Louisiana, and Mark Pryor in Arkansas had seen their poll numbers drop earlier, largely because they'd voted for Obamacare.

With support from some Republicans—fewer than a majority would have sufficed—Obamacare wouldn't be as ripe a target as it has become. It would have a bipartisan tinge. What would Obama have had to offer to get Republican votes? Probably very little. In 2009, when the bill was drafted, Republicans were in a state of shock after losing badly in the 2006 and 2008 elections. But Obama didn't take advantage of this opportunity. His partisanship prevailed.

Even I can't bear to watch.

The same is true with the economic "stimulus." The president wooed three GOP votes in the Senate to overcome a Republican filibuster. That was it. Every House Republican voted no. For this, Obama has paid a double price. The economic recovery is the weakest in decades, and a solid majority of Americans believe we're still in a recession (it actually ended in June 2009).

Obama could have adopted private sector incentives sought by Republicans. He wasn't interested. His plan was government-only, with tens of billions for unionized public sector employees. White House claims that the stimulus created or saved 1.6 million jobs per year in its first two years are not credible. On the contrary, the percentage of Americans in the workforce has shrunk to the lowest level since the 1970s. And there are fewer jobs today than in 2007.

Again, it could have been different. Had Obama compromised with Republicans and added incentives for private investment and job creation, the economy would in all likelihood have grown more robustly. And Republicans wouldn't have a "growth and jobs" theme in 2014. House speaker John Boehner said last week it's the best issue for the GOP.

For the president, approving the Keystone pipeline—stretching from the oil sands of Alberta, Canada, to refineries on the Gulf Coast—should have been a snap. The State Department had studied it and concluded there was no significant environmental downside. Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper visited Obama in 2009 and stressed how important the pipeline was to his country, our closest ally and trading partner.

Yet Obama dawdled. The interest group that he fears the most, the conglomerate of environmental groups, was against it. Another study was ordered, then another—with the same conclusion. Polls showed building the pipeline was enormously popular with the public. As Obama delayed a decision, opposition by environmentalists increased. It became their top issue, an emotional one.

Keystone not only symbolized Obama's energy policy—anti-oil and natural gas, pro-green power—it emerged as a major issue in its own right. Republicans criticized him. Some Democrats agreed. His indecision had left him in an awkward position. Whatever his decision, there will be a backlash.

In 2014, Republicans are the lucky party. Obama has given them powerful issues. Without them, they'd be talking about the deficit, the national debt, big government, entitlement reform, and Obama's failure as a foreign policy president—legitimate issues but not the ingredients of a Republican landslide. The issues Obama fumbled—Obamacare, the economy, energy—are. ♦

NEWSCOM

The Real Scoop Jackson

He'd be with McCain, not Obama, on Ukraine.

BY ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson was a congressman and then senator from Washington state from 1941 until his death in 1983. Jackson was a traditional Democrat: liberal on domestic policy, strongly tied to the labor movement, and a hawk on national security matters. He was very much in the tradition of Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson, with all of whom he worked closely—as he did with George Meany and Lane Kirkland at the AFL-CIO, who were also Cold War hawks. That tradition began dying after the Johnson presidency, as the party's nomination of George McGovern in 1972 and Jimmy Carter in 1976 (and Barack Obama in 2008) demonstrated. Perhaps a better proof was the fate of Joseph Lieberman, the last of the "Jackson Democrats," who was his party's nominee for vice president in 2000 but could not get renominated for his Senate seat in 2006.

Henry 'Scoop' Jackson

I first met Scoop Jackson in 1971, and while a law student volunteered on his 1972 presidential campaign. We stayed in touch, and I told him that if he ran again I'd like to be a full-time part of his staff. In March 1975 I moved to Washington and worked for his Senate staff until the end of 1976. From the day I met him in 1971, I was proud to be considered one of "Scoop's Troops."

In the 1970s and 1980s there were many of us Jackson Democrats and many references to the "Jackson wing" of the party. The meaning was clear: Democrats who cared deeply about defense issues and were hawks. They believed in military superiority for the United States, and supported big defense budgets. More important, they believed that American power was a great force for good in the world, which was not the view taken by the "McGovern wing" of the party—whose heir Barack Obama seems to be.

They were of course reviled. Jackson was called a militarist, a racist, "the Senator from Boeing," "a man with a military-industrial complex," a "Dr. Strangelove," and so on. The insults rarely fazed Scoop, though in fact, if ever a man were a moderate by temperament and in policy matters, it was he. One of his favorite words was "prudent," and his view of Lebanon was a good example: Almost alone among senators in the 1970s, he paid very close attention to developments there and cared deeply about its fragile democracy, but he opposed the Reagan administration's decision to send American troops there in 1982.

He did not think sending a small peacekeeping force was the right role for a superpower, he thought they would be a target, and he worried what would happen if they were killed—exactly what happened in 1983. The idea that Jackson was a mindless hawk, rather than a careful proponent of American power, is and always was ridiculous.

Why the history lesson? Because several weeks ago the columnist David Ignatius enlisted Jackson to support his own views of national security policy, and to attack Senator John McCain. Now it happens that McCain and Jackson knew and admired each other. After returning from prison in North Vietnam, McCain became the Navy's liaison to the Senate, and in that position spent many hours at Jackson's side, accompanying him on foreign trips.

Here's Ignatius:

> The year was 1980. The Iranian revolution had toppled the shah's regime, the Soviet Union had just invaded Afghanistan and the United States' president, Jimmy Carter, was widely perceived as a weak leader. Looking for a sharp-edged evaluation of the situation, I decided to interview Sen. Henry M. Jackson, a leading hawk.
>
> What Jackson (D-Wash.) said was surprising, even at a distance of nearly 35 years. Rather than demanding tougher statements or more saber-rattling, he said he worried about "overreaction" to events: "We appear to be going from one crisis to another," with Washington dispensing "red-hot rhetoric at least once a week about the dire consequences of this or that or something else."
>
> "We need to be prudent," said Jackson, who was perhaps the most prominent Cold Warrior of his day. "There is a need for the U.S. to make careful decisions, stand by those decisions, and avoid sending false or conflicting signals" to U.S. allies or the Russians. Jackson's message, in essence, was "cool it."

Now, the condescension in Ignatius's comments is offensive (even at a distance of 35 years). He was amazed that Jackson did not match the stereotype the media had created of Scoop the militarist who would be screaming and demanding bombing whenever a crisis arose. My God, he was "sharp edged" and a hawk, yet thoughtful and reasonable. Only a journalist who bought the stereotype about Jackson could have been surprised. Jackson was always careful, believed the United States should never bluff, and believed we needed to have strong, reliable policies if we wanted to have strong, reliable allies.

Read that quote from Jackson again—"There is a need for the U.S. to make careful decisions, stand by those decisions, and avoid sending false or conflicting signals"—and what of

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course comes to mind is Obama and his Syria red line. There, Obama made an off-the-cuff threat about what we would do if chemical weapons were used, told allies we would move to enforce the threat, and then backed off at the last minute. It's exactly what Jackson was warning against.

But Ignatius does not use that quote against Obama; he dredges it up to target Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham. His column began this way: "As the Ukraine crisis deepened, Sen. John McCain responded by criticizing President Obama's 'feckless' foreign policy, while Sen. Lindsey Graham called Obama 'a weak and indecisive president [who] invites aggression.'" So the juxtaposition is the prudent Jackson, versus the careless, hawkish, thoughtless Graham and McCain.

This is nonsense on stilts. Jackson opposed the kind of policies that are central to this administration, and would have been appalled by the massive cuts in the defense budget, the imprudent (there's that word again) rush to the exits in Iraq and Afghanistan, the effort to engage American enemies without reinforcing American power, and very clearly by the story of the Syrian red line. As to the current Ukraine crisis, an old line of Scoop's from the height of the Cold War comes to mind: "the Russians are like a burglar going down a hotel corridor, trying all the doors. When they find one that's unlocked, they go in." Jackson strongly opposed the world view that calls for American weakness and withdrawal, and was the leading opponent of the Nixon-Kissinger version of détente—in good part because he thought weakness would invite aggression, which is just what Lindsey Graham said.

Ignatius is of course entitled to his views, including his views of Ukraine, Obama, McCain, and Graham. But he's not entitled to turn the late Scoop Jackson into a critic of McCain and Graham when all the evidence of Jackson's long career suggests he would be standing arm in arm with them, worried about American strength and American reliability—and about that Russian hotel burglar. ♦

Can This Boy's Life Be Saved?

The answer may depend on President Obama.

BY MICHAEL ASTRUE

Jack Fowler at home with his parents and sister

The January 31, 2014, *Boston Globe* front page included two life-and-death stories. One announced that the U.S. Department of Justice would seek the death penalty for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who is facing trial for the Boston Marathon bombing. Animated debate about the proper penalty for Tsarnaev continues around Boston.

The other story snapped my head back because it involved a death penalty for Jack Fowler, a 6-year-old boy dying of the more virulent form of Hunter syndrome (also known as MPS-II). The drug he needs to survive, which he is being denied, is one that I had first proposed in 2003 when I was CEO of a small biotech company focused on rare diseases. In 2005, after two years of developing this drug, Shire Pharmaceuticals bought my company over my objections, and I lost touch with the program. Jack's situation is particularly compelling, but hardly unique.

Hunter syndrome is a simple disease that, absent a spontaneous mutation, kills only boys because the genetic defect occurs in the male chromosome. It is in a class called lysosomal storage diseases in which the absence of one gene on a chromosome means the body cannot produce an enzyme that clears certain cells of a substance that eventually kills those cells. The timing and details of a patient's deterioration depend on which types of cells the particular disease damages, but without treatment in almost all cases the missing enzyme causes a painful death, usually at a young age.

Every program to address a

JOHN ZICH

Michael Astrue served as HHS general counsel (1989-1992) and commissioner of Social Security (2007-2013). He was a senior vice president and then CEO of the rare disease company Transkaryotic Therapies from 2000-2005. He has not spoken directly or indirectly with Shire, the FDA, or the Fowlers about this case.

lysosomal storage disease with enzyme replacement therapy has been at least partially successful, with minimal safety risks. These days it is not a big deal from a technical perspective to make the missing enzyme and then infuse a patient with the enzyme. Shire has been hugely successful with Elaprase, an enzyme for Hunter taken through Phase III trials by my old company.

Hunter syndrome, though, has a particularly insidious twist. The enzyme the FDA approved for intravenous administration substantially cures half of the patients. For reasons that are unclear, for the other half the disease attacks the brain as well as the body, and the blood-barrier prevents the enzyme from reaching brain cells. The unlucky boys can function well for their first four or five years, but then slowly lose mental capacity, and then lose control of their bodily functions. They usually die a horrible death between the ages of 10 and 15.

I believed that we could save these children by reformulating the enzyme so that it could be injected a few times each year directly into the brain or spine, even though the FDA had never approved a biologic drug for that route of administration. At the time I lost the battle for my company, I thought that Shire would terminate this program. To Shire's credit, it persisted.

Progress with the new version of the enzyme has been slow. Shire reported positive results from a Phase I/Phase II safety and dosing trial, and is now accruing patients for the pivotal trial it hopes to submit to the FDA for approval. Jack Fowler's parents tried to enroll their son in the trial, but he did not satisfy at least one of the entry criteria. The Fowlers then asked Shire to support their physician's application to the FDA for "compassionate use" of the drug; to their surprise, Shire refused.

Boston yawned at the second death penalty story, so I called up a thoughtful friend with a national radio show, Dan Rea, and asked him to try again. He was moved by the *Globe* article, and he put Jack Fowler's parents on the air for an hour. You can listen to a podcast of their emotional discussion at www.boston.cbslocal.com/show/nightside-with-dan-rea.

Dan asked the Fowlers the pivotal question: Why would anyone not try to save their child's life? They struggled with that question and chalked it up to ignorance and greed. While I do not know Shire's state of mind, I think the most likely explanation—and the explanation in many other similar cases—is that the company is worried about antagonizing the FDA.

For decades the FDA has had an uneven track record when it comes to administration of its compassionate use programs. Some examiners work heroically with families, physicians, and companies to get an experimental drug to patients who will otherwise die soon. Other examiners are callously wedded to their standard processes and will threaten companies if they dare to ask about a compassionate use exemption.

What's worse is that compassionate use has become an entitlement of the Washington elite; for instance, if you are a relative of a member of Congress seeking a compassionate use exemption, you can expect that an FDA official will immediately call the company in question to demand that it submit and support an application for compassionate use. I was on the receiving end of those calls several times in the 1990s when my employer was in a final trial for an experimental anticoagulant, which at that time was uniquely life-saving for certain surgery patients allergic to heparin.

At any given point of time, there are thousands of patients like Jack Fowler who need a drug based on a clear mechanism of action that has a clean safety trial prior to a pivotal trial. Jack's parents have declared that they would do what any decent parents would do, and they would sign a waiver of liability that would shield Shire from any lawsuit. A hospital ethics review board would have to review Jack's particular case and determine that it is ethical for Jack's doctor to prescribe the drug for him. If those things happen, there is a real chance Jack will live. If those things don't happen, it is all but certain that Jack will die what all constitutional lawyers would consider a "cruel and unusual" death.

President Obama should end this standoff right now. First, he needs to call FDA commissioner Margaret Hamburg and make sure that there are no facts outside of the public domain that would make Jack Fowler a poor risk for a compassionate use exemption. Second, assuming that conversation goes as it most probably will, President Obama should ask Commissioner Hamburg to pick up the phone and call Shire's new CEO, Dr. Flemming Ornskov, and tell him that whatever his nervous regulatory executives are telling him is untrue, and that the FDA would genuinely welcome their support of a compassionate use application for Jack Fowler.

Almost surely, that phone call will save Jack from a death penalty that is the indirect product of a nontransparent and unpredictably administered regulatory process. It is important, though, that President Obama not stop there; his time is too valuable to keep making these kinds of calls.

President Obama should have his lawyers draft an executive order that will keep sick children off Death Row. In that order he should direct the FDA to convene an advisory committee with several ethicists and a hefty dose of patient advocates to advise the FDA on a public list of experimental drugs presumptively approvable under the compassionate use exemption. The current compassionate use rules, which were thoughtfully revised under this administration, are fine as far as they go, but they do not address the nontransparency that enables unpredictable decisions that cause unnecessary deaths.

President Obama can do something heroic if he simply shows his respect for human life by directing that life-and-death decisions under his control are made openly, honestly, and compassionately. He does not need new legislation—it is just a question of using the authority he already has.

Surely, even with all our political divisions, every decent person in Washington can get behind saving the Jack Fowlers of our nation. ♦

Dismembering Ukraine

The Putin invasion.

BY REUBEN F. JOHNSON

Kiev

In more ways than one, the crisis that now grips Ukraine and Russia—as well as the rest of Europe—dates back to September 2011, when Russian president Dmitry Medvedev announced that Vladimir Putin would return as president in 2012. Medvedev had turned out to be, as feared, a seat-warmer who would step down after serving one term in order to pave the way for Putin to return and serve what may very well be a second set of two consecutive terms for another 12 years in office. Barring some personal or political disaster, Putin can now stay in power at least until 2024, when he will be 72 years old, putting him at roughly the same age and number of years in power as a predecessor in Moscow, Joseph Stalin.

In 2000 Prime Minister Putin became temporary head of state when President Boris Yeltsin resigned. Russian law called for a new presidential ballot in 90 days, and so a trio of writers was commissioned to produce in assembly-line style (and almost overnight) a biography designed to be the PR tool to ensure Putin's victory.

In 2008 the Russian-American writer Masha Gessen penned an in-depth profile of Putin that included a lengthy discussion with Nataliya Gevorkyan. She was one of the three writers drafted into producing the laudatory bio, but—recalling her experience eight years later—as she delved into his background and personality, Gevorkyan found Putin increasingly less likable.

Reuben F. Johnson writes frequently on defense issues for The Weekly Standard *and IHS Jane's Information Group in London.*

Specifically, she zeroed in on the wish Putin nurtured from a very young age to become a KGB agent. "What kind of person wants to be a KGB agent at the age of 15 or 16, when everyone else wants to be a cosmonaut?" asked Gevorkyan. "A mean, small-minded, and vengeful person" was her ultimate conclusion.

'Mean, small-minded, and vengeful'

All three attributes seem to describe the mindset of Putin for the past several months, as he tried to keep Ukraine from leaving Russia's orbit and moving onto a path towards membership in the European Union. It began with the fateful meeting in November 2013 in which then-Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych was threatened with retaliatory measures from Moscow if he followed through with his declared plans to sign an Association Agreement with the EU—the first step towards eventual membership.

Putin's pathological personality flaws were in full flower that day. James Sherr, a fellow at the Russian and Eurasian program at the London-based think tank Chatham House and a leading Western expert on Ukraine with very well-developed sources inside the Ukrainian government, gave the English-language *Kyiv Post* a description of what transpired. According to Sherr,

> Putin effectively said to Yanukovych that if he signed the association agreement with the EU he (Putin) would break every bone in his body. And he showed him how he would do it. By that I mean that Putin presented him with the telling details of the work done by [Putin's adviser] Sergey Glazyiev and others, which targeted the key sectors of Ukraine's economy vulnerable to Russian influence, including the industrial and financial interests closest to Yanukovych himself. My understanding is that Putin spoke in direct and brutal language: in language that would normally oblige the president of an independent state to end the meeting and return home.

Yanukovych then made an abrupt about-face and declared he would not sign the EU accord. This sparked the popular revolution that three months later had him fleeing Ukraine with a thuggish coterie of his kleptocratic inner circle (along with all of the expensive furniture and household relics he could carry with him) and scurrying across the border to safe haven in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Ridding themselves of Yanukovych's disastrous and murderous neo-Soviet regime was a victory for the people of Ukraine. But it only heightened Putin's mean and small-minded vengefulness. So he invaded Crimea.

The inclusion of Crimea within the territory of Ukraine has long been a sore spot with Russian nationalists. This southern peninsula was ceded to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954 in what has been characterized as an off-the-cuff move that no one on the Soviet Politburo spoke up to oppose. The combination of lingering Russian resentment and Putin's desire to wreak vengeance on Ukraine for toppling the bully-boy he had picked to rule in Kiev has now prompted him to invade another sovereign nation. This has plunged Central Europe into the most dangerously destabilizing

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situation since Hitler's *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938.

Impartial observers have dismissed the absurd fiction that the thousands of Russian troops in Crimea who have removed their flags and unit insignia are "self-defense forces" with no connection to Moscow. Putin has thus violated the most cherished precept of modern international law by occupying territory of a neighboring state and then attempting to ratify that annexation with a rigged election, whose date was moved up to assure that there would be no time for monitors to be put in place to prevent irregularities in the voting.

The hastily installed Moscow-backed leader in Crimea is not a popular figure. Sergei Aksenov and his Russian Unity party polled a whopping 4 percent of the vote in the last elections and have only 3 seats in the 100-seat Crimean legislature. For his part in attempting to subvert the rule of Ukraine in Crimea, Ukrainian authorities have charged Aksenov under Part 1 of Article 109 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine that forbids "actions aimed at the violent overthrow, change of constitutional order, or the seizure of state power."

Out of the collection of Western politicians pushing for actions to be taken against Moscow, the one standout personality who understands how dangerous it is to give even an inch to Russia's KGB president is Polish foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorski. He said plainly on March 10, "We cannot let Putin get away with this. By annexing Crimea, Russia is forcing a major change of boundaries on Europe. It means the breaking of the post-Cold War consensus. That is verboten."

Back in Russia, not even the suggestion that Putin could be dragging the world into another war is tolerated. On March 7, Russian police detained a 75-year-old survivor of the Nazi siege of Leningrad and fined him 10,000 rubles ($275) for attending an antiwar rally and holding a sign that read "Peace to the World." A pro-Kremlin lawmaker, Vitaly Milonov, who denounced the elderly man as a supporter of "fascism," took a placard from his hands and ripped it into pieces.

When asked what provoked Milonov, who represents the pro-Putin United Russia party, the elderly man, Igor Andreyev, said, "I was telling him that I was a child of the siege, that I know what war is like."

Sadly, there appear to be not enough Sikorskis outside of Russia or enough Andreyevs inside the country to remind Putin of the horrendous consequences if the two sides in Crimea start shooting at one another. Most of the Western diplomats and intelligence officials in Kiev believe that hostilities could begin at any moment. Russia's naked aggression and takeover of military bases is beginning to grate on the nerves of the Ukrainian military units in the Crimea, and if Kiev does not order its military force to be used soon there may not be enough combat-effective units left to offer any credible resistance. ♦

A Big Fight Over Small Differences

The powers behind the Nebraska Republican primary. BY MARK HEMINGWAY

The National Republican Senatorial Committee is mad as hell, and it's not going to take it anymore. This is the third election cycle in a row where incumbent Republicans and the NRSC's handpicked candidates have faced stiff primary challenges funded by Tea Party groups. No less than Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell is being primaried, and he's made it clear what he plans to do to groups going after the national GOP.

"I think we are going to crush them everywhere," McConnell told the *New York Times* on March 8. "I don't think they are going to have a single nominee anywhere in the country." According to the *Times*, "The goal is to deny [outside groups] any Senate primary victories, cut into their fund-raising and diminish them as a future force in Republican politics." But there are a lot of outside groups, and McConnell's ire is very specific. "One of the biggest obstacles to that change, however, is the Senate Conservatives Fund [SCF], a rogue political operation that has co-opted the liberty movement for its own enrichment to the detriment of the conservative cause," he told the website *TruthRevolt*.

It's understandable that he would be irked by the SCF. Aside from McConnell, the SCF is targeting Hill veterans Thad Cochran of Mississippi (in Congress since 1973) and Pat Roberts of Kansas (since 1981). Speaking to CNN, former NRSC communications director and GOP strategist Brian Walsh lamented the SCF's history of "propping up weak candidates and attacking Republicans under the banner of conservative purity so they can line their own pockets."

It's true the SCF has helped oust establishment favorites only to have their candidates go on to underperform or become national embarrassments, notably Ken Buck in Colorado and Christine "I'm not a witch" O'Donnell in Delaware. On the flip side, there have been a number of underwhelming

Mitch McConnell, left

NRSC-supported candidates in recent years—see Connie Mack in Florida, Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin, and Rick Berg in North Dakota. And the list of SCF-endorsed candidates who triumphed over national GOP opposition in recent elections is a who's who of party superstars: Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, and Mike Lee.

This brings us to the May 13 primary for the open Senate seat in Nebraska, where the NRSC's meddling is particularly hard to justify. The two top Republicans are Ben Sasse and Shane Osborn. Both men are impressive. Sasse is a fifth-generation Nebraskan and Yale Ph.D. He worked for Boston Consulting Group and McKinsey & Company, specializing in crisis management and turnaround projects. Just after 9/11, he worked in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Policy. Later in the Bush administration, Sasse was an assistant secretary of Health and Human Services, where he worked on initiatives to rein in entitlement spending and modernize health care, and acquired a reputation as a formidable health policy expert. He moved back to his hometown of Fremont, Nebraska, to become president of Midland College. In the last four years, Sasse rescued the college from bankruptcy, gained national attention for his tenure reforms, and doubled the college's enrollment.

Osborn is a former Navy lieutenant commander. In April 2001, the EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft he was flying was struck by a Chinese fighter plane. Osborn managed to land safely but in Chinese territory, resulting in the first of the nascent Bush administration's many foreign policy crises. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for courage and airmanship, and the Meritorious Service Medal for leadership as a result of the episode. Osborn was elected Nebraska state treasurer in 2006, where he trimmed budgets and developed a record as a reliable fiscal conservative. In 2009, he joined Academy Securities, where he is a partner and chief marketing officer. The successful financial services firm specializes in providing careers for veterans.

Both men are eminently qualified for high office, and according to an Intel/Harper poll of Nebraska in February, the race between them was a dead heat. Osborn drew 30 percent support, Sasse 29 percent. A poll last week found Sasse trailing 35-24, but the pollster, Kellyanne Conway of the Polling Company, says that Sasse is poised to breakout. Osborn's early ballot strength is likely a reflection of name ID, from having been previously elected in Nebraska, says Conway. Further, Conway notes that "Sasse is up handily among voters who have an opinion of both Osborn and Sasse—he has a 21-point advantage." With Mike Johanns retiring, there's no incumbent. If ever there were a race where the national GOP might stand on the

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sidelines and let voters decide, it's one like Nebraska's.

Yet there's little doubt who the NRSC's preferred candidate is. If you guessed it's the former Bush administration official, endorsed by the likes of former vice presidential candidates Sarah Palin and Rep. Paul Ryan and Senators Tom Coburn and Mike Lee, you'd be wrong. "Looking at their records and their rhetoric, you wouldn't be able to tell which is the candidate of the Tea Party and which is the candidate of K Street and the GOP establishment," reported *Washington Examiner* columnist Tim Carney in January. "But their donor lists make it crystal clear. The Club for Growth and the Senate Conservatives Fund are backing Sasse. Perhaps for that reason, K Street and the GOP establishment are bankrolling Osborn."

Officially, the NRSC is neutral. "As far as I'm aware and have seen, the NRSC isn't taking sides in Nebraska," Walsh tells The Weekly Standard. "Both Osborn and Sasse have used the NRSC to host fundraisers." That's a bit of a red herring. Providing space for a fundraiser isn't nearly as important as who the NRSC brings to it. In the case of Shane Osborn, some of the biggest Republican-friendly names on K Street keep showing up on his guest lists. Billy Piper, McConnell's former chief of staff and current UnitedHealth lobbyist, has been raising money for Osborn. Carney further reports that medical device lobbyists canceled a Sasse fundraiser for fear of alienating Republican Senate leadership. "It's no secret that Mitch McConnell and the NRSC are working behind the scenes to defeat Ben Sasse in Nebraska," says SCF executive director Matt Hoskins.

In Osborn's defense, precious few candidates look a gift lobbyist in the mouth and run the other way when the national party offers to help. The favoritism also hasn't hurt Sasse's fundraising. Sasse has raised $1.4 million compared with nearly $950,000 for Osborn, and Sasse has raised almost twice as much money from Nebraska donors.

This D.C. fundraising battle is the backdrop for a campaign in which on-the-ground rhetoric has both candidates running away from the establishment and asserting ideological purity. They haven't always been successful. Sasse has received criticism for favorable comments he's made about Medicare Part D, the prescription drug program, being a model for health care reform. Though some conservatives decry the entitlement, Sasse protests that "policymakers should understand why Part D is the least bad way to run one of these programs. . . . You can say truthfully that one part of a program is decent, and yet more fundamentally that we shouldn't have unfunded entitlement programs." The Medicare Part D attacks on Sasse have largely been leveled by Dean Clancy at the Tea Party group FreedomWorks, which is supporting Osborn. Regardless of merit, it's a curious argument coming from Clancy, who helped implement Part D in the Bush administration Office of Management and Budget, and was later a major pharmaceutical lobbyist.

Osborn has his own problems running away from the policies of the GOP establishment. Mitch McConnell has been hammered by his Tea Party challenger Matt Bevin for calling the 2008 Troubled Asset Relief Program "one of the finest moments in the history of the Senate." McConnell pointed out that in his capacity as an investment fund president Bevin signed a letter calling the massive taxpayer bailout a "positive" development. And Osborn, too, has a link to TARP. "He was opposed to TARP. Pick a government bailout of an industry and he's opposed to it," Osborn campaign manager Bill Novotny tells The Weekly Standard. But last year, Osborn's company Academy Securities signed a contract with the Treasury Department to sell a billion dollars' worth of GM stock as part of the TARP program. Novotny says that Osborn "stepped back" from operations at Academy Securities as soon as he began contemplating his Senate run in March 2013, though more recent disclosure forms and the firm's website suggest any disconnect is an informal arrangement. Further, Academy Securities was hired by Treasury in February, while he was still active as chief marketing officer. Novotny says Osborn is only licensed to sell municipal bonds and only receives compensation for the commissions off of his own deals, but considering Osborn's a partner in a firm profiting off of the program, his eagerness to distance himself is telling.

Supporting TARP shouldn't be unthinkable for a Republican candidate; Congress approved it with signifcant Republican support in the fall of 2008. Even Tom Coburn, no one's idea of a fiscally irresponsible conservative, voted for it. But GOP primary voters aren't terribly enthusiastic these days about candidates defending the difficult choices made by congressional Republicans.

So why is the NRSC pulling the purse strings in a race where there isn't even an incumbent, much less a classic insider-outsider divide? Sasse has used his health policy expertise to run hard against Obamacare, and Hoskins speculates, "McConnell was upset that Sasse called for stronger Republican leadership to stop Obamacare." However, McConnell's search-and-destroy mission against SCF-endorsed candidates might have more to do with Hoskins than Sasse. Hoskins was the chief of staff for former South Carolina senator Jim DeMint. For years, Senate Kremlinologists noted a litany of cloakroom-and-dagger operations prompted by DeMint and McConnell's long-simmering feud. Since leaving the Senate, DeMint has used his position as head of the powerful Heritage Foundation in ways that have irked Senate Republicans.

It's an open question whether the NRSC is making threats that it can't back up. Aside from Sasse, observers think the SCF-endorsed Chris McDaniel has a good chance of beating Mississippi's Thad Cochran. And when McConnell crows about the SCF not having "a single nominee anywhere in the country," he's setting a low bar. If the SCF wins just one or two Senate races, that may be all it takes for McConnell to wake up and find that, far from being crushed, his Tea Party opposition is emboldened. ♦

A Tea Party of Rivals

The Ted Cruz-Rand Paul foreign policy split.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

Ted Cruz is not in a fighting mood. The Texas senator is sitting in a booth at the Capital Grille, an upscale restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue, about halfway between the Capitol, where Cruz works, and the White House, where many suspect he'd like to end up. His jacket is off, his light blue tie is tucked behind his crisp white dress shirt as he casually picks at the salmon filet on the dinner plate in front of him and sips a glass of Pinot Noir.

Cruz has spent the past several days on the receiving end of a barrage of attacks. That's not unusual. But what makes the latest fusillade notable is that it comes not from Democrats or the mainstream media or establishment Republicans but from his friend and frequent ally, Senator Rand Paul.

The junior senator from Kentucky is angry—very angry it seems—that Cruz has used Paul's views on foreign policy as a way to frame his own. It's hard to imagine Cruz could have been gentler in pointing out the differences. Here's what Cruz said in an appearance on ABC's *This Week* on March 9.

> I'm a big fan of Rand Paul. He and I are good friends. But I don't agree with him on foreign policy. I think U.S. leadership is critical in the world. And I agree with him that we should be very reluctant to deploy military forces abroad. But I think there is a vital role, just as Ronald Reagan did. . . . The United States has a responsibility to defend our values.

Elsewhere, Cruz has suggested that Republican views on foreign policy run from Rand Paul to John McCain—noninterventionist to uber-interventionist—and that Cruz and Ronald Reagan occupy space somewhere in the middle.

Paul wasn't happy. In a speech to the Heritage Foundation last year, Paul had framed Republican foreign policy thinking in similar terms—isolationists on one end, neoconservatives on the other, with Paul and Ronald Reagan in the middle as advocates of a "balanced" approach to the world.

So Paul, in a series of articles and television appearances, lashed out at Cruz, accusing the Texas senator of "mischaracterizing" Paul's views on foreign policy, misappropriating Reagan's national security legacy, and, less directly, "splintering" the Republican party.

Cruz, seeking to quell the controversy, called Paul "courageous," in a statement acknowledging differences but emphasizing points of agreement and ending with a tribute to his friend. "Substantive policy disagreements are a positive aspect of the political discourse, but in the fight for liberty, I am proud to stand with Rand."

When I asked Cruz about Paul's criticism, he paused, then responded slowly and deliberately. "I love Rand Paul. He's a close friend. He is a passionate voice for liberty. We have agreed on the overwhelming majority of issues, and I fully expect we will continue to do so. On foreign policy, we have not agreed. He's certainly entitled to his views and I have no intention of characterizing his views. I will allow him to characterize his own views."

There is a fair amount of irony here. Ted Cruz, a man not known primarily for the subtlety of his critiques, is trying desperately to avoid further antagonizing Paul. And Rand Paul, who counsels restraint on matters of foreign policy and national security, has become quite the hawk, at least towards Cruz.

I reminded Cruz that Paul has already accused him of mischaracterizing those views, an implied charge of dishonesty. "What I have stated is my views," Cruz says;

> I think it would be a wonderful outcome if every Republican across the spectrum followed the model of Ronald Reagan and spoke with a clarion clarity for freedom and against oppression—spoke out against Russian aggression before they march into Ukraine, spoke out against Venezuelan aggression as Maduro murders protesters fighting for freedom, spoke out and called for the freedom of Leopoldo López, the opposition leader wrongfully imprisoned because Maduro is afraid of the desire for freedom of his citizens, and stood resolutely for vigorous sanctions against Iran, for using every tool necessary, including if necessary overwhelming military force, to prevent them from acquiring nuclear weapons. That is a Reaganesque foreign policy, and nothing would make me happier than seeing every Republican in the United States Senate embrace that foreign policy.

Cruz's critique is all substance. And he doesn't mention Paul by name. But there's no question that Paul is the target of his comments.

On Iran, Paul has supported some sanctions but opposed the recent bipartisan effort to reinstate sanctions automatically if Iran violates the terms of the Geneva agreement. Paul was one of only two Republicans to stand with the Obama White House on the issue. On Venezuela, Paul has been quiet. And just days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Paul cautioned against warning Vladimir Putin about the consequences of aggression. Some Republicans, he complained, are "stuck in the Cold War era" and want to "tweak Russia all the time." Paul acknowledged that relations with Russia would sometimes be adversarial, but he called confrontational talk misguided and urged a more "respectful" approach to Putin.

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This isn't the first time Cruz and Paul have disagreed on these matters. Last fall, Paul criticized the Obama administration for being too bellicose towards Syria. "I think the failure of the Obama administration has been we haven't engaged the Russians enough or the Chinese enough on this," he said during a September 1 appearance on *Meet the Press*. In an argument that fundamentally misunderstood Russia's interests, Paul went on: "The Russians have every reason to want to keep their influence in Syria, and I think the only way they do is if there's a change in government where Assad is gone."

Cruz had something closer to the opposite view. In a *Washington Post* op-ed, he argued that the administration should force a U.N. Security Council vote on Syria to embarrass Assad's enablers. "Doing so," he said, "would unify the world against the regime and expose China's and Russia's support for this tyrant."

Paul thought it foolish to tweak China and Russia and said so. The *Dallas Morning News* reported on September 10 that Paul "tartly derided the idea of forcing 'show votes' in the United Nations to embarrass Russia and China. 'True leadership,' he said, would involve finding diplomatic common ground."

Cruz wasn't done. In a foreign policy speech at the Heritage Foundation on September 11, he called again for a stronger approach to Russia and China. "We should understand that you don't deal with nations like Russia and China by embracing arm-in-arm and singing kumbaya. The one thing China and Russia understand is respect and strength, principled strength. . . . We shouldn't be for a moment naïve that Mr. Putin loves peace and the American way of life."

In an earlier interview on ABC News, Cruz called for consequences. "If they do veto it, we should respond by, with respect to Russia, we should reinstate the antiballistic-missile station in Eastern Europe that was canceled at the beginning of the Obama administration to appease Russia, and with respect to China, we should go through with selling the new F-16s to Taiwan that again this administration put the kibosh [on]."

Despite their very different approaches, Cruz and Paul, like many Republicans, both opposed authorizing Obama to use force in Syria. And over dinner, Cruz pointed to Syria as an issue on which he and Paul agreed. But Cruz told me that he would have been open to aiding Syrian rebels if the administration had been able to identify nonjihadists among their ranks. Although the two men ended up in the same place, their approaches to the problem were very different.

It's not hard to understand why Paul reacted so strongly to Cruz's characterization of his views. Their differences are real, and they are unlikely to help Paul if he were to run for president. While Paul has worked hard to suggest that his views on foreign policy place him squarely in the Reaganite mainstream of the Republican party, others have suggested that Paul's views are closer to those of a more recent president.

In January, Paul gave a speech at the Center for the National Interest, in which he laid out his approach to foreign policy and national security. He pointed to the agreement on Syria's chemical weapons as a model for future diplomacy. "The Syrian chemical weapons solution could be exactly what we need to resolve the standoff in Iran and North Korea. By leveraging our relationship with China, we should be able to influence the behavior of North Korea. Likewise, we should be engaging the Russians to assist us with the Syrians and Iranians."

Steve Clemons, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation who is close to the White House, was impressed. "He identifies himself squarely as a realist in foreign policy, punches neoconservatives and isolationists, and embraces negotiations with America's rivals and enemies—which puts him on the same page as Obama, Biden, Susan Rice, John Kerry, and Chuck Hagel."

On the same page as Barack Obama: It's a statement no one could make about Ted Cruz. ♦

Not a Model

Obama's inexplicable admiration for China's infrastructure policy.

BY YING MA

President Obama likes to promote his domestic policy agenda by highlighting economic competition from China. In particular, he has repeatedly pointed to China's massive infrastructure investments to tout his proposals for infrastructure spending in America.

Second thoughts about the unintended consequences of China's infrastructure boom and a new reform agenda have figured prominently in Chinese leaders' recent rhetoric and policy priorities, but the American president appears oblivious to China's actual experience. Announcing his new $300 billion infrastructure transportation plan in late February, Obama persisted in invoking China:

> As a percentage of GDP, countries like China, Germany, they're spending about twice what we're spending in order to build infrastructure—because they know that if they have the fastest trains on the planet or the highest-rated airports or the busiest, most efficient ports that businesses will go there.

This harked back to similar rhetoric earlier in his presidency. For instance, in October 2010, the president said:

Ying Ma is the author of Chinese Girl in the Ghetto, *a politically incorrect memoir, and the host of* China Takes Over the World, *a radio show.*

> [T]he longer our infrastructure erodes, the deeper our competitive edge erodes. Other nations understand this. They are going all-in. . . . China's building hundreds of thousands of miles of new roads. Over the next 10 years, it plans to build dozens of new airports. Over the next 20, it could build as many as 170 new mass transit systems.

In the immediate aftermath of the global financial crisis, President Obama certainly was not the only one who was enamored of China. As the United States sought solutions for economic recovery and renewal, Americans of different political persuasions—ranging from business executives to political activists to pundits—admitted to being seduced by China's economic success and "enlightened" leadership. The sharp contrast between the dumpiness of some American infrastructure, such as Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), and the new and shiny airport facilities in Beijing and Shanghai only enhanced China's allure.

Since then, serious flaws have become apparent in China's perceived infrastructure prowess. Grand projects were built at a feverish pace after the financial crisis, but not always with care and not always where needed: The boom created railways, airports, roads, and even entire cities that are rarely used or in the middle of nowhere.

To a large extent, the explosive infrastructure building was the result of a credit binge that the central government directed. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, China instructed its banks to unleash lending. In 2009 and 2010 alone, state banks issued $2.7 trillion in new loans. In comparison, America's stimulus package clocked in at $831 billion. In the years since, as credit in the economy continued to grow, the Chinese government became increasingly alarmed about the risks that easy money posed to the overall health of the economy and has made repeated—though not always successful—efforts to clamp down on official and unofficial lending.

Meanwhile, concerns abound about the vast debt that China's local governments have incurred and might not be able to repay. When China's National Audit Office conducted an official tally last year, it found that local borrowing had skyrocketed to $3 trillion as of midyear 2013, a 67 percent increase from the total at the end of 2012.

President Obama seems eager to ignore the lessons learned from China's infrastructure binge. In the beginning of his presidency, he regularly hyped China's extensive and rapidly constructed high-speed rail system as an example for America to follow. A tragic high-speed rail accident in southeast China that killed 40 and injured about 190 passengers in 2011 put an end to the president's advocacy on this front, but he remains unable to resist using the China example when pushing his broader infrastructure plans.

A 'ghost' city in Inner Mongolia

To be sure, China's present troubles do not mean that investing in infrastructure as a public good is generally a bad idea. Nor do China's woes make America's infrastructure deficiencies any less problematic.

The broader irony is that Obama is expressing admiration for China's state-directed government spending at a time when the Chinese leadership has pledged to undertake market-based reforms. In recent years, Beijing has repeatedly criticized its own growth model as overly dependent on exports and government investment, and has indicated an eagerness to tolerate slower growth in order to shift the economy to one that is based more on consumption.

Last November, the Chinese leadership clarified its intentions by issuing a communiqué and an agenda for reform after a major Communist party conclave. The documents emphasized the need to reduce the role of government and allow the market to play a "decisive role in allocating resources" in the economy.

Immediately afterwards, Chinese president Xi Jinping issued a long accompanying explanation in which he wrote, "Theory and practice have both showed that market allocation of resources is the most efficient."

These pronouncements do not make the Chinese leadership free-market defenders or even liberal reformers keen to undertake further privatization of China's powerful state-owned sector. In fact, in the reform documents issued last November, the Chinese Communist party could not actually bring itself to acknowledge the private sector by its proper name and instead repeatedly referred to it as the "non-public ownership economy."

Yet as economist Barry Naughton of the University of California, San Diego, recently observed, "I think that Xi Jinping is not interested in privatization at all, but I do think that he accepts that private businesses are more efficient and will out-compete state firms in most parts of the economy."

For President Obama and his domestic agenda, this narrative is not at all convenient. The president's detractors have always found his enthusiasm for the free market to be limited and his love for the expansion of government unbounded. He would much rather paint a China story that suits his political purposes than recognize the nuanced reality of the second-largest economy in the world.

Extolling the market as the most efficient allocator of resources or calling for a reduction in the role of government in the economy is something that few would expect Obama to do. The president should not be surprised, then, that even though President Xi is the general secretary of the Chinese Communist party, Obama is the one more commonly known to his critics as a socialist. ♦

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French Undressing

Where PC meets overweening government power, a terrible politics is born

By Christopher Caldwell

Paris

On a bright Wednesday afternoon in late February a bunch of French Muslims gathered in an upstairs room at the Café du Pont Neuf on the Seine. They had summoned a group of Internet journalists before whom they intended to lay out a few grievances. Their leader, Farida Belghoul, a 55-year-old Frenchwoman of Algerian Kabyle background, is a veteran of the movement that, back in the 1980s, sought to rally North African immigrants' children (known as *beurs*) behind Socialist president François Mitterrand. Belghoul was the eloquent and camera-friendly voice of the so-called Second March of the Beurs in 1984, but she drifted from view after that. She has spent the intervening years teaching, writing novels, making films, studying, and, most recently, living in Egypt. Journalists who have written about ethnicity, immigration, and left-wing politics in decades past retain a vague memory of her name.

Those who have reacquainted themselves with Belghoul in recent months have been shocked to see what has become of this onetime hope of socialism. She has seen a few things. She has drawn closer to God. And she has become the sworn enemy of the French Ministry of Education's ideas about what children should be taught about sex. In the audience at the café, silhouetted against the windows that face across the Seine toward the towers of the Conciergerie, there were women in headscarves. But the speakers sitting at Belghoul's side included leaders of Christian organizations, conservative politicians, a priest, and a former member of Nicolas Sarkozy's cabinet. Many of them until quite recently thought of Muslim immigration as a menace to the Republic. All were there to pay their respects to a woman who, for now at least, has become one of the most important right-wing leaders in France.

An embitterment has entered French politics under the presidency of François Hollande, the first Socialist to run France since the last century. Voters chose Hollande in 2012 as a way of administering a slap to the brassy martinet Sarkozy, but Hollande's popularity has fallen steadily since. The economy is flat. Hollande's advisers—mostly people of retirement age—keep scolding the public about how they ought to work harder. The Red Bonnets, a movement of protest against the green taxes that are hitting farmers hard, have been on the march in Brittany. Economic inequality has worsened, and the Paris economist Thomas Piketty—whose new book on inequality has made bestseller lists—took to the pages of the daily *Libération* to describe Hollande as a "serial bumbler." Hollande is his party's most prominent champion of French involvement in the 28-nation superstructure of the European Union, at a time when a majority (58 percent) of Frenchmen want less of it. The country's unemployment rate is over 10 percent, and Hollande's approval ratings have fallen into the teens. Never in recent decades has a Western European leader been less popular.

It is not usually fruitful to compare foreign leaders with American presidents, but there is a reason Hollande hit it off so well with President Obama on his state visit last month. Both have a mild manner that is an inestimable asset when the leader of the party that likes to shake things up is courting swing voters. Both, though, are ideological adventurers, with a reverence towards what the university utopians in their party dream up, even if they are not dreamers themselves. But Obama has trump cards Hollande lacks: a reserve currency, an empire, a vast army. He also has Republican opponents who have restrained him from nominating too many Van Joneses and Debo Adegbiles. Hollande has had the personal good fortune, and the political bad fortune, to get the allies he has wished for. He has wound up beholden to the Europe-Écologie party (EELV), which is too radical for most French voters' tastes.

It was partly at the EELV's suggestion that Hollande went out on a limb last winter and legalized gay marriage. It was a mistake. The law has been more ferociously resisted in France than in any Western country. As with President Obama's health care reform, the passage of the law has done nothing to settle the argument over it. The

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protests have continued. The problem, it is clear, was not just the law itself but also the spirit in which it was offered. "It's a reform of society," said justice minister Christiane Taubira in late 2012, "and you could even say a reform of civilization." That remark, and others like it, awakened a section of political France that had been slumbering for decades—the Catholic part, the traditionalist part, the sort of people who have five kids, favor cardigans over hoodies, and can describe France as the "eldest daughter of the church" without snickering.

UNMITIGATED GAUL

It is hard to say what made Catholics in France more hostile to gay marriage than those in other countries. Perhaps they have been so long at a distance from power that they have not acquired the habit of political negotiation and compromise. One factor in the resistance is certainly the incentive gay marriage offers to irregular adoption. French people are uneasy about mixing up money values and human values. Surrogate motherhood is still not legal; in fact, one sees it likened to the slave trade in certain newspapers, although legal activists have sought to ease restraints on the practice.

Frigide Barjot, leader of the first Manif pour Tous

Gay marriage in France is called *mariage pour tous*, "marriage for everybody." The mostly church-inspired movement against it is called *la manif pour tous*, "the demonstration for everybody," *manifestation* being the French for a political march or protest. After all, everybody used to be Catholic. In the spring of 1984, several hundred thousand marchers convinced François Mitterrand to withdraw his project of absorbing the country's Catholic schools into the state system.

This was what the anti-gay-marriage protesters had in mind. The main voice of the marches when they started was Frigide Barjot, a gifted and gentle eccentric who had been growing more and more serious about her Catholic faith for a decade. Barjot was an admirer of Pope Benedict XVI. She wrote interesting memoirs, was married to the comic writer Basile de Koch (his name and hers are pseudonyms), and had even made racy music videos. She had (and retains) many gay friends, and she appeared not to have a milligram of ill-will in her body. ("Who am I to judge?" she often says, quoting the present pope.) She was good on TV and the Internet, a person of integrity, living poor as a church mouse with her husband and children in an apartment in a modest block near the Eiffel Tower. (The left-leaning city government of Paris has begun proceedings to kick them out of it; when I visited, it was crammed with dress racks and piled high with cardboard boxes.)

Barjot described gay couples as a blessing for France and even backed civil unions for them; she insisted only that every child was the product of a mother and a father and deserved to be raised that way. The universe of people ready to sign on to these views turned out to be vast. It ranged from the lay Catholic bloggers of *Salon Beige* to the Jérôme-Lejeune Foundation (which campaigns for those with Down syndrome) to former housing minister Christine Boutin's pro-life group Alliance Vita. That is leaving aside Muslims, Jews, the "fundamentalist" Catholics who reject Vatican II, and those who reject gay marriage for reasons that are nonreligious.

By last winter, the Manif pour Tous showed itself capable of drawing millions—1.4 million showed up for its event in Paris in March 2013, almost double the turnout of the biggest marches in 1984. It was stunning—most polls put Mass attendance in France at around 5 percent, and Catholics themselves had come to think they were dying out. Many Catholics describe the spirit of the Manif pour Tous in exactly the same terms gays did when they began protesting after the Stonewall riots of 1969—they were shocked to discover how many people there were who felt just as they did. Some even described them as "Catholic Pride days."

Just as Scott Brown's election to a Massachusetts Senate seat in 2010 was assumed to signal the end of President Obama's health reforms, these marches should have meant the end of gay marriage in France. The constitution of the Fifth Republic turns the French presidency into an elective monarchy, which was fine in 1958 when it was designed for Charles de Gaulle. But it has proved a bad fit for anybody who cannot write on his résumé: "Saved the nation in World War II." France doesn't have midterm elections (although the approaching municipal elections will permit the public to send a signal). It has little local ability to temper the will of the capital. What it does have, especially since 1968, is a virtually constitutional role for street protests. If you can put enough people in the street to protest a government action, the government will back down. No one understands that better than the 59-year-old Hollande, who was mentored by his party's *soixante-huitards*, or '68ers. Mitterrand had to let

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Catholics keep their schools in 1984. Chirac had to abandon budget cuts in 1995 and a youth jobs program in 2006.

That didn't happen last time. The anti-gay-marriage protests of 2012 and 2013 drew record crowds, and yet the government didn't relent. In fact, it dug in. The number of arrests at Manif pour Tous parades was high. In recent days, a Russian student has told reporters that police offered her help obtaining citizenship in exchange for spying on the movement. "The government saw it as a sign of their own virtue to have these people marching against them," said one non-Catholic sympathizer of Frigide Barjot. If this really was a reform of civilization, then those families marching in the streets were the new civilization's enemies.

COLD FRONT

Opponents often describe the social-issues protesters as being on the "extreme right" or even a "French equivalent of the Tea Party," both of them labels that get applied to whatever force the political class is most eager to exclude. These epithets were not ones that the broad, pious, native-French upper-middle class would have chosen as descriptions of itself. In fact, these people seem to have no political allies at all—either in the center of French politics or on the extremes. The Gaullist UMP, the closest French equivalent to the U.S. Republican party, is no place for "values voters." Sarkozy talked a good game to them but left them no less disappointed than the rest of his coalition of followers. His housing minister, Christine Boutin, the only outspoken pro-life politician in the party, has now left the party, gravitating to Christian Democracy and the world of Farida Belghoul. The party's candidate for mayor of Paris, the yuppie ex-Sarkozy spokesperson Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, not only distrusts the Manif pour Tous but has demanded recantation from any candidate in her party who ever expressed the slightest sympathy for it. This included Hélène Delsol, whom Kosciusko-Morizet dropped from her list of candidates, allegedly for her links to a centrist candidate. Conservatives often speak of the political establishment as the "UMPS"—a jamming-together of the party acronyms of the Gaullists and the Socialists.

There is nothing to drive a population rightward like the softening of its putatively conservative party. Most people in any society would like to be considered easygoing and accommodating. They will say the proper, tolerant things as long as they are confident someone else is willing to endure the social stigma of being the humorless keeper of order. When people lose confidence there is anyone more conservative hiding in the woodwork, they reluctantly take on the embarrassing job of expressing conservative thoughts themselves. That is what happened with the Tea Party.

When people lose confidence there is anyone more conservative hiding in the woodwork, they reluctantly take on the embarrassing job of expressing conservative thoughts themselves.

And it is part of the explanation for why the rightist National Front (FN)—which, while democratic in its conduct, has for decades spoken with fascist overtones—has gained popularity in recent years, and why 40 percent of the UMP are ready to form alliances with it, according to an IFOP poll. Purged of its anti-Semitic and some of its anti-immigrant elements by its new leader, Marine Le Pen, it is leading the polls for the upcoming European elections. But the FN never rallied to the Manif pour Tous. Some attribute this coldness to Le Pen's excess of caution, others to a reluctance to offend the Front's gay supporters and members. Whatever the reason, these were not the Manif's people. The National Front's rank and file opposed gay adoption, but only by 56 percent to 37, not far from the views of the French public at large.

About a year ago, though, the Manif pour Tous movement began to harden. Cast adrift from the French political system with no weapon but their numbers and their good intentions, by turns ignored and calumniated by an unpopular but steely government, certain marchers began to see the beautiful soul of Frigide Barjot as more of a liability than an asset. She was frozen out of her leadership position, replaced by Ludovine de la Rochère, an officer of the Jérôme-Lejeune Foundation. At the March 2013 demonstration of the Manif pour Tous, the one that drew 1.4 million people and ran for miles down the Avenue de la Grande Armée, police blocked the route. A group of marchers tried to end-run a police blockade and enter the Champs-Élysées, a nonauthorized parade route, to the chagrin of Barjot and some of the movement's more orderly leaders. A businesswoman named Béatrice Bourges backed the marchers.

That was the beginning of Bourges's explicitly political movement Printemps Français. The name, which means "French spring," betrays an assumption, perhaps, that France is not much freer than the countries of the Arab world, where Bourges was born. Bourges wants to remove Hollande from office under the little-known Article 68 of the constitution for extreme dereliction of duty. She has not been specific about whether he most deserves ousting for his economic, his immigration, or his gender rights policies, nor has she been particular about whose company she travels in. In late January she organized a Day of Rage. The

17,000 people who gathered in the Place de la Bastille were not Frigide Barjot's live-and-let-live types. There was a bit of humor. One held a sign reading "We want a state that is transparent, not a state of 'trans' parents." But there was other stuff as well. "Jews!" read one placard. "France does not belong to you!"

M'BAD NEWS

There have been incidents like this for at least 15 years in France, but they have tended to look like mere *dérapages*, moments when somebody loses his head and does something stupid. No longer. What seemed even two or three years ago to be only a serious *potential* problem has emerged as a present danger. There now exists an identifiable constituency for anti-Semitism in France. It is not necessarily broad, but it is not just a few fringe individuals, either. It is what you could call a "market." Dieudonné M'bala M'bala, a gifted and sometimes riotously funny comic of Cameroonian descent and pronounced left-wing views, began to attack Israel and Zionism at the turn of the century, just after the second intifada and the September 11 attacks. Since then his ideology has evolved in a Farrakhanite direction and beyond. The literary scholar Robert Faurisson, France's highest-profile denier of the Shoah, as the Holocaust is known, participated in one of Dieudonné's onstage routines in a striped Auschwitz-style suit. Dieudonné sings a bouncy song called "*Shoah-nanas*" (a homonym for "Hot Pineapple"), complete with a dance. In December he said of one of his journalistic critics, "When I hear him talk, Patrick Cohen, I think . . . you know . . . the gas chambers . . . too bad . . ."

Béatrice Bourges at a Paris protest

Dieudonné's defenders often say he is not anti-Semitic, only "anti-system." But at times like now, when France's "system" seems bent on dismantling its old institutions and adapting its culture to the cyber-economy, the system has suited Dieudonné fairly well. He churns out homemade videos that get millions of hits on his theater's website, on YouTube, and on *EgalitéetReconciliation.fr*. This last is the brainchild of Alain Soral, a bestselling underground author, the brother of a famous Swiss actress, and an inspired provocateur. In one sense he resembles the television commentator Glenn Beck, an apostle of autodidacticism who offers his presumably angry viewers long reading lists with which to arm themselves intellectually—in Soral's case, an interesting mix of left and right that includes Kropotkin, Ezra Pound, the contemporary economist Satyajit Das, the Dréyfusard Bernard Lazare, and the Marxist philosopher Pierre Clouscard. But whereas Beck's books are mostly attacks on Woodrow Wilson or New Deal statism, many of Soral's favorites question the whole modern order, and would have been found congenial by French fascists in the 1930s. He, too, spends a good deal of his energy thinking about Zionism. He has moved from Communism to the National Front to what he calls a "national socialism *à la française*."

At the turn of the year, word spread that Dieudonné was about to take a particularly rebarbative show on tour. Interior minister Manuel Valls—the Socialist party's only public figure with a reputation for being tough on crime—decided to come down on him like a ton of bricks. Valls sought to have the show banned before it even opened. When the city of Nantes, the first stop on the tour, refused to ban it, on the grounds that this would constitute prior restraint, the Conseil d'État—a sort of supreme court that operates out of the country's executive branch—overruled it. Tax authorities raided Dieudonné's house.

The public's response was nothing like what the government might have anticipated. Valls, who had started the week as the most popular politician in France, saw his approval ratings plummet. The French pollster BVA showed his approval among young people, who are disproportionately of immigrant background, falling from 61 percent to 37 percent. It may be that they were unnerved by the government's weakness—the realization that it required the entire disciplinary apparatus of the state to constrain one Afro-French vaudevillian. On the other hand, they may have been unnerved by the government's presumption. France's tools for disciplining opinion have been so wantonly overused that many who sincerely deplored Dieudonné's views may have felt they had less to lose from his opinions than from giving the state more means of control.

In such a context, though, the Day of Rage alarmed even the government's most vocal opponents. They saw it as a pointless squandering of the Manif movement's hard-earned reputation for constructive engagement, and a foolish opening, intentional or not, to extremists. The *Figaro* columnist Ivan Rioufol, usually a slashing opponent of political correctness and conformism, called the demonstration "the example not to follow" and faulted Bourges for failing to distance herself from the wackos a protest movement inevitably draws. Bourges said afterwards that she hadn't seen the worst offending placards during the march. Rioufol had been used by the mainstream media, she said, adding: "The people are almost pre-revolutionary." She insisted that channeling people's rage was not the

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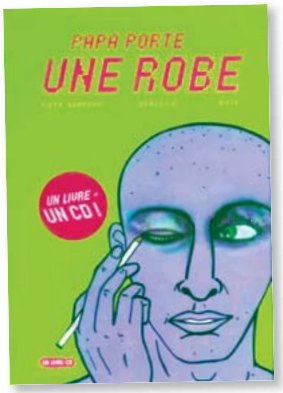
same thing as violence. What she didn't do was apologize.

In this she sounded a bit like the Ukrainian boxer and political activist (and now presidential candidate) Wladimir Klitschko, who, when asked by the *Guardian* in January whether it bothered him to protest alongside the occasionally anti-Semitic extremist Oleh Tyahnybok, replied: "In order to land a punch, you need to bring your fingers together into a fist. We need to join all of our forces together. That is the only way that we can win." In other words, no, it didn't bother him. There are suddenly a lot of people talking and thinking this way in France. In forming political alliances, the extremism of one's allies is becoming a second-order consideration.

A week after the Day of Rage, the Manif pour Tous held a much larger, much milder demonstration, amid threats from Valls that there would be a massive police reaction to any excesses. The following day, the Hollande government withdrew a law on the family that would have eased adoption rules and given new rights to stepparents. This occasioned another "day of rage" against Hollande, this one coming from his own party's left wing. Was it the quiet, decent side or the unsavory side of French conservatism that had brought about this reversal? Was it the gentle Christians or the fuming radicals? Both sides claimed the credit.



The cover of
Daddy Wears a Dress

EVERYBODY'S NAKED

The French government has been speaking about sexual matters almost nonstop for two years now without ever giving a satisfactory explanation of its philosophy. So incoherent has Hollande been that many commentators assume he has chosen sex and gender arbitrarily, as a means of diverting attention from his economic-policy failures, or, more ambitiously, following a Leninist strategy of sowing confusion in the public. Compare him with Barack Obama. The president has backed gay marriage on the grounds that marriage is such a noble institution that it ought to be opened to everybody—a grounds that, while debatable, is also perfectly straightforward. Hollande appears bizarre by contrast. He married neither Ségolène Royal, the mother of his four children, nor Valérie Trierweiler, the journalist whom he publicly acknowledged as his companion in 2010. Nor has he announced any plans to marry Julie Gayet, the actress for whom he evicted Trierweiler from the Elysée Palace. He has shown himself willing to risk civil strife over an institution he does not believe in in the first place.

(A question that has interested French observers somewhat more is how the chubby 59-year-old has had such success as a . . . a . . . you could almost call him a sexagenarian. French women tend to explain it with reference to Hollande's sense of humor, which is legendary in political circles. *Une femme qui rit*, runs the French proverb, *est à moitié dans ton lit*. If you can make a woman laugh, you've got her halfway into bed.)

On the eve of Hollande's visit to the Vatican in January, which came just days after his household reshuffle, 120,000 Catholics wrote an online petition to Pope Francis, asking him to raise a long list of grievances with their president: a 1993 law against "hindering an abortion," which has been used against antiabortion protesters and carries a prison sentence of up to two years; the desecration of churches by the Pussy Riot-style Ukrainian feminist group Femen; and the stated wish of the minister of education, Vincent Peillon, to "free the student of all determinisms." This last bit of bureaucratic mumbo jumbo may not sound like much. But it is what drew those enraged Catholics and Muslims to the room over the Café du Pont Neuf in February.

Political correctness came late to France, but the country has made up for lost time. France is now at the nadir of politically correct Zhdanovism, the stage America reached in about 1991, when Anita Hill accused Clarence Thomas of harassment at his Supreme Court confirmation hearing, Antioch College required lovers making passes at one another to obtain verbal or written consent at each "base," people said things such as "differently abled," and elementary schools raised the consciousness of children by forcing them to read *Heather Has Two Mommies*.

Yet PC has acquired institutional redoubts in France that it never did in the United States, and it now appears almost invincible. This may have to do with France's Jacobin tradition, which centralizes everything governmental and discourages wiggle room. Right now the Ministry of Education is conducting a monomaniacal campaign to persuade schoolchildren that there is no difference whatsoever between boys and girls, other than the ones they have been taught by a sexist culture. The ministry aims to fight centuries of sexism and bigotry through a kind of counter-brainwashing: giving girls trucks and balls, boys bottles and dolls, and turning Little Red Riding Hood into a boy. So much for *Vive la différence*.

Opponents call such teachings *la théorie du genre*, or gender theory. In February, conservative UMP leader Jean-François Copé publicly criticized a list of books that were either required or suggested for use in schools. It was a bold move, a real coup, and might have had more effect on

French voters had not the UMP already introduced a certain amount of gender theory to the schools under Sarkozy. The books Copé publicized included *Does Miss Zazie Have a Peepee?*, *Daddy Wears a Dress*, and *Everybody's Naked!*, which contained vivid pictures of children and adults ("The babysitter is naked," "The policeman is naked," "The teacher is naked") and promptly rose to number one on Amazon's French website.

Two things turned the controversy over *théorie du genre* into a scandal. The first is that education minister Peillon and his associates claimed there was no such thing. Peillon professed himself "absolutely against" gender theory; he was just for teaching children about the interchangeability of the sexes at ever-younger ages. "You mustn't confuse it with gender studies," said women's rights minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem. "What they're teaching [kids] is the values of the republic," said finance minister Pierre Moscovici, "those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." They were, it turns out, taking their voters for dummies. The conservative television gadfly Éric Zemmour claimed that what was being taught came not from child psychology but from gay political activism. The new school materials were "carbon copies" of activist documents, he said, and he began to produce them: a plan to have the national railways "educate against homophobia," memos from the Socialist party group Homosexuality and Socialism, last year's government "Teychenné Report" on "LGBT-phobic Discrimination in Schools."

More books slated for French schools: Does Miss Zazie Have a Peepee? *and* Everybody's Naked!

The *théorie du genre* was the principle on which the government had been legislating in practice for the past two years—why on earth wouldn't they avow it? If you accept that sexuality is chosen, not given, then there's no shame in taking steps to broaden the options on a child's sexual menu. It was obvious to everyone except the government that this new vision of the Rights of Man was precisely what parents did not accept. Normally in such circumstances, confronted with dug-in resistance, the government would adopt a more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger tone and explain that the country was changing. It was getting more diverse. Our schoolbooks had to be opened to a greater variety of people. . . . But apparently there was a limit to diversity. In the weekly *Marianne*, the journalist Éric Conan noted a striking omission in this dynamic, multicultural time. "The Ministry of Education and the editors," he wrote, "have carefully avoided *Mohammed Has Two Daddies* or *Fadela Has Two Mommies*."

That is where Farida Belghoul came in.

PATH OF MIDDLE EAST RESISTANCE

Belghoul is a heroine of French antiracism. It is an odd-sounding role. One of the mysteries of contemporary French political life is that the government has institutions for combating race prejudice patterned on American ones—but without having perpetrated slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, or any of the historic misdeeds that made the corresponding American remedies necessary. The political action group SOS Racisme was founded in the mid-1980s at the urging of President Mitterrand, just after his root-and-branch reforms had led the country into an economic collapse. It was what we would call an "Astroturf" group, a top-down movement designed by leaders to be passed off as grassroots. The first leader of SOS Racisme, Harlem Désir, is now the chairman of the Socialist party. A few people at the time, most forcefully the sociologist Paul Yonnet, suggested that the campaign against racism was a bizarre priority for France, having more to do with Mitterrand's political needs than with France's historic responsibility.

More people think this now, and Belghoul is one of them. As communism once did, the French antiracism movement is producing renegades. Ex-Communists often took the menace of communism more seriously than they had taken the promise in their more credulous days; their exposure to both sides of certain arguments often gave them a more profound sense of ideological battles than their contemporaries on either side.

On a Sunday afternoon in February, Belghoul explained her beliefs over sugar cookies in the sunny living room of her house a train ride into the modest *banlieues* (or suburbs) northwest of Paris. Fighting for the rights of second-generation North Africans in France made up a big part of her early life. Belghoul herself spent three uneventful years in the Communist party starting at age 17. She considers it a passing enthusiasm of little importance, but she retains from somewhere a gift for dialectics and wounding political invective. Taking the government literally in its insistence that there is no difference between a man and a woman, she

calls the beautiful Najat Vallaud-Belkacem "Monsieur" and Vincent Peillon "Madame"—when she is not calling him the "minister of re-education."

Belghoul studied at the Sorbonne and read a lot of history, philosophy, and literature. She marched with the groups that would eventually be swallowed up in SOS Racisme and spent the early 1990s working for Radio Beur. She now believes the antiracist movement was about securing the votes of the heavily Arab banlieues, not about solving their problems—particularly illiteracy, an obsession for her. On a personal level, too, she felt used and discarded. After leaving Radio Beur she disappeared off the Socialist party's radar screen.

Belghoul sees a common thread between the antiracism movements of the 1980s and gender theory: Both are means, in her view, of "destroying the basis of people's identity." Confusing children about their sexuality is just another way to break them of their ability to think clearly (*déstructurer la pensée* is her phrase), to make them more pliant before the state. Belghoul homeschooled her children, something that is easier to do in France than one might assume. Her response to the government's gender theory has been to organize a movement of *journées de retrait de l'école* (JRE), when large numbers of parents keep their children home from school. To keep the government from organizing against the parents, she does not announce these days in advance. By February, the movement had spread to a hundred schools.

Obviously, antiracism aims explicitly to make native French people feel ashamed of their prejudices. For Belghoul it threatened the identity of minorities, too, including her own. In the 1980s, SOS Racisme and the Union of Jewish Students of France promoted a Jewish-Arab dialogue. This was an "illegitimate debate" in Belghoul's view. "It was as if we were living in the Middle East," she says. Many conservative Jews have made the same complaint—that the requirements of left-wing identity politics turned French Jews from citizens like anyone else into something they had not been in generations: a "minority." The focus of Muslims' attention on Israel is similarly the result of politicians' need to blame someone other than France for the difficulties of French Muslims. There is a lot of truth in this.

But Belghoul has made many of these points on Soral's *EgalitéetReconciliation.fr*—a website that few people visit for its sensitivity to the plight of the Jews. You don't have to press her to get her views on why she has consented to be interviewed there—enough people have raised it with her that she anticipates the question. "You'll see me alongside anyone who speaks out for the banning of gender theory in school," she says, "even if I am in total disagreement with the rest of their opinions. We need to set priorities. Today's attacks on the family put the future of our society at risk. When that goes, I don't see what's left. So we need to set aside—and maybe this is an instance of grace—all our quarrels, even those that seem most important to us, in order that the sacred priority of defending childhood may win out." It is a very good answer. Whether it is a satisfactory one depends on whether you share Belghoul's view of the seriousness of the threat to France's children.

Belghoul is always talking about grace. She shouted a doggerel version of Romans 5:20 (*La grâce est toujours là / Là où le péché sera / Là où le péché abonde / La grâce surabonde*) at a television interviewer named Saïd on the network OummaTV in February. Anyone who thinks this way is bound to see Catholics and Muslims as involved in the same struggle—"*même combat*," as French political activists are fond of saying. Almost all of the Christians who stood up at her press conference at the Café du Pont Neuf, from Christine Boutin to Béatrice Bourges to Alain Escada (of the Catholic fundamentalist Civitas movement), described themselves as converts of a sort—to the view that those who want to make France more Muslim and those who want to make it more Christian are not necessarily at odds.

One thing Belghoul says again and again is: "France is a Christian country." It is a description that would have made sense any time between St. Irenaeus' tenure as bishop of Lyon, less than a century after the death of Jesus, and a generation ago. But today Christianity has eroded in France in two ways. First, people have stopped going to Mass. Second, immigration has brought France its large and fast-growing Muslim minority. Two dozen young Frenchmen have been killed fighting with the Islamist rebels in Syria, and hundreds more are there now, according to the Ministry of the Interior.

In a way that no one seems willing to acknowledge, Muslim politics is a key to Belghoul's power. Although the JRE is small, it is one of those small things with the potential to bring an entire political coalition crashing down—in a U.S. context, imagine the Democratic party if its hold on the black vote were threatened. Hollande's government was able to ignore the mostly Catholic Manif pour Tous, no matter how large its marches got, because he had never had and did not need the votes of devout Catholics. Muslims are a different story: In the first round of the last presidential election, 57 percent voted for Hollande, versus only 7 percent for Sarkozy. What is more, their power is magnified (and that of Catholics reduced) by a system meant to respect the rights of "minorities." Should a silent majority of Catholics, by making common cause with Muslims, gain access to the same right to be heard, they will have picked the lock that has kept them out of politics since the 1990s.

Peillon has called the JRE "an insult to the Ministry of Education and to teachers" and threatened to summon any parents who keep their children out of school. "There is a

certain number of extremists who have decided to lie and to scare parents," he told the press recently. "All we are trying to do in school is teach the values of the Republic and, thus, respect between men and women. I call on all the manipulators, all the sowers of trouble and strife, to stop."

And that does not exhaust the government's means of imposing its plans on schools.

DEFENDING THE SEXBOX

All Western countries are becoming less politically free, but France is doing so at a faster rate than most. The government has many tools for enforcing conformity. Twitter is capable of suppressing tweets at the request of governments in certain extreme cases, the website *Atlantico* reported in February, and last year, of 352 such requests worldwide, 306 came from France. Valls, the justice minister, has looked into banning Bourges's French Spring group. The activist group Collectifdom sued the director Nicolas Bedos for opinions expressed in a magazine column that it considered an assault on "the honor of the Antilles." These are tip-of-the-iceberg cases.

And consider what happened when Valls lectured the philosopher Alain Finkielkraut on the TV talk show *Des paroles et des actes* in February about France's sterling record of welcoming the uprooted—Valls's own family from Catalonia under Franco, Finkielkraut's from Poland and Auschwitz. Finkielkraut agreed, but said that that didn't entitle France to ignore those of French stock—the so-called *français de souche*. For having used that expression (and for having expressed the worry that France was turning into "the Soviet Union of antiracism"), Finkielkraut found himself in legal trouble—two high-ranking members of the Socialist party called for a sitting of the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel, a rough French equivalent of the FCC.

It is a bad sign that, when the ruling party clashes this way with freedom of expression, in this way, the media tend to take the side of the ruling party. *Le Monde*'s newly active blog section has covered the popular movement against *théorie du genre* not as a clash of political opinions but as an epidemic of *intox*, or collective insanity. In column after column, the paper of the ruling class mocks people who are utterly shut out of decision-making for their attempts, necessarily based on partial information, to make sense of the mandates imposed on them. There is little attempt to address the large kernel of truth in what they say, no attempt to address directly the question of whether teachers indeed are imposing on their children an ideology about sexual matters. And there is no acknowledgment whatsoever that parents could ever have a legitimate interest in what their children are taught about sex in school. There are only restatements of the government viewpoint and worries about the mental health of its opponents.

Le Monde, for instance, notes that there is a rumor about children having to play with toy sex organs. False! "It's probable that this rumor comes from Switzerland, where in the canton of Basel, sex-education teachers actually have at their disposal a 'sexbox' containing fabric stuffed sexual organs." *Le Monde*'s blog linked to the left-wing site *rue89* (recently bought by *Le Monde*), where a Swiss sexologist described the anti-gender-theory parents as *groupuscules*, or "splinter groups." Parents, of course, are always *groupuscules*, usually consisting of two people, sometimes of one. The assumption here seems to be that parents are entitled to speak on their children's behalf only as part of some nationwide patriotic front.

Probably the most interesting magazine in France now is the monthly *Causeur*, edited by Élisabeth Lévy, who has opened its columns to the best journalists, historians, and philosophers of left and right. Last month Lévy and her colleague Gil Mihaely interviewed Dieudonné. It was a hostile and highly enlightening conversation, *Causeur* having been more relentless than most French publications in attacking his (and others') anti-Semitism over the past several years. But Bruno Roger-Petit of the *Nouvel Observateur* (also owned by *Le Monde*) saw interviewing Dieudonné as tantamount to endorsing him. He wrote of Lévy: "When you share the same goals—fighting 'political correctness'—you wind up understanding one another." So "fighting political correctness" (a fairly good synonym for "freedom of speech") and Dieudonné's kind of anti-Semitism are cast as virtual synonyms. Roger-Petit may well be interested in constraining Dieudonné. But he sounds less interested in constraining Dieudonné than in making sure that orthodox intellectuals not give up an iota of the professional advantage that political correctness affords them over independent thinkers like Lévy. A country whose intellectual and political leaders do not distinguish between Dieudonné and Élisabeth Lévy will have a hard time either disciplining extremists or accepting constructive criticism from any quarter.

France has, through political correctness, maneuvered itself into a bad position. In rough times, people fall back on what they have—savings, family, faith, various things that no decent government feels entitled to violate. What France is doing in the name of equal citizenship is ripping up every last refuge and source of identity people have. Its political leaders have met legitimate popular opposition to their plans not just with punishment but with ridicule, ostracism, and exclusion. Many of its intellectual leaders have fallen into line behind the politicians. For now, France's leaders have managed to insulate some of their wilder schemes from popular complaint. It would be a mistake to consider that a triumph in any but the very short term. ♦

Senators Arlen Specter (Pa.) and Orrin Hatch (Utah) at a press conference in support of Judge Leslie Southwick's nomination (2007)

JONATHAN ERNST / REUTERS / NEWSCOM

Ordeal by Congress

The human cost of advice and consent. BY TERRY EASTLAND

Leslie H. Southwick of Jackson, Mississippi, is (or rather, was) "the nominee," and here provides an account of his quest to become a judge on a particular federal court, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, which sits in New Orleans. President George W. Bush nominated him to that court in January 2007. The Senate approved the nomination 10 months later, but only after Southwick had become one of those "controversial" nominees, as they are whispered about in Washington, barely surviving the confirmation process.

The Nominee
A Political and Spiritual Journey
by Leslie H. Southwick
Mississippi, 336 pp., $35

Southwick doesn't see his story as an "especially worthy tale." Other nominees—both those who ultimately gained appointment to the bench and those who did not—have "their own involved stories," he writes, and each is as "worthy of recounting as mine."

Southwick is too modest. From the start of his quest, he took notes of pertinent meetings and events and phone calls. Together with relevant documents and letters he saved, those notes—in effect, a diary—have enabled him to thicken and authenticate his story, making it all the more compelling.

Southwick frames his story in terms of the steps that must be taken to become a federal judge. Thus, a person is *recommended* for the president's consideration; *selected* as the presumptive nominee by the president or his aides; *investigated* by the FBI and, perhaps, the American Bar Association; *nominated* by the president, a formal act; *interrogated* by the Senate Judiciary Committee; *reported* out of committee to the

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floor of the Senate; *confirmed* by the Senate, also a formal act and by which it provides its "advice and consent" to a nomination; *appointed*—another formal act—by the president, who signs the new judge's commission of office; and the easy last step, *sworn in*.

As Southwick makes plain, there are several points at which a nomination can fail—as when it is simply ignored by the Senate, not reported out of the Judiciary Committee, filibustered, or not confirmed if a vote is taken.

Of course, not everyone, even among those with the requisite lawyerly credentials, wants to become an appellate judge, even one on the Fifth Circuit. But Southwick's ambition is understandable. He was born and reared in Texas, one of the three states that make up the Fifth Circuit (the other two being Louisiana and Mississippi). Interested in politics from his youth, and an active Republican as a student at Rice, he graduated from the University of Texas law school in 1975, after which he clerked for a Mississippi judge on the Fifth Circuit, Charles Clark, a Nixon appointee. Southwick admired Clark and credits him with planting, during his clerkship, a "seed of being a [Fifth Circuit] judge."

That seed germinated in 1991, when Clark retired and Southwick pursued his seat. But he failed in that effort, as he did in pursuing later vacancies.

> I serially pursued nomination, fell short, dealt with the disappointment, later had hopes revived, and started over.

Indeed, the reader is struck by the time—parts of 16 years—and effort that Southwick spent in that serial, intraparty pursuit. Southwick worked the state's two Republican senators, Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, and their staffs, in addition to numerous Mississippi lawyers and politicians—anyone, indeed, who he thought might help him, including pertinent aides of George H.W. Bush and, later, of the second. Southwick had some excellent jobs in those 16 years—as a lawyer in the Civil Division of the first Bush Justice Department, and then as a judge on the Mississippi Court of Appeals. But becoming "the nominee" proved a demanding second job, one requiring intense determination that was finally rewarded when George W. Bush nominated him.

As the nominee, Southwick faced a confirmation process much different from the one experienced by his mentor Judge Clark, who was nominated on October 7, 1969, and confirmed by unanimous consent a mere eight days later. That was a time when control of the circuit courts had yet to become a strategic goal for the two parties, with very few nominations denied. In the case of the Fifth Circuit, which was created in 1869, only five nominees failed to win Senate approval prior to 1992—a span of some 125 years; during the next 15 years, five more nominees met that same fate. Three were Clinton nominees and two were George W. Bush nominees. And two other Bush nominees (Southwick and Priscilla Owen) had to overcome filibusters.

Southwick cites some interesting numbers from the last three presidencies showing that the worst time to be a circuit court nominee is when the president is in the last two years of his tenure and the Senate is controlled by the party opposite the president's. Thus, in 1991-92, the last two years of the first Bush presidency, a Democratic Senate confirmed 20 of 31 circuit court nominations, or 65 percent. In 1999-2000, President Clinton's final two years in office, Republicans confirmed only 15 of 34 such nominations, or 44 percent. And then, in 2007-08, the second Bush's last two years as president, Democrats confirmed 10 of 23 circuit nominations, or 43 percent. In those circumstances, writes Southwick, the Senate majority (Democratic or Republican) gets the "slows," thus hoping to maintain vacancies that a new president, one of its party, will fill.

Southwick was one of those 23 circuit court nominees chosen by George W. Bush in his final two years. His nomination seemed to be going smoothly enough until May 1, 2007, two days before his confirmation hearing, when liberal advocacy groups began their assault, prefiguring the opposition of Senate Democrats in the days ahead.

The groups cited two majority opinions that Southwick had joined while sitting on the Mississippi state appeals court—opinions that, they insisted, disqualified him from the federal bench. In one case, the majority held that the state Employee Appeals Board acted within its discretion in finding that a white employee who had described a coworker as a "good old n—" to fellow workers did not need to be terminated. In the other case, the majority upheld a child-custody decision by a state court judge that had taken into account whether a parent was gay or lesbian, and it used the phrase "homosexual lifestyle" in describing this factor, one of a dozen required by law in making such decisions.

For the liberal groups, that Southwick had joined these two majorities revealed a nominee retrograde on matters of race and sexual orientation. In fact, as Southwick shows, the opinions were reasonable decisions based on the role of an appellate judge. At the time, though, they "became my twin burdens . . . used to crush me in the months ahead." Not incidentally, the first Democratic senator to oppose Southwick publicly was the soon-to-be presidential candidate, Barack Obama of Illinois.

With Democrats controlling the Judiciary Committee by a single vote, 10-9, Southwick, who had received the highest possible rating from the American Bar Association, found himself needing the vote of a single committee Democrat for his nomination to be reported to the Senate floor. Otherwise, his nomination would be stuck in committee. Dianne Feinstein of California seemed open to his nomination, but would support it only if Southwick wrote a clarifying letter regarding the racial slur used by the employee in the Employee Appeals Board case. Southwick obliged, with one (included in *The Nominee*) in which he stated his abhorrence of the slur. Feinstein was satisfied—and other committee Democrats were surprised when she cast the vote that sent his nomination to the floor. Clearly, they had expected his nomination would be doomed in committee.

Still, the Democrats had another shot at blocking the nomination. Under Senate rules at the time, a three-fifths

supermajority of 60 senators was needed to end a filibuster and set up a confirmation vote. Continuing to lobby Democrats, Southwick managed to pick up the votes needed, overcoming the filibuster 62-35. The Senate then confirmed his nomination by a vote of 59 to 38.

Today, thanks to the new voting requirement adopted by the Senate three months ago, only a simple majority of members present and voting are needed to defeat a filibuster. The simple-majority threshold will weaken, though not invariably so, the Senate minority in situations in which the party of the president making a nomination and the Senate majority reviewing it are the same. And when the president is from the opposite political party, the Senate majority may wind up blocking more nominations earlier in the process—in committee, where a more disciplined Democratic Senate could have blocked Southwick's nomination.

As the subtitle indicates, *The Nominee* is the story of "a political and spiritual journey," which means that it is the story of a political journey that is simultaneously a spiritual journey, with "spiritual" understood by the Roman Catholic Southwick (who was raised Methodist) in broadly Christian terms. Major themes here are providence and forgiveness. Providence, because after constantly wondering how his journey will wind up, Southwick finally reaches the point where he is as accepting of one outcome (a successful nomination) as he is of the other (a failed one). Forgiveness, because Southwick is dismayed by his critics but comes to forgive them even as he accepts how it was that they could have opposed him.

Southwick writes that his book is "at its most basic level a plea for reconciliation among those who battle in judicial wars." Those wars, however, are unlikely to abate so long as the two parties disagree, as they so sharply do, over the role of the courts and how judges should interpret and apply the law. This well-written and engaging tale of a nomination almost undone thus promises to have an ongoing audience, perhaps including someone as eager as the author once was to become a judicial nominee. ♦

B&A

Action into Words

The Great War and modern poetry.

BY EDWARD SHORT

In 1755, in the preface to *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson declared that "the chief glory of every people arises from its authors." Barely 160 years later, when England entered the First World War, the very notion of glory began to take a beating from which it has never recovered. Wilfred Owen was perhaps its most savage critic:

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori.

In the trenches, Owen fought alongside the Manchester Regiment, with whom he saw ghastly action. As Tim Kendall, the superb editor of this anthology, points out, "In March [1917], Owen fell in the dark into a ruined cellar, suffering severe concussion; the following month, several days after experiencing the 'extraordinary exultation' of going over the top, he was blown into the air by a shell and landed amid the exploded remains of a fellow officer whose corpse had been disinterred by the blast."

In such horrifying circumstances, it is only natural that Owen should have turned against *la gloire de la guerre*.

Edward Short is the author of Newman and His Family.

Poetry of the First World War
An Anthology
edited by Tim Kendall
Oxford, 352 pp., $19.95

And yet, by recording so meticulously and so faithfully the ingloriousness of war, Owen actually bore out Johnson's contention; for without Owen's poetry, and that of the other poets collected here, we should never know the true human cost of the war. In this respect, we owe these admirable poets a special debt: They mobilized their ancient art to show how this most unmerciful of wars was an assault not only on life and limb, but on the very sacredness of humanity. Their theme was the betrayal of man's true glory.

Now that we have lived to see these assaults ramify in our culture, we can recognize in the trenches rehearsals of the dehumanization that defines so much of our own society. Yet the poets of the First World War counterattacked this dehumanization by celebrating the human, often with heartbreaking tenderness. May Wedderburn Cannan, an Englishwoman who spent the war in a canteen in Rouen, exemplifies this in her lovely lyric "After the War."

After the War perhaps I'll sit again
Out on the terrace where I sat with you,
And see the changeless sky and hills beat blue
And live an afternoon of summer through.

I shall remember then, and sad at heart
For the lost day of happiness we knew,
Wish only that some other man were you
And spoke my name as once you used to do.

That this counteroffensive was con-

ducted in poetic forms that had celebrated the human for centuries made it all the more arresting. About Ivor Gurney's sonnet "Pain," for example, the ghosts of Sidney and Shakespeare hover as a kind of ironic chorus, though the import of the poem could not be more laceratingly modern.

Pain, pain continual; pain unending;
Hard even to the roughest, but to those
Hungry for beauty . . . Not the wisest knows,
Nor most pitiful-hearted, what the wending
Of one hour's way meant. Grey monotony lending
Weight to the grey skies, grey mud where goes
An army of grey bedrenched scarecrows in rows
Careless at last of cruellest Fate-sending.
Seeing the pitiful eyes of men foredone,
Or horses shot, too tired merely to stir,
Dying in shell-holes both, slain by the mud.
Men broken, shrieking even to hear a gun.—
Till pain grinds down, or lethargy numbs her,
The amazed heart cries angrily out on God.

Gurney arrived with the Gloucesters in France in May 1916, two months before the cataclysmic Battle of the Somme. Previously, he had been enrolled at the Royal College of Music under Charles Stanford, who, although charged with teaching Arthur Bliss, Gustav Holst, John Ireland, and Vaughan Williams, thought Gurney the most talented of his pupils, despite being scarcely "teachable." The music of his verse has a headlong, colloquial urgency:

O, but the racked clear tired strained frames we had!
Tumbling in the new billet on to straw bed,
Dead asleep . . .

Gurney also recognized that the Tennysonian music that had dominated the verse of the Georgian poets before the war could not be simply kitted out for service in the trenches: It would need to be replaced with something altogether different to reflect the new dissonant reality. So, in one of his poems about the false euphoria before the Marne, he writes:

High over London
Victory floats
And high, high, high,
Harsh bugle notes
Rend and embronze the air.

This anthology, although dedicated to Jon Stallworthy, who edited the Penguin book of World War I poetry, is in many ways a welcome departure from previous collections. Kendall includes introductions to each of the 27 poets; he adds selections from several unjustly neglected

Robert Graves (1941)

poets; and he appreciates that the war was not simply an exercise in senseless carnage. For all of its ravage, it was a war of liberation: Neither the Belgians nor the French nor the British were willing to live under Kaiser Wilhelm's jackboot; each fought to protect their respective sovereignty.

Kendall illustrates this by quoting one of the lesser-known poets of the war, Mary Borden, an American heiress from Chicago, who worked as a nurse in the French Red Cross. Recalling the *poilus* among whom so much of her life-saving work was carried out, she observed, "I see them still, marching up the long roads of France in their clumsy boots and their heavy grey-blue coats that were too big for them; dogged, patient, steady men, plodding to death in defense of their land. I shall never forget them." At the same time, Kendall includes lines from Thomas Hardy that complicate this or any other *casus belli*: *The Sinister Spirit sneered: 'It had to be!' / And again the Spirit of Pity whispered, 'Why?'*

In his excellent *Modern English War Poetry* (2006), which should be read in conjunction with his anthology, Kendall stresses the ambivalence of the war poets. Contrary to received opinion, they were not simply antiwar. They were poets rather than polemicists, and their poetry has to be read with the same care that one would read any other poetry. As Kendall writes:

> The truths told by war poets continue to disconcert, not least because they encompass what Wilfred Owen called the "exultation" of war as well as the futility, the imaginative opportunities as well as the senseless horrors. War poets cannot wholly regret even the most appalling experiences, as they transform violence, death, atrocity, into the pleasing formal aesthetics of art. Poetry, we never cease to be told, makes nothing happen; but war makes poetry happen.

Then, again, Kendall understands what often lay behind the formal aesthetics of war poetry. By including such popular trench songs as "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag" and "Oh! It's a Lovely War" he shows how their often-jaunty defiance of war and war's despair influenced many of the poets in this collection, Edgell Rickword perhaps most strikingly.

I knew a man, he was my chum,
but he grew darker day by day,
and would not brush the flies away,
nor blanch however fierce the hum
of passing shells; I used to read,
to rouse him, random things from Donne—

like 'Get thee with child a mandrake root.'
But you can tell he was far gone,
for he lay gaping, mackerel-eyed,
and stiff and senseless as a post
even when that old poet cried
'I long to talk with some old lover's ghost.'

The youngest of the war poets, Rickword crossed the Irish Sea to join the newly formed Berkshires in Dublin in 1918. For carrying out a highly

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dangerous reconnaissance mission, he received the Military Cross, and he later almost died after succumbing to a bad case of septicaemia, which cost him his left eye. Although he would publish books of verse and contribute critical reviews to journals after the war, he spent most of his long life (he died in 1982) touting the benefits of Bolshevism. Robert Graves might have had Rickword in mind when, in a powerful piece called "Recalling War," he sought to make sense of his own harrowing experiences in the trenches.

And we recall the merry ways of guns—
Nibbling the walls of factory and church
Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch.
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
A sight to be recalled in elder days
When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair.

In *Goodbye to All That* (1929), his memoir of the war, Graves offended his friends Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden by turning his wartime experiences into the knockabout comedy of the music halls. In a typical passage, Graves described how a platoon commander "whistled the advance," but none of his men seemed to notice.

> He jumped up from his shell-hole, waved, and signaled "Forward!"
> Nobody stirred.
> He shouted: "You bloody cowards, are you leaving me to go on alone?"
> His platoon-sergeant, groaning with a broken shoulder, gasped, "Not cowards, sir. Willing enough. But they're all f—ing dead."

If Graves chose to satirize the conduct of the war, he was never unreceptive to its unexpected blessings.

And have we done with War at last?
Well, we've been lucky devils both,
And there's no need of pledge or oath
To bind our lovely friendship fast,
By firmer stuff
Close bound enough,

By wire and wood and stake we're bound,
By Fricourt and by Festubert,
By whipping rain, by the sun's glare,
By all the misery and loud sound,
By a Spring day,
By Picard clay.

Show me the two so closely bound
As we, by the wet bond of blood,
By friendship blossoming from the mud,
By Death: we faced him, and we found
Beauty in Death,
In dead men, breath.

Reading this, or David Jones's moving *In Parenthesis*, in which he speaks of how *No one sings: Lully lully / for the mate whose blood runs down*, one is not so quick to dismiss lines from Laurence Binyon, a Red Cross volunteer who, before and after the war, was keeper of the prints and drawings at the British Museum and an expert on British, Japanese, and Persian art.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august
and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears. ♦

B&A

Hunger for Truth

The silence that came with starvation in the Ukraine.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

For decades, the notebooks of Gareth Jones (1905-35), a brilliant young Welshman murdered in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, were stashed away in his family's house in South Wales, only to be retrieved by his niece, Siriol Colley, in the early 1990s. By that time, Jones, once a highly promising journalist and an aide to a rather better-known Welshman, David Lloyd George, had largely vanished from history. But two books that appeared around then, Robert Conquest's *The Harvest of Sorrow* (1986) and Sally J. Taylor's *Stalin's Apologist* (1990), gave a hint of what was to come.

In the first, a groundbreaking account of the manufactured famine that devastated Soviet Ukraine in 1932-33, Conquest told how Jones had gotten off a Kharkov-bound train, tramped through the broken Ukrainian countryside, and, on his return to the West, sounded the alarm about what Ukrainians now call the Holodomor (literally, to "kill by hunger"). Conquest explained how Jones's "honorable and honest reporting" was trashed not only by Soviet officialdom, but also by Western journalists in the Soviet capital, a squalid episode discussed in more depth in *Stalin's Apologist*, a biography of Walter Duranty, the *New York Times*'s

Gareth Jones
Eyewitness to the Holodomor
by Ray Gamache
Welsh Academic Press, 266 pp., $84.50

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gareth Jones

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Pulitzer Prize-winning correspondent in Moscow.

Duranty, whose relationship with the Stalin regime fueled a very well-paid career, took the lead in discrediting Jones. Claims of famine were "exaggeration" or, worse, "malignant propaganda." Jones hit back, but to little avail. With just two years of life remaining to him, the path for his descent into historical oblivion was set. As for those three, four, five, maybe more, million deaths—well, so far as the West was concerned, nothing on that scale had happened. Sure, *something* bad had taken place, but to borrow Duranty's term, there's no omelet without breaking eggs; that's how it goes.

It says something about the extent to which the Ukrainian genocide had been erased from Western memory that when Colley went through her uncle's notebooks—the scribbled source material for the best English-language eyewitness reports of the famine—what caught her eye most (admittedly it had long been the source of family speculation) were later sections relating to what would ultimately be his murder in Manchuria. That was the topic that became the subject of Colley's first book, *Gareth Jones—A Manchukuo Incident* (2001), a privately published volume in which only a page or two was reserved for Ukraine.

Times change. The reappearance of Gareth Jones was accelerated by the determination of many Ukrainians—free at last from imposed Soviet silence—to understand their own history. The investigation of a family tragedy broadened into an effort, helped by supportive members of the Ukrainian diaspora, to rediscover a journalist whose long-forgotten writing could be used to shape this newly independent nation's sense of self and, more specifically, to help pull it away from Russia's grip. It is no coincidence that Gareth Jones was posthumously awarded Ukraine's Order of Merit at a time when Viktor Yushchenko, the most pro-Western of Ukraine's presidents up until now, was in charge.

By then, Siriol Colley had written *More Than a Grain of Truth* (2005), a biography (again self-published) of her uncle, offering a fuller portrait of a man who was a blend of Zelig—on a plane with Adolf Hitler, at San Simeon with William Randolph Hearst, you name it—and Cassandra, warning of nightmares to come. Meanwhile, a website (Garethjones.org) developed by Colley's son Nigel had evolved into an invaluable online resource for anyone wanting to know more. Interest in Jones has continued to grow. A steady flow of stories in the British press, a documentary for the BBC, an exhibition at his old Cambridge college, and much else besides, were evidence that Jones was reentering history beyond the frontiers of Ukraine—history that (as related in the West) finally had room for the Holodomor. This shift boosted interest in Jones, but was also, in a virtuous circle, partly the product of the rediscovery of his account of that hidden genocide, an account written in accessible English rather than a Slavic tongue.

But the reemergence of Jones does not diminish the darkness that accompanied his original eclipse, a darkness that runs through *Gareth Jones: Eyewitness to the Holodomor*. Ray Gamache's work does not pretend to be a comprehensive biographical study, although it features enough helpful detail to act as a reasonable introduction to Jones's extraordinary life. And it handily knocks down a few myths along the way. To name but two, the notion of a plot by the Moscow correspondents (such as it was) should *not* be overstated. And Jones did not sneak onto that train to Kharkov (his journey had official approval); it was where he got off—in the middle of nowhere, into the middle of hell—that was unauthorized.

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Dead and dying horses on a collective farm (1934)

That said, this fine book's central focus is something more specific, a perceptive, methodical, and diligently forensic examination of the articles that Gareth Jones wrote about the Soviet Union, the circumstances in which they were written, the message they were designed to deliver, and, critically, their overall reliability. The reader is left in no doubt that this courageous, intensely moral man, an exemplar of the Welsh Nonconformist conscience at its best, saw the horrors he so meticulously chronicled in his notebooks and to which he then bore witness in his journalism: "This ruin I saw in its grim reality. . . . I saw children with swollen bellies."

This is an academic book and thus not entirely free of jargon ("journalism

texts are linguistic representations of reality") or the contemplation of topics, such as the journalistic ethics of Jones's giving food to the starving, likely to be of scant interest off-campus. That said, Gamache's shrewd, careful work gives an excellent sense of Jones's powerful analytical skills and the layers of meaning contained in his plain, unvarnished prose.

Above all, this book forcefully conveys Jones's foreboding that something wicked was headed towards the peasantry. A leftish liberal in that early-20th-century way, he had had a degree of sympathy with the professed ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution; but then, as he wrote later, "I went to Russia." And while he found things to admire in the Soviet Union, the underlying structure of its society appalled him. He saw a ruthless Communist party astride a hierarchy of which the peasantry—relics of the past who were of use, mainly, to feed the industrial proletariat—were at the bottom. With the dislocation, the fanaticism, and the failures of the first Five Year Plan becoming increasingly obvious, Jones knew who would pay the price. References to the danger of famine begin to surface in his reporting, and by October 1932, he was writing two pieces for Cardiff's *Western Mail* under the headline "Will there be soup?" In March 1933, Jones returned to the Soviet Union to find out. The rest is history.

That it took so long to be recognized as such, however, was due to more than Soviet disinformation and Walter Duranty's lies. For as dishonest and influential as that campaign by Duranty was, some of it, even on its face, did not ring quite true—not least the tortured circumlocutions with which he buttressed his denials of famine. Writing in the *New York Times*, Duranty conceded that, yes, there had been an increase in the death rate, but "not so much from actual starvation as from manifold disease due to lowered resistance."

Phraseology like that is only sufficient to fool those who wanted to be fooled, and there were plenty in the West ready to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt. Many more simply did not care. The broad outline of what was happening, if not its details, was there for anyone prepared to look. To take just a few examples, there was the reporting of Jones and a handful of others (including Malcolm Muggeridge, whose role vis-à-vis Jones was, as Gamache reminds us, a complex one); there were the stories filtering out through the diaspora; there was the relief effort being attempted by Austria's Cardinal Innitzer. But few took much interest. After all, said Duranty later, the dead were "only Russians," a faraway, alien people who didn't, apparently, count for a great deal.

And there was something else. Gamache records how the Foreign Office, which had access to good information of its own about the famine, deliberately kept quiet, worried about some British engineers then being held by the Soviets—by July 1933, all had been released—and, more broadly, about damaging Britain's relations with the USSR, a concern sharpened, Gamache suggests (perhaps too charitably), by Hitler's arrival in power earlier that year.

Looking across the Atlantic, Gamache notes, it has been argued that plans by the Roosevelt administration to extend diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union may well have led Washington to downplay the famine. In any event, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to establish formal diplomatic relations in November 1933, an event fêted with a lavish dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria, where Walter Duranty was a guest of honor. In a nod to the cuisine of the Soviet homeland, borscht, a traditional Ukrainian dish as it happens, was on the menu. That evening, at least, there was soup. ♦

B&A

An Echo of Balanchine

Janie Taylor: an appreciation.

BY SOPHIE FLACK

At the beginning of this month, New York City Ballet principal dancer Janie Taylor, one of the most captivating dancers since George Balanchine died in 1983, took her final bow along with her husband, fellow principal Sébastian Marcovici.

As it happened, Taylor concluded her career by reprising the very first principal role she ever danced in the company, the heroine seduced by Death in Balanchine's *La Valse*. Taylor and Marcovici also performed Jerome Robbins's *Afternoon of a Faun*, a rethinking of Vaslav Nijinsky's groundbreaking work for the Ballet Russes, set in a ballet studio. Taylor's 15-year career was under the leadership of Balanchine's successor, Peter Martins, but her unwavering service has been to the company's founder, Balanchine himself. Her insistence on looking back has made her one of Balanchine's greatest disciples, and Janie Taylor's departure will be a huge loss not only to the company, but to the dance world at large.

Along with energy, attack, and clarity, George Balanchine loved individualism in his dancers. Yet Taylor says her style doesn't come from trying to be different, or more like "herself," but from her unwavering dedication to Balanchine: "I sometimes say that I wish I had been born 30 years earlier," she says. While many dancers are concerned with making a ballet their own by approaching it differ-

Sophie Flack, a former dancer with the New York City Ballet, is the author of Bunheads.

ently than anyone else, Taylor says she prefers to depict Balanchine ballets the way they looked when he was creating them.

With a lofty jump, and flexible limbs and back, Taylor epitomizes Balanchine's American ideal. But while she is never afraid to take incredible risks (she can be frightening to watch), it is the inherent contradictions in her dancing that make her so appealing. She can outjump some of the men in the company, but there is also a vulnerability to her. Onstage, her near-translucent skin appears to glow from within.

At 15, Janie Taylor left her family in New Orleans to train in New York at the School of American Ballet, the feeder school for the New York City Ballet. She initially felt inferior to her classmates and wondered if she belonged in a lower level, but she was eager to learn and revered her teachers because they had worked directly with Balanchine. One in particular, Susan Pilarre, recognized Taylor's potential, and her visual teaching style spoke to Taylor. "Something that makes a good dancer is having a very clear idea of what you want to look like," Taylor says. "And [Pilarre] made those details and those shapes seem so important." In 1998, after a haunting performance of Balanchine's *Harlequinade* at the school's annual workshop performance, Taylor received the prestigious Mae L. Wien Award and was invited to become an apprentice with the New York City Ballet. She was awarded her corps contract only one month later. At the beginning of her career, Taylor would regularly perform every night, often in multiple ballets.

Taylor was never the most proficient technician in the company, and would occasionally stumble out of pirouettes. But achieving perfect technique was never her ultimate goal. "I think it's okay for someone to be a really special dancer, and they may fall down or not be as secure as someone else," she says. "But I still feel like it's worth seeing, and sometimes even more enjoyable to watch." Taylor says that when technique is overemphasized, femininity can be neglected, and that's a mistake. One of Balanchine's last ballerinas, Merrill Ashley, who was known for her stellar technique, wrote in *Dancing for Balanchine* (1984):

> Balanchine valued individuality and how ready he was to overlook shortcomings, provided he received enough in return. . . . Suzanne Farrell was his favorite and she broke the rules both on the stage and, more surprisingly, in class.

d'Amboise, says that Balanchine used to ask his dancers, "Why are you holding anything back?" In her one and only performance of *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* in 2002, Taylor seemed to have been coached by Balanchine himself. Dancing with complete abandon, she was reminiscent of another Balanchine ballerina, Patricia McBride, as she devoured space with a wonderfully springy jump while remaining

DEVIN ALBERDA

Janie Taylor leaves the stage after her last New York City Ballet performance (March 1, 2014).

A majority of Taylor's repertory is made up of Balanchine ballets, and to prepare, she requests videotapes ("the oldest thing I could get my hands on") from the company video archives. She also spends time at the Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center studying VHS tapes of the original Balanchine casts. Taylor was fortunate to participate in several filmed coaching sessions for the George Balanchine Foundation, led by former dancers including Allegra Kent and Violette Verdy, who originated roles. Taylor says their instruction was illuminating but that there are only a "small handful" of NYCB dancers today who are interested in how Balanchine ballets were originally danced; many debut principal roles without ever having seen the ballet.

One former NYCB dancer, Jacques feminine and beautiful. Taylor says she assumed she wasn't any good at the role because she was never asked to dance it again. But that performance was, by far, the greatest rendition of the ballet I've ever seen.

In 2004, Taylor performed more than at any other time in her career: She felt a little run down, but figured that some exhaustion was to be expected with her demanding schedule. She also noticed that she'd been bruising easily, but thought nothing of it. As a precaution, Taylor visited her doctor, who performed a routine blood test, and she returned to work.

Then, in the middle of rehearsal one day, the doctor called with the test results. He urged her to stop what she was doing and go immediately to the nearest emergency room. Taylor was diagnosed with idiopathic

thrombocytopenic purpura, a dangerous autoimmune disease which destroys platelets in the spleen, resulting in a dangerously low platelet count, meaning blood doesn't clot. Her doctor prescribed a steroid regimen that controlled the disease, but each four-day bout of steroids left her joints loose, making dancing extremely precarious. In the month-and-a-half between treatments, however, Taylor had her blood tested regularly and was not only able to dance, but rose to the pinnacle of her ability.

In 2005 she performed the lead role in Balanchine's *Square Dance*, a ballet that is almost technically impossible and shows the company at its most virtuosic. Taylor was coached by Merrill Ashley, who had revived the role with Balanchine in 1976, thus making her a star in the company. "Balanchine wanted a high level of energy in every movement," says Ashley in *Dancing for Balanchine*. "It made no difference whether we were moving slowly, quickly, or not at all." And you can see Ashley's instruction through the clarity of Taylor's slicing footwork. Taylor was promoted to principal dancer before her second performance, but *Square Dance* was also one of the last *allegro* ballets she would ever dance. After months of treatment, the steroids were deteriorating Taylor's body, and shortly after her promotion, she decided to have her spleen removed.

The surgery was a success, but the steroids weakened her, and her injuries were slow to heal. As a result of her illness, Taylor had to rebuild her repertory with dramatic *adagio* roles (usually reserved for more experienced ballerinas) rather than the *allegro* roles for which she'd been known. Over the next few years, Taylor debuted in Balanchine's *Davidsbündlertänze*, *Liebeslieder Waltzer*, and *La Sonnambula*, among others. The new rep forced her to explore a different side of her capabilities, and critics noticed Taylor's development.

Taylor says her approach to dance hasn't changed over the years, but she has been forced to develop her mental acuity. She can no longer afford to injure herself by continually trying to dance by trial and error: "I try to use my brain a little more now that I'm older." While other dancers perpetually run through choreography, or practice turns in succession before the curtain goes up, Taylor can be seen sitting or standing quietly by herself, looking blankly into space. But she's not in a daze; she is running the ballet through in her mind so that she'll know exactly how she will approach each step before setting foot onstage.

Janie Taylor and Nilas Martins in Balanchine's 'Square Dance' (2005)

Taylor and her husband are relocating to Los Angeles, where Marcovici will begin a new position as ballet master with Los Angeles Dance Project, where Taylor plans to take company class. She is designing the costumes for Justin Peck's new ballet for NYCB, which premieres this spring, but she has no plans to dance professionally. While there is no shortage of creative outlets for Janie Taylor, she says there is nothing she won't miss about being part of the New York City Ballet. She looks forward to a life without pain, however: "I can't remember the last time I just felt great, so that'll be a nice relief." Then she smiles to herself: "Or it'll be, like, *'Well, this hurts, but who cares? It doesn't matter!'* I think that'll be nice."♦

B&A

Why They Filmed

The Hollywood response to the challenge of war.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

It is almost unimaginable: five men past the age of 35 (one nearing 50), among the most successful and garlanded professionals in their field and at the height of their earning powers, leaving their jobs and their families to produce government propaganda. The experience was frustrating and often profoundly unsatisfying. Underequipped and trapped in layers of bureaucracy—their work mired in red tape and kept from public view for excruciatingly long periods of time by jealous pedants—they were never quite sure what they were doing. And that's when they weren't being shot at. Three of them developed what today we would call post-traumatic stress disorder; one lost his hearing.

But they had chosen to subsume themselves in the greatest national mission this country has ever known

Five Came Back
A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War
by Mark Harris
Penguin, 528 pp., $29.95

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

PAUL KOLNIK

for the highest of reasons—and, perhaps, to save themselves from the haunting notion that they had been frittering away their talents on frivolity at a time when civilization itself was at stake. It was, one of them later said, an "escape into reality."

This is the story Mark Harris tells in this wonderful new book, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War*. Imagine if, after 9/11, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Quentin Tarantino, Martin Scorsese, and George Lucas had all volunteered for military service to film documentaries about the war on terror. In a way, that is what happened at the outset of World War II.

John Ford, who had won three Oscars in six years for directing, was already an officer in the Naval Reserve and was called up to active duty immediately after Pearl Harbor. Frank Capra, the most famous director in America, became head of the Army's film unit. William Wyler, the famously meticulous helmer of *Dodsworth* (1936) and *Jezebel* (1938) and *Wuthering Heights* (1939) and *The Letter* (1940), went into the Army Air Forces. George Stevens, then considered perhaps the most inspired director of comedy in Hollywood, was part of the Army Signal Corps. So was John Huston, whose triumphant directorial debut with *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) came only months before Pearl Harbor.

The analogy to recent history is inexact, of course. The entirety of the nation wasn't mobilized in 2001 as it had been after Pearl Harbor; and even before, the America Firsters who opposed U.S. entry into World War II were already on the run. Harris offers a hilarious chronicle of the last gasp of the isolationists, a September 1941 hearing into the evils of war-promoting movies that blew up in the scowling faces of senators Burton Wheeler and Gerald Nye.

Once war broke out, the pride all five directors felt in their own self-sacrifice was mirrored in the universal respect they were accorded. Capra, tasked with making a series of national morale-boosters collectively called *Why We Fight*, won an Oscar for the first one, *Prelude to War* (1942). That year the documentary category was expanded so that Ford could win one as well, for his film on Midway; he'd win another the next year for a rabble-rouser called *December 7*. Wyler won his first Oscar in 1942 for the last film he made in Hollywood before his enlistment, a celebration of British gumption called *Mrs. Miniver*. In general, the nonfiction fare all five men produced was hailed uncritically, as though the movies were analogues to the brave soldiers and sailors fighting the war.

The commitment of the lions of American popular culture to the war effort went beyond these directors. Actors like James Stewart, Clark Gable, Henry Fonda, Mickey Rooney, Tyrone Power, and Ronald Reagan all went into active duty at the paramount moments of their careers. (Reagan did not see action because of his imperfect eyesight.) John Ford never forgave his protégé John Wayne for keeping out of the fray. The first movie Ford made after his service, the powerful *They Were Expendable* (1945), starred Wayne as a naval officer alongside Robert Montgomery, who had actually captained a PT boat on D-Day. Ford, a difficult man who always picked out a cast or crew member to abuse during the making of a picture, was vicious to Wayne: "Duke," he screamed, "can't you manage a salute that at least looks as though you've been in the service?" Montgomery, who was in every way a remarkable human being, demanded that Ford apologize to Wayne—and made Ford cry.

Perhaps the greatest and most influential of all sound-era directors, Ford found himself inventing a new visual language for documentary film as well. He accompanied Colonel James Doolittle on the first American retaliatory bombing raid on Tokyo and was there for the first great American naval victory, at Midway—and the raw, shaky, you-are-there footage he produced helped set the standard for the way the world still sees war when it is not on the battlefield.

Capra's confused efforts to create thematic propaganda from his office in Washington and Ford's efforts to bring the war home to America dominate the first half of the book. But it is in the descriptions of the travails of Wyler and Stevens that *Five Came Back* achieves its greatest power. Wyler's *The Memphis Belle* (1944), about a B-17 bombing raid, remains the best of the films Harris chronicles. Wyler crawled through the plane on his hands and knees into the bombing turret, in a plane that was "uninsulated, unpressurized, and so cold that frostbite was taking a substantial number of flyers out of the action." As Harris writes, "The gunners and navigators weren't sure what to make of the slightly rotund, bespectacled, vaguely foreign-sounding man who had no fixed position and was manning not a gun but a camera."

Two years later, filming in the belly of a B-25 over Italy as the war was winding down, Wyler went deaf.

Stevens had the worst and least productive war experience of the five—until he found himself on the scene at the liberation of Dachau. What he filmed could not be shown in American theaters; what he saw could not be unseen. He simply began recording faces, corpses, interviewing survivors. He would place reels in film cans with notations for the War Department of what was inside: "More dead bodies—closeups of their heads"; "Shot of naked prisoners shivering with the cold." It was not footage, but evidence, and eventually Stevens made two films solely to serve as part of the case for the prosecution at the Nuremberg trials.

The work produced by Wyler and Capra after the war was entirely informed by their experiences. Capra made *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), which was not recognized at the time as the transcendent work of popular culture we now know it to be. Wyler made *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), the peerless portrait of three veterans coming home after the war, and one of the four or five greatest American films.

Stevens's last film before going into the Army was a Washington-goes-to-war romance called *The More the Merrier* (1943), a sparkling and joyous piece of work. Returning home after Nuremberg, the man who had made his reputation as a cameraman for Laurel and Hardy, and at the helm of the two best Astaire and Rogers movies, never directed another comedy. ♦

"The White House on Wednesday rejected Republican arguments that a Democratic congressional candidate lost a special election in Florida due to public displeasure with President Barack Obama's signature healthcare law." **—Reuters, *March 12, 2014***

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Obama blames House defeat on Florida candidate's name

ALEX SINK LIKENED TO DEBBIE DOWNER

President tells worried Dems, 'It's not me, it's you'

BY ZACHARY A. GOLDFARB

President Obama speaks to Democratic senators with "lame" names.

On the heels of a disappointing loss for Democrats in a Florida special election, President Obama met with vulnerable House and Senate incumbents to assuage their fears that the defeat had something to do with the Affordable Care Act. "People are signing up for insurance every day," the president reminded them. "The website is working. If you like your insurance, you can keep it for another year. If you like your doctor, well, there might be other doctors you might like even more. So what's the problem?"

Instead, Obama pointed to several other factors that led to Republican David Jolly defeating Democrat Alex Sink in last week's congressional election. For instance, the seat had been in Republican hands since the Nixon administration. But the president placed most of the blame on the candidate's name. "Do you like to sink or swim?" he asked. "And remember those terrible sinkhole stories? People, cars, houses getting swallowed up by the earth!" On the other hand, "in light of all the depressing news these days, who doesn't want to feel jolly?" The president's explanation was reportedly met with silence.

"With a name like Alex Sink, you might as well vote for Debbie Downer," Obama went on. The president then looked around the Roosevelt Room, gauging electoral prospects based on names. "Mark Pryor? You might get some votes because people are reminded of Richard Pryor—funny guy. It's just a shame you aren't named Kevin Hart. That guy is hot right now." This remark seemed to have left the members confused.

"And Chris Coons? Seriously? Good luck with that," said the president with a laugh, though he tried comforting the Delaware senator by adding, "at least your name isn't

DICK SWETT CONTINUED ON A6

Obama to boycott Sochi summit despite nonrefundable deposit