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the weekly

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Veterans Aren't Victims

BY MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS

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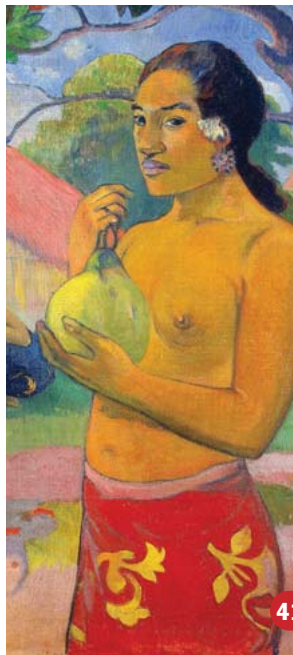
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Is That the Harry Truman Choo-Choo?

In the spirit of bipartisanship, THE SCRAPBOOK is happy to endorse the proposal—offered by the two Missouri senators, Claire McCaskill (D) and Roy Blunt (R)—to rename Washington’s Union Station for the 33rd president. If all goes as planned, the main railroad terminal in the nation’s capital will henceforth be called Harry S. Truman Union Station, which is fine with us.

If it had already been named for a famous Washingtonian—Duke Ellington, for example, or J. Edgar Hoover—we would have opposed the change on principle; but there are Union Stations all over America. And on a historic note, Truman was the last president whose campaign for election (1948) was largely conducted by train. The idea makes sense.

And for two other reasons. In 1998, when it was proposed that Congress rename Washington’s National Airport in honor of Ronald Reagan, the idea was criticized—very loudly,

in certain cases—by congressional Democrats. As it happens, the proposal easily passed the Senate (76-22) but was opposed in the House by 186 Democrats, led by the airport’s local representative, the egregious

There is one other reason as well. One of the *Washington Post’s* bumptious Metro columnists, named John Kelly, has announced his opposition to honoring Truman in this way. Kelly still resents the fact that National Airport is now called Reagan National Airport —“There’s the irony of naming an airport after the guy who broke the air traffic controller’s union. It’s like renaming Atlanta ‘Shermanville’”—and complains that Harry Truman was just one of many “other train-riding presidents.”

Well, yes—except that Washington is host to a center for the performing arts named for a president (John F. Kennedy) whose taste in literature ran to James Bond thrillers, and contains a glowering statue of Martin Luther King executed in

Maoist style by a sculptor from Red China. The idea of adding the name of President Truman to the prosaic “Union Station” seems positively inspired by comparison. ♦



Washington’s Union Station

James Moran (D-Va.). Here, now, is a chance, in THE SCRAPBOOK’s opinion, for congressional Republicans to demonstrate which party on Capitol Hill contains the grownups.

Make Your Bed!

We’ve weighed in sufficiently in recent issues on unhappy commencement activities at the nation’s universities. So here’s a change of pace: a fantastic speech, delivered by Admiral Bill McRaven. As *Navy Times* blogger David Larter reports, McRaven “is a bad-ass—and fount of good advice. Head of the U.S. Special Operations Command, he is a 36-year SEAL who has been at the tip of the spear in the war on terror since 2001. He has commanded a squadron in the fabled Naval Special Warfare Development Group, better known as SEAL Team Six, and he oversaw planning and execution of the raid that killed Osama bin Laden.”

Add to that list of accomplishments what may be the most memorable commencement address of the



season, delivered to graduates at his alma mater, the University of Texas at Austin, on May 17. Here are some of THE SCRAPBOOK’s favorite parts:

Every morning in SEAL training, my instructors, who at the time were all Vietnam veterans, would show up in my barracks room and the first thing they’d do is inspect my bed.

If you did it right, the corners would be square, the covers would be pulled tight, the pillow centered just under the headboard and the extra blanket folded neatly at the foot of the rack.

It was a simple task—mundane at best. But every morning we were required to make our bed to perfection. It seemed a little ridiculous at the time, particularly in light of the fact that we were aspiring to be real warriors, tough battle-hardened SEALs—but

ADMIRAL MCRAVEN, COURTESY UT AUSTIN; UNION STATION, NEWS.COM

the wisdom of this simple act has been proven to me many times over.

If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride, and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another.

And by the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that the little things in life matter.

If you can't do the little things right, you will never be able to do the big things right.

And, if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made—that you made—and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better.

So if you want to change the world, start off by making your bed. . . .

Several times a week, the instructors would line up the class and do a uniform inspection. It was exceptionally thorough. Your hat had to be perfectly starched, your uniform immaculately pressed and your belt buckle shiny and void of any smudges.

But it seemed that no matter how much effort you put into starching your hat, or pressing your uniform or polishing your belt buckle—it just wasn't good enough.

The instructors would find “something” wrong. For failing the uniform inspection, the student had to run, fully clothed into the surfzone and then, wet from head to toe, roll around on the beach until every part of your body was covered with sand.

The effect was known as a “sugar cookie.” You stayed in that uniform the rest of the day—cold, wet and sandy.

There were many a student who just couldn't accept the fact that all their effort was in vain. That no matter how hard they tried to get the uniform right—it was unappreciated.

Those students didn't make it through training. Those students didn't understand the purpose of the drill. You were never going to succeed. You were never going to have a perfect uniform.

Sometimes no matter how well you prepare or how well you perform you still end up as a sugar cookie.

It's just the way life is sometimes.

If you want to change the world get over being a sugar cookie and keep moving forward. ♦



Protection Racket

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was created in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis to protect Americans from predatory practices by financial institutions. That sounds like a noble goal, but asking a federal agency to police irresponsibility has almost always been a bad idea in practice. The CFPB has yet to defy our low expectations.

In March, watchdog group Judicial Watch filed a FOIA lawsuit because the agency was refusing to turn over records relating to the remodeling of the agency's Washington headquarters. The remodel started out costing an absurd \$55 million before soaring

over budget to an astronomical \$145 million. In April, the Office of the Inspector General issued a blistering report about the CFPB's Supervision, Enforcement, and Fair Lending division—the part of the agency directly responsible for launching investigations of financial institutions. The IG report detailed eight separate areas of concern, but the gist of the report is that CFPB's investigations are excessively drawn out and often carried out in disregard of the agency's own accountability measures.

Then last week, *American Banker* reported that the CFPB has made a questionable overhaul of its employee evaluation system. Employees were rated on a scale of one to five, and high-

er scores corresponded with larger pay and benefit increases. (Bear in mind, these are federal workers, so actually punishing them for poor performance evaluations was a nonstarter.) The results of the evaluations were awkward in terms of identity politics. The evaluation found that white employees received an average rating of 3.94, Asians received 3.81, Hispanics 3.69, and African Americans 3.63. Also notable was that the average for nonunion employees was 4.04, significantly higher than the 3.79 average rating for unionized employees. On the other hand, women received higher ratings than men and the agency's younger employees outperformed its older employees.

In response to these disparities, CFPB head Rob Cordray announced a novel solution: Any employee who received a 3 or 4 in the last two years will receive the same salary and benefit increases as an employee who received a 5 on the evaluation. The move will cost the agency an additional \$5 million. According to the *Washington Examiner*, Cordray explained the move to CFPB staffers saying the agency must hold itself "accountable to the same standards of fairness that we expect of our regulated entities."

If the CFPB expects America's financial institutions to reward people regardless of their performance, they are well and truly doomed. And at this rate, taxpayers are going to need a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Protection Bureau. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"The more I read the news, the more it looks to me that four words are becoming obsolete and destined to be dropped from our vocabulary. And those words are 'privacy,' 'local,' 'average' and 'later.' A lot of what drives today's news derives from the fact that privacy is over, local is over, average is over and later is over. Lord knows I have no sympathy for the Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling, but . . ." ("Four Words Going Bye-Bye," Thomas L. Friedman, *New York Times*, May 20). ♦

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Technical Difficulties

With growing amusement (and only mild alarm), my wife and I have been noticing how our parents' quirks have gotten, well, quirkier. My mother and father, for instance, steadfastly refuse to text-message. "I don't want to get charged," my mother says. And besides, "Why do you need to text when you can just call me?" Of course, this assumes she hears her flip-phone at all—it's often buried deep inside her handbag. She also has a habit of turning the phone off.

While I pay most of my bills online, the mere thought of entering credit card information on a website makes my parents uneasy. As for ATMs, "Someone can just walk up to you and take your cash!" my mother warns. Instead, she prefers going to her bank and waiting in line for the next available teller. Those cash machines just plain scare her.

My in-laws, meanwhile, have an LCD television in their living room and pay for high-definition channels. Yet I've never seen them watch anything HD on this flat-screen. "I can never remember those channels," my mother-in-law complains. They end up watching letter-boxed programs but zoom in to get rid of those pesky black bars.

There was a time, however, when my parents were downright cutting-edge. Among our friends, our family was one of the first to purchase a VCR. This was back in the early 1980s, and the state-of-the-art videocassette-recorder we acquired was an RCA Selectavision 650. According to a commercial preserved on YouTube, this model boasted "a maximum 6 hours' recording time, an unsurpassed 14-day memory, and remote control special

effects like slow motion, picture search, and stop action."

But at some point my parents could no longer keep up with the technology. "Everything just happens too fast," an older colleague explains. "You've got no choice but to slow your game down" in order to succeed at a few tasks.

Now, to be fair, my parents have caught up in some respects. They



do use an iPad and keep in touch with relatives on Facebook (and play hours of Candy Crush). Likewise, my mother-in-law just bought her first smartphone. One day she and my father-in-law may even watch programs in high definition.

"You wait," my wife tells me. "One day our children will be making fun of us." But I have my doubts. After all, I still do my best to keep current. For example, I recently upgraded my smartphone to an iPhone 4s, although this prompted a former colleague to respond, "They still make those?"

When asked if I've been watching *Game of Thrones*, I confess I canceled HBO after *The Sopranos* ended in 2007. But we do have Netflix. "So what did you think about that insane first episode of *House of Cards*?" another asks. At which point I explain we are still a Netflix-by-mail household: We receive an actual disc in our mailbox. When we're done, we mail it back, and a few

days later another movie arrives—but the second season of *House of Cards* is still not available in this format. "Why don't you just use Netflix streaming?" friends ask.

Stream what? Apparently I can access movies on the Internet through my Blu-ray player. Except I do not own a Blu-ray player.

My wife and I only recently finished viewing *The Wire*, which ended in 2008. One of these years we'll finally find out why there was so much fuss about that show *Breaking Bad*. (I am suddenly reminded of the *Onion* headline "Aliens Mourn As Final *Cheers* Episode Reaches Alpha Centauri.")

A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* examined a new smartphone app called Venmo. As *Journal* columnist Joanna Stern explained, "I pulled up the payment-exchange app on my iPhone, punched in my debit-card number and typed in a quick 'To Julie, \$286 for such a fun weekend' and hit send.

Even before I had returned home to begin the recovery process, the money was in her Venmo account, ready to be cashed out into her bank account, or used for another payment." I can't imagine ever doing this.

Meanwhile, the Chop't Creative Salad Company has begun to replace its loyalty card with a smartphone app. So rather than having your card scanned with every purchase (enough visits will earn you a free drink, a cookie, and even a salad), you simply scan your phone. But there's a catch—you must also pay using your phone. So I haven't been there since the changeover because paying by phone (and using it for scanning) is something I just don't do—I even avoid using my debit card unless I'm withdrawing cash from an ATM run by my bank.

Using my phone instead of my wallet? That just plain scares me.

VICTORINO MATUS

Waiting for the Wave

If you've been around for a while, you know what it feels like to be in the middle of a congressional "wave" election, when the electorate is turning sharply against the party in the White House. If the wave is with you—think 1994 or 2010—you can feel the energy and sense the anticipation. If the wave is against you—think 2006—you can feel the disillusionment and sense the dread.

Democrats may well feel disillusionment and even dread this year. But we can't say we're overwhelmed by any Republican sense of energy and anticipation. Perhaps we've just become insensate and jaded. Or perhaps we've been reading too much history. Because history suggests you get only one wave election per two-term presidency: 1958 for Ike, 1966 for Kennedy-Johnson, 1974 for Nixon-Ford, 1986 for Reagan, 1994 for Clinton, 2006 for Bush, 2010 for Obama. We rode our wave in 2010. To get to do so again in 2014 would be fun—but unprecedented.

This doesn't mean 2014 won't be a good election for Republicans and conservatives. It should be. The Senate map is favorable, the Republican candidates are impressive, and Obama's approval rating and the congressional generic ballot are consistent with a good Republican showing. But it's also worth noting that Obama's approval rating—which reversed over the course of 2013 from about 53 positive and 42 negative to 42 positive and 53 negative—has stabilized. Indeed, his rating has ticked up a bit in 2014—it's now at 44 approval and 51 disapproval. And the generic congressional ballot, which moved in a Republican direction during 2013—from about +7 Democratic to even, has stayed even in 2014.

So the good news is the GOP has more or less held onto its gains—or to Obama's losses—from 2013. The bad news is that momentum has stalled.

There may not be much to do about that. We'd like to see more energetic action by the Republican leadership in Congress, both in taking on the Obama administration and

in advancing a positive, populist conservative policy agenda. We think it would help. But we don't expect to see it.

Thus to the degree Republicans in Washington can create a favorable environment for candidates, it will be up to backbench legislators to do the heavy lifting. They'll have to take the lead in explaining the Republican alternative to Obamacare while also taking on the insurance companies' Obamacare slush fund. Backbenchers (or rogue committee chairs) will have to agitate for getting rid of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, saving community banks (though not necessarily Wall Street) from the burdens of Dodd-Frank, pushing pro-labor, pro-middle-class, pro-family tax reforms (reducing the payroll tax should probably be a high priority), and strengthening the military. Such legislation won't pass the Senate in 2014. Some of it may not even pass the House. But having such debates in D.C. might help candidates around the country. And the more these arguments are engaged in 2014, the better shape a Republican Congress would be in to advance a serious and bold governing agenda in 2015.

Still: The basic fact of 2014 is that GOP candidates are going to have to earn their victories. They can't simply dog-paddle in place, or sit on their surfboards, waiting for the wave to sweep them to triumph. They'll have to make the case for themselves and against their opponents, and will have to explain what policies they'll advance in Congress that would improve the status quo.

Such efforts would provide a good example for the 2016 presidential candidates. Obama rode in on the waves of 2006 and 2008. Partly as a result, he was utterly unprepared to govern, and had engaged in no real rethinking of liberal policy nostrums and pieties. Reagan ran for president in 1980 following an adequate but non-wave-like Republican showing in 1978 (the GOP gained 15 seats in the House and 3 in the Senate, despite starting from extremely low, post-1974 levels). Reagan had to make his own way. He had no wave to ride.



Republicans have taken to extolling earned success. Maybe they should stop hoping to hitch a ride to success on an unearned wave. Maybe they should go forth and achieve victory by deserving it.

—William Kristol

Failures Galore

Last month the president of the Syrian Opposition Coalition went to the White House. Ahmad Jarba and the Syrian rebels want American weapons, in particular the shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles that might neutralize Bashar al-Assad's air force and stop it from dropping barrel bombs loaded with chlorine gas canisters. What Jarba got instead was a handshake and platitudes.

National Security Adviser Susan Rice hosted the meeting and Obama arranged to drop in later, a sure sign that the guest is, at best, of secondary importance. There was no photo of Jarba meeting the president. The administration doesn't want to give the rebels the missiles they seek, and it certainly doesn't want to give a platform to anyone with evidence of the regime's continued use of chemical weapons. After all, if Assad is still using his unconventional arsenal, then the White House's vaunted diplomatic initiative with Russia to rid the regime of chemical weapons is simply another foreign policy failure in a long series stretching back to Obama's first days in office.

While the administration's handling of Benghazi and Crimea leads the news these days, it's worth remembering some of Obama's early miscues. The White House beat up on Israel right out of the gate and still failed at the Palestinian-Israeli peace process that the president believed, wrongly, was key to Middle East stability. In failing to support the Green Movement in the wake of Iran's likely fraudulent June 2009 elections, Obama missed an opportunity to destabilize the clerical regime in Tehran. In the fall of 2009, the administration cashiered a missile defense agreement with NATO allies Poland and the Czech Republic, lest Moscow spurn Obama's desire for a reset with Russia. Obama promised Putin more "flexibility" after his 2012 reelection, and the former KGB officer and judo expert took him at his word and tied him up like a pretzel: In the face of the administration's feeble complaints, Putin continued to back Assad, gave refuge to the treacherous Edward Snowden, and ran roughshod over the sovereignty of Russia's neighbors.

Given Obama's record, it's no wonder that Congress is wary of the White House's talks with Iran over its nuclear weapons program. Last week, Republican senator Bob Corker pushed for legislation that would give

Congress some say in any final deal the administration makes with the clerical regime. Democrats nixed Corker's effort, but it seems they're on the wrong side of public opinion. According to a new poll released by the Israel Project, a nonpartisan educational organization, 69 percent of likely voters support congressional oversight of a nuclear deal with Iran.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom pushed by the Obama administration and its press surrogates, American voters care about the U.S. role in the world and how we are perceived abroad, by our allies as well as by our adversaries. According to the Israel Project poll, 58 percent of likely voters believe that foreign policy is either the top priority, or among the top. The number is even higher among Tea Party supporters, often labeled isolationists, at 65 percent. The issue is that the White House seems not to have a foreign policy in the traditional sense, a worldview that prioritizes strategic threats, like the Iranian nuclear weapons program. Instead, as former State Department senior adviser and expert on jihadist movements William McCants said recently, "It seems we are back to counterterrorism as a guiding focus for American policy."

In other words, for the White House the big problem, practically the only problem, is transnational terrorist organizations. What's most worrisome about the Syrian conflict, wrote White House sounding-board David Ignatius, isn't the tens of thousands of Iranian allies and assets, from Hezbollah to Iraqi Shiite militias, fighting on behalf of Assad, but rather the Sunni jihadist group the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). According to Ignatius, "One veteran U.S. official views the terrorist threat coming out of Syria and Iraq as potentially the most worrying development in the Middle East since the late 1970s."

And this, says the administration, is what Ahmad Jarba and the Syrian opposition should be focusing on—not Assad and his Iranian allies, but Sunni radicals. The White House released a statement after the meeting with Jarba explaining that they "discussed the risks posed by growing extremism in Syria and agreed on the need to counter terrorist groups on all sides of the conflict." There is no doubt that ISIS, as well as al Qaeda affiliates, is trouble for a post-Assad Syria, and may come to pose a threat to U.S. national security. However, it's useful to put that threat in context. After all, "the most worrying development" in the region from three and a half decades ago is still around, and likely a soon-to-be nuclear state sponsor of terror—the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Indeed, it may be that characterizing the White House's policy as a focus on counterterrorism is altogether too generous. Obama has made it clear he'll do nothing to topple Assad, himself a state sponsor of terror. Perhaps even more telling is that throughout the Levant, the administration has waged its counterterrorism campaign alongside terrorist groups that have American blood on their hands.

In Lebanon, the U.S. intelligence community has worked with Hezbollah to fight Sunni extremists, and in Iraq it is aligned with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, whose allies include groups like Asaib Ahl al-Haq, sponsored by Iran's Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani, in his battle with a Sunni insurgency.

Both Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq are fighting in Syria, but for the White House the only real terrorists are Sunni. That's an eccentric view, one that just happens to be shared by the Shiite regime ruling in Tehran. A policy that makes common cause with Iranian-backed terrorist groups that have killed Americans does not really deserve to be termed a counterterrorism policy. It's a policy designed not to discomfit but to satisfy Tehran. It's no wonder Americans want their elected representatives to monitor the White House's negotiations with Iran.

—Lee Smith

Democrats vs. Free Speech



Sen. Tom Udall

Looking for issues to push in this year's congressional elections, Senate Democrats are proposing a constitutional amendment that would enable government at the federal and state levels alike to heavily regulate campaign contributions and expenditures. The effort is driven by the Democrats' intense disagreement with Supreme Court decisions on campaign finance. The amendment likely will fail, as it

certainly should. As in so many areas of governance these days, liberty—here the freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment—is at stake.

The Democrats began talking up the ostensible need for a campaign finance amendment in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. There the Court held that the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting independent campaign expenditures by corporations, associations, or labor unions. Now, in a case from the current term, *McCutcheon v. FEC*, the Court has ruled, again to the Democrats' dismay, that the First Amendment prohibits restrictions on how much money an individual donor may contribute in total to all candidates or political committees.

The Democrats see *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon*, together with *Buckley v. Valeo*, the landmark 1976 case striking down restrictions on campaign expenditures, as the leading cases in a First Amendment jurisprudence that has wrongly limited the power of government to regulate campaign contributions and spending. Their amendment, drafted by New Mexico senator Tom Udall and cosponsored by 40 of his 55 Democratic (or independent) colleagues, would overrule that jurisprudence by establishing, in effect, a new Constitution for campaign finance.

Under the Udall amendment, "power to regulate the raising and spending of money" on political campaigns would lie with Congress and the states in their respective spheres. And regulatory action taken pursuant to that power would entail "setting limits" on essential matters in campaign finance: on the "amount of contributions to candidates for nomination for election to, or for election to," federal and state office, and on the "amount of funds that may be spent by, in support of, or in opposition to" such candidates.

Significantly, the Udall amendment states two rationales for "setting limits." One is "to protect the integrity of the legislative and electoral processes" against corruption. The other is "to advance the fundamental principle of political equality for all." The first rationale the Court, or at least four of its members, recognizes. The second it has explicitly refused to recognize.

The Udall amendment thus would enable Congress and the states to set limits in pursuit of an equality that its advocates have described as "a level playing field" and "equal financial resources of candidates." You get the idea: The equality is one of results. And regulations aimed at moving in that direction are easily imagined—rules designed to reduce the amount of money spent in politics or to restrict the political participation of some citizens in order to enhance the relative influence of others.

In the lead opinion in *McCutcheon*, Chief Justice John Roberts said that the equality rationale is "not an acceptable government objective." The reason it is not, he pointed out, is the First Amendment, which states that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech." And at the core of the speech that it protects is political speech, which is exercised when money is contributed to candidates or spent on campaigns. In other words, there is a constitutional right of political speech. And under the Court's cases so far, it may not be abridged except in cases of corruption.

The Udall amendment would effectively remove political speech from the speech protected by the First Amendment and relocate it in a new amendment, where it would assume the guise of a political activity to be strenuously regulated. So it is that by amending the Constitution as Udall and company propose the country would be losing a most basic freedom.

The word "freedom" actually appears in the Udall

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amendment, in Section 3, which states: “Nothing in this article shall be construed to grant Congress the power to abridge the freedom of the press.” Now, we at THE WEEKLY STANDARD are press or, to use the modern term, media, including digital. And the media enjoy “the freedom of the press,” which is provided for in the First Amendment, and the exercise of which duly affects politics and elections. Section 3, which was not present in an earlier version of the Udall amendment, is a shout-out to the media that we aren’t coming after you: an assurance to the prestige media (which leans left; see the *New York Times*) as well as to regional and local media that they would remain unregulated. Under the amendment, then, citizens who are not part of the media (and who determines who is and who isn’t?) could see what used to be their right of political speech sharply limited, while the media would carry on as before, free and undisturbed by government. How about that for a level playing field!

Majority Leader Harry Reid promises “multiple votes” on the Udall amendment. But the good news is that the measure is unlikely to go anywhere, not in the Senate this year or in any credibly imagined future. After all, two-thirds of both houses of Congress must approve an amendment, to begin with, and then three-quarters of the state legislatures must ratify it for it to be added to the Constitution.

Somehow, though, the Democrats have persuaded themselves that the amendment is worth making an issue in an election year in which they are pitching themselves as the party of equality, willing to take on the rich and powerful and reduce their influence in politics, including by limiting campaign contributions and expenditures. They are running uphill. Political speech is not a right most Americans are ready to give up.

There is, of course, another way for Senate Democrats to prevail on campaign finance, and that is to rely on the Court to change its jurisprudence. That won’t happen unless there is turnover on the Court such that a vacancy created by the departure of one of the judicial conservatives is filled by a judicial liberal, thus creating a majority that could overrule cases like *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon*, and lay down case by case a jurisprudence of equal results, perhaps even one that would require public financing of campaigns, a goal of some “reformers.” In addition to the necessary vacancy, that scenario would require a Democratic president and a Democratic Senate—both of which, of course, we have now.

Republicans would like to change that. Indeed, they must change it in order to protect the First Amendment against the Democrats’ depredations, and to thwart other assaults upon constitutional liberty.

—Terry Eastland

Ex-Im Bank: Big Opportunity for Small Businesses

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

An employer doesn’t have to be big to have the aspiration, or the opportunity, to do business on a global scale. In fact, if businesses want to grow, creating American jobs in the process, they need to find more customers—and 95% of them live beyond U.S. shores.

The Export-Import Bank of the United States—which provides loans and loan guarantees when other financing is not available—has enabled businesses of every size to reach foreign markets and customers, including a growing global middle class with rising spending power. Almost 90% of Ex-Im’s transactions have helped small and medium-size businesses export, and the overall impact on our economy has been huge. Last year alone, the bank provided financing or loan guarantees for \$34.7 billion in U.S. exports and supported more than 200,000 American jobs.

Across the country, small businesses are expanding and hiring in large part because of Ex-Im and the trade it facilitates. Maryland-based Patton Electronics, a family-owned firm started by two brothers in their parents’ garage, is now exporting its products to more than 120 countries because of a loan guarantee backed by the bank. Because Patton does the majority of its business abroad, its operations and workforce rely on the continued availability of Ex-Im-backed financing.

Some critics are wary of government financing for private enterprise, but Ex-Im has proved not only to be an effective tool for economic growth and job creation—but also a pretty good deal for U.S. taxpayers. Over its 80 years of lending history, Ex-Im financing has exposed U.S. taxpayers to very little risk, boasting a default rate lower than commercial banks. And taxpayers actually see a return on investment. Since 1990, the bank has returned \$7 billion more to U.S. coffers than it has received in government funding.

To keep this vital resource for export growth and job creation available, Congress has to reauthorize the Ex-Im Bank before its funding runs out at the end of September. Failure to do so would limit opportunity for small and medium-size businesses to expand and hire. Worse still, it would unilaterally disarm the United States in the global economy. Many of our global competitors have much more aggressive trade finance programs. If we close down the Ex-Im Bank, we’ll put billions of dollars in U.S. exports and tens of thousands of American jobs at risk while our competitors continue to heavily invest in financing.

Leaders from both sides of the aisle repeatedly—and rightly—call for a bold trade agenda. By reauthorizing the Ex-Im Bank, they’ll put their money where their mouth is—and keep an important tool in the hands of America’s job creators.



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The Frontrunner

Hillary's Democratic challengers are likely to fall short. **BY JAY COST**

Hillary Clinton is back in the news, facing questions about her health and lingering doubts about what exactly happened in the aftermath of the Benghazi terror attack. Meanwhile, some Democrats—Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont most notable among them—have been making noises about challenging Clinton for the Democratic nomination. In light of the fact that Clinton was the overwhelming frontrunner at this point in the 2008 cycle, such events cannot be overlooked. It's a fair question to ask: Is Clinton really as strong as she appears for the 2016 Democratic nod?

In a word: yes. While she's unlikely to go unchallenged, the landscape favors her overwhelmingly.

The rules of the two parties' nominations systems are virtually identical, but since their coalitions are different, the dramas play out differently. On the Republican side, voters tend to be demographically similar, and the main question is ideological, with candidates squaring off over economic, foreign, and cultural issues. On the Democratic side, there are substantial demographic differences, and the interplay of race, gender, and socioeconomic status has often been determinative.

So to get an early read on the 2016 Democratic battle, one can start by looking at the groups that make up the Democratic party. Who are they, and whom might they support? First,



the party has a substantial and growing minority population. Barack Obama's coalition in 2012 was 45 percent nonwhite, compared to 35 percent in 2008 and 27 percent for Bill Clinton in 1996. Within the nonwhite population, Latino and African-American voters have been known to back different candidates.

After that, there is the union vote. Historically, it was dominated by industrial and craft unions. Think of Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers vetoing Jimmy Byrnes for the vice presidency in 1944. Nowadays, though, the service and government unions really matter, while the old-style unions are virtual nonentities.

Then there is the socially upscale, usually white liberal vote: university professors, government and nonprofit workers, college students, and so on, who are very interested in causes like abortion and environmentalism.

Next, there are a class of voters whom we might call the "Robert Rubin Democrats." Well-heeled, culturally and economically influential, their votes do not matter as much as their checkbooks.

Finally, there is the so-called white working class. Socioeconomically downscale whites have been trending Republican since the 1960s, but this bloc remains important in Democratic presidential politics, especially in the Ohio River Valley.

In the 2008 battle with Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton won Latinos and the white working class overwhelmingly. She lost black voters overwhelmingly and liberal whites by a good margin. She split the unions and the Robert Rubin Democrats. Importantly, her coalition was probably large enough to win, had she run a better campaign. Obama's victory among pledged delegates was a scant 127 out of a total of 3,424. His entire margin of victory rested upon his superior organization of low-turnout caucus states like Idaho and Maine, where Clinton's potential coalition was probably stronger. So, assuming that Team Clinton learns the rules of its own party this time around, a would-be challenger will actually have to build a bigger coalition than Obama's.

Moreover, recent polling on the race has indicated that African Americans are inclined to support Clinton in 2016. Furthermore, the moneyed party donors look pretty well unanimous. For instance, Hollywood big-shot David Geffen supported Barack Obama over Hillary Clinton in 2008, but this time around looks set to go with Clinton.

So where do the potential Clinton challengers stand in relation to the

Jay Cost is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

GARY LOCKE

Democratic electorate? Can any of them hope to cobble together a coalition that can challenge Clinton's? Let's take each in turn.

A Beltway fixture for more than 40 years, Vice President Joe Biden lacks much of an electoral bond with any Democratic constituency group. He could poach some of Clinton's white working-class vote and raise some cash from Wall Street, but it is hard to see him breaking through.

Senators Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont could both play effectively to upscale white liberals; as a woman, Warren might attract some of the voters Clinton would otherwise win for identity-based reasons. Still, both would scare the bejesus out of Wall Street, where Democrats go to subsidize their anti-Wall Street demagoguery. And it is hard to see how either would have appeal for minority voters.

Former senator Jim Webb of Virginia and former governor Brian Schweitzer of Montana might attract the white working class, but the power of Bill Clinton to appeal to these voters cannot be overestimated. It is hard, too, to see how they would win over minority voters or raise substantial sums from wealthy Democrats.

What about Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York? He might raise substantial money, but who in the Clinton coalition would bolt for him? Ditto Governor Martin O'Malley of Maryland.

That leaves two primary concerns for Team Clinton. The first is Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick. As an African American, he would be a threat to Clinton with the black vote, which would virtually guarantee a real race. And he might be able to raise substantial money; it is no coincidence that in the last 26 years, Massachusetts has supplied 3 of the 10 nonincumbent major party nominees.

The other concern for Team Clinton would be an interactive effect amongst these candidates. Suppose, for instance, that Schweitzer, Patrick, and Warren all attracted significant support from their electoral bases, at Clinton's expense. That scenario might be

chaotic, and thus jeopardize Clinton's path to the nomination. This would not be unprecedented in Democratic politics; something similar happened in 1976, 1988, and 1992, although in none of those instances was a candidate as strong a frontrunner as Clinton will probably be.

In the end, Clinton's greatest advantage might be the continued political weakness of Obama. History is not on the side of the Democrats as they try to win the White House for a third consecutive term. A party has only done so once in the postwar era—in 1988, when Ronald Reagan's job approval was in the mid-50s by Election Day. Currently, Obama's is mired in the mid-40s. Yet Clinton has a personal reputation that might

transcend Obama's unpopularity, and she polls extremely well at the moment. So long as that continues, risk-averse Democrats of all demographic stripes might be inclined to put aside their internecine battle to prevent a Republican victory, something they all equally oppose.

None of this is to claim that Clinton is an objectively strong candidate. She manifestly is not; otherwise she would be president right now. But objectivity does not matter when you are battling for the nomination. Everything is relative to where your party stands in the public mind and where you stand in relation to the other candidates seeking nomination. Right now, both of these factors conspire to make Hillary Clinton the odds-on favorite for 2016. ♦

Ready or Not . . .

Here she comes.

BY DANIEL HALPER

If you're one of the more than 132,000 Twitter followers of the Ready for Hillary super-PAC, or one of the more than one million supporters on the group's email list, you're probably aware of two things: Hillary Clinton has a new book coming out June 10, and the super-PAC held house parties last weekend to harness support for a Hillary run for president.

Hillary's book, *Hard Choices*, is reportedly a pre-presidential-campaign memoir of her State Department years. "President Obama and I knew we had a hard choice: Keep reading from the same playbook—politically safe but practically unsustainable—or tear up the old playbook and devise a new strategy," Hillary recently explained. It's widely

expected to be her 656-page blueprint for how the voters should view her time in the Obama cabinet.

That's also apparently how the super-PAC sees the book—a campaign document. It sent out an excerpt to its large email list, with links making it easy to buy the book.

But Saturday, the super-PAC took a break from book promotion to have a couple of cold ones.

"Your neighbors are getting together to talk about the movement we're building for a Hillary Clinton presidency, and you should join them," executive director Adam Parkhomenko wrote in an email to me and a million others. "Saturday is going to be so great."

It was an invitation I couldn't turn down.

The house party I attended, just outside the Beltway in Herndon, Virginia, was held at the modest home of a federal employee named Holly. I

Daniel Halper is online editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD and author of Clinton, Inc.: The Audacious Rebuilding of a Political Machine (forthcoming).

was the first to arrive, just after 6 P.M.

Holly immediately apologizes. A number of her friends have had to bail at the last minute, she says. She's unsure we'll reach critical mass and is slightly embarrassed.

That's no problem, I respond. I explain that I found the party on the Internet, after receiving several invitations from Ready for Hillary.

She graciously welcomes me, a complete stranger, into her home and her backyard, where a sizable spread is set up on one side of the small swimming pool. A half-dozen bottles of wine and a couple dozen beers and soft drinks are stationed on the other side.

Holly, who's barely under 60 and appears to live alone, explains that the point of the party, as she learned from the two-hour training session for hosts, is to gather names, addresses, and emails of supporters. Ready for Hillary wants to sell the data to the Hillary for President campaign, Holly says. (Why they can't just give it to the campaign, Holly wonders out loud. She isn't sure.)

The second guest comes at 6:15. She's the host's former next-door neighbor, who just lost her home to foreclosure. As Holly explains, she bought at the wrong time and got caught between a rising interest rate and a stagnant salary. It's a tough economy.

Eventually four others show up: a long-retired couple who used to work for the federal government and a middle-aged woman, who all go to church with Holly, and Hunter, a 25-year-old who flunked out of college, spent years delivering pizzas, and has now found his calling at the Maine Maritime Academy. He ships out for his internship on a tugboat in a couple days and admits he has no idea why we're gathering—he just wanted to see Holly, who, he says, practically raised him (she dated his father). I explain it's a rally for the Ready for

Hillary super-PAC. He shrugs and heads over to grab a cold Corona.

If all this sounds like small ball, the Ready for Hillary team is tweeting out pictures of other, grander parties inside the Beltway. The D.C. Latinas looks like a packed house.

And, more important, it's part of a much larger effort to convince unde-



The non-candidate non-campaigning in New York

cided Democrats that this time their candidate is really, truly the Inevitable One. While it was started by a few unknown wannabe politicians, these days Ready for Hillary claims to have raised over \$5.75 million from more than 55,000 donors and is backed by heavyweights. Former Clinton and Obama aide Rahm Emanuel, now mayor of Chicago, is on board. He'll do a fundraiser next month. Virginia senator Tim Kaine, an early backer of Obama, supports the cause.

One early sign-on was Craig Smith, who "is something of an adopted son" of Bill and Hillary Clinton, according to *Time* magazine. "He worked for the pair in Arkansas, was the very first hire for Bill's 1992 presidential run, followed them to the White House and then advised both the 1996 and 2008 campaigns."

His role as senior adviser to the super-PAC signaled to Clinton watchers that the group was legitimate, sanctioned by a Hillary (and Bill) intimate. Smith has said that campaign law prevents him from talking to the Clintons and their employees or otherwise coordinating with candidates. This, despite the fact that Hillary is not technically a candidate for political office.

At a private event last December at the Blessings Golf Club in Fayetteville, Arkansas, Smith told donors to the super-PAC that it would be part of a \$1.7 billion pro-Hillary effort. Just that day he had met with President Obama's 2012 campaign manager, Jim Messina, and Sean Sweeney, another former Obama aide. It was "extraordinarily helpful," Smith told the crowd.

Messina, along with President Clinton's former chief of staff John Podesta, would run the TV ads through the super-PAC Priorities USA, which ran Obama ads last go-around. "Podesta and Messina are . . . going to do \$200 million worth of TV ads," Smith said. (Within a couple

months of the meeting, Podesta would actually be back in the White House working for Obama, though it was reported he'd stay only a year, before returning to the world of super-PACs, undisclosed Democratic money, and the potential Hillary campaign.)

Smith also told the donors that the president of the abortion-rights group Emily's List, Stephanie Schriock, "just launched a \$5 million research program" to help determine how voters feel about a woman president. According to Smith, the early findings suggest people might even prefer a female candidate—except on foreign policy. Which may be why Hillary's memoir of her four years as secretary of state is being pushed so hard. The super-PAC adviser also mentioned yet another group, American Bridge PAC, that had well over a dozen researchers

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working for Hillary and against her potential Republican opponents.

Smith warned that, while his new allies had been “very helpful,” they have “their own sets of politics that they’ve got to take care of.” President Obama himself is a case in point. “The president has been very helpful,” Smith says, before making a reference to a possible 2016 bid for the White House by Vice President Joe Biden.

“We all have to be cognizant that we have a vice president of the United States,” Smith told the crowd of about 30, each reportedly contributing over \$1,000 to attend this private session. “He doesn’t want to be disrespected, and we have to be sensitive to that, or as President Obama says, ‘I have to have lunch with this guy once a week for the next three years.’”

Back in Herndon, we make awkward small talk (I mention that I work for this magazine and am called out for being a “spy”) until Holly

decides she can’t forget the reason for our gathering. She grabs a bottle of Corona to use as a faux microphone and silences us so she can speak. She starts by praising Obama, who, while not perfect, has done the best he could under the circumstances the Republicans have put him in. And, as the first black president, he’s paved the way for the first woman.

Holly passes around the Corona, and everyone timidly expresses support for Hillary. They support her not because they’re true believers, it seems, but because she is the most plausible Democratic nominee for president in 2016.

That’s a good enough reason. Politics is about winning elections, it is said, and if they believe Hillary can win, more power to them. But Hunter—who at this writing is probably out somewhere in that tugboat—offers another rationale: He can’t wait to see the shenanigans Bill Clinton will pull as first dude. The crowd (there are now nine of us) laughs. ♦

later as a theater of operations in its own right. Concerns regarding the Brotherhood’s activities—ranging from its impact on the ability of Muslims to integrate into European societies to its links with violent extremist movements—have been raised in numerous countries. Following a brief period of electoral success in the Middle East after the Arab Spring, the MB is now under attack on almost all fronts. A combination of public protests, internal repression, and wider geopolitical pressures has arguably left the MB more imperiled in the Arab world than it has been in decades. To compensate for these setbacks, the MB now seems to be seeking to expand its exploitation of Europe as a safe haven for its leaders, a financial center, recruiting ground, and forum in which to exercise political and social influence.

And London is the center. This has been all the truer since the ouster of Egypt’s elected president, Mohamed Morsi, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in July 2013. Several top MB officials from Egypt now call London home, among them MB spiritual leader Gomaa Amin and Salim Al-Awa, chief of Morsi’s defense committee and president of the MB parallel government in London.

Also in November 2013, a who’s who of international MB members gathered in London to discuss strategy. Mahmoud Ezzat, the deputy supreme guide of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, viewed by many as the group’s “iron man,” was present. The MB moved its media headquarters to London, where the English-language website Ikhwanweb.com was already based. And on March 30, 2014, a London-based, Qatari-financed newspaper, *Al-Arabi al-Jadeed*, was launched. Given all this, the urgency of determining the true nature of the MB’s presence in Europe has never been greater.

Publicly, Europe’s MB affiliates have sought to define themselves as enemies of extremism. Key leaders, however, have been consistently dogged by allegations that they

The Brotherhood in London

Why the Cameron government is concerned.

BY OLIVIER GUITTA

London
British prime minister David Cameron’s announcement on March 31 that his government would be looking into the Muslim Brotherhood’s activities in the United Kingdom and potential links to terrorism was reported around the world. Cameron has charged John Jenkins, his knowledgeable ambassador to Saudi Arabia, with heading

a review of the MB’s philosophy and activities, while MI5 and MI6, the intelligence services, will look into the MB’s potential links to terrorism. While a case can be made that the government is responding to pressure from countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, one should not discount the domestic aspect—the Muslim Brotherhood’s growing presence in the United Kingdom.

Europe has been very much the second home of the movement since the 1960s—initially as a base for exiled members of the group, and

Olivier Guitta is the director of research at the Henry Jackson Society, a think tank in London. Camelia Assen assisted in researching this article.

provide ideological and financial support for violent movements outside Europe. The MB itself may not actively encourage violence against European targets, but it does divert those it influences away from any path but Islamism. It is therefore inevitable that some who adopt the outlook of the MB will gravitate toward direct action. In light of this, the British

Brotherhood in the past five months, there were no immediate signs of Britain's succumbing to pressure. On the contrary, right after Egypt declared the MB a terrorist organization in December 2013, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was swift to come to the group's defense, stating that the Muslim Brotherhood was an "entirely legal organization" in the

billion into Harrods, \$2.3 billion into Sainsbury, \$1.7 billion into the London Stock Exchange, and over \$8.4 billion into prime London real estate.

In light of this massive commercial relationship, it was not in London's interests to anger Qatar. So why would Cameron move forward?

What is also at play and has been underappreciated in the coverage is the potential discontent of Britain's European allies, in particular France. Many European nations must have been displeased to see London becoming a major MB hub, especially at a time when even Tunisia was refusing MB leaders asylum.

Though foreign influence must have played a role in Cameron's decision, domestic considerations cannot be discounted. Yes, the MB in England has been peaceful for the past 40 years, but no one knows how the arrival of members of the global MB will affect the local Islamist scene. This is relevant to possible developments in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world, but also to concern over the large number of British citizens joining the jihad in Syria, estimated at some 700.

Another troubling development is that on April 26 al Qaeda's leader, Ayman al Zawahiri, expressed support for the incarcerated members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and called for the kidnapping of non-Muslims all over the world. Also, according to terrorism expert Aimen Dean of the Five Dimensions consulting group in Dubai, there are strong indications that the MB is supplying intelligence, information, and money to two al Qaeda-related groups in Egypt, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis and Ajnad Masr. This could spell trouble for foreign nationals and in particular Britons there.

The British government has a responsibility to ensure its citizens' safety at home and abroad. Therefore it needs to make sure that members of the MB newly arriving in Britain will not get involved in any type of violence on, or launched from, British soil. This too is what is at stake in Cameron's move. ♦

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Supporters of former Egyptian president Morsi protest in London, July 2013.

government's need to educate itself about the MB is obvious.

The security threat the MB poses to Europe is difficult to define. Certainly, the organization is not foolish enough to directly support or openly encourage attacks in Europe. While there is a lack of consensus among the European security services regarding the danger posed by the MB, any moves toward active involvement in domestic terrorism by the group would result in a level of scrutiny from the authorities that would make its day-to-day operations impossible.

So why has Cameron intensified scrutiny now? Almost every commentator offered the explanation that the United Kingdom had been pressed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. But this may be only part of the picture.

While it is true that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have banned the Muslim

United Kingdom. This is consistent with Britain's history of cozying up to Islamists since the 1970s. Indeed, the recent decision is quite a turnaround for Britain.

But assume for a moment that Saudi Arabia in particular had pushed for Cameron's inquiry. It is true that by appointing Jenkins, the sitting ambassador to a country that has banned the Brotherhood, to head part of the investigation, Cameron opened himself to criticism. But if the reason for the inquiry were actually related to commercial and financial interests, then Qatar, the largest and most vocal supporter of the Brotherhood, would also have come into the picture and would have opposed any investigation. Indeed, Qatar is one of the main foreign investors in Britain, having poured an estimated \$11 billion into Royal Dutch Shell, \$2.8 billion into Barclays Bank, \$2.5

A Performance Review

The president needs a lot of improvement.

BY FRED BARNES

The public's judgment of President Obama is that his performance in office is not so great. Nearly every opinion poll shows that more Americans disapprove of how he's doing his job than approve. Sometimes the gap between disapprove and approve is more than 10 percentage points.

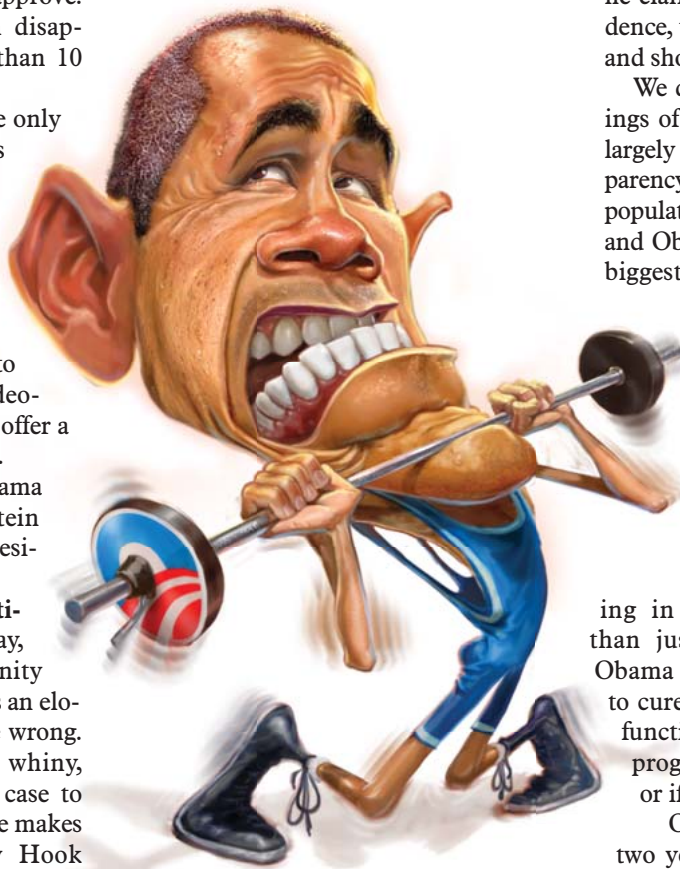
But public opinion isn't the only way to assess a president's effectiveness. In 2000, Fred Greenstein, a scholar of the presidency at Princeton, came up with six "qualities that bear on presidential performance." While they are subjective measures open to disagreement, they're nonideological, nonpartisan, and they offer a useful way to judge presidents.

So the question is: Does Obama exhibit the qualities Greenstein says are important for any president? Let's look at the six:

• **Effectiveness as a political communicator.** Even today, some in the political community and the press regard Obama as an eloquent communicator. They're wrong. He's become windy, boring, whiny, and unpersuasive. He has a case to make for his presidency, but he makes it poorly. After the Sandy Hook school massacre in 2012, he delivered a series of speeches advocating new gun control legislation. When he finished, national support for tighter restrictions on gun sales and ownership had fallen.

It's true the bully pulpit isn't what it once was as a vehicle to rally the

public. But other vehicles are available, such as the media. The problem is Obama thinks the press is puerile and annoying. Thus presidential press conferences are infrequent. When he



honored the NFL champion Seattle Seahawks at the White House last week, Obama said he was "sorry" running back Marshawn Lynch wasn't there. "I just wanted to say how much I admire his approach to the press," Obama said, prompting laughter. Lynch refuses to talk to the press.

One reason for the failure of Obama's speeches is their sameness.

He insists the public loves his current agenda (minimum wage hike, more money for infrastructure, etc.), blames Republicans for blocking it, and uses rhetorical devices such as straw men. Republicans, he said again last week at a Maryland fundraiser, don't believe "we as a community, as a country" should give people "a hand up." I don't know a single Republican with that attitude.

• **Organizational capacity.** This isn't an Obama strength either. He rarely seems to be on top of events. The VA scandal caught him by surprise. He had no idea the rollout of Obamacare might be disastrous. Now he claims, absent convincing evidence, that Obamacare is a success and shouldn't be criticized.

We don't know the inner workings of the Obama White House, largely because of its lack of transparency. But second terms are often populated by second-rate advisers, and Obama's is no exception. The biggest problem is lack of competence. And Obama has trouble firing the duds, perhaps out of fear that it would reflect badly on him.

• **Political skill.** Any politician who wins a presidential election is smart, deft, and cunning. But prevailing in Washington takes more than just those skills. In 2008, Obama assured us he knew how to cure the polarization and dysfunction that impede bipartisan progress. Turns out he didn't, or if he did, he didn't try.

Obama succeeded in his first two years, enacting Obamacare, a "stimulus," and a federal takeover of student loans. But any president would have succeeded with majorities in Congress as large as Obama had. Since then, with Republicans controlling the House, he's fared miserably.

Why is this? Is it solely the fault of Republicans? Hardly. Obama doesn't get along with those who disagree with him. In negotiations with Republicans, he lectures and grows

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

GARY LOCKE

petulant when he doesn't get his way. He lacks a knack for crafting compromises, which is another way of saying he doesn't know how to lead in strained circumstances.

- **Vision.** Obama has one. It's a left-wing vision, and it's mostly coherent. He's for raising taxes, redistributing the wealth, giving federal regulators and bureaucrats more power than they've ever dreamed of, and reducing America's sway in the world. For all his complaints about gridlock, he's achieved a good bit of this. Oh, and he wants the national political discussion to focus on race, poverty, sexism, and fairness. He's making headway on that too.

Greenstein, in his book *The Presidential Difference*, says vision "has a variety of connotations." One is the capacity to inspire, and Obama can inspire the left (but only the left). Another is a "set of overarching goals." And Obama has those. But marketing his vision to a majority of Americans—that, he hasn't mastered.

- **Cognitive style.** This is the ability to collect, analyze, absorb, and process information. From all appearances, Obama is pretty good at it. He prides himself, or at least used to, on his ability to understand both sides of any issue. Greenstein, by the way, thinks President Eisenhower's cognitive style gave him "the kind of strategic intelligence that cuts to the heart of a problem." Obama isn't quite that wise.

- **Emotional intelligence.** It's one of Obama's strengths and far more important than it sounds. Emotional problems can undermine presidential leadership. That happened in President Clinton's case, for sure. The return of Monica Lewinsky reminds us of that. Obama may golf a lot, take many vacations, and have a streak of narcissism. But emotionally impaired? I don't think so.

If you're a conservative, you may be surprised to find Obama has strengths you never suspected. Indeed, he does. But I think the six qualities for judging a president simply confirm the public's opinion of Obama: As president, he's not so good. ♦

Not Everybody Loves a Parade

Marching for and against Israel.

BY KATE HAVARD



Protest in Melbourne, Australia, 2010

New York
On a cold wet day in April, a small crowd of protesters stood outside the United Jewish Appeal-Federation headquarters in New York to oppose the inclusion of anti-Israel groups in the Celebrate Israel parade. This year is the 50th anniversary of the parade, one of the most prominent displays of American support for Israel.

On June 1, around 30,000 people are expected to march down Fifth Avenue. It is a vibrant affirmation of Jewish unity. Except when it isn't. Over the past few years, the parade has become a source of friction as pro-Israel activists have objected to the participation of groups involved with the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement. That's the pernicious global

campaign that calls for governments and businesses to wage diplomatic and economic warfare against Israel. The BDS movement speaks the language of nonviolence and human rights, but seeks Israel's destruction.

The protesters against the participation of BDS groups in the parade are led by Richard Allen, an accidental gadfly, a businessman who says he never considered political action until he joined the Manhattan Jewish Community Center (JCC) to use its gym. It's supposed to be an apolitical gathering place—Hebrew classes and bake sales and jewelry-making workshops. Instead, Allen would walk through the lobby and see groups that supported BDS setting up tables, distributing flyers, and giving lectures.

"The JCC were not just letting them debate," he says. "They were hosting them." Since the JCC runs largely on donated money, he says, "It's using

Kate Havard is a Tikvah Fellow at the Wall Street Journal in New York.

TAKVER

Jewish communal dollars to push BDS in the community. The JCC was trying to legitimize a movement that wants to delegitimize Israel.”

So Allen formed a group called JCC Watch, dedicated to calling out anti-Israel extremism that tries to pass itself off as part of the Jewish mainstream. Allen has had some successes—he’s gotten links to BDS groups, like Adalah (that’s Arabic for “Justice”) and the Mossawa Center, removed from the JCC’s website. His group has picketed events hosting supporters of the BDS movement, Roger Waters and Alice Walker, at the 92nd Street Y.

“And I haven’t seen any BDS in the lobby of the JCC lately, either,” he says. “They’ve koshered themselves up a little bit.” His next goal: get the pro-BDS groups kicked out of the Celebrate Israel parade.

Theoretically, this should be no problem. The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), the parade’s

host committee (which is funded by the UJA-Federation), says that BDS groups are not allowed to march in the parade. The thing is, JCC Watch and the parade committee disagree on what it means to be a “pro-BDS” group. The groups that have raised the hackles of Allen and his supporters are the New Israel Fund, Partners for a Progressive Israel, and B’Tselem, which insist that they are not supporters of the BDS movement. They’ll even condemn it.

But these groups have ties to groups that are full-fledged members of the BDS movement, and—here’s the sticking point—they support boycotts of Israeli products that are manufactured in the West Bank. They argue, passionately, that there’s a difference between full-on BDS and targeted boycotts of products like SodaStream, whose factory is located in an Israeli town just over the “Green Line,” or 1949 armistice line.

“We do not ourselves support the

boycotts, but we don’t exclude groups that support the boycott of settlement products from our funding,” says Naomi Paiss, the New Israel Fund’s vice president for public affairs. “It’s not our job to do that.”

“People on the hard left and the hard right both try and conflate these two for their own purposes,” she says, “but we profoundly disagree.”

The parade committee is inclined to buy this fine distinction, though they say that they themselves do not approve of any boycotts. JCC Watch says that even targeted boycotts contribute to the BDS movement.

The parade committee, which is struggling mightily to avoid the controversy, has tried to settle the issue by requiring every group marching to sign a pledge saying that they support a Jewish and democratic state of Israel. Since the global BDS movement rejects Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state, the pledge is meant to act

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Sadanand Dhume - Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and, Columnist, Wall Street Journal

Moderator

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as a de facto ban on BDS supporters.

If the New Israel Fund and the others sign the pledge, this gets them into the parade. Yet even if these far-left groups really do want to preserve Israel's Jewish identity, JCC Watch says, their methods threaten it.

They point out that the New Israel Fund was until recently a major funder of groups that were explicitly and proudly leaders of the BDS movement. Until 2011, the NIF backed a group called Coalition of Women for Peace. This organization pioneered an online database that was crucial to the development of the BDS movement. After NIF's funding was exposed, the NIF came under enormous pressure to cut them off. But by that time, the Coalition of Women for Peace was already up and running and enjoying funding from other sources.

The NIF "do some very good charitable and social work," Allen says, "but a percentage of what they do still goes to very bad things."

In an April press release, NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research organization run by Gerald Steinberg, reported that "while about 80 percent of NIF's budget goes to internal Israeli social and economic issues, the rest is problematic. . . . With the other 20 percent, the NIF has made many mistakes, providing legitimacy and funding for BDS campaigns."

"Funny, isn't it?" says Paiss. "The 20 percent that they are most concerned about funding are the ones who are most critical of the Israeli government's policy."

According to NGO Monitor, as recently as 2012, the NIF still funded Adalah (\$356,911), which calls for a new Israeli constitution that would eliminate the right of Jews to immigrate, effectively ending the country as a Jewish refuge and Jewish state.

The New Israel Fund says that Adalah's position on the status of Israel is irrelevant. "It would be ridiculous to expect Arab groups to be Zionist," Paiss says. "We do not support groups who are working to change the nature of Israel as a Jewish democratic state," she says. "That's not what Adalah does. Adalah's job is to litigate cases for

Arab civil rights. If they changed their job, their main purpose, we would no longer fund them."

Another group backed by the New Israel Fund is B'Tselem, whose U.S. branch marched in the Celebrate Israel parade last year. B'Tselem is perhaps best known as the group that helped produce the Goldstone Report, a 2009 document released by the U.N. that accused Israel of war crimes and intentionally targeting civilians in Gaza. B'Tselem was the single most frequently cited source in the report. Congress overwhelmingly condemned it,

The protesters against the participation of Boycott, Divest, and Sanction groups in New York's Celebrate Israel parade are led by Richard Allen, who says he never considered political action until he joined the Manhattan Jewish Community Center to use its gym.

and in 2011, Richard Goldstone himself retracted its claim about civilians.

B'Tselem says it doesn't support BDS but has been happy to take money from BDS groups in the past. And the kind of work B'Tselem produces—overwrought accusations in which virtually every Israeli security effort is declared a war crime or a human rights abuse—gives aid and comfort to the BDS movement, which attacks Israel's legitimacy with the same accusations.

Allen's group is not alone. He has received support from a number of other nonprofits, including the Zionist Organization of America, Americans for a Safe Israel, and the Emergency Committee for Israel. Members of the Israeli Knesset, among them Yariv Levin, the equivalent of Israel's speaker of the House, wrote a letter of support for the protest.

Criticism of Allen's group veers wildly, from eye rolls and assertions

that he is inconsequential to claims that JCC Watch will stir up so much trouble that the parade organizers will take their floats and go home, and Allen will have ruined the day for everyone.

The truth is, Allen, JCC Watch, and the parade's critics are neither inconsequential nor terribly powerful. While they are unlikely to get everything they want this year, there are signs that JCC Watch is laying the groundwork for a policy change next year.

An unnamed Israeli government official told the *Jerusalem Post* that, "due to the ongoing controversy that has now erupted, the Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs Ministry will review its funding of the parade for future years, [although] not this year."

In the meantime, B'Tselem seems to have quietly dropped out of the parade. When asked about JCC Watch by the *Jerusalem Post*, B'Tselem spokesman Sarit Michaeli was indignant, and said that her organization hadn't even signed up to be in the parade.

"I have no idea why our name keeps getting dragged into this particular row, aside from the fact that the people behind this campaign haven't bothered to look into the actual list of groups joining," she says. B'Tselem was "dragged in" to the argument because they marched last year, proudly carrying B'Tselem signs and banners.

And indeed, there's no indication that they've signed up to march in 2014. Were they unwilling to sign the pledge? Perhaps they just didn't feel like Celebrating Israel this year? It is unclear. Multiple calls to B'Tselem-USA were not returned.

Either way, Allen doesn't really see it as a victory for JCC Watch. "This is not just about a parade," he says. "What we're concerned about is these groups that are beyond the pale, covering themselves up in the Jewish community like they're just normal. They want it to be an acceptable Jewish position to boycott the state of Israel."

"I'm fine with having the left in the parade," he says. "Even the far left. We'll march together. We can even hold hands. But no BDS," Allen says. "BDS is beyond the pale. We cannot have that." ♦

Life After Wartime

Combating the Veteran-as-Victim Narrative

BY MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS

What does America owe its veterans? Perhaps the best answer to this question I have ever seen came from a young woman named Julie Ponzi—wise beyond her years—in response to a review I had written of Karl Marlantes’s magnificent Vietnam war novel, *Matterhorn*. She observed that by providing a real understanding of war and its sacrifices, memoirs and novels such as *Matterhorn* make it possible for “our fighting men to finally get some genuine gratitude. Not sympathy or pedestals; but real gratitude. . . . Every civilian should understand that the veteran has done nothing less, and also nothing more, than what is sometimes required to maintain liberty.”

Neither sympathy nor pedestals, but gratitude: How breathtakingly simple! Alas, too many Americans see veterans as victims, a phenomenon that goes back to Vietnam. But as the highly regarded and greatly admired retired Marine general James Mattis argued in a recent speech to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, those Americans are wrong.

“You’ve been told that you’re broken,” said Mattis during the Q&A portion of his April 23 speech at the Marines’ Memorial Club in San Francisco, “that you’re damaged goods and should be labeled victims of two unjust and poorly executed wars. I don’t buy it. The truth, instead, is that you are the only folks with the skills, determination, and values to ensure American dominance in this chaotic world.

“There is no room for military people, including our veterans, to see themselves as victims even if so many of our countrymen are prone to relish that role,” he continued. “While victimhood in America is exalted, I don’t think our veterans should join those ranks.”

Mackubin Thomas Owens, a Marine infantry veteran of Vietnam, is professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College and editor of Orbis, the quarterly journal of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

One of Gen. Mattis’s targets is a major component of the veteran-as-victim narrative: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which he calls a “disease orientation” toward combat stress. As Thucydides observed, war “proves a rough master that brings most men’s characters to a level with their fortunes.” Those who have experienced it are never the same as they were before. One who has seen a comrade die or who has looked into the eyes of an enemy whom he is about to kill lest his enemy kill him is forever

transformed. But the disease orientation underlying PTSD paints the combat veteran as one who is broken and cannot be repaired, who is a threat to society and needs to be medicated, and who might explode in violence at any time.

While not denying the existence of PTSD, Gen. Mattis offers an alternative, which he calls “post-traumatic growth.” Post-traumatic growth (PTG) has echoes of Nietzsche’s aphorism from *Twilight of the Idols*: “From life’s school of war: what does not kill me makes me stronger.” In Mattis’s view, PTG describes the fact that most veterans return from war with the

potential to be stronger than before. The PTG orientation holds that what the returning veteran needs are time and support in order to actualize that potential for growth.

Karl Marlantes makes a similar argument in *What It Is Like to Go to War*, his nonfiction follow-up to *Matterhorn*. Marlantes calls war “the temple of Mars,” a “sacred space” that possesses a mystical quality for those who fight it. A major thrust of Marlantes’s argument is that modern liberal society doesn’t recognize the psychological split that war engenders in those who fight it. Killing is what soldiers do for society. But the split it creates in the soldier’s psyche is a spiritual weight that the combat veteran will carry for the rest of his life. In the HBO series *The Pacific*, the father of future Marine Eugene Sledge, a genteel Southern physician who served in World War I, tells his son that “the worst thing about treating those combat boys from the Great War was not that their flesh

The image of the veteran as victim had its genesis in the anti-Vietnam war left of the 1960s and '70s. According to this image, the Vietnam war was uniquely brutal and unjust, and it brutalized those who fought it.

had been torn, but that their souls had been torn out.”

Marlantes captures the source of this spiritual burden for the soldiers of a liberal society, writing, “War is the antithesis of the most fundamental rule of moral conduct. . . . To survive psychologically in the proximity of Mars, one has to come to terms with stepping outside of conventional moral conduct. This means coming to terms with guilt over killing and maiming other people.” But what one does or witnesses in war is properly seen as a source of strength, not victimhood.

Another veteran, my friend and colleague Dave Danelo, the author of *Blood Stripes*, invokes the mythologist Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in his own forthcoming treatment of returning veterans, *The Return: The Warrior Life After Combat* (Black Irish Books, fall 2014). Campbell held that “universal myths,” the quintessential example of which is *The Odyssey*, represent a quest for meaning, maturity, and mastery that is repeated by human beings in infinite forms.

The hero makes a journey marked by departure, adventure, and return. For Danelo, the universal myth also describes the veteran’s quest: “lifting ourselves up, finding new experiences, drawing on the old soul’s ancient wisdom, and making ourselves more useful to our families, communities,” and country.

Gen. Mattis, Marlantes, and Danelo all treat the veteran as an object of admiration and respect, not a victim. But as Mattis observes, the veteran-as-victim narrative exerts a profoundly powerful influence over the American people. It can be seen in news stories that paint veterans as overrepresented in rates of suicide, drug abuse, homelessness, and incarceration.

Such sensationalist stories inevitably portray an “epidemic” of some sort among veterans, such as the commission of murder. The implication is that veterans have been traumatized by their combat experience and are ticking time bombs who inevitably will commit mayhem against themselves or civilian society.

A particularly egregious example of this sort of journalism is a February 2013 *Washington Post* story on the “epidemic” of suicide among veterans, presumably resulting from the trauma of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. It featured a photo of a young, healthy Navy SEAL who did indeed commit suicide, though in reality the story makes clear that most of the veterans who commit suicide are over 50 with no connection to either of our recent wars.

Such stories are fundamentally flawed. Do some veterans commit suicide? Are some others afflicted by drug use, homelessness, and incarceration? Of course, but it is always necessary to compare veterans with nonveterans by age cohort, something that sensationalist reporting based on the veteran-as-victim angle habitually fails to do. When such

comparisons are made, the claim that veterans are uniquely likely to lead dysfunctional lives falls apart.

But the very number of such stories confirms Gen. Mattis’s contention that the veteran-as-victim narrative is strongly embedded in the American psyche and seems to be a constant feature of our view of veterans. However, as the old adage has it, “It’s not the things we don’t know that get us into trouble. It’s the things we know that just ain’t so!” But in order to correct the narrative, it is important to understand its origin.

‘T he country doesn’t know it yet, but it has created a monster, a monster in the form of millions of men who have been taught to deal and to trade in violence, and who are given the chance to die for the biggest nothing in history; men who have returned with a sense of anger and a sense of betrayal which no one has yet grasped.”

So testified John Kerry, before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on April 22, 1971.

The image of the veteran as victim had its genesis in the anti-Vietnam war left of the 1960s and ’70s. According to this image, the Vietnam war was uniquely brutal and unjust, and it brutalized those who fought it. At first the antiwar left vilified veterans as war criminals and baby-killers. But this approach evolved into the idea that the Vietnam veteran was a victim: He was victimized first by his country, which disproportionately sent the poor off to fight an unjust war. Then he was victimized by a military that dehumanized him and turned him into a killer, one who was dangerous to society because he could lash out at any time.

The press was complicit in perpetuating the negative stereotype of the Vietnam veteran. B.G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley’s incomparable 1998 book, *Stolen Valor*, explains how. Burkett used the Freedom of Information Act to check the actual records of the “image makers” used by reporters to flesh out their stories on homelessness, Agent Orange, suicide, drug abuse, criminality, and alcoholism. What he found was astounding. More often than not, the showcase “veterans” who cried on camera about their dead buddies, about committing or witnessing atrocities, or about some heroic action in combat that led them to their current dead end in life, were impostors. Many had never been in Vietnam, or even in the armed services. Burkett’s book stands as a rebuke to a generation of journalists who were so predisposed to believe the worst about the Vietnam veteran that they failed to do due diligence in checking the facts.

The “Vietnam vet goes berserk” angle became a staple of journalism. A watershed event in the evolution of this genre was the 1988 CBS documentary *The Wall Within*, which constituted a veritable caricature of Vietnam veterans: During

the war, they routinely committed war crimes. They came home from an immoral war traumatized, vilified, then pitied. Jobless, homeless, addicted, suicidal, they remain afflicted by inner conflicts, stranded on the fringes of society.

It was during the Vietnam war that PTSD became a major issue. While PTSD was not officially recognized as a psychiatric syndrome by the American Psychiatric Association until 1980, its foundation was laid by such anti-Vietnam war psychiatrists as Robert Jay Lifton, who claimed that the psychiatric trauma suffered by Vietnam veterans was unique. In other words, since Vietnam was worse than earlier conflicts, returning soldiers were suffering severe psychological effects specific to the war.

Vietnam also marked a related change in military psychiatry. In World War I, the psychological stress of combat went under the name of “shell shock”; in World War II, it became “combat fatigue.” In both of these conflicts, the goal of military psychiatrists was to return the soldier to combat as quickly as possible. Approaches differed, but the idea was that the traumatized soldiers should be treated as close to the front as possible. Of course, not all could be returned to combat, and many who could be had to be treated farther to the rear.

The World War II approach was nicely captured by the 1963 movie *Captain Newman, M.D.*, starring Gregory Peck, Angie Dickinson, Tony Curtis, and Bobby Darin, who received a best-supporting-actor Academy Award nomination for his role as a traumatized soldier. He is cured and returned to combat, only to be killed in action, illustrating the military psychiatrist’s dilemma.

Despite the recognition by the medical profession that psychological trauma was a reality, those suffering from such maladies were often seen as malingerers or even cowards. A case in point involved Lt. Gen. George Patton, who on two occasions slapped and berated soldiers who were patients at evacuation hospitals but without physical injuries during the Sicily campaign in 1943.

As Eric T. Dean noted in his fascinating book *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*, psychiatrists had traditionally seen their job as “salvaging” the agitated soldier and returning him to combat. But with Vietnam, psychiatry moved from a cooperative stance vis-à-vis the military to an adversarial one; the new goal was to keep soldiers from returning to combat. Dean quotes a psychiatrist who wrote:

Out of kinship with the veterans, some professionals have moved beyond therapy alone, and toward advocacy; we have entered actively into public affairs. Our goal is to give the widest publicity to the unique emotional experiences of these men; to do so, we go—together with the veterans—wherever we will be heard: conventions, war crimes hearings, churches, Congress, even abroad.

As Dean wrote, “PTSD has formed a perfect bridge between the horrors of combat in Vietnam and the supposedly widespread readjustment problems of its veterans.” Today’s PTSD disease orientation, focused on an irreparably “broken” veteran, is directly traceable to Vietnam.

The ideological basis of PTSD as a disease caused by service in Vietnam gave opponents of that war an incentive to claim that the malady was very widespread, leading to soaring estimates of the disorder’s incidence among Vietnam veterans. Indeed, some have claimed that as many as half of those who served in Vietnam suffered from the malady. This seems implausible given the fact that only about 15 percent of those who served in Vietnam took part in combat.

But the ideological predisposition to over-diagnose PTSD soon became linked to a bureaucratic one. Just as PTSD was becoming an issue after Vietnam, the Veterans Administration was facing budget cuts due to the precipitous decline in the World War II veteran population. Thus the VA had an incentive to over-diagnose PTSD in order to protect its budget. Ideology and the self-interest of bureaucrats constitute a powerful combination.

In addition, there is a conceptual problem that helps to explain some of the recent travails of the VA. Most diagnoses of PTSD fail to distinguish between the stress that most combat veterans experience in the aftermath of combat—post-traumatic stress or PTS—and a more or less permanently disabling neuropsychiatric disease—PTSD properly understood. Just about anyone who has been exposed to combat has at one time or another exhibited symptoms of PTS: hypervigilance, flashbacks, insomnia, nightmares, depression, guilt—particularly survivor’s guilt—and psychic numbing.

But most veterans prevail over their demons and, like Odysseus, return “home.” Thus as Gen. Mattis observes, the crucible of combat can lead to post-traumatic growth.



The ideological basis of PTSD as a disease caused by service in Vietnam gave opponents of the war an incentive to claim that the malady was very widespread, leading to soaring estimates.

The problem is that all too often, PTS and PTSD are conflated. This is probably one factor that has led to the current scandals afflicting the VA. Is that agency dragged down by bureaucratic inertia and incompetence, even criminal incompetence? The answer is most certainly yes (for more on this, see the excellent reporting by Mark Flatten in the *Washington Examiner*). But it is also the case that the VA is swamped by disability claims for PTSD, which—for bureaucratic and political reasons, as suggested before—is over-diagnosed.

In August 2013 President Obama acknowledged as much in a speech to disabled veterans:

The last time I was with you, I pledged to cut the backlog, slash those wait times, deliver your benefits sooner. And I'm going to be honest with you; it has not moved as fast as I wanted. Part of it is all these new veterans in the system who came in—Agent Orange, PTSD. It means a lot more claims, and despite additional resources, it's resulted in longer waits. And that's been unacceptable—unacceptable to me, unacceptable to Secretary Shinseki.



The Vietnam Veterans Memorial plaque, unveiled in 2004

Not all of these additional claims are valid, and in a bureaucratic version of Gresham's Law, bad claims of PTSD often drive out good.

The veteran-as-victim narrative has hampered efforts by those who want to distinguish between valid and invalid claims of neuropsychiatric disorder resulting from combat. Attempts to draw the distinction have often been blocked by the assumption that to question any claim of a veteran is to deny him what is his by right, reinforcing the veteran's status as a victim. The tragedy here is that unjustified claims of disability arising from the over-diagnosis of PTSD mean that less money is available to ensure that those truly suffering are receiving the care they need.

A milestone of sorts in the veteran-as-victim narrative occurred near the end of Bill Clinton's presidency, when he signed legislation authorizing a plaque near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to commemorate veterans who died after the Vietnam war of maladies attributed to Agent Orange and PTSD. According to the *New York Times*, "experts estimate that the number of veterans who died from these conditions is at least equal to the number inscribed on the wall, 58,220." There is not an ounce of scientific evidence to support this breathtaking assertion.

Worse, the addition of the plaque to the memorial reinforces the stereotype of the Vietnam war veteran as

victim. Indeed, the *Times* made the connection explicitly in its headline: "New Category of Victims at the Vietnam Memorial."

But the veterans of the Vietnam war themselves have rejected this victim narrative. In response to a comprehensive VA survey taken in 1980, 91 percent of respondents who had seen combat in Vietnam reported that they were "glad they had served their country." A healthy 80 percent disagreed with the statement that "the U.S. took advantage of me." Nearly two out of three said that they would go to Vietnam again—even knowing how the war would end.

If Vietnam veterans have largely rejected the veteran-as-victim narrative, so have the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, they also have had to make the journey of Odysseus, the return from war to peace. Iraq war veteran Danelo describes it this way:

As we return . . . we feel ourselves growing strong in our center. Like stressed vines making wine, the broken places strengthen our resolve and sweeten our spirits. Combat's magic and malevolence can never leave us, but we draw on the same places inside us as we move ahead. . . .

When we first come home . . . awareness of the fundamental truths of war and peace, appreciation of their euphoric and tragic dualities, and application of combat's virtues in routine contexts makes us masters of the universal journeys inside our hearts, minds, and spirits. Violent demons of death and depression threaten, but vibrant dreams of dynamism and destiny emerge. We engage with the constant, but not impossible struggle to direct combat's mental and emotional energy towards a civilian life that is getting more confusing and chaotic every day.

This is what Gen. Mattis means by post-traumatic growth, and it, more than the disease orientation of PTSD, describes the journey home that most veterans successfully make.

There are two images that serve as metaphors for the veteran's return from war. The first, which beautifully captures the duality of human life, is Homer's description in *The Iliad* of the Shield of Achilles, which depicts, among other things, the city at war and the city at peace. Of course Achilles, unlike most veterans, will never get to enjoy the fruits of the city at peace.

The second is a passage from Wolfram von Eschenbach's medieval epic *Parzival*, which illuminates the psychological split within the veteran engendered by war: "Shame and honor clash where the courage of a steadfast man is motley like the magpie. But such a man may yet make merry, for Heaven and Hell have equal part in him." ♦

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India à la Modi

Hope and change on the subcontinent

BY JONATHAN FOREMAN

The Indian elections that ended with a resounding victory for the Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi and an even more resounding defeat of the ruling Congress party have huge implications not just for India's potential prosperity, political evolution, and unity but also for the region and the world economy.

For most of the seven decades since independence, the Indian National Congress party—and therefore the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty—has ruled India and dominated Indian political life. The Fabian socialism, bureaucratic protectionism, and *tiers-mondiste* “nonaligned” inclinations of Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi set the tone for mainstream Indian politics for well over half a century. And that family's quasi-hereditary hold on the prime ministerial residence has been reproduced on a smaller scale in parliament, with seats that are essentially passed on from one family member to another, and in the states by hundreds of hereditary political fiefdoms.

The fact that up to a third of India's citizens still lack access to clean water or reliable electric power, that a quarter of the population is illiterate, and that the country's transport infrastructure is decades behind that of China can largely be laid at the door of the Congress party and the Gandhi family—although the country's leaders have a habit of blaming their failure to improve the population's lot on the legacy of colonialism, the restraints imposed by democratic politics, or the “foreign hand” (i.e., the malign influence of the CIA and Pakistani subversion).

It was only in 1991 after a huge balance of payments crisis and decades of feeble growth that India's leaders finally began to liberalize the economy, allow some foreign direct investment, and dismantle parts of the notoriously corrupt “License Raj,” in which permits were required for almost every form of economic activity. These reforms, as limited as they in fact were, unleashed long-suppressed entrepreneurial energies and led to a massive leap in growth and the

emergence of a new, ambitious, 300-million-strong “middle class” (characterized by owning at least one major electrical or motorized device, like a fridge or scooter).

However, the reform drive petered out in the face of opposition from the hard left, from an intellectual elite whose reflexive hostility to capitalism, “globalization,” and “neoliberalism” remains undiminished, and from business families and associations that benefit from a system founded on cronyism, connections, and monopoly. Corruption scandals, often involving government programs supposed to be “pro-poor,” have grown larger in scale and more frequent.

Partly as a result of all this, India's economic rise has stalled. Annual growth of more than 8 percent has dropped to 4 percent. These days you no longer hear nearly so much ebullient talk in New Delhi about India as a “superpower” or this being “the Indian century.” Foreign companies, many of which have fallen prey to red tape and bureaucratic protectionism, or to New Delhi's habit of retroactively imposing punitive taxes, are now much more cautious about investing in India. Millions of Indians who believed the hype about the irresistible rise of “Incredible India” feel betrayed by their rulers.

All except in one Indian state—Gujarat—where Narendra Modi has been chief minister since 2001, and where businesses, foreign and domestic, not only don't have to fear the destructive whims and ruthless predation of bureaucrats and politicians but feel positively welcome. Since Modi came to power Gujarat has become a hub for pharmaceuticals and the automobile industry and boasts the country's largest oil refinery as well as its biggest private-sector, deepwater port. It has grown much faster than India as a whole. And while India has dropped on the Fraser Institute index of economic freedom, Gujarat has gone up.

It is hard for foreigners to appreciate just how extraordinary this is without understanding how little purchase free-market ideas have had in India—and the extent to which the Indian right has tended to be as protectionist, statist, and xenophobic as the center and left. For instance, only last year Modi's party, the BJP, opposed allowing foreign direct investment in “multibrand retail,” i.e., supermarkets. (The current mom-and-pop system of distribution leads to some 30-40 percent of food produced in India being spoiled.)



Narendra Modi

Jonathan Foreman is the founding editor of a Mumbai-based magazine, The Indian Quarterly.

Of course, Modi cannot take all the credit for the economic success of his state. Gujaratis have long been known as one of India's most entrepreneurial peoples and are among the most successful ethnicities in the Indian diaspora. Moreover there have been scores of articles in the English-language Indian press claiming that Gujarat has not in fact been such a success and that its poverty indices are actually worse than those of other states. These are not *all* agitprop on behalf of a political and cultural establishment that has long loathed Modi: There is still great poverty in Gujarat, and the state's unique growth has not benefited all its citizens.

On the other hand there has been something bizarre about the inability of many mainstream Indian commentators to admit that Gujarat is obviously better governed and economically healthier than much of the rest of India. An outsider can hardly help but notice the difference between Gujarat and the rest of India within moments of crossing into the state. Most obvious is the quality of the roads, and the fact that Gujarat enjoys electric power 365 days a year, a boon painfully rare in the rest of India.

You almost wonder if the establishment's apparent blindness to Gujarat's economic superiority is somehow connected to that general complacency about poverty and degradation that so baffles foreigners visiting the subcontinent. Similarly, when Modi gets little credit from the political class for the fact that he is not personally corrupt and runs an administration that by Indian standards is remarkably efficient and honest, you wonder if the postcolonial establishment has not become deeply, cruelly complacent about graft.

That said, there are plenty of reasons why a fair-minded Indian who accepts and appreciates Modi's accomplishments in Gujarat might still be worried at the prospect of his becoming prime minister. After all, conceding that he has achieved the economic equivalent of making the trains run on time would hardly lessen the gravity of the crimes Modi has been accused of, chief among them responsibility for a horrifying 2002 massacre in his state.

Nor is it clear that Modi's party at the national level is genuinely enthusiastic about or capable of bringing the "Gujarat model" to the rest of India; since it was last in power in 2004 the BJP has arguably seemed more concerned with Hindu nationalist cultural and symbolic sectarian issues.

However, Modi's success as chief minister of Gujarat enabled the party—which in many parts of the country has proved itself to be every bit as venal and incompetent as its rivals—to campaign convincingly on a platform of administrative competence and friendliness to enterprise. And because Modi is in so many ways an outsider (and had to fight long and hard to achieve supreme power even in his own party), the BJP was able to cast itself as a party that is fighting the system on behalf of ordinary people.

That the apparent economic success and relative honesty of Modi's administration in Gujarat inspired so many Indian voters shows how desperately fed up much of the electorate is. It also suggests that India's democratic institutions may be becoming less amenable to control by a small, English-speaking, quasi-hereditary political class that has coasted for years on the prestige of having achieved independence from Britain.

Rahul Gandhi, the handsome but feckless scion of the Nehru-Gandhi clan, seemed visibly shocked by the lack of deference he encountered campaigning in traditional Congress strongholds. It was as if decades of broken promises of "*bijli, pani, sadak*" (electricity, water, roads) had finally come home to roost. Hundreds of millions of Indians, who now enjoy some access to mobile telephony, satellite TV, and the Internet, no longer accept poverty as their destiny.

Just the fact that Modi was his party's candidate represents a breach with Indian politics as usual. At 63, Modi qualifies as youthful in a system in which many powerful figures are well over 70, and is the first prime minister born after independence. He has been able to leverage his dominance of a single state into the leadership of a major national party, something that other charismatic outsiders, like the film star Jayalalithaa and the Dalit (untouchable) leader Mayawati have not succeeded in doing. Most significant of all, Modi actually comes from the people.

Modi is the largely self-educated son of a humble railroad station tea seller who comes from the Ghanchi caste of oil pressers. (The Ghanchis count as one of India's "Other Backwards Castes," an official category that entitles members to certain affirmative action benefits.) He himself sold tea from a bus station stall as a child.

Barrel-chested, bespectacled, neatly bearded, Modi doesn't look like anyone else in Indian politics. He's an equally far cry from both the gangsters and caste-activists who achieve political power in lawless districts of central India and the smooth talking political families of New Delhi. He is a traditionalist who made inspired, almost Obama-like use of social media in his campaign. He is known to be ruthless, thin-skinned, and vengeful, though probably no more a threat to a free media in India than the Congress party, which tried to clamp down on Internet freedom in 2012.

Moreover, not only has Modi *not* made a fortune as chief minister (and you can get seriously rich in Indian politics), he is famously abstemious. This has huge appeal in a culture steeped in religious asceticism, and which is heartily sick of flagrant political graft. As important as his personal rigor, Modi is celebrated for imposing his morality on the Gujarat government and making it stand out in India for its accountability, transparency, and (relative) honesty. It may help that he has no immediate family of his

own. Though married at 18 (probably not consummated), he lives alone, and for politics.

For all that, Modi is deeply controversial and inspires as much fear as hope, in particular among India's 150 million Muslims but also among those concerned with press freedom, women's rights, and human rights violations in the many Indian states where security forces are battling local insurgencies.

Observers who should understand the term better have inaccurately or at least prematurely labeled Modi a fascist. But there is no question that he and the BJP have been involved in some of the darker and more frightening events in modern Indian politics, beginning with the violent 1992 destruction in the town of Ayodhya of a celebrated 16th-century mosque that Hindu fundamentalists believed had been built on top of the birthplace of the god Ram.

Moreover, Modi is a lifelong member of the RSS (for *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, which roughly translates as "national volunteer association"), an association of Hindu militants founded in 1925 that has a distinctly paramilitary style that reflects the admiration of its founders for Europe's fascist movements. (Its members march in white shirts and khaki shorts like Boy Scouts but carry sticks and practice military drills.) It was a former RSS member who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi.

It is true that Hindu nationalist parties and politicians have been unfairly caricatured by the Indian establishment in much the same way that the American media caricature Christian evangelicals. But there is also little question that Hindu nationalist parties and politicians have been responsible for some very nasty, atavistic manifestations of intolerance in recent years.

Although Modi and his party have issues with the phrase "Hindu nationalist" and claim to be genuine secularists, they do espouse *Hindutva*, a vague but compelling ideology that combines Hindu religiosity with social conservatism and a deep sense that India's core culture has been suppressed by first Muslim and then Christian conquerors.

For them the great unsettled question about what it means to be an Indian has a simple answer: It means to be culturally if not religiously Hindu. For the postcolonial elite the answer was more complicated and had to do with Nehru's upper-class, British-educated, Bloomsbury-influenced worldview, and his obsession with Mao's Great Leap Forward.

Modi and the BJP also oppose caste and religious affirmative action policies and the existence of a separate legal code for India's Muslim citizens. For decades Congress successfully cultivated certain minorities—Muslims, *adivasi* hill tribes, *dalit* untouchables—by establishing various forms of affirmative action including "reservations" in government hiring. Arguably this led to deepening social division

and even greater inefficiency and cronyism. Modi says he believes in "a bigger pie, which would benefit everyone."

Modi himself has opposed some of the more extreme manifestations of the *Hindutva* ideology by calling for "toilets not temples" and "development not deity." On the other hand, if he carries out BJP election promises to build a temple on the Ayodhya mosque site or to bring the already tense Kashmir Valley under central control, it will be surprising if communal violence does not result.

Modi is most controversial because of his alleged role in the Ahmedabad massacres, in which more than a thousand people were killed, most of them Muslim. The violence was triggered by an incident on February 27, 2002, at a train station in the town of Godhra in Gujarat. A train carrying Hindu activists and pilgrims from a demonstration stopped at the station, where passengers got into an altercation with Muslim vendors on the platform. A Muslim mob then attacked the train, apparently in the belief that the activists had kidnapped a Muslim girl who had been helping her aged vendor father. One of the train cars then caught fire, and 59 people died. The next day, February 28, Modi called the burning an act of terrorism. Simultaneously, mobs of angry Hindus started attacking the neighborhoods of Muslims in Ahmedabad and other cities.

The savagery was eye-watering. There was mass rape, looting, arson, and murder by blade and flame. Children were forced to drink kerosene or gasoline and then set on fire so they burst like bombs. The violence continued for four days, some of it in front of the cameras of India's new 24-hour news networks. A curfew imposed after the first day of rioting seems to have gone largely unenforced by the police, and the savage attacks ended only after troops were deployed and given a "shoot to kill" order.

In general, sectarian riots in modern India tend to be orchestrated or tacitly condoned by politicians and community leaders rather than spontaneous eruptions of communal hatred of the kind that occurred towards the end of British rule. In this case the Hindu mobs of Ahmedabad had in their possession copies of the electoral rolls—which list the religion of each household—and so were able to quickly find their victims.

A Gujarat court later found the chief minister guilty of "inadequacy, inaction and negligence." Modi, who is famous for keeping a close eye on all his officials, has never apologized for the failure of the authorities to stop the riots or even expressed much regret that they took place. Nor has he responded to the claim that it was his speeches following the train fire—at one point saying that every action has a reaction, on another occasion saying that the "people of Gujarat have shown remarkable restraint after grave provocation"—that inspired some of the violence. The closest he

came to condemning the massacre was to say that he felt about the rioting as he would about the accidental running over of a puppy in the street: “If something bad happens anywhere, it is natural to be sad.”

While there is no conclusive evidence that Modi himself authorized or directed or overtly enabled the violence, and a special investigation ordered by the Indian supreme court did not find him legally culpable, his role seems analogous to that of Russian officials during the anti-Jewish pogroms under the czars. He may not have ordered or encouraged the riots, but the shocking inaction of his police force certainly ensured that they spread and took many lives. It is common knowledge in India that if a riot goes on for more than a couple of days, it must have some kind of official approval. After all, disturbances are not uncommon here, and the country’s various paramilitary security forces are large, well-armed, and well-prepared to deal with disorder—and not at all hesitant to use deadly force when they deem it necessary.

Perhaps the most infamous modern example of a riot with official approval was that of November 1984, when in the wake of Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination by her Sikh bodyguards, anti-Sikh mobs took control of Delhi and other cities and killed, raped, and burned for four days. Congress party politicians and officials led rioters into Sikh neighborhoods, openly exhorted them, and in some cases provided them weapons, including the kerosene that was used to burn victims alive. It is said that when Rajiv Gandhi was asked why the army had yet to be sent in to suppress the violence he told his interlocutor: “When a great tree falls, the earth shakes.” At least 3,000 people were killed in Delhi and some 5,000 in other cities. Over the next 30 years there were multiple, mostly bogus government investigations into the riots, but it was only in 2013 that a few relatively minor figures were actually prosecuted and convicted. This is one of the reasons why Modi supporters scoff at jeremiads about Ahmedabad from supporters of the Congress party.

There is little reason to believe that a Modi premiership will mean more pogroms. There has been no recurrence of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in the 12 years since the riots, not even after the Pakistani-sponsored terror attack on Mumbai. And while Modi has never admitted the abject failure of his government to protect Muslim citizens, he has not otherwise engaged in dangerously divisive or sectarian activity since then. Moreover his achievements in Gujarat have won him surprising support from some prominent Muslims, including various film stars and M.J. Akbar, one of the country’s leading editors. Pre-election polls showed as many as 13 percent of Muslim registered voters supporting the BJP.

There’s no question Modi campaigned as a moderate and a modernizer. His was not a divisive or rabble-rousing campaign, and it had nothing in common with the campaigns of

Hitler and Mussolini. Modi’s emphasis was on economics not enemies, internal or external, with no talk of restoring Hindu honor or avenging humiliation by Muslim and Western conquerors. And Modi is probably unique in the annals of populism, especially in India, for wanting *less* protectionism and more foreign investment.

All that said, there is always a possibility that Hindu or Muslim extremists could exploit Modi’s election as an opportunity to engage in communal violence. If that happens Modi’s claim to be a leader for all Indians will be put to the test.

Some observers think the Modi-led BJP may be more likely to achieve a workable, sustainable peace with Pakistan than Congress has been. Modi will have the advantage of a majority government that speaks with one voice. And the fact that no one in India doubts his nationalist and anti-Pakistan credentials might make it easier for him to make necessary concessions to Pakistani paranoia. Certainly the last BJP government in 1998-2004 could count among its achievements not just economic liberalization but a better relationship with Pakistan.

But these things aren’t predictable. A Modi premiership could well lead to even greater tensions between the two mutually hostile, nuclear-armed neighbors. Modi has always talked tough about Pakistan, and quite a lot of support for the BJP comes from Indians who feel that their country has been too feeble in its reaction to Pakistan’s many provocations. Many BJP voters want India to have a much more assertive or even aggressive foreign policy, as befits a regional superpower and a great civilization.

While Pakistan is not as responsible for outbreaks of ethnic separatism as the post-independence elite would like to believe, there is no question that it trains, arms, advises, and sends militants—sometimes led by its special forces—across the border into Indian-controlled Kashmir in the same way that it sponsors the Taliban in Afghanistan. In 2008, it sent terrorists to attack Mumbai. New Delhi, for its part, has long responded to Pakistan’s ceaseless sponsorship of India’s insurgents with some covert proxy warfare of its own, reportedly backing separatist rebels in Baluchistan and the MQM militants in Karachi. It is possible that Modi will order the Indian intelligence service to step up paramilitary efforts against Pakistan, especially if Islamabad engages in acts seen as provocative.

Modi may also seek to grow his country’s military and economic support of Afghanistan, a country India had close relations with until the Taliban takeover. This would fan Pakistan’s already hysterical fears of an Indian-sponsored knife at its back, increasing the likelihood of an Afghan civil war that is largely a proxy war between the countries.

Modi has had so little concrete involvement in foreign

policy that it is hard to know if his hard line on Muslim terrorism in India and what seems like a general unfriendliness to Islam will have ramifications for India's foreign relations. Will he want to or be able to maintain India's close relationship with Iran? India is now one of the Islamic Republic's biggest trading partners, and under Congress rule, New Delhi has positively relished defying American admonitions about doing business with Tehran.

India is also a consistent supporter of the Assad regime in Syria and the remaining tyrannies of the Middle East, partly on the grounds of 1970s-style Third World solidarity (India is the only big country that still takes the Non-Aligned Movement seriously). It seems unlikely that Modi will adopt a less cynical and more pro-democratic approach to the Middle East. But it will be worth watching to see if a Modi-run India might be more protective of its millions of poorer citizens who work in the Gulf states, often in brutal and appalling conditions.

In general it is not clear if Modi's undoubted deal-making skills, honed in the electoral wards and bazaars of Gujarat, will translate into international politics. His education is limited. He is uncomfortable in English. He is not well traveled. The BJP slogan of "modernization not Westernization" suggests that he might be more comfortable with foreign leaders like Shinzo Abe of Japan than with Europeans and Americans. Indeed, what Modi's prime ministership will mean for relations with Washington is a fascinating question.

Modi was barred from entering the United States in 2005 because of his alleged role in the Ahmedabad massacre. His visa was revoked under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, thanks to lobbying by an unusual coalition of evangelical Christian, Muslim, and Jewish groups, human rights organizations like Amnesty International, and Republican politicians.

Yet despite his hyperpatriotism and what he considers to be his own mistreatment by U.S. authorities, Modi and his people do not come from a milieu that is instinctively hostile to or suspicious of America. In general, the BJP has tended to be the most pro-American (and pro-Israel) of India's parties, and the financial contributions of U.S.-resident Indians to the party continue to influence its attitude to America. So it is certainly possible that his premiership could change Indian-American relations for the better.

Relations have cooled dramatically since the Bush presidency, partly because of Obama administration incompetence but mostly because of ferocious Indian reactions to perceived insults such as the arrest last year of an Indian diplomat for exploiting her servant and lying on immigration forms.

This cooling might continue if a Modi government should bring about a worsening human rights situation in

India. As it is, India's armed forces and security services enjoy almost total impunity for crimes committed in counterinsurgency operations in the several states that are wracked by rebellion. Torture, the disappearing of alleged militants, and "encounter killings"—executions disguised as shootouts—are common. Under Modi, India's vast internal security apparatus, much of it set up along Soviet lines, is likely to have an even freer hand, especially in Kashmir.

It would also be hard to imagine Indian-American relations improving if the status of women in India is seen to decline. In the recent past, BJP officials have made notoriously noxious statements about the place of women in society, even justifying rape and other violence against women in retribution for scandalous behavior such as going to bars unchaperoned. Set against these is Modi's claim that he is a law and order candidate and the relative safety of Gujarat's streets for women and even Muslims.

If Modi really were to initiate a reorientation of Indian foreign and defense policy away from implicitly anti-American "nonalignment," New Delhi would find a genuinely enthusiastic ally in America and its military. The timing is propitious for a major reconciliation given that America's imminent withdrawal from Afghanistan means Washington will no longer be so vulnerable to Pakistani blackmail concerning our main supply routes to Kabul. American policy towards Pakistan may, finally, take account of multiple betrayals by our supposed allies in Islamabad. Freed from most of the need to cultivate Pakistan (and perhaps in a state of open hostility to it), the United States would have much to offer India, and a great deal to gain from a new, formal alliance. This might include access to her superb intelligence sources in Pakistan, and the possibility of fruitful cooperation with her powerful and expanding navy—something especially useful at a time of growing tensions in Southeast Asia and increasing Chinese aggression.

In the salons of New Delhi and Mumbai, and among most of the people who went to the 10 or so private schools that almost everybody who is anybody in India attended, Modi's name has long inspired disgust and horror. For them his victory has provoked dismay, and the kind of bafflement that Pauline Kael famously expressed when Richard Nixon was first elected ("but nobody I know voted for him").

Deepak Lal, one of the most interesting writers on contemporary India, says the question about Modi is whether he is a Margaret Thatcher or an Adolf Hitler. Lal prefers to think of him as a Thatcher, but the jury is certainly out. And he could well turn out to be something in between, like a Putin. The Indian electorate deserves full credit for finally and convincingly turning out the complacent, corrupt, and incompetent Congress-led coalition, but it has gambled an astonishing amount of hope on Narendra Modi. ♦

They Had a Dream

Rule by experts comes a cropper

BY NOEMIE EMERY

They had a dream. For almost a hundred years now, the famed academic-artistic-and-punditry industrial complex has dreamed of a government run by their kind of people (i.e., nature's noblemen), whose intelligence, wit, and refined sensibilities would bring us a heaven on earth. Their keen intellects would cut through the clutter as mere mortals' couldn't. They would lift up the wretched, oppressed by cruel forces. Above all, they would counter the greed of the merchants, the limited views of the business community, and the ignorance of the conformist and dim middle class.

Out of sorts and out of office after 1828, when power passed from the Adamses to the children of burghers and immigrants, they had begun to strike back by the 1920s, led by the likes of George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, H. L. Mencken, Herbert Croly, and Sinclair Lewis. Their stock in trade was their belief in themselves, and their contempt for the way the middle class thought, lived, and made and spent money: Commerce was crude, consumption was vulgar, and industry, which employed millions and improved the lives of many more people, too gross and/or grubby for words. "For the American critics of mass culture, it was the good times of the 1920s, not the depression of the 1930s, that proved terrifying," says Fred Siegel, whose book *The Revolt Against the Masses* describes and eviscerates this group and its aspirations. In their dream world, "intellectuals, as well as poet-leaders, experts, and social scientists such as themselves would lead the regime," as Siegel tells us. "It was thus a crucial imperative to constrain the conventional and often corrupt politics of middle-class capitalists so that these far-seeing leaders might obtain the recognition and power that was only their due."

Attitudinal rather than doctrinaire in their judgments, they leaned Democratic because of their loathing of business, but they judged people largely by mores and manners, and men in both parties would earn their contempt. Harry Truman, as Siegel notes, "had triumphed not only over Republicans and business, but also over Henry Wallace and

the supporters of the Soviet Union on the left, and Strom Thurmond and the Dixiecrat segregationists of the right." Truman was also a businessman whose small men's-wear store had gone bankrupt, and for this Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., a solon whose influence would span half a century, called him "a man of mediocre and limited capacity." Schlesinger, who also complained about the "Eisenhower trance" and described the race between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter as "Babbitt vs. Elmer Gantry," would find his true soulmate in Adlai E. Stevenson, a fellow snob and two-time loser in the race for the White House, whom Michael Barone has described as "the first leading Democratic politician to become a critic rather than a celebrator of middle class American culture." Schlesinger famously fell for John Kennedy and Franklin D. Roosevelt, less for their politics, which were in the end not too different from Truman's, than for their personal glamour and aura of privilege, which set them apart from the multitude. But even those two, and their successors, fell short. Kennedy shunned Schlesinger's counsel. Bill Clinton was a wonk but also a Bubba, who never completely outgrew the Hot Springs experience. All three had middlebrow tastes when it came to the culture, sympathized with the middle class, and tried to promote and not stifle prosperity and upward mobility. And thus the elites had to wait for the man of their dreams.

When they found him, he was a rare breed: a genuine African American (his father was Kenyan) who thought and talked like the academics on both sides of his family, a product of the faculty lounge who dabbled in urban/race politics, a man who could speak to both ends of the liberals' up-and-down coalition, and a would-be transformer of our public life whose quiet voice and low-key demeanor conveyed "moderation" in all that he spoke and did. Best of all, he was the person whom the two branches of the liberal kingdom—the academics and journalists—wanted to be, a man who shared their sensibilities and their views of the good and the beautiful. This was the chance of a lifetime to shape the world to their measure. He and they were the ones they were waiting for, and with him, they longed for transcendent achievements. But in the event they were undone by the three things Siegel had pegged as their signature weaknesses: They had too much belief in the brilliance of experts, they were completely dismissive of public opinion, and they had a contempt for the great middle class.

Noemie Emery is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD and a columnist for the Washington Examiner.

From the beginning, they made it clear that the Obama regime would be different from all others that had come before. The damaged economy was the critical issue, but the creation of jobs took a back seat to boutique left-wing causes. The stimulus, costing more than a trillion dollars, came and went leaving nothing behind it, unlike the spending of FDR's era, which at least for a while gave jobs to real people, and left behind things like bridges and dams and parks. "Climate change" had become an obsession, symbolized by the refusal to act on the Keystone pipeline proposal, which would have created jobs in Middle America, but which Obama's Hollywood backers denounced as unclean.

But nothing did so much as the historic, transcendent health care proposal to contradict David Brooks's contention, in the summer of 2009, that the president "sees himself as a Burkean" and "understands complexity and the organic nature of change." Social Security had been large, but made no change in the structure of government, and the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 (signed by Bill Clinton at the Republicans' urging) was based on successful experiments at the state level conducted by governors of both parties. The Affordable Care Act looked for advice to academics, not governors, and proposed the state takeover of an industrial complex responsible for one-sixth of the gross national product based not on what had been proved to work through experience, but on what some intellectuals had guessed might work. If a camel is a horse designed by a committee, this camel was a 2,801-page non-bestseller filled with labyrinthine riddles that nobody seemed to know how to solve. To insure approximately 18 million out of 300-plus million Americans (they confessed the plan would still leave 20 million uninsured), they proposed to spend trillions on a reengineering of the entire system that would in time cause 80 to 100 million of the currently insured to lose and to seek new insurance.

"This system requires coordination of over 288 policy options . . . each with three or more levels of coverage, while simultaneously calculating beneficiary income, tax credibility, subsidy levels, deductibles, not to mention protecting applicant privacy, insuring web security and managing a host of other data points," the *New York Times's* Thomas B. Edsall informed us, adding that all this had to

be coordinated with numerous state and federal departments and public and private bureaus and agencies that were not well equipped to assist in these ventures. Apparently, the possibility that the agencies that these experts assumed would coordinate easily with the new health insurance bureaucracy and with each other would not in reality be able to do so did not occur to the experts. They planned to move millions upon millions of people from one set of doctors and networks to new ones heedless of the fact that people form relations of trust with their doctors and would resist losing them. They imposed health-insurance mandates on companies that employed 50 or more people with little consideration that this might apply



The high-water mark: Obamacare becomes law . . .

a strong brake to the expansion of businesses and move millions of people into part-time employment. They levied taxes on companies that manufactured the medical devices that improved and saved lives, with no idea this would lead to fewer inventions. They heaped new levels of regulation and paperwork onto the shoulders of doctors and hospitals, with no idea that this would lead many to think about early retirement. When the practical effects of their theories ran into the

realities of human nature, the market, and the political imperative to appease constituents, the result was a blizzard of waivers, exemptions, and extensions of deadlines. At this point, there is barely a deadline that has not been erased or extended, a rule that hasn't been excised or rewritten to make its impact less lethal, and even the most frantic of changes hasn't made the system work well.

As Edsall asked, "Is the federal government capable of managing the provision of a fundamental service through an extraordinarily complex system?" The answer is probably no, and even if it is yes, it's abundantly clear that the uber-class of super-professionals aren't the people to do it. Their faith in academics and experts had failed this new class of liberals, as would soon become obvious. Their related belief that the opinion of the less-elite classes should not be important would soon fail them, too.

Doubtless, Obama and crew had fully expected their project to be popular, owing to two tenets of liberal theory—that a crisis always makes people more open to large and expansive federal government and that people never turn away from free stuff. But

this assessment was drawn from the New Deal experience, when the crisis was much graver, government was much smaller and had more room to grow, and examples of what could occur when government became too big and expensive were not yet in anyone's mind. Even at that, FDR waited to introduce Social Security until well after the financial panic was quelled, while Obama introduced his big, expensive, and far more complex program while the crash had not yet abated.

Polls at the time showed that people resented having the emphasis switched from the economic recovery to the health care proposal, and when the details started to leak out during the spring and summer of 2009, they began to resent it still more. Over that summer, Obama's poll numbers steadily descended from the astronomical highs he had reached upon taking office, protests broke out in large public rallies, and Democrats coming from purple and red states and districts began hearing from angry voters. An FDR would most likely have pulled back a little, tried to reassure his constituents, reached out to some centrist Republicans, and crafted a bill with broader backing. But Obama was no FDR. He came from the school that maintained the country quite often didn't know its own interests. Mencken had called the people "ignorant peasants," and Stevenson, when told that "all thinking Americans" had voted for him, replied, "Yes, but I need a majority."

There would be no backing off. The Obamacare debate appeared designed to create opposition where it never existed, and provoke it where it had already occurred. The Democratic leadership bent many arms and even broke a few to push the first draft of the bill through the House, winning no votes from the Republicans while losing 34 of their own. In November, Virginia and New Jersey, which had gone for Obama by 6- and 15-point margins, elected Republican governors in vote swings of 18 and 12 points. In December, Democrats muscled the bill through the Senate as a Christmas Eve present, having spent millions to bribe their own members to defy their constituents. In January, Massachusetts, in a special election to fill the seat of Ted Kennedy, elected Scott Brown, who had run on a pledge to be "the 41st vote" against Obamacare.

With public resistance now unmistakable, Obama exploited a loophole in the Senate rules to negate the will of the country. Meanwhile, Nancy Pelosi thought it a good idea to provoke the crowds by any means possible, striding through the Capitol grounds with an enormous grin and a gavel the size of a Louisville slugger, surrounded by Black Caucus members who tried to replay the bridge scene at Selma and later charged the protesters with flinging racial slurs at them, which no one else ever seemed to have heard. Having been provoked, and

then slandered, the protesters became even more angry. It's no surprise that anger was key to the 2010 midterms, in which Democrats lost 63 House seats, and much of their chance to make any more mischief. Public opinion did count, after all.

“Sinclair Lewis’s 1920s never went away,” says Fred Siegel, citing Obama as the first American president to campaign against Main Street, in word, thought, and deed. There was “you didn’t build that!” said to every entrepreneur who imagined that his business had been his creation, and the comment on those clinging to guns and to God out of bitterness. But all that was just a prelude to the targeted attack on the middle class in his single and signature legislative creation. Last October, amid the troubled rollout of the HealthCare.gov website, some six million Americans who had purchased their plans on the individual market were stunned to find out that their plans were being canceled, and the new ones would not only cost them hundreds or thousands more but in many cases cause them to lose their own doctors and enjoy a less comprehensive level of care.

Obama had reassured them again and again that if they liked their plans and their doctors, they would be able to keep them, but this proved inaccurate. For the first time in American history the cost of a massive social program would be concentrated on a small slice of the populace that was not rich, and in some instances, could not afford it. Those costs came in many different dimensions: Parents found they could not take sick children to the same hospitals they had used before. People with complex chronic conditions found that the teams of doctors who had worked together to treat them had been broken up. For the people who had been insured through the individual market the elites had little compassion. Cancer patients who took their complaints to the press (and to the Republicans) were “fact checked” and then viciously attacked by the Democrats, among them Harry Reid, who called them all liars. “We have to pass the bill, so that you can find out what’s in it,” Nancy Pelosi infamously said. People had finally found out and they were furious.

In February 2010, in the midst of the row over Obamacare’s passage, 80 highly credentialed experts in health care, graduates of and teachers in the best schools in the country, sent an open letter to the president and the leaders of Congress insisting the bill be passed. The Affordable Care Act, they maintained, would “cover more than 30 million people who would otherwise have gone uninsured. . . . Provide financial help to make coverage for millions of working families. . . . Strengthen competition and oversight of private insurance. . . . Provide unprecedented protection for Americans living with chronic illness and

disabilities. . . . Make significant investments in community health centers, prevention, and wellness. . . . Increase financial support to states to finance expanded Medicaid insurance coverage, eliminate the Medicare prescription drug donut hole . . . provide a platform to improve the quality of the health care system . . . [and] reduce the federal budget deficit over the next ten years and beyond.”

They were not alone. “Historians will see this health care bill as a masterfully crafted piece of legislation,” wrote Jonathan Chait in the magazine *Herbert Croly* cofounded. “The new law untangles the dysfunctionalities of the individual insurance market while fulfilling the political imperative of leaving the employer-provided system in place. . . . They put into place numerous reforms to force efficiency into a wasteful system. They found hundreds of billions of dollars in payment offsets, a monumental task in itself. And they will bring economic and financial security to tens of millions of Americans who would otherwise risk seeing their lives torn apart.”

It did none of these things. It did not fix the dysfunctions of the individual market; it destroyed it. It did not save money; it squandered billions. It did not bring peace and security to tens of millions of people; it took it away from them. The best and the brightest had made their predictions. They were wrong.

Today, Obamacare is a technical mess and a public relations disaster, a bomb that has been radioactive to all who come near it. Thus far, it has terminated the careers of almost 70 national Democrats, given the Republicans control of 26 states, and brought in a new crew of GOP leaders inspired by fighting it, just when it seemed that the well had run dry. It has overwhelmed Obama’s presidency, destroyed any chance to build a center-left coalition, or to pass any other big bills. As it was four years ago, it is the central issue in the midterm elections, and the reason the Democrats may lose big again. Obama did win reelection, but it is now widely understood it was because the bill’s main provisions were designed not to go into effect until a year after that election.

Supporters of the president profess themselves

thrilled with the progress since last fall. True, Obamacare is still alive, but it is on life support—hooked up to IV drips of varied descriptions in the intensive care unit and worlds away from being that jewel in the liberal crown that they imagined in 2009, a historic achievement for which the country would be forever grateful. In Kentucky, the Democrats’ senatorial candidate and a rising star in the party celebrated her win over her primary rivals last week by blowing off her president and all of his doings, and refusing to say that she would have voted for his historic and signature act. As even the *New Republic* admitted, the

launch was “a fiasco that could haunt progressives for years to come.” Also, “Liberalism has spent the better part of the past century attempting to prove that it could competently and responsibly extend the state into new reaches of American life. With the rollout of the Affordable Care Act, the administration has badly injured that cause.” One could say also that for the better part of the past century intellectual liberals had been attempting to prove they had superior judgment, and



. . . and then the voters had their say.

that hadn’t gone too well, either. But to note that it was a setback for their belief in themselves and their wisdom might have been a little too much to expect.

But that doesn’t mean that we cannot draw some conclusions about them and their class and their kind. One is that they were perhaps not as good as they thought they were, and perhaps deserved to be not that much listened to. Another is that the people who shine in the faculty lounge ought to stay in it, that novelists have not been good judges of political horseflesh, and that if you really believe you belong to an aristocracy of the intellect, you most likely do not. The intellectual salons include a whole lot of windbags, and would have excluded a number of very effective real-world practitioners, such as Truman and Reagan and Ike.

“It is actually harder to do some of these things in reality than we thought when we put it down on paper,” a book review in the *Washington Post* quoted a former Obama health care adviser as saying. This can stand as the last word for the great aspiration, and the people who held it. They wanted their chance, and they got it. They had it. They blew it. They’re done. ♦



Hello, Beethoven

A look at the life behind the music. BY GEORGE B. STAUFFER

This new biography of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) begins by taking us to the scene of his funeral. We ascend the stairs of the Schwarzschanerhaus, just outside the city walls of Vienna, and enter a candlelit room, where we see Beethoven in his coffin, arms folded over the front of his body, a wax cross and large lily in his hands. Pallbearers solemnly close the coffin and carry it down the steps into a bright courtyard, where nine priests offer blessings and Italian court

George B. Stauffer is dean of the Mason Gross School of the Arts and distinguished professor of music history at Rutgers.

Beethoven
The Man Revealed
by John Suchet
Atlantic Monthly, 400 pp., \$30

singers intone a funeral ode as soldiers restrain an immense crowd of admiring citizens. The throng presses forward in an attempt to get closer to its departing hero, pushing tightly against the 40 torchbearers that line the route.

Vienna had never seen anything like this, we are told, and the extraordinary homage ends the final act of a life filled with paradox, contradiction, and turmoil.

Traditional biographers have not skirted the dramatic aspects of Beethoven's life, but they have kept them in the background, concentrating instead on the composer's personal growth and his creation of an unprecedented series of pathbreaking works. Like the music, these accounts have been serious affairs, beginning with Alexander Wheelock Thayer's magisterial five-volume *Ludwig van Beethovens Leben* of 1866-1908 (translated, abridged, and revised by Elliot Forbes as *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*) and continuing into modern times with Martin Cooper's insightful *Beethoven: The Last Decade, 1817-1827* (1970), Maynard Solomon's psychoanalytic *Beethoven* (1977), and

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Lewis Lockwood's Pulitzer-nominated *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* (2003).

Past writers have viewed Beethoven through the lens of his music, commonly dividing his life into four periods, defined by the evolution of specific bodies of work: his initial training in Bonn as a piano prodigy under the watchful eye of Christian Gottlob Neffe (1770-1792); his move to Vienna and his composition of ambitious but mostly conventional pieces up to the Second Symphony (1792-1802); his turn to a new "Heroic" idiom in the Third Symphony (*Eroica*), the Fifth Piano Concerto (the *Emperor*), *Fidelio*, and other innovative works (1803-1813); and a final phase marked by singular masterpieces such as the Ninth Symphony, the *Missa Solemnis*, and late quartets (1813-1827). Taken as a whole, the four phases reflect Beethoven's compositional journey from Classicism to Romanticism.

There is no sense of that development here. John Suchet, a popular commentator on the morning program of Britain's Classic FM, focuses instead on Beethoven the man. "He might have been one of the greatest artists who ever lived," Suchet states in the preface, "but he was still a man who had to live among fellow mortals, eat and drink, buy clothes, pay his rent. That is the Beethoven of this book." It certainly is—and the author takes us through the emotionally charged events of Beethoven's life with remarkable gusto, unencumbered by any serious consideration of the music. The First Symphony and *Pathétique* Sonata are dispatched in a single sentence; the *Eroica* Symphony is discussed solely from the standpoint of its ill-fated dedication. (Beethoven famously tore up the title page naming the work for Napoleon when the latter declared himself emperor of France.)

Indeed, Beethoven's erratic behavior and fiery temperament are front and center in Suchet's volume, which is organized into 20 chapters, each addressing a sensational episode in the composer's career: "My Poor Hearing Haunts Me (But there is 'a dear charming girl who loves me')"; "Two

Pistols and Gunpowder (An invitation to get away from it all)"; and so forth. The result is a narrative that reads much like a highly charged exposé from *People*, and it is easy to imagine its transformation into a screenplay, perhaps for a film directed by Bernard Rose and starring Gary Oldman in the lead role. We have before us the potential script for *Immortal Beloved II*.

But that is not necessarily a bad or inappropriate thing, for Beethoven's eccentric personality lends itself well to such an approach. *Immortal Beloved* (1994) may have embellished the story of his life here and there, but it was great fun. So is Suchet's biography.

In truth, Beethoven thrived as a strong-willed but socially adept virtuoso pianist and composer for his first 25 years or so. As he developed hearing problems in his late 20s, however, and moved toward the realization that the malady was irreversible, he began to turn inward. As he descended into deafness in his 30s and 40s, he grew increasingly mercurial, irritable, and paranoid. At times, he appeared to be fully irrational. He wrote emotional confessionals and fought with members of his family. He flirted with numerous women but was unable to sustain a lasting relationship. He moved restlessly from dwelling to dwelling, changing residences in Vienna more than 30 times in 35 years. A smart dresser in his youth, he appeared increasingly unkempt and disheveled. In his final decade, he became so dissipated that he was once mistaken for a vagabond and thrown into jail. By any measure, Beethoven's personal life was bizarre.

All this is well-documented in his diary and conversation books (in which acquaintances wrote questions that the deaf Beethoven answered verbally), his voluminous correspondence, court proceedings and printed reports, and eyewitness accounts. Anton Schindler's *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (known to English readers as *Beethoven As I Knew Him*), written and revised within 20 years of Beethoven's death, is filled with tantalizing anecdotes about the Vienna

years. Beethoven himself contributed fuel to the fire by leaving behind neatly written, carefully preserved testimonials seemingly aimed at posterity. As Suchet points out, the famous Heiligenstadt Testament, in which Beethoven describes his inner battle with deafness and declares that he will live to compose, as well as his letter to an "Immortal Beloved," in which he confesses his passion for a mysterious, unnamed woman, were thoughtfully preserved through the composer's many moves in Vienna from one dwelling to another.

The Beethovenian paradox of "crisis and creativity"—to use the phrase coined by Solomon—has been well described in the past. But no one before Suchet has focused quite so intensely, and so eagerly, on the crisis part—and the composer's melodramatic highs and lows: stopping the orchestra during an already overly long performance and insisting that the players start again from the beginning; refusing to bow before passing royalty when walking in the park with Goethe; receiving a distinguished visitor with an unemptied chamber pot under the piano. Such stories, well known to historians, are too good to make up.

Or so one thought. Suchet doesn't hesitate to embellish them further when the facts are insufficient to make a truly memorable tale. Consider his recounting of Haydn's visit to Bonn in December 1790. Haydn was traveling to London for the first performance of his symphonies at the Salomon concerts, and on a stopover in Bonn, he was treated by the elector to a surprise banquet with local musicians. Two years later, Beethoven would set off for Vienna to study with Haydn (carrying with him Count Waldstein's famous benediction: "With persistent hard work you shall receive Mozart's Spirit through Haydn's Hands"). But Beethoven's initial encounter with Haydn may have taken place at the Bonn dinner. Although there is no concrete evidence that they met in Bonn, past biographers have pondered the possibility. Suchet does not hesitate to fill in the gap: "I shall now shamelessly

indulge in speculation,” he informs us, before placing Beethoven at the event and manufacturing an exchange with Haydn that might have taken place. “I confess the conversation and that last quote are drawn from my imagination,” he admits upon finishing the story. This broad interpretation of the facts is typical of Suchet’s approach.

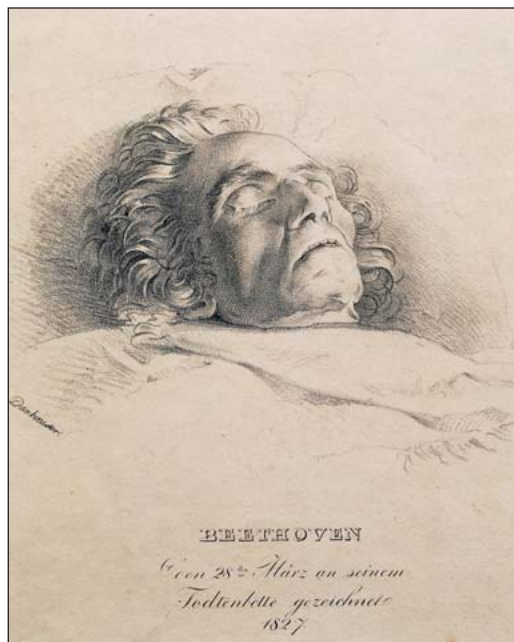
In the case of Eleonore von Breuning, or “Lorchen,” the personable young daughter of the von Breuning family to whom Beethoven gave piano lessons in Bonn, Suchet proposes not only that Beethoven fell in love with his pupil soon after commencing instruction (she was only 16 at the time) but that he attempted to put his feelings into action with an unwanted kiss. This she rejected, Suchet reasons, causing Beethoven to write her later from Vienna, apologizing for the earlier offense. The letter, containing a reference to a disagreement, exists; the physical attraction and attempted caress are pure hypothesis. “I imagine he made an ungainly lunge at her, which she rejected and which left her seriously upset,” Suchet writes, after warning us at the start that “we are in the realm of conjecture now, but I make no apologies for what follows.”

Elsewhere, Suchet recounts the celebrated row between Beethoven and his patron Prince Karl Lichnowsky. In 1806, Lichnowsky invited Beethoven and a group of French Army officers to dine together, despite the fact that Beethoven’s animosity towards the French (who were occupying Vienna at the time) was well known. In Suchet’s retelling, the officers repeatedly ask Beethoven to play the piano, which he refuses to do. When Lichnowsky joins in the pleading, Beethoven storms out of the hall, goes to his room upstairs, locks the door, and packs his things to leave. Lichnowsky follows and has servants force open the door. An angry confrontation succeeds, during which Beethoven picks up a chair and threatens to strike Lichnowsky.

At this point, the prince is persuaded

to leave, and an indignant Beethoven then pens the oft-cited remark: “Prince, what you are, you are by accident of birth. What I am, I am through myself. There have been and will always be thousands of princes. There is only one Beethoven.” Beethoven later seizes the marble bust of Lichnowsky in his Vienna apartment and smashes it to the ground. Suchet admits that there are several versions of this story, but assures us that he has chosen the most dramatic.

Rigorous Beethoven scholarship this is not. Yet, somehow, we forgive



Beethoven on his deathbed

Suchet, for if he is shameless, he is also sincere. He has most of the facts right, and he alerts us to the fabrications along the way. This is not just Beethoven revealed, but Beethoven hyped—the great anecdotes related and embellished by an enthusiastic, engaging raconteur.

The most compelling portions of Suchet’s book are the detailed discussions of the “Immortal Beloved” and Beethoven’s troubled guardianship of his nephew Karl. On the latter: When Kaspar Anton Carl van Beethoven died in 1815, he named his wife, Johanna, and his brother Ludwig as co-guardians of his 9-year-old son, Karl. This was not acceptable to Beethoven, who

sued for sole possession of the child on the grounds—fully unsupported—that Johanna was unfit to be a mother. The Landrecht, or court of the nobility, ruled in Beethoven’s favor, and he assumed Karl’s care. Three years later, Johanna appealed the case before the Magistrate, or lower court, and won Karl back. Two years after that, Beethoven appealed the case once again—and prevailed, this time not only winning Karl but obtaining an injunction against visiting rights for his mother. Thus began Beethoven’s overbearing attempt to raise his nephew as a pianist, even though the boy had neither talent nor interest in music. It also became quickly apparent that Beethoven was unsuited for parenting.

The disastrous guardianship eventually came to a head with Karl’s attempted suicide at the age of 20. Beethoven’s maliciousness towards Johanna, and his misguided treatment of his nephew, have been difficult for biographers to handle. How does one reconcile the composer of such radiant pieces as the middle movements of the *Emperor* Piano Concerto and the *Pathétique* Piano Sonata with the vengeful, slandering uncle who emerges during this ugly affair? Suchet relates the story well and gives us a good sense of the legal tangles and emotional upheaval caused by Beethoven’s actions. Of Beethoven’s perplexing relationship with Johanna, he writes:

A modern-day psychiatrist would require many sessions with Beethoven on the couch to try to get to the bottom of just why he disliked Johanna so intensely. Was it to mask a hidden desire for her? Was it more simply that he was envious of his brother’s success in finding a wife? Was it that he thought she was unworthy to carry the name “Beethoven”? We cannot know.

Suchet also presents ongoing reports regarding Beethoven’s gastrointestinal issues, which run through the book like an *idée fixe*. These begin with a description of the stomach pains and diarrhea that Beethoven experienced before his

DE AGOSTINI / GETTY IMAGES

first concert at the Burgtheater in Vienna in 1794, followed by periodic updates on his irritable bowel syndrome, bad digestion, irregularity, acute constipation, colic, distended stomach, and more. While these disorders have been noted elsewhere, they are presented in unusual detail here, so much so that one begins to wonder whether the book might have been more aptly titled *The Inner Beethoven*. This may be more information about Beethoven's bodily functions than we want to know.

Not unexpectedly, Suchet rounds out his story by taking us back to the Schwarzspanierhaus for the dramatic account of Beethoven's last moments. Late in the afternoon of March 26, 1827, as the composer's closest friends gathered in his living quarters in anticipation of the end, a violent storm arose, with driving snow and hail. It was unusual weather for early spring, and to those present it seemed to reflect the tumult of heaven as it prepared to receive the soul of the defiant composer. Beethoven had been ill and bedridden for some time, suffering from an acute deterioration of the liver. Several days earlier he had conceded to those present: "Plaudite, amici, comedia finita est" ("Applaud, my friends, the comedy is over"). Now, as the curtain was about to fall on the final act of that comedy, he rallied one last time. The pianist Anselm Hüttenbrenner later reported:

At around a quarter to six, there was an enormous clap of thunder, which startled everyone present. Beethoven opened his eyes, lifted his right hand, and looked up for several seconds with fist clenched, as if he wanted to say, "Inimical powers, I defy you! Away with you! God is with me! Courage, soldiers! Forward! Trust in me! Victory is assured!"

In the spirit of this book, we may imagine there was a bit more: "And do not allow a certain John Suchet to delve into the particulars of my private life after I am gone!" But for one reason or another, the inimical powers did not oblige, and as a result we have this pleasurable and highly entertaining read. ♦

BCA

The Ace of Aces

Eddie Rickenbacker in the nation's service.

BY GABRIEL SCHOENFELD

The F-22 Raptor is America's fifth-generation, supersonic, super-maneuverable, air-superiority fighter, capable of engaging in electronic warfare, collecting signals intelligence, and launching fire-and-forget/beyond-visual-range/air-to-air missiles. The life story of Eddie Rickenbacker, the World War I ace, is, among other things, a remarkable reminder of how far military aviation has come in one century.

As we learn from *Enduring Courage*, Rickenbacker, born in 1890 in Columbus, Ohio, began life as a prodigy. At an early age, and despite (or perhaps because of) grinding poverty and family dysfunction, he came to know and understand everything there was to know about an amazing new contraption known as the automobile. By the age of 17, he was supervising entire teams of auto engineers as chief of design at the Columbus Buggy Company, which, according to author John F. Ross, still boasted of producing "some of the nation's finest horse-drawn vehicles." Rickenbacker's specialty became the design and construction of racing cars, which he began to drive himself.

Rickenbacker became famous as a racecar driver, but it was not his skill at driving fast that elevated him from fame to glory. When America entered the Great War, and Woodrow Wilson ordered General John Pershing to take an expeditionary force to Europe, the president suggested that he ask Rickenbacker to come along. Not as a pilot—Rickenbacker had only once briefly held the controls of an aircraft

Enduring Courage
Ace Pilot Eddie Rickenbacker and the Dawn of the Age of Speed
by John F. Ross
St. Martin's, 400 pp., \$27.99



belonging to a friend—but as Pershing's personal driver.

Thanks to a combination of willpower, finagling, and cajolery, Rickenbacker rose from that lowly station to supervise the construction of an air base, and then became chief mechanic for repairing airplanes that the French and Americans were throwing into the fray. He enjoyed ready access to planes, and he practiced on them, quickly learning to perform maneuvers well beyond what they were designed to do. Flying in those years, under any circumstances, was a perilous occupation; in 1910 alone, reports Ross, 37 "experienced" American pilots perished, a huge proportion of the trade. And that was in peacetime. Once the shooting started, the death rate would be far higher.

But at first, military aviation did not involve much shooting: Planes were initially used for reconnaissance alone. But then, quaintly, pilots began to carry pistols and other small arms with which to blind the "aerial scouts" of the enemy.

Gabriel Schoenfeld is the author, most recently, of A Bad Day on the Romney Campaign: An Insider's Account.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Some attempted to drop hand grenades into enemy cockpits. By March 1918, when Rickenbacker first made it into the pilot's seat in combat, a rudimentary machine gun was already in use. So, too (as Rickenbacker flew missions patrolling the front lines), was enemy flak.

With American pilots dying by the day, Rickenbacker rose to take command of 1st Flight, one of three groups within the 94th Aero Squadron. On his own missions, he racked up more kills than any other American flier, shooting down 26 German planes—a number scrupulously verified by matching affirmations from other pilots with reports by observers on the ground. (Rickenbacker's unverified kills were not counted.) This tally brought him to the eye of an American public far broader than racing fans, and his fame was bolstered by the plainspoken humility that reflected his humble roots. By war's end, and before he knew it, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker had become the most recognizable and famous hero of the war.

Returning to the United States, Rickenbacker began a hugely successful business career in which he fused together his expertise with automobiles and airplanes. In 1920, he founded the Rickenbacker Motor Company, manufacturing technologically advanced cars that incorporated the latest innovations from automobile racing, such as the rearview mirror. The company failed, but over the course of the 1920s and '30s, successful investments enabled Rickenbacker to buy a fledgling airline called Eastern. Under his leadership, it became the most profitable airline in America.

Unfortunately, Adolf Hitler came along to interrupt Rickenbacker's adventures in entrepreneurship and return military aviation to center-stage. Like his fellow (and rival) aviator Charles Lindbergh, Rickenbacker was initially a supporter of the isolationist movement America First. But Rickenbacker did not share Lindbergh's anti-Semitism, nor did he require a surprise attack at Pearl Harbor to open his eyes to the dangers facing the United States. As Great Britain struggled to survive, Rickenbacker resigned from America First and became an

ardent supporter of aiding the British.

In 1941, he suffered serious injuries and narrowly escaped death in a devastating aircraft crash near Atlanta. (He was not at the controls; it was a commercial flight.) Following his recovery, Rickenbacker was selected by Secretary of War Henry Stimson to transport and personally deliver a reprimand to General Douglas MacArthur, then supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, headquartered in New Guinea. MacArthur had publicly criticized President Roosevelt. Rickenbacker was chosen, according to Ross, because there were few Americans who could stand up to such a "war god."

But another aviation disaster followed: The B-17D Flying Fortress ferrying Rickenbacker got lost in the

Pacific and was forced to ditch at sea. Together with the rest of the crew, Rickenbacker spent 24 harrowing days adrift on a life raft without food or water. The story of his survival and rescue is the most gripping part of *Enduring Courage*. Suffering from starvation, dehydration, and extreme sunburn, Rickenbacker nevertheless made it to MacArthur and delivered Stimson's admonition. (The *New York Times* headline reporting that Rickenbacker had been found alive read: "Rescue of Airman Delights Millions.")

Nowadays, of course, you don't see headlines like that in the *New York Times*, and we don't have national heroes remotely like Eddie Rickenbacker. But we do have amazing warplanes like the F-22 Raptor. Is there a correlation? ♦



Scratch an Actor

... and you'll find an actor—like Laurence Olivier.

BY HENRIK BERING

In the annals of villainy, Laurence Olivier's portrayal of Richard III holds a special place: In the 1955 film version of Shakespeare's play, Olivier's Richard brims with malevolent energy, all the more lethal for being witty. In *On Acting*, his tricks-of-the-trade book from 1986, Olivier describes how he played up the comedic potential of the role by making Richard's voice "the thin reed of a sanctimonious scholar," high-pitched and prissy, as befits "the perfect hypocrite." The result is Evil in its most beguiling form, "the baddie who makes you laugh with him."

Regrettably, the written word was not Olivier's forte. Apart from a few scattered insights, *On Acting* was a sloppy effort, as was his earlier autobiography, *Confessions of an Actor* (1982), the platitudes of which, according to the London *Sunday Times*, came

Henrik Bering is a writer and critic.

Olivier

by Philip Ziegler
MacLehose, 352 pp., \$26

"thudding out like stuffed bison." Its reviewer went on to fault Olivier for writing in a "stage voice." In his coquettish modesty, Olivier reminded critics of an old music-hall comedian, hiding behind a variety of the false noses he so enjoyed using on stage.

Undaunted by the challenge of his subject, Philip Ziegler vividly captures the excitement of Olivier's stage presence. As critic Kenneth Tynan, surveying the actors of Olivier's day, put it:

Between good and great acting is fixed an inexorable gulf, which may be crossed only by the elect. ... [John] Gielgud, seizing a parasol, crosses by tight-rope; [Michael] Redgrave, with lunatic obstinacy, plunges into the torrent, usually sinking within yards

of the opposite shore; Laurence Olivier plevaults over, hair-raisingly, in a single, animal leap. Great acting comes more naturally to him than to any of his colleagues.

Olivier's friend and colleague Ralph Richardson spoke of his "splendid fury," while John Mortimer stressed his ability to impart a sense of danger and unpredictability: "You simply had no idea what he was going to do next."

His range was enormous, as proved by his fondness for taking on contrasting parts. Thus, in a double bill at the Old Vic in 1937, he played the title role in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Mr. Puff in Sheridan's *The Critic*: "I wanted to be completely different in every performance. I like to appear as a chameleon," he said. "Nothing has given me more pleasure than knowing I have tricked the audience and been on stage for more than five minutes without being recognized."

In the early days of his career, Olivier broke with tradition. John Gielgud, with whom he alternated in the roles of Romeo and Mercutio in the 1935 New Theatre production of *Romeo and Juliet*, represented the lyrical pre-war tradition of almost singing Shakespeare's blank verse. That was not Olivier's way. Without pretending that it was prose, he believed that Shakespearean verse should be spoken, not sung: "I have always despised Shakespeare sung. I don't think it is opera; I think it is speech." For years, his blank-verse delivery was criticized.

Unlike Gielgud's mellifluous tones, Ziegler notes, Olivier's voice was a clarion call, "brass rather than strings." To train it, we find him, at one point, roaring at the cows in the field at his country home, Notley Abbey. He was also the most physical of actors and loved taking risks. As Macbeth fighting Macduff, Olivier on one occasion packed his opponent off to the hospital—and it constantly had to be pointed

out to him that Macbeth is supposed to be the loser of the fight: "I always fought with too much vigor. That came from a sort of pride," he noted.

Like a portrait painter, Olivier worked from the outside in, whether with a physical gesture or some verbal tic, the opposite of the Lee Strasberg school, which requires its students to *be* their role rather than *play* it. Olivier's Richard had the pedantic, reedy voice; his Hotspur had trouble with his Ws. For his Othello, a part he had long avoided as he thought his

salt on the snow; when the little animal emerges, it will keep licking the salt until its tongue freezes onto the ice. To achieve the required intensity for his scream, Olivier would think of the ermine's agony.

Ziegler stresses Olivier's similarity to David Garrick, the leading 18th-century actor, in their approaches to acting. Both had a strong penchant for comedy. Said Olivier:

I personally feel that the difference between tragedy and comedy is far more thin than by most is imagined. . . . I wish, you see, to leave the audience in the position of the gods to whom, after all, our most searing tragedies must be things of comedy.

His offstage personality is harder to pin down, due to his disconcerting habit of assuming the hue of his surroundings. "Scratch an actor and you'll find an actor," he wrote. Richardson and Gielgud had no idea who he was, notes Ziegler, and for Tynan, he seemed "a blank page." He once told his son, "I don't know who I am"; and he would complain about interviewers who "always want to give me eccentricities. They want me to be a quaint Dickensian and full of character, very romantic." We get a careful account here of his three marriages, particularly his marriage to the unstable

Vivien Leigh, which turned into a hell of Strindbergian proportions, but proved useful onstage.

As for his contribution to Britain's National Theatre, the false modesty of *Confessions* tended to make Olivier appear to be the doorman rather than the director. Getting the project up and running was a Herculean task, Ziegler notes—made more difficult by the unpleasant political climate of the era. According to Christopher Plummer, the National's actors "were a bunch of unwelcoming humorless malcontents whose socialist leanings not only were far left of Lenin but



Laurence Olivier as Henry V (1943)

voice did not fit (he saw Othello as a black African rather than as a Moor), he made his voice drop an octave and built up his physique to the point where one critic saw him as embodying the whole African continent, as in Rubens's allegory.

He would draw inspiration from the strangest sources: As Ziegler notes, the inspiration for Olivier's celebrated scream in *Oedipus Rex*, when the tragic hero realizes that he has killed his father and slept with his mother, came from an animal. Among hunters, it is common practice, when hunting ermine, to scatter

made Harold Wilson look like King Farouk." Olivier was fundamentally a conservative who wanted to appear modern, which occasionally made him put on a play against his better judgment. Yet only a man of Olivier's stature could have created the required company spirit to make the National Theatre a success. He was reluctant to give up the director's job in 1973; his hatred of his successor, Peter Hall, "verged on the paranoid."

No longer capable of taking on taxing stage roles due to failing health, his later years were devoted to films and television. He played the dying Lord

Marchmain in the 1981 Granada version of *Brideshead Revisited*, in which Gielgud played Charles Ryder's father. Typical of their ever-present rivalry, Olivier was jealous of Gielgud for getting the best lines.

His own personal deathbed scene was entirely in character: His night nurse would try to quench his thirst by squeezing half an orange in a gauze. At one point, a few drops ran down his cheek and into his ear, reminiscent of the scene in which Hamlet's father is poisoned in his sleep by Claudius, causing Olivier to mutter: "It's not f—ing Hamlet, you know." ♦

pace for the rapid shifts and suspense of a finely crafted thriller.

Marcel Theroux, son of the American writer Paul Theroux, has given his hero, Nicholas Slopen, some elements of his own biography (ancient English public school, English literature at Cambridge, Russian speaker, two children, residence in Tooting), and, in some respects, *Strange Bodies* is reminiscent of the realistic novels of post-financial-crisis Britain, such as John Lanchester's *Capital* (2012). There's the preoccupation with neighborhood status (Slopen refers to his wife as having something "Notting Hill manqué" about her), the hurdle of private school tuition, the need to pigeonhole everyone in terms of social background: Besides the one obvious science fiction element, *Strange Bodies* is social realism all the way.

The conceit of Theroux's fifth novel is that it is possible to implant a human being's consciousness into another body, as long as a certain density of that person's words is available. "The Procedure," it is explained, is undertaken by a rogue team of ex-Soviet scientists in Kazakhstan operating on bodies obtained from unfortunate mafia foot soldiers and ex-convicts.

Theroux comes down firmly on the Ludwig Wittgenstein side of one of the 20th century's great philosophical debates, insisting that consciousness is linguistic, the sum total of our verbalization of our experience, rather than some mysterious "ghost in the machine." One of the novel's scientists, in fact, chooses as an early-stage experiment to replicate Samuel Johnson in a new body, selecting him because his dictionary, diary, and letters, together with Boswell's biography, might come close to replicating his entire consciousness. (How things work out for the new Dr. Johnson is another matter.)

Strange Bodies doesn't explain how the consciousness of the old inhabitant of the body is extirpated—and Slopen sometimes thinks he has had dreams of a former life that belonged to his new body's old owner. But the project of coding and uploading a human consciousness isn't just a staple of science fiction; it's one that many



Brain Drain

A tale of old minds in new bodies, and the meaning of consciousness. BY ANN MARLOWE

I'm poor in everything but ironies, and to be truthful, I've forgotten what's so good about irony in the first place. It's just the resting state of the universe. . . . Irony is not order, but it gives a shape to things.

This is the voice of the narrator of *Strange Bodies*, and there's nothing in his diction to betray that this is a book of speculative fiction, or science fiction, as you prefer. Nor is there anything in his asides about his academic specialty, Samuel Johnson ("Johnson seems to project a vast empathy back out to the reader; he seems to know what it is like for the reader to live"), or in the stray facts we learn as he recounts the story of his life. (Who knew that, in Dr. Johnson's England, postage was paid by the recipient, so letters were written to use each sheet of paper to the maximum?)

The speculative element, which comes upon the reader in the very first line—"Whatever this is, it started when Nicky Slopen came back from the dead"—is developed in our

Strange Bodies

A Novel

by Marcel Theroux

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 304 pp., \$26

narrator's grave and understandable anxieties about his identity. But these are announced in terms more usual in literary fiction: "I am a living refutation of Descartes. I am a codable sequence of proteins. I am a mind's shadow. *Someone is building God in a dark cup.*" (I had to look up that last line, from Jorge Luis Borges's poem "Baruch Spinoza.")

What we think of as unique in us is infinitesimal. We can be coded in a few days. . . . The truth is, we are virtually identical. We are interchangeable. That is the true beauty of humanity: ant beauty, not peacock beauty.

About midway, there's a wrenching moment when we understand who the narrator is and what the references to coding mean and why he has been talking around the fact. But by then, the novel has shed its initial stately

Ann Marlowe is a writer in New York.

futurists think is right around the corner. There's no mention here of "The Singularity," a lately much-discussed theoretical near-future moment when artificially intelligent beings become smarter than human beings and begin to replicate themselves—and the rate of change becomes so rapid as to make the future unknowable.

Ray Kurzweil—director of engineering at Google, inventor of a half-dozen clever machines, and promoter, in a series of popular books, of "trans-humanism"—has claimed in his 2005 book *The Singularity Is Near* that human brains will be uploadable by 2045 and that, around this time, artificial intelligence will claim consciousness for itself. He even wants to bring his father back by way of a DNA sample and his own memories of him, a project that The Procedure tackles from a different angle. (See "So You Want to Live Forever" by Charlotte Allen, May 12.)

The broader culture knows something is afoot. Last year's film *Her* nods to both the issue of when AI becomes indistinguishable from human intelligence (the so-called Turing Test) and the impulse to embody AI in a human. The film's popularity, moreover, speaks to audiences' inchoate interest in these issues—and in the voice of Scarlett Johansson. Charles Stross's 2005 novel *Accelerando*, about The Singularity and the centuries (!) following, also considers the issue of moving minds between different bodies—even to animal bodies.

Kurzweil and many of the sci-fi novels that deal with these issues often take for granted the need to defeat death, and there's a last-moment plot twist in *Strange Bodies* that suggests Nicholas may be able to accomplish the feat not just once but twice. Still, he muses, as his end comes upon him: "And the dead are dead for good reasons, profound reasons, that we ignore at our peril."

Strange Bodies is an astounding work that grows in power as it unwinds its surprises. It also tackles, head-on, the ultimate questions about identity, personhood, and the human condition that many contemporary novelists dodge with irony. ♦

BCA

Paradise Found

The ideal(ized) vision of Paul Gauguin.

BY DANIEL GOODMAN

If John Cheever was the Chekhov of the suburbs, Paul Gauguin was the Cheever of the South Pacific. A nonconformist whose iconoclastic art would be used as a motif in the literary art of another artistic iconoclast (namely, Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus*), the Parisian-born Gauguin gravitated to the South Pacific, most famously to Tahiti, where he lived during 1891-93, and again after 1895. He was fascinated by the primitive, and he desired to visit places he thought were unspoiled by civilization and Western culture.

Gauguin's art is a showcase of the beauty of Tahitian life, and like a Tahitian Chekhov, Gauguin portrayed prosaic Tahitian life with a gimlet painterly eye. Gauguin's art depicts Tahitians as they are sleeping, worshipping, and engaging in other quotidian activities. But whereas Cheever, Chekhov, Roth, John Updike, and other literary artists used their keen perceptive abilities in the pursuit of sober realism, Gauguin put his artistry to the purpose of imaginative proto-surrealism.

Gauguin, who rejected European cultural and religious constraints, thought of himself as a savage in the eyes of the civilized world. *Oviri* (1894, his personal favorite amongst all his sculptures) and many of his other works were regarded as radical for a variety of reasons, not least because they subverted traditional, conventional ideas of feminine beauty. In this regard—as in his use of primitive effects—Gauguin proved to be a precocious prolepsis for Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907, which can also be seen at the Museum of Modern Art, on the floor below this exhibition).

Daniel Goodman is a writer and rabbinical student in New York.

Gauguin
Metamorphoses
Museum of Modern Art
Through June 8



'Oviri' (1894)

In the department of Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, Gauguin can occasionally be overlooked, and exhibits like this one and the Philadelphia Museum of Art's 2012 bravura "Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse: Visions of Arcadia" are ensuring that this will no longer be the case.

"Metamorphoses" is not a comprehensive treatment of Gauguin's art—his most famous work, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897-98), is missing—but it is billed as the first exhibition to explore the lesser-known aspects of Gauguin's oeuvre: his prints, his sculptures, and, especially, his inventive woodcuts.

Gauguin was not only prolific but exceptionally innovative; his experimental, diverse, and unconventional approach is on full display here. He

singlehandedly pioneered an inventive use of the monotype technique (a hybrid between drawing and printmaking). He'd take a subject and reinterpret it by transfiguring it in a new work, in a new medium, over time.

While this exhibition focuses on Gauguin's prints, ceramics, and woodcuts, his color paintings should not be overlooked, because Gauguin's use of color is extraordinary. The fantastic, perfervid *Upa Upa (The Fire Dance; 1891)*—along with *Words of the Devil (1892)*—is reminiscent of Henri Rousseau's vivid jungle surrealism. To gaze into its lurid, fiery display is to feel as if you were wading into a closed cultic rite. Gauguin could paint a still life like Cézanne and a pointillist gouache like Seurat. He is not often thought of as a great colorist, and while he may not have been Matisse, "Metamorphoses" illustrates that he may have been just as talented—making the fact that Gauguin lacked formal artistic training all the more remarkable.

He was a bit of a magpie when it came to his subject matter. A pose in one of his paintings was derived from a 16th-century painting by Cranach the Younger. He was influenced by children's book illustrations and Japanese prints, and several of his paintings borrow poses from a sculptured frieze found at the Borobudur Buddhist temple in Indonesia.

Gauguin was also a Miltonic mythologizer, and he created his own story of Eve. Indeed, the story of the fall from grace recurs throughout his work. In his 1892 painting of the Tahitian Eve—*Tē nava nava femua (The Delightful Land)*—however, the forbidden fruit is not an apple but a flower, and the reptilian tempter is not a snake but a lizard. (Snakes were not native to Tahiti, but lizards were.) Gauguin's Eve is primitive, primordial, and much darker (not only in skin-tone) than prior Western depictions of Eve.

The centerpiece here may be the gorgeous *Mata Mua (In Olden Times; 1892)*. It is, unfortunately, cast off into a corner and should have been displayed in a more prominent position. Nonetheless, it is stunning to see in person. The light and dark greens, squash yellows, bell-pepper oranges, tomato reds, and eggplant purples are a feast for the eyes. In *Mata Mua*, Tahitian women dance, play instruments, and worship a

tree squarely in the center, subtly reminding us of Gauguin's abiding interest in Christianity.

In fact, despite his fascination with Polynesian religion, and his dissatisfaction with Roman Catholic doctrine and institutional religion, Gauguin remained interested in Christianity and the Bible. Biblical themes and Christian motifs recur throughout his work, but are often melded into an artistically scintillating Christian-Polynesian syncretism. And his preoccupation with Polynesian religion is evident in the majority of works on display. Gauguin incorporated the Polynesian moon and earth gods into several of his artworks, and was fond of depicting Polynesian worship rites. Yet he was disappointed to find that this traditional faith was almost entirely expunged by Christian missionaries, who purged the island of graven images. Gauguin used pigments, prints, woodcuts, and his own imagination to reconstruct these religious sculptures, most notably in *Mata Mua* and in *Oviri*, the foreboding sculpture of a Polynesian goddess entirely out of his own mind.

Of course, Gauguin experienced his own paradise lost when he arrived in Tahiti and discovered that it was not the unspoiled paradise of his imagination. Many of his paintings

depict not what he actually saw but what he had wanted to see. *Mata Mua* is Gauguin's vision of paradise. He created the pristine world he wanted to experience, rather than the fallen one he had to experience. It's a "romantic, idealized, but ultimately false" vision of Tahiti, say the MoMA curators; but though Gauguin's vision of Tahiti was objectively false, it was entirely true in the realm of Gauguin's imagination. And from the perspective of artistic surrealism, nothing could have been truer than Gauguin's Tahitian Eden. ♦



'Mata Mua (In Olden Times)' (1892)

statue of Hina, the Tahitian moon goddess. The women frolic in a lush, idyllic landscape in the foreground, while purple mountains protruding out of an off-white sky loom over them in the background, and a large cross-shaped bluish-gray tree (the Tree of Life in this Tahitian Eden?) centers the canvas.

What may be most interesting about *Mata Mua* is that, even though the Polynesian religious ritual is the central subject matter, Gauguin limits the scene to the left corner of the painting and places the cross-shaped

Godzilla sans Giggles

'Less is more' works for atomic monsters, too.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Why does it feel like a modest triumph that the new version of *Godzilla* is actually not bad? This is really the best thing to say about *Godzilla*—if said in a surprised, *huh, who'da thunk it?* kind of way: *Hey, not bad!* It's an achievement of a kind when a film about a rubber-suited character featured in some of the most infamously ridiculous pablum ever made (*Godzilla vs. Mothra*, *Godzilla vs. SpaceGodzilla*) doesn't make you giggle. Whatever its flaws, and they are many, this *Godzilla* never does.

That is primarily due to the inspired direction of Gareth Edwards, a young whiz who was entrusted with a \$160 million budget after making a \$150,000 movie called *Monsters* (2010) whose special effects dazzled everyone who saw it. Edwards justifies the thousand-fold budgetary increase by a simple directorial gambit: However Michael Bay would have shot a scene in *Godzilla*, Edwards does the opposite.

Bay, the go-to man in Hollywood for colossally expensive effects films like the three *Transformers* pictures, goes for endless sequences of urban destruction, which he chops up into thousands of short cuts that make it impossible to get a sense of where the action is taking place or what is happening. It's all flash and noise, exhausting and maddening, and instantly forgettable—like watching an utterly charmless toddler smashing his toys. (The first *Transformers* was enlivened here and there by some funny bits of character business for its actors, but by the third film, Bay pretty much dispensed with actors and stories and just set about destroying Chicago.)

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

Godzilla
Directed by Gareth Edwards



Bryan Cranston

The original 1954 *Godzilla* postulated that the atomic-bomb attacks on Japan both revived the titular dinosaur and made him the height of a skyscraper. The new movie plays ripped-from-the-headlines games as well, and cleverly: It begins with a mine collapse in the Philippines, reminiscent of the one in Chile a few years ago, and then proceeds to a Fukushima-like crisis. An American engineer played beautifully (natch) by Bryan Cranston of *Breaking Bad* works at a Japanese nuclear plant that is destroyed by a supposed earthquake. He realizes, however, that the calamity was not the result of a seismic disaster but something far stranger. His obsession with the case turns him into a reclusive crank. Fifteen years later, Cranston is arrested for trying to sneak back into the city where the plant had been located—a city entirely abandoned and under quarantine due to radiation.

Cranston realizes there was, in fact, never a radiation breach. The city was sealed off because there is something at the plant the world cannot know about. Just as in the original *Godzilla*, nuclear tests in the 1950s brought back a giant dinosaur that emerged from the deep, made trouble, and then returned to it.

An international organization was created to locate Godzilla before he could reemerge to destroy all of humankind. But it turns out it was not Godzilla that took out the nuclear plant, but the arrival across the seas from the Philippines of some kind of prehistoric hatching pod attracted by the radiation. The creature that emerges from it is a terrifyingly sleek flying bug about 100 feet tall—and it's come to look for friends.

This is the first half-hour of the new *Godzilla*, and it's terrific—ominous and compelling, and for a monster movie aimed at adolescents, surprisingly tough. What follows isn't anywhere near as good, because it's little more than the serial destruction of three cities and the well-meaning but lame efforts of the U.S. military to stop the creatures. *Godzilla* appears eventually, and for once, the problem isn't that *Godzilla* is laughable; rather, the plot is. For example, even though the military honchos know the creatures live off radiation and cannot be killed by it, they keep conveniently putting nuclear weapons within easy reach. (Apparently Hollywood big-shots don't know you can use powerful missiles that don't have nukes on them.)

But by not showing us too much of the giant monsters, as last year's dreadful *Pacific Rim* did, Gareth Edwards makes sure we remain unsettled by them. And watching *Godzilla* doesn't give you a headache the way Michael Bay's movies do. No wonder the movie made far more money in its first weekend than its studio dared to dream it would; after a decade of watching monster-disaster movies that try to top each other by piling on the wreckage, audiences are finding Edwards's less-is-more approach a thrilling change of pace. ◆

***“It is important that our veterans don’t become another political football, especially when so many of them are receiving care right now.”
—President Obama, May 21, 2014***

PARODY



OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — May 26, 2014
Remarks by the President at a DCCC Rally
Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio
8:16 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thanks so much. (Applause.) No, really, you’re too kind. (Applause.) Please be seated.

Now I couldn’t think of a better place to be tonight—inside a hangar, surrounded by fighter planes, helicopters, and, of course, the men and women who operate them and keep us safe. Let’s give it up for our troops! (Applause.) I’d also like to add that many of them have volunteered to serve as waitstaff for tonight’s gala, so thank you for your service! (Applause.)

And what a gala this is. Honestly, have you ever seen so many Périgord truffles under one roof—and out of season, no less? (Laughter.)

But let us keep in mind something that is no laughing matter: protecting our men and women in uniform. As you all know, there have been some distressing reports concerning our Department of Veterans Affairs. But I promise you those responsible will be held accountable. And ultimately I take full responsibility. You heard me right. I am fully responsible for finding those responsible for this mess. And those responsible will be held accountable. That is ultimately my responsibility.

We must also not allow our veterans to be used as a political football to score points in an election year—a crucial election, I might add, that determines the future of this country. Who will be there to protect our veterans as they come home from the wars I have ended? Who will make sure our veterans receive the best care and aren’t exploited for political purposes? Our veterans need us, and we need them. Which is why I am launching a new, nonpartisan campaign called Hug a Veteran.

Whenever you see veterans or active duty soldiers, give them a hug. Heck, give them two hugs—one from you and one from me. And be sure to tell them that second hug is from the president. Tell them to remember that hug in November. And be sure to take a selfie with a veteran and send it to obamavets@

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