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AMONG THE PALEFACES
MATT LABASH

HOME STRETCH

FRED BARNES • JAY COST
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COVER BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

The War on (Palin) Women

The Scrapbook has no particular investment in Sarah Palin's career at this date. She no longer holds public office and seems content with her speaking and TV gigs. Certainly, she is still a politically outspoken public figure, but this in no way justifies the media obsession with her.

Given all of that, we were perfectly content to ignore the brawl at a house party that Palin's children were involved in last month. Track Palin, 25, was said to have gotten in a scuffle with another party guest who had once dated his younger sister, Willow. In response, Bristol Palin was attacked. Police say that alcohol was a factor in the fight, and no one was seriously hurt. Events of this nature are not unfamiliar to a good number of ordinary American families and almost never bear dwelling on by the national media.

And yet the story of the Palin brawl has dragged on for weeks. The liberal website *Talking Points Memo* actually asked readers to "crowd source" the identities of the people in the police photos for further investigation. And then last week, audio of Bristol Palin's call to the police was released. Regardless of who instigated the fight, it is difficult to listen to the obviously traumatized young woman recount being attacked, cursed, and dragged along the ground.

Now here's how CNN anchor Carol Costello introduced the audio recording. "Okay. I'm just going to come right out and say it. This is quite possibly the best minute and a half of audio we've ever come across—well, come across in a long time anyway. . . . Sit back and enjoy." After the audio was over, Costello told viewers, "You can thank me later." Indeed, Costello's deliberate remarks here—and the media's gleeful attention to this story more generally—seem far more unforgivable than the Palin children finding themselves in the middle of a drunken brawl.

It's even more appalling when you consider the contrast between the leering coverage of the Palin offspring and the all-but-ignored recent news that Vice President Joe Biden's son was kicked out of the Navy for doing cocaine. The mentions of this incident in the news have ranged from somber to nonexistent. Hunter Biden is 44 years old and has three kids, so this is no youthful indiscretion. We sincerely hope he gets clean, and applaud the media for eschewing any jokes or tabloid coverage that might be prompted by the buffoonish conduct of his father.

But unlike the family of private citizen Sarah Palin, Hunter Biden's conduct should be of some interest to the media. How was he allowed to enlist in the Navy Reserve in his 40s? Was there some sort of favoritism involved? What about the revelation earlier this year that Hunter Biden was appointed head of legal affairs at Ukraine's largest private gas producer? Isn't it noteworthy that this company has ties to Devon Archer, a Democratic bundler and friend of Secretary of State John Kerry? The media have largely dropped the ball on Hunter Biden's conduct. Instead, they give us round-the-clock coverage of the Palin family's inconsequential dramas.

Postscript: Costello, to her credit, told *Politico* last Thursday: "Over the past few days I have been roundly criticized for joking about a brawl involving the Palin family. In retrospect, I deserve such criticism and would like to apologize." The Palins are overdue for many such apologies from the media. Maybe this will be the beginning of a salubrious trend. ♦

Brought to You By . . .

Frank Bruni, the restaurant critic-turned-op-ed columnist for the *New York Times*, traveled to Texas recently to attend the Austin City Limits Music Festival—and did he have a miserable time! The music seems to have been enjoyable enough, but Bruni's own pleasure was seriously diminished by ubiquitous commercialism. During the concerts, Honda and Samsung Galaxy ads could be seen, as well as a Miller Lite banner hovering near the stage. "Someone shoved a free sample of Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal at me on my way in," he complained in his column last week. "Someone else handed out free beer cozies advertising Imperial, a brew on sale at the event."

This was not just annoying to Bruni, but disheartening as well. Austin's "subversive soul" is usually to Bruni's taste, but "I was at the limits of my patience. I hadn't expected all these corporate come-ons . . . to be assaulting me here of all places." And from Austin, Bruni expanded his purview, finishing his essay with a list of grievances, including sports venues with corporate names (MetLife Stadium), movie stars who advertise commercial products (Matthew McConaughey), and "the way hucksterism invades everything, scooping up everyone."

In one sense, The Scrapbook is sympathetic to Bruni—although, truth to tell, we find corporate stadium names more amusing than distressing, and lament the fact that most are sponsored by banks or insurance companies and not hemorrhoid medicines or insect repellents.

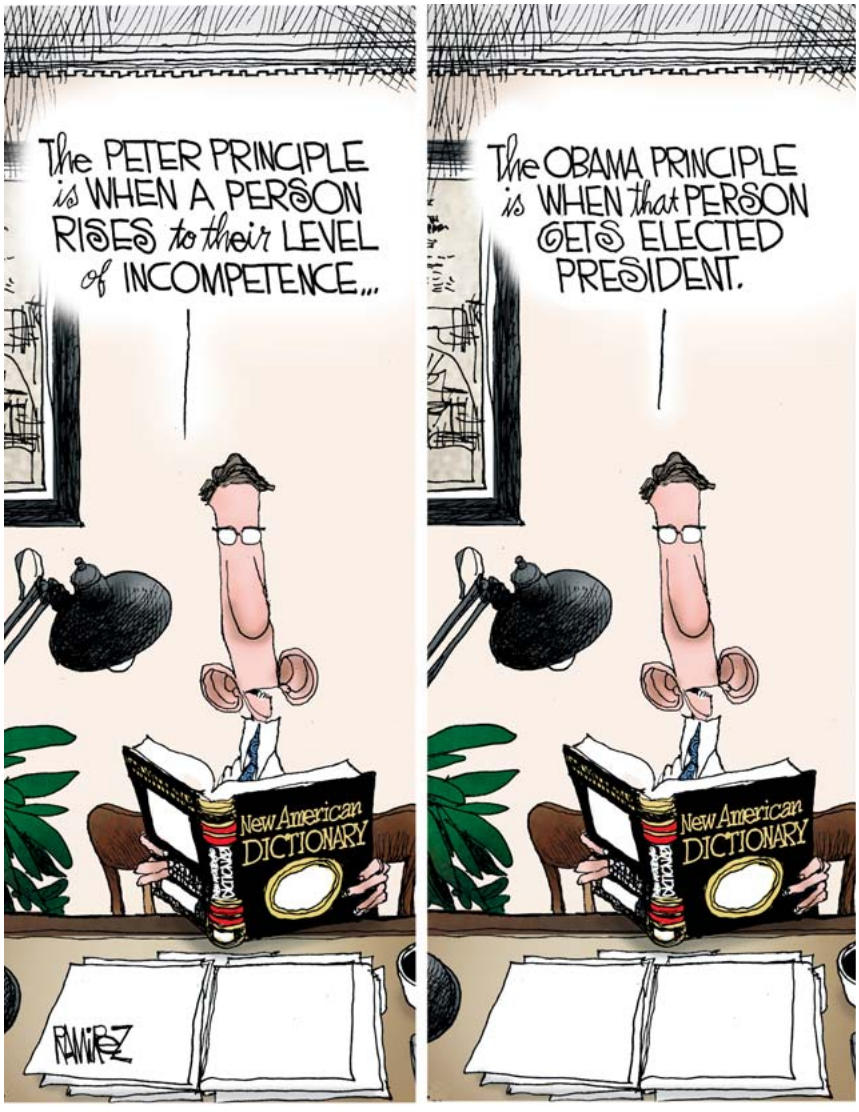
Of course, deploring the commercialization of American life is nothing new, so far as we can tell, the progressive equivalent of fundamentalist complaints about secular Christmas. But our sympathy for Bruni was,

frankly, complicated by the actual experience of reading his column. Not the column itself but, just as in Austin, its immediate surroundings. For in order to get to Bruni's column in this particular edition of the *Times* (October 22), The Scrapbook was obliged to wade through pages, and untold inches, of brazen commercial advertising—all with a distinctively affluent, not to say ostentatious, tone.

There were corporate come-ons for One Percenter playthings such as private banks (BNP Paribas) and elegant ads for high-end shoes (MaxMara), jewelry (Paul Morelli, Marina B), perfume (Chanel), diamond watches (Breitling, Ebel, Patek Philippe—sold at Tiffany, no less), "grape-specific" wine glasses (Riedel), luxury tourism (Caravan), women's fashion (Dior), men's cashmere overcoats (Frank Stella), and private aircraft (NetJets, "feel as safe at 41,000 feet as you do on your own two").

Indeed, The Scrapbook was not just demoralized by all this, but insulted, too. When we read the *New York Times* we expect to be informed, not solicited, and enlightened, not assaulted by rampant commercialism. Journalism, as the *Times* frequently reminds us, is a sacred calling, a private expression of a public trust, not a forum for "hucksterism [invading] everything, scooping up everyone."

At least we weren't menaced by beer cozies and free samples of Cinnamon Toast Crunch. ♦



So Long, Yoda

The Scrapbook is sorry to hear that Andrew Marshall is retiring from the Pentagon, where he has led the Department of Defense's internal think tank, the Office of Net Assessment, since 1973. Frankly, The Scrapbook is also a bit surprised. Marshall's popular nickname, Yoda—taken from the sage of the *Star Wars* epic—while honoring his sagacity, wisdom, and mystery, is also testimony to his longevity. Marshall has served every defense secretary since James Schlesinger and every president since Richard Nixon, and it's difficult to imagine the Pentagon without him. It's even more difficult to imagine what the world will look like without Marshall and his staff imagining its contours for us.

The purpose of the office Marshall has directed since the middle of the Cold War is to forecast the various threats that the United States might someday face. His job was to look into the future and guess, in the words of one of his former bosses, Donald Rumsfeld, about the shape and scope of the unknown unknowns.

"Net assessments have consistently sought to determine where the United States stood in various areas of military competition relative to rivals and adversaries," write Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts in their forthcoming book *The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of Modern American Defense Strategy*.

> Their ultimate aim has been—and remains—to illuminate emerging problems and strategic opportunities far enough in advance for senior leaders to have time to make decisions that will either mitigate the former or exploit the latter. From the Soviets' achievement of strategic nuclear parity in the early 1970s to America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan following al Qaeda's 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Marshall's net assessments have

been remarkably prescient in identifying "the next big thing" for senior national security officials to worry about or capitalize upon. Far ahead of most others, he foresaw the consequences of the revolution in warfare brought about by precision weaponry and the rise of China as a major strategic competitor.

Krepinevich and Watts, both of whom worked under Marshall at the Pentagon, write that their aim was not to produce his biography, "but rather his intellectual history"—a narrative that necessarily dovetails with the history of the Cold War. Marshall, a Detroit native, attended the University of Chicago, where, write Krepinevich and Watts, he "assisted the legendary physicist Enrico Fermi with a cyclotron." In 1949, Marshall joined the RAND Corporation, where he embarked on an "intellectual journey toward becoming one of the nation's most influential behind-the-scenes strategists." The authors of *The Last Warrior* describe Marshall as "an intellectual giant," comparable, they write, to strategists like Herman Kahn, Henry Kissinger, and Albert Wohlstetter.

Of course, one of the reasons that Marshall is not as well known as his peers is that, as Krepinevich and Watts explain, "much of what he has written, as well as the products of the Office of Net Assessment, remain classified." Then there's also Marshall's aversion to self-promotion, perhaps best exemplified by the fact that one of his favorite quotes is "There is no end to the good a person can do if he does not care about who gets the credit"—a motto that another of his former employers, Ronald Reagan, displayed on a plaque on his desk.

Nonetheless, Americans owe Marshall their gratitude for his having helped U.S. policymakers safely navigate our country through the Cold War and other conflicts. We also owe him thanks for the many disciples he leaves behind at the Pentagon and elsewhere whom we can count on to defend America by imagining the unimaginable—and planning for it. ♦

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BPA WORLDWIDE

Tse-Sick

A lot of people worry about Ebola these days. Not me. I'm calm, relatively speaking. That is, I'm calm, relative to the shuddering, sobbing basket case that the mere thought of infectious disease once reduced me to.

A movie from third-grade science class is to blame. Since we didn't see many films in school, I remember every one I saw. Aside from a few underwater documentaries by Jacques Cousteau, there was *Viva Zapata!*, *The Last Hurrah*, and Stanley Kramer's *Bless the Beasts and the Children*. They seem to have been meant to teach us "critical thinking," although I also recall one about Erich von Däniken's theories of how extraterrestrials built the pyramids.

Nothing prepared me for *The Rival World*. It was about insects. All the details that follow are a 9-year-old's thoughts, unreliably recollected from decades back, but the terror the film induced is vivid and with me still. It was a cross between *Science Friday* and "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Mankind was locked in an apocalyptic battle against bugs, it seemed, and we were outnumbered a-bazillion-to-one. We were probably doomed. Look what was happening in Africa: See the devastation wrought by bugs. There was a rail-thin man shivering uncontrollably in his bed, making a *hih-bih-bih-bih* sound. I am ashamed to say we 9-year-olds tittered at this point—the shaking man sounded like Curly in *The Three Stooges*.

But now the narrator was enjoining us, in his authoritative baritone, to wipe that complacent smirk off our faces. This was malaria, the work of the anopheles mosquito, which breeds in its teeming billions in swamps around the world and gets closer and closer to our school in Massachusetts every day. Up close the anopheles looked like the mosquitoes that had ravaged my ankles the summer before, except that it covered about eight feet of schoolroom wall. You could see the thing puncturing the skin of some hapless tribesman with its death-dealing proboscis.

The narrator was just getting started. Soon we met the tsetse fly,

CHRIS BEATRICE

bearer of trypanosomiasis, the dread Gambian "sleeping sickness." Oh, cripes. There were scenes of felled human beings immobile in the dust. Then we saw the tsetse at a thousand times its size. The camera got so close you could hear it buzz. Look at that! After a close-up on a locust, the film crew boarded a small-engine plane and flew into a whole plague of them. The bugs splattered loudly against the windshield like so many balls of snot, turning it amber-colored and opaque. Now look again! There was a giant beetle on top of a lettuce leaf, secreting dark and poisonous drool as it chomp-chomp-chomped, with a deafening noise as of tramping boots.

When the lights came up it was lunchtime. I had a horrible feeling that I wouldn't have again until alcohol became part of my life many years later: that of recollecting something recent, horrible, and dreamlike that turns out to be no dream at all. No one else appeared concerned in the slightest. We were all carrying our brown lunch bags out to the playground. My classmates were laughing as if nothing had happened. I sat down on the tar, leaned against the sunny brick wall that faced the tetherball poles, and opened my lunch. My mother had made me a tuna-salad sandwich, my favorite. But now I got it out of the wax paper and saw it had lettuce on it. Was she crazy? It was probably swarming with beetle eggs and contaminated with bug drool! I put it aside. I pulled out the plastic baggie of Hydrox cookies (a kind of cut-rate Oreo) and ate those instead.

That made me feel better. I had acted like an idiot, I now saw. I took a bite of the tuna sandwich—it was my mother's usual delicious concoction, on Arnold's white bread, of Chicken of the Sea, Cains mayonnaise, salt, pepper, and chopped celery. I looked down at it and . . .

Oh, no! I had been right! There were beetle eggs all over the thing! Small, black, right where I had been chewing. I leapt to my feet in terror, threw my sandwich into the bag and ran into the school with it.

"Oh, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Booth!" I wailed at the lady who managed the front desk. "Call the nurse!" I told her about *The Rival World* and about the beetle eggs in the sandwich my mother had made.

"I don't think there are beetle eggs in your sandwich," Mrs. Booth said.

"*Yeah?*" I said, with a mix of fear and impatience, pushing the sandwich onto the desk in front of her. "What do you call *these*?"

She bent over it and squinted. "If I didn't know any better," she mumbled, "I'd say they were little pieces of Hydrox cookie."

Christopher Caldwell

the weekly Standard

An Election About Everything

At long last, the conventional wisdom about the 2014 midterms is here: It's an election about nothing.

The *Washington Post* may have been first in declaring the coming midterms "kind of—and apologies to *Seinfeld* here—an election about nothing." But the *Daily Beast* chimed in: "America seems resigned to a *Seinfeld* election in 2014—a campaign about nothing." And *New York* magazine noted (and embraced) the cliché: The midterm election "has managed to earn a nickname from the political press: the 'Seinfeld Election,' an election about nothing."

Soon enough this description was popping up everywhere—the *New Republic*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Bloomberg*, *Politico*, and many others. The 2014 Midterms, the Seinfeld Election.

Obama votes early in Chicago, October 20, 2014.

Others posited something even worse. "The 2014 campaign has been the most boring and uncreative campaign I can remember," wrote *New York Times* columnist David Brooks. That wasn't harsh enough for Chris Cillizza at the *Washington Post*, who went further. The election isn't just "boring," he wrote, "it's vapid and inconsequential."

The big television networks seem to agree. The signature newscasts of ABC, NBC, and CBS have barely found the upcoming elections worthy of notice. According to the Media Research Center, ABC's *World News Tonight* didn't run a single story about the midterms between September 1 and October 20. Over that same seven-week period, NBC and CBS evening newscasts ran just 11 and 14 stories, respectively. (It probably goes without saying that the networks found the prospective Democratic triumph in the 2006 midterms much more compelling. Over the same time period that year, NBC ran 65 stories about the midterms, CBS ran 58, and ABC ran 36.)

We have a different view.

Not only is this election not about nothing, it is being fought over exactly the kinds of things that ought to determine our elections.

It's about the size and scope of government. It's about the rule of law. It's about the security of the citizenry. It's about competence. It's about integrity. It's about honor.

It's about a government that makes promises to those who have defended the country and then fails those veterans, again and again and again. It's about a president who offers soothing reassurances on his sweeping health care reforms and shrugs his shoulders when consumers learn those assurances were fraudulent. It's about government websites that cost billions but don't function and about "smart power" that isn't very smart. It's about an administration that cares more about ending wars than winning them, and that claims to have decimated an enemy one day only to find that that enemy is still prosecuting its war against us the next. It's about shifting red lines and failed resets. It's about a president who ignores restrictions on his power when they don't suit him and who unilaterally rewrites laws that inconvenience him. It's about a powerful federal agency that targets citizens because of their political beliefs and a White House that claims ignorance of what its agents are up to because government is too "vast." In sum, this is an election about a president who promised to restore faith in government and by every measure has done the opposite.

As even Barack Obama acknowledges, the upcoming election is about his policies and those elected officials who have supported them. It's about an electorate determined to hold someone responsible for the policy failures that have defined this administration and the scandals that have consumed it—even if many in the fourth estate will not.

And it's about time.

Our politics is healthier when candidates in both major

NEWSCOM

parties win election because they've campaigned on a policy agenda. We hope that the Republicans who run for president in 2016 will engage in a detailed and thoroughgoing debate on substance and ideas.

But much of the political debate this year has unavoidably focused on Barack Obama and his performance as president. Most voters think he's done a lousy job and disagree with his policies and priorities. Democrats have supported him. Republicans have opposed him. That's what will matter on November 4.

And that's not nothing.

—Stephen F. Hayes

The Morning After

Supposing Republicans win a big victory on November 4. What then?

First, celebration. Republicans are sober and conservatives are . . . conservative. Neither group has a reputation as party animals. But The Weekly Standard gives them permission—nay, we urge them with the full authority of our weighty editorial voice—to let themselves go for one night. Pop the champagne corks. Put on the party hats. Go wild with the funny little noisemakers.

Because the result—assuming it's as strong as it looks 12 days out—will be worth celebrating. It will be good news that Barack Obama's spell over the electorate has been broken. It will be a relief that the Grand Old Party lives. It will be heartening that the conservative movement still moves. It will be gratifying that the obituaries of 2012 were premature. It will be reassuring to have a Republican majority in the Senate to mitigate the damage Obama can do in his final two years. It will be exciting to anticipate the arrival of bright, young, impressive new Republican officeholders on the floor of the Senate and the House.

We look forward to celebrating ourselves (insofar as curmudgeons ever really celebrate). But we also look forward to getting back to work. For the celebratory mood, though heartfelt, will be brief. It might last through coffee the next morning, as we take one last look at the satisfying election returns. But then, as we go outside to put the champagne bottles in the recycling bin, we'll recall that we're still stuck for two years with a president who fiddles while the West burns. As we dispose of the noisemakers and paper hats, we'll remind ourselves that it's no big deal to win big in the sixth year of a presidential term: It's happened five of the last six times. As we head off to work, we'll remember that this sixth-year election, like its predecessors, was mostly a negative and backward-looking referendum on the incumbent. And as we arrive at the office, we'll reflect that the electoral results of 2014 are probably of limited utility in indicating what will happen next in the drama of American politics.

What will happen next is 2016. And it is toward victory in 2016 that all conservatives will turn their efforts. Virgil said it well: *Hoc opus, hic labor est*. This is the work, this is the toil.

Will November 2014 turn out to be a new beginning for the conservative movement, the harbinger of an era of American constitutional self-government at home and American greatness abroad? Or will 2014 be merely a brief interruption in a long downward slide toward mediocrity and decay?

Much will depend on what happens over the next two years—in Congress, in the statehouses and governors' mansions, in the overall political discourse of the country, and in the Republican presidential nominating process. Victory in 2014 will mean we conservatives have a chance—more of a chance than most observers gave us six years ago.

But the tasks of 2015 and 2016 are far from trivial. Republicans have to constrain the president, rebuild American defenses, do their best to stop a bad deal with Iran, lay the groundwork for repealing and replacing Obamacare. They will need to be vigilant in countering the president as he tries to do end runs around Congress via the regulatory apparatus and executive orders. There is overdue business to attend to: pushing an economic growth agenda for Middle America and enlivening and invigorating the Republican party to increase the chances for victory in the all-important 2016 presidential election.

Conservatives will be the first to recognize that history is full of chances not exploited and of promising roads not taken. But there are also moments when a party, a movement, and a nation rise to the occasion. To have contributed to such a moment would be worthy of a lengthy celebration.

—William Kristol

The Real Party of the Rich

The Democrats' three big weapons: money, money, money.

BY FRED BARNES

Democratic senator Kay Hagan of North Carolina was pounded last winter and spring in TV ads by conservative groups for having voted for Obamacare and echoed President Obama's false claim that people could keep their current health insurance. "They had her on the ropes," says Marc Rotterman, a Republican consultant in North Carolina.

Then Senate Majority PAC, Harry Reid's personal political action committee, intervened. Its television spots defended Hagan and attacked Thom Tillis, her Republican challenger, for supposedly dubious ethics. This was only the beginning. By last week, Reid's PAC had spent $9 million to boost Hagan's reelection. And Hagan's candidacy was saved from an early, and possibly fatal, tailspin.

Hagan has outraised Tillis, the state house speaker, $19.2 million to $4.8 million. But that's only one measure of her money advantage. Liberal and Democratic groups have devoted $26.3 million to going after Tillis—a chunk of it on ads while he was still running in the Republican primary—and another $4 million touting her. Conservative and Republican groups were unable to neutralize the anti-Tillis barrage. They've spent $17.3 million against Hagan and $10.9 million to promote Tillis. In overall campaign spending, Hagan tops Tillis by $53.7 million to $33 million. This, however, doesn't count undisclosed millions in "issue ads" criticizing Hagan by Americans for Prosperity, a conservative group.

The result: Hagan, a mediocre candidate at best, led Tillis in polls for months. Only in mid-October, with spending for Tillis finally matching that for Hagan, has the race tightened. He was ahead by a percentage point or two in several recent polls. Still, Hagan felt confident enough of winning to skip a scheduled debate with Tillis last week.

The North Carolina campaign is a reflection of what's happened in many of the competitive Senate races. The political fundamentals favor Republicans. President Obama is so unpopular that Democratic candidates avoid mentioning his name, much less inviting him to appear at their campaign events or in their TV spots. Meanwhile, the economy is stagnant. Foreign policy failures continue to stack up. America's global influence fades. Two-thirds of Americans are pessimistic about the country's future. Democrats have few national issues they're comfortable talking about.

Yet they have one significant asset: money, lots and lots of money. It's this advantage, more than any other factor, that has prevented a Republican wave from developing. It has kept vulnerable candidates like Hagan from falling far behind. And rather than building up their own candidates, it has allowed Democrats to concentrate on negative TV ads assaulting Republicans and bankrolling costly Democratic get-out-the-vote efforts.

The Democratic congressional campaign committees, Senate and House, are outspending their Republican counterparts. The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) projects they will spend $427 million by Election Day to $330.9 million by the GOP committees. The Republican National Committee, in contrast, is expected by CRP to outspend the Democratic National Committee in the midterm election cycle by $169 million to $155 million.

GARY LOCKE

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

The Democratic edge in spending, especially in key Senate races, belies one of the party's prominent campaign themes: that Charles and David Koch are corrupting politics by their funding in support of Republicans. It turns out liberal billionaire Tom Steyer is the biggest single political donor in 2014 at $58 million, at least in terms of publicly disclosed funding. The Kochs back several "issue" groups that are not required to reveal either their spending or their donors.

"Outside spending by groups—mostly super-PACs—that disclose their donors . . . is dominated by the left," CRP says. Liberal PACs will outspend conservative PACs by $270.5 million to $181.1 by Election Day, CRP projects. But if the estimate of $100 million in undisclosed spending is accurate, the liberal advantage "will be washed away" by Election Day. Maybe. But it won't change the Democratic edge in candidate fundraising where it matters the most—in the contests where control of the Senate will be decided. Republicans have gained in fundraising in October.

In Alaska, Democratic senator Mark Begich has raised $275,000 less than Republican Dan Sullivan. But he has a $3.9 million edge in outside spending. In Colorado, the situation is similar. Democratic senator Mark Udall has outraised Republican Cory Gardner $10.4 million to $9.3 million. And Udall has gotten nearly $2 million more in outside aid.

New Hampshire is another example. Democratic senator Jeanne Shaheen leads Republican Scott Brown by $9.9 million to $6.3 million in fundraising. Spending by outside groups favors Shaheen by $1.1 million. Louisiana, where Democratic senator Mary Landrieu has brought in $13.7 million to Republican Bill Cassidy's $8.6 million, is still another example. She's gotten $3.5 million more in outside help.

All this is not to accuse Democrats of doing anything wrong or illegal. They've merely emphasized the only asset they have this year. And they've been helped enormously by the nation's fundraiser in chief, President Obama.

The ability of Democrats to spend so much money before Republican fundraising picked up had strategic value for a party facing the likely loss of the Senate. "The money kept them in this up to Labor Day," says Scott Reed, the chief political adviser at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "Without it, we'd have made North Carolina and New Hampshire safe and been able to expand the playing field." Senate elections in Michigan, Minnesota, Virginia, and Oregon would have gotten more attention—and money—from Republican groups, Reed says.

Last week, another liberal group rushed to the aid of Kay Hagan. The League of Conservation Voters Victory Fund announced it would invest $4.2 million to boost Hagan, both with television ads and money for increasing Democratic turnout. In the final days of the campaign, the Democratic fundraising spigot is still gushing. ♦

If You Knew Ben Like I Knew Ben

The establishment mourns one of its own.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

Like all charming and physically imposing persons, Ben Bradlee had an enormous head.

There. I said it: the last original observation not already to be found in the three billion words of tribute that poured forth after the death last week of Bradlee, the great editor of the *Washington Post* and an essential figure in the late-20th-century American establishment. And it's true, when you met Bradlee and spoke to him, the thing that really overwhelmed you, more than the face-famous good looks and the booming voice inflected with Beacon Hill lockjaw, was the sheer scale of that melon rising up from the stiff white collar of his Savile Row shirt. No one failed to walk away impressed. I still haven't got over it. Obviously.

So it goes when a famous person dies these days: The tributes were equally about the newly dead and the people paying him homage. There was the goopy exaggeration that always comes with graveyard prose—and always perfectly appropriate, too, under the principle *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* ("If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all") and its modern corollary: "If you say something nice, overdo it."

"Ben Bradlee was someone in a newspaper office that the country needed at a very dark time for democracy," overwrote one *Esquire* blogger earnestly. An old Bradlee protégé—there are scores of these, and last week it was all hands on deck—closed his tribute like so: "I for one often imagine Ben as a kind of journalistic King Arthur and we, his Knights of the Round Table. He was not only my gruff guardian angel, but the nation's as well." That's a lot of metaphor for two little sentences, but grief can do that to a protégé. Here's another one: "His passing, in a way, marks the end of the 20th century." About time.

Many of the tributes were of the I'll-never-forget-the-day-Ben-first-met-me variety, recollections of young reporters cowering before the great man and his massive desk as he bestowed his famous f-bombs upon them like papal blessings. (Bradlee was revered for his profanity.) They

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were more like pocket memoirs than obituaries, and the upshot seemed to be that Bradlee's true greatness rested in his hiring of the memoirist and others just like him.

Twitter is particularly useful in getting this kind of daisy chain going. Michele Norris, the former NPR news reader, tweeted a tweet that read (my translation from the twitterese): "Careers shaped by Bradlee: John Harris, Peter Baker, Gwen Ifill, Mike Wilbon, Michel McQueen Martin"—all of whom are famous among themselves for being famous journalists. One of those mentioned, Peter Baker of the *New York Times*, instantly retweeted Michele's tweet with this modification: "And Michele Norris!"

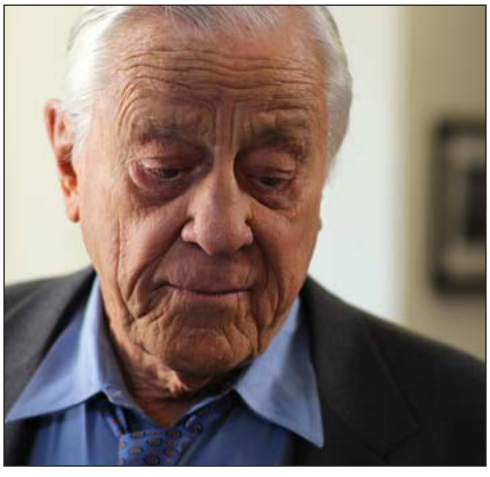
Indeed, Bradlee's death may cement Twitter as the indispensable tool of the self-referential obituarist. You can do so many things with Twitter when someone dies. Consider this multitasking tweet from yet another no-longer-young protégé: "Last time I saw Ben Bradlee [who suffered dementia], he said, 'I can't remember who the f— you are, but it's great to see you.' Loved that guy."

So much is going on here, all subtly serving to lift the tweeter into the circle of Bradlee's supernal light. First, he gets to drop a personalized Bradlee "f—," which titillates Bradlee's admirers more than an ordinary "f—" would. Second, "Last time I saw him . . ." implies that such occasions were not infrequent and always informal. Third, "Loved that guy" is the kind of thing you'd say about a fellow towel-snapper at the country club locker room, establishing intimacy. There's more, but that's at least three tweets in one.

With so many words pouring out, there was bound to be some repetition. Bradlee, the *New Yorker* affectionately recalled, "had the attention span of a gnat." Also, said the *New York Times*, "he had the attention span of a gnat." Many writers noted that Bradlee would express his admiration for colleagues by noting—this is a metaphor, I'm sure—their brass testicles. Bradlee himself, the *Times* told us, "clanked when he walked."

"Men were divided into two camps," said a *Post* writer: "those whose private parts 'clanked when they walked' and those whose, alas, didn't." Bradlee of course was a member of the first camp. You could look it up in the *Times*. He must have sounded like a trolley car.

His fearlessness became the grand theme of the obituaries. "Bradlee," wrote a blogger on the website Vox.com, "built his legend—and his paper—because he was willing to be hated." The same *Post* tribute went on: "Nothing pleased Bradlee more than a piece that nailed the corrupt, pricked a narcissist, uncovered a creep, exposed a phony, felled a climber and really told it like it was."



Ben Bradlee, 2010

But not all such pieces pleased Bradlee, not if they were directed at him or other members of the establishment, among whom were plenty of creeps, narcissists, and climbers, though their creepiness, narcissism, and climbing skills were protected by virtue of being members of Bradlee's class. I don't mean the Brahmin class he was born into but the new class of elite journalism, academia, philanthropy, mass entertainment, and finance that remains, in its way, as oblivious and self-satisfied as the old elite it replaced. The obituarists, all members in good standing, filled their tributes with quotes and turns of phrase from Bradlee. No one mentioned my favorite, which came from the mid-1980s.

Bradlee was complaining that a lot of the fun had gone out of journalism during the Reagan years. The reason, he said, was that "there are so many of these asshole watchdog groups now."

He was referring in particular to Accuracy in Media, or AIM, a conservative practitioner of the kind of ideological press criticism that is now a common feature of the media world, so greatly enlarged by cable TV and the Internet. These parvenus were crowding his territory, barbarians trying to breach the gates. He and his friends were the watchdogs, goddammit, and the watchdog didn't need any watchdogs watching it.

But the new order allowed the watchdogs and other buttinskis an audience as large as his own paper's. It made Bradlee churlish. AIM was founded by an earnest man named Reed Irvine, a sweet, slightly buffoonish drudge whose suit always seemed a size and a half too large and whose pinched appearance made him easily mocked, especially by men whose own suits were bespoke. Irvine's great mission in life was to expose the pretenses to fairness and disinterestedness of a monolithic press—to "tell it like it was," to borrow a phrase from the *Post*'s piece. He was a genuine subversive, nipping at the heels of an establishment that in its vanity considered itself "antiestablishment."

Publicly, Bradlee called Irvine a "retromingent." The word describes a kind of animal, one that urinates backward. The insult was funny and revealing in its casual cruelty.

These days their battle—asymmetric as it was—seems so long ago, a dispute from a vanished era. The tributes to Bradlee from his protégés had the same quality, voices assuming the authority of an order that is passing, that has passed away. Now that both men are dead, I hope it's some consolation to the shade of Reed Irvine to know that, in the effort to dismantle and discredit a corrupt regime, he won and Bradlee lost. ♦

MIGUEL ARIEL CONTRERAS DRAKE-MCLAUGHLIN

A Scorecard for the Senate

What to watch for election night.

BY JAY COST

With about a week to go until the midterm election, Republicans stand to make gains in the House and generally hold the line in governorships. The battle for the Senate has been the locus of attention for most people engaged in the campaign.

Most pundits and poll-watchers now favor Republicans to take control. Democrats have a modest edge in the upper chamber (55 Democratic-aligned seats to 45 Republican seats), but the vast playing field for the GOP combined with President Obama's unpopularity have given Republicans their best shot at controlling the Senate in a decade. Still, there is a wrinkle: Republican missteps in crucial, must-win states give Democrats some hope that they can hang on to a narrow majority.

Let's run down the major states by the time we should expect the first results on Election Day. First off is Georgia, whose polls close at 7 P.M. In a year like this, the race *should* be an easy victory for the Republican party. After a hard-fought primary, the GOP landed on a seemingly good candidate in businessman David Perdue. Yet his campaign against Michelle Nunn has been lackluster, and now Nunn has gone on the attack for comments Perdue has made about "outsourcing." The Republicans have had to pump money into this race late, and polls show a jump ball. Good news for Republicans: If no candidate gets a clear majority, the race heads to a January runoff. That looks like the most likely outcome—Libertarian Amanda Swafford, polling at just 4 percent, is the spoiler—though it should never have gotten to this point.

The polls in Virginia also close at 7 P.M. Mark Warner has held a comfortable lead throughout the cycle, but recent news regarding his role in the so-called Puckett scandal—whether Warner tried to get a job for the daughter of a critical state senator—has cast some doubt. Warner has worked hard to maintain a sterling reputation throughout the state, so Republican Ed Gillespie remains a massive underdog. Still, a "perfect storm" just might produce the upset.

Scott Brown stumps with Mitt Romney, October 15, 2014.

Closing at the same time statewide is Kentucky. Both sides have fought hard for this state, but it looks like Republican Mitch McConnell will pull out the victory. The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee has sent mixed signals about its commitment to this race, and Alison Lundergan Grimes has been inartful in distancing herself from President Obama.

At 7:30 P.M., the polls in West Virginia close. This should be an easy pickup for Republican Shelley Moore Capito, set to succeed retiring Democrat Jay Rockefeller. West Virginia does not interest liberal pundits and journalists nearly as much as North Carolina, but the Mountain State has just as many Senate seats, and its shift rightward continues apace.

Then there are the two GOP "stretch" seats. North Carolina's polls close at 7:30 P.M. while New Hampshire's hours vary by precinct. A win in either state would signal a big Republican wave. North Carolina, like Georgia, should have been an easy win, but the Republican nominee, state house speaker Thom Tillis, has been under fire for his tenure in the legislature. Late-breaking attacks on Democrat Kay Hagan—for missing key committee hearings and her family's acquisition of stimulus money—seem to have shaken the race up a bit. As of this writing, Hagan still has about a 2-point lead, down from 4 or 5 a month ago. She is still favored, but a big GOP wave could even sweep a bad candidate like Tillis into the Senate.

In New Hampshire, former Massachusetts senator Scott Brown was written off as a longshot, but he has continuously closed the gap with incumbent Jeanne Shaheen. Now, he trails by less than 3 points. There are not many undecideds left, and New Hampshire has been a tough state for Republicans over the last 15 years. Still, an upset is possible.

The polls in Arkansas close at 8:30 P.M., and here Republicans can look forward to Tom Cotton defeating Democrat Mark Pryor. Cotton has led consistently in the polls as Pryor has struggled to articulate a coherent case for his reelection. Most pundits are now publicly putting this race in the GOP's column, and indeed many of them have been doing so privately for some time.

Next up is Louisiana, whose polls close at 9 P.M. on the East Coast. Democrat Mary Landrieu shows a slight lead in the close race. But Louisiana,

NEWSCOM

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like Georgia, has a runoff, which will almost certainly occur because a Tea Party conservative appears set to siphon just enough of leading Republican Bill Cassidy's vote. So the real action here will be on December 6; then, Cassidy will be favored.

Closing at the same time statewide is Kansas. This is the second of the GOP's unforced errors this cycle. In arguably the most Republican state in the union, GOP senator Pat Roberts is in the fight of his life against nominal independent Greg Orman. The good news here is that Roberts—once he detected trouble—began to fight back, aggressively. He has worked hard to bring the Republican electorate—about 50 percent of the state—home. Polls right now show a tie, with momentum favoring the incumbent.

Also closing at 9 P.M. are the polls in South Dakota, which has a strange three-way race. This contest was long thought to be a cakewalk for former Republican governor Mike Rounds. Yet a controversial visa program run under his watch has given him heartburn, and iconoclastic former senator Larry Pressler is running as an independent. Previously a Republican, he has shifted leftward and would be a pretty reliable vote for Democrats in the upper chamber. There has not been a lot of polling here, but the Republican party is aware of the challenges, and the buzz is that Rounds should pull off the win.

Montana's polls also close at 9 P.M. Democrat Max Baucus, the longtime senator from the state, is now ambassador to China. A plagiarism scandal knocked Democrat John Walsh out of the race, and the party responded by nominating a far-left liberal out of touch with voters here. Expect another easy GOP pickup.

The polls in Colorado close at 9 P.M., too. Long a Republican stronghold, the Centennial State has moved pretty remarkably to the Democrats in the last decade. Liberals tend to credit this to the rise of the Latino vote, but that is only partially true. White voters still hold the balance of power here, and they have shifted noticeably against the GOP. Yet recent polling suggests that they have soured on Barack Obama, which should benefit Republican Cory Gardner in his race to unseat Democrat Mark Udall. Gardner has led consistently in the polls, but Colorado has a mail-in ballot option that makes this race a real puzzler.

At 10 P.M. on the East Coast, the polls in Iowa close. This is one of the true toss-up states in the cycle, though Republican Joni Ernst has held a consistent but small lead over the last few months. Iowa is a bit mystifying. Long viewed as a purple state, Iowa actually has its own political rhythm. A bad farm recession in the late 1980s shifted it from Republican to Democrat, but it drifted back to the GOP by 2004. Then it became Barack Obama's darling, propelling him with an unlikely caucus win early in 2008 and backing him in both elections since. Independent-minded, rooted in the farm economy, and often unpredictable, Iowa voters probably favor the GOP this time, but not by much.

Finally, at midnight, the polls close in Alaska. On presidential election nights, Alaska's solid Republican tilt and three electoral votes mean that it's usually not of interest. But its Senate races for the last decade or so have been interesting. This year Republican Dan Sullivan is looking to unseat Democrat Mark Begich. Surveys have shown a pretty steady Sullivan lead, but Alaska is a hard state to poll.

Add all this up and what kind of hand do we have? Republicans hold a polling lead in a net eight Democratic seats; they need to net six to wrest control of the Senate. They are, moreover, within striking distance in another two. Despite Republican missteps in key races, such as Kansas and Georgia, the field of opportunity is so large that Democrats basically need an inside straight to keep Harry Reid as majority leader. ♦

The Nastiest Race?

Terri Lynn Land's uphill struggle.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

Utica, Mich.

Kelly Ayotte, the Republican senator from New Hampshire, is normally quite composed, but she's leaning forward on her folding chair completely slack-jawed, eyes bugging out. "What?" Ayotte finally says, barely above a whisper. "That's ridiculous. That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard. Are we going backward?"

Ayotte is sitting in the backroom of the Macomb County Republican headquarters, having flown in that morning to campaign with Terri Lynn Land, Michigan's Republican Senate candidate, who has had difficulty closing what is now a 9-point deficit. Land shakes her head and confirms that the accusations that have left Ayotte speechless are true.

For months now, Land's Democratic opponent, Rep. Gary Peters, has been attacking Land on the grounds that, contra every modern cultural norm, she's not an equal financial partner in her own marriage. Land and her husband have a reported net worth north of $30 million, and they've put $3 million of their own money into the campaign. "I work, he works, and we both put money in a joint checking account," Land tells Ayotte in her flat Midwestern accent.

However, the Peters campaign is charging that, because her husband earns most of the money, Land's campaign is engaged in some sort

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of shenanigans, even though joint accounts aren't restricted by campaign finance limits. The Democratic accusation is that while Land's husband was bringing home the bacon, Land was busy doing such trifles as raising two kids and twice being elected Michigan's secretary of state. Therefore, she's not entitled to spend her husband's millions.

In an era when refusing to subsidize a $10 package of birth control pills is deemed by liberals to be just shy of a war crime, the accusations directed at Land are a reminder of what a genuinely sexist campaign attack looks like. Nonetheless, the media have been happy to amplify Peters's press releases with headlines such as "Gary Peters calls on Terri Lynn Land to disclose husband's tax returns, details of $3M in funding" at MLive.com.

Indeed, it seems there's nothing Land's money won't taint. In September, the *Huffington Post* ran this shocking exposé: "Terri Lynn Land Family Gives Millions To Evangelical Group Targeting 'Unreached People.'" Land and her husband have donated a lot of money to support Christian missionaries in Africa, which *HuffPo* spins as "Land seeks to deflect attention from her wealth."

Terri Lynn Land

Dig through the clip file, and you keep finding dire warnings about Land's plutocratic excesses. "Michigan GOP Senate candidate Terri Lynn Land used her family's company as the site for dozens of official meetings while she was the Michigan secretary of state, according to newly released records," leads an October 15 *Politico* report. A few paragraphs later we get the requisite disclaimer: "Land does not appear to have violated any Michigan laws or ethics rules with these meetings." A Michigan Democratic spokesman is nonetheless quoted asking "what she's hiding about her shady relationship with Land & Co."

The *Politico* piece finally caused Ken Braun, a conservative columnist for MLive.com, to snap. "The meeting schedule exposed by *Politico* means that roughly once per month top level staffers were required to leave behind their stuffy state office building and its Soviet-inspired

architecture and visit instead a location where wealthy people work," wrote Braun.

While dispatches of Land's wealth abound, Peters—who, by the way, is a multimillionaire stockbroker—has evaded similar scrutiny. In December 2012, Peters hired Kandia Milton as a liaison in his congressional office, and Milton worked in Peters's office for much of last year. Milton is the former chief of staff for imprisoned Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, and was fresh out of the big house for taking a $20,000 bribe in exchange for expediting the sale of city property.

Some might question Peters's decision to place the public trust in a man convicted of public corruption. But the media spied a different angle: "Congressman Peters gives Kandia Milton a second chance" was the headline at Detroit's Fox station. "I'm a Christian, and I believe in redemption," Peters said of the unusual hire.

Of course, nearly all GOP candidates face a hostile media environment. More than a few Republicans have publicly and privately said that Land just isn't a strong candidate. The bad-candidate narrative was cemented in May, when Land ran away from a scrum of reporters saying, "I can't do this. I talk with my hands."

Heather Swift, Land's brassy flack, gets indignant when asked about the incident. "They were shoving microphones into her *throat*." The campaign further says it was rebuffed when it asked for the footage of the event from a Detroit TV station, and it seems odd that the video of such an allegedly pivotal event has never surfaced. Since then, Land has spent a lot of time intentionally dodging the press.

From the campaign's perspective, Land is damned if she talks to the press, and damned if she doesn't, so at least they can deny them the satisfaction. The campaign had plans to meet with every paper in the state, but after a *Detroit Free Press* columnist declared that Land had been avoiding reporters like "a music video diva recovering from plastic surgery," the campaign skipped the paper's endorsement meeting and accused it of "gaslighting" the sexist attacks on her.

Land's discomfort with campaigning seems to have been exaggerated. She appears at ease stumping, even if she's not going to win any blue ribbons for extemporaneous talking point recitation. She spends much of her stump speech hitting local issues such as student loan programs for vocational training and EPA regulations hurting farmers. Denunciations of Obamacare are always popular. One woman at the Macomb County GOP event waves her hands wildly to indicate she lost her insurance as a result of the president's broken promise.

Many observers have also conceded that Peters isn't going to win any laurels for a vibrant and dynamic candidacy, either. The real rap on the Michigan Senate race is that it's boring by the standards of modern political drama. There have been no debates—neither campaign could decide on a format—and it's attracted very little national press coverage.

The campaign was a dead heat through the summer before Peters started pulling away, thanks to lots of spending from the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and organizations backed by liberal billionaire Tom Steyer. Not coincidentally, the Land campaign was spending more back when the race was tighter.

Then in early October, the National Republican Senatorial Committee announced it was pulling $850,000 in ad buys in the final weeks of the campaign. This was widely interpreted as a signal the national GOP was throwing in the towel. Normally, such a close race wouldn't be abandoned. But Republicans have so many pickup opportunities this year, their resources are spread thin. Some unlucky candidate had to draw the short straw.

But it's not over until it's over. In a recent article in the *Atlantic*, Democratic insiders conceded the race is tighter than polls suggest. Obama is set to make a rare campaign appearance at Peters's side before the election. A presidential endorsement is toxic in much of Michigan, so the Peters campaign must be worried about turnout among black voters in Detroit.

The Land campaign recently sent out a memo arguing that the race has been closing and that it's really only 3 points behind. This is not unreasonable spin given national Democratic headwinds. And fortunately for Land, Michigan's Republican governor is up by 8 points, according to the latest poll. They're hoping, not implausibly, that his coattails may drag Land across the finish line just ahead of Peters. (If that happens, expect a Democratic press release accusing her of capitalizing on a man's success.)

Land has clearly been through the wringer. But there's a steely reserve that comes out as she tries to pick apart the irony of being a female candidate who finds herself on opposing sides of the War on Women, depending on the news cycle. She's proud of her actual governing experience. While secretary of state, she started the Lead Worker program to train state employees, especially women. "Whenever management jobs would come up, I would look at some of the women in the office and they were really good and I'd say, 'Why don't you apply?' And they'd say, 'Well, I don't know how to do that job,'" she says. "I thought, 'Let's teach you how to do the job.'" Sure enough, Land left the secretary of state's office with more women in management positions than when she started. It's not as, well, sexy as free birth control—but it's the sort of thing likely to make a real difference in women's lives.

Still, there's a lingering sense Land hates what she's had to endure these last few months, even as she insists she believes in what she's doing. If that's what makes her a bad candidate, it certainly doesn't make her unworthy or unqualified to be the next senator from Michigan. "You've got to have a thick skin for this. But the issues are more important, when you think about your kids, and the direction of our country, it's just more important," she says. "You can't sit back. You've got to get involved." ♦

As New York Goes . . .

Only a year ago, there were Democratic fantasies of retaking the House.

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

'Republicans could lose their House majority because of the shutdown," blared the headline of a story published at the *Washington Post*'s *Wonkblog* by Princeton professor Sam Wang on October 8, 2013, midpoint of the 16-day shutdown. Two weeks after Wang pointed to surveys showing control of the House could slip away from Republicans, three different reputable polls showed the situation even more dire for the GOP: Democrats led Republicans by 8 percentage points on the "generic ballot" question—the same margin by which House Democrats had led when they'd delivered their 2006 "thumping" to Republicans.

What a difference a year makes. "If Democrats were able to hold their losses under five seats in the House, that's a great night for them," Dave Wasserman of the *Cook Political Report* told me in an interview two weeks before the upcoming midterm elections. "If Democrats lose between 5 and 10 seats, that's about what we would expect. If Republicans gain 10 seats or more, wow, that would be a great night for them."

House Republicans mostly have Obamacare to thank for the reversal of partisan fortunes. Days after the government shutdown ended, millions of Americans learned that they were losing health care plans they liked—contrary to the president's emphatic promises that they would be able to keep them. By November 2013, the Democrats' approval had tanked, and it never recovered.

Republicans now hold a 4-point lead on the generic ballot question and have gone on the offensive in the Northeast. There are at least six races to watch in New York alone on election night. When polls close on the East Coast on November 4, these races may signal whether a national GOP wave or merely a good year is unfolding for Republicans.

Elise Stefanik, left, campaigns in Ballston Spa, New York, August 27, 2014.

AP / MIKE GROLL

■ Republicans have their best shot of picking up a seat in upstate New York's 21st District, where polls show Elise Stefanik, a former aide on the Romney campaign and in the Bush White House, leading Aaron Woolf, a documentary filmmaker and grocery store owner from Brooklyn. Stefanik's likely win will come as vindication for conservatives, who were told only a moderate or liberal Republican could carry the district.

During a 2009 special election in the 21st, the local and national Republican establishment backed liberal Republican Dede Scozzafava, who supported Obama's stimulus package, taxpayer-funded abortion, and card check (which eliminates the secret ballot in union elections). She wouldn't even say if she would vote against Obamacare. But conservatives were told that Republicans would have to move left if they wanted to win in upstate New York in the Obama era. For the first time in an election, the Tea Party rebelled and backed Conservative party nominee Doug Hoffman, who lost narrowly after Scozzafava dropped out of the race and endorsed the Democrat. Moderate pro-choice Republican Matt Doheny lost the district in 2010 and was defeated again in 2012.

In 2014, incumbent Democrat Bill Owens retired after Stefanik jumped into the race and the Obamacare implementation debacle occurred. Stefanik, a 30-year-old fiscally conservative, hawkish, and pro-life Republican, has united the GOP. If elected, she will be the youngest woman ever to serve in Congress.

■ Republicans also have high hopes for another young New York Republican, 34-year-old Lee Zeldin, who is running for Congress in New York's 1st District, on the eastern half of Long Island. Zeldin, an Iraq war veteran and state senator, trailed incumbent Democrat Tim Bishop by 10 points (51 percent to 41 percent) in the Siena College poll released in early September, the only public poll released so far.

But Republicans say the race has tightened in internal polling. "Every poll I've seen shows this race tied," says one GOP operative. "I don't mean margin-of-error tied—I mean 42-42, 46-46. This is going to be one of the closest races in the country." Republicans have certainly put their money where their mouth is: The National Republican Congressional Committee has spent nearly

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$2 million on the race. The *Cook Political Report*'s Wasserman gives "a slight advantage in that race to Bishop, but there's no doubt it's competitive." If Zeldin wins, he will be the only Jewish Republican in Congress.

■ Two other potential pickups for Republicans in New York are the 24th District and the 18th District. Republicans captured both in 2010 but lost them in 2012. In the 18th, Republican Nan Hayworth, a doctor, is trying to win back the seat she lost in 2012 to Democrat Sean Maloney. In the 24th, Republicans believe they've fielded a strong candidate in federal prosecutor John Katko, who is challenging incumbent Democrat Dan Maffei. The Democrat lost the seat by less than 1 percentage point in 2010, but took it back in 2012 by more than 5 points. If this seat falls, it may be a sign of a Republican wave.

■ There are also two New York GOP incumbent races worth watching. In New York's 11th District, Staten Island Republican incumbent Michael Grimm may hang on despite facing a 20-count indictment for fraud, tax evasion, and perjury and gaining notoriety for threatening to throw a reporter "off a f—ing balcony" and "break him in half" for asking Grimm about the scandal.

"I think there are a number of voters who are voting strategically because they believe if he's forced to resign, at least they'll have an opportunity to replace him in a special election with a better Republican, rather than hand the seat to a Democrat for a full term," says Dave Wasserman. "I'd have a hard time even guessing who's going to win."

Republicans could be saved here by the weakness of the Democratic candidate, city councilman Domenic Recchia. In a *New York Daily News* editorial titled "Train Recchia," the editors called him "not the swiftest gazelle on the savanna" for, among other things, "tout[ing] his foreign policy bona fides thusly: 'When I was on the local school board, I ran a student exchange program with Japan,' adding, 'I've been to many, many countries across this world.'"

■ Last, but not least, there's the 19th District, where Democrat Sean Eldridge is challenging incumbent Republican Chris Gibson. The suspense in this race is low, but the potential for *Schadenfreude* is high. Eldridge, who decries "money in politics" and income inequality, became extraordinarily wealthy by marrying Facebook cofounder Chris Hughes in New York in 2012. The couple then went shopping for a congressional seat, buying multimillion-dollar mansions in two different districts in New York. Eldridge proceeded to give away millions of dollars in "loans" to businesses in the Hudson Valley and poured further millions into his own campaign. The district ought to be competitive, but Eldridge has proven to be such a terrible candidate that the only public poll showed him losing to Gibson by 24 points.

Even if Republicans don't pull off House upsets in New York or elsewhere in the country, at least they'll be able to take comfort in Eldridge's failure to buy the election. ◆

Dynasties "R" Us

The names to watch in Georgia are Carter, Nunn, and Perdue. BY MICHAEL WARREN

Republican governor Nathan Deal has spent much of his race for reelection talking up Georgia's progress since he took office in 2011: targeted tax reform, economic development, a bigger education budget. His ads tout that the state has added 175,000 jobs and make the vague, hard-to-verify claim that Georgia is the "number-one place to do business."

But the positive campaign hasn't quite done the job of securing his reelection. That explains a different tone from the 72-year-old at a private fundraiser in LaGrange, an hour southwest of Atlanta. "I am the roadblock," he declared.

The roadblock, that is, to Democrat Jason Carter, grandson of the former president and Georgia governor Jimmy. At 39 years old, with just four years in the state senate, Carter *petit-fils* is challenging Deal for governor and making a good run of it, too. Polls have consistently shown Deal with less than 50 percent support, and more than a few have him losing to Carter. As recently as September, one poll had Carter with a 3-point lead, winning independents and even a tenth of Republicans. The specter of a Carter dynasty—Jason is the first elected official in the family since Jimmy left the White House—is the kind of thing that keeps Georgia Republicans up at night.

More broadly, Deal stands in the way of Democrats regaining power in the state after being mostly shut out for more than a decade. It began with Deal's predecessor, Sonny Perdue, who in 2002 was elected Georgia's first Republican governor since Reconstruction. By the end of Perdue's second term, Republicans had complete control of the state for the first time in history. They now hold all eight statewide offices and both houses of the state legislature, as well as both U.S. Senate seats and a majority of U.S. House seats.

The 2014 election is the first real threat to Georgia's GOP hegemony, and it's not just Carter pounding at the gate. Democrats sensed opportunity with an open Senate seat and tapped Michelle Nunn, whose father is former Democratic senator Sam

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Nunn. Michelle, 47, has everything Georgia Democrats could want: a famous name, a business career, and ties to Republicans (including George H. W. Bush, who inspired the Points of Light Foundation she once ran). Most important, she has no political or voting record, making it challenging for Republicans to tie her to President Obama or Washington.

Nunn's Republican opponent is also a political rookie with a familiar name: David Perdue, cousin of the former governor and a multimillionaire businessman. Born in Macon and a graduate of Georgia Tech, the 64-year-old made his fortune in management and corporate turnarounds, including stints as CEO of Reebok and Dollar General. When Saxby Chambliss announced his retirement, the man who had succeeded fantastically in business decided to try his hand in politics.

"I've never done this before," Perdue loves to say of his first run for office. But the Republican has surrounded himself with plenty of political professionals, including pollster Nick Ayers, spokesman Derrick Dickey, consultant Paul Bennecke, and ad guru Fred Davis. All of them are veterans of his cousin Sonny's gubernatorial campaigns. It was a strange and memorable TV ad (a Fred Davis speciality) that put the well-funded Perdue campaign on the map in a five-way primary with opponents who all had experience in elected office. The ad depicted his Republican rivals as screaming, crying babies, sitting amid hundreds more babies on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol. Perdue trumpeted his business experience dealing with "large, complex situations." He came first in the primary, with just over 30 percent of the vote, and then won the runoff against longtime congressman Jack Kingston.

"People are very concerned about the state of Washington. They feel like it's not working, and they want something done about it," Perdue tells me. "There are a lot of people right now in Georgia who want a change in direction."

Yet Perdue finds himself in worse shape than Deal. His poll numbers have stalled in the mid-40s, and Nunn has led or tied him in the last five polls. That may be due to sustained ad campaigns from Nunn and the Democrats focusing on Perdue's work for Pillowtex, a troubled North Carolina-based textile company. Perdue joined Pillowtex as CEO in 2002, earning more than $2 million in salary and bonuses while trying to manage the company out of decline. He left after 10 months, and Pillowtex went under shortly thereafter, laying off nearly 5,000 employees.

David Perdue and Michelle Nunn after a debate, October 7, 2014

The Pillowtex story reared its ugly head with a report in early October about a 2005 sworn deposition in which Perdue says he "spent most of my career" doing outsourcing. A reporter asked Perdue to defend the outsourcing. "Defend it?" he said, on camera. "I'm proud of it." The clip has featured in Nunn ads flooding the Atlanta media market. Suddenly, Perdue's biggest asset—his business career—has become a liability.

And it's one the Perdue campaign is trying desperately to avoid. Before my brief phone interview with Perdue, a campaign staffer called twice to confirm that I wouldn't ask about the "outsourcing" comment. When I did, Perdue dismissed it as "right out of the Democratic playbook."

"They've tried it since Day One," he said. "It's not sticking."

The polls suggest otherwise. Only the most loyal Perdue Republicans still talk about winning outright on Election Day. More likely is that neither Perdue nor Nunn will win 50 percent of the vote (there's a Libertarian party candidate running as well), and the race will proceed to a January 6 runoff. Republicans like their chances in the runoff, even with a flawed candidate. Georgia swing voters may not be in love with Republicans anymore, but they're not enamored with Democrats, either.

The problem for Nunn and Carter is that they're white, legacy-name candidates for a party that comprises black voters and young liberals who don't remember or care much about Sam Nunn or Jimmy Carter. Moderate-to-conservative white Democrats have fled the party, but those are the voters Nunn and Carter have to win back, while at the same time energizing the party's base. It's a double bind, forcing Nunn to downplay her relationship with President Obama in a TV ad, while Obama himself calls into a black radio station in Atlanta to tell listeners that "if Michelle Nunn wins . . . we can keep on doing some good work." It might get Nunn to the runoff, but it won't be enough to put her over the top.

Republicans see these too-close-for-comfort races as a wake-up call. "I think there has been a little bit of complacency among Republicans," says Eric Tane nblatt, a longtime GOP activist in Georgia. "That's what happens when you're in power for a while."

The best argument to be made for both Nathan Deal and David Perdue is that they aren't Democrats. For now, that may just be enough to be a roadblock. ♦

NEWSCOM

Voters Aren't Buying

. . . the growth agenda the GOP is selling.

BY HENRY OLSEN

Indications of a midterm GOP wave are making Republicans more optimistic about the party's 2016 presidential chances. Data from a recent 50-state poll offer support for that feeling. But the survey also shows the party's core economic message may not be as popular as many Republicans think.

The data come from a poll released in early October by CBS News, the *New York Times*, and the YouGov polling firm. Using an online panel weighted to reflect the political and demographic trends of each state, YouGov asked questions about a host of issues and attitudes that are likely to be important in both this year's midterm and the 2016 election. Five questions are of particular import in gauging potential receptiveness to the GOP economic platform.

The best news for the GOP comes on government spending. Voters were asked to choose one of three options to cut the federal budget deficit: raise taxes, cut spending, or do both. Even when given the squishy "split it down the middle" option, voters in 47 of the 50 states said Congress should only cut spending. Liberal bastions like California and New York gave a plurality victory to the "ending spending" option. Voters in 36 states gave majority backing to the conservative approach, including those in the swing states of Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

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Repealing Obamacare was also widely popular. YouGov gave voters four options regarding the president's signature effort: expand it, keep it as is, repeal part of it, and repeal all of it. Again, even voters in liberal bastions chose to repeal Obamacare in whole or in part. Voters in 45 of the 50 states gave majority approval to the combined repeal options.

Good idea—but not enough

Running solely on a "repeal Obamacare" platform, however, won't be enough. No more than 40 percent of the voters in any swing state carried by Obama in 2012 approved of the "repeal it all" option. A clear majority emerged when voters saying that only part of the law should be repealed were added to the mix. There are a plethora of Obamacare replacement plans from conservative health experts. A successful GOP nominee will likely have to pick and choose from among these to craft a winning message, explaining that some of the attractive goals of Obamacare can be better achieved by a conservative alternative.

The poll has less positive news when it comes to the party's approach to generating economic growth. The GOP has largely been united against increasing the minimum wage. However, increasing the minimum wage is as popular as repealing Obamacare. Only 5 deep red states opposed increasing the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour, and a majority of voters in every swing state gave the populist measure their thumbs up.

Most important, the ground for the party's apparent current economic message, which tends to stress incentives for those with capital, may not be very fertile at all. YouGov asked voters if the country's economic system favored the wealthy. A plurality in all 50 states said it does. A majority of voters in most deep red states agreed, and over 60 percent of voters in every swing state followed suit. Other national polls show that a large majority of voters believe the GOP is the party of the rich. Together, these data suggest the 2016 nominee will need to tread carefully when crafting a tax plan.

The 2016 GOP nominee is likely to be caught between two economic possibilities. By 2016, voters could be less populist and feeling better about their chances in the economy. But that is only likely if the economy is getting better, and if that happens the Democrats are likely to get the credit. On the other hand, if things get worse the populist mood will likely only deepen. Voters won't trust government, but they also will remain embittered at a class that continues to fare well even as they lose jobs or income.

The current depth of this populist mood is best seen in YouGov's question on immigration. The poll asked a standard question: what voters think should be done about illegal immigrants already in the country. Unlike most pollsters, however, YouGov did not ask if those already here should be "deported." Instead, it asked if illegals should "be required to leave the U.S." When given this

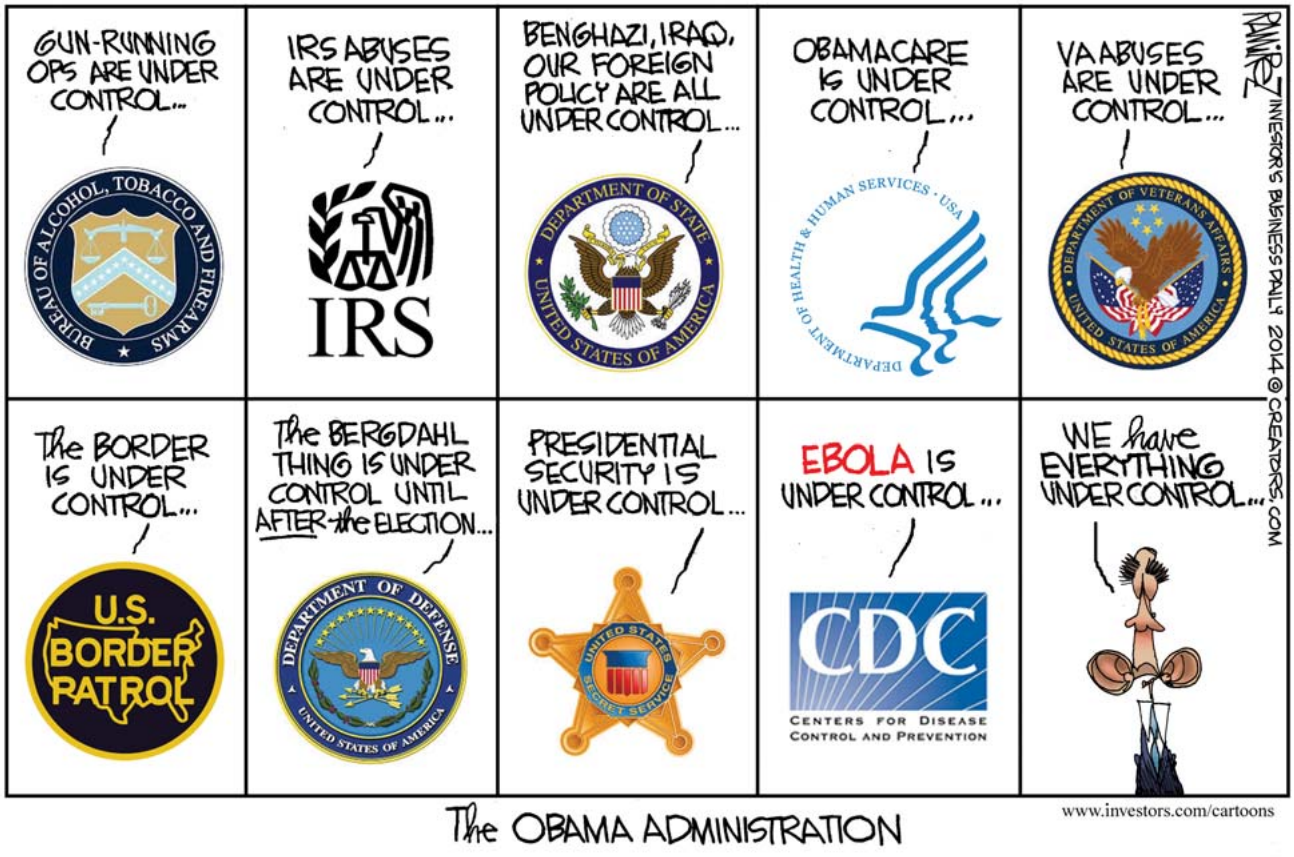
less emotionally charged option, majorities in 32 states chose the "leave the U.S." choice. This did not include three swing states with significant Hispanic and/or young, secular, college-educated populations (Colorado, Florida, and Virginia), but did include every Midwestern swing state plus Pennsylvania and New Hampshire. It even included Maine and Rhode Island, two states with significant white working-class populations. The immigration hardline position won in states with 278 electoral votes, just enough to elect a president.

The approach favored by the GOP establishment, which includes giving illegals a path to citizenship, is not popular even in deep blue states. Indeed, no state gave majority support to the option that illegals should "be allowed to stay and apply for citizenship." If one adds the third YouGov option, "stay but no citizenship," to the "leave the U.S." voters, every state has a majority opposed to a path to citizenship. The opposition to citizenship for illegals in swing states ranges from a low of 56 percent in Colorado to a high of 66 percent in New Hampshire.

The standard GOP establishment tax and budget playbook might also be a rough sell. Establishment Republicans strongly favor comprehensive tax reform, and most current GOP versions of that would raise taxes on many middle- and upper-middle-income families while lowering taxes for those earning $500,000 or more annually. Republicans also support cutting domestic spending, especially on entitlements like Social Security and Medicare. These cuts would be phased in over many years and exempt current recipients in most cases, but the values the GOP prioritizes would be clear. Those values, favoring budget stability and investment by the wealthy over continuation of the old-age safety net Americans are familiar with, are unlikely to be shared by voters who already think the economic system is rigged for the rich.

The GOP establishment should instead look very carefully at what the GOP governors in light blue and purple states have done. All have either accepted Medicaid expansion or otherwise expanded subsidized health care. Michigan governor Rick Snyder signed a bill increasing his state's minimum wage, and Wisconsin governor Scott Walker is pledging to freeze tuition at state universities. Walker, Snyder, Ohio governor John Kasich, and Florida governor Rick Scott have also all cut income, business, or property taxes, but none has passed the type of comprehensive individual income tax reforms favored by the national GOP establishment. Republicans running statewide who have shepherded through comprehensive tax reform bills, such as North Carolina house speaker Thom Tillis and Kansas governor Sam Brownback, are currently either behind or running even with their Democratic opponents despite the national GOP tide.

It's not like these more popular GOP governors have all taken the



easy, "me too Democrat" road to reelection. Snyder signed a "right-to-work" bill in one of the most pro-labor states. Walker famously took on his state's public employee unions and beat them in a nationally prominent, yearlong fight. Both, however, understood that politics is the art of the possible and that one must pick one's battles carefully.

Establishment Republicans need to understand that America is in a populist moment. Most Americans did not see much benefit from the growth of the mid-2000s; throw in the recessions before and after that, and they haven't seen much rise in disposable income in 15 years. Some have fallen behind, others are treading water, and few feel things are working well for them. Ignoring their sentiments is a sure way to stay out of the White House. ♦

Enemies, Allies, and Kurdistan

The case for a major new U.S. military base.

BY JONATHAN FOREMAN

It is not clear at the time of writing if Turkey will or will not allow the United States to use the NATO air base at Incirlik for airstrikes against ISIS forces in Syria and Iraq. On October 13, national security adviser Susan Rice announced that Turkey had finally agreed to the use of the base, only to be contradicted the very next day by Turkey's foreign minister. A subsequent press report claimed that the Turks were allowing their American allies to fly reconnaissance drones from Incirlik but no manned aircraft.

The brouhaha exemplifies a troubling downward trend in America's ability to project power in the Middle East, a trend that goes beyond Turkey and its peculiar, complicated, sometimes hostile relationship with America. The ISIS crisis and the feebleness of the current air campaign don't just provide evidence that only a foolish leader would preclude putting at least some "boots on the ground" in a military campaign. They also show that the countries that have long given us basing rights in the region may not be as cooperative or as trustworthy as our planners assume them to be, and that this is likely to get worse.

Given this unfortunate development, it is time for America's planners to consider breaking with tradition and setting up new bases in countries that are likely to remain reliable allies—even if they are not yet recognized as independent states.

Iraqi Kurdistan is just such a place (another is the Somaliland Republic, just across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen). It is not technically an independent state, as it has not seceded from the battered, unraveling republic of Iraq. But at this point that doesn't really matter. Baghdad is hardly in a position to object to any deal between the United States and the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Indeed, any hope that Iraq has of remaining a single state, federal or confederal, once ISIS has been defeated would depend on Baghdad and whoever controls it (likely a Shiite-dominated government), giving the KRG something very close to de facto independence.

Similarly, the only way Iraqi Kurdistan will feel really safe from invasion by Baghdad-controlled forces, an ISIS-Sunni alliance, a Turkey that has returned to its old anti-KRG ways, or Iran (Syria is unlikely to be a threat for a long time to come) is if there is a U.S. military presence in the country.

For both the Iraqi Kurds and the United States, then, a U.S. base in Kurdistan—which already has airfields with long military-spec runways—would offer the United States tremendous strategic advantages.

These are all the more important in a region where U.S. influence has diminished, and in which the United States may well lose access to some of its biggest air, land, and naval bases in the medium or long term.

In the short term it obviously makes sense. There has been much talk about the need for the United States and its allies to stand up effective local forces in the war against ISIS. But the 5,000-strong Syrian rebel force that U.S. military leaders think they can stand up within a year or two is nowhere near adequate.

A proper alliance with Iraqi Kurdistan, one that includes the training and equipping of more effective Kurdish armed forces, offers perhaps the only hope of defeating ISIS without having to cooperate militarily with Iran (which would demand nuclear concessions and continue to undermine U.S. interests in Iraq) or Syria's Assad regime (which has much American as well as Syrian and Iraqi blood on its hands).

Despite the Obama administration's reflexive hostility to Kurdish aspirations and the official U.S. government preference for dealing only with Baghdad, the airports of Iraqi Kurdistan have reportedly become U.S. military installations as a matter of simple necessity. Some of the big air bases in Iraq proper like Balad and Taji are either too vulnerable to ISIS attack to be used by coalition aircraft or have already been captured. As for bases further south like the Rasheed base in Baghdad, the Iranian military is already using them to launch surveillance drones, and U.S. military officials are rightly nervous about the security implications of sharing an air base

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with, and being studied by, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

But quite apart from the immediate value of Iraqi Kurdistan in the ISIS campaign, it would make sense for the United States to form a closer military partnership with the KRG. Unlike several of the countries from which we fly our aircraft or base our ships, its leaders and people are pro-American, its ruling regime is not a monarchy ripe for Arab Spring-style overthrow, it's not trying to replace the United States as a regional hegemon, it does not sponsor Islamist terrorism, and if we did ally with it, we would be guaranteeing its freedom and security in such a way as to bind it to us by the strongest cords of self-interest and gratitude.

Currently, American military efforts in the region are dependent on Qatar, which hosts CENTCOM's forward HQ and the huge al-Udeid air base, Kuwait, home of the Ali al-Salem airfield, the UAE, location of the Al-Dhafra air base, and Bahrain, which is the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.

Qatar is said to sponsor Islamism and jihadist militancy around the world: Its financial beneficiaries have allegedly included Hamas, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Somalia's al Shabab, the al Qaeda-allied Nusra Front in Syria, and finally the Afghan Taliban. Alleged Qatari support for ISIS has prompted the U.S. Treasury to single out the kingdom as an especially "permissive jurisdiction" for terrorist financing.

Kuwait, too, has sponsored the Muslim Brotherhood as well as more radical Islamist groupings around the world. It was revealed by WikiLeaks to have been a key transit point for al Qaeda financing.

Moreover, the Arab Spring showed that even the most stable-seeming authoritarian monarchies and dictatorships can be more vulnerable than they look. It should be clear to U.S. planners that it is risky to assume that the rulers of the Gulf States will continue in power or that they will continue to be on America's side.

Certainly violence in Bahrain, where members of the Shiite majority protested against Sunni rulers and were brutally repressed with Saudi assistance, should have the Pentagon making plans for the day when the regime has been overthrown and neither CENTCOM nor the Navy can use the country as a base.

As for Turkey, now that it sees itself as potential top dog in a region from which America withdrew, it is unlikely ever to give us free rein at Incirlik, regardless of the destination or mission of U.S. aircraft. And even if the Erdogan government were inclined to be more cooperative in the matter of ISIS, the Turkish military has on several occasions shown itself willing to sacrifice the U.S. alliance on the altar of its anti-Kurdish obsession.

A Kurdish fighter and U.S. Black Hawk helicopter, 2012

There is a strong argument that gaining a permanent U.S. base in Iraq, preferably in Kurdistan, always ought to have been a primary U.S. goal after the 2003 invasion, and not just because such a boon might have quieted those "realist" opponents of the Iraq mission who abhorred talk of fostering democratic government in the Middle East.

The United States has lost several key bases in recent years, the most significant one being the Kharshi Khanabad base in Uzbekistan (thanks to Russian pressure). At the very least, the existence of a major modern U.S.-equipped air base in Kurdistan would offer redundancy for whenever Turkey refuses permission for the use of Incirlik, or for the day when Turkey might cease being even a nominal ally.

A U.S. air base in Iraqi Kurdistan would give America the ability to influence events in the immediate region and also in the Caucasus. Just the reconnaissance capability would be transformative. After all, Sulaymaniyah is only 330 miles from Tehran and 500 miles from Damascus.

A U.S. base in Kurdistan could make all the difference to Washington's military options when dealing with the Iranian nuclear program. The fact that airstrikes would be significantly less difficult—not to mention the potential for inserting special forces by air or land—might well have a salutary effect on Tehran and therefore make such an action less necessary and less likely.

Iraqi Kurdistan is one of the few places in the world where both the government and the population actively desire an American military presence. Indeed the KRG has been quietly lobbying for more than a decade for the United States to establish a base in its territory.

The Kurdistan Regional Government certainly has its flaws and would continue to have them even if the country asserted its independence and became a formal U.S. ally. Its key institutions are dominated by two rival clans, there are serious problems with corruption, and also periodic problems with press freedom. Still, the country is more democratic and much more religiously tolerant than most others in the region. A formal, quasi-permanent arrangement for a U.S. base in Kurdistan could transform for the better America's position in the region. It would also be a good thing for all the Kurds (not just those in Iraq), a good thing for Iraq, and arguably a good thing for a region that otherwise will be a proxy battleground for Iran and Turkey. ♦

NEWSCOM

Destroying Pakistan

The curse of the blasphemy law.

BY NINA SHEA & FARAHNAZ ISPAHANI

Pakistan's blasphemy law, which turns 30 this year, has become only more deadly with age. Since blasphemy was made a capital crime under the nation's secular penal code, the effect has been to suppress moderate influences, pushing "Pakistani society further out on the slippery slope of extremism," said Mujeeb-ur-Rahman, senior advocate at the Supreme Court of Pakistan, in Washington last week. With its large population and sensitive location, Pakistan is a place where any societal shift in the direction of the Taliban deserves the attention of all concerned about Islamic extremism. Instead, this is one more foreign threat that the Obama administration underestimates.

On October 16, for the first time, an appeals court affirmed a death sentence for blasphemy meted out to a woman. A Christian mother of five, Asia Bibi was arrested in 2009 after fellow field hands complained that, during a dispute, she had insulted the prophet of Islam. No evidence was produced, because to repeat blasphemy is blasphemous. Similarly, anyone who defends an accused blasphemer risks being labeled a blasphemer; two officials who made appeals on Bibi's behalf—Salman Taseer, governor of Punjab, and Shahbaz Bhatti, federal minister for minorities affairs—were assassinated in 2011. Bibi has one last legal recourse, an appeal to the federal Supreme Court, but now no public official dares speak up for her—or for any other blasphemy defendant.

Accusations of blasphemy are brought disproportionately against Pakistan's Christians, some 2 percent of the population. Intent is not an element of the crime, and recent years have seen cases brought against illiterate, mentally disabled, and teenage Christians. Each case seems to heighten the sensitivities of the extremists and further fracture society. The flimsiest rumor of a Koran burning can spark hysteria ending in riots against entire Christian communities. Lahore's St. Joseph Colony was torched last year in such a pogrom.

But blasphemy complaints against Muslims are also on the rise. Muslims now make up the largest defendant class; by contrast, during the entire 200 years of the British Raj, not a single blasphemy case against a Muslim is documented, according to the Islamabad Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS). Particularly hard hit are the Ahmadis, who pride themselves on reconciling Islamic beliefs with modern principles of pluralism, secularism, and peace. In 1974, the constitution was amended to declare the group heretical, and two of the five penal code sections devoted to blasphemy are specific to them. A few months ago, in a not atypical case, an Ahmadi doctor was charged with blasphemy after two Pakistanis posing as patients accused him of "posing as a Muslim" because, at their request, he read from a Koran.

Increasingly, liberal thinkers among Pakistan's majority Hanafi Muslims are accused of blasphemy. The law's vagueness—it bans irreverent words about Islam "either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly"—means it can be used against almost anyone, for almost anything. Extremists aggressively manipulate perceptions. Emboldened and even legitimized by the law, some are dispensing with the legal process altogether, acting, often with impunity, as judge and executioner.

The most famous victim of this parody of justice is Malala Yousafzai, one of this year's Nobel Peace laureates. The media have downplayed the whispering campaign accusing Malala of defaming Islam by challenging the cultural taboo against female education. The accusations have come not only from the Taliban, who shot her but failed to kill her two years ago. Husain Haqqani, former Pakistani ambassador to the United States, pointed out in the *Wall Street Journal* the Twitter campaign #MalalaDrama, whereby hundreds of young followers of cricket hero Imran Khan have denounced Malala as a "tool of the evil West who is seeking to impose Western values on Islamic Pakistan." She wisely remains in exile in the United Kingdom, even though Swat, her homeland, has been reclaimed from the Taliban. (Malala is Pakistan's second Nobel laureate. Its first, Abdus Salam, awarded a Nobel in physics in 1979, was among the earliest Ahmadis driven from Pakistan. He died in exile, but after his remains were buried in Pakistan, a magistrate ordered that words identifying him as Pakistan's first "Muslim" Nobel laureate be filed off his tombstone.)

Scholar Akbar Ahmed says that "perhaps dozens" of Pakistani reformist educators have faced blasphemy complaints lodged by their students. Junaid Hafeez, professor of English literature at a university in Multan, is currently on trial for his life for blasphemy. He allegedly insulted the prophet on Facebook, though again there is no evidence. Another, Professor Mohammed Younas Shaikh, who started "The Enlightenment" group in Islamabad as a forum for Muslims to discuss their faith in the contemporary context, was accused

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Farahnaz Ispahani is a former member of the Pakistani parliament and the author of Waiting to Die: Pakistan's Religious Minorities *(forthcoming).*

of blasphemy by a student and sentenced to death, though he managed later to emigrate.

Last month, Professor Shakeel Auj, dean of the Islamic Affairs Department at Karachi University and an acclaimed Koranic scholar, was shot to death by unknown assailants. While well within the Sunni mainstream, Auj espoused a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of Islamic jurisprudence conducive to expanded rights for women. This brought death threats, including from some of his faculty colleagues. His pleas for protection were ignored, and the four professors arrested for threatening him were out on bail when he was killed.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan's Rahman told us that the lawyers' association of which he has been a member for 40 years has also grown more extreme under the blasphemy regime. In 2008, the *New York Times*, reporting on then-president Pervez Musharraf's threat to judicial independence, exclaimed that Pakistan's lawyers were evidence that "there truly was a liberal tradition in Pakistan, buried beneath six decades of dictatorship, corruption and religious extremism" and attributed to such lawyers "perhaps the most consequential outpouring of liberal, democratic energy in the Islamic world in recent years."

Three years later, lawyers in their trademark black suits were seen leading quite a different outpouring. This time its purpose was to cheer Mumtaz Qadri, assassin of Gov. Taseer and one of his security detail, who had said on television, "Salman Taseer is a blasphemer, and this is the punishment for a blasphemer." Jarring reports showed members of the bar showering the defendant with rose petals as he entered the courthouse for his murder trial. Three hundred pro-bono lawyers signed his defense papers. After rendering a guilty verdict, the judge immediately went into hiding. The BBC entitled its report on the episode "Has Pakistan passed the tipping point of religious extremism?"

In 2000, no less an authority than the Lahore High Court chief justice, Mian Nazir Akhtar, gave a public statement to the effect that "no one had authority to pardon blasphemy and that anyone accused of blasphemy should be killed on the spot, as a religious obligation." British writer and human rights activist Benedict Rogers commented on the thuggery accompanying the law: "Regularly, mobs of Muslims, often led by Mullahs, crowd into the courtroom, shouting threats at the judge if he does not rule in their favour. Defence lawyers receive death threats for taking on blasphemy cases. Mobs gather outside the courtroom, and physically threaten the lawyers as they leave."

Some 60 people have been murdered in connection with the blasphemy law, according to CRSS. On September 25, a prison policeman, in cold blood, shot and killed 42-year-old Reverend Zafar Bhatti, president of the Jesus World Mission, accused, without evidence, of blasphemy, and wounded his cellmate, Mohammed Asghar, a 70-year-old diagnosed schizophrenic on death row for blasphemy. Earlier, on May 7, for defending Professor Hafeez, Rashid Rehman, a lawyer of 20 years' standing, became the fourth person working for Pakistan's Human Rights Commission to be murdered. Two lawyers were among those who threatened him.

As part of its changing cultural climate, Pakistan has become an "increasingly harsh environment for journalists, particularly those considered liberal," the BBC reports. The Committee to Protect Journalists cites scores of reporters killed. Media personalities either shot and wounded or threatened with death for blasphemy so far in 2014 include: Shoaib Adil, a publisher in Lahore whose current affairs magazine is considered a rare liberal voice in the Urdu media; Pakistan's most famous television journalist, Hamid Mir; the country's most popular television host, Shaista Wahdi; and television anchor and journalist Raza Rumi. The BBC noted that Adil, whose transgression was to publish an Ahmadi judge's book, is not a Taliban target but "the victim of an everyday witch hunt by Pakistan's powerful religious groups—the kind of witch hunt that's so common and yet so scary that it never makes headlines."

The United States lacks a diplomatic strategy to oppose Pakistan's blasphemy law. Instead, it actually goes along with the idea of other countries' criminalizing offensive speech. In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, co-chairing a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), initiated the ongoing "Istanbul Process" to curb anti-Islamic blasphemy (also called religious "defamation," "insult," and "hate speech"). The administration has even had the United States cosponsor U.N. resolutions with the OIC—resolutions supported, needless to say, by Pakistan—intended to promote stricter global enforcement of hate speech bans.

We need to change course. Education, law, and the media—the backbone of secular civil society—are being dangerously undermined by Pakistan's blasphemy regime. Raza Rumi, who in March narrowly escaped the assassin's bullets that killed his driver, wrote, "If politicians, policymakers, judges and lawyers tremble in fear, we may as well surrender our birthright to those who would deny us it. This culture of fear, orchestrated by powerful clerics and frenzied mobs, has paralyzed the criminal justice system. Those enjoying positions of power appear helpless. And there is no counter-narrative to oppose the spread of extremist ideology."

The United States should make an unapologetic defense of free speech in every appropriate forum and work to roll back this subversive secular law. We should lend moral support to the majority of Pakistanis who are struggling to retain a semblance of a democratic and pluralist society and peace in the region. To the world's detriment, the administration underestimated the Islamic State. The damage will be all the greater if we continue to ignore the danger from Pakistan's blasphemy law. ♦

Among the Palefaces

Yet another effort to start a conversation about race in America

By Matt Labash

As a lifelong white person—or Person Without Color, for the more sensitively inclined—I have nothing against white people. I mean, sure, at this late date in their history, I'm all too aware of the dubious and disheartening white-people statistics. Nearly all Prius owners, Vineyard Vines wearers, and girls named "Addison" are white. Almost 8 out of 10 Canadians are white. And the most reliably annoying person in the world, Gwyneth Paltrow? You guessed it: white.

Still, as a committed multiculturalist (I play Chinese checkers, drink Black Russians, and frequently Indian-give my kids' allowance when running low on cash), I freely admit that black people have a lot to apologize for, too—as anyone who has ever been to a Tyler Perry movie can attest. So nobody's perfect. And white people have inarguably enriched the culture as well, having invented everything from modern air conditioning to Yacht Rock.

It was with bemused curiosity, then, that I approached the *Whiteness Project*, an "interactive documentary short" brought to us by acclaimed documentary filmmaker Whitney Dow, under the aegis of PBS's *POV*, which bills itself as American television's longest-running showcase for independent nonfiction films. After all, it's hard to think of two entities that bring more unassailable authority to the subject of whiteness than PBS and guys named "Whitney."

For many years now, white people have been the equivalent of the goofy sitcom dad. It's okay to take shots at them, since it's assumed that they run everything, to the detriment of everyone else (our black president notwithstanding—though he is, in point of fact, half white). You see it most recently in films like Justin Simien's *Dear White People*, a campus comedy of manners that spends much time sending up white people. The script, written by Simien, who is black, was honed over several years on his DearWhitePeople Twitter page, where he celebrates #TokenTuesdays (group shots of smiling white people with one black friend) and tweets out Caucasian-tweaking zings such as "Dear white people, dating a Black person doesn't count if it pisses off your parents."

Matt Labash is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

But though Simien is enjoying the white-hot spotlight now (sorry, my white privilege at work), he had to stand in line behind white people (what else is new?) to make fun of white people. There was Norman Lear, whose lovable bigot Archie Bunker, for all his bite, was still the butt of the joke. And there was cracker comic Jeff Foxworthy ("You might be a redneck if you've ever climbed a water tower with a bucket of paint to defend your sister's honor"). Most notably, there was Christian Lander, whose "Stuff White People Like" franchise for years kept white people snorting their Aprihops India Pale Ales from their noses as they read of white people: liking black music that black people don't listen to anymore, picking their own fruit, being offended, eating hummus, wearing bangs, and buying sea salt.

Granted, Lander's wasn't a taxonomy of Wal-Mart-America's white people—the ones you see wearing their best sweatpants-and-slippers into the store, their shopping carts overflowing with refined sugars and heavy carbs, as they frantically comb the shelves for Bacitracin ointment to apply to their eighth-grade daughter's newly inked neck tattoo. No, Lander was Jeff-Foxworthy-in-Warby-Parker-glasses, classifying a particular genus of precious, rarefied, fussy white person—basically, *Slate* readers.

But the point is that fussy white people like to laugh at themselves, enjoying as they do the security of those who love themselves, even if they secretly hate themselves after sitting for years in their overpriced universities, enduring God-knows-how-many Critical Race Theory classes in which their Associate Professor of Indignation (who is often white) lectures them about how white people have ruined the world.

And that's where Whitney Dow and the *Whiteness Project* come in.

Even though its awkwardly constructed subtitle—*Inside the White Caucasian Box*—makes the *Whiteness Project* sound like a charity MMA match at an Aryan Nation picnic, make no mistake. This is a Serious Project, and Dow is a Serious Person. It might sound like self-parody, but it is not satire. This is Deadly Serious. Don't take my word for it. Take Dow's. "I am deadly serious about this," he wrote on that most serious of platforms, Twitter.

In his lengthy "filmmaker's statement," Dow offered that "most whites see themselves as outside the American racial paradigm and their race as a passive attribute.

Subsequently, they feel that they do not have the same right to speak about race as non-whites." Therefore, this project "hopes to bring everyday white Americans, especially those who would not normally engage in a project about race, into the racial discussion—to help them understand the active role their race plays in every facet of their lives, to remove some of the confusion and guilt that many white people feel around the subject of race and to help white Americans learn to own their whiteness."

Or, as he put it less grandiosely to *Vice*, "If whites are going to participate in changing the racial dynamic, they have to deal with their own s— first. And they also have to be allowed to be fully vested *participants* in the conversation. If every time a white person opens their mouth about race, someone yells, 'You're being a f—ing racist!' at us, we can't do it. White people don't have a lot of experience talking about their race, so they're going to say a lot of dumb s—."

Dow, of course, is indisputably correct on the "dumb s—" score. But I'm not sure what planet he's inhabiting in which white people don't have a lot of experience talking about race. In fact, despite the serially recurring call for a "national conversation on race" after every flashpoint event like Ferguson, many seem never to stop talking about race. You can clearly do it in Whiteness Studies classes across the nation's campuses, where guilty-white instructors assist students in swapping out their Klan hoods for hair shirts. Or you can experience campus life on Amazon, by picking up books with titles such as *White Like Me*, or *Understanding White Privilege*, or *Interrupting White Privilege*, or *Challenging White Privilege*, which is not to be confused with *Dismantling White Privilege*.

Or you can attend the annual White Privilege Conference, which trains our nation's educators to end it, not mend it. Or you can subscribe to their peer-reviewed *Journal for Understanding and Dismantling Privilege*, which contains articles like "Signified Honky—Stories in the Key of White." Or you can visit Diversity Inc.'s website, which has an "Ask the White Guy" column, in which the white guy answers questions such as "Is Trayvon today's Emmett Till?" and "Is the Oxford English Dictionary Definition of Racism Too White For You?" Or you can read "When Whites Just Don't Get It," the three-part series in the *New York Times* by Nicholas Kristof, noted white person.

Or since the critical race theorists of yesterday are the *BuzzFeed* staff writers of today, you can take any number of online "privilege quizzes." Taking *BuzzFeed*'s, I scored 69 out of 100, making me not overwhelmingly privileged, but still privileged enough that *BuzzFeed*'s quizmasters, who have never met me, felt compelled to tell me, "You've had a few struggles, but overall your life has been far easier than most. This is not a bad thing, nor is it something to be ashamed of. But you should be aware of your advantages and work to help others who don't have them. Thank you for checking your privilege."

Dow, however, is endeavoring to bring other kinds of white people into the conversation. The kind of white people who'd take a privilege quiz are Christian Lander's white people. Dow wants to bring in Jeff Foxworthy's. And so the *Whiteness Project* is not a traditional documentary at all. There's no sequential narrative line. Rather, it is an ongoing series of interviews, posted online, with (mostly) regular ol' white people talking about their whiteness. Earlier this month, Dow posted the first 21 of what he hopes will total 1,000. (It was widely and errantly reported that he'd posted 24 interviews, but that was an honest mistake, since white people tend to look alike.)

While Dow intends to strike out across the country for future installments, all 21 of the initial interviews are with citizens of Buffalo. Which seems as good a stop as any to take white people's temperature. Not only are white and black populations more geographically segregated in Buffalo than in most American cities. But Buffalo has been home to many quintessential white people and things: Millard Fillmore, folk singer Ani DiFranco, polka music, NHL hockey, and Buffalo wings —a staple food that white people often ingest while watching black professional athletes physically exert themselves for the entertainment of white people screaming imprecations at their flatscreens through blue-cheese-dipping-sauce-smeared lips that are as white as their privilege.

Each Buffalonian in Dow's series is shot from the chest up in front of a stark white background, as if for an Avedon portrait. With neither names nor backgrounds given, they ostensibly say white things about being white; Dow has pared 30-minute interviews down to about 90 seconds each, so as to extract the maximum whiteness. Still, it's hard not to notice that what they say about their whiteness tends to line up with what they think of affirmative action and preferential hiring and how they feel about talking about race in front of black people. In Dow's biosphere, whiteness is all about blackness. Whether they're coached in this direction or just naturally head there, we don't know, since the questions they are answering are never asked on-camera. But the latter scenario makes some sense. What else do white people talk about when asked about whiteness? In my four-plus decades of being a white person, I've never had a single conversation with another white person about what it means to be white.

To cut to the chase, the interviews themselves, for all their salt-of-the-earth honesty, are a bit of a snore. Sure, an occasional interviewee steps into the bear-trap of racist

awkwardness. The worst of it comes from a girl who resembles Amy Winehouse's less drugged-up sister, who has soda cans rolled in her hair like hot-curlers. "I really don't have a lot of black friends," she offers, "but I do have a lot of gay friends and that's kind of a similar construct." She worries that her gay friends would be offended at the word "gay," just as in front of blacks, she says, "You can't even talk about fried chicken and Kool-Aid without wondering if somebody's gonna get offended. It's always like walking on eggshells, isn't it? I don't know, you just don't know where the line is."

But most approach the issue with a more anodyne befuddlement. Plenty decry quotas and minority hiring preferences and the ridiculousness of reparations—the usual Caucasian curmudgeon's shtick. One bushy-eyebrowed Jack-Germond-type gent facetiously suggests he'd be for reparations since he had ancestors who were sold into white slavery. So if other groups are set for payouts for events that occurred hundreds of years ago, "I should be in line, too, huh?"

Others proceed tepidly, giving it their conscientious white-person best, speaking of the need for color-blindness and treating people as equals, or noticing how there're not very many black people in their IT workplace. A good many seem to be taking their cues from the Grievance Group Guild, whining of their own victimhood. An otherwise attractive white woman with purple hair, a skeleton tattoo on her chest, and "trouble" tattooed on her neck is herself pleading for special-victim status based on her looks, saying, "I don't get the same treatment as a normal white person does. I get discriminated against just as much as a minority. . . . I'm not clearly a minority, but I am."

I could go on, but why? You get the idea: 21 yobbos with varying opinions who are not used to expressing them in front of a camera. They probably sound the way any other 21 yobbos of any color would if they did the same. And while the commentariat strives to invest great meaning into the worst of these, I don't see how that can be done. Even soda-can-hair girl isn't representative of white people. Just as she's not representative of people with hair.

Of course, that beacon of light and nuance, the Twitterverse, passed swift and ferocious judgment: @chrisalie3 tweeted, "this whiteness project s— just reaffirms that racial ignorance is alive and kicking." While @herwittythought tweeted, "because we need them to tell us to get over it in a different way." General sentiment was probably best encapsulated by a *Guardian* headline: "The Whiteness Project Will Make You Wince. Because White People Can Be Rather Awful."

Dow, for his part, seemed slightly wounded by the backlash, telling *New York* magazine, "I expected white people to be outraged, and what's actually interesting to me is the biggest critics of the project are white progressives on the web." Surprised by white progressives' expressing sanctimonious outrage? He clearly doesn't get out much.

The blowback is all the richer since Dow has impeccable social-consciousness credentials. He has a black coproducing partner (whom he's forever mentioning), who for a time in college lived in Dow's family's house. Together, they made the knotty and compelling Peabody Award-winning documentary *Two Towns of Jasper*, examining the 1998 death of James Byrd, who was dragged behind a truck for two miles by three white men. Dow is from Cambridge, Massachusetts. He attended an Ivy League school. He's had an audience with the queen herself (Oprah).

Dow is hardly a white supremacist. Quite the opposite. So the criticism from his own (@emdawgz1 tweeted, "Mr Dow. . . . Sometimes when getting your a** kicked . . . it's best to just curl up in a ball and wait for it to be over") is almost enough to make me feel sorry for him. Almost. For if his online critics are playing to form, as shrill, shortsighted, and willfully myopic as you expect the Twidiocracy to be in the middle of a race-related feeding frenzy, Dow is just as selectively dishonest in his *Whiteness Project*.

The project's interviews come without editorializing from Dow, unless you count the bumpers at the end of each minute-and-a-half episode, which flash statistical pronouncements intended to bloodlessly drive home the sorry state of white people in America. To his credit, Dow names the source from which each figure came. But when I delve into them, it becomes apparent that, while he never outright cooked the numbers, he often goosed them to tell a story that didn't necessarily reflect reality.

After one interview, he reports that 60 percent of white Americans say "race relations are 'generally good.'" The implication being: O, ye clueless white people. But in the very same 2014 CBS News survey that Dow quotes, 55 percent of blacks said the same—a mere 5-point difference and a fact that he doesn't bother mentioning, though CBS did: "Whites and blacks are nearly in agreement in their views; majorities of both call race relations generally good."

After an interview with a gruff, tank-topped bar owner who expresses distaste for minority-hiring preferences, Dow informs us that 26 percent of white Americans say minority business and education successes are due to racial preferences. Sounds pretty uncharitable of white people, or at least one-quarter of them. Except when you go to the Pew survey he references, it clearly states that, while a majority of white respondents said affirmative action in college admissions is a good thing, "significantly more people worry about the fairness of the programs . . . [and] Black-white differences on this question are much smaller than on the question of whether such programs are a good thing or not." Forty-three percent of whites figured they were unfair, and 35 percent of blacks agreed.

After interviewing soda-can girl, Dow tells us that 70 percent of white millennials "did not grow up in families that talked about race." Translation: White people are ostriches with their heads in the sand. But when raking through the MTV survey he used as a source, one discovers that maybe those millennials didn't get the stern racial talking-to because "84 percent say their family taught them that everyone should be treated the same, no matter what their race. . . . [A] belief in equality has become this generation's 'first commandment'—true across all races."

But wait, there's more! After one interview, Dow tells us that 75 percent of white Americans say their social networks are entirely white. Obviously, white people are out of touch. Except the same Public Religion Research Institute survey found that 65 percent of blacks also reported their social networks are composed entirely of people who are black, which is presumably even harder for them to do, on account of there being fewer people to choose from.

In another epiphany on race relations, Dow tells us that only 10 percent of white American adults believe most whites are racist, while 38 percent believe most blacks are racist. Message: stupid white people! But go to the same Rasmussen Reports survey that Dow cites, and just one paragraph above that statistic lies this one: "Among black Americans, 31 percent think most blacks are racist, while 24 percent consider most whites racist." Could it be true? Who knows? It's just one more poll. But if we take this poll at its word—as Dow himself saw fit to do, at least partially—more blacks think blacks are racist than think whites are racist.

I've now given you five instances of Dow thumbing the scale when presenting data, but for good measure, here's one more. Smack in the middle of the Ferguson conflagration—the marquee race-relations fiasco of 2014—Dow relies on a *New York Times* survey that found three-quarters of white Americans say they come into contact with either "a few" or "no" black people on a regular basis. But the *Times* was kind enough to break that survey out by race. While blacks weren't asked how many white people they come into contact with, they were asked other questions, which turn out to be illuminating.

When asked how comfortable they felt talking race with someone of another race, 81 percent said they felt either very or somewhat comfortable. When asked how race relations were in the United States, only 44 percent said "generally good." But when asked how race relations were in their communities, "generally good" shot all the way up to 73 percent. Even after Ferguson, one of the most controversial police shootings of our time, when asked if they thought of police more as friends or enemies, only 13 percent of blacks said they saw the police as enemies.

So according to Dow's own sources, black and white America aren't nearly as far apart as our race-hustlers of both colors suggest. What they can agree on is the increasing uselessness of the "national conversation" on race, the one that Dow and others strive so clumsily to jumpstart, which does more to divide than unite. Perhaps the conversation we should have is a conversation about ceasing counterproductive conversations, instead addressing each other as individuals rather than as grievance-group blocs each intent on blowtorching the other with our respective briefs of historical injustice. Only a philistine would be antitolerance. But tolerance suggests empathy, which isn't about asserting ourselves, but seeing through the other guy's eyes, even if he has cataracts. Empathy means tolerance as defined by Voltaire: "What is tolerance? It is the consequence of humanity. We are all formed of frailty and error, let us pardon reciprocally each other's folly—that is the first law of nature."

Not to go too touchy-feely—we white people can get emotive—but I regard the last word on the subject as belonging to Brian Eno, an uber-white person, ambient music producer, and Roxy Music alumnus, who inadvertently stated an ideal race-relations philosophy when discussing a cappella singing. I never much cared for Roxy Music—way too white for my taste. Nor have I ever liked ambient music—music white people listen to when they need an excuse to drink. (I prefer Leroy Carr and Black Boy Shine's "Bad Whiskey Blues." Call Christian "Stuff White People Like" Lander and have him file me under "black music that black people don't listen to anymore.") But Eno once said: "When you sing with a group of people, you learn how to subsume yourself into a group consciousness, because a cappella singing is all about the immersion of the self into the community. That's one of the great feelings—to stop being me for a little while and to become us. That way lies empathy, the great social virtue."

Or, to frame it more earthily, I could turn to the *Whiteness Project*'s comments section. There, among all the spittle-flecked "conversationalists" who have joined the National Race Invitational, who call each other "filthy white pieces of s—" and "whiny parasites" and "dumbass" and "old white retard" and "Browntown" and "anime-loving neckbeard" and "nigga" and "mentally retarded" and "dumber than a kindergartner" and "cracka," was this rare bit of wisdom from "Lily the cat":

"Stop! I can't take it anymore. People listen to yourselves. We are going backwards as a society and nation. . . . Seriously, life is not about this petty, idiotic crap. . . . Okay, my rant is over. Starting loving more and hating less. It is later than we think." ♦

'Pulling Down the Statue of King George III, New York' (ca. 1852) by Johannes Oertel

Let George Do It

A royal road to American independence? BY JACK N. RAKOVE

Eric Nelson is a young historian of political thought at Harvard whose basic ambition is to transform every topic he studies. He has published three books in the past decade, and each seeks to transform a major subject in the study of early modern (16th-18th century) political ideas. His first book, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (2004), identifies a mode of thinking about the collective use of property that departs sharply from the emphasis on political liberty and personal independence that dominates the scholarly interpretation of early modern republicanism. Nelson built on this argument in his second book, *The Hebrew Republic* (2010), by noting how early modern thinkers used the biblical idea of the half-century Jubilee to support the redistribution of property. But that book's greater contribution lies elsewhere. Nelson argues that the Jews' desire to replace direct divine rule with monarchy, as expressed in 1 Samuel 8:4-9 and rabbinic commentaries, provides a basis for preferring representative govern-

The Royalist Revolution
Monarchy and the American Founding
by Eric Nelson
Belknap Press, 400 pp., $29.95

Jack N. Rakove, the William Robertson Coe professor of history and American studies at Stanford, is the author, most recently, of Revolutionaries: A New History of the Invention of America *(2010).*

ment to arbitrary royalty. The use of these sources by early modern writers demonstrates that creative political thinking was profoundly informed by religious texts and concerns and was not merely a secular development.

In *The Royalist Revolution*, Nelson turns his attention from Europe to revolutionary America. His argument will alternately surprise, shock, distress, and outrage many scholars, but it will also help to reshape a debate about the origins of the presidency, a topic that gravely matters as we agonize over the role of the post-9/11 executive in our impassioned and impasse-ridden politics.

Nelson's argument begins with an ingenious analysis of a surprising claim that American revolutionaries made just before independence. Resistance leaders and the Continental Congress repeatedly urged George III to take their side in the struggle against Parliament's assertion that it possessed unlimited authority to enact laws governing the colonies "in all cases whatsoever." In their view, the king should act as a wholly independent monarch who would treat each of his empire's representative assemblies as possessing essentially the same authority. If Parliament overstepped its power in enacting laws for the colonists, the king should intervene, wielding his royal veto against unjust legislation. He should act, as Thomas Jefferson memorably wrote in 1774, as "the balance of a great, if a well poised empire." Far from clinging unthinkingly to the Glorious Revolution settlement of 1688 and its aftermath, which made the British king a decidedly constitutional and limited monarch, George III should reclaim his prerogative and vigorously exercise the independent powers that custom and theory located in the executive. The clearest exponent of this view was James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who later played a critical role in shaping the novel presidency that emerged from the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Other scholars, myself included, have never known quite what to make of these claims. Taken at face value, they imply an ignorance of British governance so profound as to make the colonists seem like political idiots. Perhaps the claims can be read as an ultimatum to Britain's ruling class. The colonists really did not believe that the king would take this part. They simply wanted to demonstrate that they would no longer recognize any parliamentary jurisdiction over America, beyond allowing it to regulate imperial trade, a power that had to be lodged somewhere.

Nelson powerfully demonstrates that there was a depth to this position that other scholars have simply missed. In his view, some (though

Eric Nelson

hardly all) American leaders had become "patriot royalists" who were strikingly sympathetic to the monarchist arguments that the "execrable" Stuart monarchs of the 17th century had made against Parliament. The key texts here pivot on a largely forgotten struggle in the 1620s, when Parliament tried to enact legislation regulating American fisheries, and James I and Charles I each wielded the royal prerogative to insist that the colonies were not subject to parliamentary governance. For patriot royalists arguing within the precedent-laden traditions of Anglo-American governance, the Stuart success on this point in the 1620s provided crucial evidence that the colonists could revive and deploy a century-and-a-half later.

If Nelson stopped here, he would have provided a notable corrective to our understanding of the arguments that some colonists directed against Parliament before independence—but not much more. In the end, the British government in its wisdom was impervious to American arguments. There could be no relinquishment of Parliament's jurisdiction over the colonies. Nor could the king possibly abandon his loyalty to the principles of 1688. Indeed, no one supported the policies of his government more ardently than George III. Next to him, Lord North was a simpering, weak-kneed wimp.

Nelson has a second and more ambitious goal with this book, however: to explain how the presidency that Americans created a decade after declaring independence was also derived from the defense of executive prerogative in the age of the Stuarts. Here, it is important to say "executive" rather than "royal," because none of the authors of the U.S. Constitution—not even that purported quasi-crypto-monarchist Alexander Hamilton—seriously imagined an American king or hereditary ruler. But the same "patriot royalists" who wanted the king to nullify Parliament in 1774-76 remained advocates of a republican executive armed with independent prerogatives (such as the presidential veto) that hardly conformed to the weak models of executive leadership that Americans had once favored.

Here again, Nelson brilliantly uses 17th-century English sources largely neglected by American scholars to illuminate another critical debate. American ideas of political representation, it is often argued, rested on a belief that election by the people in constituencies mapping the real distribution of the population formed a sufficient basis of political legitimacy. Architects of the revolutionary constitutions conceived of a representative assembly as a "miniature," "mirror," "portrait," or "transcript" of the larger society. If these images were

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accurate, the demand for active consent was adequately satisfied.

But arguments like that had also appeared during the English civil war of the 1640s, to be countered by the idea that the king also embodied the national interest. If the executive was adequately *authorized* to serve that function, advocates for this claim held, the theory of exclusive legislative supremacy grew weaker. A space might be cleared in which the claims for executive prerogative—for an independent capacity to recognize and pursue the public interest—would complement, or even counter, the republican orthodoxy of 1776.

At the Constitutional Convention, the patriot royalists of the mid-1770s thus acquired a second opportunity to vindicate their position, as part of a process of positive constitution-making. The presidency that emerged in 1787 was the product of this process, and its great architects were founders like Wilson and Hamilton. By contrast, James Madison remained a muddled thinker on this point. Madison was preoccupied with legislative deliberation rather than executive decision—a gap he would have to correct in the 1790s, when the exercise of presidential prerogative became a decisive controversy in American politics.

Nelson's main argument thus holds that a critical element of American constitutionalism—the capacity of the president to serve as an independent source of political authority—emerged from the revolutionary controversies of the 1770s. The origins of this position did not lie in the republican tradition that passed from Machiavelli to 17th-century English radicals and on to the colonists. It came, instead, from the ostensibly detested sources of Stuart despotism, to be propounded by those Americans who did not believe that the legacy of the Glorious Revolution captured the whole of constitutional wisdom. Here, as in his other books, Nelson wants to remake the landscape of the history of political thought by rescuing neglected sources that were surprisingly influential.

This is a provocative argument, and there is much to learn from it, but also much to dispute. Here are four main criticisms that identify significant weaknesses in Nelson's case.

First, Nelson does not provide a credible account of why the mainstream of American opinion remained so decidedly suspicious of executive power in 1776. He disparages this attitude as "the antimonarchical enthusiasms" or "the frenzied antimonarchism of the moment." But that attitude culminated decades of political quarrels over the disparities between the use of prerogative power in the colonies and its limitation in Britain, as Bernard Bailyn (one of Nelson's mentors and my own) argued a half-century ago.

James Wilson

Second, Nelson also describes his advocates as participants in "a twenty-year campaign in favor of prerogative power." But that hardly matches the circumstances of revolutionary constitution-making. Nelson awards excessive importance to a single pamphlet by Edward Bancroft, better known to history (though not to his contemporaries) as the British spy in the American embassy in Paris. (Nelson weirdly describes Bancroft as a "Connecticut physician"; he lived there as a youth, but only became a physician after his studies in Britain, where he resided thereafter.) Important developments did take place with the writing of the constitutions of New York (1777) and Massachusetts (1780), but these did not create a movement. It took the conditions that led to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to permit the Framers to puzzle out a reshaped version of executive power.

Third, when Nelson turns to the convention, his decisive conclusion, he accords far more coherence to the Framers' vision than they possessed. The Constitution certainly restored a significant measure of prerogative—notably the veto—to its most novel creation, the presidency. But other customary prerogative powers went to Congress, in Article I, Section 8. Moreover, the critical powers over war and foreign relations, key aspects of the royal prerogative, were divided in complicated ways between the president and Congress (or the Senate).

Equally important, Nelson overlooks the greatest uncertainty of all: the nature of the political influence the president would exercise. The mode of presidential election was not determined until the convention's final days. When it was, none of the Framers could readily predict how the proposed electoral system would operate. It took decades of experimentation, at least to Andrew Jackson's reelection in 1832, for the American political system to acquire some of its mature characteristics. Perhaps Jackson's veto of the bank renewal bill, rather than the adoption of the Constitution, would be the best moment to mark the proper conclusion of Nelson's experiment.

But that would turn this remarkably productive and provocative scholar into more of a historian than he wants to be. Eric Nelson's real genius is to force us to rethink both the origins and substance of critical political ideas. Much may be problematic in *The Royalist Revolution*, but for the third time in a decade, Nelson has captured an ambitious goal. We will be wrestling with the implications of its argument for some time. ♦

IMAGES: NEWSCOM

B&A

Craft Warning

Classic style for the modern temperament.

BY DAVID SKINNER

Vladimir Nabokov, who knew a thing or two about the subject, once wrote, "Style is not a tool, it is not a method, it is not a choice of words alone. Being much more than all this, style constitutes an intrinsic component or characteristic of the author's personality." I happened to run across this line while in the midst of reading *The Sense of Style*. Nabokov, I thought, had summed up the major part of what was missing from this otherwise laudable book.

Not that its author is lacking in personality. Steven Pinker has plenty, and a cheerful kind of intelligence, even about difficult questions, that wears well. His politics and associations are openly conceded as he quotes genuinely impressive passages from his favorite writers: first, the arch-atheist Richard Dawkins; next, Pinker's own wife, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein; then, the physicist Brian Greene; later, Goldstein again. In another chapter, Pinker, who has written a book arguing that violence has been on a great downward swing in human history, finds many faults in a difficult passage in *A History of Warfare* by John Keegan.

If all this sounds a little too secular-humanist-triumphalist for you, at least consider another source from Pinker's literary honor roll, one even more fundamental to his argument here: a great but not-very-well-known book called *Clear and Simple as the Truth* by the American scholars Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner. For the nonfiction writer who thinks seriously about his craft and finds the competing lists of do's and don'ts in most guides to be inadequate, *Clear and Simple* is an excellent alternative, a book that can actually deepen your awareness of the basic assumptions behind any style of writing. It is not, however, a general guide to writing: Thomas and Turner are primarily concerned with "classic style," the strikingly confident prose style developed by such French writers as Descartes, La Rochefoucauld, and Madame de Sévigné. Their book identifies its key premises, and elaborates further by a close examination of classic style in English, from the Declaration of Independence to the reportage of A. J. Liebling.

The Sense of Style
The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century
by Steven Pinker
Viking, 368 pp., $27.95

Steven Pinker

Pinker, to his credit, aims to popularize the key ideas of classic style, which he says can be applied as an antidote to academese, bureaucratese, and other subspecies of language marred by the distracting tendency to encode even ordinary phenomena in the language of the specialist. What is so unclassic about the prose of the postmodern academic, for example, is that such language revels in its own obscurity. It is aimed at fellow initiates in a belief system founded on suspicion.

Classic style, by contrast, is stylistically and philosophically optimistic. It takes as a given that truth exists and that we are all competent to recognize it. Classic prose—invariably described in visual metaphors, emphasizing presentation—is a window to truth. It becomes the writer's job simply to direct the reader's gaze in the appropriate direction, never dirtying the windowpanes with distracting meta-commentary that belabors the writer's own effort. Without footnotes, unnecessary hedging, or jargon, the classic writer says: Look, here it is.

Pinker transforms this into practical writing tips, such as: Keep the signposting—writing about what you're going to write before you write about it—to a minimum. Another is to imagine your writing as a conversation—not that it should seem talky or especially casual, but rather modeled on an ideal of one-to-one directness. Pinker gives an apt side-by-side of two sentences. The unclassic sentence: "There is a significant positive correlation between measures of food intake and

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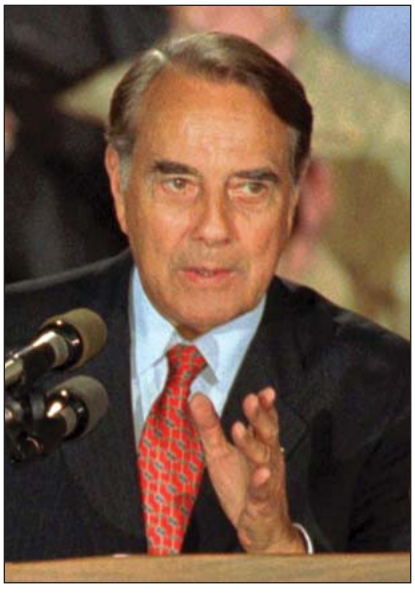
body mass index." The rewrite: "The more you eat, the fatter you get." One sounds like a book, the other like a human being with a point to make.

Where Pinker breaks ranks with most enemies of tendentious writing is on the question of motive. He cites Hanlon's razor—"Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity"—and turns to cognitive science for explanations of why we are so bad at presenting our hard-earned knowledge to others. A major reason, he says, is that once



'. . . not based on a lack of understanding.'

we learn something, it is very hard for us to know what it is like *not* to know it. This "curse of knowledge" leads us to under-explain and rely on abbreviation, shorthand, and jargon, as we assume our readers know much more than they actually do.

A related problem, Pinker says, is that writers fail to notice that the manner in which they think about a subject is far from the best way to present it. Our minds do things to our knowledge that, as writers, we need to undo. The more familiar we become with an idea or piece of information, for example, the more abstract it becomes in our thinking. Another of our handicaps is the way our memory works, "chunking" pieces of related information into packages our brains can handle more easily. All this creates a dilemma for the writer. The shorthand, jargon, and abstraction that ruin prose are, apparently, integral to the way our brains work, but such compression and complexity are antithetical to how we read and learn. Fascinating as this analysis is, the solutions Pinker recommends are well-known: Read your prose aloud, show drafts to other people.

Next, Pinker discusses sentence structure, to which he applies a method of diagramming somewhat like what used to be taught in schools. Many linguists would sooner tell a butterfly how to be beautiful than tell a native speaker how to use his language. That Pinker has written an advice book is remarkable by itself; that he has taken up sentence diagramming places him in a tradition of grammar education that linguists have tried to discredit. But if a pictorial explanation works to make the relevant concepts and relationships clear, why not?

Pinker's diagrams do help to show how some sentence structures place too heavy a burden on the reader's memory and concentration; but after deciphering the diagrams, one starts to wonder if the diagnosis isn't more involved than the cure. Consider this convoluted sentence from Bob Dole, which Pinker quotes.

> The view that beating a third-rate Serbian military that for the third time in a decade is brutally targeting civilians is hardly worth the effort is not based on a lack of understanding of what is occurring on the ground.

Pinker rightly says that the first problem here is that the reader has to process all these self-embedding phrases before being able to link the initial subject noun with a verb: "The view . . . is not based . . ." Making matters worse, this statement gets qualified by a hard-to-digest double negative ("not based on a lack of"), plus an irritating cliché: "on the ground."

"Only with a tree diagram can you figure it out," writes Pinker.

Or you could just rewrite it. Let's start with "A third-rate Serbian military . . . for the third time in a decade is brutally targeting civilians." The time element should probably precede the noun phrase ("for the third time in a decade, a third-rate . . ."), and I wonder if the two numbers are adding to the mental load; either way, that's enough information for one sentence. Okay, now the so-called view: "Some say beating them is hardly worth the effort." Turn completed, let's see if we can make it around the block: "This view . . . is not based on a lack of understanding of what is occurring on the ground." Try reversing the charges from two negatives to a positive to see if that helps: "This view is supported by what's occurring on the ground." Or "the facts on the ground actually support this view."

There is still a lot more work to be done here, but we have replaced one unreadable sentence with three readable ones. This is not neuroscience, or even cognitive science; it's copyediting.

The last third of *The Sense of Style* packs in a smattering of grammar, punctuation, and usage issues that help us see that being a linguist does not inoculate you from developing pet peeves. College professors who have to read student papers may be especially prone. A good portion of this material seems glib compared with the rest of the book: I didn't know that any controversy was attached to the use of "livid" to mean "angry," and I still didn't know much after Pinker's only comment on the matter ("Look it up").

So now do we have style? Not necessarily. One may adopt the principles of classic style, strive valiantly against the curse of knowledge, avoid common errors—and still not write with any distinction. Something additional, and far more precious, is needed to achieve a style that goes beyond mere competence: an overlay of personality, intelligence, fun, imagination, verbal dexterity, the taking of positions that are somehow unique and striking, a sense of intellectual drama, some or all of this, and a great deal of effort. It's not surprising that few of us even try—what with jobs to show up for and loved ones to see. ♦

IMAGES: NEWSCOM

B&A

A Finishing Canter

Doctor Gawande's practical prescriptions.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

If you are one of the growing number of older Americans who scan the newspaper obituaries of strangers—at what age did the Grim Reaper strike, and how?—Atul Gawande's new book is for you. But it is not for the elderly alone. This is the fourth of the Boston surgeon's book-length discussions of modern medicine, its frontiers, its promises and hazards. Its easy, informative style will be familiar to those who read his medical pieces in the *New Yorker*.

For most of human history, as Gawande has observed, ignorance was the handicap of medicine. Think, for instance, of the bleeding for routine bronchitis that probably killed George Washington and the obstinate ignorance of germ theory before Joseph Lister. As recently as the 1950s, specialists in heart disease (then, as now, the number-one killer, though lately much ameliorated) were, by today's standards, clueless. Now the cure of coronary artery disorders is all but routine.

But this isn't a recipe for complacency. With ignorance vanquished in so many areas of medicine comes the challenge of underperformance—"necessary fallibility," as Gawande calls it. Today there is far more know-how: A recent World Health Organization inventory identifies some 13,000 treatable conditions, syndromes, and disorders. But know-how is often bypassed or ignored in ways that Gawande, who practices endocrine surgery, discusses with candor. He is a physician who levels with the public (and his own patients) about the limits of treatment and the stark failures, including his own. As he puts it, surgeons still "practice on people." There is no other way to learn the craft.

Being Mortal
Medicine and What Matters in the End
by Atul Gawande
Metropolitan Books, 304 pp., $26

Two of his major causes stand out. No other physician, so far as I am aware, has done more to promote two simple, nontechnical precautions: hand-washing, a miraculous preventative of infections; and the checklist, borrowed from aviation, which is of special value in operating rooms. In *The Checklist Manifesto* (2009), he describes how, in the early days of human flight, those who flew airplanes learned, by deadly failures, about the risk of overlooking routine steps (enough fuel for the distance?). The remedy was the checklist, which captains may be seen going through today, no matter how experienced or how familiar the prospective journey. Gawande helped plan and conduct a recent WHO global study of operating-room procedures in eight countries. The results were so startling as to be at first disbelieved: "The rate of major complications for surgical patients in all eight hospitals fell by 36 percent after the introduction of the checklist. Deaths fell 47 percent. . . . Infections fell by almost half."

These outcomes show what happens when practitioners surrender smugness and run through a simple list of steps. As for the precaution of hand-washing, it has been a struggle, but a fruitful one, to persuade doctors and nurses (and the public) to wash hands effectively and to use the antiseptic gels that had become routine in Europe.

It seems clear that it was the recent decline and death of Gawande's father—a surgeon with a large urological practice in Ohio, where Gawande grew up—that inspired *Being Mortal*, whose subject all must face.

> I learned about a lot of things in medical school, but mortality wasn't one of them. . . . Our textbooks had almost nothing on aging or frailty or dying. How the process unfolds, how people experience the end of their lives. . . . The one time I remember discussing mortality was during an hour we spent on *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Tolstoy's classic novella. . . . One afternoon we contemplated the suffering of Ivan . . . as he lay ill and worsening from some unnamed, untreatable disease.

Gawande has since undergone a humane education, though his profession is still short of geriatric specialists. His theme here is that the care of aging and death has been over-medicalized: Half of lifetime medical outlay in the United States occurs in the last six months of life, and the question is, for what benefit? "The experiment has failed," he says, in part because physicians are fixers, trained to treat remediable conditions. But for many of the elderly, there is an equal if not greater need for relief from boredom and depression, and for being allowed personal autonomy: We wish, above all, "to be allowed to remain the writers of our own story," as did Gawande's father.

Gawande is an advocate of the

Edwin M. Yoder Jr. is the author, most recently, of Vacancy: A Judicial Misadventure.

relatively new idea of "assisted living," which aspires to "sustenance of soul," autonomy, and privacy. He tells the story of one innovator in the field who designed a facility with locks on doors and who flooded his nursing home with parakeets, dogs, and cats, causing patients to take a new interest in life and, far from incidentally, causing a drastic drop in medication and death: "The number of prescriptions . . . per resident fell to half that of the control nursing home. Psychotropic drugs for agitation, like Haldol, decreased in particular. The total drug costs fell to just 38 percent of the comparison facility. Deaths fell 15 percent."

A confession: I can't write impersonally about the author, whom I have known as a friend and as the son-in-law of close friends since his college years, when he began to court my wife's sometime ballet student, a fellow student at Stanford. He and I had shared a common privilege: study at Oxford on the same coveted scholarship. Beyond that, however, I have watched his growing knack for transforming medicine—a sometimes prosaic if fascinating subject—into art. It seems that, in his younger days, someone had admonished him: "To be a writer you will need something to write about." Could I have said anything so pompous? I hope not, and he denies it. But whether or not I said it, he has found "something to write about." ♦

B&A

Calm Before Storm

The self-delusion of Seneca's service to tyranny.

BY DANIEL LEE

In *All the King's Men* (1946), Robert Penn Warren's novel inspired by Huey Long, Warren uses a narrator, Jack Burden, to show the simultaneously corrosive and transformative effect that proximity to power can have, even on people of goodwill. We learn in James Romm's *Dying Every Day* that it has ever been thus, with the stakes even higher in first-century Rome. In that era, the corrosive effect was itself transformative in the worst possible manner: A pitilessly common way to mollify a disgruntled dictator was to open a good-sized blood vessel and obligingly bleed to death. Hopefully, then, he would go easy on your family.

Nero, because of his vain determination to be known as a great musician and poet, comes to us caricatured as a feckless adolescent fiddling as Rome burned. It turns out that he was actually capable of much darker performance. Just in his inner circle, he had overseen deaths nearing double figures by the 12th year of his 14-year reign as princeps—the more precise term for an office often referred to as emperor. By 62 A.D., a partial butcher's bill included his pubescent half-brother Britannicus and cousins Plautus and Sulla, all potential rivals; palace functionaries Narcissus and Pallas; Praetorian Guard leader Burrus; sex pal Doryphorus; stepsister and wife Claudia Octavia; and even his own mother, Agrippina, who had engineered his reign in the first place.

Dying Every Day
Seneca at the Court of Nero
by James Romm
Knopf, 320 pp., $27.95

Such leadership makes it difficult for even good men to live up to their ideals, a fact illustrated by the life and works of Seneca, a Stoic philosopher and author, Roman senator, and Nero's tutor and adviser. His proximity to the throne—exceptional for a Stoic supposedly uninterested in worldly matters—has made him a subject of scholarly dispute to this day. Was Seneca a decent man trying to manage an impossible situation or just another of Nero's dark creatures?

The experience of Seneca the Younger—his Iberian father Seneca the Elder was a noted Roman rhetorician—with court-related agonies began with Caligula, whom he discusses in horrific detail in his *De Ira* (*On Anger*). Romm says that the work "show[s] the young senator reckoning up the spiritual cost of despotism: the psychic wounds of those forced to capitulate. It was the defining problem of Seneca's age, and he was forced to grapple with it as no one else did, both in his writings and in his own life."

It was a life that included exile by Caligula and, later, the rehabilitative beckon of Agrippina, who needed him as tutor for her son, Nero. He became a source of legitimacy and gravitas, supporting Agrippina's plan to have the boy replace the current princeps, her new husband Claudius, a weakling who had been installed by the king-making Praetorian Guard after their elimination of the rampaging Caligula. That is, if "rampaging" quite captures the full horror of a monster capable of petulantly killing a man's son and then forcing the man to drink to the crime, as Seneca describes in *De Ira*.

Seneca argues that rage must be stifled even in such cases lest it corrupt a person's reason, which he valued more than life itself. Suicide, for Seneca, was preferable.

> I will say to the man whom it befell to have a king shoot arrows at his dear ones, and to him whose master makes fathers banquet on their sons' guts: "What are you groaning for, fool? . . . Everywhere you look you find an end to your sufferings. You see that steep drop off? It leads down to freedom. You see that ocean, that river, that well? Freedom lies at its bottom. You see that short, shriveled bare tree? Freedom hangs from it. . . . You ask, what is the path to freedom? Any vein in your body."

Daniel Lee is a writer in Indiana.

For Romm, Seneca illustrates the psychic danger of accommodating villainy by a fastidious retreat into reason. "It is one thing for a great Stoic to ignore a man who jostled him in the public bath," he writes, "or even one who spat in his face (two other tales told in *De Ira*). To accept the murder of one's children goes beyond anger management, into the realm of moral self-annihilation." But it isn't only such final submission that has hurt Seneca's reputation. His writings veer between obsequious truckling to power and gentle counseling against misbehavior. He didn't just serve as Nero's tutor; later he advised the tyrant, wrote his speeches, and was unable (or unwilling) to prevent his intimidation of the Senate. He may even have been complicit in the murder of Nero's mother.

Romm finds similarly damning passages elsewhere in Seneca's writings that seem to endorse the bloody realpolitik of dynastic struggles and imperial rule: "'Death to the weaker; leave the stronger to reign in the empty throne room.' . . . In *De Ira*, he had compared a princeps to a gentle physician, administering death only as a form of mercy when a patient was beyond cure." But were these really Seneca's views, or were they just necessary temporizing in the face of a dictator wielding immense power and violence? Romm leaves the question open.

Seneca's imperial sojourn ended in the bloodbath following Nero's discovery of an extensive plot against him in 65 A.D. The resulting spiral of death began with a small conspiratorial circle and expanded outward in a familiar pattern of condemn-before-you-are-condemned. Eventually it included the astonishing spectacle of two undiscovered conspirators torturing a third in Nero's unprotected presence yet unable to muster the will to simply turn and strike the tyrant down. Horrifying, but not surprising: The crimes of the despot himself are never the only evils of tyranny. The rot merely begins at the top, extending eventually throughout society. One is reminded of the files of the East German secret police, the Stasi, thrown open after the fall of communism: At one time or another, it seemed, nearly everyone had been informing on everyone else.

JOSEPH MARTIN / NEWSCOM

'The Death of Seneca' (1871) by Manuel Domínguez Sánchez

Though likely uninvolved in the conspiracy, Seneca was swept up in its aftermath. Eventually he had to do the usual thing: open his veins and bleed. This proved painful, but, surprisingly, not immediately fatal. Hemlock was brought, also without success. Finally, blood loss, the hemlock, and the vapors of a hot bath combined somehow to do him in. Just two years later, in 68 A.D., Nero himself was dead, having committed suicide as rebel soldiers closed in. But he didn't manage it without the assistance of palace retainers, and he appreciated the gesture. "*This*," he said, "is loyalty." ♦

B&A

Their Children's Hour

The unbearable lightness of Ronan Farrow and friends.

BY JUDY BACHRACH

I don't like to make too much of all the celebrity heirs who, in an extremely down media market, somehow keep on snagging major journalism gigs. It makes me sound bitter and envious and uncharitable, all of which I sort of am. But how can anyone help it? All the so-called smart people who run the networks keep on hiring them, at vast expense and for no good reason.

And then all the so-called smart people who run the networks get fired for having hired these hopeless, ill-equipped celebrity heirs to absolutely no avail: no lofty ratings, no intelligent analysis of the day's events, no critical acclaim. And yet it makes no difference. Far from being television pariahs, the sons and daughters of the famous somehow—magically, really—keep on coming, bleating lambs to the slaughter, sometimes even on prime time, when no one sipping a Chardonnay especially wants to see a slaughtered lamb.

Judy Bachrach, a contributing editor to Vanity Fair, *is the author, most recently, of* Glimpsing Heaven: The Stories and Science of Life After Death.

There appears to be an inexhaustible supply of them, hordes of famous names panting to be on TV, reporting, of all things, the news. It's very perplexing; it's frankly painful to watch. Why are they doing this?

I'm talking here specifically (and as you've probably guessed) about the MSNBC news host Ronan Farrow—young, blue-eyed son of Mia and Whomever—and about the former $600,000-a-year ace NBC newswoman Chelsea Clinton. And while we're at it, *Today* show correspondent Jenna Bush Hager and, before her, Meghan McCain, a onetime "contributor" to MSNBC who famously declared that she believes the Obamas deserve what she called "an emoticon" of privacy and also provided the world with her (incensed) opinion on the decision by Greta Van Susteren to invite Lindsay Lohan to the 2012 White House Correspondents' Dinner.

In a way, you have to feel sorry for celebrity heirs. A lot of snarkiness has come their way, sometimes because their salaries might appear at first glance a tad lofty, and sometimes because, as you can sort of tell from the preceding paragraph, their contributions are decidedly not. But very often the public outrage their appearances produce has to do with the journalism credentials of these heirs—or rather, their *complete lack* of credentials. After all, before his network ascension (if you want to call it that), Ronan Farrow was a lawyer. Chelsea was . . . a Chelsea. Jenna was a twin.

Personally, however, these reportorial deficiencies don't trouble me much. Journalism, I like to explain every year to the damp-eyed students in my investigative reporting classes, is a lot like prostitution in that just one foray makes a professional. It doesn't require the practitioner to have a license, an education (well not much of one, anyway), or even, as it now appears, years and years of honing the craft.

But it does require a strong, almost brutal intelligence—the kind of probing, relentless instincts and intuition that you get generally from being born unprivileged, unadmired, and, at the start anyway, completely unrecognized.

Thus, in April 2013, when Chelsea Clinton interviewed the Geico gecko for NBC ("Is there a downside to all this fame?"), she proved herself not merely insufficiently qualified for the job she held at the network for three years—but a creature of another caste: the caste, that is, that never needed to acquire any of the hard-won skills of her peers, the caste that does not know how to say "no" to a bad idea. People who, at the outset, cannot find any use for hardheadedness and cunning discover, as time goes by, that these become unattainable. They are not on tap simply because you decide to go on television.

In much the same way as Chelsea, Ronan Farrow appeared last February on an early-afternoon show called *Ronan Farrow Daily*. (Translation: There's practically no avoiding it.) In the media, initially, much was made of his well-spent youth—26 and a Rhodes scholar! A guy who says, in a valiant effort to amuse and deflect questions about his paternity, "Listen, we're *all* possibly Frank Sinatra's son."

But that, I'm afraid, is precisely the problem. It doesn't matter if young Ronan is the offspring of one celebrity or two, doesn't matter that he's passably intelligent and nicely put together in a wide-eyed childlike way that makes you want to put him up for adoption. The point is that Ronan Farrow hasn't a clue. He doesn't know which end is up. Doesn't know, in other words, when to croon or how to hold an audience. Doesn't know—does this sound familiar?—how to say "no" to a dumb idea.

In almost no time at all, the blond news host was, eerily enough, interviewing MSNBC's veterinary counterpart to Chelsea Clinton's gecko: a dolphin handler who popped up in the company of predictably voluble sea mammals. On yet another episode, Ronan begged viewers—young viewers, the kind the 26-year-old was cynically and specifically selected to court on television—to go on Twitter and reply that minute to the challenging question: *Why are you so beautiful?*

By late May, only 50,000 in the preferred 24-54 viewer demographic found him compelling enough to watch. By June, when Ronan snagged Angelina Jolie for a sit-down (ostensibly to discuss sexual violence during war), he had a total of just 201,000 viewers, 27 percent lower than when he first started. By July, only 43,000 of the preferred demographic was tuning in.

I am not recounting this in order to gloat—well, not totally to gloat, anyway. To be perfectly honest, if someone had asked me at birth, *Hey kid, you want to be the only child and sole heir of a president and a first lady, both of whom will eventually have a net worth of around $100 million, or would you rather be a journalist for life?* I don't think I would have struggled overmuch with the answer.

My point is only this: I wouldn't have expected to be both. ♦

B&A

My Dinner with Riggan

I'm OK, you're OK, and you're entitled to your opinion. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

If you go see the universally praised *Birdman*, the story of an over-the-hill film star trying to make a comeback by starring in a Broadway play, I hope you enjoy yourself. I really do. That's what movies are for—to provide enjoyment, a few hours of diversion. Genuine art transcends that shallow goal. It doesn't really matter whether you enjoy *The Brothers Karamazov*; but if you're ready for it, it will change your life, and that (along with its horrific plot) can be a painful experience.

Earlier this year the celebrated radio host Ira Glass made a fool of himself on Twitter, announcing that he'd seen a production of *King Lear* and that, let's face it, "Shakespeare sucks. . . . No stakes, not relatable." This is, of course, surpassingly stupid—*King Lear* is the greatest work ever written about the terrors of old age, which is certainly "relatable" to most people on earth—and it misses the point. *Lear* isn't supposed to be *fun*. It's a tragedy, designed to evoke pity and terror. Gripping, maybe. Ennobling even. Fun, no. Movies, however, are supposed to be fun. It appears that many critics found *Birdman* fun: They use words like "trip" and "ride" and "mind-blower" to describe it. I trust that they mean this. For all I know, you might agree; as I said, if you go, I hope you do. You're out a bunch of money if you don't.

Birdman is a depiction of a period of severe stress for an actor named Riggan Thomson—a period during which he is either battling with a psychotic break or developing supernatural powers. Thomson is played by Michael Keaton, who is mirroring his own experience of having been the first onscreen Batman in the two blockbuster Tim Burton films from 1989 and 1992. Just like Keaton, Riggan Thomson made hundreds of millions of dollars for the studios playing a superhero (named Birdman) in the 1990s, then fell off the A-list. Now Thomson is "putting it all on the line," as the movie tells us more than once.

Birdman
Directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu

Michael Keaton

For me, there's something cringe-inducing about movies that take the inner lives and struggles of actors seriously, maybe because in my experience there are few people on earth simultaneously less interesting and more self-involved than actors when they are offstage. The argument that actors are to be paid special respect because they're out there every night "putting it on the line" is one of the solipsistic showbiz self-aggrandizements that drive me crazy. Firefighters and soldiers and cops put it all on the line. Actors try to make a living playing in front of others. From where I sit, that beats working.

Birdman's cowriter and director, Alejandro González Iñárritu, made a film called *Babel* in 2006 that I dubbed, in these pages, "the feel-bad movie of the millennium." This might be called the "feel-bad comedy of the millennium," in which people behave badly and do silly things without a moment's real levity, because Iñárritu keeps moving into faux-existential argle-bargle. That's doubtless what has made the world of cinematic opinion go wild for *Birdman*, which carries with it the ridiculously portentous subtitle of "The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance." That, and the fact that, for no intrinsic reason, Iñárritu has filmed it as though the entire action takes place in a single take.

I had much the same reaction 30 years ago when the world of conventional opinion went hog-wild for *My Dinner with Andre* (1981), a movie consisting entirely of a conversation between two actors in a restaurant debating the meaning of life. In my estimation, *My Dinner with Andre* was like sitting through a dorm room discussion at a fourth-rate school whose advanced philosophy curriculum comprised readings from Carlos Castaneda and M. Scott Peck.

My Dinner with Andre was brilliantly staged by its director, Louis Malle, who managed to make something entirely static seem surprisingly fluid and lively. *Birdman*, by contrast, is one of the most overdirected movies I've ever seen; it's as though Iñárritu was jealous of his cast and wanted to make sure we knew he was the real star.

There's a confrontation near the end of the film between Michael Keaton and the critic for the *New York Times*, who informs him that she is going to kill his play because he's a movie star and she hates everything he stands for. Keaton goes into a rant about how bad reviews are merely labels and nasty adjectives and mean nothing, especially since he's going out there every night laying himself bare. One virtue of this scene, maybe the best in the movie, is that it puts every critic on notice: Attack this movie and you're a vampire, feeding off real life.

So, out of fear, let me just say this: Maybe you'll like *Birdman*, in which case you're clearly a better, finer, and wiser person than I. Because I thought it was awful. ♦

FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES / NEWSCOM

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

PARODY

"Understanding full well Obama's unpopularity is a drag on some Democrats in tight congressional races, White House officials are signaling to party leaders and campaign managers alike there will be no consequences should they run away from the president in order to win."
—CNN.com, October 10, 2014

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Candidates shun Obama

'NO HARD FEELINGS'

Obama likened to 'anti-Christ'

BY HILDY JOHNSON

With less than two weeks to go before the midterm elections, beleaguered Democratic candidates are resorting to desperate measures. Not only are they keeping a healthy distance between themselves and the increasingly unpopular president, but in some instances they have been harshly critical of him.

"I'm not ashamed to say I voted for the president," said Louisiana senator Mary Landrieu, who is in a tight reelection race. "But I am ashamed of his performance these last two years. It's nothing personal. We just don't agree on every issue. For example, I'm a big believer in capitalism and democracy."

Next door in Arkansas, incumbent Democratic senator Mark Pryor narrowly trails Republican congressman Tom Cotton. Pryor hasn't been seen in public with Obama for some time, but he insists this isn't intentional. "It's simply bad timing," he explained. "Our schedules just don't match. Sometimes I'm in D.C. casting a crucial vote, and sometimes I'm back home watching 'American Ninja Warrior.' It's just unfortunate."

GETTY

Visiting California, President Obama thanks Rep. Steve Israel for referring to him as "President Obola" only once.

And the further a Democrat lags behind his or her opponent, the more critical he or she is of Obama. "I'm not saying whether or not I voted for him," said Alison Lundergan Grimes, who is running against Sen. Mitch McConnell in Kentucky. "Let's just say he's not the one I was waiting for. He's different now. And I just hope he doesn't turn out to be some sort of Manchurian candidate." Lately, Grimes has also been referring to the president as "Barry Hussein."

In the Nebraska Senate race, Republican Ben Sasse is leading Democrat David Domina by an average of 22 percentage points. Domina, however, remains defiant. "I am an independent-minded Democrat," he maintained. "And if I disagree with President Obozo and his plans to socialize medicine, I'm going to tell him. And frankly, Obummer can go back to where he came from, which I believe is somewhere in Indo-

MADRASSA CONTINUED ON A4

Wendy Davis vows to 'stand up' for Texas