the weekly Standard

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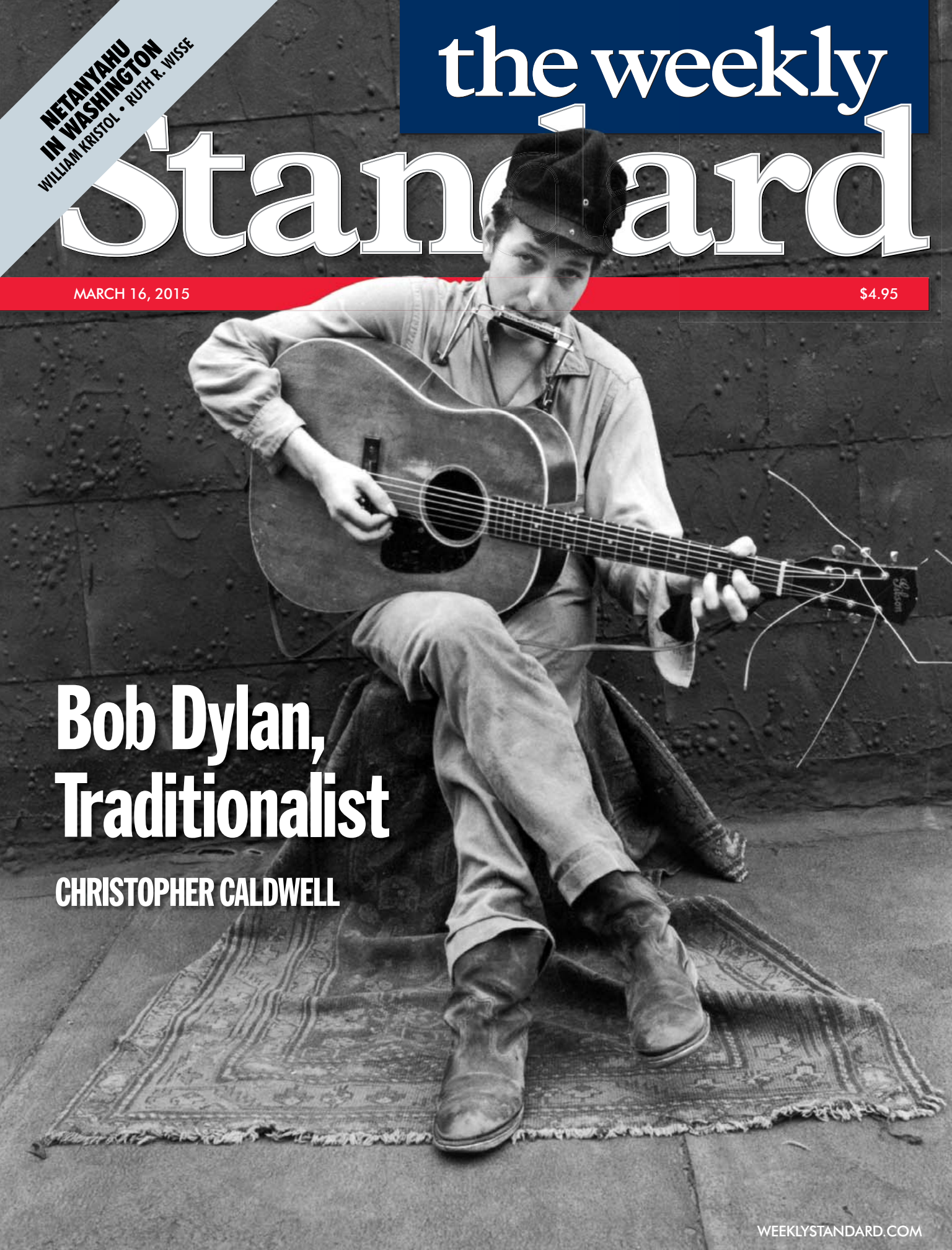

Bob Dylan, Traditionalist

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

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COVER: JOHN COHEN, COURTESY L. PARKER STEPHENSON PHOTOGRAPHS

M. Stanton Evans, 1934-2015

There's a thick vein of subversion in any good conservative journalist, and in M. Stanton Evans, who died last week, the vein ran wide and deep. Always, though, it was tempered by good humor, a sly appreciation for human absurdity, and an implacable love for his country and for what his friend Russell Kirk called "the permanent things." He was one of a handful of men who could lay claim to being a founder of the conservative movement in the United States, and if the movement has lost some of his bounce and zing along the way, we can't blame Stan.

The many tributes have showcased some of his best lines. "I didn't like Nixon until Watergate," he said after Nixon's resignation. The Falklands war, he said, posed a particular dilemma for conservatives: "On the one hand, we like imperialism. On the other, we favor military dictatorships." On economic policy: "Tax cuts are like sex. When they're good, they're very, very good. And when they're bad, they're still pretty good." And as for the great villain of American history, at least in liberal mythology: "I didn't agree with what Joe McCarthy was trying to do, but I sure did admire his methods."

Editor of the Indianapolis News *in 1960*

Stan's own method, as these excellent jokes demonstrate, was to take the liberal caricature of conservatives and turn it to his own advantage: The transparent absurdity of the caricature revealed more about the vanity and credulity of liberals than about conservative beliefs and attitudes. The move requires a great deal of self-assurance, and it was this confidence that was perhaps Stan's greatest gift to his fellow conservatives in the early days. He showed that there's never a need to be diffident in defending, as conservatives are supposed to do, the principles of economic and political freedom. He mounted his defense from a variety of perches: as an editor (at the *Indianapolis News*, *Human Events*, and *National Review*), as a columnist (syndicated widely for nearly 20 years), and as a freelance commentator (for CBS and NPR). His most lasting contribution may be as founder of the National Journalism Center, which has trained such well-known journalists as Ann Coulter, Greg Gutfeld, and Malcolm Gladwell.

The high spirits of Stan Evans's public character carried over to his social and private life. He liked to smoke, and he liked to drink, and, as he would doubtless be pleased to point out, his vices finally caught up with him—at age 80. It was a nice run. ♦

A Conspiracy So Vast

The Scrapbook was somewhat startled by the headline at ProPublica, the influential nonprofit journalism outlet, about the *King* v. *Burwell* case: "Behind Supreme Court's Obamacare Case, A Secretive Society's Hidden Hand." Secret society? Hidden hand? That sounds ominous.

The "secretive society" is the conservative legal group the Federalist Society. This far-from-secretive group has been around since 1982, and one of its main missions is promoting *public* debates on legal issues. Invitations to participate in these debates are regularly extended to prominent legal scholars, liberals as well as conservatives. Supreme Court justices Antonin Scalia, John Roberts, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito—as well as luminaries too numerous to mention—have been either members of the organization or participants in its confabs. Indeed, just about every significant right-leaning lawyer or judge in America probably has some connection to the Federalist Society, and, as near as we can tell, none of them ever felt the need to hide it. Despite this, ProPublica frets, "The Federalist Society doesn't even make public its membership rosters."

Well, a great many organizations with thousands of members, political or otherwise, don't make their membership lists public for lots of obvious reasons. Despite this, ProPublica's interview with the author of a new book notes that he was able to piece together "speaker agendas from Federalist Society national student conferences and lawyer conferences from 1982 to 2012 to construct a database of everyone who's ever participated in one of these meetings: 1,190 individuals in all." If the goal is to hide their membership, the Federalist Society is doing an extremely poor job of it.

If the Federalist Society is being portrayed as a shadowy cabal, it's only because liberals have often resented it for its effectiveness as a counterbalance to the liberal legal establishment. To cite one notable example, in the George W. Bush administration, the Federalist Society played a significant role in getting the government to abandon the silly practice of letting the liberal American Bar Association rate judicial nominees. Recall that the ABA gave such distinguished Reagan appointees as Richard A. Posner and Frank H. Easterbrook their lowest possible ratings of "quali-

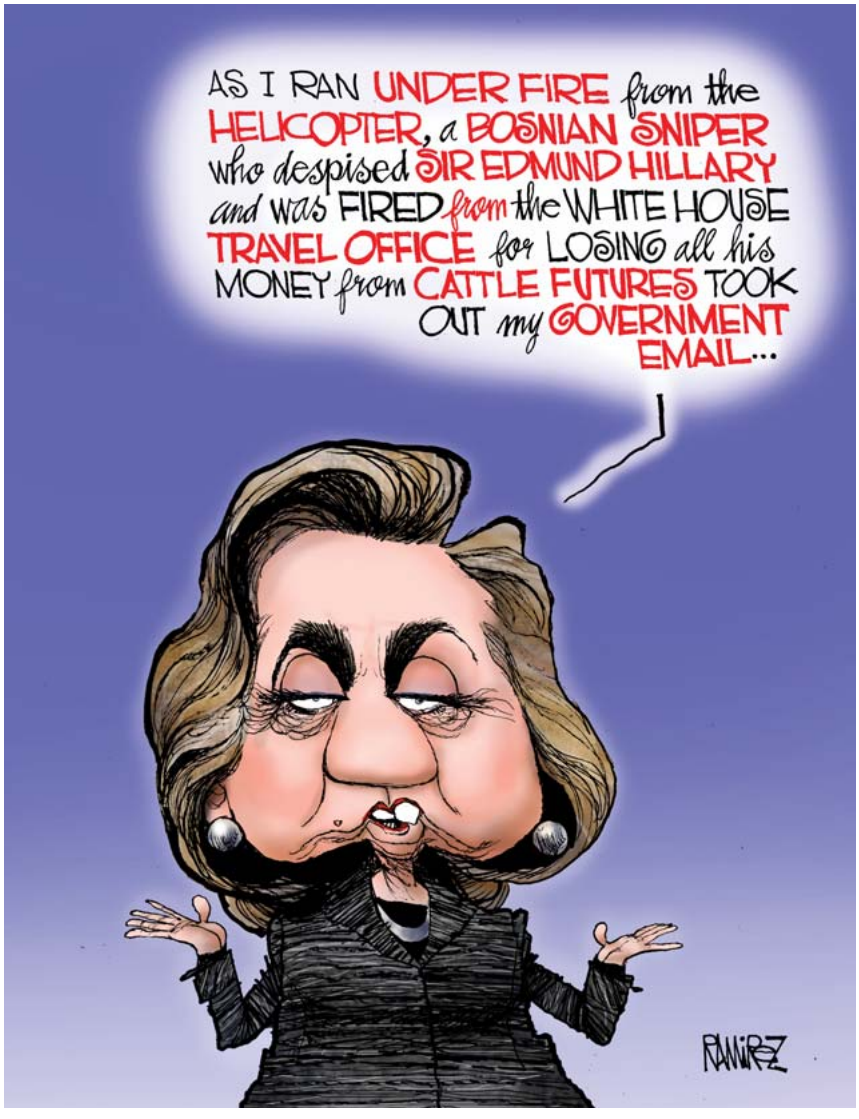
INDIANAPOLIS STAR / LARRY GEORGE / THE NEWS

fied/not qualified," despite both men becoming toweringly influential in the world of jurisprudence.

Which brings us to a related bizarre case of liberal conspiracy-mongering. The day after ProPublica's report on the Federalist Society, the *New York Times* ran this breathless headline: "Challenge to Health Overhaul Puts Obscure Think Tank in Spotlight." The report begins this way: "In the orbit of Washington think tanks, the Competitive Enterprise Institute is an obscure name with a modest budget that belies its political connections to conservative titans like the Koch brothers."

That description of CEI simply beggars belief. In the orbit of Washington think tanks, CEI is anything but obscure. CEI has also been around for over 30 years. Its regulatory analysis and work on environmental issues is hugely influential, and regularly cited by courts and media. They're listed as one of the "Top Think Tanks in the United States" in the 2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report. CEI's annual dinner is one of the most beloved and best-attended social events on D.C. conservative and libertarian social calendars.

To say CEI is "obscure" tells us much more about the ignorance of the *New York Times* than it does about CEI. Hillary Clinton was at least partly right—there is in fact a vast, right-wing network in this country. But it's out in the open and anything but a conspiracy. ♦



Wood on Bailyn, cont.

The Scrapbook was delighted a few weeks ago when The Weekly Standard published Gordon S. Wood's review of a new collection of essays by Bernard Bailyn ("History in Context: The American vision of Bernard Bailyn," Books & Arts, February 23). To use a sports metaphor, this was a two-run homer: Bailyn, longtime professor of history at Harvard, is the dean of early American studies; and Wood, recently retired from Brown, is our leading authority on "the creation of the American republic"—the title of his classic 1969 study of the subject.

In The Scrapbook's considered opinion, the essay was written with the customary insight and elegance that has earned Wood his Pulitzer and Bancroft prizes, the National Humanities Medal (from Barack Obama!)—even the enmity of Matt Damon's character in *Good Will Hunting*.

The review, for the most part, considers the disconnected essays Bailyn has assembled to define and describe his approach to the challenge of history. But because his narrative technique—in Bailyn's words, "redirecting [history] from established channels into new directions, unexplored directions, so that what was once vague or altogether unperceived is suddenly flooded with light, and the possibilities of a new way of understanding are suddenly revealed"—is currently out of fashion in the academy, Wood takes the occasion to describe Bailyn's mastery ("[H]e has transformed every aspect of the subjects he touched—from the social basis of colonial politics to early American educational history to the origins of the American Revolution to early American immigration") and deplore current trends in the profession.

"It's as if academics have given up trying to recover an honest picture of the past," Wood writes, "and have decided that their history-writing should become simply an instrument of moral hand-wringing. . . . College

students and many historians have become obsessed with inequality and white privilege in American society. And this obsession has seriously affected the writing of American history."

All of this, of course, should be obvious to any student of the subject, and the consequences of politicizing history are evident for all to see: a growing ignorance about American origins, hostility to learning about them, and the reflexive habit of judging the behavior of people in the distant past by contemporary standards. This has had the effect not only of distorting our understanding of American history, but of alienating students from an appreciation of their country's rich heritage.

And as if on cue, the Internet seems to have exploded in response. For the next week or two, Twitter accounts and academic blogs were consumed in scholarly rage at Wood's apostasy, and in terms—"Gordon Wood's trainwreck of a Weekly Standard article"—that suggest his essay was singularly effective. To be sure, there were strong political components to the outbursts, and most comments seem to have emanated either from junior faculty members feeling their oats or peripheral campus types ("TheTattooedProf") well below Wood's league.

Still, The Scrapbook takes some quiet satisfaction in the spectacle—in the rancorous debates about American history and the lessons of our national past, The Weekly Standard furnished a wise, authoritative voice that needs to be heard. Better yet, if we measure the violence of any response to its cause, Gordon Wood's reflections on Bernard Bailyn's achievements may be read for some time to come. ♦

Caffeinated Confusion

Not only has the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee backed away from its decades-long warning about cholesterol (see Geoffrey Norman elsewhere in this issue), but it has also finally spoken out on a subject of vital importance to The Scrapbook: coffee consumption.

"Currently, strong evidence shows that consumption of coffee within the moderate range (3 to 5 cups per day or up to 400 mg/d caffeine) is not associated with increased long-term health risks among healthy individuals," the committee reports. "In fact, consistent evidence indicates that coffee consumption is associated with reduced risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease in healthy adults. Moreover, moderate evidence shows a protective association between coffee/caffeine intake and risk of Parkinson's disease."

But before we brew ourselves another pot of coffee, let us keep in mind that Americans drink on average two cups of coffee a day. Upping our dosage to five might just have us bouncing off the walls, having palpitations, or worse. As the *Washington Post* points out, "due to its high caffeine content, brewed coffee may always be a source of insomnia, irritability, acid reflux and other negative side effects for others, especially those with underlying conditions, such as anxiety disorder or heart disease."

In an earlier *Post* writeup, we are told that coffee "has been linked to a lower risk of depression" but is "also a top source of acrylamide, a chemical whose link to cancer is being investigated." In addition, "cafestol, a compound in coffee grounds, has been found to increase levels of LDL, or 'bad,' cholesterol. Brewing with a paper filter helps remove the substance. Coffee made other ways, including French press and espresso, has higher levels of cafestol."

So will drinking more coffee make us healthier or kill us? The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee tells us that "moderate coffee consumption can be incorporated into a healthy dietary pattern, along with other healthful behaviors." Moderation, of course.

So is that two cups of coffee a day or three to five? The Scrapbook still isn't sure and is actually feeling a bit panicky. The Scrapbook also can't stop tapping its foot.

Oh, and by the way, all of the above refers to black coffee. If you like adding cream and sugar to it, experts say, you're done for. ♦

the weekly Standard

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Measure for Measure

It used to happen regularly. Some poor science writer for a magazine or newspaper would try to humanize an astronomy fact: *The distance light travels in a year is enormous! It's 5.88 trillion miles!* Or try to tell a biology story in everyday terms: *The grana stacks, where photosynthesis happens in a plant cell, are only 0.0002 inches wide, about a third of the width of a human hair!* And dozens of letters from outraged readers would promptly arrive, denouncing the writer for daring, *daring*, to relate a scientific fact in any units other than those of the metric system.

What those readers understood, of course, is that only Le Système International d'Unités stands as genuinely scientific. Only the decimalized measurement created by the French revolutionaries in 1799 has truly escaped the medieval mess of premodern times. Diderot may have wanted the last king to be strangled with the entrails of the last priest, but his more precise successors in the revolution would have specified 1.5 meters of the lower intestine. For that matter, only the metric system is *enlightened*. It's practically a religious obligation, and those who dared fail to use it were to be pilloried, shunned, and shamed.

Alas, America's butchers sell meat by the pound. Milk is still offered in quarts, yarn still skeined in yards, nuts and bolts still packaged in grosses, nails still measured by pennyweight, and paper still cut in inches and sold in reams. The weather is still reported in Fahrenheit degrees, and the cooks on television still measure out their spices in teaspoons.

All the way back in 1971, the National Bureau of Standards issued its perfectly titled report *A Metric America: A Decision Whose Time Has Come*. All the way back in 1988, Congress passed the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act. And still we lumber along with feet and miles, acres and sections, pints and gallons. We Americans have failed, as we so often do. We have let the rest of the world down. We are a bitter, backward people, clinging to our Bibles, guns, and yardsticks.

DAVE CLEGG

Which, I have to say, is okay with me. They can have my bathroom scale when they pry it out from beneath my cold, dead feet. When rulers are outlawed, only outlaws will have rulers. Or something like that. I don't hate the metric system. I hate the French. Or rather, I hate the more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger officials—why do I picture Jimmy Carter here?—who insist on fundamental changes in the way Americans live their lives, because, after all, the *French* do things differently.

But that's not what I want to talk about. Years ago, I constructed a case against the metric system that I called the Argument from Poetry. In 1959, C.P. Snow denounced the divide between the two cultures of the humanities and the sciences—but nowhere was the divide greater, he failed to note, than in systems of measurement. Can scientists not hear the joy of measuring horses by hands? Racetracks by furlongs? Pirate gold by troy ounces? Valleys of death by leagues? Anything that keeps old words in circulation is to be treasured, the French Revolution be damned.

Nowadays, however, the religious fervor behind the metric system seems to have faded. Angry letters to the editor don't come in reams anymore, and presidents in sweaters don't typically harangue the hangdog nation. And the reason is not the triumph of poetry, unfortunately, but the triumph of computers.

I could make a deep case here that the base-2 of machine language, the base-16 of programming, taught the nation that decimal bases are just as arbitrary as any other numeral system—and thus that carpentry is welcome to its feet and inches, useful since 12 is the lowest number divisible evenly into halves, thirds, and quarters. But that's probably not the real reason. In truth, what computers did was make conversion easy.

A Google search for *convert inches to centimeters* brings up 663,000 results, headed by Google's own handy conversion calculator. My father kept a card with conversion formulas in his wallet. My mother had a refrigerator magnet with similar ratios (so she could use French recipes, naturally). But even when they encountered metric measurements, they still had to grab scraps of paper to scribble out the math—and computers now do it all in a single step. The speed of light is around 300 million meters per second, or 671 million miles per hour, and who cares anymore about the difference in measuring systems?

Not I, Mr. Carter. Not I.

Joseph Bottum

the weekly Standard

Hillary's Email Trickery

Upon learning that Hillary Clinton used a private email account to conduct all official business during her tenure as secretary of state, CNN's Dan Merica remarked, "GOP aides on the Benghazi committee have long said they were going to find something others hadn't. And they did." The *New York Times* broke the news, though its own report reveals the story was essentially gift-wrapped: "The existence of Mrs. Clinton's personal email account was discovered by a House committee investigating the attack on the American Consulate in Benghazi."

Clinton's suspicious email habits are in direct violation of Obama administration directives and perhaps a number of federal laws. News organizations and watchdog groups are contemplating suing the State Department for dodging their Freedom of Information Act requests. Naturally, there's plenty of chatter about how this affects Clinton's presidential ambitions. But the email scandal also can and should breathe new life into the Benghazi investigation.

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

The media have tried to say from the start that Republican partisanship has driven questions about the Obama administration's conduct surrounding the September 11, 2012, attack in Libya that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. Their attempts to dismiss Benghazi as a scandal didn't stop even when the House Intelligence Committee released its report last November confirming that the murders were part of a planned terror attack, exploding the myth perpetuated by the administration and an influential *New York Times* report that found "no evidence that al Qaeda or other international terrorist groups had any role in the assault."

The media downplayed the key revelation—which suggests there was a political coverup—and spun the report as "debunking a series of persistent allegations hinting at dark conspiracies," in the words of the Associated Press. (The AP, ironically, is now complaining "the State Department has failed to turn over government documents covering Hillary Rodham Clinton's tenure as secretary of state" for years.)

There are certainly questions to be raised about the competence and tenor of the GOP-led investigations, but the claim that it's clear there was nothing for Republicans to investigate is now impossible to make. With investigators unable to examine Clinton's emails, any Benghazi inquiry to date is obviously incomplete.

In this regard, there's another shocking disclosure in the *New York Times* report: "It was only two months ago, in response to a new State Department effort to comply with federal record-keeping practices, that Mrs. Clinton's advisers reviewed tens of thousands of pages of her personal emails and decided which ones to turn over to the State Department."

In other words, Clinton was allowed to decide which emails she would turn over. Congressional investigators were given, last month, copies of just 300 of the 50,000 emails she provided to State. It seems very unlikely any of those emails happens to provide evidence of incriminating behavior—assuming any incriminating emails still exist.

Given Hillary Clinton's legal troubles in the 1990s Whitewater investigation over record-keeping for her work at the Rose Law Firm, it's utterly implausible she was unaware she might be doing something wrong. ABC News footage from 2000 has her on camera saying, "As much as I've been investigated and all of that . . . why would I ever want to do email?" We've subsequently learned that Clinton's email account was hosted on a server in her house, set up a few weeks before she was sworn in as secretary of state.

That the State Department was only recently given any of her emails casts even more doubt on the department's internal investigation into Benghazi. In her recent book *Hard Choices*, Clinton makes the conclusions of the State Department's Accountability Review Board (ARB) central to her defense of how she handled events. However, it's not clear the ARB had access to her emails.

As The Weekly Standard's Stephen Hayes has reported in detail, the ARB was laughable in terms of transparency and accountability. Clinton associates were given advance copies of the findings. Interviews conducted were not recorded in any fashion. In at least one case, the language of the report was softened at the behest of Clinton advisers. *Hillary and her key aides were never interviewed.*

The need for a thorough accounting of the events of September 11, 2012, is greater than ever. Four Americans

are dead. Two and a half years and several stonewalled investigations later, we still don't know basic facts that would help explain how it happened. We can, however, say for certain that Hillary Clinton has deliberately and brazenly erected roadblocks that have so far prevented us from learning the truth.

—Mark Hemingway

The President's Authority

President Obama wants explicit legislative authorization to use military force against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The administration has sent a draft of an AUMF to Congress, which has begun hearings that could last a while.

Of course, we already are using military force against ISIS. And the president is confident that it is authorized. Last August, when he first ordered targeted airstrikes against ISIS, he wrote Congress a letter stating that the actions "are in the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States, pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive."

Nine days later, the president sent a second letter to Congress, this one regarding airstrikes to help retake the Mosul Dam, which had just been seized by ISIS. In relevant part, Obama used exactly the same language, stating that the new actions "are in the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States, pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive."

In neither letter did the president claim as authority the 2001 AUMF against al Qaeda, passed in the wake of 9/11. But the administration soon did so, thus adding statutory authority to the constitutional one.

If we sat in Congress, we'd ask why yet more authority, in the form of an ISIS-specific AUMF, is needed, especially since the military operations anticipated are essentially the same kind used against ISIS over the past eight months. We'd also see those operations the same way Obama did in his letters to Congress—duly authorized by "my constitutional authority." As for the draft AUMF itself, we'd be especially concerned about one of its provisions.

The 2001 AUMF says that "the president is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons." Obama's draft AUMF says "the president is authorized, subject to [certain] limitations, to use the Armed Forces of the United States as the President determines to be necessary and appropriate against ISIL or associated persons or forces," the unstated purpose being (as Obama said in the transmittal letter) "to degrade and defeat ISIL."

The most important difference between the two documents is that the 2001 AUMF does not subject the authorization to limitations and the proposed AUMF does. And the most important limitation is this: "The authority granted . . . does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces in enduring offensive ground combat operations."

In prepared testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, University of Texas law professor Robert Chesney, a war powers scholar, fairly described the limitation as "grossly indeterminate on its face," concluding, "If the use of ground forces *are* to be constrained, far more care must be taken to develop, articulate, and enshrine the boundary lines."

That is a rather big "if" for Congress to approve, for a reason Chesney identified: "We have never before had a situation in which the United States sought to 'defeat' or 'destroy' a military enemy while Congress affirmatively forbade the commander in chief from pursuing that end with ground forces."

That is where Obama and his party would take the country, but it is not a place we should go. To borrow words Secretary of State John Kerry spoke last year in Senate testimony, Congress should not "preemptively bind the hands of the commander in chief or our commanders in the field in responding to scenarios and contingencies that are impossible to foresee." The limitation would raise the stakes politically against using ground forces, thus making it harder for a president to prescribe such action.

Note that if Congress doesn't pass the limitation, Obama will remain free to forgo ground combat operations against an enemy we are trying to defeat. On the other hand, if Congress does pass it, Obama still may order boots on the ground, using his constitutional authority. We would hope, of course, that if faced with the decision to use ground troops or not, Obama would make the right one, which, ironically, could mean the one he would have forbidden by statute.

Fortunately for the country, the prospect for passage of the AUMF, as currently written, is not good: Republicans control Congress, and many of its Democratic members fall to Obama's left on war powers issues. Even so, the constraint on presidential action in the draft AUMF is something our aspiring commanders in chief ought to address. How about you, Hillary? And you, Rand Paul?

—Terry Eastland

Speaking for Israel—and America

Three moments stood out for me as I watched Benjamin Netanyahu's speech Tuesday from the gallery of the House of Representatives.

Shortly after 11:00 A.M., with the chamber and galleries full and buzzing with anticipation, the doorkeeper announced in his stentorian voice, "Mr. Speaker, the prime minister of Israel." As one watched Prime Minister Netanyahu enter the chamber, one couldn't help but reflect that those words—"the prime minister of Israel"—had never been uttered, could never have been uttered, prior to 1948. And then, for the prime minister of Israel to be welcomed enthusiastically by legislators of the world's most powerful nation—this was a moment to savor for anyone, Jew or Gentile, who has been moved by the creation, survival, and flourishing of the state of Israel. The Zionist song "Hatikvah," now the Israeli national anthem, closes by expressing *The hope of two thousand years, / To be a free nation in our land, / The land of Zion and Jerusalem.* And here was the prime minister of that free nation, in its historic land, being warmly greeted by the elected representatives of a great and free nation both a century and a half older than, and millennia younger than, Israel.

Netanyahu is applauded by House speaker John Boehner and the Senate's Orrin Hatch, March 3.

NEWSCOM

Second, there was the passage in Netanyahu's speech that prompted perhaps the loudest roars of approval, certainly from the predominantly Jewish spectators in the gallery, but also from Gentiles on the floor of the House: "We are no longer scattered among the nations, powerless to defend ourselves. We restored our sovereignty in our ancient home. And the soldiers who defend our home have boundless courage. For the first time in 100 generations, we, the Jewish people, can defend ourselves." Israel as not just a new nation in its ancient land, but as a nation that can defend itself—that was the Zionist hope. The prime minister of Israel proclaimed the hope reality, and the audience was moved by the proclamation and even more by the fact.

Finally, it was moving when Netanyahu quoted the Bible (Deuteronomy 31:6) in Hebrew. He then of course translated the passage into English: "Be strong and resolute, neither fear nor dread them." To see an Israeli prime minister, speaking to a world audience, quoting the Bible in the language in which it is written, a language brought back to day-to-day life in modern Israel . . . this was a moment that will stay in memory.

One also couldn't help noticing that Netanyahu quoted only the first part of Deuteronomy 31:6. He left unsaid the remainder of the verse: "For the Lord your God Himself marches with you; He will not fail you or forsake you." Jews and Christians trust that this is the case—just as Americans profess, "In God We Trust." But in neither Israel nor America do we simply trust in divine providence. In both, "we the people" have to act, as best we can and on behalf of what is right "as God gives us to see the right." Here too one was reminded of the deep kinship between the two nations, the United States and Israel.

At the end of the speech, as I joined in the sustained standing ovation for Netanyahu, I thought of a sentence in the 1956 letter by the political philosopher Leo Strauss, in which he tried to convince the editors of the recently launched *National Review* that conservatives should be pro-Israel: "Political Zionism was the attempt to restore that inner freedom, that simple dignity, of which only people who remember their heritage and are loyal to their fate are capable." One felt, watching the prime minister of Israel speak, that, whatever other challenges await, in this task political Zionism has been successful. One also looked forward to the day when the United States would once again stand unswervingly and unstintingly in the ranks of those fighting for human freedom and dignity.

—William Kristol

Rising to the Occasion

Bibi Netanyahu's heroic speech.

BY RUTH R. WISSE

On the day that Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu was leaving for the United States to give what the *Washington Post* called "the most important speech of his life," my grandchildren were watching *Big Hero 6*. When I heard the smallest of the animated characters say, "We didn't set out to be superheroes, but sometimes life doesn't go the way you planned," it sounded like the tagline for Bibi's launch as hero of the free world.

Can such a hero prevail? Elected leaders of democratic societies can rarely rise to courage or bravery of heroic proportions because of the compromise it takes to get reelected and because critical electorates feel compelled to cut leaders down to *their* size. In his nine nonsuccessive years heading Israel's government, Netanyahu has taken as much political firepower as Israel has from its enemies. Nonetheless, like the country he heads, Netanyahu has grown stronger in every round. Despite attacks against him from both sides of the Atlantic, he gave Congress one of the boldest speeches in its great history—a speech its audience knew was as consequential for America as it was for the Jews.

Heroism needs a theater of opportunity to demonstrate its engagement with evil. Alas, the real and present danger is not in dispute. Running for office in 2012, President Barack Obama declared Iran "a threat to our national security" and vowed that it "would not get a nuclear weapon." The danger has since then dramatically increased as Iran directly and through its terrorist proxies now controls the territory from Iran and Iraq through Syria, Lebanon, and the Mediterranean. Iran threatens America and Israel—the big and little Satan alike—but its boast that Israel will be "a one-bomb state" prompted Netanyahu to differentiate this week between the threats to America's *security* and to Israel's *survival*.

So it fell to the prime minister of Israel to explain the dangers the Obama administration's proposed agreement with Iran posed "not only to Israel, but also [to] the peace of the entire world." No doubt everyone would have preferred Netanyahu's speech to be given by the commander in chief of the world's superpower rather than by the leader of the Jewish state, if only because sooner or later American strength will be required to defeat the new super-threats. Even England could not defeat Nazism on its own. But the Talmud teaches, "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man," which Yiddish translates as being a *mentsh*, a worthy human being. In times of peril this apparently simple task may require heroic capacities. President Obama's disinclination to identify let alone resist the forces of evil made it imperative for the prime minister of Israel to do so in his stead.

It was to be expected that as the son of a Jewish historian, Netanyahu would relate his appearance on the eve of Purim to events 2,500 years earlier, when a powerful Persian viceroy named Haman plotted to destroy the Jewish people. They were saved by courageous Queen Esther, who exposed the plot, persuaded the king to reverse Haman's verdict, and won for the Jewish people the right to defend themselves against their enemies. "Today the Jewish people face another attempt by yet another Persian potentate to destroy us. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei spews the oldest hatred . . . of anti-Semitism with the newest technology. He tweets that Israel must be annihilated—he tweets. You know, in Iran, there isn't exactly free Internet. But he tweets in English that Israel must be destroyed." Enmity against the Jewish people remains oddly repetitive, and Netanyahu was claiming for the Jews of today the same right that Esther won to defend against their enemies.

A more familiar historical parallel than the one with ancient Persia is the one Netanyahu drew between radical Islam and radical Nazism that likewise targeted the Jews as warmup for the conquest of Europe. Depending on their points of view, commentators on the current scene invoke Chamberlain at Munich as an augury of appeasement or Churchill before Congress after Pearl Harbor. The parallel is especially painful, not only because Elie Wiesel was sitting in the gallery to remind us of the missing third of the Jewish people but because of the similarities that persist despite Netanyahu's stated confidence that "Israel will stand!"

Much has happened since the Second World War to justify Bibi's faith in the Jewish future. In a famous Hebrew story written in Palestine in 1942 ironically entitled "The Sermon," an ordinary member of a kibbutz named Yudka announces to his colleagues that he strongly "objects" to Jewish history. He says Jewish history was made for the Jews by Gentiles, and ought never to be taught to the children: "It has no adventures, no conquering heroes, no great rulers or potentates. All it has is a mob of beaten, groaning, weeping, begging Jews. And you'll agree with me that there's nothing interesting about that . . . nothing!"

How very surprised Yudka would have been at the reception the U.S. Congress gave the leader of the Jewish state that his kibbutz helped bring into being. He might have been even more surprised that this "uninteresting" Jewish experience was what the

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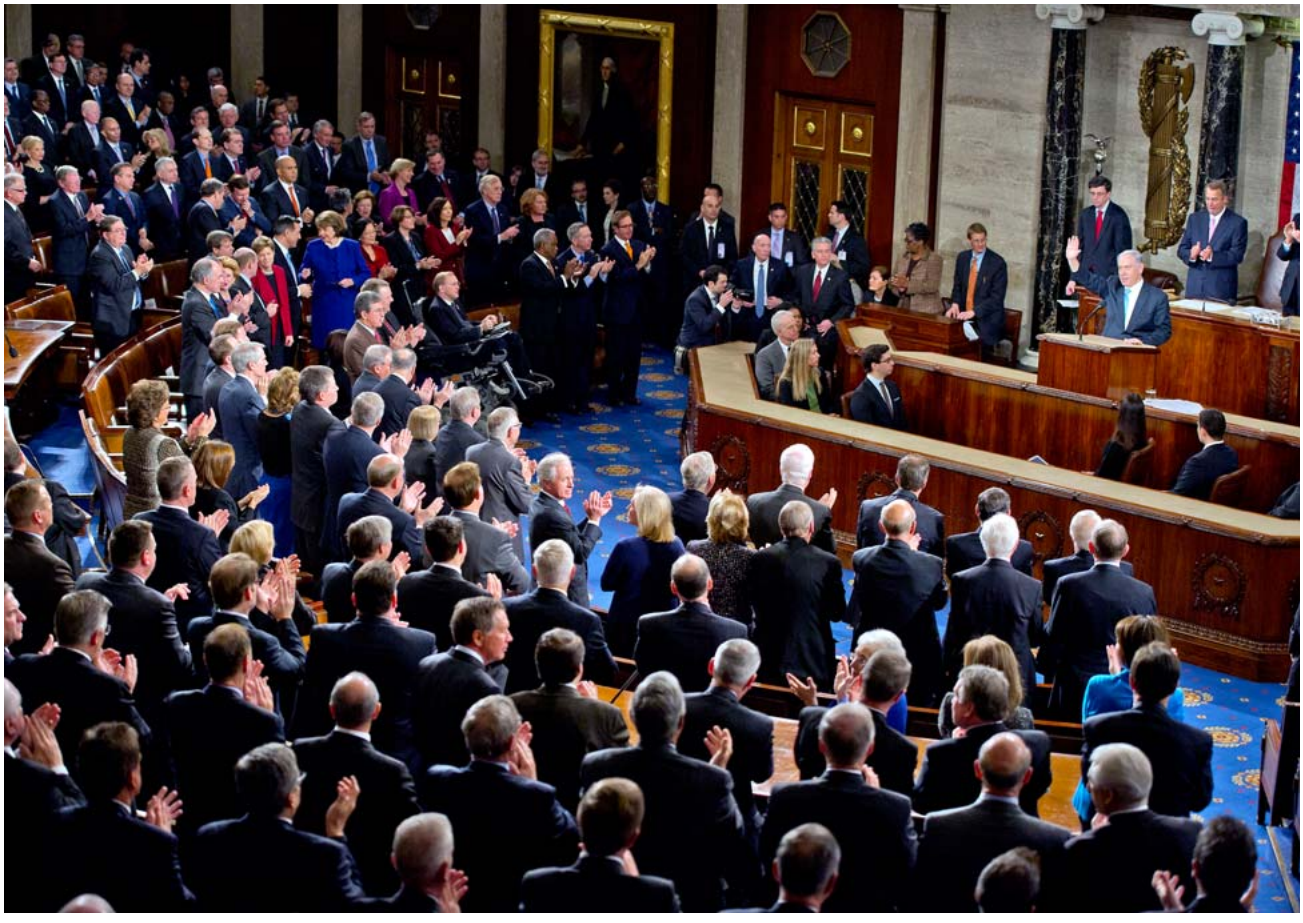

Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledges one of several ovations during his address to Congress, March 3.

allegedly "chickens—" Netanyahu used to warn the world against getting it wrong again.

In fact, the Jews were never the passive beggars Yudka described but rather a people constituted politically very differently from others. Religions that claimed to be universal tried to make others subject to their truth. Nations that claimed superiority tried to expand their reach and powers. Jews who were dedicated to pursuing their way of life among other nations were consequently dependent on the reciprocal toleration of other nations. Belligerents through the millennia found easy prey in people who had no incentive to aggress against them. The malignancy of some of those Gentile nations does not reflect on the achievements of the Jews.

In his conclusion, Netanyahu invoked Moses, who led the Jews from enslavement in Egypt and gave them a civilizing constitution. But Jews thrived in their homeland and wherever else they were admitted only if they could protect whatever they achieved. Time and again, the gap between their visible attainments and their ability to protect those assets invited stronger nations, envious neighbors, and even their former protectors to expropriate, expel, or exterminate them. Jews became the no-fail target of the world's most murderous regimes—Nazism yesterday, Iran today. As targets of the foulest forces, they became a constant reminder of the evil that must be resisted. Netanyahu used this history to remind Americans: Unless you soldier effectively, you will incite genocidal hostility against you.

President Barack Obama came into office believing that he could put an end to war and to the need for war. His make-believe has instead emboldened warmongers, encouraged expansionists, and fired up apocalyptic ideologues. When America gave up the task of "policing" the free world, it imperiled hope for maintaining order in any part of that world. Police are not infallible, but their absence makes evildoers implacable. No peaceable nation can expect to thrive without defensive power equal to its accomplishment. America itself is not too big to fail.

Netanyahu could not replace Barack Obama as leader of the free world. Unlike supermen in comic books or superheroes of animated film, he cannot protect America. But what Bibi could do, and did do, was to identify the dangers that the president and his followers have tried to obscure. Because of the cruelty directed against them in particular, Jews protect the world best when they best protect themselves and have something to teach about the necessary ratio of defensive power to peace. Neither Netanyahu nor the people of Israel set out to be heroes. Sometimes it simply requires taking up the task you were assigned. ♦

NEWSCOM

Murder on the Kremlin's Doorstep

Boris Nemtsov, 1959-2015.

BY CATHY YOUNG

If Boris Nemtsov, the Russian statesman and activist killed in Moscow last week, had been a character in a political thriller—and he certainly had the looks and charisma for the part—the script might have been criticized as lacking subtlety. There is the opposition leader gunned down on the eve of a major protest march, shortly after an interview that foreshadows his murder. There is his nemesis, the authoritarian strongman whose foes often turn up dead, vowing to personally oversee the investigation.

In the new Russia, political murder is old hat. Even before Vladimir Putin's rise to power, member of parliament Galina Starovoitova, a leading pro-democracy voice, was shot dead in 1998 in an apparent hit ordered by a fellow MP with ties to organized crime. Notable Putin-era victims include journalist Anna Politkovskaya and human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov. Yet even with this grim history, Nemtsov's murder was shocking—both because of his stature and because of the brazenness of an assassination on the doorstep of the Kremlin.

The details of the murder remain murky, almost certainly as a result in part of deliberate disinformation. Nonetheless, Nemtsov's allies are pointing to the Kremlin as directly or indirectly responsible. Putin himself has called the murder a "provocation," and his defenders argue that he is far more likely to be hurt than helped by Nemtsov's death. In fact, circumstantial evidence of government involvement—with or without Putin's actual approval—is compelling. But those who seek to exonerate Putin of this crime may ultimately be right about its outcome.

Nemtsov, 55 at the time of his murder, was by all accounts a remarkable man, one who could have been a brilliant physicist if he had not traded science for politics. Raised in the provincial city of Gorky in the Soviet Union's twilight years, he became politically active in the late 1980s, Russia's genuine era of hope and change. In 1990, he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation; during the hardliners' coup in August 1991, he grew close to Boris Yeltsin, leading to his appointment that November as administrative chief of the Nizhny Novgorod region (Gorky in Soviet days). Later he won a popular election for governor, leaving that post in 1997 to join the Yeltsin government.

Nemtsov at a Moscow rally, March 15, 2014

At the time, the young, dynamic, charming Nemtsov was touted as an heir apparent to Yeltsin; a 1997 poll found him leading potential presidential candidates with nearly 30 percent support. That plummeted to 1 percent after the economic collapse of 1998, which shattered Russians' faith in the pro-Western course Nemtsov championed. When Yeltsin sacked the government in the wake of the crash, he asked Nemtsov to stay; Nemtsov chose to resign and return to independent politics.

Always his own man, Nemtsov was willing to defy his mentor on such issues as the war in Chechnya, against which he led a petition drive in 1996. Still, like many Russian liberals, he staked his hopes on a powerful pro-market, pro-freedom president rather than a system of checks and balances. That was a fatal error: The executive powers created for Yeltsin enabled Putin's authoritarian restoration. Early on, Nemtsov hailed Putin himself as the new "good czar," endorsing him as Yeltsin's successor and even coauthoring a January 2000 *New York Times* op-ed that defended Putin as "Russia's best bet."

Sincere or tactical, these sympathies were short-lived, and Nemtsov soon found himself in increasingly vocal—and futile—opposition. His attempts to get elected to Russia's parliament, the Duma, were stymied both by lack of popularity and by changes in election laws intended to hobble independent parties. He persisted, working to unify opposition groups and publishing several acclaimed reports that scathingly analyzed Putin's policies and claimed to document his illegal wealth. In late 2011 and early 2012, the revival of protests after the announcement of Putin's return to the presidency propelled Nemtsov to the front rows of vast crowds; it also earned him several arrests and stints in jail, including a day in a barely lit solitary holding cell with no bunk or chair.

By the summer of 2012 the protest movement had waned, demoralized and frightened into submission; in 2014, the crisis in Ukraine gave it new life. This was a cause with special meaning for Nemtsov, who had supported the Orange Revolution in 2004-2005 and served as a consultant to Ukraine's pro-Western president Viktor Yushchenko. Yet, with the Kremlin propaganda machine in overdrive

NEWSCOM

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and with paranoid and patriotic fever running high, the liberals' position was more precarious than ever. Putin, always inclined to paint critics as disloyal, spoke darkly of "national traitors." The media followed with an orgy of dissident-bashing; nationalist groups that openly urged violence against "enemies" moved from the margins to the mainstream. Last April, a large banner with five faces—one of them Nemtsov's—and the words "The fifth column: Aliens among us" hung briefly outside a bookstore on a main avenue in downtown Moscow.

At the time, Nemtsov told the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* that he saw the banner as a signal of a likely crackdown. When the reporter asked what he expected the authorities to do to prominent dissenters, he replied, "Lock them up. . . . Why, are there any other options? Well, maybe kill them, I don't know. But probably lock them up." Still, the other possibility was on his mind. On February 10, he told the online magazine *Sobesednik.ru* that his 86-year-old mother feared for his life: "Every time I call her, she laments, 'When are you going to stop badmouthing Putin? He will kill you!'" Pressed on whether he shared those fears, he said he did "a bit," then laughed it off: "If I was actually scared, I wouldn't do what I'm doing."

Just over two weeks later, before midnight on February 27, Nemtsov lay dead on Big Moskvoretsky Bridge, shot in the back four times; two bullets hit his head and his heart. Initial statements from Moscow police said that he was shot from a car as it sped by; later reports, backed by what appears to be a video recording from a distant security camera, indicate that the shooter approached on foot and then fled in a car. Many questions remain; Nemtsov's girlfriend, Ukrainian model Anna Duritskaya, who was walking with him to his apartment after a late-night dinner, has said that she did not see the killer and was in too much shock to notice the make of the getaway car.

Many of Nemtsov's friends and allies have blamed his murder on the climate of virulent hate toward "the fifth column." Others, including Vladimir Milov, Nemtsov's former colleague in the Yeltsin government and coauthor of his reports on Putin, are convinced that the killer was not just a self-styled patriot acting on his own. Writing on his blog, Milov has noted that the area where the shooting took place is under tight control by the security services and that Nemtsov himself had to be under close surveillance, especially given that he was one of the leaders of a major protest march scheduled for March 1.

Why kill Nemtsov, who ostensibly posed no threat to the regime? The reasons could be many, from intimidating the opposition—which makes Putin nervous despite its small numbers and marginal status—to silencing a political activist who had some influence in the West. (Nemtsov was a strong backer of sanctions personally targeting high-level Russian officials.) Nor should revenge be underestimated as a motive. Igor Yakovenko, a columnist for the independent website *EJ.ru*, notes that Putin regarded Nemtsov as "personal enemy number one."

Could this murder speed the undoing of the Putin regime? It was tempting to think so as one watched tens of thousands marching in Nemtsov's honor last week, in lieu of the protest he was to have led—a march that his death brought to the heart of Moscow, where the original rally had been denied a permit. The demonstrators' signs said, "We will not forgive or forget," "I am not afraid," and "Heroes never die"; a popular placard added a silent letter to the name "Boris" to form a word that means "Fight on."

In the final hours of his life, and his final interview on the embattled radio station Ekho Moskvy, Nemtsov voiced the hope that the March 1 protest would be the start of a "spring revival" for the opposition. When host Ksenia Larina questioned the rally's "springtime" theme given the bleak situation in the country, Nemtsov replied: "No one wants to go to a wake." In the end, it was his own wake that became one of Russia's most powerful recent moments of resistance to power. ♦

Yoga Test

You got a license for that?

BY P.J. O'ROURKE

According to an article in the *New York Times* on Monday, March 2, "a debate . . . has roiled Colorado's growing yoga world." (And don't start thinking about what kind of planet the "yoga world" is.)

A Colorado state agency, the Division of Private Occupational Schools, wants to license and certify programs that train yoga instructors. Yoga studios where yoga instructors are trained—especially small, marginally profitable yoga studios—protest that the $1,750 certification fee, the required curriculum review, and other time-and-money-sponging bureaucratic bumf will put them out of business.

I don't have a downward dog in this fight, but . . . Does big government liberal regulatory overreach really have no limit? Furthermore I detect the possibility of big government liberal crony capitalism polluting the pure Colorado air. Lorna Candler, director of Colorado's Division of Private Occupational Schools, is herself a yoga instructor at, to quote the *Times*, "CorePower Yoga, a national chain with 22 locations in Colorado." (Yoga has Walmarts? Maybe we're living in the yoga world already.)

Predictably, the *Times* ends its article by quoting Candler's *pensées*:

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> A lot of people said, "Look we're teaching love and compassion, how do you regulate love and compassion?" . . . But there needs to be some kind of regulation in order to ensure there is some kind of order.

Consult White House statements on marriage rights and the Affordable Care Act to hear further arguments in favor of regulating love and compassion.

Colorado's yoga world is messed up. I blame it on state bureaucrats failing to sufficiently utilize their legal right in Colorado to possess and use marijuana as a recreational drug.

This is simply begging for regulation.

Then they'd give up on bringing yoga instruction some kind of order and instead order some kind of pizza.

However, all that said, as a professional writer I would be willing—for a reasonable fee—to compose the multiple-choice portion of the licensing exam to be given to prospective yoga instruction teachers.

I don't happen to know a lot about the yoga business. But Lorna Candler seems to know a bit too much. She needs more "union of the individual self with the universal spirit" (definition 1 of *yoga* in *Webster's Third*).

I think the state of Colorado will find my yoga test to be evenhanded and fair. It does not favor the chain store or corporate forms of yoga over small yoga enterprises. Nor does it discriminate on the basis of gender—no matter how much of a cute chick thing yoga is—or race, ethnicity, sexual identity, sexual preference (other than my own), religion—whether Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Tantra, Wicca, or Modern Wellness—or how much test-takers have been utilizing their legal right in Colorado.

BIG STOCK PHOTO

Yoga Instructor's Yoga Instruction of Yoga Instructors for Instructing Yoga Official Colorado State Examination

Circle the phrase or sentence that correctly completes or answers the following statements or questions.

Yoga is . . .

A. A physical, mental, and spiritual practice or discipline.
B. The plural of yogurt in the original Turkish.
C. "Street" slang for "Do you have?" as in "Yoga the Benjamins?"
D. A way to meet cute chicks.

A yogi is . . .

A. An individual who practices yoga.
B. Smarter than the average bear.
C. Catcher, manager, and coach for the New York Yankees.
D. Like Yogi always says, "There are some people, if they don't already know, you can't tell 'em."

What is the difference between Hatha yoga and Vinyasa yoga?

A. The spelling.
B. In one you contort yourself until you're standing on your Hatha, in the other one you stick your head up your Vinyasa.
C. Hatha is slow-paced and gentle, ideal for beginners, while Vinyasa is more vigorous with greater concentration on breath control.
D. Depends on whether you like cute chicks with major Hatha or cute chicks with Vinyasa that's the bomb.

What is "hot yoga"?

A. See-through Lululemon yoga pants.
B. Cute chicks.
C. Yoga exercises performed under hot and humid conditions.
D. Yoga exercises performed under hot and humid conditions? Are you nuts?

Yoga is more than merely a form of exercise because . . .

A. It has a meditative, spiritual core.
B. Eating yogurt is not a good way to get exercise.
C. If you're going to get down on the floor in strange positions, Twister is actually a better workout.
D. It's a way to meet cute chicks.

Who is Swami Kuvalayananda?

A. Undocumented alien prevented from applying for a work permit by a federal judge staying President Obama's executive action on immigration.
B. Runs the convenience store on *The Simpsons*.
C. Guy who wrote "Way Down Upon the Swami River."
D. He helped popularize yoga in America by founding the Kaivalyadhama Health and Yoga Research Center in 1924.

Where are your chakras?

A. I left them in the car.
B. I ordered those once at Taco Bell. They're gross.
C. Atop my chakrabsorbers.
D. In my Sahasrara, Vishuddha, Ajna, Anahata, Manipura, Savadhishthana, and Muladhara. Especially in my Savadhishthana, if you know what I mean.

Choose the correct description for each of the following yoga poses.

"Half Moon"

A. Plumber's crack.
B. Butt out car window with underpants left on.
C. White Lightning and Mountain Dew.
D. Standing asana (Uttihista Sthiti).

"One-Legged King Pigeon"

A. Sthiti on head of a statue in the park.
B. Season is from Sept. 1 to Sept. 28. Daily bag limit, 15.
C. Confidence racket with disabled war vet as the mark.
D. Squatting backbend with hands touching extended foot (Purva Pratana Sthiti).

"Lord of the Dance"

A. Irish people in theaters who do a lot of stomping.
B. Guy who put vodka in the punch at the prom.
C. John Travolta.
D. One-legged standing backbend (Purva Pratana Sthiti).

"Full Boat"

A. Frantic bailing motion.
B. North African immigrants trying to reach Malta.
C. Three of a kind and a pair.
D. Abdominal asana (Udara Akunchana Sthiti).

"Frog"

A. Yoga pose that makes you croak!
B. Season is from April 1 to Oct. 31. No daily bag limit.
C. Okay in the Hatha and Vinyasa departments, but a face that only a mother could love.
D. Prone backbend (Purva Pratana Sthiti).

"Feathered Peacock Pose"

A. Get your Purva on!
B. Major Hatha *and* Vinyasa that's the bomb.
C. Plumber's crack.
D. Forearm balance (Paschima Pratana Sthiti).

Which of the following do you have in your home or your Prius? (Circle as many as apply.)

A. Crystals.
B. Dream catchers.
C. More than 25 scented candles.
D. Hope and Change bumper sticker.
E. Kale.
F. Hope and Change bumper sticker pasted over Howard Dean bumper sticker.
G. Incense.
H. Batik.
I. More than 10 rescue cats.
J. Enya CDs.
K. Six-pack, handgun, and meat snacks.

For extra credit:
Are you or does your yoga studio attract many . . .

A. Cute chicks? ♦

Do I Dare to Eat an Egg?

Dietary guidelines, over easy.

BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

There have been a lot of memorable eggs in my life but I suppose the best of them would be those I gathered myself from the little henhouse we kept at the edge of the meadow for a couple of summers. I'd knock off this chore (and I never thought of it as that) first thing in the morning, and those eggs would be breakfast. The yolks were closer to orange than yellow and exceedingly firm. Delicious, of course. Especially with thick-sliced bacon.

It did not seem possible to me, when I was eating one of these ambrosial breakfasts, that I was committing slow suicide. And as a matter of fact, I *didn't* believe it. Didn't care what the legion of food scolds—the most prominent of them on the government payroll—were saying. I put my faith in eggs. And butter. And salt.

They had "science" on their side, and the machinery of government, which they used to demonize the egg and proselytize for something called the "food pyramid." Against their "science," I had only my faith. But it was strong and I held to it.

Now, it seems, we egg lovers have been vindicated.

Something called the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee of the Department of Health and Human Services has finally decided that you may go ahead and eat eggs without fear. This, after 40 years of warnings that a couple over-easy in the morning was a kind of slow walk down the road to a coronary.

Since I had never stopped eating eggs, my reaction to the news was not to feel as though I had been liberated but wonder who, if anyone, would pay for getting it so wrong. When the government started issuing edicts about what constitutes a "healthy diet," and warning people off eggs and red meat and shellfish and pointing them down the path of cereal and pesto, one person in seven in the United States was obese. The number is now one in three.

A lot of people who got that way thought that they were following a government-approved diet.

Egg consumption declined by over 30 percent when the government put them on its dietary blacklist. People have to eat, so they substituted other things for eggs. Things that helped to make them fat. The eggs they did not eat would not, it turns out, have clogged their arteries and killed them. The stuff they substituted for those eggs, however, might well have caused them to suffer from type 2 diabetes and worse.

It is not as though there were no dissenting voices raised against the dietary scolds and hall monitors. The study that could be said to have started it all was challenged. Critics pointed out that its author, Ancel Keys, did broad surveys and comparisons of populations, regarding what they ate and the prevalence of heart disease in each. The United States came out looking bad, and he put the blame on cholesterol. But Keys cherry-picked his subjects

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NEVIT DILMEN

and did not include West Germany and France and other nations that favored diets high in cholesterol but did not suffer from especially high incidences of heart disease. He got the results he was looking for, and Americans were told to lay off the eggs.

Among the skeptics were James W. Vaupel and John D. Graham, who published an essay—wonderfully titled *Egg in Your Bier*?—in the Winter 1980 number of *The Public Interest*. Vaupel and Graham did both the heavy statistical lifting and the skeptical risk assessment that the anti-egg sentimentalists had neglected in their crusade. The nub of the argument is captured nicely in this paragraph:

> For a 40-year-old U.S. male the probability of death from coronary heart disease is about 4 in 10,000; for an 80-year-old male the probability increases to a bit more than 3 percent. A one-third of 1 percent reduction in these probabilities would reduce the chances of death by about one in a million for the 40-year-old and one in 10,000 for the 80-year-old. From this perspective, eggs hardly seem to be worth worrying much about.

But we were made to worry by those whose profession is to incite worry. They had a mission and it was to keep the rest of us safe. They were, and are, apparatchiks of the Nanny State.

It is, I suppose, fair to wonder if what you eat or drink is going to make you ill or even kill you. But the least trusted source and guide if you are asking that question would seem to be the government. There are all kinds of theories and schools of thought on the matter of nutrition. There are crackpots and trained scientists peddling their particular dietary doctrines. You can go with vegan, or paleo, or even high-carb if you are into retro. But if you are looking for authority to settle the question, good luck.

Government had it wrong all these years, and government responds to pressure from the zeitgeist. If the government is down on eggs, it may be because it has been influenced in this direction by the people who sell things that are, supposedly, egg substitutes. Or because the health and hygiene lobby has put the arm on some vulnerable senator. If there is an interest group that aims to force us to put corn into our cars, then why not one pushing for laws about putting eggs—or their substitutes—in our mouths? The same review that led to eggs being removed from the dietary blacklist also resulted in a finding that coffee was not just okay and harmless but positively conducive to good health. We are thus advised, while we resume eating eggs, to also drink more coffee.

So did the lobbyist for Starbucks get to the panel?

In the end, one thinks, the hell with them all. If you are fortunate enough in this world to have a henhouse out behind your house, as I was, and your hens are reliable layers, then go out and gather their bounty every morning. Bring it into the kitchen, where you will lay a fat butter pat in the skillet, and when it is melted and popping, break two of those eggs—even go for three, if you are feeling daring—and when the white part begins to firm up, turn them gently so as not to break those plump orange yolks. Continue frying until firm. Slide on to a plate. Sit at the window and eat while you look out at the world and give thanks. ♦

Beyond Bibi

American-style politician Naftali Bennett makes his case in the Israeli election. BY MICHAEL M. ROSEN

Tel Aviv

It's a Tuesday night three weeks before election day, and Naftali Bennett, the head of one of Israel's oldest religious parties, is speaking in English to 1,000 mostly young, secular Israelis. For Bennett, 42, an ambitious, talented, American-style politician seeking to catapult his Jewish Home faction to third place among Israel's parties, this isn't all that surprising.

The contest is widely seen here as a referendum on Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's second-longest-serving prime minister and a lightning rod for criticism across the political spectrum. The yard signs and billboards of the opposition declare "It's us or him," and an American-style PAC, reportedly funded, indirectly and in part, by the U.S. State Department, has launched ubiquitous anti-"Bibi" ads urging Israelis to "Just change." Netanyahu's highly controversial address to Congress about the Iranian nuclear threat only added fuel to the fire.

But while the "Bibi-or-else" theme has dominated the electoral conversation here and abroad, most outside observers have largely ignored the role of Bennett as a potential kingmaker. Polls show the leading parties, Netanyahu's center-right Likud and the center-left Zionist Union, jockeying for anywhere between 22 and 27 seats each (out of a total of 120), leaving many seats to be filled by coalition partners—including Jewish Home, if Likud comes in first in the balloting.

The son of American immigrants from San Francisco, Bennett entered politics only after a successful career as a high-tech entrepreneur; he sold off his banking security software company for $145 million in 2005 after spending several years in Manhattan with his wife, Gilat, who apprenticed as a pastry chef at some of the Upper East Side's tonier joints.

Bennett brings an American sensibility to the rigors of Israeli politics. He smiles a lot. He's mastered social media. He's run funny, clever commercials. He's as comfortable speaking

Michael M. Rosen, a San Diego-based attorney and writer, is living in Israel with his family this year.

unaccented English on CNN as he is fluent Hebrew to local media. He smoothly parries tough questions and defuses tense situations with humor, as he did the evening I heard him speak in Tel Aviv when a dozen gay-rights activists unfurled rainbow flags during his remarks. And he's even adopted an old Mitt Romney slogan—"No Apologies"—as his own.

He has also striven to widen his party's reach beyond its core of "national-religious" voters, a relatively small but growing slice of the Israeli electorate. When he took the helm in 2012, Jewish Home held 3 seats in the Knesset—an "irrelevant relic," in Bennett's telling. The following year, the party won 12 seats, and some polls have predicted a total of 18 this cycle. But Bennett's efforts to grow Jewish Home's appeal have at times roiled its traditional base.

He has vigorously sought to steer the national conversation toward domestic politics and thus beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict, of which the country has wearied. As minister of economic affairs for the past two years, he's applied his experience in the private sector to good effect, fostering investment from and forging joint ventures with other countries (China, most prominently), enticing Western companies to open R&D centers in Israel, ending price-fixing by the dairy and cement cartels, scrapping outdated regulations, and helping to lower the overall cost of most food products—a potent electoral issue.

Bennett has also enhanced job opportunities among certain troubled sectors of the economy. "We opened dozens of employment centers for Arab women," he noted at the Tel Aviv event, offering "a one-stop shop" for these new workers and funding 30 percent of their salaries for three years. During his tenure, he says, the workforce participation rate among Arab women jumped 50 percent.

But try as he might to focus on economic gains, the everlasting conflict makes its presence known, again and again. And here, Bennett and his party embrace a maximalist territorial position, calling for the annexation of all Jewish areas in the disputed West Bank. This "stability plan," Bennett says, would incorporate 50,000 Palestinians into Israel proper while granting "autonomy on steroids" to the remainder, who would live in contiguous territory encircled by Israel.

While Zionist Union proudly supports the creation of a Palestinian state, and Likud does so ambivalently, Bennett abhors the concept. "We have a problem in the Arab world," Bennett told the AP in a February interview, "which is getting more and more radical. Throwing [the Palestinians] pieces of Israel's land and hoping that will satisfy the radical Islamist beast won't do it."

NEWSCOM

Naftali Bennett, left, poses for a photograph with a supporter, February 3.

Unfortunately, it's not just the Islamic world challenging Israel. Many European allies have recognized a Palestinian state, and sentiment in world capitals—especially on the left—has turned sharply against the Jewish state in recent years.

While center-left Israelis fear the long-term diplomatic and economic repercussions of the current Arab-Israeli stalemate, Bennett is unfazed. "If it means that the world will penalize us," Bennett told the AP, "that is unfair, but so be it." After all, he reckons, the international community already refuses to recognize Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, so why not also parts of the West Bank?

And anyway, from Bennett's perspective, and that of many Israelis, the time is inauspicious for compromise, given the turmoil convulsing the Arab world. Territory governed today by the relatively moderate Palestinian Authority could fall tomorrow to Hamas or, worse yet, to ISIS. "Trying to apply a Western full-fledged solution to a problem that is not solvable right now," Bennett told the *Wall Street Journal* in January, "will bring us from an okay situation to a disastrous situation."

Bennett doesn't look like a typical settler, and he resides in the leafy Tel Aviv suburb of Ra'anana, not the West Bank (our children attend the same elementary school). But while the packaging of his territorial argument may be more alluring than his predecessors', its content is every bit as forceful. And last summer's bruising Gaza war has only heightened its appeal among a growing swath of Israeli voters.

Jewish Home has run a mostly engaging campaign, including an amusing, creative ad featuring Bennett as a bearded, bespectacled, beflanneled Tel Aviv hipster apologizing for everything. He's also widened the party's orientation by tweaking its rules—candidates no longer have to observe the Sabbath or keep kosher—and including more female and secular pols on the list.

But the campaign has been far from flawless, and the party's expected vote total has shrunk in the wake of several tactical mistakes.

In late January, Bennett appointed former soccer star Eli Ohana to a prominent spot on the party list in an effort to enhance its star power. But Bennett caught flak from all sides. Religious supporters saw in the secular Ohana an opponent of their values, while others regarded him as a political novice unsuited for high office. After a painful week, Ohana withdrew his candidacy.

Worse, the Ohana episode triggered a breakdown in the uneasy political truce between Likud and Jewish Home. Regarding the soccer star's recruitment as an invasion of its secular-but-traditional turf, Netanyahu launched his own incursion into Bennett's electoral heartland, targeting religious-national communities in the West Bank and elsewhere. Polling revealed Likud had

captured a handful of extra seats—from Jewish Home, not Zionist Union.

Then in early February, Bennett tripped alarms among the politically correct for highlighting—and promising to reverse—above-average crime rates in Israeli Arab towns and cities. These remarks earned him an angry response from the left, including a tweet by a journalist claiming Bennett had "called all Arabs car thieves." Of course, several Israeli Arab leaders candidly acknowledged the crime problem within their communities, even if they couldn't bring themselves to praise Bennett for underlining it.

He's also absorbed criticism for his party's handling of prickly religious issues. Jewish Home has traditionally served as a moderating force between the secular parties and the ultra-orthodox, who compose more than 10 percent of the Israeli population. But its muddled positions during the last Knesset term on issues of conversion, marriage, and divorce have drawn fire from both religiously liberal and conservative supporters.

Eventually, Netanyahu and Bennett mended ties—the latter, in fact, got his start in politics as the former's chief of staff—with the Jewish Home leader taking to Western airwaves in support of Bibi's speech on Iran's nukes, by far Israel's greatest existential threat.

In a February appearance on Fox News, Bennett amplified Netanyahu's caution against negotiating, noting that "just a decade ago [Iran was] not allowed to even have one centrifuge," while under the deal Obama reportedly offered the mullahs, they'll enjoy "six or seven thousand centrifuges that they're allowed to have spinning." Echoing a widespread consensus in Israel, Bennett vehemently insists that Iran has engaged in "deceit and delay" and that the West is snatching defeat from the jaws of victory by playing along.

Exactly how many secular Israelis will cotton to Bennett, and how many religious supporters will stick with him, remains to be seen. But if he can thread that needle and increase his vote total, expect to see him forecast as Israel's next prime minister—after Bibi exits the scene, of course. ♦

The Paleo Diet, Japanese Style

Cuisine as statecraft.

BY DAVID DEVOSS

Students at Sanya Elementary School in Tokyo attending 'Food Education School'

IMAGES: DAVID DEVOSS / EAST-WEST NEWS SERVICE

The Japanese, seemingly stuck in political doldrums, sluggish economic growth, and waning international influence, are pushing past those frustrations with a new government-led campaign to sell the world—and their own children—on their country's distinctive traditional cuisine.

Unfortunately, they're not talking about shrimp tempura, California rolls, or spicy tuna sashimi. That "commercial" Japanese food has long since won over at least Europe and the Americas, just as Western food has made inroads in Japan. No, the traditional *washoku* cooking that is the new new thing consists of umami-flavored fish, soya, mushrooms, and seaweed steeped in *dashi*, a liquid made by boiling desiccated kelp with dried tuna shavings. It is, for many, an acquired taste.

Yet the campaign's sponsors have high hopes. "We want Japan's real dietary culture to become a pop culture for the world," says Hiroko Kaizuka, a senior deputy director with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Once people learn to appreciate *washoku* they will love Japan and its people."

If this sounds far-fetched, consider that French celebrity chef Alain Ducasse is an enthusiastic supporter of Tokyo's effort to climb to the top of the international food pyramid, as is Jean-Robert Pitte, president of the French Mission for Food Heritage and Cultures. "Since the days of Napoleon, France has used its cuisine as an imperialistic element to seduce the rest of

David DeVoss, editor of the East-West News Service and recipient of a 10-day food fellowship from Japan's Foreign Press Center, is still trying to acquire a taste for washoku.

Europe," he explains. "It's harder for an island nation to communicate the complexities of fish and rice."

Japan's gastronomic campaign was launched in December 2013 when Tokyo convinced UNESCO to list *washoku* as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This January, Japan underscored its commitment by staging the Washoku World Challenge, an international competition that brought 10 foreign chefs to Kyoto to see who best could master the subtleties of savory umami cuisine. Seattle sushi chef Aaron Pate, whose soya milk shabu-shabu was edged out in the final round by a competitor from Thailand, represented the United States.

For Kyoto mayor Daisaku Kadokawa the event demonstrated "the superiority of a society that feeds tofu to people, not soybeans to cattle." Other political observers saw the competition as an attempt to rescue traditional Japanese food from irrelevance.

Part of the impetus for the campaign is the belief that Japan is losing its soul to globalization. Certainly fewer Japanese adults are eating traditional food. Over the past decade even the consumption of sake has declined 40 percent as people switch to wine and beer.

The move away from the Japanese paleo diet of dried kelp, anchovies, fermented sauces, and herring roe began as long ago as 1872, when the Meiji emperor finally allowed the people of Japan to eat meat. Back then meat was seen as the most modern of proteins.

Today, the rejection of traditional food is especially pronounced among the young. Yoshihiro Murata, chairman of Japan's Culinary Academy, first sensed an impending crisis several years ago when he observed that schoolchildren were unable to distinguish Japanese dishes from Western ones. "Their favorite foods were curry rice and spaghetti," he recalls with disgust. Nutritionist Yukio Hattori, host of the *Iron Chef* television program that ran for six years in 89 countries, says the problem has only grown with time. "It's hard to go back once you get used to Western food," he sighs. "Today we're seeing that many kids don't even know how to use chopsticks."

Above, a chef demonstrates how to prepare a traditional, 'one soup, three dishes' Japanese lunch. Below, Seattle sushi chef Aaron Pate competes in the Washoku World Challenge.

Countering that cultural loss is an ambitious public school lunch program in which every elementary student receives a 500-calorie lunch, freshly prepared in each school and served by the students who will eat it. "The principal is the first person to eat lunch," says Masahiro Oji, director of the Ministry of Education's School Health Education Division. "If he gets sick none of the rest of the food gets served."

At the Sanya Elementary School in Tokyo's Suginami ward, students visit local farmers, maintain their own vegetable garden, and receive full accounting before every lunch on the provenance of each dish they are served.

Its promoters say *washoku* should be embraced not only for the sake of tradition but also for its health benefits. To be sure, Japan's present Western-influenced diet has produced one of the healthiest societies in the world. Only 3.5 percent of Japanese are considered obese—one-tenth of the U.S. figure. And according to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, while 153 Japanese were over the age of 100 in 1964, there are 54,397 centenarians today, and the figure projected for 2025 is over 150,000.

Still, to ensure Japanese children develop a taste for low-calorie food, University of Kyoto chemists and the Meiji food company have developed a new "fishier" baby food that partially replaces meat, potatoes, and green beans with kelp, tofu, miso, and tuna. "Babies prefer food with more fat and sugar," admits Meiji nutritionist Eiji Kanno, "but if they don't learn to like the *dashi* taste as a toddler they'll never enjoy the Japanese taste as an adult."

Kyoto University professor and Meiji consultant Tohru Fushiki says the baby food smells like "weeds straight from the ocean," but insists that's a good thing. "Children growing up with that smell will still eat junk food as teenagers, but they should return to fish as adults." If so, they'll be beneficiaries of Tokyo's massive Tsukiji Fish Market, a marvel of efficiency, which processes one out of every five fish caught in the world. They'll also be prime candidates to embrace the *washoku* revival. ♦

AWOL from the Summer of Love

Bob Dylan's 'Basement Tapes'

By Christopher Caldwell

In the mid-1960s the most celebrated folk musician of his era bought a house for his growing family at the southern edge of the Catskills, in the nineteenth-century painters' retreat of Woodstock. He was a "protest singer," to use a term that was then new. His lyrics—profound, tender, garrulous—sounded like they were indicting the country for racism ("where black is the color where none is the number"), or prophesying civil war ("you don't need a weatherman to know the way the wind blows"), or inviting young people to smoke dope ("everybody must get stoned"). Fans and would-be acolytes were soon roaming the town on weekends, hoping to catch a glimpse of him. Eccentric-looking by the standards of the day, they infuriated local residents. Nothing good was going to come of it. One of the town's more heavily armed reactionaries would later recall:

> [A] friend of mine had given me a couple of Colt single-shot repeater pistols, and I also had a clip-fed Winchester blasting rifle around, but it was awful to think about what could be done with those things. . . . Creeps thumping their boots across our roof could even take me to court if any of them fell off. . . . I wanted to set fire to these people. These gate-crashers, spooks, trespassers, demagogues were all disrupting my home life and the fact that I was not to piss them off or they could press charges really didn't appeal to me.

The folk singer was Bob Dylan. The reactionary old coot with all the guns . . . well, that was Bob Dylan, too. At age 25, he was growing uncomfortable with the role conferred on him by the music he'd written at age 20. "I had very little in common with and knew even less about a generation that I was supposed to be the voice of," he would later write in his memoir *Chronicles*.

There is certainly an element of baloney in this. No one writes a song like "The Times They Are A-Changin'" without a certain oracular ambition. And, on the evidence of his music, Dylan's ambition was overpowering. Listen to "Positively Fourth Street," "Just Like a Woman," or "Most Likely You Go Your Way (And I'll Go Mine)," in all of which the passions are expressed through a narrative about social standing—who's on the way up and who's on the way down. Beautiful as they are, the fire in these songs comes not from political injustice or unrequited love but from the warning: You are really going to regret having been mean to me, once I'm famous.

The Basement Tapes Complete
The Bootleg Series Vol. 11
(Deluxe Edition)
by Bob Dylan
Sony / Columbia, 6 CDs, $119.88

The Basement Tapes Raw
The Bootleg Series Vol. 11
by Bob Dylan
Sony / Columbia, 2 CDs, $18.99

Million-Dollar Bash
Bob Dylan, The Band and the Basement Tapes
(Second Edition)
by Sid Griffin
Jawbone Press (London), 326 pp., $19.95

And yet, Dylan's unease with his listeners' expectations rings true. Born in 1941, he was not a baby boomer, as all high-school and almost all college students were by the time he moved to Woodstock. Nor was he a suburbanite. Hibbing, Minnesota, where he grew up, is in the Iron Range, 200 miles north of Minneapolis. And he chose not to join the great mass migration of the middle class into America's universities. Maybe the new world that was on its way didn't mean as much to him as everyone thought it did. It was just something folk singers sang about, in the same way they sang about floods, freight trains, and the woman who shot down that no-good man of hers who done her wrong.

By July 1966, Dylan was a hot ticket—too hot. He had just finished a grueling four-month world tour during which fans alternately swooned and shouted abuse, accusing him of having "betrayed" folk music by playing it on loud electric instruments. An even more demanding American tour was scheduled to begin in early August, and by then Dylan was supposed to have met deadlines for a television special, a movie about the last tour, and a not-quite-finished novel. Dylan's manager then announced he had

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard.

been in a near-fatal motorcycle crash. While Dylan's record label Columbia issued a press release speaking of fractures and a concussion, there was no police report, and Dylan was never treated in any hospital. Rock historian Sid Griffin—whose authoritative book about Dylan's Woodstock recordings, *Million-Dollar Bash*, has just been reissued in expanded form—believes some kind of accident happened, but that Dylan almost certainly exploited it as a pretext for desperately needed rest and recuperation. He would not tour again for eight years.

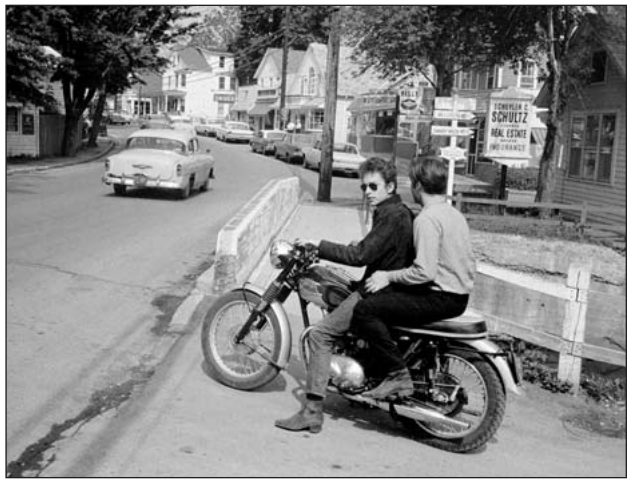
Dylan's fourth album had been called *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. At Woodstock he withdrew from the public eye to pursue another other side: that of a bookish, strikingly apolitical family man who was even then beginning his turn to the born-again Christianity he would embrace with an evangelist's zeal a decade later. Organizers of the 1969 Woodstock music festival had hoped to stage it in the town largely because that was where Dylan lived. But Dylan never showed an interest in taking part. And because of local opposition, partly aroused by the earlier invasion of Dylan's fans, the concert wound up being held not in Woodstock at all but on a dairy farm in Bethel, New York, an hour's drive west.

THE FIRST BOOTLEG

The convalescent Dylan summoned four Canadian musicians from his touring band. The idea was that they would help Dylan with his movie as a way of earning their retainer from the delayed (and eventually canceled) nationwide tour. They had time to kill. They were killing it by helping the long-haired falsetto and left-handed ukulele-player Tiny Tim make a psychedelic documentary film of his own called *You Are What You Eat*. ("If you ever see this movie you'll understand what 'freaks' are," said one of the dancers who worked on it.)

The musicians were guitarist Robbie Robertson, bassist Rick Danko, drummer-pianist Richard Manuel, and organist Garth Hudson, who was also an accomplished sound technician. This was a crucial talent, for within a few weeks Dylan began recording with the group. Working mostly in the garage of a big, pink-asbestos-shingled split-level house that Danko had rented in the woods of West Saugerties, Dylan recorded at least 10 dozen songs in just a few months around the middle of 1967. All sorts of songs: blues standards, sea shanties, gunslinger ballads, Welsh folk songs, some reworked pop hits from the 1950s, some reworked hits of Dylan's own. But most of the recordings were newly written Dylan songs of astonishing originality and wit. And the musicians backing him up coalesced in ways they hadn't before. Towards the end of the sessions they were rejoined by the Arkansan drummer-singer Levon Helm, who had left Dylan's 1966 tour in a huff. The band would become The Band. Building on the tracks recorded with Dylan and even releasing their own versions of some of them, they would produce two or three of the most original albums of the rock era, starting, the following year, with *Music from Big Pink*.

The summer of 1967 was the Summer of Love. People going to San Francisco were sure to wear flowers in their hair. The country had got itself in a terrible jam, way down yonder in Vietnam. But aside from one mumbled aside about burning draft cards, nowhere in the hours of recordings Dylan made with The Band is there the slightest mention of the concerns of the 1960s—peace, race, revolution, psychedelia. Their collective secession from the fuss of the sixties astonished the English guitarist Eric Clapton when he went to visit them: "It became quite obvious to me I was on a different planet to these guys," Clapton recalled in a 2004 interview. "I had an Afghan jacket and curly hair and pink trousers. They looked like The Hole in the Wall Gang."



Dylan and singer John Sebastian in Woodstock, January 1, 1964

DOUGLAS R. GILBERT / REDFERN / GETTY IMAGES

Dylan's manager Albert Grossman seems to have made him a tacit deal. As long as Dylan wrote songs that his music company could sell to other artists, Grossman would keep at bay any Columbia executives inclined to ask whether his injuries were really serious enough to merit canceling a lucrative national tour. This arrangement—in which a celebrated musician was in essence living off sales of sheet music—was an anachronism even at the time. It may have rested on an underestimation of Dylan by the squares in suits. Although Columbia had begun to advertise that "No One Sings Dylan Like Dylan!" it is not clear they fully understood that Dylan's gravelly and erratic voice, far from being a liability, was a gauge of authenticity and a cash cow. The arrangement may also have recommended itself to Grossman because the music company he had set up gave him half the publishing rights to the songs Dylan wrote—something Dylan discovered to his shock only in 1968.

The songs Hudson recorded in the garage were pitched to potential recording artists through a 14-song "demo" tape distributed in London, New York, and Los Angeles. The Byrds, Peter, Paul and Mary, Manfred Mann, Joan Baez—they all got to listen to the new recordings. Clapton later said that what he heard Dylan and The Band doing "shook me to the core." Low-quality rerecordings of these extraordinary songs began to leak, and by 1969 they were assembled on an illegally produced record called *The Great White Wonder*—rock's first notable "bootleg" album.

In 1975 Columbia Records released *The Basement Tapes*, which consisted of 16 of these upstate New York recordings, assumed to be almost all that had survived. They were enhanced with extra instrumental tracks to make them sound slicker, and supplemented by eight songs The Band had made at other times and in other places. Two factors motivated the release. First, Columbia (and the musicians) wanted the revenue that the pirate record presses were draining. Second, the musicians in The Band had drifted into drug abuse, apathy, and creative doldrums. *The Basement Tapes* of 1967 came out in 1975 for much the same reason that the poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, having made a grand gesture of burying his unpublished poetic manuscripts with his wife when she died of a drug overdose in 1862, had her exhumed during a bout of writer's block seven years later.

The album hit number 7 on the charts. Certain of the songs had a rollicking beat that no one had heard since the 1950s. Others had a sense of humor that had never been heard in rock, ever. And the range was remarkable. The *New York Times* rock critic John Rockwell called it "one of the greatest albums in the history of American popular music."

Rockwell did not know the half of it. More songs have emerged over the years, and this winter, all the recoverable recordings from those 1967 upstate New York sessions were finally released together as the eleventh volume of Columbia's Dylan "Bootleg Series." We can see that back in 1975, at least one more selection of equivalent quality to *The Basement Tapes* could have been made. Fully 138 tracks make up the 6-CD "Complete" version of the recordings. A highly affordable 2-CD "Raw" version excerpts some of the best of these tracks, and actually has a more informative song-by-song booklet than the 6-CD version. (If you care about that kind of information—including informed guesses about who is playing what on which track—you ought to get the Griffin book.) The 2-CD version plays to the expectations of those familiar with the 1975 selection, stinting on what is genuinely new. The 6-CD version will be amply worth it for Dylan fans, even if the sound quality on the sixth CD reminds one of AM radio stations fading in and out on a long drive across the Great Plains.

This collection is extraordinary for its unselfconsciousness. It is not one of those boring, live-from-the-studio compilations that give 12 near-identical botched takes of a hit song, along with lampoonable badinage about whether the bass is coming through on mike three.

FOLK ERUDITION

This collection is extraordinary for its unselfconsciousness. It is not one of those boring, live-from-the-studio compilations that give 12 near-identical botched takes of a hit song, along with lampoonable badinage about whether the bass is coming through on mike three. There is little banter, even if the album begins with Dylan's voice. "Why don't you shut it off," he says, "and I'll see how it's recording." There follows a beautiful, rough melody that was supposed to turn into a song about seagulls called "Edge of the Ocean." A couple dozen of the tracks are curiosities of this sort—not so much songs as fascinating stabs at songs, in which Dylan is spouting filler lyrics as he tries to find a melody. Of course, even the finished songs were not supposed to be really finished until various other singers and bands interpreted them. Rough or polished, the surviving versions are the most advanced of any given song, because when the musicians didn't like the way something sounded they would rewind and record over the previous take.

Dylan has always dissented from the 1960s artistic worldview in a crucial way. He believes that creativity has more to do with tradition than with inspiration. At an awards speech in February, he defended his art by insisting it was *not* original. "These songs didn't come out of thin air," he said. "I didn't just make them up out of whole cloth." In his view, anyone who listens to a lot of folk songs will absorb their musical vocabulary, and develop an ability to express himself in it. If a person doesn't do that, he's not writing real folk songs. Dylan gave the example of a mid-twentieth-century song by the Shelton Brothers called "Deep Ellum":

When you go down to Deep Ellum keep your money in your socks.
Women in Deep Ellum put you on the rocks.

Dylan asked his listeners to notice how close it was

to his own "Tom Thumb's Blues": "Sing that song for a while," he said, "and you just might come up with

When you're lost in the rain in Juarez and it's Easter time too
And your gravity fails and negativity don't pull you through
Don't put on any airs when you're down on Rue Morgue Avenue
They got some hungry women there and they really make a mess outta you."

If this was Dylan's method of composition, then you can see that his greatest gift might have been the aural equivalent of a photographic memory. ("I could learn one song and sing it next in an hour if I'd heard it just once," he said in the same speech.) It gave him what could, in the context of balladeering, be called erudition. The musical interests evident on his expanded Basement Tapes collection are extraordinarily wide. There are a couple dozen folk songs from various traditions, as if Dylan were trying to sing his way into his own composing. The spooky country-western classic about dying of thirst, "Cool Water," which the Sons of the Pioneers made famous in the 1940s, is here. So is John Lee Hooker's "Tupelo," about the Mississippi floods of 1927, floods having exerted a fascination for Dylan at every stage of his career, starting with "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." His range, in fact, often far exceeds his singing ability. On Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready," he never quite finds the key. On Ian Tyson's "Four Strong Winds," he seems to transpose the verse melody and the chorus melody.

But some of these miscellaneous ballads are triumphs. Dylan had a great ear for Irish ballads, and the 6-CD set includes a masterful version of Brendan Behan's sad "The Auld Triangle," the song of a prisoner on the day of someone else's execution. It has been recorded by dozens of the world's best singers, in Ireland and elsewhere—and generally mis-sung. Often they are too angry, too maudlin, or simply too drunk (as Behan is in his own recorded version), whereas the song calls for a slight affectlessness—what Kingsley Amis, referring to Philip Larkin's poetry, once called a "tight-reined sadness." Dylan's version of the song may be the best, with his icy melancholy perfectly accompanied by Robertson's ruminative electric guitar.

CREATIVITY REQUIRES PRIVACY

Privacy is the condition for experimentation. No privacy, no creativity. What makes these recordings so inventive is that the stakes were so low. They were not meant to be heard. Privacy freed Dylan from being hammered into a kind of generic model of a rock star, not just by his corporate employers but also by his loyal listeners. As he sang in 1970:

The man in me will hide sometimes to keep from being seen
But that's just because he doesn't want to turn into some machine.

("The Man in Me," *New Morning*)

Privacy is even more important to one who is proud of his method of building his own music from other people's—what Hudson called Dylan's method of "singing one song to arrive at another." You play something, and

Dylan outside his Woodstock home, 1968

ELLIOTT LANDY / LANDYVISION, INC. / GETTY IMAGES

the melody, the mood, the key will drift until they become something new. The process is a sort of de-plagiarization. One of the scratchier recordings on the 6-CD collection is a rope-skipping rhyme called "Jelly Bean." It starts off sounding like "Ain't No Cure for the Summertime Blues," runs through a semblance of "Just Like a Woman," and winds up something different altogether—not a song worth going on with or refining, but an instructive failure.

There is a lot of laughter in these songs. One of the highlights of the collection is a silly and sinuous slow blues number Dylan wrote called "Get Your Rocks Off." What a delight. Compare Dylan's own version, which has the structure of a joke—

You know, there's two old maids layin' in the bed
One picked herself up and the other one said:
"Get your rocks off."

—and is interrupted by laughter midway through, with the vulgar sex anthem that Manfred Mann turned the song into. Anyone who doesn't hear the humor in Dylan's songs should try to imagine, say, Van Morrison, Tom Jones, or Lou Rawls singing some of them.

A couple of the very funniest songs from the 1967 sessions made it onto the 1975 album—"Clothesline Saga," for instance, meant as a parody of Bobbie Gentry's smash hit of 1967, "Ode to Billie Joe," in which some mysterious Southern Gothic intrigue, probably involving infanticide, gets hinted at while a family makes boring dinner table conversation. Dylan writes an equally deadpan song that is literally about watching clothes dry:

The next day everybody got up
Seein' if the clothes were dry
The dogs were barking, a neighbor passed
Mama, of course, she said, "Hi!"
"Have you heard the news?" he said, with a grin
"The Vice-President's gone mad!"
"Where?" "Downtown." "When?" "Last night"
"Hmm, say, that's too bad!"
"Well, there's nothin' we can do about it," said the neighbor
"It's just somethin' we're gonna have to forget"
"Yes, I guess so," said Ma
Then she asked me if the clothes was still wet

This kind of humor, which has something in common with Beckett, Pirandello, and various midcentury absurdist dramatists from Europe, is like a very last breath of life from literary modernism. And Dylan has another reliable kind of silly song, where he uses a strong blues beat as a trellis on which to hang nonsense verse. The 1975 selection has a bias towards songs in this madcap idiom, like "Yea! Heavy and a Bottle of Bread" and "Lo and Behold!":

I came into Pittsburgh
At 6:30 flat
I found myself a vacant seat
And I put it down my hat.
"What's the matter, Molly dear?
What's the matter with your mound?"
"What's it to ya, Moby Dick?
This is Chicken Town."

Dylan avails himself, too, of the freedom to mess around with, refine, and (as graduate students would now put it) subvert his own songs. When he had tried this in concert the year before, fans wedded to various messages and meanings had tried to shout him off the stage. The fifth CD in the complete collection has a driving, heavily electrified roadhouse-blues version of "Blowin' in the Wind" that sounds a little bit like Steely Dan's "Pretzel Logic," followed by a very differently paced "It Ain't Me, Babe." "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean"—a song by the Texas bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson that Dylan sang to dirge-like effect on his very first album—reappears in livelier form here (entitled "One Kind Favor"), with Dylan's beautiful, unruly, almost celestial-sounding strumming of an autoharp in the middle of it.

There may be nothing better in this new collection than the version of the melancholy love song "One Too Many Mornings," the first verse sung by Richard Manuel, whose deep, bright voice is one of the highlights of late-1960s rock. It far surpasses the version Dylan released on *The Times They Are a Changin'*. Rather thrillingly, the liner notes for the 2-CD version of the set say: "This track has never even been rumored to exist."

HE BUILT A WORLD HE COULDN'T INHABIT

By the mid-1960s, Dylan was in an impossible position. He had become perhaps the most famous person on the planet by snickering at the American game of ambition as a rat race. Dylan's fans not only had unmeetable expectations of his music, they had unmeetable expectations of him. He was supposed to share and even embody a whole set of burn-it-down, I-spit-on-your-bourgeois-institutions attitudes towards American society—and he simply didn't. He was suspended like a cartoon character in midair over the chasm separating his own pre-1960s America from the post-1960s America he had done so much to create. His fans would have been appalled (perhaps he, too, would have been appalled) to recognize on which side of that chasm he thought virtue lay.

So a touching moment on this collection comes when Dylan begins to strum and sing the syrupy "Mister Blue," a number-one hit for the Fleetwoods in 1959, a perfect embodiment of Eisenhower-era sentimentality, and someone in the background laughs. Across the years, you can't tell whose laugh it is, or whether the laugh is a joyous one of recognition or a snotty one of expectation that Dylan would mock or parody this exquisite but dreadfully passé song. One might expect irony, but irony was for a later generation. Dylan delights in "Mister Blue," and Robertson, recognizing this, embroiders around it a quiet lead-guitar accompaniment that is reminiscent of Bruce Langhorne's on the Dylan hit "Mr. Tambourine Man" three years before.

There is a Golden Oldies sound to even the most polished songs on the Basement Tapes. The rockabilly song "Dress It Up, Better Have It All" will wow today's listeners with its rollicking wildness, but it is wild in the

way Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry had been wild in the 1950s, not in the smash-your-guitars-after-the-concert way that The Who or Jimi Hendrix was starting to be wild. "I'm Your Teenage Prayer" could have come off the *American Graffiti* soundtrack. In its exuberant improvised silliness, it also reminds one a bit of the Beatles' "You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)," recorded at about the same time. The pretty, unfinished "Santa Fe" anticipates certain late-1960s songs that, although countercultural, are countercultural in a commercial way—like the ones Jimmy Webb would write for Glen Campbell or the stuff Linda Ronstadt would soon sing for Stone Poneys.

Again and again on this album, Dylan seems to be consciously stepping out of synchrony with his younger, hipper listeners. It is as if his inmost thoughts were no longer cool enough, no longer vanguard enough, for the audience that was waiting on him—and Dylan knew it, even if his fans didn't yet. And there was another way in which Dylan was even more out of step with his times than if he had proposed, say, escalating the war in Vietnam. In one passage in "Open the Door, Homer" (inspired by the wholly dissimilar 1947 Count Basie song "Open the Door, Richard"), he sings:

Take care of all of your memories, said Mick
For you cannot relive them
And remember when you're out there tryin' to heal the sick
That you must always first forgive them.

When the songwriter Carly Simon, who was also managed by Albert Grossman, met Dylan around the time of his move to Woodstock, he was drunk and, she later said in an interview, "saying a lot about God and Jesus." Dylan's Christianity has, ever since, been allusive, idiosyncratic, and never of the sort to place him on anyone's side in any *Kulturkampf*. But there are a half-dozen songs in these sessions that begin to show the more open Christian religiosity that would appear on his late 1967 album *John Wesley Harding*.

Even before Dylan was explicitly religious, he had a partiality to biblical imagery and a rather eschatological way of framing things. Sid Griffin mentions that Mick Jagger was one of the London musicians who got to hear the first 14-song demo of the recordings Dylan and The Band were doing. Marianne Faithfull, the hard-luck singer who was Jagger's girlfriend at the time, was haunted by certain of the songs she heard—particularly "This Wheel's on Fire" and "Lo and Behold!" "It was one of the first times that Dylan started talking almost in sort of ancient tongues," she told an

interviewer years later. "I always felt that the place where the great horrors were going to come from was America. And when I listened to these things I felt that he knew that, too."

The version of "This Wheel's on Fire" that appears on the new release is extraordinary. It is the same one that went on the 1975 Basement Tapes, but stripped of some of the instrumental tracks that were added then to make it sound smoother and catchier. The restored original has none of the elements of an exuberant highway song that one hears on various other versions, from The Band's own to the one that rolls with the credits on the early-1990s BBC series *Absolutely Fabulous*. It is, rather, a terrifying, funereal song about how Faustian bargains end, with weird and beautiful harmonies by The Band's bassist Rick Danko, who cowrote the song. Although it was written in the middle of the 1960s, it encapsulates the decade:

Dylan, center, performs with, from left, Levon Helm, Rick Danko, and Robbie Robertson of The Band, as singer Odetta looks on, at Carnegie Hall, January 20, 1968—Dylan's first appearance since a reported motorcycle accident in August 1966.

If your memory serves you well
You'll remember you're the one
That called on me to call on them
To get you your favors done
And after every plan had failed
And there was nothing more to tell
You knew that we would meet again
If your memory served you well

These songs are packaged as a Bob Dylan record, but it is important to bear in mind that they were recorded in a collegial atmosphere with a band that would become—granted, only for two, and possibly three, albums—a musical force as great as any that came out of the sixties. The compatibility between Dylan's voice and Danko's warbling is almost alchemical in its sweetness. You can hear it not just on the song they wrote together but on Dylan's heavily adapted version of Woody Guthrie's "Nine Hundred Miles." Robbie Robertson's insouciant, understated guitar playing (on, for instance, "My Woman She's A-Leavin'"), untempted by the attention-seeking busy-ness that marks most of the era's guitar solos, fits Dylan's guitar the way Danko's singing fits Dylan's voice.

The Band is the greatest Canadian rock ensemble, and Dylan performs a few Canadian standards on this recording. Such matters are generally of interest exclusively to Canadians, but at the time, The Band's Canadianness was pivotal. They were not like the other young men who were hanging out in Woodstock—because they were not eligible to be drafted into the Vietnam war. (Even Helm, the one non-Canadian, was older.) Antiwar rallies were the great clearinghouses of political information and agitation, and the members of The Band weren't spending any time at them. This is one reason why the political issues of the day go untouched here. Dylan was making music with a bunch of Canadians running towards America at a time when the counterculture was made up of Americans running towards Canada.

Within a very few years after Dylan made his basement recordings, everything worth tweaking or ribbing or questioning had been not only tweaked, ribbed, and questioned but ridiculed and discarded. That is why Dylan's protest music sounds more balanced, less propagandistic and shrill, than that of singers from the 1970s and 1980s who are only slightly younger—people like Janis Ian, who complains about inequality in the sphere of lovability; or Supertramp, which finds the root of Western unfairness not in capitalism but in logic; or Bruce Hornsby, for whom greed is embodied, anachronistically, by a "man in a silk suit."

If Dylan was the voice of a generation, it was not of the generation we think. He belonged to the generation before the one that idolized him, as did The Band. For them, the pre-baby boom frameworks of meaning were all still in place, undeconstructed and deployable in art. One of history's secrets is that revolutionaries' appeal in the eyes of posterity owes much to the traits they share with the world they overthrew. They secure their greatness less by revealing new virtues than by rendering the ones that made them great impracticable henceforth. There is no reason this should be any less true of Dylan. His virtues are not so much of the world he left us with as of the world he helped usher out. ♦

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Charles Mingus (bass), Roy Haynes (drums), Thelonious Monk (piano), Charlie Parker (alto saxophone) in New York (1953)

BOB PARENT / GETTY IMAGES

Bird Still Lives?

Sixty years on, the legacy of Charlie Parker. BY TED GIOIA

Charlie Parker never achieved stardom, at least not by the standards of the music business. He never had a gold record to hang on the wall or enjoyed a significant radio hit. He never had a contract with a major record label. His face didn't appear, even in a bit role, in a Hollywood film. If you measure a musician's worth at the cash register—the ultimate arbiter of talent nowadays, or so it seems—Parker can only be called a minor figure, operating at the fringes of the entertainment industry.

But within the subculture of modern jazz, Parker was more than a star. He was a legend. Even before his death at age 34, 60 years ago this month, Parker had assumed the status of a demigod among those who followed the most progressive currents in jazz—as well as among hipsters, beatniks, and various practitioners of what passed for "alternative lifestyles" during the Eisenhower era. And even now, with 60 years of perspective since his untimely passing, we still struggle to separate the man from the myth.

Charlie Parker came of age in Kansas City at a time when the city enjoyed a scandalous renown for jazz, uninhibited nightlife, and easy access to illegal intoxicants. The Parker mythos was built on the same ingredients: His nickname, Bird, perhaps referred to his free-flying alto saxophone lines, which darted and flowed with a mesmerizing unpredictability. But his life was similarly unconstrained, almost in free-fall.

The two sides of Parker, virtuoso

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musician and haunted victim of personal demons, often seemed to go hand in hand. I still encounter musicians who tell me that Bird's visionary music was inspired, at least in part, by heroin. Back in the 1940s and '50s, this view was even more prevalent, and Parker's example had too many followers who could justify their self-destruction by pointing to his rare artistry.

They could call attention to the amazing 18-month run leading up to Parker's July 1946 arrest and subsequent institutionalization at Camarillo State Hospital in California. Parker was clearly in a state of dissolution and chemical dependency during this period, yet it was when he made many of his most influential recordings—pathbreaking tracks such as "Ornithology," "Night in Tunisia," "Ko-Ko," "Salt Peanuts," "Hot House," "Yardbird Suite," and "Billie's Bounce." These recordings invented the bebop vocabulary and defined the course of modern jazz for years to come.

When I was a teenager, I studied this music as if it were holy writ, a source of arcane wisdom for those desiring initiation into the inner sanctum of jazz improvisation. Parker had died before I was born, but he was ever-present in my own coming-of-age as a musician. I listened over and over again to everything Parker recorded during the mid-1940s—even the alternate takes and false starts. I studied transcriptions of Parker's solos and made marks in the margins to call attention to especially striking licks and phrases. And around the time of my 20th birthday, I bought a turntable that allowed me to play records at half-speed. I delighted in my ability to hear in slow-motion Bird songs that previously had flown by at breakneck pace.

This is the side of Charlie Parker that I cherish, analytical and almost mathematical in its purity. It's not as sensational as the tales of the desperate addict, pawning his sax to get a fix. It isn't suitable for a made-for-TV biopic. It's not tawdry or glamorous. But the secret to Bird's ability to swoop and soar resides here, in his manifold ways of combining the 12 notes of our tempered scale.

So forgive me if I wax rhapsodic over Parker's bold use of chromaticism—which went far beyond anything done previously in jazz. The same goes for his placement of rhythmic accents and subdivisions of the beat. I simply can't talk about Charlie Parker without acknowledging these remarkable achievements. I learned as much about melody construction from Bird as I did from Bach and Beethoven, and I still apply his teachings every time I sit down at the piano and improvise. Parker never wrote a textbook, but he really didn't need to—

Even before his death at age 34, 60 years ago this month, Parker had assumed the status of a demigod among those who followed the most progressive currents in jazz. And even now, with 60 years of perspective since his untimely passing, we still struggle to separate the man from the myth.

his records present the results of a long process of synthesis and codification, available to anyone with open ears and a willingness to put them to the test.

Yet I note with some sadness that Parker's contributions aren't as widely recognized, or even understood, as they once were. After his untimely death, bebop acolytes proclaimed "Bird Lives," which served triple duty as graffito, mantra, and shibboleth for the cognoscenti. But sometimes I wonder how much vitality Parker's spirit still possesses in the context of the current music world. His former sideman Miles Davis is much better known, among both the general public and up-and-coming musicians. If you were to ask sax players under the age of 40 to name the artist who most influenced them, you would probably hear the names of John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Wayne Shorter, and maybe even Michael Brecker before Parker got acknowledged.

Sixty years is a long time, and the revolutions of the 1940s must seem like grandpa's tea party to a new millennium audience. Also, young jazz fans show a marked preference for artists who recorded albums with the superior high-fidelity technology that emerged in the late 1950s. If Parker had lived to his 40th birthday, he could have taken advantage of this aural leap forward. But as it stands, the jazz albums of 1959 (Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, The Dave Brubeck Quartet's *Time Out*, Charles Mingus's *Mingus Ah Um*) are cherished by contemporary jazz fans, who see them as part of an ongoing cultural dialogue, while the jazz milestones of the 1930s and '40s are mostly forgotten.

But it's no coincidence that John Coltrane's first recordings show him slavishly imitating Charlie Parker. Or that Miles Davis grew to maturity as a musician by studying Bird's example. Or that Charlie Mingus and Thelonious Monk also developed their skills while working alongside Parker. By my measure, he is one of the three most influential figures in the history of jazz—along with Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. Yet of the three, Parker is by far the least well-known.

Ah, but just when I fear that Parker is becoming a footnote to music history, someone comes along to restore my faith that Bird does still live. One of my favorite saxophonists, Rudresh Mahanthappa, just released a Parker tribute album called *Bird Calls*. And not long ago, Joe Lovano, one of the greatest living masters of the tenor sax, released his *Bird Songs*. Saxophonist Steve Coleman, awarded a MacArthur "genius grant" last year, also draws frequent inspiration from Parker's oeuvre.

A few jazz writers have kept Parker's flame burning. Stanley Crouch recently released the first volume of his long-awaited biography of Parker, *Kansas City Lightning*. As a result, we now

know more than ever about the formative years of this musical master, and we can finally see the flesh-and-blood person behind the murky legend. Crouch casts light on the dark side of the altoist's lifestyle but refuses to glamorize it; above all, he never lets us forget that Parker's greatness transcends the tawdry details that so many others have emphasized. This is, I am convinced, how Parker would want to be remembered.

For my part, I know how I will celebrate the anniversary of Parker's death. I will turn again to the music, especially those recordings from the mid-1940s that captivated me as a teenager and that still excite me today. That's my fix, maybe even my addiction. And I see no reason why, all these years later, I should break the habit. ♦

B&A

No Place Like Homer

The immediacy of the distant past.

BY SUSAN KRISTOL

In a Platonic dialogue, Socrates describes Homer as "the best and most divine of the poets." Not a bad blurb, if taken at face value. Such an exalted position, however, could not remain unchallenged. Homer's excellence, not to mention his very existence, has been frequently called into question over the millennia.

Paradoxically, it was a humble folk instrument from the Balkans—the gusle—that 80 years ago dealt Homer's lyre a nearly mortal blow. A hand-carved, one-stringed wooden box covered with animal skin, the gusle is held upright in the lap and played with a bow, like a mutant violin. As Adam Nicolson writes in his imaginative and emotional *Why Homer Matters*, "Nothing about the sound of the gusle is charming." But charming or not, this musical instrument has helped reduce Homer, at least for classical scholars, to a mythical being, a mere name imposed on a poetic corpus that evolved organically over time.

In the early 1930s, a Harvard professor named Milman Parry traveled to Yugoslavia to make recordings of the Serbo-Croatian guslars, illiterate singers of traditional ballads who performed at festivals and in coffee houses. According to Nicolson, the guslars "always sang their long epic songs of battle and disaster with a kind of hard energy, loud, at a high pitch, the singer's whole frame gripped with the effort. This was no smooth crooning but a passionate engagement of mind and body." Each performance was different because the bard composed as he sang, with the help of a fixed syllabic pattern and word units that fit the meter.

The best way to imagine this mode of composition is to think of jazz improvisation, which may begin with the germ of a melody and is elaborated on the spot, while adhering to a traditional set of rules or chord progressions that give it structure.

The paradigm-changing claim of Milman Parry and his followers was that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were the products of a centuries-old, preliterate tradition of oral composition similar to that of the guslars. The idea of the epics as designed for oral performance is not farfetched, since the Homeric epics themselves depict bards singing epic tales. (This is art taking a selfie, so to speak, roughly 2,800 years ago.)

What was new about Parry's work, however, was his claim that the performance was the moment of composition. His chief evidence was Homeric epithets such as "wine-dark sea," "swift-footed Achilles," and "rosy-fingered dawn," which sometimes seem inapposite where they appear, but each of which has a unique rhythmic shape. He argued that the epithets were not chosen to be particularly meaningful, but rather served as compositional aids to the singer, inserted on the fly into slots of the dactylic hexameter where needed. At some later date, the fluid process of extemporaneous composition was replaced by memorized performances of the poems. Finally, perhaps around 750 B.C.E., the epics were written down and became the texts we have today.

Milman Parry died in 1935 at the age of 33, when, according to Nicolson, "a revolver mixed in with his clothes in a suitcase" went off "accidentally." His papers were published posthumously by his Yale classicist son Adam, who was also fated to die young, along with his classicist wife Anne, in a motorcycle accident in France in 1971.

The influence of Milman Parry's ideas, fitting so perfectly with the zeitgeist, and magnified no doubt by the drama of the three untimely Parry deaths, was so domineering that any hapless classics graduate student in the 1970s or thereafter who ventured to utter the noun "Homer" followed by the verb "wrote" could expect to be tarred and feathered and ridden out of the seminar room on a rail. As a result, in the view of most classicists today, there was never a person called "Homer," any more than there was a Theseus or a Heracles. The name Homer is just shorthand for the process

Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue
Creating the Foundations of Classical Civilization
by Peter J. Ahrensdorf
Cambridge, 278 pp., $45

Why Homer Matters
by Adam Nicolson
Henry Holt, 320 pp., $30

Susan Kristol has a doctorate in classical philology.

of centuries-long oral composition that resulted in the two epics attributed to him, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

The oral-composition theory of Milman Parry has become as accepted in the academic world as Darwinian theory. This is what makes Peter Ahrensdorf's *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue* such a bold statement. In its most radical version, the oral-composition theory presents a major challenge: To what extent can we find meaning in a text that has no author and that simply evolved over time into a masterpiece? To Ahrensdorf—whose introduction also addresses the analyst critical school, the unitarians, and the historicist critics, whose discrediting of Homer began with Bacon and Vico—the answer is clear. "In his two epic poems," he writes, "Homer offers a systematic critique of both the tragic warrior heroism represented, for example, by Achilles and Hector, and the seemingly rational heroism represented by Odysseus." Homer was a philosopher-poet who deliberately shaped his two epics to reflect on each other and, thereby, on the meaning of heroism and mortality.

Ahrensdorf's first chapter, on the theology of Homer, questions whether the Homeric gods actually care about justice on earth. The gods are frivolous, inept, and self-absorbed. They capriciously inflict misery on humans. Because they are immortal, they can't love as deeply as do humans, nor do they attain the wisdom humans gain through suffering.

As Achilles' meeting with King Priam at the end of the *Iliad* shows, compassion is a human quality, not a divine one. Through a detailed look at the text, Ahrensdorf demonstrates that while Homer seems to portray the gods as supporting justice at the beginning and end of the epic, in other places the poet leads the careful reader to question conventional piety. Humans, not the gods, are the ultimate source of virtue. And Homer, not "the Muse," is the source of wisdom.

Because of Homer's challenge to piety, in Ahrensdorf's view, two distinctive features of Greek civilization can be traced to his influence: the celebration of "the beauty of the human animal, body and soul" and a "singularly questioning posture toward the divine." As a later Greek philosopher was to say, "Man is the measure of all things." Ahrensdorf argues, convincingly but against expectations, that Achilles is the most philosophic hero, not Hector, with his unquestioning loyalty to his city and selfish desire for glory, and not the more shallow "man of many wiles," Odysseus, who ends his epic in a cascade of wrathful violence. It is Achilles who withdraws from battle and takes on a Homeric role, "delighting his mind with his lyre . . . singing of the glories of men," and questioning the justice of the gods as well as the entire heroic enterprise.

Fresco of lyre player, Palace of Nestor, Pylos (13th century B.C.E.)

This is not an antiwar poet, but "on virtually every page of the *Iliad*, Homer presents with sorrow and with pity the horrors and the ugliness of war." Among Homer's many famous interruptions of his own narrative is this quiet reminder of the routines of daily life that war destroys, a short digression in the midst of the furious pursuit of Hector by Achilles:

> Beside these [springs] are the beautiful washing-hollows of stone, where the wives of the Trojans and their beautiful daughters washed the clothes to shining, in the old days, when there was peace, before the coming of the sons of the Achaians.

By contrast, Adam Nicolson's rambling and enjoyable study has a completely different feel from the organized argumentation of Ahrensdorf. It is partly autobiographical, and it ventures off on odd tangents, including a curiously unemotional reminiscence of being raped at the age of 25 in the Syrian desert, along with discussions about the Indo-Europeans, John Keats, the 1944 kidnapping of a German general on Crete, the Egyptians and the Hittites, the Spanish Extremadura, and the steppes. He quotes his own delightful poem about taking the night train to Scotland, remembered from the days when he invented bedtime poems for his children. It is a poem filled with repetitions and no subordinate clauses, much like the Homeric epics: *Dark was the train and wonderfully shiny / the light from the station shining on its flanks / and the lights in the cabins glowing inside*.

These two authors, although so different, come to similar conclusions. Nicolson, like Ahrensdorf, gives us striking insights into the epics and highlights Homer's humanity, the poet's distancing himself from his gods and heroes even as he depicts their shocking deeds. Just as Ahrensdorf quotes the passage

about the springs outside the walls that the women could no longer visit because of the war, Nicolson quotes the famous simile from the *Odyssey* when the hero weeps at hearing a bard sing his own story, the story of the sacking of Troy:

As a woman weeps, lying on the body
Of her dear husband, who died fighting
for his city and his people,
As he tried to beat off the day of
pitilessness,
And as she sees him lying and gasping for
breath
And winding her body around him
She cries high and piercing while the men
behind her
hit her with the butts of their spears
and lead her away to captivity to work
and sorrow
and her cheeks are hollow with her grief.
Such are the tears that Odysseus lets fall
from his eyes.

Nicolson sees in Homer "the ability to regard all aspects of life with clarity, equanimity and sympathy, with a loving heart and an unclouded eye. . . . That is his value, a reservoir of understanding beyond the grief and turbulence of a universe in which there is no final authority."

Both of these books provide a path for the reader into a deeper appreciation of the first, and best, literature we have. One can never go wrong by treating a great book as though it were, indeed, a great book, composed by a great mind—and seeing where that assumption will lead. In the case of Homer, beginning from that premise leads to an understanding of the richness of Homer's achievement, one that repays any amount of reading and rereading. ♦

B&A

Danse Macabre

Not every artist fled in horror from the Third Reich.

BY ANDREW NAGORSKI

Artists Under Hitler
Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany
by Jonathan Petropoulos
Yale, 424 pp., $40

Here's a generally accepted syllogism: The Weimar Republic saw an explosion in the arts, particularly of modern forms like expressionist painting and atonal music. When Hitler swept away the freedoms of the Weimar era and assumed dictatorial powers, he targeted "degenerate art"—the Nazis' designation for anything modern of which they disapproved. Ergo, the country's most creative artists were forced into immediate opposition to Hitler's regime.

There's just one problem. As Jonathan Petropoulos convincingly demonstrates, this syllogism is sloppy at best—and in all too many cases, it's dead wrong. To be sure, there were artists, such as the composer Kurt Weill and the playwright Bertolt Brecht, who fled Germany as soon as Hitler took power, both for personal and political reasons (Weill was Jewish, Brecht was a Marxist). Marlene Dietrich, who had already launched her career in Hollywood, famously and contemptuously rebuffed efforts by the Nazis to lure her back. She chose, instead, to become an American citizen, and during the war she made anti-Nazi broadcasts and offered memorable performances for American troops in North Africa and Europe.

But Petropoulos, who has written extensively about the cultural scene in the Nazi era, focuses on the prominent artists who stayed behind—at least for as long as they could. Although a few tried to help Jews and others who were targets of the new regime, there are no profiles in courage here. Most of the artists desperately sought to continue their careers at any price, which meant serving the Nazis and constantly seeking to prove their loyalty. In the land of Faust, they eagerly followed a Faustian script.

In the early years of Nazi rule, many artists clung to the hope that the new regime would tolerate some manifestations of modernism. Yes, Hitler had dismissed the movement's proponents in *Mein Kampf* as "spiritual degenerates or slimy swindlers." But the artists reassured themselves that there were "decent people" in the Nazi leadership who collected modern paintings and sculptures. Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his wife commissioned a portrait of their children from the expressionist painter Otto Dix, and chief propagandist Joseph Goebbels talked about a "healthy view of Expressionism."

When it came to something like designing service stations for the new autobahns, even Hitler, the artist manqué, admitted that modernist design was more appropriate than "Romantic eccentricity or anachronistic buildings." He wanted industrial projects to convey a suitable contemporary style. Moreover, Petropoulos argues that initially, "Hitler refrained from making his personal views state policy," which allowed "pockets of tolerance" of modern art to survive. That is, until 1937, when the Nazis staged their infamous "Degenerate Art" exhibition, signaling an end to whatever experimentation remained.

While Petropoulos ably charts the Nazis' tightening stranglehold on the arts, the real value of this book is its unsparing examination of the behavior of Germany's artists as they tried to adapt to the rapidly evolving new realities. Petropoulos divides his subjects into two groups: those who tried to seek accommodation with the authorities but failed, and those who largely succeeded. Neither group presents a pretty picture.

Andrew Nagorski, a former Newsweek *bureau chief in Berlin and Moscow, is the author of* Hitlerland: American Eyewitnesses to the Nazi Rise to Power.

The composer Paul Hindemith exemplified both the cynicism and the naïveté of those who believed they could ingratiate themselves with the new regime. Writing to friends in September 1933, he proclaimed that he "had been asked to cooperate and had not declined." He was convinced that he would be able "to export German culture, beginning with music," which would be very much in tune with the goals of the Nazis' Fighting League for German Culture. In April 1933, Hindemith met with that group's leaders and reported to his publisher, "I got the impression (after satisfying them that I was neither a half- nor any other fractional Jew) that they have a good opinion of me there."

Hindemith felt no embarrassment in discussing his obsequious behavior—despite the fact that his wife was half-Jewish and he was friends with Jewish musicians. Nor did he have any hesitation about contrasting his work with the "sonic orgies" and "decadent intellectual efforts" of Jewish composers such as Weill and Arnold Schoenberg. By presenting himself as a Germanic musician, he was successful in the early days of the Third Reich, and he was even appointed to the Reich Chamber of Music in 1934. Two years later, he signed an oath of allegiance to Hitler.

But Hitler still viewed Hindemith's music as too modern and, therefore, as suspect. Hindemith was included in the "Degenerate Music" exhibition that opened in Düsseldorf in May 1938, thus ending his career in the Third Reich. He was featured alongside Weill and others, accused of having "deteriorated into a Jewish sensibility." This prompted him and his wife to move to Switzerland, and then to the United States, where he taught at Yale. But writing from the ship that took him across the Atlantic, he declared: "If I could return [to Germany] with good grace and with the prospect of a somewhat secure existence I would have the ship turned around right away."

Like the Bauhaus founder and famed architect Walter Gropius, who left Germany in 1934 for Great Britain and later ended up teaching at Harvard, Hindemith and other artists in this group were not driven into exile by opposition to Hitler. As Petropoulos repeatedly points out, it was not for a lack of trying that they were not accepted by the Nazis; far from it. And like Hindemith, Gropius held out the hope that he might return to Germany, in his case as late as 1939.

Some never left but nonetheless found themselves banished. A prime example was the expressionist painter Emil Nolde, whose support for the Nazis dated back to the early 1920s. The Nazis burned many of his works and forbade him from painting more. Yet he secretly painted 1,300 watercolors during the war years, his "unpainted pictures," as he called them. They were less vulnerable to discovery because they did not exude the odor that oil-based paintings did.

Paul Hindemith (1931) by Rudolf Heinisch

At times, Petropoulos's workmanlike style drains the drama from these stories. But he has done an impressive job assembling evidence about the behavior and attitudes of the artists, and the result is a fascinating collection of human portraits. When it comes to the better-known cases of those who succeeded in working for the Nazis to the end, his profiles of filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl and actor Gustaf Gründgens are particularly fresh and insightful. While Riefenstahl occasionally helped Jews, she did not hesitate to use her influence to punish those who displeased her. During the filming of *Tiefland*, based on the opera of the same name, she threatened a Roma slave laborer who had been brought in as an extra. When the young woman refused to beg Riefenstahl for forgiveness after she fled the set and was captured, the famed director told her: "You'll go to a concentration camp!" The woman was dispatched to Ravensbrück.

Both Riefenstahl and Gründgens prospered because of the propaganda films they made; they enjoyed fame and lavish privileges, including handsome payments from the Nazi rulers. More remarkably, perhaps, many such artists not only continued their careers but also continued to garner critical acclaim after the war. Those who were driven into exile early also benefited from the popular misconception that they had been ardent opponents of Hitler. On the centenary of Gropius's birth, for example, the Bauhaus-Archive in Berlin described him as a "declared enemy of Fascism."

While Riefenstahl and Gründgens could hardly deny their artistic roles in the Third Reich, they maintained the pretense that those roles had nothing to do with Nazi ideology—or, in Riefenstahl's case, that her close personal relationship with Hitler signaled approval of his genocidal policies. On May 9, 1946, Gründgens returned to the Deutsches Theater in Berlin to offer his first postwar performance. The opening line of his character included the words "*das ist grotesk*." The same could be said about Gründgens—and about so many of the artists who take center stage in this revealing book. ♦

B&A

Same Difference

A metaphor is like a—well, what, exactly?

BY BARTON SWAIM

There is something magical about saying a thing is something that it obviously is not. Children know this instinctively. Calling a shoebox a castle, or a pencil a scepter, can elicit momentary raptures of delight in a child: not primarily for the functional reason that it allows him to immerse himself in an imaginary story, and certainly not because he thinks the shoebox *is* a castle, or the pencil *is* a scepter, but chiefly because it's a thrill to think of something in a different way by calling it by another name.

Later, let's say in preadolescence, he will discover the addictive pleasures of assigning inapposite words to people and things he wishes to injure or control. He calls his brother a rat, his school an asylum, his math teacher a cow. Not great instances of wit, to be sure, but in calling people and things by the wrong signifiers—by turning them into metaphors—he in some way transforms them.

Which is why metaphors are everywhere. Sometimes they clarify; more often they confuse. Sports commentators speak almost exclusively in metaphors. "Romero needs to step up. . . . After the injury last week, Rodgers is a huge question mark. . . . The Seahawks aren't yet a dynasty." I sometimes think the popular but widely hated phrase "it is what it is" was invented simply to provide a bit of relief from all these metaphors.

Some of the fiercest arguments in our politics revolve around metaphors: debt ceilings, glass ceilings, cooling effects, reset buttons, political footballs.

Barton Swaim is the author of Scottish Men of Letters and the New Public Sphere: 1802-1834.

Metaphor
by Denis Donoghue
Harvard, 240 pp., $24.95

Massive and largely deleterious governmental interventions have been carried out under the guise of metaphorical appellations: the War on Poverty, Head Start, No Child Left Behind, and many others. Indeed, it's almost a safe assumption that any time you hear politicians or bureaucrats using a metaphor to describe what they want to do, they're up to no good. The 2009 stimulus bill, remember, was supposed to "jumpstart the economy."

Good metaphors force you to think about the things they reference in fresh ways. There aren't very many good ones, though. They're mostly concocted for the purpose of coercing you into changing your opinion. They annoy and distract rather than illuminate.

Denis Donoghue takes a far more sanguine view of them. In *Metaphor*—a loose, at times digressive series of essays on a literary device that's almost impossible to define with precision—he consistently downplays metaphors' power to confuse. He includes a chapter on writers who've expressed apprehensions about the use of metaphors—Hannah Arendt, for instance, ridiculed the way psychoanalysis depends on the metaphor "peak of the iceberg" to conceptualize consciousness—but Donoghue backs away from any serious criticism of metaphors and the uses to which they're put. He can only think of one metaphor that effectively deceived: President Clinton's use of the phrase "move on."

Donoghue's tolerant view of metaphor robs this book, to my mind, of some of its power. Why, after all, have poets and novelists struggled to find the right metaphor, treating the device almost as a dangerous thing, if it doesn't even have the power to mislead?

Donoghue's definition is a disarmingly simple one: A metaphor is "the transfer of a word from its proper or ordinary position in a sentence or a phrase to a position alien to that or distant from it." A number of critics have all but equated metaphor and simile—John Middleton Murry thought a metaphor was just a "compressed simile." Donoghue rightly disagrees. Similes ask only that you observe likenesses; metaphors ask you to imagine.

Metaphors go wrong more easily than similes do: You can always say that two things bear some similarities and sound plausible; saying one thing *is* the other thing while still sounding plausible is far trickier. Yet a well-placed metaphor can grab your attention far more effectively than even the most powerful simile.

"In a simile," writes Donoghue, "the things compared are not altered by the comparison," whereas metaphors somehow change the things they reference. Drawing on I. A. Richards's terms "tenor" (the thing or action needing explication) and "vehicle" (the thing or action whose qualities are borrowed), Donoghue suggests that "the minimal requirement in a metaphor is that the tenor is changed by the vehicle; not replaced by it or superseded but changed in quality or character by the new company it is made to keep."

One could cite plenty of examples, but consider the greatest. If Jesus had said "This is *like* my body" and "This is *like* my blood," Christians would have naturally assumed he was merely teaching his disciples some important principle or doctrine, as he had done on many previous occasions. But by saying "This *is* my body" and "This *is* my blood," he was manifestly saying something far bigger. The more suggestive metaphorical wording gave rise to endless and oftentimes acrimonious disagreement, but no one in any Christian tradition thinks Jesus was merely drawing attention to similarities in order to get his point

across. That is the power of metaphor.

Donoghue does not explain this point with great efficiency, and instead gets tangled up in a subject far too complex for a book as limited in scope and stylistically discursive as this one is—namely, the symbolic relationship between the Old and New Testaments in Christian theology. He seems to have relied on whatever books lay nearest to hand. Erich Auerbach's once well-known essay on the metaphorical uses to which the New Testament puts the Old Testament, for example, has not improved with age; indeed, it's shallow and frequently just wrong. When Auerbach writes that Paul's epistles "are intended to strip the Old Testament of its normative character and show that it is merely a shadow of things to come"—lines quoted by Donoghue in an effort to move his argument forward—Auerbach has to ignore the many passages in which Paul quotes the Old Testament in order to urge his readers to live according to their normative standards. (In any case, the phrase "a shadow of things to come" was written by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, not by Paul.)

Nor does Donoghue get any reliable help from John Henry Newman, who argued in *A Grammar of Assent* that Jesus, by declaring himself "Son of Man" and "Son of God"—terms "declaratory of the two natures of Emmanuel"—"separates Himself from the Jewish Dispensation, in which he was born, and inaugurates the New Covenant." Newman has it precisely wrong: The term "Son of Man," Jesus' favorite self-designation, is drawn straight from the Old Testament and has nothing to do with his human nature.

The brilliance one expects from Donoghue is intermittently evident here. He upends linguist George Lakoff's contention that by using bellicose metaphors for the idea of argument (e.g., "he attacked Smith's assumptions") people too often think of arguments as war and conduct themselves accordingly. Says Donoghue: "Wars end, if they do, in peace, sometimes with formal treaties. . . . [F]urther, if rhetoric is the art of persuasion, Jack may reach a point in the argument at which he says: 'Jilly, I think you're right, I'll vote for Obama after all, with some misgiving.'"

Donoghue also composes a bracing takedown of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Keats, he says, crams three big unexplained metaphors into the first three lines—*Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness*, / *Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time*, / *Sylvan historian. . .*—and gives away his argument by using the word "unravish'd" before the reader has any clue why a bride would be unravish'd. I am not sure I agree, but he makes a case.

Still, much of *Metaphor* is needlessly difficult to read. The chapters are discursive to the point of being aimless, and the author has an irritating tendency to assume his readers know as much as he does, which is a great deal. When he writes "Newman," you just have to know that he means Cardinal John Henry, and quotations from French sources are usually not translated. The book is also haphazardly organized: Donoghue quotes a paragraph from a letter by Franz Kafka (the English translation, mercifully), then quotes the same paragraph a few pages later, with no indication that it's been quoted before. The fourth chapter is titled "It ensures that nothing goes without a name," but the words themselves, originally those of Quintilian, don't appear until the sixth chapter.

That a writer as accomplished as Denis Donoghue could produce such a book on a topic about which he is so well-suited to write is deeply disappointing. But it is what it is. ♦

B&A

Rebels with a Cause

George Washington and Robert E. Lee faced a decision.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

The Man Who Would Not Be Washington
Robert E. Lee's Civil War and His Decision That Changed American History
by Jonathan Horn
Scribner, 384 pp., $28

For most historians most of the time, reach exceeds grasp—necessarily so, for reasons intrinsic to the craft. Save for its occasional grandmaster, a Gibbon or a Namier, past mysteries lie too deeply embedded to be definitively solved in a later age. *The Man Who Would Not Be Washington* provides a fascinating instance of the difficulty. It is Jonathan Horn's thesis that a great turning point in Robert E. Lee's life—his decision to reject command of the Union forces, resign his U.S. Army commission, and side with Virginia—stands in sharp contrast to George Washington's example as *pater patriae*, father of the country.

Just when in those tense early months of 1861 Lee made his final decision to cast his lot with Virginia is unclear. But the decision was certainly sealed by mid-1861, when his state, after long hesitation, voted to secede. Until that moment, Lee had clung to his federal allegiance and his desperate hope that the Upper South would stay with the Union. He considered secession "revolution" and had no love of slavery. "I am," he told a friend, "one of those dull creatures that cannot see the good of secession."

But Virginia's decision was a response to Lincoln's call for volunteers to suppress what he termed "rebellion." For Lee, that made it likely that the Southern states would be coerced into renewed loyalty. His

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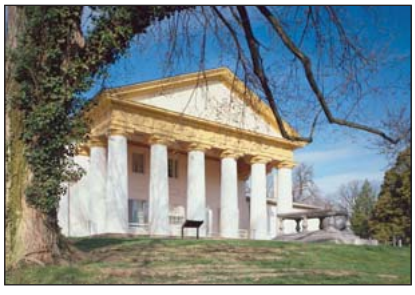
mentor, the astute Gen. Winfield Scott, chief of the Union forces, told him in their last anguished meeting, "You have made the greatest mistake of your life." Perhaps Scott was right. Certainly it brought on Lee's head outcries of "treason" that continue even today.

What Lee said, in explanation of his reluctant decision, was that he could not draw his sword against state and kin—a simpler choice in the mid-19th century than it would be in the atomized American republic of today, where regional and local identities are frayed by mobility and money-grubbing. Lee's biographer Douglas Southall Freeman comments: "This was not a sectionalist bias—[Lee] looked on Virginia as he did his family [and] did not, then or thereafter, stop to reason out the nature of this instinctive feeling." Lee felt that honor, as well as heritage, obliged him to choose as he did.

Indeed, the Virginia heritage, as that of the Upper South generally, had long featured a civil coexistence of regional and national loyalties. Thomas Jefferson, as both president and ideologue, had set the typical example in which states-rights rhetoric often collided with nationalist action—as in the Louisiana Purchase and the later Embargo.

In the face of this history, the author of this interesting study condemns Lee's famous defection in the light of Washington's counterexample: Lee becomes "the man who would not be Washington." The argument could obviously be reversed 180 degrees. While the issues and circumstances differed, Washington's decision in 1775-76 to abandon his loyalty to the king and his former status as an officer in the crown's militia seems precisely to parallel Lee's. (Thus, many British observers of our Civil War were baffled by the Unionist anxiety to distinguish between 1776 and 1861, and between the sentiments of the Declaration of Independence and the rhetoric of secession.) But that parallel being stipulated, how does Jonathan Horn construct his counterargument?

To begin with, Horn places great weight on personal and family connections and affinities. Many ties indeed linked the Washington, Custis, and Lee families. George Washington, who had no natural children, married the wealthy widow Martha Custis; that legacy ultimately brought to Robert E. Lee and his wife, Mary Custis Lee, Washington's step-great-granddaughter, not only the magnificent house, gardens, and grounds at Arlington but a problematic set of bondsmen designated as the "Custis slaves," who, within five years, were to be freed under the will of their late master, G.W. Parke Custis. Moreover, grandfather Custis had bequeathed $10,000 each to the four Lee daughters. It was a tall challenge for Robert E. Lee, as the executor of his late father-in-law's confusing and



Arlington House

ambiguous will. He could not see how the the emancipation deadline could be met or funded—Custis was some $10,000 in debt at his death in 1857, and it was estimated that the repair of the run-down Arlington estate could not be managed short of another $10,000. Lee sought a judicial interpretation of the confusing passage in the Custis will, but it seems to have been of little help. And the issue was apparently preempted by the outbreak of the Civil War and Emancipation.

Beyond those complexities, however, there were other close affinities. Lee's profligate father, the revolutionary warrior and hero "Light Horse Harry" Lee, had been one of Washington's favorite colleagues. And the Lees and Washingtons, like many old Virginia tribes, were linked by a web of cousinly ties, near and distant.

All indisputable; and Horn assembles the elements of the story confidently. But what, exactly, do those affinities prove in support of his argument? Washington, as *pater patriae*, had united with his personal prestige the fractious and quarrelsome states, which, before the framing of the Constitution under his chairmanship in 1787-89, threatened to collapse into warring mini-nations. Again, undeniable, and tending to underscore Washington's vigorous unionist sentiments.

Yet Horn's thesis seems, on other grounds, rather tenuous—more a literary conceit than documentable history. One needn't be a student of the follies of King Lear to know that family ties offer no firm insurance against destructive quarrels. And how might one answer the question of questions: How would Washington have responded to the bitter crisis of 1861? The deadly wave of secessions came more than half a century after Washington's death, in a country inflated with "manifest destiny" and the divisive booty of the Mexican War. Freeman severely scolds historians like Lytton Strachey, his prime negative example, who purport to read the minds of historic figures without compelling documentation. So it is a bold historian who ventures to read the mind of Washington retrospectively and transposed 50 eventful years. To his credit, the author concedes the difficulty; though he seems at times to overcome it—to Lee's discredit.

Notwithstanding the foregoing reservations, it must be said that Jonathan Horn writes well and makes responsible, often vivid, use of his sources. His handicap is that he follows in the footsteps of Freeman, whose enduring Lee biography benefited from 20 years of study and the natural sympathies of a fellow Virginian. Moreover, Freeman's exhaustive chapters on Lee's dilemma lack any hint that Lee measured his actions in 1861 against a pattern set by Washington—or, indeed, that Lee was troubled by that precedent when he made the "mistake of [his] life."

The Man Who Would Not Be Washington, with its implication that Lee was false to the legacy of the American patriarch, fits current fashion and will win friends among advanced thinkers. The punctiliousness of two Virginia gentlemen of the old school is like a lost language for which the key has long since vanished. ♦

B&A

The Long Con

How much longer for pleasant, diversionary cinema?

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Focus
Directed by John Requa & Glenn Ficarra

There should be movies like *Focus* every week. It's a stylish and amusing film with glamorous actors, memorable supporting players, lush settings, and lots of twists and turns. Will Smith plays a successful con artist who chisels people all over the world. He's amused when a two-bit newbie played by Margot Robbie tries to run a hustle on him—amused and also powerfully attracted, because Margot Robbie may be the most beautiful woman to grace the screen since the 1960s heyday of Natalie Wood and Julie Christie.

He's the Paul Newman to her Robert Redford, except that there's sex involved.

Will Smith, Margot Robbie

Like Redford in *The Sting* (1973), Robbie wants to learn the "long con"—the big-money score that not only requires stealing from a very rich and dangerous person but also ensuring that said person never knows he's been had. Smith pooh-poohs the long con: "We're in a volume business," he explains as he and a crew of 20-30 people set up a thievery ring during the week of the Super Bowl in which they work together like a corps de ballet in beautiful synchrony on hundreds of small scores.

But—and this is the graceful aspect of the otherwise workmanlike script and direction by John Requa and Glenn Ficarra—you're never quite sure whether Robbie might not be conning Smith or what Smith is really up to with Robbie. And he may not be as dismissive of the long con as he says.

Now 46 and a decade past being the biggest star in motion pictures, Will Smith is not the rough-edged force of nature of his early years or the weird martyr-type he became after he stopped playing his kid roles. He downshifts here. And in playing it cool, he is as smooth as anyone has ever been on screen. He's really a joy to watch.

Robbie is not only an exquisite camera subject; she gives every sign here, as she did in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, of possessing real comic chops and an underlying core strength. She's too tough to be winsome, but she gets you on her side somehow. There's something new about her.

Requa and Ficarra clearly studied the classic caper pictures and learned the importance of having a vivid secondary cast. There are two terrific turns here. An actor, heretofore unknown to me, named Adrian Martinez plays Smith's heavy-lidded and heavyset partner in crime. And Gerald McRaney, a television star of the 1980s and '90s who staged a dazzling move back into the spotlight as an enigmatic billionaire on the Netflix series *House of Cards*, pops up at the end as a tough-as-nails security guard, and in a few minutes' screen time all but steals the picture.

Focus isn't a world-class film by any means. It doesn't reignite the caper-movie genre the way that, say, the Harrison Ford-Tommy Lee Jones version of *The Fugitive* reinvented the chase film back in 1993. It has nothing on its mind, and all the watch-stealing and con-man gimmicks grow a bit tiresome when you know they're just movie-staged nonsense. Still, *Focus* doesn't pretend to be anything that it's not: It's diverting, and even a little bit surprising, and it goes well with popcorn.

Yes, movies like *Focus* should be released every week. But they aren't, because the sad truth is that movies like *Focus* don't quite work any longer—and by "work," I mean that they don't make all that much sense as a central item in one's weekly entertainment diet.

When movies were the best, or even the only, game in town in terms of large-scale entertainment, and when they didn't cost anywhere near as much to attend, a good-but-not-great star vehicle could be a terrific diversion—the way you can have fun now when you land on some cute television program, like the cop-detective show *Castle* or the military-detective show *NCIS*, and find yourself happily diverted for an hour.

And that's the problem. A happy diversion ought to be enough to make any movie a success; but for most people, it isn't—not any longer. Most people hardly ever go to the movies; the trick to making a movie succeed is getting those folks to leave the house and give it a shot. (That's the secret to the colossal triumph of *American Sniper*, which turned out an audience of people who haven't been to a movie theater in years.) *Focus* doesn't offer enough of a reason for a couple to spend 30, 40, 50 bucks on it, a large soda, and a package of Twizzlers. It was more than enough for me. But I have to admit, they pay me to go. ♦

WARNER BROS.

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

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