

**BERNIE SANDERS
IS NO JOKE**
GEOFFREY NORMAN

the weekly

Standard

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THE BIN LADEN DOCUMENTS

The Obama
administration's
modified limited
hangout

STEPHEN E. HAYES
& THOMAS JOSCELYN



Hayes

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Once a Clintonite . . .

Peter Schweizer, the author of *Clinton Cash*, seems to be a victim of the law of unintended consequences. His book lays out, in lurid detail, what it claims in its subtitle: *The Untold Story of How and Why Foreign Governments and Businesses Helped Make Bill and Hillary Rich*. And it must be said, coverage in the media has generally been favorable: Even publications prone to admire the Clintons (the *New York Times*, for example) have treated with respect Schweizer's chapter-and-verse account of corruption and influence-peddling in Clintonland.

But while *Clinton Cash* may or may not influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential campaign, its most prominent victim, thus far, has not been Hillary or Bill Clinton but their old friend and sometime colleague George Stephanopoulos. And truth to tell, Stephanopoulos has only himself to blame: When, in late April, he conducted a distinctly hostile interview with Schweizer on his program, *This Week*, the onetime Clinton political operative and senior White House staffer failed to mention that, during the past three years, he had contributed some \$75,000 to the Clinton Foundation.

When the *Washington Free Beacon* revealed this conflict of interest, Stephanopoulos was obliged to go on the air and apologize—in fact, apologize twice—for failing to disclose this pro-

“he really isn’t a journalist”—although ABC News is heavily invested in him. Since joining the network’s news division directly from the Clinton White House in the late 1990s,

George Stephanopoulos has evolved from one of several “political commentators” to his current exalted status as chief anchor of ABC News, co-anchor of *Good Morning America*, host of the aforementioned *This Week*, and chief political correspondent of ABC News.

Nice work if you can get it, especially since it has been reported that Stephanopoulos recently signed a new seven-year, \$105 million employment contract.

At this point, THE SCRAPBOOK must declare its mystification. Yes, it is appalling that Step-

hanopoulos would regard his belated admission of unethical behavior as (in his words) “going the extra mile.” But is it surprising? It is not as though George Stephanopoulos fell unexpectedly from the heavens last week into the studio, or that his longstanding intimate relations with the Clintons had been disguised.

It is good, THE SCRAPBOOK concedes, that this is now subject to public discussion. But what took so long? ♦



Poster near ‘Good Morning America’ studios, May 21

fessional impropriety to his employer, ABC News, much less the public.

Accordingly, it’s been a tough couple of weeks for Stephanopoulos and ABC. To be sure, the fact that Stephanopoulos contributed such a princely sum to the Clintons while “covering” the news about Hillary Clinton’s candidacy could have meant the end of another journalist’s career. But as Carole Simpson, Stephanopoulos’s former ABC colleague, has explained,

Must Reading

In the release last week of a few more documents from the raid on Osama bin Laden’s compound in Pakistan, the director of national intelligence included a list of the English-language books that were found in bin Laden’s possession.

Among them, THE SCRAPBOOK was pleased to see, was one by our friend Henry Sokolski, an occasional contributor to these pages.

Sokolski has a theory for why bin Laden kept that volume, *Checking Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions* (coauthored with Patrick Clawson), on his bookshelf. “I think OBL was interested

in what a strategy to foster a Green Revolution in Iran might consist of,” he told THE SCRAPBOOK last week. “That’s what the book was all about—it came out five years before the revolution [in Iran] actually occurred and unfortunately failed.”

Bin Laden may have been curious, but it seems that no one in the

White House read the book, or else the regime might have been toppled in the summer of 2009. Instead, it's on a glide path to a nuclear weapon.

That's hardly surprising to Sokolski, a former Pentagon official and now executive director of the Non-proliferation Policy Education Center. From his perspective, American policymakers are always a step or two behind, especially on nuclear proliferation issues. "We seem to wait until the problem is all but unsolvable in each case, rather than acting as soon as we can, when we still have options."

His latest book, *Underestimated: Our Not So Peaceful Nuclear Future*, explains why that's a dangerous habit. "We wait until things get so bad, when it does become a problem there's no easy solution," says Sokolski. "Unless that culture changes, if you don't want to do things modestly outlined in this book, you might be toast."

Underestimated is a powerfully concise volume, 15 years in the making, explains Sokolski. "Other fields of study, like economics and military science, track trends and tell you how to avoid the worst. But when I looked at the field associated with the spread of nuclear proliferation, mostly what you have are tactical accounts and recommendations regarding current events. There's little or no serious attempt to forecast the future. And I thought, shouldn't you want to take a stab at what current trends might lead to?"

It's not an upbeat book, as Sokolski confesses. "That's not because these trends can't be averted, it's just that I don't think we are going to do it. We like talking about it, but we are not taking it seriously."

To take one example, Sokolski thinks it's possible to curtail potential problems in East Asia before events outrun America's ability to do anything about them. "The opportunities for restraint are enormous, but what we are doing seems contrary to that." For instance, a proposed civilian nuclear agreement with Beijing that gives China wide berth to



produce weapons-usable plutonium from U.S.-designed reactors risks rattling its neighbors even more than they already are.

As for the chief proliferation issues of the day—North Korea and Iran—Sokolski thinks the train has already left the station. "Twenty-five years of neglect regarding Iran, when we didn't blow the whistle, and looked the other way," says Sokolski, who was writing memos at the Pentagon on Iran's drive for a nuclear weapon back in 1989. "And now we think that at the last hour you can stop this? I'm skeptical."

As the author himself says, *Underestimated* is not an upbeat book. But it is an essential one. ♦

Crime and Punishment

Between the early 1950s and mid-1990s, crime rates rose steadily across the United States. Crime destroyed neighborhoods, ruined lives, and topped public opinion polls of the issues Americans cared about most.

Unsurprisingly, politicians from both the left and right learned that being "tough on crime" was an electoral winner. More police, more prisons, and harsher punishments were all steps that just about everyone came to support.

The policies that took hold were successful in reducing serious crime. Crime rates have declined steadily

for nearly 20 years and now stand at about half their all-time highs. But the social costs of this approach also become apparent. Today, a country with 5 percent of the world's population has nearly a quarter of its inmates. Policymakers from across the political spectrum are beginning to wake up to this reality, looking for ways to cut prison populations, treat drug abuse, and rein in other excesses of the "tough on crime" era.

Examples of just how broadly this attitude has spread of late can be found in a new anthology published by New York University's Brennan Center called *Solutions: American Leaders Speak Out on Criminal Justice Reform*. The collection includes essays from nearly every figure considered a major candidate for president in 2016, including Hillary Clinton, Gov. Scott Walker, Gov. Chris Christie, and Sen. Rand Paul. (Jeb Bush is notably absent.)

Overall, the sensible ideas and sound analysis in the book outweigh its weaker arguments by a healthy margin. The essays show strong bipartisan support for promoting drug treatment, reducing the number of federal crimes, and dealing with minor offenses by means other than incarceration. Several of the essays are worth reading in their own

right, particularly scholar Mark A.R. Kleiman on prisoner reentry, Marc Levin of the Right on Crime effort on results-based policies, and Sen. Ted Cruz on reducing federal penalties. But none introduces truly novel ideas, and a few, mostly in passing, trot out the left's discredited theories that blame crime on poverty and bigotry.

For the first time since 1992, it's possible that crime may figure as a major issue in the next presidential election. But rather than trying to figure out harsher ways to punish criminals, candidates from both parties are likely to advance ideas about how public safety can be preserved with a more compassionate and nuanced approach to criminal justice. If criminal justice does remain a live topic in the campaign, it will be a rare case of an issue bubbling up as much because of policy successes as because of failures. ♦

Stories We Stopped Reading

‘Alexandra Svokos was six years old, growing up in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, when she became a Hillary Clinton fan’ (“Not What You’d Expect: What Young Feminists Think of Hillary Clinton,” *National Journal*, May 16, 2015). ♦

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Among Fans

I used to watch sports on television in the same episodic and grudging manner I would tune in to C-SPAN. The proceedings mattered little, but I picked up useful information. It made me better at water cooler conversation—I got passing references to Monday night’s game.

Then something changed. It happened during the Mayweather-Pacquiao fight, and it’s been converting me into a fan of televised sports—admittedly, a fan with an asterisk.

Before we get to that experience, though, some history. I grew up playing sports and loving it. Whether running track alone or playing on a soccer team, I was at it almost every day, from elementary school through high school. Sure, I slowed down in college and graduate school, and now that I’m starting to see soft middle age on the horizon, a hint of duty has crept into my jogging. I’ve even started lifting weights with my health in mind. But once I’m back from a run or a trip to the gym, I still feel some of the old exhilaration.

Through it all, there’s been that constant: Much as I love athletic activities, I find watching them on TV a gross waste of time.

I realize I’m in a minority on this. Unless there were multitudes of viewers, how could the channels get away with televising, year round, night and day, 162 baseball games, 82 basketball games, 82 hockey games, and—most popular in all the land—16 football games—per team, not even counting the playoffs! If, like most serious sports fans, you augment your sports-watching hours with hours’ more

expert analysis provided by writers and talking heads, you might almost be forgiven for forgetting to vote, pray, and tuck your children in at night.

Not only do I find the time commitment unimaginable, but I’m puzzled by the mood swings—the deep lows my buddies sink to after the inevitable Redskins letdown and the ecstatic highs that accompany a rare playoff berth. How can mere games—games and teams so forgettable that we



remember them about as well as we do last term’s Congress—provoke so much passion?

But then something happened as I watched the big fight. I found myself listening, truly listening, to what my friends were saying as Floyd danced out of Manny’s reach. They were talking not so much about technique as about people, as if what was unfolding on the screen were less an athletic competition than a human drama.

My wife, for instance, backed Pacquiao-the-Pious against Money Mayweather because of Floyd’s nasty history of domestic abuse. Opposite her sat a friend who strongly supported Mayweather. The decision, he said, was easy. Mayweather is an American, and as an American, he deserved the support of his countrymen. Both wife and friend, swept up in the larger theater of

the fight, revealed something of themselves in their reactions.

Hearing them, I thought of past sporting events I’d watched with family or friends that had made deep impressions on me. I was just 12 years old when Kerri Strug limped slowly to the runway during the 1996 Olympics for the vault that secured coveted gymnastics gold for the United States. The scene is seared in my memory for the guts and determination she showed despite her injury. Mike Tyson, desperate for a comeback, slowly picked apart at the hands of the giant Lennox Lewis still strikes a tragic note. And, most recently, Usain Bolt’s

world-record-breaking 100-meter dash, forever (or at least until the next speedster comes along) serves as a reminder that sometimes the line between good and great is razor thin—in his case, 0.11 seconds. Though I hadn’t understood it before, watching these events on TV and hearing others’ live reactions had enhanced my appreciation of each.

And so, as the night and the fight of the century drew to an end, I felt the gang had grown closer. The beer and the food made for a comfortable setting, but mainly we’d been learning about one another through our spontaneous give and take over many hours, prompted by what we were watching on TV.

It’s true, my newfound taste for televised sports deserves, as I said, an asterisk. It’s not the athletic event itself that draws me—you still won’t catch me watching baseball or tennis or any other sport alone. But you might find me, even this very weekend, at the home of a good friend, clustered with others around a glowing box, more alert than I’ve ever been before to the satisfactions of wonderful company.

DAVID BAHR

Ten Is Too Few

Last week, Fox News announced its guidelines for the first debate among presidential contenders endorsed by the Republican National Committee (RNC). The network plans to invite the top 10 candidates, with the ranking determined by an average of the five most recent national opinion polls before the August 6 event. This is similar to the approach it has taken in previous cycles.

Following historical precedent is often smart. In addition, using a hard-and-fast metric, like a candidate's poll position, is better than subjective criteria to determine whether a candidate is "serious."

However, Fox has adopted the wrong approach, and the RNC is wrong to endorse it. Several problems stand out:

■ The "margin of error" in polling does not disappear when one averages polls together. For instance, five polls with 750 respondents apiece would still yield

a margin of error of about 1.5 points. That may not seem like much, but it could be trouble early in the cycle. What if the candidate in 10th place is polling at 4 percent on average, while the 11th-place candidate is at 3.5 percent? Statistically speaking, there is no difference between the two, yet one would be included while the other would be left out.

■ Polls have been misbehaving of late. They were wildly wrong in Britain and Israel, and they were wide of the mark in our 2014 midterms. Worse, there has been evidence of what Harry Enten of *FiveThirtyEight* calls "herding": pollsters producing results that closely mimic one another, but not what is happening in the real world.

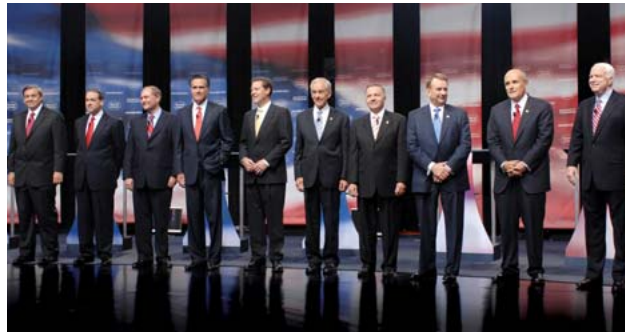
■ Polls simply do not tell us very much so early in the cycle. Voters are hardly paying attention, which means their opinions can be arbitrary and easily changed. We saw this in both the 2008 and 2012 GOP nomination battles, where the primary debates rapidly moved public opinion. Why should pre-debate polls carry any weight?

■ There is no meaningful separation between the candidates yet. The *Real Clear Politics* polling average has Jeb Bush in first place, with 15 percent, and John Kasich in 11th place, at 2 percent. A 13-point gap is insubstantial in the

early days of a presidential campaign cycle. Just ask President Barack Obama. At one point in 2007, he trailed Hillary Clinton by 26 points in the *RCP* average.

■ It is not the business of Fox News or the RNC to determine the range of acceptable choices for Republican voters. If this were a typical cycle, with maybe a half-dozen serious candidates, a threshold such as this would make sense. It is the only way to exclude obviously nonserious or fringe candidates. But this is not a typical cycle. If we used the current *RCP* polling averages, the

proposed threshold would exclude John Kasich, Carly Fiorina, Bobby Jindal, and Lindsey Graham from the first debate. These are all serious candidates—two sitting governors, a sitting senator, and a former Fortune 500 CEO. Moreover, the RNC has talked a good game about how to grow the party. Does it make sense to exclude a woman, the son of immigrants



Yes, it's unwieldy: 10 GOP candidates on one stage, at the Reagan Library, May 2007.

from India, and the governor of a must-win purple state? Neither Fox News nor the RNC should take it upon itself to decide that such candidates are unworthy of consideration. That task is best left to the voters.

There is no doubt that the RNC faces a logistical challenge with these debates. It is simply not practical to include more than 10 candidates in a single session (and even 10 will be a stretch). However, excluding serious candidates based on statistically meaningless poll positions so early in the cycle is a terrible solution.

There has to be a better way. For instance, CNN intends to have two debates, one with "first tier" candidates, and another with "second tier" candidates pulling in at least 1 percent apiece. But this approach still creates an arbitrary and meaningless distinction between who participates in which debate.

Both Fox and CNN should hold more two (or even three) debates, with the candidates divided up by some random selection, including all candidates who meet some basic threshold like 1 percent in the polls or a minimum sum of money raised. It makes sense to apply more stringent criteria later in the cycle; however, there should be a maximally

inclusive approach in the early days of the campaign, without discrimination between candidate “tiers.”

The GOP electorate would surely appreciate this. A recent Pew poll found that Republicans are more excited about this field than their choices in the previous two cycles. It is an easy bet that primary voters would eagerly watch multiple debates.

In fact, the RNC should *insist* on inclusion. The only way to produce the best candidate to defeat Hillary Clinton is to examine all the credible contenders carefully. This means they all should be included in the debates, even if this means two or three-tiered debates in the early going.

—Jay Cost

Three Boomer Presidents Are Enough



Last week, Bloomberg’s Mark Halperin convened a focus group of Iowa Democrats to discuss Hillary Rodham Clinton. They were Ready for Hillary. Indeed, they were enthusiastic about the prospect. But when Halperin asked them to name an accomplishment of Hillary as secretary of state, they couldn’t come up with one. Nor, for that matter, could they have named an accomplishment of Hillary as senator. Nor as first lady. Nor as Arkansan.

This is not evidence of the deficiencies of the Iowa school system. No group of Americans in any state could honestly name any significant accomplishment of the

woman who is the prohibitive favorite for the Democratic nomination for president, and who is ahead in most general election polls as well.

Not that this is necessarily a problem for the Hillary candidacy. None of the three most recent presidents had much to show for himself by way of accomplishments, personal or professional or political, when he ran for office. Each could in fact be said to have had more in the way of disqualifications than qualifications for office. Yet Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama all became president.

Once is happenstance. Twice is a coincidence. Three times is a trend. Perhaps lack of accomplishment is a feature, not a bug, for baby boomer presidents.

After all, in the world of the baby boomers, what is an accomplishment? Accomplishments are what their parents, conventionally patriotic and earnestly bourgeois, labored and strove for. Baby boomers, by contrast, aspire rather than labor, and seek rather than strive. Baby boomers aspire to the appropriate attitude and affect, and seek the suitable sense and sensibility.

Accomplishments are old school. Truman, Ike, JFK, LBJ, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush—all had accomplished things, often difficult things, in their personal and public lives before they ran for president. We dare say all (even Carter) had done more than any of their boomer successors. That all served in the military is only a small part—though a telling part—of the story. The boomer presidents, of course, didn’t serve, or barely served. As the late Dean Barnett wrote in these pages, “History called the baby boomers. They didn’t answer the phone.”

The boomer presidents were indulged as young men. They then indulged themselves with the fancy that they should be president. The voters indulged them, too, passing over the question of their qualifications—and, indeed, excusing several manifest disqualifications.

So Hillary Clinton would fit right in. She would be a worthy successor to the boomer presidents who have stood at the pinnacle of American politics for almost a quarter century. Hillary’s would be the *echt*-boomer presidency. She would be our second affirmative action boomer president (after Obama), our second boomer legacy president (after Bush), and our second reflexively dishonest boomer president (after her husband).

It may be that every generation gets the presidents it deserves. But enough already. Surely it’s time—to use a phrase associated with the Clintons—to move on.

But some other candidate will have to make the case for why we need to move on, and where we should be moving to. An unimaginative Republican candidate running an orthodox GOP campaign could well lead voters to accede to our fourth baby boomer president. Three baby boomer presidencies are enough.

—William Kristol

Feminist Enemy Number One

Christina Hoff Sommers might need a safe space.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY



Christina Hoff Sommers speaks at Wagner College in New York, April 7, 2010.
At left is Lionel Tiger of Rutgers.

Lately, there's a lot of talk among feminists about the need to keep women safe. The rape culture is allegedly inescapable, and trigger warnings are appended to college syllabi to protect sensitive souls from reminders of any past cause of pain, from "neuroatypical shaming" to mention of "how much a person weighs." But it turns out that if you dare to debunk feminist myths, you're the one that really needs protection.

For years now, Christina Hoff Sommers, author of *Who Stole Feminism?* and *The War Against Boys*, has been promoting what she calls, in the title of her latest book, *Freedom Feminism*. This view, she writes, "stands for the moral, social, and legal equality

of the sexes," but also for women's freedom—including the freedom to embrace traditional femininity. "Efforts to obliterate gender roles can be just as intolerant as the efforts to maintain them," she writes, and "theories of universal patriarchal oppression or the inherent evils of capitalism are not in [freedom feminism's] founding tablets." Above all, Sommers's approach is moored in reality, not utopian notions of social justice.

Sommers's efforts to spread her gospel have annoyed many academic feminists for years, but recently the response to her has gone from confrontational to hostile. "I have never stopped going to campuses, and I've been going to law schools. But I have rarely faced protests," she tells THE WEEKLY STANDARD. "I used to face vigorous debate, and the young

women would come ready to argue—and that was fine, that's what I was there for. But this is different, and it only started happening this year."

At Sommers's speech in April at Georgetown University, multiple undercover policemen were placed in the audience. At Oberlin, also in April, uniformed police officers never let her out of their sight and after her speech escorted her in a police car from the campus to a dinner. In May, she was the guest of honor at a Washington, D.C., meetup of "Gamergate" supporters—video gamers concerned about radical feminism's influence in the video game industry (more on that later). In response, *Salon* and *Daily Beast* columnist Arthur Chu started a social media campaign to pressure the bar where the gamers were meeting to drop the event and sent emails to the venue accusing them of hosting a "right-wing hate group." Despite the pressure, the owner of the bar, Local 16, emailed Sommers to tell her they "would never keep any group out. This is America." A bomb threat soon followed, necessitating a heavy police presence and a tour of Local 16 by bomb-sniffing dogs.

Through all this, Sommers says, "I didn't feel threatened. I'd never known feminists to be violent." Her calm in the face of feminist extremism is in marked contrast to the fury of her critics. "I am a threat to their health, to their mental well-being. That attitude is new," she says. "Before, they might have thought, 'Oh, her views on feminism are reactionary.' But now it's that her views are a threat."

Indeed, an inability to distinguish between threats and disagreements seems to be a hallmark of this contemporary feminism. Sommers is scary precisely because she doesn't shy away from heightening the contradictions. Where op-ed writers have patiently picked apart the discredited "wage gap" statistics feminists insist on recycling, Sommers shows up in the proverbial lion's den, calmly points her finger at the scold-in-training, and challenges them to

BRIAN HARKIN

prove their commitment to female equality by changing their major to the lucrative and male-dominated field of petroleum engineering.

These days, campus feminists make no attempt to debate Sommers on substance. Instead, she routinely faces attempts to shun her, silence her, or distort her message. After her Georgetown speech, there were demands that the student group that had hosted her remove the protesters from video of the event. A university administrator warned that if the upset students weren't edited out, "Georgetown [would] need to step in."

Got that? Protesters showed up at a public event to draw attention to their message—but then realized that footage showing ostensible adults holding signs saying "Trigger Warning: Antifeminist" was an embarrassment to the students and bad PR for the school, so they wanted it censored. Another embarrassment is young feminists' ignorance. When Sommers joked at Oberlin that the Junior Anti-Sex League had occupied campus feminism, a voice from her audience yelled, "What the hell is that?"

Before Sommers's speech at Oberlin, 150 feminists signed a letter to the campus newspaper claiming that, among other libelous assertions, Sommers was a "rape denialist" for daring to poke holes in the improbable campus rape statistics bandied about. (According to an article in *Slate* last year, the commonly spouted figure that one-quarter of college women are victims of rape or attempted rape "would mean that young American college women are raped at a rate similar to women in Congo, where rape has been used as a weapon of war.") The Oberlin letter was titled "In Response to Sommers' Talk: A Love Letter to Ourselves" and urged students to boycott the speech and attend another event hosted in a "safe space." While Sommers went on to address a full lecture hall, the *Oberlin Review* reported that "the alternative event, 'We're Still Here,' was attended by approximately 35 students and one dog." Disappointingly, the *Review* did not elaborate on how exactly

Sommers's presence on campus had managed to traumatize the dog.

The intensity of the opposition Sommers is facing may be new, but its seeds were planted a few years ago. Sommers says some of the opposition to her is a logical consequence of government policy. In 2011 the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice told campuses they were obligated under Title IX of the Civil Rights Act to protect women from harassment—even exposure to sexual language and innuendo—and that they had to lower their standards for determining guilt. "The colleges panicked, but it empowered that contingent. . . . The 'drama feminists' suddenly could hold the school hostage because they could threaten lawsuits under Title IX," she says.

Sommers has forged an entire career by brushing up against drama feminists. As a professor of ethics in the 1980s, she recalls being surprised by the reaction to a paper she presented at the American Philosophical Association. "I argued against the increasing radicalism of feminist theory and its fixation on doomed projects—like overthrowing 'male science' with 'women's ways of knowing.' My plea for moderation was not appreciated. Gender theorists in the audience hissed and stomped their feet. I was excommunicated from the church of feminism on the spot."

But despite rubbing some of her peers the wrong way, Sommers thrived, in part because she wasn't completely alone. There were a number of prominent "second-wave" feminists—Wendy Kaminer, Katie Roiphe, Mary Lefkowitz, Cathy Young, and others—who were also questioning whether the political program of the feminist left was good for women. For a while, their thinking was in vogue, and they earned plaudits not usually given to heretics. In 2000, *The War Against Boys* was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. Those days are gone.

For more than a decade, Sommers has been happily ensconced in the think tank world at the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

She's still a Democrat and says she's "pro-choice, pro-gay, pro-trans—I mean, I'm just in favor of personal liberty." She's quick to add, "This does not save me from being called a right-wing crank [by the feminist establishment], because you have to go along with their increasingly paranoid version."

Sommers may not be scoring any points for feminist orthodoxy, but don't discount envy as a reason she's increasingly targeted. Unlike a lot of feminists, Sommers has escaped the academic ghetto. In feminism, cultural relevance has always been the coin of the realm, and Sommers is awash in it right now, thanks to her involvement in the controversy over sexism in the culture of video games. And for anyone who hasn't been paying attention, video games are bigger business than Hollywood.

Gamergate's origins are murky—it started with the online revelation that a well-known feminist video game developer was cheating on her boyfriend with, among others, her married boss. Somehow the surrounding revelations unspooled so as to confirm the suspicions of many gamers that a cabal of influential industry players and journalists was trying to impose a politically correct agenda on video games. Now hordes of video game fans call Gamergate their movement to enforce ethics and reject political correctness in the video game industry.

As for Sommers, she says she hasn't played a video game since "Pac-Man in a bar in Cambridge, Mass., in 1980." But when an Entertainment Software Association study last year claimed that most video game players were adult women, the anti-Gamergate crowd seized on the news as proof that the video game industry needed to stop focusing on shoot-'em-ups in favor of female-friendly games.

The topic was ripe for Sommers's "Factual Feminist" YouTube series. Once again, the feminist "facts" were incorrect. "There are casual game players—and there are hard-core

gamers for whom highly complex, competitive video games are a primary life passion,” she explained. “Adult women are not a key demographic here. Researchers at UCLA have been studying the pastimes of college freshmen for more than 40 years. For incoming freshmen, 65 percent of girls but fewer than 19 percent of boys said they played no video games at all in a typical week.”

Gamergate supporters began passing Sommers’s Factual Feminist video around, and in the first three weeks it garnered over 440,000 views and 7,700 comments—pretty impressive for a think tank scholar talking into a camera. Sommers is now referred to by Gamergaters as “Based Mom,” with “based” being video game slang for cool.

To some extent, Sommers is walking a fine line by defending Gamergate. She has repeatedly condemned Internet harassment and threats against women; there are indeed unsavory and misogynist elements among hard-core video gamers. But her personal example of reasoned debate has had a positive influence on the controversy, which otherwise might have embodied everything that’s wrong with arguing online. Her allegedly enlightened critics in the video game community have mainly indulged in glorified name calling. Video game website *Polygon* called Sommers a “reactionary” and said her supposed indifference to video game sexism was an “irresponsible abrogation of our shared humanity.”

There’s a certain novelty to feminist agitation invading video games, but what’s at issue is still the notion there’s only one valid way to think about women’s lives, and it assumes they’re victimized by every aspect of the culture.

By being poised, persuasive, good-humored, and scrupulous with facts, Sommers is exploding unhelpful feminist stereotypes. It says a lot about contemporary feminism that precious few who claim the feminist label also embrace liberty and reject victimhood—and for that, they’re the ones who are getting bomb threats. ♦

Big (Phony) Data

A study in credulity.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

When a new study came out late last year proving—scientifically!—how easy it is to turn opponents of gay marriage into supporters, the political scientist Andrew Gelman managed to summarize his reaction in a single unscientific word: “Wow!”

He was writing in the *Washington Post*, but his sentiment was echoed throughout the mainstream liberal press: the big daily newspapers, websites like *Vox* and the *Huffington Post*, TV network news, and public radio—especially public radio. Twitter lit up like a nonsectarian Holiday Tree. The men and women who write about “social science” were uniformly giddy.

Why the commotion? For years, social scientists have believed (scientifically) that it is extremely difficult to change another person’s political opinions, especially if the other person is an “everyday American” and not a social scientist. Multiple studies and mounds of research—by political scientists, sociologists, social psychologists, all kinds of scientists—have confirmed the bullheadedness of everyday Americans. People’s attitudes and opinions are not the consequence of argument or experience, research revealed, but rather of unreasoning bias and emotion. The studies proving this, by the way, are not the consequence of bias and emotion. They are designed by scientific researchers studying *other people*.

So imagine the surprise when a pair of researchers found that Americans weren’t so stubborn after all, at least

when the subject was gay marriage. The scientists, one from Columbia, another from UCLA, published their paper last December. The paper was called “When Contact Changes Minds: An experiment on the transmission of gay equality.” What happened in the experiment was this: Homosexual canvassers and heterosexual canvassers were assigned to go door to door in Los Angeles talking to voters about gay marriage. Ultimately canvassers talked to nearly 10,000 voters living in precincts that had voted for Proposition 8 in 2008. Prop 8, if you need reminding, is the nefarious (among social scientists) constitutional amendment banning gay marriage in California. These Angelenos were hard cases, in other words. But they cracked with astonishing ease.

The writers who cover social science were deeply impressed with the scientific rigor of this experiment. For control purposes, some of the voters were canvassed by a gay canvasser, others by a straight canvasser (other controls were used too). The canvassers didn’t argue with the everyday Americans, they didn’t cajole or steamroll them with facts. Instead they read from a script provided by a local gay rights organization, which also recruited the canvassers. The canvassers were supposed to keep the conversation going for 20 minutes. The script could be loosely or closely followed, but at all times, according to the press release accompanying the study, the canvassers would be engaged in “heartfelt, reciprocal, and vulnerable conversations.”

Heartfelt, reciprocal, and highly persuasive. Over the course of the conversations, the researchers said, a very



Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

TWS PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: CLOWN, WILL HEATON

large number of voters changed their initial view on gay marriage from anti- to pro-. (None of the voters who was for gay marriage changed his mind.)

This wouldn't be big news, necessarily. Short-term effects like this are pretty common among the people you find in social science experiments. They say they change their minds but then they change back again.

The big news in "When Contact Changes Minds" was that the minds stayed changed! When the canvassers went back to the voters at intervals of three weeks, six weeks, nine months, and a year, most of the changelings were still in favor of gay marriage. Even better, the gay canvassers managed to change many more minds for longer periods than the straight canvassers. And a further survey discovered that the respondents were, on average, able to persuade at least one member of their household to take the pro-gay marriage view too.

Vox, a well-trafficked website that often explains the complexities of

social science to its readers, put it like this: "Before, respondents felt the same about gay marriage as Nebraskans; after, they felt the same as folks from Massachusetts." There is no better definition of heaven, scientists say.

The researchers wrote up their report and sent it off to the "peer-reviewed" journal *Science*. The peers reviewed it. They gave the editors a thumbs-up. The gay rights group in L.A. rushed out a press release. The swoon, as I say, was universal.

A month later, in January, two researchers from Stanford and Berkeley found themselves so impressed with the study that they decided to extend its methods into other areas of opinion research. (Note, they didn't want to replicate the study. Though other sciences consider replication necessary to establish the validity of a finding, in the social sciences it's strictly for chumps. Typically replication is done only by the people who did the original experiment. Replications are therefore wonderfully successful.)

The Stanford-Berkeley guys retrieved as much of the original data as they could and undertook a blizzard of statistical manipulations. To their surprise, they say, they concluded that the study was more or less worthless. One of the original researchers, a psychologist from UCLA named Michael LaCour, had fabricated the data, hopelessly contaminating the results gleaned by the canvassers. Last week, the other original researcher, a well-known political scientist from Columbia named Donald Green, wrote an embarrassed letter to *Science* retracting the study, saying he had relied on the data provided by LaCour.

To their great credit the outlets and writers that reported the original bogus result, from Andrew "Wow!" Gelman in the *Post* to *Vox* to the *New York Times*, quickly ran news of Green's retraction. Crow was eaten. The headline in *New York* magazine captured the crestfallen mood: "A Really Important Political Science Study About Gay Marriage Used Faked Data."

Help Rebuild Our Roads and Bridges

By Thomas J. Donohue

President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The American Automobile Association projected that 33 million U.S. travelers hit the road this Memorial Day weekend—up more than 5% from last year. Fueled by lower prices at the pump and rising consumer confidence, this trend is expected to continue throughout the summer driving season.

But are America's roads and bridges ready for the surge in traffic? Maybe not. Though America has one of the best systems in the world, it is aging and in need of repair.

The U.S. Interstate System is nearly 70 years old—and roads are typically built to last for about 30 years. The American Society of Civil Engineers reports that today 32% of America's major roads have deteriorated into poor or mediocre condition and 42% are snarled with congestion.

The costs of disrepair in our system are high. Poor conditions cost the average motorist \$324 a year in additional vehicle

repairs. Every year U.S. drivers lose 5.5 billion hours sitting in congestion, and more than 2.9 billion gallons of gas are wasted in idling traffic. And in tragic cases where our infrastructure fails altogether, the costs can be deadly.

Efforts to maintain and modernize our system have been dogged by funding uncertainty for years. The Highway Trust Fund—a federal resource to help pay for construction and repairs—is once again on the brink of insolvency. Fed by user fees at the pump, resources have dwindled as motorists drive fewer miles in more fuel-efficient vehicles. The fund will go dry in July unless Congress takes action.

At the time of this writing, the House passed a temporary reauthorization of MAP-21—legislation that sets surface transportation policy and funds projects—extending it to July 31, and the Senate was expected to follow suit. A short-term extension may prevent an immediate disruption and layoffs, but now Congress must focus on a long-term solution.

One such solution that has the backing of the U.S. business community and partners in labor and across industry is a modest, phased-in increase to the user fee, which hasn't been raised since 1993. The user fee is simple to collect and can be done immediately with no further costs. It is a fair solution, asking those who use the roads to help make them better and safer.

With gas prices still relatively low, now could be a good time for consumers to absorb a small additional cost in exchange for a significant benefit. And polls suggest that the public would be even more keen to support increased investment if it had some guarantee that Washington was spending the money wisely.

It's time for Congress to act to modernize, maintain, and expand our roads and bridges for the 300 million American motorists who rely on our transportation system.



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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Now, it's much too easy to make sport of the hacks; anyone, any journalist, can fall for a fraud if it's clever enough.

The thing is, this fraud wasn't particularly clever. In fact, it looked like a typical endeavor in pop social science—which is to say, pretty ridiculous by the commonsense standards of people outside social science. Journalists have become habituated to the implausible, not to say preposterous, mechanics of experiments routinely undertaken in sociology, political science, social psychology, and the rest. Scientist and hack alike treat these artificial protocols as though they were guarantees of the kind of objectivity that the physical sciences strive for and attain. Outright fabrication of data is probably rare in the social sciences. As in Washington politics, the scandal lies not in what's unusual but in what's typical. In the case of "When Contact Changes Minds," the clues were there in the original paper, evident to anyone not blinded by the dazzling claims of scientific hoo-ha.

Just for starters, the incredible size of the experiment's effects should have struck people as . . . um, incredible. These entailed a shift among respondents of 20 percent from the anti-gay marriage view to the pro-gay marriage view, after only 20 minutes of conversation with a stranger. No such permanent shift, of any size, had ever before been recorded in similar experiments. "We're talking about a causal effect that's a full 40 percent of what is pretty much the maximum change imaginable," Gelman wrote in the *Post* when the study was first released. "Wow, indeed."

Last week, after the debunking, Gelman wrote: "in my previous post on the topic, I expressed *surprise* at the published claim but no *skepticism*."

There were lots of reasons for skepticism. The study was laced with evidence of self-interest that could tilt results. The simple term "gay equality" in the subtitle of the paper shows we are in the realm of advocacy rather than investigation: It has become a term of art among activists, an infinitely elastic portmanteau, used less for description

than propagandizing. (Affirm traditional marriage and you oppose "equality.") It's a much more tendentious phrase, for example, than the now-neutral "gay rights," and we should assume it was chosen with care.

The continuing involvement of the gay activist group would likewise have hoisted a red flag for someone with a skeptical eye. The group hired the canvassers and wrote the scripts, and it had undertaken the original canvass with the specific purpose of testing methods to advance the cause of gay marriage. In explaining the findings to reporters, LaCour, the researcher who cooked the data, paraphrased the 1970s gay activist Harvey Milk: "It's harder to deny people rights if those people have names and faces." If a scientist talks politics when he should be talking science, double-check the numbers.

And there's much more. As is common in social science research, the respondents were paid to participate, and at intervals over time. Arrangements like this can easily influence how much voters wanted to please the canvassers by telling the canvassers what the canvassers wanted to hear. (*Of course I still agree with you! Where's my fifty bucks?!*) The sample of voters wasn't randomly chosen, as it is in the most plausible experiments; instead the researchers used a more convenient "snowball sample," which means respondents basically were self-selected.

In "When Contact Changes Minds," the researchers used a technique known as the "feeling thermometer" to gauge the strength of voters' opinions: The respondent offers his feelings about a person or issue at different points in time on a scale of 1 to 10, as on the old *McLaughlin Group*. The feeling thermometer is notoriously imprecise, often producing wild effects, and scrupulous social scientists avoid it. Indeed, one clue that tipped the Stanford-Berkeley debunkers to the bogus results was the strange uniformity in the feeling thermometer results.

No single one of these shortcomings is enough to cripple a study, but taken together they would arouse

suspicion—if the subject weren't a matter of such ideological urgency for researchers and journalists alike. You can't help but suspect that had such a questionable piece of work produced a result unflattering to the cause of "gay equality," social scientists and journalists would have flogged each of its methodological mistakes. But this assumes that such a study could get published in the first place.

Which leads us to what should have been the brightest red flag of all. The study confirms—perfectly, exquisitely, suspiciously—the picture that gay marriage advocates hold of the believers in traditional marriage, who are assumed to be at once brainless and heartless. Given that no rational or objective reasons exist for opposing gay marriage (goes the assumption), the only explanation for such a view is an unfamiliarity with gay people and a lack of sympathy for them. That's why the gay canvassers just had to be more persuasive than the straight canvassers. Harvey Milk just had to be right.

Before the debunking, before the retraction, the scientists and their journalistic followers scratched their chins raw trying to explain the process the voters went through in changing their views. Green, the researcher who eventually retracted the study, tried to place himself in that typical American household after the gay canvasser had left.

"Perhaps," Green mused, "the conversation was something like, 'Honey, I met a gay man and he was nothing like the gay man I thought I would meet.'"

It's the comment of a man who has yet to recover from watching *All in the Family*. The America of Green's imagination must teem with Archie Bunkers. The uplifting message of "When Contact Changes Minds" was that such people could be redeemed, and pretty quick too.

In truth Green's study tells us nothing about the people who hope to defend traditional marriage. It does speak volumes—whole libraries!—about the parochialism and ignorance of the social scientists who did the study, their peers who reviewed and published and cited it, and the journalists who swallowed it whole. ♦

Lessons from a Non-Candidacy

The GOP field gets a little less crowded.

BY JOHN R. BOLTON

On May 14, I joined a tiny, highly exclusive group of Republicans, namely those who have decided not to seek our party's presidential nomination. By contrast, the coach section of the party contains perhaps two dozen people who have announced (or soon will) their availability. Good luck to them all (well, maybe not *all*). Here's the hard reality. If two dozen candidates actually declare, 23 of them will lose. I, on the other hand, will still be able to say I have never been defeated in a nomination contest.

Nonetheless, I thoroughly enjoyed "considering" running and learned a lot about our country. Here's a bit of what I picked up, some of which professional political operatives and their chattering class hangers-on get, and some they do not.

First, the Republican nomination is wide open, and the polls will fluctuate wildly for some time. Voters expressing a preference frequently do so only very weakly. Citizens inclined to support candidate X are still completely willing to consider switching to someone else. Although campaign staffs and volunteers are beginning to develop into visible organizations in key states, even those are fluid and evanescent. Accordingly, there is today no compelling reason to heed what commentators say about the "horse race," since they have no better idea than anyone else what is going on.

Second, I was truly impressed by

John R. Bolton, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations in 2005-06.

how seriously voters in states like New Hampshire and Iowa take their responsibilities. They expect candidates to answer tough, often penetrating questions about issues they think are important. Those who complain



Bolton speaking at CPAC, February 27, 2015

that the early states are not "representative" of America as a whole miss the point. The early states vary widely among themselves, but more important, they are the only venues where significant retail politics at the presidential level is still possible. Iowa and New Hampshire voters may react enthusiastically to red-meat speech lines and love seeing celebrities as much as anyone, but on the decisive day, I believe they will vote for what they think is in the country's best interests. (And, no, I am not opening offices in Manchester and Des Moines looking forward to 2020 or 2024.)

Third, the focus on recapturing the White House is exceptionally strong.

This election is critical to reversing the Obama presidency's mistakes, one reason the candidate field is so large and support so fractured. Congressional Republicans should take heed, because this energy also needs to be mobilized to defend the 24 of 34 Senate seats up for election held by Republicans and the close House races where Democrats will exert every effort. No one doubts the presidency's political centrality, but our task must be to fuse the intense desire to win it with the need to keep House and Senate majorities to support a new Republican president. Otherwise, we will simply repeat the current stasis.

Fourth, a generalized desire to win does not determine the ultimate winner. The issues that will differentiate the candidates have not yet emerged, and there is currently no dominant theme. True, as time passes, some contenders with no realistic chance will fall by the wayside because of their own weaknesses. Nonetheless, losing candidates from prior cycles cannot be ruled out. The desire for a "fresh face" will not inevitably prevail over the attractiveness of real experience, given the debacle of electing the resolutely unqualified Barack Obama.

I believe protecting the country is a president's first responsibility, and that national security should therefore be the most important issue, especially in a Republican nomination contest. Candidates must show they are prepared to make decisions of potentially mortal consequence for the country's safety, not just spar verbally with Hillary Clinton during debates. This involves far more than advocating going from A to B; it requires the skills necessary to actually get from A to B.

Once the media tire of mooted what George W. Bush did in Iraq in 2003, threatening developments abroad could play a major campaign role. A terrorist attack on the homeland, more chaos in the Middle East, or Russian agitation in the Baltics could prove graphically how insecure we have become under Obama. One dominant impression from my "considering" days is just how

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unimaginative Washington-based political commentators and operatives can be. The conventional wisdom today is that national security will be central in 2016, whereas a year ago, the conventional wisdom was precisely the opposite. Eugene McCarthy said during his 1968 campaign against Lyndon Johnson that reporters were like a row of birds perched on a telephone line: When one flew off, all the rest flew off. Nothing has changed.

Fifth, the heavy hand of government weighs on politics as on business. When America was a freer country, less encumbered by statutes and regulations endlessly promulgated by the Federal Election Commission and the Internal Revenue Service, running for the presidency was much easier. Today, candidates and their supporters are burdened in often irrational ways.

And real dangers exist. Although FEC chairwoman Ann Ravel recently confessed that the commission was gridlocked and unlikely to police federal election laws effectively, that does not mean anything goes. I took Ravel's announcement to be an open invitation to the 93 U.S. attorneys around America—the vast majority partisan Democrats, many with higher political aspirations—to have at it. Primary enforcement of federal election laws was intended to be civil rather than criminal, but Ravel's statement essentially reversed that. Presidential candidates, be warned.

Republicans have ample grounds for optimism, but are also deeply worried the establishment media will rally around Hillary Clinton, dragging her carcass across the finish line by main force if necessary. We do not have the luxury to stand idle or simply complain about how unfair contemporary political life is for Republicans. Nor is there room, once the Republican nominee is chosen in Cleveland, for sulking in our tents if our favorite does not prevail.

There is no magic formula for winning. Hard work and dogged persistence are the most important political assets, and we have them in abundance. Now we must deploy them. On to the White House! ♦

Hindsight? Feh.

If you knew what you know now . . .

BY LAWRENCE B. LINDSEY

The latest craze in the presidential campaign is to ask the contenders (on the Republican side) whether they would have invaded Iraq *if you knew what you know now*. The answer is supposed to be obvious. Jeb Bush got himself into some trouble by answering the more important question, which is where the errors were made and how he would have corrected them. He is now backpedaling on the unforgivable error of having given too sophisticated an answer.

None of the other Republican contenders is falling into the trap—all are saying that of course they would not have gone into Iraq. No one in the media seems to get the inanity of the question; neither presidents nor any other ordinary mortal has the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, and trying to judge a candidate's qualities on the assumption that they do misses the real skill you want in a president: the ability to make sound judgments based on the facts at the time.

Consider real life. You get up, get in the car, drive to work, and have a fender bender along the way. Knowing what you know now, would you have gone to work that day? Or consider an investment professional who rigorously analyzes a trade, finds it likely to pay off, and makes the investment only to find it a loser. Knowing what he or she knows now, should the trade have been made? The simplistic answer is no; the mature, grown-up answer is yes. Because we only have the information available at the time, we have to make our best judgment. The danger in second-guessing based on 20-20 hindsight is paralysis based on fear.

Lawrence B. Lindsey's most recent book is What a President Should Know . . . but Most Learn Too Late.

Maybe I shouldn't go to work today because I might have a fender bender, or maybe I shouldn't ever make an investment because it might go wrong. Let us never forget that France and Britain stood paralyzed in the face of Hitler's aggression because they feared a rerun of World War I.

The other reason the *knowing what you know now* question is irrelevant is that it ignores the alternative. Since Iraq is discomfiting for Republicans, consider some tough questions for Democrats. Knowing what you know now about how badly it was implemented, would you have had the House pass the Senate's version of the Affordable Care Act that was stapled together at two in the morning the day before Christmas recess without going to a conference committee to make it more functional? Or, knowing what we know now, would Secretary Clinton have handed Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov a gift-wrapped Reset Button to celebrate a new era in Russian-American relations?

A loyal Democrat would answer yes to both questions. In the case of the Affordable Care Act, failing to pass it that way would have meant endless delays as the Democrats no longer had a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, and millions of Americans would have been denied coverage. And of course, the alternative to a reset with Russia would have meant continuing the policies of the Bush administration. One can agree or disagree with the tradeoff, but no decision is ever made in isolation, so *knowing what you know now* also requires an educated guess on what would have happened if the alternative path had been chosen.

Now consider what the alternative of *not* invading Iraq would have meant. The United Nations had passed 17 Security Council resolutions

that Saddam Hussein had violated. The last resolution passed unanimously and gave the United States and its allies a mandate to surround Iraq with 150,000 troops to pressure Saddam to comply. *Knowing what you know now*, would you have just left those troops there to roast in the desert as summer rolled in? For how many years? And, *knowing what you know now*—that U.S. troops did find 400 Borak rockets and stockpiles of Sarin nerve agent in 2005 and 2006, along

with other finds in the decade of occupation—would you have just left them with Saddam? Note that these were never found by Hans Blix and the U.N. in their search; it only happened with U.S. troops on the ground.

Would you have left a war criminal who tortured his own people in power? And would you have demonstrated to the world that the United Nations is a totally worthless body whose unanimous Security Council resolutions can be ignored with impunity? Stated that way, the decision to invade Iraq was far from obviously a bad one, and I say this *knowing what we know now* (and I happened to believe then), that the administration was underestimating the likely cost of the decision it made.

There is no good answer to a 20-20 hindsight question. So, let's get real about our choice for president—an individual who almost certainly will have to clean up after a crisis that has been building as the result of neglecting tough decisions at home and abroad. He or she is not going to have the benefit of hindsight. What we really need is someone with a little foresight—someone who is going to define, as well as possible, the nature of the crisis we might be headed for and have a rough plan on how to deal with it.

Here are some questions that involve a little—not a lot—of foresight:

■ Under Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin has consistently salami-sliced his way into restoring the Soviet empire. If this process continues, and



U.S. tanks roll under the 'Hands of Victory' in Baghdad, November 2003.

foresight suggests it will, what would you as president do about it?

■ American prestige in the Middle East has been in free fall ever since the Cairo speech in which President Obama apologized for American mistakes in the region. What would you, as president, do to reverse the course?

■ The U.S. budget deficit has bottomed out and will, by 2025—the last budget you will submit if you win a second term—see Social Security, health care, and interest payments balloon by 4.6 percent of GDP. What will you do about it? Raise taxes across the board by 20 percent to cover the shortfall? Cut entitlements? Just roll the dice?

■ The Federal Reserve has quintupled the size of its balance sheet in the last five years and maintained

an unprecedented policy of zero interest rates. Do you see any risks in that? What would you suggest the next Fed chairman do about these risks?

Why aren't these questions being asked? Why aren't our candidates, in both parties, coming up with answers? ♦

Political Healing

An outreach campaign from Capitol Hill to grassroots Republicans. **BY FRED BARNES**

At long last one of the nastiest rifts in the Republican party is being dealt with. It's not the divide between conservatives and moderates. Nor does it involve who's right about how to cut taxes, supply-siders or reform conservatives. This rift is bigger. It's between Republican leaders in Congress and the Republican grassroots.

It's manifested itself in numerous ways. The drive to oust, or at least embarrass, Speaker John Boehner is one. That effort led to 25 House Republicans opposing Boehner for speaker in January. That's just a tenth of the GOP caucus—246 strong—but was enough to threaten Boehner's

majority in the House since every Democrat voted against him.

Another example: the primary defeat last year of House majority leader Eric Cantor of Virginia. The victor was David Brat, an economics professor at Randolph-Macon College who'd never won elective office. Brat is now close to a loose group of 20 or so dissident House Republicans, dubbed "chuckleheads" by former Republican congressman Steve LaTourette of Ohio.

Then there's the constant refrain one hears from Republican activists around the country, particularly the Tea Party ones. They're often as critical of Boehner and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell as they are of President Obama. Or so it seems. Conservative talk radio amplifies their criticism.

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

What's their beef? It's that Boehner and McConnell would rather compromise or yield than fight for conservative causes against Obama and congressional Democrats. Grassroots Republicans prefer outspoken fighters like Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, even if the cause is lost or prompts a politically harmful exercise such as a government shutdown.

That a gap exists between GOP leaders in Congress and Republicans outside Washington is hardly a secret. Now a step has been taken, with more to come, to narrow that gap. It consisted of 30 minutes of Q&A last week between McConnell and directors of center-right think tanks at the state level. Also invited were officials of national think tanks: the Cato

Institute, American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute, and Heartland Institute.

A conference call may not sound like much, but it's a start. McConnell has agreed to answer their questions every three months. Boehner, whose first session will come in a few weeks, has agreed to the same quarterly schedule.

The idea for this connection comes from Grover Norquist, the head of Americans for Tax Reform. He's been discussing the idea with McConnell and Boehner for months. He read the questions submitted by what he calls conservative "opinion leaders" to McConnell. More than 120 people joined the call.

The goal is for GOP leaders in Washington to explain what they're doing to influential conservatives around the country. "They haven't explained well enough," Norquist said. "That's a connection that hasn't been happening and needs to." It creates "the opportunity for better cooperation."

Much of what reaches conservatives and Republicans in the states has been "filtered through certain

groups that have different agendas," Norquist told me. "It's useful to get it from the horse's mouth."

In last week's session, McConnell answered all but one question. That question was about how Republicans on Capitol Hill will respond if the

running again," McConnell said.

Reid allowed few amendments to protect Democrats from having to cast a vote on controversial issues. Under Reid, there were just 15 votes on amendments in 2014. This year, there have been more than 100. "If you're afraid of tough votes, you ought to go into another line of work," McConnell said.

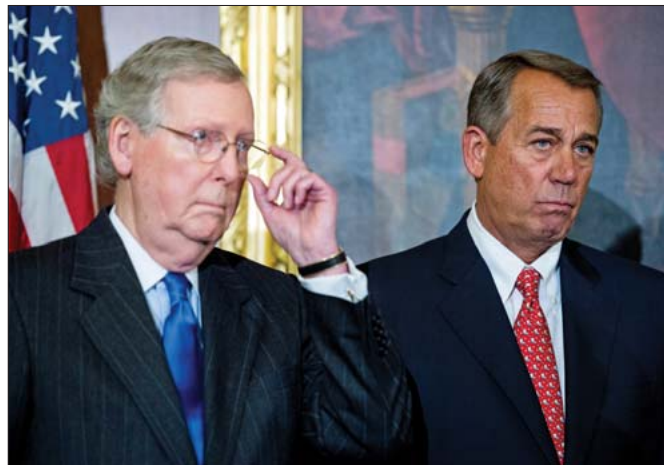
On issue after issue, McConnell said where Senate Republicans stand. Prospects for patent reform are "pretty good." Legislation to ban abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy is "on our agenda to be brought up," having already passed the House. Tax reform "needs a new president," McConnell said. "It's pretty obvious this president is not Ronald Reagan. . . . Barack

Obama is not going to the center. . . . [He's] far left." Reagan engineered sweeping tax reform, with an assist from Democrats like Sen. Bill Bradley, in 1986.

McConnell said Republicans can invoke "reconciliation" to repeal parts but not all of Obamacare. That means a simple majority rather than 60 votes is required, thus thwarting any Democratic plan to filibuster. Republicans control the Senate 54-46. But the president is sure to veto bills passed through reconciliation. "He's not going to sign anything that only Republicans" have voted for.

In the 2016 election, Republicans won't get to 60 seats to overcome filibusters, according to McConnell. The open Florida seat, he noted, is "quite competitive." Incumbent Marco Rubio is retiring to run for the Republican presidential nomination. Republicans have an opportunity to win Democratic seats in Nevada and Colorado, McConnell said.

He revealed the tentative campaign slogan for next year: "Do you want four more years of the last eight years?" In Washington and beyond, Republicans agree the answer is no. ♦



McConnell, left, and Boehner: It's all about the base.

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Supreme Court bars federal Obamacare exchanges from giving subsidies to individuals to help pay the cost of health insurance. That's being studied, McConnell said. But "we'll be prepared to act."

McConnell seized the opportunity to explain how he's uprooted the way Democratic leader Harry Reid ran the Senate. This year, Republicans passed a budget. That hadn't occurred in the previous five years under Reid. "The Senate is up and

Reading Ovid at Columbia

A Victorian solution for delicate sensibilities.

BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

They're outraged, the students at Columbia University—outraged that their professors would dare to put Ovid on mandatory reading lists, outraged that the ancient Roman author doesn't share their sensitivities, outraged that a modern education would include something so . . . so . . . so *unmodern*, dammit. Something so vile, so visceral, so triggering of all the thoughts we must not think in these days of the new morality.

Which is an irony, of a kind, since the university's description of the core-curriculum text insists that Ovid is "a particularly modern poet"—by which the school means an older sense of the word *modern*: mocking, genre-busting, and suspicious of received pieties. Nevertheless, in an op-ed this spring in the school newspaper, several students on Columbia's "Multicultural Affairs Advisory Board" denounced Ovid's *Metamorphoses* because its depictions of the rapes of Persephone and Daphne are too much for college women to bear. One young woman in particular "described being triggered while reading such detailed accounts of rape" and related how offended she was by her professor's focus on "the beauty of the language and the splendor of the imagery."

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* may be "a fixture" on the college reading list, the students conclude, "but like so many texts in the Western canon, it contains triggering and offensive material that marginalizes student identities in the classroom." And so out he must go.

Fortunately, there may be a way to save poor Ovid—the beauty of his

language, the splendor of his imagery. Ours is not the first society to be in this position, after all, caught between one cultural impulse that praises the artistry of a text and another cultural impulse that feels offense at the explicitness of its sexual descriptions. The feminist phrasings of the current indictment of Ovid hide their return to the old, old revulsion of the Victorians at the grossness of this world—a return to a spiritualizing and moralizing of the body.

Or, at least, a spiritualizing and moralizing of women's bodies. This isn't feminism but a priggishness that has seized feminism as a handy club with which to beat the culture into submission. Mrs. Grundy has returned as Ms. Grundy, revenant and ready to take offense.

Even the vocabulary of rape on America's campuses hides the reality that prissiness is making a return. Perhaps some activists have deliberately tried to expand the meaning of the word *rape* because the word is so fraught, so immediately identifying of the horrible and indefensible. But for many, the word has grown in meaning simply because they have no other moral vocabulary. The only wrongness they know for sex is rape, and so every wrongness about a sexual encounter—every violation of their newly moralized sense of the body—must end up being called rape. And then, when they read something like the divine rapes in Ovid's

mythological accounts, all the possible wrongnesses of sex are brought to mind. Triggered, as they say.

But, as I noted, there may be a solution to our current dilemma of Ovid's place on America's campuses. Why reinvent the wheel? If we're going to be the new Victorians, then let's be new *Victorians*. They were, after all, a people who possessed a kind of wonderfully hardheaded practicality, which they would apply even to the problems caused by their soft-headed sentimentalism.

Faced with the difficulty of obscenities in classic Roman texts, for example, Victorian translations would often leave the offensive passages untranslated. When you were reading along in an English translation and you suddenly got a few lines of Latin, you knew that *something* scandalous had just been described, even if your Latin wasn't good enough to tell quite what.

The notion was, of course, that if you were educated enough to read the somewhat technical Latin descrip-

tion of sexual intercourse, then you were also presumably a person of sufficient sophistication and self-control *not* to be pruriently swayed by the indecent passages. The translator's task was complete: No liberties were taken with Ovid, no bowdlerizings were imposed on the text. But the fair cheeks of maiden readers were spared a blush, and the imaginations of pure-minded boys were left unstained.

And isn't that what those outraged students want? A remoralizing, a respiritualizing, a re-Grundying of the world? What would solve all of Columbia's problems is a new English translation of the *Metamorphoses* that leaves the offensive passages in Latin. That way, Ovid can stay in the canon, and no triggers need be pulled in the reading of his work.

It worked for the old Victorians, so why not for the new ones? ♦



Bernini's Rape of Persephone

Joseph Bottum is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Slow Release

A few more documents from the bin Laden raid are finally revealed. They do not flatter the judgment of the Obama administration.

**BY STEPHEN F. HAYES
& THOMAS JOSCELYN**

After four years of fierce internecine battles and inexplicable delays, the intelligence community last week started the process of releasing more documents captured in the 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) posted on its website several dozen documents of uneven importance, bringing the total number of bin Laden documents available to the public to slightly more than 100.

A statement from the office of James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, reports that an inter-agency team, working with the White House, will examine the remaining documents with the goal of releasing those “whose publication will not hurt ongoing operations against al Qaeda or their affiliates.” The statement further promises that the “intelligence community will be reviewing hundreds more documents in the near future for possible release.”

So it’s a start. But it’s not much of one.

The talk of “hundreds” of additional documents is curious. In the days after the raid, Obama administration officials touted the size and importance of the intelligence haul. Tom Donilon, who was then President Obama’s national security adviser, said that the collection was the equivalent of a “small college library.” And a Pentagon spokesman said that the captured documents represented the largest single collection of materials from a senior terrorist in U.S. history.

According to Lt. Gen. (retired) Michael Flynn, former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, which participated in the exploitation of the files, the bin Laden collection totals more than 1 million documents. Jeffrey Anchukaitis, a spokesman for the DNI, disputes Flynn’s claim of a million documents. “That is not correct,” he says. But the DNI did not offer its own assessment of the

size of the cache, and several current and former intelligence officials who spoke to us confirmed Flynn’s estimate.

While the announcement of the release touted the disclosures as a triumph of transparency, the reality is that the American public today can see only an infinitesimal fraction of the document cache. The same is true for members of Congress, including those on the intelligence oversight committees.

If the quantity of documents is inadequate, the quality is little better. Five intelligence sources familiar with the documents tell *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* that the broader collection includes explosive documents about al Qaeda’s relationship with the regime in Iran and its dealings with Pakistan’s intelligence services. In one of the files, bin Laden goes into great detail about al Qaeda’s arrangement with Iran—an arrangement the Obama administration itself has cited in designations of terrorists on both sides of the relationship. That relationship spans more than two decades, and while there are signs in the documents of antagonism between the two, it’s clear their disputes did not preclude cooperation. Another document in the possession of the U.S. government describes the support al Qaeda received from the Iranian regime in the years before the 9/11 attacks. The 9/11 Commission highlighted Iran’s support for al Qaeda and noted that several hijackers traveled through Iran on their way to participate in the attacks. These documents were not part of last week’s release and have not been made available to lawmakers, though they would have significant bearing on how the American public and its representatives view the current nuclear negotiations with the Iranian regime.

Still, some of the documents released thus far do provide some insight into the evolution of al Qaeda and the global jihadist movement, as well as the way in which the Obama administration dealt with those challenges.

“Bin Ladin’s Bookshelf,” released last week, lists an eclectic assortment of reading materials found at the compound. The al Qaeda master was interested in everything from 9/11 conspiracy theories (he must have been puzzled by the claim that the hijackings were an inside job)

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD. Thomas Joscelyn is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

to rational assessments of the terrorist threat produced by think tank analysts. The media are especially interested in the publications and authors bin Laden was reading—and those he wasn't. But there is a problem with the administration's version of transparency even in this regard.

According to multiple current and former U.S. intelligence officials, bin Laden made copious notes in the margins of the publications he read. The ODNI, however, did not release copies of the manuscripts and papers bin Laden had his couriers deliver to him. It released a partial catalogue of bin Laden's library. The most interesting aspect of "Bin Laden's Bookshelf"—what bin Laden thought of the materials he read—remains classified.

The ODNI's list also lacks any reference to the intelligence reports leaked by the anti-American activists at WikiLeaks. Prosecutors introduced evidence related to bin Laden's reading of the WikiLeaks files at Army Pfc. Bradley Manning's trial. The Associated Press reported in 2013 that authorities produced evidence showing bin Laden had "asked for and received from an associate the Afghanistan battlefield reports that WikiLeaks published." Indeed, a letter written by bin Laden on August 7, 2010, contains his order "to download the files that were leaked out of the Pentagon in regards to Afghanistan and Pakistan so that they can be translated and studied because it contains information about the enemy's policies in the region." Bin Laden added, "The Defense Secretary mentioned that these documents were leaked and that they would affect the war negatively." Bin Laden's versions of the WikiLeaks files are not even listed in the ODNI's "bookshelf."

The most valuable documents released in the past week are some of al Qaeda's management files, especially bin Laden's correspondence during the last year of his life with his top manager, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, who was killed in an August 2011 drone strike. These files, more than the others, led the CIA to radically alter its view of how al Qaeda works. Prior to the Abbottabad raid, the agency assumed bin Laden had given up day-to-day operational control of al Qaeda's global network. It was widely believed at the agency that bin Laden was merely an ideological figurehead at the time of his death, something the Obama reelection campaign used to suggest the deterioration of al Qaeda more broadly and the attenuation of the jihadist threat. The management files tell precisely the opposite story. Bin Laden was obsessed with details, answering queries from his subordinates around the globe.

The CIA and the Obama administration misjudged al Qaeda in another way as well. They believed the Arab Spring would sound the death knell for al Qaeda's ideology, because the uprisings that began in early 2011 were largely peaceful, while al Qaeda had long argued that political

change in the Muslim-majority world was only possible through violent jihad. The bin Laden files show that al Qaeda correctly believed the opposite—that the turmoil sweeping through the Middle East and North Africa would be a boon for its operations. The security vacuums caused by the fall of dictators meant that the jihadists now had the room to operate and spread their ideas with a freedom they had never before enjoyed.

"[O]ur duty at this stage is to pay attention to the call among Muslims and win over supporters and spread the correct understanding," bin Laden wrote just days before his death, in a letter dated April 26, 2011. Bin Laden believed "the current conditions [had] brought on unprecedented opportunities" for the jihadists. Bin Laden and Rahman discussed sending senior al Qaeda veterans to their home countries, where they could take advantage of the newly permissive environment. Senior al Qaeda operatives were dispatched to Libya and elsewhere.

One of the great mysteries of the bin Laden raid on May 2, 2011, concerns the extent of al Qaeda's support network in Pakistan. Even before then, there was a widespread suspicion that senior or midlevel officials in the Pakistani intelligence service knew bin Laden's whereabouts. The files released thus far do not lend credence, at all, to the highly conspiratorial story by Seymour Hersh recently published in the *London Review of Books*. Contrary to being a "prisoner" of the Pakistani establishment, as Hersh's sources claim, bin Laden and al Qaeda were actively involved in the insurgency being waged against the army in northern Pakistan.

The Pakistani intelligence service even reached out to al Qaeda to negotiate a truce. In mid-July 2010, Rahman explained that the "Pakistani enemy has been corresponding with us" and the Pakistani Taliban "for a very short time." Rahman continued, "We received a messenger . . . bringing us a letter from the [Pakistani] Intelligence leaders including Shuja' Shah, and others." (Shuja' Shah may be Ahmad Shuja Pasha, the head of Pakistani intelligence at the time.) "They said they wanted to talk to us, to al Qaeda. We gave them the same message, nothing more." The Pakistanis arranged the contacts through jihadists who were both sponsored by the Pakistani state and allies of al Qaeda. A former senior Pakistani intelligence official, Hamid Gul, also helped broker the talks.

In a letter to Rahman dated August 7, 2010, bin Laden blessed the ongoing negotiations. "Regarding the ceasefire with the Pakistani government, the continuation of the negotiations in the fashion that you described is in the interest of the Mujahidin at this time," bin Laden wrote.

It does not appear that a ceasefire was agreed upon. But the documents do not fully exonerate the Pakistani military

and intelligence establishment. At a minimum, the files show that senior Pakistani intelligence officials knew how to get in touch with bin Laden's lieutenants. This implies, but does not prove, that they knew al Qaeda's leaders were nearby. Several U.S. intelligence officials say the files that remain classified contain even more explosive details.

The limited document release also sheds light on the Obama administration's misguided approach to the Afghan Taliban. In 2010 and 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pushed for negotiations with senior Taliban leaders. Clinton devotes an entire chapter to the episode in her book *Hard Choices*. But some of the recently declassified files raise new questions about the wisdom of that diplomatic effort.

As Clinton writes, the State Department's negotiations hinged on the idea that Mullah Omar's personal representative, Syed Tayyab Agha, could potentially agree to a peace deal that would lead the Taliban to sever its longstanding relationship with al Qaeda. The State Department was so hopeful Agha could open the door to a diplomatic breakthrough that Clinton's team nicknamed him "A-Rod," after the New York Yankees baseball player. The negotiations ultimately led to no tangible benefits for the United States, but did pave the way for the Obama administration's controversial decision to swap five senior Taliban leaders held at Guantánamo for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who is accused of deserting his fellow soldiers.

Interestingly, the Abbottabad letters show that Agha continued to communicate with bin Laden even as Foggy Bottom was trying to convince him to break ties with al Qaeda. There is no evidence of tension between Agha and his al Qaeda comrades in the few letters made available to the public.

Al Qaeda general manager Atiyah Abd al-Rahman explained to bin Laden that he was communicating with Agha in a letter dated June 19, 2010. Agha is described as the "friend of Amir Al Mo'mineen," a title meaning "Emir of the Faithful," which is how al Qaeda refers to Mullah Omar.

"Attached is a letter from Tayyab Agha, the friend of Amir Al Mo'mineen, and we are in contact with him, thanks to Allah," Rahman wrote to bin Laden. Agha's letter, Rahman added, "seems to be a reply to another, older letter from [Ayman al Zawahiri] that we sent to them maybe a year ago." Rahman summarized the contents of Agha's letter: "It includes a warning, reminder and discussion about: Iran, UAE and some expressions that they use." The last part, mentioning "some expressions" used by the Taliban, is cryptic, but may be a reference to the Taliban's public rhetoric.

In early April 2011, just weeks before bin Laden's

death, Rahman said he was going to forward new letters from Agha to his boss. "I will also include two letters from Tayyab Agha along with my responses," Rahman wrote to bin Laden.

What do Agha's letters say? Did he tell Rahman and bin Laden about his meetings with Clinton's representatives? We do not know. While the missives are mentioned as attachments to memos sent to bin Laden, Agha's letters haven't been made public. Why not? Again, we do not know. This is one of many instances in which the documents released by the administration tell us only part of the story.

We do know Clinton's decision to negotiate with Agha was controversial within the Obama administration. Clinton explains the behind-the-scenes debate in *Hard Choices*.

In 2009, President Obama ordered a strategy review for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The assessment was conducted by Bruce Riedel, a 30-year veteran of the CIA who served as a campaign adviser to Obama in 2008. The review concluded that negotiations with senior Taliban leaders would not work because they are "extremists who could never be reconciled with the government in Kabul," Clinton writes. Riedel's strategy review left the door open for "bottom-up" talks, which would focus on peeling off individual Taliban commanders and fighters who were not ideological hardliners. But Riedel's review found that "top-down" talks were bound to fail, because there was no evidence senior Taliban leaders would compromise. Clinton explains this distinction at length in *Hard Choices*, but she gave her top deputy on the issue, Richard Holbrooke, the go-ahead to proceed with the "top-down" negotiations anyway. Clinton admits that "some of our colleagues at the Pentagon, CIA, and White House were reluctant" to engage in the talks.

But talk they did. Clinton's emissaries met with Agha several times in 2010 and 2011. Clinton even softened the State Department's negotiating position to make sure the talks could move forward. Initially, Clinton and the administration insisted that the Taliban lay down its arms, break with al Qaeda, and respect the Afghan constitution before any negotiations took place. But Clinton decided to drop these "preconditions" and turn them into "necessary outcomes" of the talks instead. Clinton made this concession in a speech she delivered in February 2011. In *Hard Choices*, she euphemistically calls this a "nuanced change" that would "clear the way for direct talks." In reality, of course, it was a major concession—the Taliban, and Agha, no longer had to renounce al Qaeda before talking with Clinton's State Department.

Clinton agreed to additional measures in service of pushing the talks forward. "As a first step," she writes in *Hard Choices*, "we agreed to begin working with the

United Nations to remove a few key Taliban members from the terrorist sanctions list, which imposed a travel ban.” The Taliban leaders couldn’t travel abroad to take part in the negotiations without fear of arrest. So the State Department had them taken off the U.N. terrorist list. Clinton defends this move in *Hard Choices*. “To understand our strategy, it was important for Americans to be clear about the difference between the al Qaeda terrorists, who attacked us on 9/11, and the Taliban, who were Afghan extremists waging an insurgency against the government in Kabul.” But this ignores the fact that al Qaeda itself has invested much of its resources in the Afghan insurgency, fighting alongside the Taliban since the 1990s and enjoying its protection during the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, from 1996 to 2001. In a declassified letter written in June 2010, bin Laden’s lieutenant, Rahman, explained that al Qaeda had “very strong military activity” in Afghanistan and was closely cooperating with other insurgency groups. This is part of the reason the Taliban has been unwilling to forswear al Qaeda.

Just days after the Abbottabad raid, the State Department continued to reach out to Agha. Clinton writes that she had her representative, an official named Frank Ruggiero, “pass along a direct message from me” to Agha. This “was the time for the Taliban to break from al Qaeda once and for all, save themselves, and make peace,” Clinton let Agha know through Ruggiero. Clinton claims Agha “did not seem distressed about losing bin Laden” and “he remained interested in negotiating with us.” Clinton seems to take the absence of distress as a good sign, a further confirmation of the separation between al Qaeda and Taliban leaders. But her interpretation of those events is less an indication that Agha was actually untroubled by bin Laden’s death than it is evidence of confirmation bias—Clinton seeing what she wants to see. After all, there is no reason to believe that if Agha had been distressed about bin Laden’s demise he would have shared his anguish with the Americans who were responsible for it.

In any case, the deal that Clinton imagined with the Taliban never happened. There is also no indication in *Hard Choices* that just weeks before Ruggiero delivered Secretary Clinton’s message to Agha, Rahman had promised to forward Agha’s letters to bin Laden.

There are additional indications of the close relationship between al Qaeda and the Taliban in the declassified files. In May 2010, a U.S. drone strike killed Rahman’s predecessor as bin Laden’s right-hand man, Shaykh Abu Yazid al Mustafa. The Taliban honored Mustafa as a hero. “In the name of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, we offer our condolences to our brothers the mujahidin of al Qaeda and to the Islamic Nation in general for the loss of this heroic fighter,” one of the files recovered in bin Laden’s compound

reads. Another newly released file recounts the lessons al Qaeda learned from the fall of the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan in 2001. The third bullet point in the document mentions the “bombing of the Tayyab Agha house in Qandahar after its satellite communications” were presumably intercepted. Fortunately, from al Qaeda’s perspective, “the brothers were rescued with Allah’s grace.”

While the Taliban did not break, and has not broken, with their “brothers” in al Qaeda, as Clinton hoped, the State Department’s talks did result in some benefits for Mullah Omar’s men. It was during the Clinton-approved talks that the Taliban raised the possibility of getting its five most-senior leaders in U.S. custody released from Guantánamo.

“The Taliban’s top concern seemed to be the fate of its fighters being held at Guantánamo Bay and other prisons,” Clinton writes in *Hard Choices*. “In every discussion about prisoners, we demanded the release of Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, who had been captured in June 2009. There would not be any agreement about prisoners without the sergeant coming home.”

The Taliban Five, all senior Taliban figures with ties to al Qaeda, were exchanged for Bergdahl in 2014, after Clinton had left office. When the deal was finalized, Clinton’s people reached out to the press to say she had been “skeptical” of the swap and might not have gone through with it. It was an odd claim, since according to Clinton’s own book, the exchange was proposed during the State Department’s talks with Agha—or “A-Rod.” A final irony: These Taliban leaders, some of whom led al Qaeda fighters in battles against the Northern Alliance shortly before the 9/11 attacks, were themselves evidence of the unbreakable bonds between senior Taliban leaders and al Qaeda.

It’s been more than four years since the raid that killed Osama bin Laden. It should be unacceptable that the Obama administration has released some hundred files out of a million in its possession. The notion that the intelligence community, working with the Obama White House, would release only “hundreds” more is indefensible and ought to be a source of outrage from Republicans and any Democrats who care about national security.

Representative Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, has been pushing for the intelligence community to declassify and release more. Nunes included that requirement in last year’s intelligence authorization bill, which is the reason we’re seeing more documents today. But too many Republicans have allowed the administration to withhold documents crucial to understanding the threats we face as a country. The time to force these documents into the public sphere is now, while the information can shape the way our policymakers address the threats from al Qaeda and its allies. ♦

Not Ready for Hillary

Bernie Sanders is no joke

BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

Burlington, Vt.

The senator was returning to the place where it had all begun for him. Almost 40 years ago, to the surprise of practically everyone, perhaps including himself, he had been elected mayor of Burlington, Vermont's largest city and the only one with any real claim to the title. Back then, students from the University of Vermont, mobilized by his energetic grassroots campaign, had contributed significantly to his 10-vote margin of victory. Now he was back, at the student union, on a very cold night in February to speak of many things, including the possibility that he would run for president. He had been saying that he was thinking seriously about it. Which translated, if you lived in Vermont, into, "He's running." He had, after all, been running for something here in Vermont long before most of the people in his audience were born. Even before their parents were born.

Though Bernie Sanders wasn't likely to say anything he hadn't said before, many times, I had decided to make the two-hour drive up to Burlington to listen to him. The rough two-lane road was mostly empty, and the Adirondacks and Lake Champlain glowed in winter sunset colors off to the west. The big Champlain Valley dairy farms looked as if they had seen better days. Sanders and Vermont's other senator, Patrick Leahy, make it something like a sacred trust to keep those farms in business. They survive but they do not prosper. Like just about everything else in Vermont, they look like they have seen hard use. Vermont is struggling.

Burlington (pop. 40,000), however, was bustling. My wife and I found a place to eat that could have been picked up and moved to any number of small, prospering American cities. It featured a wide selection of Vermont-made cheeses. While the big dairy operations work hard to get by, the boutique cheesemakers flourish. There were also a number of Vermont-brewed beers on the menu, and my Long Trail IPA was very good.

After dinner, we made our way to the student center. The Sanders event had brought out such a crowd that the room where he spoke was filled to capacity. The overflow was sent

to another room, where the audience could watch the senator on a large television screen. This room was also nearly filled. My eyeball estimate put the turnout at 1,000 or so.

Sanders spoke only briefly, and it would be charitable to call it a speech. He made remarks around themes that are a constant in his political life. The fixed stars on his horizon are economic inequality and the essential unfairness of the political system. His Manichean universe consists—and always has—of Wall Street and the millionaires and billionaires in opposition to the middle class, the poor, and what he likes to call "working people." American life consists of an unequal and ceaseless struggle, which the bad guys are always winning.

"I wish I could tell you my generation left this country in a better place, but it hasn't," he says to the students. "And now your job is to start thinking hard about these issues. Embrace democracy in its fullest form and do everything you can to make sure this country fulfills its potential."

The students listened raptly as a 73-year-old man told them, among other things, that they need to step it up. "Sixty-three percent of the people who are eligible did not vote. Eighty percent of the eligible people in your age group."

Sanders does not pander and he does not joke. If my generation made a mess of things, he tells his audience, then so far, yours isn't doing much better.

The students, of course, lap it up.

One reason might be that, unlike the politicians they see on television, Sanders clearly speaks out of conviction. Also, he doesn't deal in qualifiers or nuance or even complex sentences. He is direct and forceful. In his run for the White House—announced a few weeks after we heard him—he will certainly be underfunded. But, you think, he can save a lot on polling and focus groups and that sort of thing. There is no ambivalence in his DNA.

Sanders, tonight, is saying the same things to these students that he said to some of their parents and grandparents. You don't go to a Sanders speech expecting to be surprised. His political thinking (the only kind of thinking that he seems to do) has not changed since he first ran for the Senate as a candidate of the Liberty Union party in 1971 and captured 2 percent of the vote. A reporter, now retired, who remembers covering Sanders back then, says today, "Even if you don't like Bernie—and I don't—you have to admire him for two things: his consistency and his determination."

Geoffrey Norman, a writer in Vermont, is a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Since the lyrics never change, I pay attention to the music. Sanders comes off as less strident and abrasive in a relatively small room than he does on television. The cameras have a way of turning him into a caricature. On television, his clothes inevitably appear rumpled enough that he might have been wearing them when he boarded a long flight and not yet had time to change. Not rumpled enough, that is, that he might have slept in them, but close. Say, for politeness's sake, that he *napped* in them. His clothes tonight are straight-up Eddie Bauer casual—uncreased by design.

Up close, the shock of unruly white hair that always looks, on camera, beyond what could charitably be called “tousled” appears, if not tamed, then housebroken. He could easily be a member of the faculty. A tenured professor, perhaps, in the political science department as opposed to the 19th-century anarchist he looks like on the tube.

And then there is the voice. Bernie Sanders was born and raised in Brooklyn and he still talks like it, which makes for a grating, hack-saw-on-metal quality when it comes at you electronically. In this room, while his voice is certainly not soothing, there is nothing about its quality that would detract from the content of what he is saying.

For the retail aspect of his campaign—the meeting and greeting and working small rooms—Sanders will not need to employ the services of a speech coach or a wardrobe consultant. So there is a little more money saved.

And, finally, there is the physique. On television, he appears slightly stooped and, as a result, comes off as weary and burdened, as if he's been worn down by the fight. In person, the posture is more an athletic slouch. He stands the way a pitcher on the mound might, while rubbing up a new ball. He was a good athlete in high school, he tells us in his book, *Outsider in the House*. It is one of the few—the very few—personal items he shares. Reading the book, you would never know that he is a grandfather, and when it comes up in other contexts, he does not dwell on it, unlike his rival for the nomination who is a new grandmother and won't let anyone forget it.

So the overall physical impression among people he approaches in person or speaks to in small rooms, asking them to vote for him for president of the United States, will not have them thinking, “Are you kidding me?” He looks strong, confident, and utterly comfortable in his own skin.

A \$3,000 suit and a \$400 haircut would, in fact, destroy his credibility and the source of his appeal: He is who he is.

And you know what he stands for. More important, in the campaign he proposes to wage against Hillary Clinton, so does he.

The speech to the students is short and almost perfunctory. Then he opens the floor to questions. “I hope that maybe we'll spend one-tenth of the time talking about the important issues facing America,” he says, “as we do talking about the Super Bowl.”

The questions cover the usual territory, and he handles them effortlessly. He proposes a big increase in spending to “rebuild our crumbling infrastructure.” He

wants to get money out of politics, especially that \$900 million that the Koch brothers have pledged to spend in the coming presidential campaign. He wants to rein in Wall Street and put an end to “casino capitalism.” He considers it an “outrage” (perhaps the most-used word in his entire political vocabulary) that the median middle-class income is \$5,000 lower now than it was before the Great Recession. It is equally an outrage that 45 million Americans live in poverty. The outrages and the data flow effortlessly. This is what he does.

In this room there is a lot of interest, understandably, in his enthusiasm for President Obama's recent proposal to make the first two years of college

free. Indeed, he would raise the president two years.

“It is absurd that a large number of low-income citizens cannot go to college simply because they cannot afford it,” he says. “America should want all of its citizens to be educated because it is good for the country.”

Three months later, Sanders put his plan for making college “free” into legislative form. His plan, he announced, would cost “\$750 billion over the next ten years.” Anticipating the question of “How do we afford it?” he answers, predictably, “At a time of massive income and wealth inequality, at a time when trillions of dollars in wealth have left the pockets of the middle class and have gone to the top one-tenth of 1 percent, at a time when the wealthiest people in this country have made huge amounts of money from risky derivative transactions and the soaring value of the stock market, this legislation would impose a Wall Street speculation fee on Wall Street investment houses and hedge funds.”

As he spins out his vision of a free college education for



Bernie Sanders calling for tuition-free higher education, May 19, 2015

all, one begins to understand the point of this evening. Bernie Sanders does not need to campaign on a college campus in his hometown on a brutally cold night in February. While he received only 1 percent of the votes in that first Senate race, he was elected to the Senate by a 33-point margin in 2006 and reelected in 2012 with 71 percent of the vote. He could be senator for life in Vermont. The state's three electoral votes will be his in 2016 if he is the Democratic candidate. They might even be his if he chooses to run as an independent, which is what he has called himself since 1976, when he left the Liberty Union party after a run for governor that got him 6 percent of the vote.

This event at the University of Vermont and the appearances at other Vermont campuses in the last few days are, then, a form of road testing, designed to see if what worked once will, with some fine tuning, work again. Sanders is returning to his roots. That first time out, he ran, and won, as an insurgent and hopeless underdog against a political machine that was slightly corrupt and vastly overconfident and never saw what hit it.

It began—and begins—with consciousness raising. He must build a movement that is fueled by a feeling of “us against them.” This movement will be made of people who are willing to do the tedious work of knocking on doors and spreading the word—foot soldiers in the great campaign, volunteers and almost inevitably the young.

They will be a crucial part of the coalition of “us” that he needs to build on his way to the nomination of the Democratic party. He has “us” in his pocket on the social issues, having long been out front on those. Now he will work the bread and butter stuff. This generation, after all, is graduating deeply in debt and looking for employment that often turns out not to be worth that expensive university degree. “Your standard of living,” he tells them, “will be lower than that of the generation that came before you.”

What might be a problem for some primary voters will not concern people like the ones in this room. The young do not care that while he is running for the Democratic party nomination, he has always insisted that he is not a member of any party. That he is proud to run and serve as an “independent.”

In his book, he writes,

As the only Independent in Congress, I face unique fundraising handicaps which my campaign works very hard to overcome. Unlike Democrats and Republicans, I do not receive any funds from a political party. I do not benefit from the coordinated campaigns that Democrats and Republicans utilize. My campaign does not get support from a party organization which provides staff, polling, literature, offices, mailings, voter checklists, and other services.

The entire infrastructure of a modern campaign, in other

words. For which, according to news reports, Hillary Clinton will be raising and spending some \$2.5 billion.

Sanders is probably the least wealthy member of the Senate and almost certainly the one who cares least about money. His own money, that is. When it comes to money in politics, his resentment (call it “outrage”) comes off him like heat off an oven. And it seems impossible that his fierce consistency will allow him to give Hillary Clinton a pass on this one.

He was never, for that matter, a fan of Bill Clinton and is not shy about saying so. In his book, he writes,

I have opposed his convoluted health care reform package. [Sanders is, unsurprisingly, for a straight-up single-payer system.] I have helped lead the opposition to his trade policies, which represent the interests of corporate America. . . . I opposed his bloated military budget, the welfare reform bill that he signed, and the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, which he supported. He has been weak on campaign finance reform and has caved in far too often on the environment. . . .

Do I have confidence that [Bill] Clinton will stand up for the working people of this country—for children, for the elderly, for the folks who are hurting? No, I do not.

Still, he supported Clinton in a vague way, endorsing him as the lesser evil, because there was no acceptable alternative. Which will not be the case in this campaign when the alternative to another Clinton will be . . . *Bernie Sanders*.

He has been right, by the standards of the left, about many things. While Hillary Clinton is obliged to publicly regret her vote in favor of the invasion of Iraq, Sanders can point to his opposition to the first Gulf war. There is almost no big issue on which he has deviated from leftist orthodoxy. If he is not 99.4 percent pure in anything, it is the issue of guns.

But then, he represents the people of Vermont, where a proposal to change the regulations regarding deer hunting will turn out larger crowds at public hearings than the ordinary, annual town meetings of which the state is so justly proud. It is generally acknowledged that gun ownership in Vermont is robust and that gun violence is very rare. A Vermont politician running on a gun control platform would be committing political suicide. Sanders, for all his consistency in the leftist faith, is also an able politician. So he has an uneven record on guns.

He might never have achieved national office if a Republican opponent had not endorsed a gun control bill. Chris Graff, who was AP bureau chief and the go-to source on Vermont politics during those times, told an interviewer, “There was absolutely no doubt in that ’90 vote,” when Sanders won his seat in Congress for the first time, “that the NRA got him elected, and he owed them.” Once he had been elected, Sanders voted against the Brady bill.

But if this is a chink, it is hard to think of it as a serious one and possible, even, to see it working to his advantage

in a campaign against Hillary Clinton. One can imagine an out-of-work coal miner or some other struggling voter weighing a wealthy member in good standing of the political class who has endorsed the most recent free trade treaty (though she now has “concerns”) and is pure on gun control against the righteous fury of a man who is down the line in his support for the old left/labor causes and also okay with him keeping his deer rifle and the 1911 Colt that stays next to the bed.

Gun control will probably not be much of an issue in the Iowa caucuses or the New Hampshire primary, and if it even comes up, Sanders will explain himself in something that resembles the answer he gave, in his *Playboy* interview, to the question: *Vermont has quite a few gun owners. How do you position yourself on the debates regarding gun ownership and restrictions?*

Sanders answered, “Vermont does have many gun owners who enjoy hunting, target shooting and other gun-related activities. But most people in Vermont understand that as a nation we must do everything we can to end the horror of mass killings we have seen in Newtown, Connecticut; Aurora, Colorado; Blacksburg, Virginia; Tucson, Arizona and other American communities. Clearly, there is no single or simple solution to this crisis. While the legislation [to expand background checks] recently brought forth in the Senate would by no means have solved all our gun-violence problems, it would have been a step forward, and that’s why I voted for that legislation.”

That will be good enough for most of the people he is trying to reach.

The month of February, when Sanders spoke to the students in Burlington, was part of a quarter during which the economy grew by a meager .2 percent. And that anemic number might, as more data come in, fall into negative territory. One quarter of negative GDP growth gets you halfway to a recession, something the voters Sanders is going after feel firsthand and are likely to regard as more important than any gun control legislation.

Sanders could get all the fresh material he needs simply by reading the *Wall Street Journal*. According to one headline, “The U.S. Economy Just Had Its Worst Month Since the Recession.” Another reads: “Top CEOs Make 373 Times the Average U.S. Worker.” In the body of that story, one learns that “overall CEO compensation rose nearly 16% last year. The average worker’s wages rose just 2.4%.”

Sanders has a word for that sort of thing.

The night ends with the senator walking out of the room, without entourage, carrying his own briefcase, stuffed with papers. He is smiling and surrounded by adoring students. It is late. Past bedtime for most 73-year-olds, but he looks as if he could go another couple of hours, hanging around the

student union and talking about the things that really fire his jets: Eugene Debs, the minimum wage . . .

I leave the event thinking, first, that when Sanders does announce, it will be treated in the media as an amusing side-show. There will be lots of stories about how Sanders calls himself (can you believe it?) a “socialist.” His looks and his voice will be fair game (“disheveled and awkward political outcast,” will be the *New York Times’s* way of thumbnailing him). And the mismatch will be (fairly, perhaps) painted as something on the order of David vs. Goliath . . . before the rock went whistling through the air and laid the giant down.

All true, but . . . Nobody expected Sanders to win when he ran for mayor of Burlington in 1981. And that may not be the example that resonates most with him and some of his long-term followers. He is a child of the ’60s, and he was, as he writes, “active in radical politics at the University of Chicago, where I was involved in the civil rights and peace movements.”

The war was the great galvanizing force for the young in the political revolt of the sixties. Their opposition to it was based on both idealism and self-interest. There was, after all, a draft. (Which Sanders evidently avoided because he was married. He later divorced and remarried while he was mayor of Burlington. He and his new wife honeymooned in the Soviet Union. Really.)

The opposition to Vietnam was widespread, but there was no political figure willing to grasp it until Eugene McCarthy announced, in November 1967, that he would be challenging President Lyndon Johnson for the nomination of the Democratic party. This was dismissed by the wise people as a joke and a bad one. Johnson was a colossus, the second coming of FDR, and McCarthy was a dilettante who actually liked to write poetry.

But the “kids” signed on. They famously went “clean for Gene,” with the boys shaving their beards and cutting their long hair and the girls putting on dresses, before they went around New Hampshire over the next few months, knocking on doors and earnestly making their case.

In March 1968, their man took 42 percent of the votes in the New Hampshire primary. He didn’t win, but he didn’t have to. The vote exposed the rot. Johnson was humbled and ruined. He withdrew his name from consideration for his party’s nomination.

For the students who turned out to hear Bernie Sanders in February 2015, that would be ancient history. For Sanders?

Well, that might be just yesterday. Those days no doubt resonate still. And the possibility that history might, in some sense, repeat itself must thrill him to his bones.

This is his moment. The one for which he has lived his whole life.

Always underestimated. And never giving up. ♦



Neanderthal family models in 'Ice Age Giants' exhibition, Garding, Germany (2011)

Poor Relations

The rise and fall of our Neanderthal cousins. BY ELIZABETH POWERS

Pity the poor Neanderthals, our prehistoric cousins. The first Neanderthal fossils were discovered in a place of that name in Germany in 1856. Archaeologists have since turned up fossils ranging from Protoneanderthals and Transition Neanderthals to Classic Neanderthals at about 75 sites from Western Europe to Central Asia. In examining the recovered fossils, tools, and other remains, archaeologists have attempted to reconstruct the lives, habitats, and habits of these archaic humans.

Elizabeth Powers is writing a book on contemporary liberalism.

The Invaders
How Humans and Their Dogs Drove Neanderthals to Extinction
 by Pat Shipman
 Belknap Press, 288 pp., \$29.95

Since all living non-Africans share, on average, 2.5 percent Neanderthal DNA, the question of their relationship to modern humans has fascinated scholars and the public alike.

There have been two theories concerning the disappearance of Neanderthals from the archaeological record about 30,000 years ago. One ascribes a

primary role to the effects of radical and wildly fluctuating temperatures during a climate phase known as Oxygen Isotope Stage 3 (OIS3) on the environment and, thus, on the lives of Neanderthals. A climate downturn from 40,000 years ago coincides with their decline. Since Neanderthals had already lived in Eurasia for up to 200,000 years, during which time they had experienced and adapted to many glacial cycles, we are talking about really extreme weather, the likes of which Earth has not again experienced.

Modern humans moved out of Africa and into Europe about 40,000 years ago, during OIS3. Thus, *Homo sapiens* plays

WOLFGANG RUNGE / NEWS.COM

a major role in the second theory, which posits that the short, stocky, barrel-chested Neanderthals were forced to compete for woolly mammoths and cave bears with the more agile and leaner humans, who also carried assault weapons in the form of spears and other projectiles. Human-mediated extinction is the premise of *The Invaders*, with a twist. As the hyperbolic title proclaims, it was the “invading” humans and their dogs that did in the Neanderthals. *Homo sapiens*, Pat Shipman writes, is “unquestionably predatory.” We are in the territory of Elizabeth Kolbert’s recent *Sixth Extinction* (2014).

In this paleo-anthropological approach, Shipman, a retired professor of anthropology, marshals a bnumbing amount of research on radiocarbon dating of fossils, chronology, genome sequencing, isotope stages, and such subjects as intraguild competition (“competitive exclusion”) and canid domestication. (This book is not for the fainthearted, and it is much in need of tables and graphs.) Shipman discusses what these new investigative techniques reveal about Neanderthal demise. She concedes, for instance, that “the severe bout of climatic deterioration” that began occurring about 45,000 years ago and that wiped out much of the vegetation behind which Neanderthals carried out their hunting gave the newly arrived humans and their projectiles a “substantial edge.”

She draws support for the human-mediated theory from the current field of “invasive biology,” which studies the effects of introducing species into (or removing species from) an ecosystem. In an ecosystem, there is invariably an “apex consumer” whose predatory habits keep the food hierarchy in circulation, while invasive species, as Shipman writes, disturb the balance and are “a major contributing factor in many and possibly most extinctions.”

Her proxy evidence for the effect of a new “apex predator” within an ecosystem, and thus for the disappearance of Neanderthals, is contained in her chapter on Yellowstone National Park. Before Yellowstone’s designation as a national park in 1872, most of the indigenous tribal peoples had

been driven off the land. The incoming white humans eliminated their chief remaining rival, wolves, according to a policy endorsed by ranchers and the federal government. The removal of wolves, however, led to an overabundance of elk, which, in turn, caused degradation to rangeland. The number of coyotes also soared, since they were freed from suppression by their main competitors for prey. In the mid-1990s, 31 gray wolves from two Canadian parks were “released into [Yellowstone] to restore the natural balance of the original ecosystem before settlement by people of mostly European ancestry.” Elk numbers fell, while coyotes were immediately killed and driven away by the wolves, improving (among other things) “the survival rate of fawns of pronghorn antelope considerably.”

I am a layperson, but it strikes me as specious to compare the Yellowstone ecological “event”—which took place within a little more than a century and, moreover, was orchestrated by humans—with events that occurred over a time span of millennia and that cannot be directly observed.

What the archaeological record does show is that extensive cultural adaptation began to take place after the entry of humans into Eurasia and their dispersal to China and Australia. Thus, while archaics and moderns overlapped in Eurasia for at least 5,000 years, the latter were forced to improvise in their new surroundings—for instance, making garments that would protect their tropics-adapted bodies from the ravages of cold during OIS3. Did their Neanderthal neighbors learn anything from them?

Such adaptation to new surroundings also included the domestication of wolves. Wolves, as Shipman writes, are not obvious candidates for domestication, but, like early humans, they are a social species and travel in packs. The archaeological record shows the presence of large canids (“wolf-dogs”) in sites made by humans from about 36,000 years ago. Mitochondrial DNA indicates that all modern domestic dogs (“a wolf that acts like a dog and relates to people”) originated in

Europe, with genetic data suggesting an origin between 32,100 and 18,800 years ago. Their domestication would have helped humans to retain possession of the carcasses of large animals, with the wolf-dogs keeping other predators at bay.

Thus, unlike with Neanderthal hunting, it was no longer a matter of simply chopping off a few choice cuts of meat and running for shelter; instead, every ounce of sustenance could be drawn from the slain animal, after which it would be carefully skinned and dismembered, with its skins used for clothing and its bones for construction of shelters. For Shipman, it goes without saying that such “assisted hunting” contributed to the demise of “any last lingering Neanderthals.”

Shipman introduces a nice bit of speculative evidence for the mutual attraction of humans and young wolves: namely, the presence of “white scleras”—the white part of the eyeball surrounding the colored iris—in both. She notes that white sclera make the direction of a person’s gaze visible from a distance, especially when directed horizontally, which would have been an advantage in hunting with wolf-dogs. “Gaze communication” and the tendency to look for cues from humans are apparent to anyone who has petted a dog—and are correspondingly lacking in our other favorite domesticated animal, cats. (Apes, likewise having dark sclera, are not skilled in “gaze reading.”)

The domestication of wolves indicates quasi-permanent settlements. Domestication of sheep, goats, and pigs would follow, but not for another 10,000 years or so: Modern humans had to make it through the last Ice Age before they could cultivate crops. To this day, as Shipman points out, most of us do not eat dogs, while we regularly feast on other carnivores.

The attractive format, the title, and the cover of *The Invaders* are meant to influence a larger audience, which is being slowly conditioned to relativize human achievements. Thus, the human-mediated theory of Neanderthal demise has been accompanied by the attempt to elevate the status of

Neanderthals so that they approximate modern humans: After all, they used ochre for body adornment and wore pendants. But did the Neanderthals, as Shipman asserts, really live “successfully” for at least 200,000 years? Were they “clever, adept, and well adapted to their environment and ecosystem” when the encounter with humans occurred?

As with present-day climate science, wishful thinking plays a large role. From the evidence here and elsewhere, Neanderthals were never at the top of the food chain, never ruled the territory that modern humans “invaded.” They were not “apex predators” but simply one species among many trying to fill their stomachs while avoiding being devoured themselves. Using clubs and other hand weapons in a world of great beasts, they depended on ambushing their prey. H. G. Wells once suggested that they may have followed herds and played the part of jackal to the saber-toothed tiger.

It was a tough life, and obtaining food was “a lifelong task.” Consider “Nandy,” a Neanderthal re-created from 60,000-year-old bones found in a cave in northern Iraq in the 1950s:

Years before Nandy died, at age 40 or more, he had already survived multiple fractures of the skull, legs, hands, and feet, and a crushing fracture over the left eye that deformed his face. The wounds may have left him partly paralyzed on his right side and blind in his left eye. His right arm was gone just below the elbow, perhaps amputated after a crushing injury. The pattern of wear on his teeth implies that he grasped objects with his jaws and manipulated them with his right hand. Probably some of Nandy’s wounds were caused by fights with stone weapons, others by rockfalls or hunting accidents.

This description is from *Man and Microbes: Disease and Plagues in History and Modern Times* (1995) by the popular science writer Arno Karlen. Karlen drew on the account of the discoverer of Nandy (officially, a skeleton known as “Shanidar I”), Ralph S. Solecki, whose *Shanidar: The First Flower People* (1971) suggests the affection that can be aroused by Neanderthals. Despite

his multiple injuries, Nandy’s life was “neither very short nor unrelievedly brutish,” writes Karlen. The reason: Although his wounds “left him barely able to forage, and surely unable to survive on his own,” the fact that he lived so long must have been due to being protected by his band, who shared resources with him. If we are looking for an empathy gene in humans, we need go no further. Remember that 2.5 percent.

While Neanderthals had larger crania and brains than modern humans, nowhere in that gray matter were they able to store enough information to get a step up on the animals on which they depended for their survival. The absence of language, which Shipman does not discuss, may have played a role. Even though researchers have learned that Neanderthals had the same gene for speech as humans (FOXP2), it clearly did them no good, as they neither handed down knowledge to their immediate offspring nor passed it on to fellow bands in distant habitats. Population estimates for OIS3 are hard to come by, but the numbers are not large, with fewer than 100,000 individuals

across Eurasia. Humans may have been able to communicate with kin groups and bridge the distances by way of spoken language.

The puzzle here seems not to be whether Neanderthals succumbed to climate reversals to which their bodies could not adjust or to competition from invasive predators, but how the species lived so long and so dumbly. While they were adept at making stone tools, even Elizabeth Kolbert admits that they spent “tens of thousands of years making the same tools over and over again.” The truly sad story is that the Neanderthals eked out an existence for 200,000 years doing the same old things.

I am reminded of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit*, in which Hell is being stuck with the same annoying people and going through the same motions for eternity. Did Neanderthals simply die out from world-weariness? If the arrival of modern humans into an otherwise balanced ecosystem played a role in ushering Neanderthals off the stage of prehistory, it seems more like a *coup de grâce*. ♦

BCA

Mortgage Madness

Blame for the 2008 financial collapse is, and should be, widespread. BY JAY COST

In *The Semisovereign People*, political scientist E. E. Schattschneider argues that “political conflict is not like an intercollegiate debate in which the opponents agree in advance on a definition of the issues. As a matter of fact, the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power. . . . He who determines what politics is about runs the country.” Schattschneider calls the

Jay Cost, staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD, is the author of *A Republic No More: Big Government and the Rise of American Political Corruption*.

Hidden in Plain Sight

What Really Caused the World’s Worst Financial Crisis and Why It Could Happen Again

by Peter J. Wallison

Encounter, 432 pp., \$27.99

organized effort to ensure that some alternatives remain illegitimate “the mobilization of bias.”

Peter J. Wallison must be quite familiar with this idea. A longtime critic of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the government-sponsored enterprises (GSE) tasked with injecting liquidity into the

secondary mortgage market, he has offered warnings about these agencies that have fallen on deaf ears for over a decade. When he and Edward Pinto, his colleague at the American Enterprise Institute, correctly pointed out that Fannie and Freddie were loaded up with the subprime mortgages that contributed to the financial collapse of 2008, and that maybe—*just maybe*—this had something to do with the mess, they were greeted with accusations of Hitlerism. “The Big Lie” is what Joe Nocera of the *New York Times* accused Wallison and Pinto of propagating.

There are some ideas that simply cannot gain mainstream acceptance because they challenge essential priorities of the ruling elite. Accordingly, any connection drawn from Fannie and Freddie to the financial collapse must be squashed, because distributing federally subsidized credit to low- and middle-income (LMI) borrowers has been a backbone of the nation’s housing policy for nearly 20 years. All of this makes Wallison’s work intriguing to anybody inclined to question the status quo—even more so because he has written this excellent book in defense of his thesis.

Wallison argues that the existing explanations for the crisis are either wrong (overregulation) or insufficient (monetary policy in violation of the Taylor rule). This is easy pickings. Most accounts focus on the investment practices of the banks, to the exclusion of what they were actually invested *in*. It is almost as if they could have invested in anything and produced the same result, because they were so greedy, leveraged, unregulated—whatever. Wallison points out that the troubled institutions were all tangled up in the same sort of investment—mortgage-backed securities (MBS)—and while he avers that part of the crisis has to do with how these were traded, he places the MBS at the center of his analysis.

This approach is straightforward and intuitive, and if it did not lead inexorably to a damning critique of a quarter-century’s worth of federal housing policy, it would probably be widely

accepted. Wallison contends that the MBS market was dangerous because mortgage-lending standards had steadily declined since the mid-1990s. He traces this to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which, after 1992, was empowered to create affordable housing goals for the GSEs. HUD did this with gusto, insisting that low- and moderate-income buyers become an ever-greater share of Fannie’s and Freddie’s books. In response to this, the GSEs lowered their lending standards; and because they were such a huge part of the market, everybody’s standards were lowered.

share of the domestic economy. Calamity arrived because of mistakes at the top: The Basel Accords lowered capital requirements for holding MBSs; the federal government was too slow to suspend mark-to-market rules, forcing firms to report huge accounting losses; the federal government’s response was ill-considered and unpredictable, especially its decision to bail out Bear Stearns while letting the much larger Lehman Brothers fall into bankruptcy.

Again, this is a perfectly intuitive thesis that does not exclude other proposed causes, although Wallison is rightly skeptical of some. He makes a



Franklin Raines: ‘We manage our political risk with the same intensity that we manage our credit and interest rate risks’ (1999).

This had two powerful effects. First, it facilitated a housing market bubble that, as Wallison notes, was substantially larger and longer than any of its predecessors. Second, it increased the potential for defaults. Wallison demonstrates the commonsensical notion that as mortgage lending abandons “prime” standards, default rates rise. So long as the bubble was expanding, this was not a problem, as borrowers could refinance because of rising home values. But when the market turned, as it did in 2006, defaults rose, and banks that had invested in mortgage-backed securities were on the hook.

This alone should not have been catastrophic, because (as Wallison notes) the housing market is a relatively small

compelling case, but it is such a technical issue that his should not be the final word. It should prompt open debate, discussion, and deliberation; instead, we’re treated to accusations of Hitlerism.

Why all the fuss?

There is a diverse group of people—affordable housing advocates, primary lenders, real estate agents, home builders, and more—that does not want the public to consider the possibility that HUD’s policies had *anything* to do with the crisis. That Wallison makes the contrary argument, and that he does so in a persuasive manner, makes him dangerous. And what we have seen is a classic example of Schattschneider’s mobilization of bias: interests organizing to

declare a certain viewpoint illegitimate before debate has actually begun.

Wallison hints at the politics behind these arguments. His professional background, however, is in law and finance, and *Hidden in Plain Sight* follows accordingly. He does not spend much time focusing on the powerful interest groups with private stakes in housing policy. But considering the politics of affordable housing policy sharpens the story. Wallison often portrays the GSEs as operating at the behest of HUD, even accepting losses in pursuit of its LMI goals. But the relationship is quite complicated. Housing policy during 1992-2008 was dominated by a kind of bootleggers-and-baptists coalition: affordable housing advocates who wanted easy credit for LMI borrowers and private interests in pursuit of profit. The bargain they hammered out was for profit and affordability, risks be damned. This is why HUD could push the GSEs for ever more LMI loans but was simultaneously ignorant of the questionable practices used to achieve these goals.

The GSEs were at the center of this coalition from the beginning, especially Fannie Mae. These were not strictly private firms, nor were they part of the public bureaucracy. Fannie and Freddie were instrumentalities of the government: privately owned companies with a public mandate that implied Uncle Sam would bail them out in case of trouble. This guarantee was extremely valuable: The Congressional Budget Office estimated that it was worth \$23 billion by 2005; CBO also estimated that Fannie and Freddie kept about a third of this bounty for itself.

This was the foundation of the interest-group alliance that formed. To protect this enormous federal rent, the GSEs aligned with affordable housing advocates, primary lenders, and home builders. They all had a shared interest in keeping oversight to a minimum. Thus, insofar as the GSEs accepted losses from LMI mortgages, it was only to protect their substantial cut of that \$23 billion subsidy.

Indeed, Fannie Mae was an integral player in writing the very law that HUD used to increase its afford-

able housing goals. It made sure, for instance, that HUD was hamstrung in developing capital requirements, that its regulators had to go to Congress for funds, and that oversight did not reside in a more competent department such as Treasury.

Wallison is not writing about politics, so he only touches on these subjects intermittently. But bringing in politics makes for an even gloomier narrative: It is not merely that federal housing policy was short-sighted, providing loans to people who could not pay them back; *it was designed this way* by those who profited from the irresponsibility.

Where was Congress in all of this? It has an oversight role to play; why did it not play that role? The troubling answer: These groups, especially Fannie Mae, were experts at the inside game of influence peddling, and they effectively bought Congress off. As Franklin Raines, the former CEO of Fannie Mae, said in 1999: "We manage our political risk with the same

intensity that we manage our credit and interest rate risks." Indeed. The GSEs walked away basically unscathed from a massive accounting scandal in 2003—and later acquired substantially more subprime loans than anyone knew. That was not accidental. Their regulator was impotent because the GSEs and their allies leaned on Congress to make it so. Then they leaned on Congress to look the other way for the next two decades.

Wallison ends on a distressing note. He asserts that because experts have embraced a false narrative about the crisis, the remedy of Dodd-Frank will not protect us from the next calamity. Actually, it's worse than this. The answer to the financial crisis may have been hidden in plain sight, but the failure to see it was willful. A powerful coalition of interest groups dominated housing policy for a generation, and they still do—despite the damage that policy caused in the Great Recession. ♦



Isn't It Romantic

The late Peter Gay underestimates the movement.

BY JAMES SEATON

Peter Gay, who died May 12 at the age of 91, had a long and estimable academic career, writing "ground-breaking books on the Enlightenment, the Victorian middle classes, Sigmund Freud, Weimar culture and the cultural situation of Jews in Germany," according to the *New York Times*. Unfortunately, his last book, on Romanticism, was neither ground-breaking nor estimable.

Why the Romantics Matter is a short book—only 117 pages of text—but it

James Seaton, professor of English at Michigan State, is the author, most recently, of Literary Criticism from Plato to Postmodernism: The Humanistic Alternative.

Why the Romantics Matter

by Peter Gay
Yale, 176 pp., \$24

could have been shorter. Despite obligatory references to "the rich romantic past," Gay seems unable to convince himself, let alone his readers, that the Romantics really do matter. His last, summarizing paragraph confesses that 21st-century readers, himself included, just don't find Romantic poems or novels worth their time: "We no longer read much William Wordsworth—we have T.S. Eliot. We no longer amuse our free hours with Sir Walter Scott—we have Virginia Woolf."

As this passage suggests, for Gay, the Romantics are important only as predecessors of the moderns, to whom he devotes the lion's share of his attention. One might think a focus on modernist writers and artists would be out of place in a book about the Romantics, but Gay solves that problem by repeatedly referring to modernist authors as the "new romantics" or "serious late romantics." Oscar Wilde, for example, is both "a belated romantic" and "an heir to the romantics."

One problem with this approach is that most of the modernists not only did not regard themselves as "new romantics" but saw themselves as opponents of Romanticism. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot rejected the Romantic notion that art, especially poetry, was an expression of feeling: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." He aligned himself with classicism against Romanticism, asserting in "The Function of Criticism" that the difference between classicism and Romanticism could be described as "the difference between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic."

In the Romantic view, the greatness of art derives from the greatness of the soul of the artist. Thus, the work of art is not so much valuable in itself but, instead, as a means of approaching the inner self of the author. In his "Defence of Poetry," Percy Bysshe Shelley claimed that the actual written poem was only a "feeble shadow" of the thoughts of the poet: "[W]hen composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet." According to this view, the role of criticism would be to search for the "original conceptions" on the basis of the inevitably limited written record supplied by the poem and also by referring to what could be learned about the life of the poet. The poet was more important than the poem.

This hierarchy was reversed by the New Criticism that arose as a response to

modernist masterpieces such as Eliot's *Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. For the New Critics, it was the work itself that was important. The biography of the poet or novelist was, if not entirely irrelevant, decidedly secondary. Almost everything worth knowing about a poem or novel could be discovered by paying close attention to the work itself. A work of art was not (as the Romantics assumed) so much an expression of emotion as it was a self-contained object. While poems by Romantics like Wordsworth, Shelley, and Lord Byron seemed to document the personal or spiritual life of the poet himself, modernist works were more like the product of a craftsman whose technical skill effaced any trace of personality.



Shelley Memorial, University College, Oxford

One can make a case that the modernists were, despite themselves, more influenced by the Romantics than they acknowledged. As Gay rightly observes, they shared an antagonism to the values associated with the middle class, or what the modernists (like the Marxists) called the *bourgeoisie*. Both the Romantics and the modernists responded to what they saw as society's lack of proper respect for artists by making extravagant claims on the artists' behalf, perhaps the most famous of which is Shelley's assertion that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Peter Gay, however, makes no case at all, as though simply labeling the modernists "new romantics" or "late romantics" is enough. If one wants to

seriously consider "why the romantics matter," one would have to turn elsewhere. A good place to begin would be M.H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), which not only analyzes Romantic poetry and thought with insightful precision but also makes a case for the contemporary value of the Romantic vision as an alternative to the rejection of "the culture of Western humanism" and "all life-affirming values" by what Lionel Trilling once called the "adversary culture."

For Abrams, "The Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what to many writers seemed the imminence of chaos." If the Romantics rejected the dogmas of organized religion, it was only to "save what one could save of its experiential relevance and values." The Romantics' "poetic imagination was a moral imagination and their vision of the world a moral vision." Abrams believed a sympathetic study of the Romantics would reveal their "reaffirmation of the elementary positives of Western humanism."

In contrast, the self-described humanist Irving Babbitt contended, in *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), that "there is no such thing as romantic morality" since the Romantic emphasis on "moments of superlative intensity" translates in practice to the notion that "the supreme good . . . is identical with the supreme thrill." An embrace of the Romantic vision leads inevitably to disaster for both the individual and society, Babbitt argues, citing the evidence of Romantic poetry itself:

a movement which began by asserting the goodness of man and the loveliness of nature ended by producing the greatest literature of despair the world has ever seen.

M.H. Abrams and Irving Babbitt disagree about almost everything concerning Romanticism except the notion that the Romantics do, indeed, matter. In the first part of the 20th century, Babbitt saw a culture in which thought was divorced from feeling in a way that deformed both. Romanticism, according to Babbitt, paradoxically turned out to encourage scientism,

since the Romantic rejection of reason created a void that a scientific reason unguided by moral principles subsequently filled.

Toward the end of the same century, Abrams saw a society whose leading cultural authorities seemed to reject any kind of morality in favor of a sophisticated nihilism. The Romantics, Abrams believed, were anything but nihilists; and their works were still a resource for reaffirming humanism in “an age of profounder

dereliction and dismay than Shelley and Wordsworth knew.”

The debate between proponents of Romanticism, like Abrams, and its critics, like Babbitt, involves issues that remain important today. Both writers defend views of life and literature that are deeply considered and deeply felt. In the ongoing debates about classicism, Romanticism, humanism, and, ultimately, about human life, the works of Abrams and Babbitt are permanently valuable contributions. ♦

BCA

Numero Uno

The not-so-secret Chinese strategy for global supremacy.

BY ALEXANDER GRAY



Chinese destroyer ‘Harbin’ visits Pearl Harbor (1997).

Warning against the threat from China has been a staple of national security literature since at least the late 1990s. This genre typically begins by compiling a list of the most alarming statistics related to China’s economic potential, military advancements, and global misdeeds—environmental degradation, cyberattacks, support for rogue

Alexander Gray is a writer in Washington.

The Hundred-Year Marathon
China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower
by Michael Pillsbury
Holt, 336 pp., \$30

regimes, and human rights abuses, to name a few—before informing readers that the United States must act now before it is too late.

In the traditional telling, China

is advancing across all measures of national power toward an ominous end-state, never fully defined, that must, somehow, negatively affect the United States and its interests. Many volumes portray China as almost being on autopilot, progressing by leaps and bounds toward superpower status merely because it can—without a larger strategy of how to get there, or what a Chinese-dominated world would look like.

Here, Michael Pillsbury fills in these considerable gaps. He is uniquely qualified to do so: A fluent Mandarin speaker and China hand since the Nixon administration, Pillsbury has decades of experience directly engaging with the ultra-nationalists in China’s military and bureaucracy, who he refers to as the *ying pai*.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Pillsbury asserts, the *ying pai* are not just strident voices in Beijing’s bureaucratic wilderness, chest-thumping about using nuclear weapons against Los Angeles but largely inconsequential in internal Communist party debates. Time and again, he demonstrates, it is China’s hawks who have dictated the course of Beijing’s actions and the so-called moderates who have found themselves marginalized and outmaneuvered.

Pillsbury’s scholarship is buttressed by an eye-popping amount of declassified material, including detailed accounts of interviews with high-level defectors. It is this treasure trove of material that forms the basis of Pillsbury’s key claim: that China, under the influence of hardline *ying pai* since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, is methodically undertaking a “hundred-year marathon” strategy to displace the United States as the global hegemon and impose a China-centric world order. If the claim of a “secret strategy” to dominate the world sounds unduly conspiratorial, Pillsbury quickly demonstrates the considerable merit, and deft nuance, of this assertion.

Any armchair student of China can tell you the value of history in Chinese strategic thinking, memorably expressed by Zhou Enlai’s apocryphal comment to Richard Nixon in 1972

that it was still too early to evaluate the impact of the French Revolution. Pillsbury devotes considerable attention to the “Warring States Period” in Chinese history, roughly from 475 B.C. until the Qin dynasty unified China in 221 B.C. In this anarchic period, characterized by persistent competition between rival fiefdoms, many of the lessons inspiring China’s hawks and their approach to America can be found. Pillsbury’s interactions with prominent *ying pai*, and his willingness to wade through their voluminous writings, reveal a Chinese leadership carefully applying the lessons of ancient history to modern-day interactions with the United States.

China sees the United States as a hegemon in terminal decline, much like Great Britain in the early 20th century. Based on their reading of history, both ancient and modern, the Chinese leadership has determined to tread relatively lightly for the foreseeable future in the hopes of avoiding an outright clash with an America still able to respond forcefully to Beijing’s march toward superpower status. Pillsbury references a Chinese proverb involving a rising power who inquired about “the weight of the Emperor’s cauldrons”—thereby alerting the ruler to the rising power’s desire to overthrow the existing order and, after victory, remove even the emperor’s cauldrons from his palace.

The lesson: It is far better to appear weak and unthreatening while building one’s own strength.

In the meantime, while China continues its ascent, Beijing will content itself with other lessons from the “Warring States” period, such as sowing doubt about its true intentions among the elite of its competitor. Hence, the assiduous courting of Western academics and intellectuals who are considered “pro-China” while vigorously confronting and denying access to those seen as more skeptical of Beijing’s actions. China has grasped that, in a hundred-year marathon, the United States is far less likely to react negatively to its rise if prominent American voices are consistently painting a more benign view of Beijing.

Pillsbury’s access to high-level defectors not only reveals the influence of ancient Chinese stratagems on its modern rulers; it also exposes the surreal anti-American propaganda emanating from China’s government. In the *ying pai*-sanctioned telling—taught in party schools and printed in official textbooks—the United States has been consciously seeking to weaken China since the administration of John Tyler (1841-45), probably the least-likely American president to be cast in such a role. Abraham Lincoln, William McKinley, and nearly every president to the present day is said to have actively sought a weakened and humiliated China. Whatever the public expressions of fondness for the United States, Pillsbury makes a convincing case that Beijing has invested tremendous resources in undermining perceptions of America for the purposes of furthering long-term competition.

Having examined China’s strategic thinking, and the dystopian view of America prevalent among China’s hawks, Pillsbury asks the overarching question: Should China succeed in eclipsing the United States as the

world’s economic and military hegemon, what would a Chinese-dominated global order look like? The military dimensions are particularly alarming, assuming China’s ability to truly restrict American access to the Asia-Pacific and alter relations with allies and partners like Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines. But Pillsbury also delves into the less-noticed changes a Chinese world order would bring, from environmental degradation with a global reach to unchecked support for brutish regimes (Zimbabwe, Sudan, etc.) that have valuable natural resources.

With our presidential election fast approaching, the time is ripe to examine the trajectory of American relations with the world’s second-largest economy. Rather than simply accepting Beijing’s stage-managed image, American policymakers would do well to understand the larger goals animating China’s rise and consider the consequences of a continued American retreat from global leadership. The marathon is hardly over, and the United States need not resign itself to spectator status, waiting for its decline at the finish line. ♦

BCA

Whitney’s New Digs

Alas, the very model of a modern major museum.

BY DANIEL GELERNTER

New York

In 1966, the Whitney Museum of American Art moved into a new building designed by Marcel Breuer that perfectly embodied its institutional contempt for museumgoers. Building and curatorship worked hand-in-glove to deliver a truly unpleasant experience: The permanent collection was so far above the lobby that only mountain-climbers could tackle the stairs. Everyone else spent five

Daniel Gelernter is an artist and CEO of a tech startup.

minutes waiting to be stuffed into one of two excruciatingly slow elevators—emerging at the top to find the curators had hidden all the art.

The Whitney collection is unbelievably strong: Its masterpieces by Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, Stuart Davis, and Edward Hopper (who left his personal collection to the Whitney) are even better than the collections at the Metropolitan or the Museum of Modern Art. But at the Whitney, masterpieces would spend most of their time inside storage vaults to make room



Eighth-floor gallery: exposed roof beams and slanted skylights

for their unknown, lesser-known, and downright worse contemporaries.

Now, the Whitney has opened its lavish new headquarters in the Meatpacking District. The new building, which has twice the exhibition space of the old one, was designed by Renzo Piano, who is extremely, delightfully charismatic. He told the press about his vision for the new museum—how the building “speaks with” the city on one side, the world on the other (the world being represented, in this case, by New Jersey). He pointed out that the upstairs galleries are some of the largest column-free spaces you’ll find in any museum and that there is practically no division between the lobby (“which I call the piazza, because I’m Italian”) and the cobbled street outside. The press adored him, this writer included.

The building is, indeed, fascinating—and like so many museums, it would be a tremendous success if it weren’t a museum. Were it, for example, a workspace for a startup company, it would be fantastic. As an art gallery for a large audience, however, it’s a disaster. It is extraordinary how all the worst aspects of the Breuer building have been replicated. Access to the upper floors is, again, by way

of a totally inadequate elevator bank. Once you get to the galleries (floors five through eight), the only staircase available is outdoors. There is an emergency staircase indoors, however, and a desperate guard trying to cope with the rush-hour elevator crush suggested we give it a try. I couldn’t suppress a bitter laugh when we walked down eight flights of stairs and ended up not in the lobby but on the sidewalk. The flow is absolutely *pazzo*.

The best parts of the building don’t have any paintings in them. The view of the Hudson from a fifth-floor glass lobby with comfy sofas is fantastic, even cathartic. The outdoor spaces are magnificent. The paintings, meanwhile, are dwarfed by high ceilings, overwhelmed by empty space, and washed out by blue sunlight from massive windows at the east and west ends of each floor. (Ask artists why they prefer a northern exposure.)

The inaugural exhibition, which occupies all four gallery floors, is called *America Is Hard to See*—and the curators have done their best to keep it that way. The organization is bizarre: Each gallery floor is nominally devoted to a segment of the 20th century, but the different segments overlap, and it is impossible to predict where a

particular artist will be. Everything is scattered hither and yon, and an artist may find his two or three paintings separated by quite a walk (or quite a wait at the elevators). This is the result of dealing with art thematically and academically rather than visually: None of the curators appears to have wondered at any point whether the results of their speculations on the American Century actually *looked* good.

This perverse approach has one curious benefit: When you finally stumble onto a great painting—and there are perhaps six or seven on the walls right now—it does feel like a

moment of discovery, like struggling through the gray and grim-faced crowds on Fifth Avenue and suddenly bumping into a long-lost friend. De Kooning’s 1960 masterpiece *Door to the River* is one of the century’s greatest works. You might have seen it at MoMA’s masterful de Kooning retrospective in 2011, but the Whitney only very rarely lets it appear on its own walls. That painting alone is worth the steep \$22 admission. Hopper’s masterpiece, *Early Sunday Morning* (1930), is also on view. So is one of Pollock’s greatest works, *Number 27* (1950).

The curatorial assistants with whom I chatted all reflected the main party line: They are actually proud of how many inconsequential artists are hanging next to the masters and of how many masterpieces remain stuck in their vaults. Of course, New Yorkers might have expected more, considering (though they may not know it) their tax dollars contributed to the new museum to the tune of \$55 million. But if you did expect more, you have only yourself to blame for forgetting that the Whitney doesn’t like people. This magnificent new building, and the truly appalling curators, will ensure that the Whitney continues not liking people for generations to come. ♦

ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Fable for Moderns

The Cubs will win the World Series. And the Fed will raise interest rates. BY JOE QUEENAN

The very old ones—*los viejos*—still tell the tale of the Cubs and the Fed.

As children, they heard stories about the legendary Cubs squads of the past, teams with players like Tinkers and Evers and Chance, Banks and Santo, Sandberg and Maddux. And, oh yes, Ferguson Jenkins. And they were told that one day the Cubs would win the World Series. *Trust us*, they were told: The Cubbies will hoist the trophy, lift the curse, stir the embers, slay the dragon. The Cubbies will not only survive; they will prevail.

Maybe not in 1909. Or in 1910. Or 1932. Or 1946. Or 1968. Or 1984. And certainly not after that idiot knocked the ball out of Moises Alou's glove in 2003, when the Cubs were holding a seemingly insurmountable 3-0 lead over the Marlins in Game Six of the National League Championship Series. But someday. Someday, they were told by the very old ones (long before they themselves became the very old ones), the Cubs would win the World Series. It would happen. It would. They only had to be patient.

But the village elders tell another tale, this one about the Federal Reserve and the short-term interest rates. When *los viejos* were very young—*los jóvenes muy jóvenes*—interest rates in America had climbed into the high teens. This was back in the early eighties, when inflation ravaged the economy and the mujahedeen were our friends and people bought records by the Thompson Twins. This was in the dark and cruel reign of the ignominious Jimmy Carter, a fool's fool,

a clown among nincompoops, The Prince of Bozos.

The young ones were told that interest rates would be raised from their current levels. In due course. Any day now. Soon. But then recession after recession crippled the economy, and the Fed kept slashing interest rates until they reached practically nothing. And the interest rates stayed that way.

And all along the Fed promised the people that they would raise interest rates, because otherwise no one would ever be able to earn enough on their life's savings to retire. Be patient, said the Fed. Please, very old ones, please tend to your knitting. Please, *los viejos*, please just chill. We will raise interest rates. We will.

But the Fed said another thing. They said that they would only raise interest rates when they felt that the economy was strong enough that they could do so without plunging the entire planet into another brutal recession. But then the third-quarter consumer spending numbers were disappointing. And then the first-quarter jobs report was disappointing. And then the second-quarter corporate earnings reports were disappointing.

And the stock market started to quaver. So they delayed. They hesitated. They dropped chimerical hints about impending rate hikes. They encouraged economists to study the tea leaves, examine the entrails, think outside the box, read between the lines of their enigmatic *pronunciamientos*. They said that this could not go on forever. All good things would come to those who waited.

So the people waited. And always, the rumors were heard. Surely the Fed will raise interest rates in January.

Surely the Fed will raise interest rates by the end of the summer. Surely the Fed will raise interest rates before our children go to college. Surely the Fed will raise interest rates before the 2020 Summer Olympics. Surely the Fed will raise interest rates before Armageddon. Surely—well, the very old ones can tell you the rest.

"Fed Can't Stand Pat Much Longer," said the *Wall Street Journal*. "Stocks Soar as Fed Softens Rate Plan," reported *Barron's*. "Strong Buck Complicates the Fed's Rate Policy," announced the *Los Angeles Times*. And so on and so forth.

Now the old ones are very, very old. They are very old, and their hearts are very heavy. They are still waiting for the Cubs to win the World Series. To be honest, they would settle for the Cubs winning the National League pennant. Actually, a lot of them would be happy if the Cubs merely sneaked into the playoffs for a quick peck-on-the-cheek and an early exit. But it will never happen. The *viejos* know this, and it makes them sad.

Other things make them sad—drought, global warming, their humongous cable TV bills, the last 17 Bruce Willis movies—but this makes them *really* sad. For they have waited their entire lives for the Cubs to stop stinking up the joint, and they know now that the Cubs will never stop. They will talk about winning, but they will never do it. Because they are the Cubs. And to be a Cub is to stink.

The very old ones know this. The very old ones know many things. That's the whole point of being very old. They know that the Los Angeles Clippers will never win the NBA championship. They know that Led Zeppelin will never reunite. Nor, probably, will Oasis. They know that the English will never give back Gibraltar. They know that Texas will never give back Texas. They know that Godot is not coming. And they know that the Fed will never, ever, ever raise interest rates.

They'll just keep talking about it. And the Cubs will keep talking about winning. And they will be talking about it forever. ♦

Joe Queenan is the author, most recently, of *One for the Books*.

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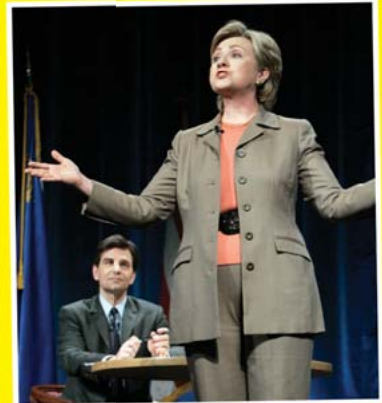
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