the weekly Standard

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TRUMP AND THE GOP
WILLIAM KRISTOL • GARY SCHMITT

Growing Old Without Growing Up

MATT LABASH goes to sleepaway camp for adults

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

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COVER BY GARY LOCKE

The Trappings of Fame

With a little more than a year left in his presidency, Barack Obama has lately been in an elegiac mood, projecting a certain nervous confidence—"I've got 12 months left to squeeze every ounce of change I can while I'm still in office"—as well as reflecting on the lessons of experience. Most of his remarks have been boilerplate Obama, but one recent interview with NPR's Steve Inskeep struck The Scrapbook as revealing.

Mr. Inskeep, of course, was appropriately deferential to the president—this is National Public Radio, after all—and the questions (and answers) were largely anodyne. But when asked what advice he would offer his would-be successors in the Oval Office, Obama had this to say: "If you are interested just because you like the title or you like the trappings or you like the power or the fame or the celebrity, that side of it wears off pretty quick [sic]. At least it has for me."

From The Scrapbook's perspective, this is all too obvious. In a democracy, anybody who pursues public office for the sake of celebrity, or mere self-satisfaction, is bound to encounter resistance and frustration. The thrill of victory, as it were, is soon followed by the agony of defeat; you cannot summon success or popularity with the snap of a finger.

But what, exactly, is Obama saying? Is there a candidate at the moment who seems to be in the contest because he or she likes "the title or . . . the trappings or . . . the fame or the celebrity" of the presidency? More to the point, have we ever had a president who pursued the office for such puerile reasons?

To be sure, all politicians, including our greatest presidents, are creatures of ambition; and it is naïve to suggest that the office seeks the man or that aspirants aren't motivated by the pursuit of power. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan—all sought power, in their way, and all judged themselves uniquely equipped to lead the country. But their goals were political, not personal, power; even their severest critics would never suggest that their ambition was prompted by a hunger for "celebrity" or because they liked "the title or . . . trappings" of the presidency. And yet, as Obama told Steve Inskeep, all that "[wore] off pretty quick, at least . . . for me."

In The Scrapbook's view, this is an especially ironic observation from a president propelled to the White House from his first term in the Senate, whose "hope and change" platform was historically devoid of content, whose churlishness is chronic, who won the Nobel Peace Prize after nine months in office, who is questioned more often by entertainers than by journalists, who accepted his party's nomination on a neoclassical stage set, and who has raised the standards of presidential narcissism to impressive heights.

Which is to say: For once, Barack Obama's condescension might well have been aimed, inadvertently, at Barack Obama. ♦

What They Were Thinking

Only one person shows up at an Iowa campaign event for former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley.

Mozilla in Decline

In early December, *Wired* magazine published an interesting feature headlined "Mozilla Is Flailing When the Internet Needs It the Most." It seems that Mozilla, which makes the popular Internet browser Firefox, has seen its share of the market decrease "from 21.3 percent of browser usage in November 2012 to 11.5 percent this month."

You might recall that Mozilla was embroiled in controversy in 2014 because it had named Brendan Eich (a Mozilla cofounder, as it happens) as its CEO, only to force him to resign shortly afterward, when it

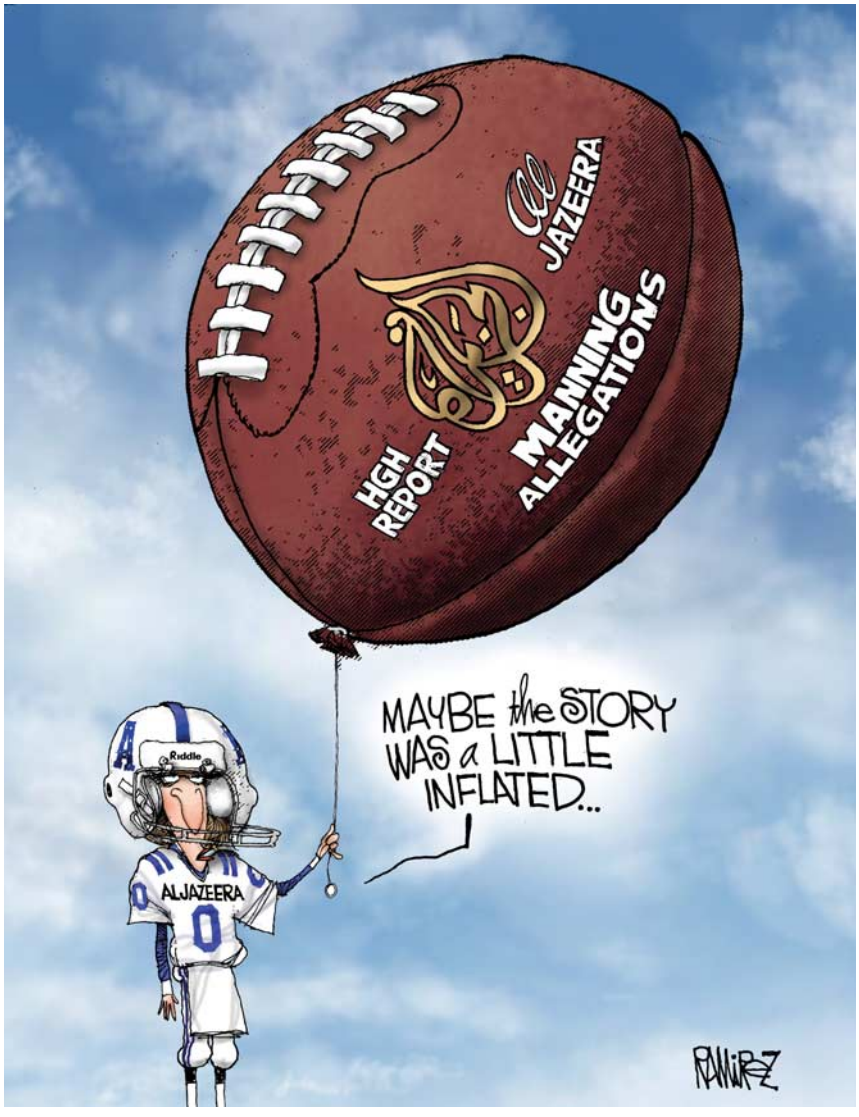
emerged he had given money to support California's 2008 ballot proposition against gay marriage. There was no evidence Eich had ever done anything improper other than hold traditional views about marriage; even gay marriage pioneer Andrew Sullivan said the witch hunt against Eich "should disgust anyone interested in a tolerant and diverse society."

Nonetheless, Eich was sacrificed on the altar of Silicon Valley progressivism, and now the company he helped to found is foundering. The controversy certainly hurt the company. Indeed, The Scrapbook personally knows many people who stopped using Firefox out of disgust over the treatment of Eich. But while we wish we could say that Firefox's declining popularity was directly related to Eich's ouster, what's happening to Firefox is a saga familiar to many tech companies: Google is eating their lunch.

Google's Chrome browser now has 31 percent market share, thanks both to the company's marketing muscle and savvy engineers. Both Microsoft's Edge browser and Firefox have adopted Google's platform for browser extensions—little add-on programs that can make your browser do all kinds of useful things, from displaying the weather to copying text without formatting—making Google the industry standard.

Of course, Eich's place in tech history was secured long before the controversy over his gay marriage views. That's because Eich invented the JavaScript programming language, which is still one of the most common programming languages used on the web today.

Again, there are many reasons to think that Google would have hurt Mozilla's market share no matter what happened. But it's not a stretch to imagine that Mozilla would be much better off under the leadership of the guy who literally invented JavaScript. Mozilla is in many respects a good company; it's a free software model, supported by a nonprofit foundation. It long served as a healthy counterbalance to the bigger and avaricious tech companies it competed with. Mozilla's enthusiastic embrace of liberal fascism, however, means we will not be among those lamenting its slow decline. ♦



The Big He Returns

In recent weeks, The Scrapbook has not been unique in coming to three related conclusions about the Hillary Clinton machine. One, she's already doubling down on running a "War on Women," identity-politics-driven campaign. Two, Hillary Clinton is such a terrible candidate and this female-centric campaign is so ham-handed—see the article "7 things Hillary Clinton has in common with your abuela" on her website for a good example of why it's no bueno—that hubby Bill has been hitting the trail to gin up support. And three, compensating for a charisma deficiency by leaning on your notoriously lecherous husband can't help but put a damper on the whole "Girl Power" theme.

So whatever one might otherwise think about Donald Trump, and let's just say he didn't exactly get a holiday gift basket from The Weekly Standard, it has been gratifying to watch him shove this deep contradiction in the faces of the

liberal establishment. He's been at it on Twitter for a while, tweeting things such as "If Hillary thinks she can unleash her husband, with his terrible record of women abuse, while playing the women's card on me, she's wrong!" It's a smart move for Trump, because while he has his own poor track record of sexist comments, he's a veritable Sir Galahad in comparison with "the Big He." Even the *Washington Post*'s Ruth Marcus had to write a column conceding that while "Trump has smeared women because of their looks," Bill Clinton "has preyed on them, and in a workplace setting where he was by far the superior. That is uncomfortable for Clinton supporters but it is unavoidably true."

Still, Marcus's criticisms of Clinton seem carefully couched rather than expressly condemnatory. In general, the media are at a loss for how to handle this glaring contradiction at the heart of Hillary Clinton's campaign to be the first female president. Take this word salad from NBC's Savannah Guthrie when interviewing Trump on December 29: "You mention Monica Lewinsky. Are you saying an alleged extramarital affair, that of course he has now admitted, is that fair game?"

We do enjoy how Guthrie's question presupposes that Bill Clinton's admission he had an affair after angrily and repeatedly lying to the public about it means talking about his predatory behavior is somehow unfair. Trump was quick to point out to Guthrie, "If he's admitted it, you don't have to use the word 'alleged.'"

But that was nothing compared with what CNN's Don Lemon engaged in when he had to discuss the topic. Lemon asked columnist and retired Army colonel Kurt Schlichter whether it was appropriate for Trump to say that Hillary Clinton got "schlonged" by Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic primary. Schlichter, who is a critic of Trump, responded, "Don, it's going to take a lot more for me to get upset at a woman who enabled a guy who turned the Oval Office into a frat house and his intern into a humidor. . . . I would need Stephen Hawking to find the theoretical limit of how little I care about Donald Trump's silly jokes."

Lemon persisted in arguing that Trump's recent comments were somehow more relevant than Clinton's past behavior. "Okay, have you ever heard a presidential candidate say things like this?" Lemon asked Schlichter. "No," Schlichter responded, "but I know of a president who, well, turned his intern into a humidor, so we set the standard a little lower than Donald Trump has even approached." Backed into a corner where it was impossible to defend the Clintons, Lemon cut off Schlichter.

While nobody is looking forward to relitigating the vulgar particulars of Bill Clinton's Oval Office shenanigans, it may be inevitable if Hillary Clinton wants to campaign for president by insisting that her chief qualification is an extra X chromosome. We are, however, looking forward to watching Bill and Hillary squirm during the incessant barrage of awkward questions her campaign is going to prompt. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'I am a poetry lover. My knowledge of American poetry is fairly vast. And yet, I always find myself coming back to the beautiful simple elegance of 'Caged Bird,' by Maya Angelou. It's . . ." (Shonda Rhimes, *New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 22, 2015). ♦

More Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Qatar-based Al Jazeera—a quite credible and respected international news organization (contrary to [Mike] Ditka's assertion), the CNN of the Middle East . . ." (*Sports Illustrated* columnist Peter King, on the allegations of HGH use by Peyton Manning, Dec. 28, 2015). ♦

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Beem Me Up

It is sad to walk down a poor street lined with $60,000 houses and to see, as one often does, a $45,000 car in one of the driveways. It is often some kind of macho Mustang, freshly washed, gaudy of hue, souped up, and glittery with detailing. What are these people thinking? Why not get a perfectly good car for $5,000 and put the remainder towards a $100,000 house so your first-grader doesn't have to sleep in the utility closet? What George Orwell said of poor people's miserable dietary habits can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to their taste in cars: "When you are unemployed, which is to say when you are underfed, harassed, bored and miserable, you don't want to eat dull wholesome food," he wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. "You want something a little bit 'tasty.'"

But I never found cars exciting. I didn't own one until I was well into my 20s. Then I owned several in rapid succession. It was always the same. They'd steam, make noise, acquire nicknames like "The Old Shitbox," and die. During the Clinton administration I had a 1983 Nissan Stanza with manual transmission, a driver-side door pocked with cigarette burns, and a back bumper that had been half clawed off by a pillar in an Arlington, Virginia, garage. I had bought it for $1,800 from a journalist colleague in 1992. "Careful on the highway," she said as she left. "It sometimes loses power."

"What do you mean, 'loses power'?" I asked.

I found out one midnight in mid-January, near the top of the Delaware Memorial Bridge, driving back from New York with my girlfriend (now, amazingly enough, my wife). With the pedal to the metal I had the car growling loudly up the incline at its maximum speed of 53 mph when it made a *foop! foop!* sound and the life drained out of it. Had we made it to the top of the bridge, we might have coasted down. But we didn't. So I put the thing in neutral, looked through the back windshield, said "Hang on!" and backed down the bridge as the highway traffic whooshed by us. At the bottom there was an emergency call box. The state trooper was cursing on the line before I could even tell him what was wrong. "You the guy we saw on the closed-circuit backing that Shitbox down the bridge?" he hollered.

DAVE CLEGG

Those days are gone. I own a limousine now. Almost 20 years ago my father—widowed, remarried, and intoxicated by the dot-com boom—took a vacation in Germany and got the idea he would buy a car there. Funny, it was he who had taught me there were better things to spend your money on than cars. What a collection of jalopies we had owned: a rattletrap Eisenhower-era Plymouth Valiant that he drove into the 1970s; a Kennedy-vintage seven-mile-a-gallon Buick Electra 225, which we got just in time for the first oil crisis; a Mercury in which the sun had baked cracks in the fake leather under the windshield, releasing runnels of cheap foam. I wondered what kind of Teutonic trashcan he would come back with.

But in the grip of an idea, my father was obsessive, imaginative, relentless. In for a penny, in for a pound. He got a BMW. Not just a BMW but an extra-long 740iL, with a car phone and a six-CD changer in the trunk. It was the most expensive object he'd ever bought, very much including our house. The thing was preposterous. The only people I knew who drove BMWs were certain of my rapacious college classmates who would rather talk about leveraged buyouts and debt-for-equity swaps than Wyatt's love poetry or Botticelli's oils. You could recognize them by the big-lensed goggle-eyed glasses that made them look like carp, by their margarine- and salmon-colored "power" ties, by their two-toned, white-collared "power" shirts . . . and by their BMWs, which they called "Beemers."

When my father died last spring, it was my responsibility to dispose of the car. I loved having this little piece of him in the weeks after he died—the mints he'd left in the door, his golf tees in the glove box, a shopping list in his handwriting under the radio—but it was way too grand for me to keep. It was with a heavy heart that I took it to the dealers. I told my sisters we would share the proceeds. "The *proceeds*?" they laughed. The car oozed oil all over the ground! Its doors were rusted! It shook when you drove it in the city or in hot weather! I asked my wife if she thought it was safe to park such an elegant car in front of the house, and she looked at me as if I were out of my mind.

At the lot they offered me $1,800. Had this not been precisely what I paid for the Nissan Shitbox in 1992, I might have left it. As it was, I drove it and parked it in the driveway.

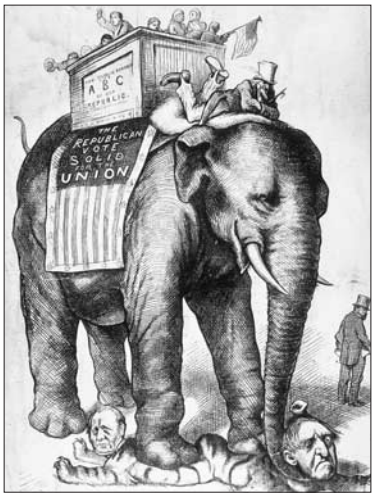
Christopher Caldwell

the weekly Standard

Happy New Year?

Well, we've endured 2015, the next to last year of the Obama administration. It's not been without damage to the country—both to its constitutional fabric and its standing in the world. But endured we have. One more year to go.

The point, though, per William Faulkner, is not just to endure but to prevail. America can prevail if today's conservatism prevails—by which we mean a conservatism that incorporates most that is good about yesteryear's liberalism and today's conservatism, and that is also willing to think and act anew, as our case is new. And conservatism can most easily prevail if the political party that is the home of conservatism prevails—the Republican party.



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In fact, the prospects for victory in 2016 aren't bad. Barack Obama began 2015 with (in the *Real Clear Politics* averages) a 43 percent approval rating and a 52 percent disapproval rating. He ends the year in almost exactly the same place, with a 44 percent approval and 52 percent disapproval. He has no upward momentum going into his last year. It's hard for a party to retain the White House when only 44 percent of Americans approve of the performance of that party's president.

Especially when most Americans also have an unfavorable view of that party's candidate. Hillary Clinton began the year with a 54 to 41 percent favorable rating. She ends the year upside down—at 42 percent favorable, 51 percent unfavorable. This reversal of Clinton's numbers may be the year's most significant development with respect to prospects for 2016. And it's a heartening development for Republicans.

Tests of Clinton matched up against her likely opponents have followed the same trajectory. Take the three most likely GOP nominees: At the beginning of the year, Clinton defeated Marco Rubio by 12 percentage points; now she trails him by 2 points. At the beginning of the year, Clinton crushed Ted Cruz by 15 points; now she leads by less than 1. At the beginning of the year, Clinton led Chris Christie by 10 points; now she leads him, too, by less than 1. Hillary Clinton is an eminently beatable Democratic nominee. Republicans should thank Joe Biden, Elizabeth Warren, and many others for choosing to forgo the race.

On the Republican side, two candidates of whom big things were expected at the beginning of the year, Rand Paul and Jeb Bush, have fizzled. That too is a good thing—unambiguously so in the case of the second Paul, somewhat sadly so in the case of the third Bush. But in both their cases, we could say the system—that is to say, the judgment of the Republican electorate—worked.

So in 2015, from a political point of view, all seemed to be going reasonably well. Only vague difficulties remained, like faraway clouds on a beautiful summer sky. These soon took the shape of Donald Trump—who became in midyear the frontrunner for the Republican nomination and who has remained the frontrunner ever since, despite never having been much of a conservative and despite not being remotely equipped to be president of the United States.

This is a bit of a problem. But in the storied ranks of political demagogues Donald Trump, though talented, is a second-rater. If Republican politicians and conservative leaders can't overcome the challenge of Trump, they're probably not up to the challenges of governance.

One clue to overcoming Trump may have been inadvertently provided by him this week. At a press conference, a reporter mentioned the name of this journal's editor to Trump—with no trigger warning!—and Trump let loose. It culminated in this Ciceronian put-down: "[Kristol's] lost all self-respect. He's very embarrassed even to walk down the street."

Readers of this magazine should be assured that its editor continues to walk, unembarrassed, down the mean streets of Washington, D.C., and McLean, Virginia. But Trump may be on to something when he speaks of self-respect. A conservative movement that would turn to Donald Trump out of frustration or exasperation or desperation or titillation would be a movement lacking in self-respect. A political party—a party with a respectable lineage, the party of Lincoln and Grant, of Theodore Roosevelt and Coolidge, of Reagan and Cheney—that would turn to the likes of Donald Trump would be a party lacking in self-respect.

Is it too much to hope that in 2016 conservatives and Republicans can demonstrate the self-respect of people who remember their heritage and are loyal to their principles? Self-respect is the path to victory. And from victory would follow the chance to truly make America great again.

—William Kristol

Five Words? Next Year Will Be Worse

It was a great year for the Obama administration's foreign policy . . . says the Obama administration. The State Department even created a new hashtag to celebrate the White House's *annus mirabilis*—#2015in5Words. "Protecting Arctic Climate and Communities" and "Protecting Health of Our Ocean" are among two of the administration's big wins.

A few of the claims are of course questionable, like "Winning Fight Against Violent Extremists." Okay, congratulations to the White House for hosting a conference on countering violent extremism in February. But that hardly stopped the Islamic State, the world's most notorious "violent extremists," from gaining ground throughout the Middle East and North Africa, waging a major attack in Paris, and inspiring a massacre of Americans in San Bernardino last month.

Then there's "Iran Peaceful Nuclear Program Ensured." Yes, the White House went to a great deal of trouble to ink a deal with Iran—subordinating much of the rest of American foreign policy to the goal of keeping the Iranians at the negotiating table—but that hardly merits the boast. Obama himself has explained that Iran will have an industrial-scale nuclear weapons program within 15 years. In the meantime, Iran's ballistic missile tests and regional aggression suggest the deal has only fueled the Tehran regime's belligerent ambitions.

There are also egregiously false claims, like "Bringing Peace, Security to Syria." A State Department spokesman defended the claim thus: "The operative word there is 'bringing,' not brought. . . . I don't think anyone would say that we are there or across the finish line."

No, what we would say is that the administration's Syria policy has been a failure of epic proportions. The death toll in Syria over nearly five years has mounted to a quarter of a million, with more than 20,000 civilians killed in the past year alone. The vast majority of these casualties are the work of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, now being propped up by Russia as well as by his Iranian patrons. This massive war has engulfed the Middle East and put Iran and Russia on the border of three important American allies, Israel, Jordan, and NATO member Turkey.

The conflict has displaced millions of Syrians, sending waves of refugees into neighboring countries and also into Europe, where the migrant crisis threatens the security and political order of America's closest partners. The fact that the continent's borders are now compromised means that a global crisis may come even closer to American shores. And in 2016 the Syrian war will almost surely get worse.

What will make the next year especially dangerous is the White House itself. Obama is eager to wrap everything up before he leaves office, and John Kerry no doubt clings to the hope that Syrian peace talks could bring him the Nobel Peace Prize he thought he earned with the Iran deal. The administration is in a hurry, and the only way it sees forward is in caving to Iranian and Russian demands—above all, the demand that Assad stay in power. Indeed, as Kerry made clear two weeks ago, the White House has finally come clean and admitted it's no longer interested in deposing Assad, if it ever was.

It's worth gaming out a few of the consequences. To begin with, the only opposition groups that can agree to a political process in which Assad is not removed are those that are in fact or in effect pro-Assad. All others will have to be excluded from peace talks, and some will be labeled terrorists, like Jaish al-Islam, one of the most effective anti-Assad units, whose leader Zahran Alloush was

recently killed in a Russian airstrike. This drove home the fact that Putin's campaign was never about fighting ISIS—rather, it was about defending Assad (and securing Moscow's Syrian bases).

Therefore, in promoting a peace process that protects Assad, the White House is giving political and diplomatic cover to Moscow and Tehran. John Kerry will be acting as Putin's enforcer, telling America's traditional regional allies that the war against Assad is over and it's time to give up. If Kerry can get Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to wave the white flag, then maybe he really is a talented diplomat. But it is very unlikely the Sunni powers will sign terms of surrender and stop supporting their chosen proxies.

Saudi Arabia can ill afford an Iranian victory of that magnitude, and it would be an even worse outcome for Turkey. Ankara is hosting millions of refugees who will never return to Syria so long as the regime that butchered their family and friends is still in power. It's a major domestic issue for the Turks, and with three unfriendly powers on its border—Russia, Iran, and Assad—the Syrian war is a national security matter. Therefore, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan believes it is vital to keep open his supply lines to anti-Assad groups, even as Putin's forces are campaigning to close them down. In other words, Kerry's "peace process" is driving a NATO member toward crisis, and perhaps a shooting war with Russia.

Israel may soon find itself in a similarly dangerous situation. Yes, even with Russian troops present in Syria, Jerusalem has continued to attack arms convoys heading across Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as Iranian assets inside Syria, like Lebanese terrorist Samir Kuntar. However, it's not clear how long this state of affairs can last, or if the Iranians will press their Russian partners to clarify whose side they're on.

This was a bad year for American foreign policy and therefore for much of the rest of the world. Instead, of bringing peace and security to Syria, the White House has jeopardized the peace and security of our friends and partners around the world—from the eastern Mediterranean to Western Europe, and from the Persian Gulf to our own shores. What makes the administration's glib year-end self-assessment even more demoralizing is the near certainty that the White House will continue on this path, and that next year will therefore be even worse.

—Lee Smith

Astonishingly Popular

How to succeed as a Republican governor in a Democratic state. BY FRED BARNES

Annapolis

As rioting broke out in Baltimore last April, Maryland governor Larry Hogan got a call from Chris Christie, his friend, political ally, and governor of New Jersey. How you handle the crisis, Christie told Hogan, "is going to be the defining moment for you" as governor.

The situation was dicey and Hogan's task—preventing the riot from spreading—was delicate. He was a Republican official in a Democratic state, a white politician dealing with a predominantly black city, a governor ready to send in the National Guard who had to negotiate with a black mayor, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. She appeared more fearful of an overreaction than of the riot itself.

Two days before lawlessness broke out, Hogan had sensed the city might explode over the death of a black man, Freddie Gray, in police custody. He opened an emergency operations center and put the National Guard on high alert. He drafted two executive orders, one deploying the soldiers at the mayor's request, the other on his authority alone. The mayor's role wasn't required by statute, but politics made it advantageous.

Hogan, 59, was ready to act once violence erupted. Police were being ambushed, buildings torched. "The city was in complete anarchy," he says. Yet Hogan couldn't reach the mayor for two-and-a-half hours. Neither could his aide, assigned to keep the two of them in constant communication.

JASON SEILER

When Hogan finally got through to her, Rawlings-Blake said she needed 15 minutes to talk to the police commissioner. With several minutes to spare, she got back in touch. She was reluctant for the National Guard to come into the city.

Hogan paraphrased her response this way: "Since you have a gun to my head and will do it anyway, I guess I'll ask you to come in." Troops and police, already mobilized in an armory, were ordered to intervene. Within hours, the riot was contained. Approximately 130 police had been injured, 300 businesses damaged, but it was not a repeat of the devastating riot of 1968.

The governor had prevailed. He "didn't want to trample over local government," he tells me. Indeed, he had been deferential to the mayor, up to a point. He recognized the sensitivity of their relationship and the need to be respectful. But he wasn't going to let rioting and destruction engulf the city.

Christie, who had dispatched 150 New Jersey state police in full riot gear to help out in Baltimore, turned out to be right. It was the defining moment for Hogan. He handled the situation—riot, mayor, armed forces—deftly. And he did so in the manner that mirrored the way in which he operated first as candidate, now as governor.

To succeed in a state as deeply Democratic as Maryland, a Republican governor is forced to limit his agenda and style. Hogan has focused on his executive power and on popular issues. He's slashed tolls on highways and bridges, refunded overcharges in income tax payments, closed the scandal-plagued Baltimore jail, and killed a new line for the city's failing rail transit system with a tunnel projected to cost $1 billion.

Hogan did get the legislature to lift the mandate requiring counties to tax storm-water runoff—the so-called rain tax. But he hasn't pushed strictly Republican proposals. "He's governor of Maryland," an adviser says. "He's not Don Quixote."

He says he must also be a goalie. "We're able to stop bad things from happening," he says. For the first time in years, taxes haven't been raised, nor has spending jumped. He postponed $68 million in spending on schools in higher-income areas.

His biggest effort is encapsulated

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

in the new slogan "Maryland: Open for Business." Hogan says the "culture of state government was unfriendly." Businesses were treated as "guilty until proven innocent." Changing that is a work in progress, he says. "It's still not where we'd like it to be."

The economy has picked up in Hogan's first year as governor. (It's the first elected office he's held.) From January through November last year, the state gained 60,000 jobs. And Maryland's mood has flipped. A Democratic poll found in October that 56 percent believe Maryland is headed in the right direction. Fourteen months ago, only 37 percent did. Surveys by the *Washington Post* and *Baltimore Sun* found the same thing.

Hogan's own poll numbers are just as impressive. His approval rating was 63 percent in a *Sun* poll in November, two points higher than Democratic senator Barbara Mikulski's. A month earlier, the *Post* found his approval had jumped to 61 percent from 42 percent in February 2015. His popularity "extends across partisan demographic lines in a state where registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans more than 2 to 1," the *Post* said.

That's not all. Hogan is the third most-popular governor in the country, according to a national poll conducted over several months last year by Morning Consult. His approval was 69 percent. Only Republicans Charles Baker in Massachusetts (74) and Dennis Daugaard of South Dakota (70) topped Hogan.

Part of Hogan's gift for governing a Democratic state is his optimism and cheerfulness, which were unwavering even after he was diagnosed in June with cancer and lost his hair and eyebrows to chemotherapy. He gained 25 pounds. He announced in November that he is "100 percent cancer-free." His bout with cancer gave a new dimension to his public life.

"I never expected to be in this position," he said at a press conference. "But having gone through this experience myself just opened up a whole new world. I'm part of the club. I'm one of them. . . . They know when they see me, [they can say], 'He knows what chemo is like.'" Hogan says he's discovered a "real camaraderie" with other cancer patients.

Hogan is not given to hopelessness. He was an underdog in his race for governor in 2014. His campaign stressed economic issues—taxes, jobs, growth, state spending—to the exclusion of all others. "We focused on the things everybody agreed on," he says. "People were leaving the state in droves," especially to Virginia and Delaware. In a Gallup poll in 2014, 47 percent said they would leave Maryland if they could.

The media paid Hogan little attention, expecting Democrat Anthony Brown, the lieutenant governor, to win easily. Brown outspent Hogan 5-1. But the Republican Governors Association funded a $1.5 million ad buy in the closing days that was crucial.

The ad was simple, tying Brown to Governor Martin O'Malley and his rash of tax and fee hikes. They "gave us an electricity rate increase, a transit fare increase, another tax on gasoline, higher income tax rates, a tax on mortgages, a rain tax, a flush tax, higher costs for health care, for being born, for dying, trips, slips, fishing, flip flops, tube socks, purses, roller skates, license plates, PJs, diapers, wipers, caps, hats, and bookbags—all courtesy of Gov. O'Malley and Anthony Brown."

In 2016, Hogan is looking to Virginia to help erase the legacy of O'Malley. "With [Democratic governor Terry] McAuliffe over there, we're trying to bring a few jobs back," he says. Chances are, he'll succeed. ♦

An Unlikely Crusade

Senator Ben Sasse targets the administrative state.

BY TERRY EASTLAND

Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska, a rookie who ranks 99th in seniority, gave his maiden speech on the Senate floor in November. Normally, senators use such speeches to discuss why this or that legislation is needed. Sasse, a former college president and a historian by training (Yale Ph.D.) who has taught public policy (at the University of Texas), didn't do that. Instead, he addressed the institutional decline of Congress.

The speech was well received in the Senate, and the news coverage was generally positive. Oddly, however, the media failed to observe that Sasse promised a series of floor speeches on the growth of the administrative state and "executive branch legislating."

The importance of this topic is evident. The administrative state is the collective name given to executive agencies (think Federal Communications Commission, established in 1934, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, created in 2010) to which Congress "delegates" power. The agencies write regulations—which they administer—that have the same force and effect as federal statutes.

Writing in *National Affairs*, Charles J. Cooper, constitutional lawyer and former head (under President Reagan) of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, says that the domain of the administrative state is vast, ranging "from the most trivial to

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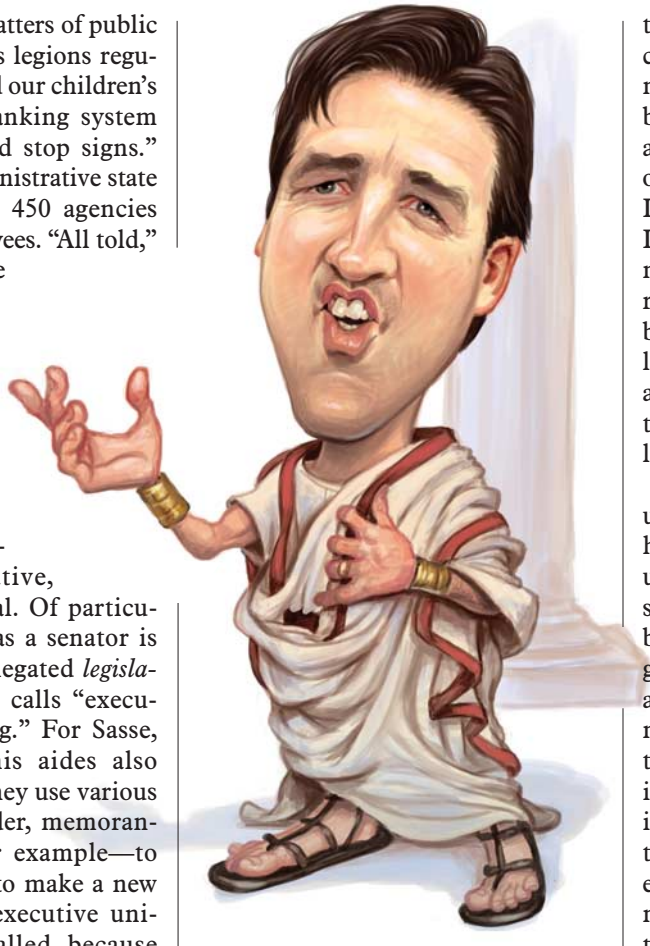
the most significant matters of public and private life. . . . Its legions regulate our health care and our children's dolls, our national banking system and our neighborhood stop signs." At last count, the administrative state numbered more than 450 agencies and 2.7 million employees. "All told," writes Cooper, "the Code of Federal Regulations contained 175,496 pages of regulations spread out over 235 volumes as of 2013."

Many agencies exercise all three federal powers—legislative, executive, and judicial. Of particular concern to Sasse as a senator is agency exercise of delegated *legislative* powers—what he calls "executive branch legislating." For Sasse, the president and his aides also engage in that when they use various means—executive order, memorandum, and waiver, for example—to amend a law or even to make a new one. These acts of "executive unilateralism" are so-called because they don't involve Congress. Thus, in perhaps the best-known example during his administration, President Obama effectively enacted changes to immigration law that Congress had resisted passing.

Of course, for a bill to become a law the old-fashioned (i.e., constitutional) way, it must be passed by both houses of Congress and presented to the president for his signature. Suffice it to say, "executive branch legislating"—whether by agency rulemaking or executive unilateralism—doesn't meet those requirements.

Sasse kicked off his series eight days before Christmas. "The problem of a weak Congress and the growth of an unchecked executive should be bad news to all of us," he told his fellow senators. "But more importantly than us, this should be bad news for every constituent who . . . votes for us under the impression that the Congress actually makes decisions and doesn't just offer whiny suggestions."



With his speeches, Sasse said he aims 'to do some history'—to describe how presidents of both parties have contributed to executive branch legislating, and how, too, members of both parties in Congress have often not wanted to lead 'on hard issues and take hard votes' but 'to sit back and let successive presidents gobble up more authority.'

In an interview, I asked Sasse what led to the series of speeches. "I think the country has a lot of big problems," he said, citing (among other things) the lack of a national security strategy for the cyber age, entitlement budgets that "can weather the next decade-plus," and a human capital strategy for an era of employment disruption. But, he said, "the bigger problem is that we don't have a shared national understanding of why we have local government. I'm a committed Tocquevillean. I believe in localism. Most of the meaningful things in life"—such as raising children and building small businesses—"happen at the local level. . . . Limited government is not an end in itself," but "a means" to the best things in life. "I think we've lost any sense of that."

Sasse's speeches may fairly be understood as an effort to explain how we lost that "shared national understanding." In the interview, he said that the federal government has been "crowding" out state and local governments and that the president and the administrative state are doing most of the crowding out—often through executive branch legislating, in rules the agencies write and in actions the executive unilaterally takes. The result, Sasse said, is weakened local governments as well as the nongovernmental institutions essential for civil society.

Sasse would seem to regard the federal government as a continuing violation of the separation of powers—the structural principle by which the Framers divided powers among three departments of government. They aimed to prevent one department's usurpation of another's power, and thus to help protect liberty. Note here that Sasse's provocative term, "executive branch legislating," names just such a usurpation. After all, the constitution vests the legislative powers in Congress, not in the executive.

With his speeches, Sasse said he aims "to do some history"—to describe how presidents of both parties have contributed to executive branch legislating, and how, too, members of both parties in Congress have often not wanted to lead "on hard issues and take hard votes" but "to sit back and let successive presidents gobble up more authority."

Sasse said that he "will not be a Republican senator criticizing the

DAVE CLEGG

current administration because it is Democratic." He intends, instead, to advocate nonpartisan "identity commitments." "It cannot be Rs against Ds. Democrats need to speak up when a Democratic president exceeds his or her powers. I plan to speak up when a Republican president exceeds his." Sasse is calling for something seldom extolled in Washington—an identity commitment that is irreducibly constitutional.

And he is calling for a due regard for the facts. Thus, in the speech shortly before Christmas, Sasse said: "Today many in my party argue that no president has ever even contemplated doing what President Obama regularly does. This is actually not true. . . . His theories are not at all new." Executive unilateralism dates back to the Progressive era's "disdain for the limits of the Constitution," and is especially evident "in the self-conscious executive expansionism of Teddy Roosevelt, the Republican, and Woodrow Wilson, the Democrat." Not incidentally, after the holidays Sasse plans to give speeches exploring those presidents' "attempts to marginalize Congress and to intentionally ignore the Congress."

Previewing that speech, Sasse told me that he "hears regularly from both Republican and Democratic senators and senior White House officials about how senators come to them and ask them to do things" that are properly within the authority of Congress but which, if voted on, might hurt their chances of reelection. "It makes sense if your only calculus is reelection," said Sasse. "Sadly, the biggest thing that motivates members is their reelection."

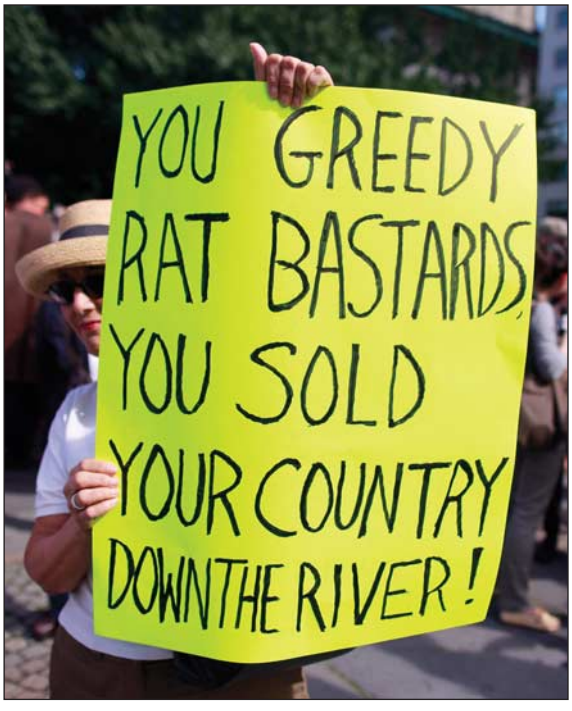
Sasse speaks of "the unbalanced nature of executive branch and legislative branch relations." That is another way of saying the legislative and executive powers are not properly—that is, constitutionally—separated. He would like to see the powers rebalanced in a more constitutional manner. For that to happen, Sasse said, "a civic reawakening of constitutionalism" will be necessary—a point on which it will be hard to argue. ♦

NEWSCOM

What Explains the Vicious Left?

When politics becomes a religion, nonbelievers must be punished. BY DAVID GELERNTER

The asymmetry of modern politics is clear to every conservative; painfully clear to several Yale undergraduates who asked me about it recently. Leftists, they pointed out, are hostile, nasty, and seem to have no concept of a civil conversation. Why? Because they are winning? Losing? Are natural-born bullies? And how can this dangerous mood be changed?



Civil discourse, Occupy Wall Street-style, October 11, 2011

It's not just a question of civility versus rudeness—which of course is no small thing in itself. The deeper problem is that the left seems to have lost its taste for democracy.

Naturally there are exceptions to the modern trend, benign leftists and nasty rightists. (Trump is a special case: see below.) The trend itself is partly explained by the Obama sneer; presidents have enormous influence. FDR's bouncy, feisty smile, Reagan's geniality, Clinton's one-of-the-boys grin, W's good-natured earnestness are part of history; and Obama's real "legacy" (aside from worldwide crisis) is that bitter sneer. His rudeness to political opponents has made a rotten political climate much worse. But the left's growing reputation for belligerent intolerance transcends Obama.

You see characteristic leftist arrogance among global warmers, who show their respect for their opponents by refusing to listen to them and implying that they are crackpots. On campus, leftists have spit at conservatives, screamed obscenities at moderate liberals, yammered on about phony "rape crises" while doing everything they could think of to promote universal debauchery, rigged local votes to silence opponents of the Kill Israel (aka "BDS") movement.

The list goes on, the arrogance is staggering, the asymmetry all too obvious. Conservatives, bursting with facts and ideas (and anger and dismay), are eager to have it out with liberals and

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maybe even convince a few. Liberals are eager to make assertions and strike moral poses, but not to respond to rational argument or speak to the facts.

Where does the asymmetry come from? American conservatives tend to be Christians or Jews. Liberals tend to be atheists or agnostics. (Yes, there are exceptions—to nearly everything, always; but that doesn't mean we can stop thinking.) Almost all human beings need religion, as subway-riders need overhead grab bars. The religious impulse strikes conservatives and liberals alike. But conservatives usually practice the religion of their parents and ancestors; liberals have mostly shed their Judaism or Christianity, and politics fills the obvious spiritual gap. You *might* make football, rock music, or hard science your chosen faith. Some people do. But politics, with its underlying principles and striking public ceremonies, is the obvious religion substitute.

Hence the gross asymmetry of modern politics. For most conservatives, politics is just politics. For most liberals, politics is their faith, in default of any other; it is the basis of their moral life.

Traditional religion used to be the iron grate that kept worldly beliefs from falling into the flames and turning into red-hot religious convictions in their own right. Among most conservatives it still is.

But for modern liberals it is only natural to be upset, defensive, dogmatic, and immovable when you are challenged on your political views. Few of us are prepared to defend our deepest spiritual beliefs. Most of us rarely think about them. Many of us have never had *reason* to believe them; we simply believe what our parents did. That is perfectly fair and suitable—except when rational, worldly politics is forced to confront politics-as-religion head-to-head.

Why should this new and dangerous virus have broken out *now*, in our generation? Judeo-Christian religion has been in decline for centuries. But important milestones have passed in our own lifetimes. Baby boomers were educated, in the '50s and '60s, in public schools that were still informally Christian—in a nation that (moreover) had been created by devout Christians guided by biblical ideas, and refounded during the Civil War by another Christian generation led by the most deeply religious of all our presidents. By the generation following the Second World War, it's likely that the U.S. cultural leadership was already mostly atheist. But it was reticent about saying so; in that era, many Americans still hesitated to go all the way. And the centrality of biblical religion to America's best self was reaffirmed during these same years by the pastors, priests, and rabbis of the civil rights movement. Today all these hugely important facts have been suppressed. My impression, as a college teacher, is that most young Americans have simply never heard them.

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So here we are today with a mainstream press, cultural leadership, and intellectuals who laugh off the idea that a presidential candidate's religion matters. Yet it matters intensely. Its real, practical importance is large. Unless you are a Jew or Christian, you are likely—as a modern American—to make a religion of your politics. And that will shape, in turn, your relation to the opposition and to the American people.

Obama is probably our first atheist president. (David Bernstein noted in *Mosaic* that Obama's Hanukkah declaration this year did not manage to squeeze in a mention of God. One more small fact among many.) If Obama is indeed an atheist, I don't blame him for not saying so; in today's political environment, he can't. (Things will likely change fast in coming years.) Much of his crude contempt for his political opponents is the man himself. But that leaves plenty left over to reflect his outrage when you question his political beliefs—which happen to be (I believe) the foundation of his identity as a human being. All devout believers have moments of doubt—but that doesn't make them indifferent to wise-guy strangers casually kicking holes in their religion. *Of course* Obama is testy when you question his statist or appeasement-based policies. Those ideas are his religion, they are *him*, they are the spiritual fuel that keeps him going. Naturally *any* leftist who has got rid of his ancestral religion and replaced it with politics will be annoyed when you treat his political views like mere *political views*.

Some people are arrogant by nature. Obama, Hillary, and Trump are textbook examples. They were born that way. But Obama got help along the way from left-wing religion—whereas Hillary and Trump probably rank among the few human beings who love themselves so much, they don't need any kind of religion. Trump, of course, is no more a right-winger than Hillary is a true leftist: They each ad lib their fundamental beliefs as required.

My students want to know: How can this possibly go on? But how can it change? How can we rearrange this bloody-minded political atmosphere? My guess is that only a religious revival, or a Euro-style religious collapse, will change it. Obviously the collapse is far more likely than the revival. But revivals have happened before. America's soft spot is its children, and children—my guess is—are the only energy source strong enough to power a modern revival. A book on "Why Children Need God" and an associated movement, with left-wing pediatricians and psychiatrists arguing that children reared in traditional religious communities grow up happier and better put-together, might do the trick. But it will take a miracle. ♦

The Party of Trump

The case for principled partisanship.

BY GARY SCHMITT

Within weeks of announcing his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination in June, Donald Trump seized the lead in virtually every national poll of GOP voters and has held that lead ever since. The *Real Clear Politics* average has Trump polling at 35.6 percent, with a 17-point spread between Trump and his nearest competitor.

Although there is no poll of GOP officials, it is pretty clear from news accounts and political reporting that elected Republicans and party officials do not favor a Trump nomination. Far from it. To judge by attributed and unattributed quotes from those stories, it would be surprising if more than 5 percent of those GOP regulars favor Trump.

No doubt GOP officials' disconnect from general polls relates to their view that his nomination would likely result in the Democrats holding onto the White House. Hillary Clinton regularly outpoints Trump, and even Bernie Sanders—the most left-wing Democratic candidate in recent decades—outpolls Trump according to the most recent Quinnipiac survey. According to the same poll, half of America would be "embarrassed" to see Trump sitting in the Oval Office. For the party pros, it's difficult to see how a nominee with such high negatives can win in November.

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And a losing presidential candidate, especially if the margin is significant, can only hurt Republicans running for the Senate and House in November. It will be rough sledding regardless for the Senate GOP, with Republicans trying to hold onto a slim majority while defending 24 seats compared with the Democrats' 10. As for the House, the deputy chair of the National Republican Congressional Committee, Rep. Steve Stivers, put the matter more starkly: A Trump nomination would be "devastating."

Trump, right, appears on MSNBC to discuss a potential run for president as the Reform party nominee, November 18, 1999.

Putting aside Trump's particular views on policy matters, it is a rather remarkable thing that a political party has so little say over who its nominee is. Presumably, political parties should not have to follow their putative leader, lemming-like, off the proverbial cliff.

Of course, losing for the sake of a principled position is not unheard of and, in fact, may rejuvenate a party for the long term. There are those who argue that Barry Goldwater's loss to Lyndon Johnson in 1964 set the stage for a more successful and coherent Republican party in the decades that followed.

But is Trump another Goldwater? Hardly. Trump's policy positions are substantively an inch deep and bombastically a mile wide. In times past, his flippant comments, vulgar attacks on opponents, and appeals to the public's anger and fears would have been characterized as demagogic.

None of this should surprise. Trump has bounced around with his party identification. Sometimes he has registered as a Republican, other times as a Democrat, and still other times as nonaligned or aligned with the Independence party. Trump himself admits he's been more than willing to give support and money to whomever might help him and his various enterprises.

There is nothing unprecedented about such behavior; it might even be smart business. But, again, there is nothing here to suggest a candidate committed to a principled party platform.

At some level, candidates should reflect the party's principles. Or, at least, that was the original intent for creating modern political parties. Otherwise, voting would be a matter of choosing this or that personality on a ballot who might or might not be anchored to some broader substantive program. And it is precisely those substantive ties to a party and its platform that give the voting public their best sense of what policies a candidate might actually follow while in office. Voting for president shouldn't be a game of Russian roulette.

Obviously, a party needs to test whether a candidate has popular appeal. Nobody, in this day and age, would argue for a system in which candidates are picked in the backrooms by political insiders cutting deals with each other. But today's system is so wide open that the party as party has little to no say over who might run, how the field is narrowed,

WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / NEWSMAKERS / LIAISON AGENCY / GETTY

and, ultimately, who the candidate will be.

As Edmund Burke, the founding father of the modern idea of party politics, understood, partisanship in government is inevitable. Without principled parties, however, men were bound to take advantage of that partisanship by appealing to the fears and hopes of citizens and doing so without offering up policies that might provide sound and stable government.

Perhaps the current system for choosing presidential candidates is here to stay; it is difficult to see a path to something different. But the Trump phenomenon is a reminder that a presidential nominating system that is so open, so independent of the very entity whose flag the nominee is supposed to carry, is a system that can produce what we see today: a potential nominee whose commitment to the party and its principles is nil to nonexistent. ♦

The Problem with Informed Consent

What you don't know can hurt you.

BY ERIN SHELEY

Spinal-surgery patient Tony Meng, right, has become the public face of 'double booking.'

BOSTON GLOBE / SUZANNE KREITER / GETTY

In a recent investigative piece on Massachusetts General Hospital, the *Boston Globe* casts light on the practice, common in certain hospitals, of "double booking" surgeons. In the name of efficiency, a particularly in-demand surgeon will participate in two procedures scheduled at the same time by moving back and forth between the two operating rooms—a practice that, unsurprisingly, occasionally renders him or her difficult to locate when a need arises in one or the other of the rooms. The *Globe* piece focuses on former MGH surgeon Dr. Dennis Burke, whose crusade against the practice revealed at least 44 problems allegedly attributable to it, including the sad case of 41-year-old dad Tony Meng, who woke up from a double-booked spinal surgery permanently paralyzed. (Whether the double-booking was directly responsible for the disastrous outcome has not been fully determined.)

While it is difficult to read the *Globe* piece without feeling somewhat nauseous about the concept of double-booking itself, the debate surrounding it raises a broader problem with the current state of medical practice: the subordination of patient control over their bodies to the preferences of their physicians in cases where the patients should be making active decisions. Tony Meng—along with most of the other MGH patients discussed—had no idea his surgery was being double-booked until after the fact. MGH, like many hospitals that deploy the practice, has no policy requiring that patients be informed of this possibility before submitting to the knife. These patients cannot, therefore, be said to have given legitimately informed consent to their surgeries.

MGH officials defended concurrent surgeries to the *Globe* with reference to long-term success rates: In the two years after the Meng tragedy they found "no significant difference in complication rates between overlapping and non-overlapping cases" and described the practice "as an extension of the teaching hospital's team approach, pairing senior doctors with residents."

While this defense may support the proposition that double-booking does not cause much harm on average, it ignores the question of whether an individual patient should be able to choose what degree of "significance" in complication rates he is willing to tolerate before allowing a procedure to be performed on him concurrently. The hospital's attitude appears to privilege its long-term pedagogical goals over the right of a patient to be given a significant piece of information about the surgery he is contemplating.

The environment in which local medical culture trumps patient autonomy has been fostered by the legal framework governing informed consent. Physicians rightfully complain

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about a litigation culture, driven by plaintiffs' attorneys, that exposes them to seemingly bottomless liability in nearly all cases with bad outcomes (many of which are unavoidable, despite the physician's best efforts). While more than half of U.S. states cap malpractice damages for pain and suffering, few restrict claims for economic damages such as long-term care. Despite all of this exposure to liability, however, the law does not do nearly enough to protect patients' ability to make informed decisions about the procedures they do elect.

Under current tort law, a patient seeking to recover against a physician for performing a procedure without providing enough information must prove three things. First, he must show that the physician failed to disclose some risk in the recommended treatment, or the existence of any alternative method of treatment. Second, he must show that he would have forgone the recommended treatment had he known of the undisclosed information. Finally, he must show that as a result of the recommended treatment he suffered an injury that would not have occurred had he opted for one of the undisclosed methods of treatment.

A patient like Tony Meng can quite easily prove the third element: The outcome of any legal action he takes against MGH will likely turn on the first or second. MGH might well argue that the risk from the concurrent surgery was not significant enough to have been obligatory to disclose under the first element, or that, under the second, Meng would not have deemed the double-booking problematic enough to have changed his decision about the surgery. In general, however, a patient as severely damaged as Meng will most likely be able to recover damages.

Yet extreme cases like Meng's tend to obscure a pervasive problem driven by the dual legal and medical inattention to patient autonomy. Most patients who undergo procedures in the absence of adequate information cannot recover at all because they are not considered to have been harmed. Imagine the case of a patient who is experiencing chronic but bearable knee pain. The doctor recommends surgery without telling her that there is a significant chance the pain will abate over time, and an even greater chance that the pain will, at a minimum, never worsen. The patient undergoes the surgery on the mistaken belief that it is necessary to prevent further degeneration and endures the pain, the risks of anesthesia and infection, the disruption to her life, physical scarring, and the long-term diminished capacity attendant to many major knee surgeries. So long as the surgery did not "go wrong" in some way beyond these expected effects, such a patient can never recover, even if she can show that the physician failed in his duty to provide adequate information about alternatives and that she would have made a different decision with that information. The law does not recognize her as having been harmed.

The law's narrow concept of harm in informed consent cases is particularly troubling in light of a growing body of literature suggesting that there are long-term psychological *and* physical effects from interference with patient autonomy. As the late psychologist Oakley Ray put it, "the causes, developments and outcomes of an illness are determined by the interaction of psychological, social, and cultural factors with biochemistry and physiology." In other words, the context in which illness takes place can affect its eventual outcome. A burgeoning field called "narrative medicine" has shown that patients have different ways of coping with their illnesses and treatment that, because of the operation of the body's stress mechanisms, can result in long-term physiological problems if ignored. For example, a patient who prioritizes bodily autonomy may suffer both psychological and physiological effects such as increased blood pressure from receiving invasive treatment beyond her control.

In the absence of legal change, however, patients—particularly patients who place a high value on bodily autonomy and control—must play a more active role in their own care. The stakes are not merely symbolic. At one extreme lies the rare necessity of avoiding a devastating outcome like Meng's. More commonly, a patient will benefit from insisting upon all of the information necessary to make certain that an invasive course of treatment is the right choice for him personally. There are a couple of habits of mind patients can adopt to this end.

First, patients should not allow doctors to prevent them from expressing themselves, either at the point of articulating their symptoms or while asking questions about treatment. A 1984 study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that the average amount of time between the opening of an interview with a patient and the doctor's first interruption was 18 seconds; these results were largely duplicated in a 2001 study. Patients must recognize that they, too, have important information relevant to their treatment and should generally not accept treatment unless they have communicated everything to their physician.

Second, patients should realize that quite frequently there is no single "correct" medical answer and that—to the extent their coverage and the severity of their condition allow it—they have an opportunity to seek out second opinions and compare the proposed treatment plans of multiple doctors. In one 1991 study of family practitioners conducted by the University of Washington, for example, 137 physician replies resulted in a total of 82 different strategies for treating a urinary tract infection. Further, a 1994 Harvard study found that one-quarter of heart bypasses, angioplasties, and catheterizations performed on elderly heart attack victims were unnecessary. And of course, some hospitals allow concurrent surgeries, others allow surgeries to overlap by only a limited amount of time, and others ban them. Rather than accepting a physician's word as monolithic truth, a patient must consider it to be the word of a highly trained specialist who is providing a service to the patient. In the absence of legal or medical norms of facilitating patient choice, the patient may find himself better informed about his treatment when he begins to think of himself as a consumer rather than an object. ♦

Growing Old Without Growing Up

Sleepaway camp for adults

By Matt Labash

Sanger, Calif.

On this late October day, as I wheel into the Wonder Valley Ranch Resort nestled in the foothills of the spellbinding if drought-scorched Sierras, I'm struck by the notion that it's a bit late in the season to be going to a summer camp for adults. But then, it would seem a bit late to be going to summer camp at all. For at age 45, I am what noted gerontologist Cedric the Entertainer calls "a grown-ass man."

But that hardly matters anymore. For I am also a citizen of Infantilized America, where getting old has gotten old, and youth is no longer just wasted on the young. Maybe it's due to narcissism or nostalgia, or all our institutions atrophying. (Even for rebellious souls, what old order is there left to upset?) Maybe it springs from the heaping buffet of cultural junk-food available to us as binge-eating consumers, or from wishing to simplify a dizzying world. But ours is a country whose adultescents now play with Legos and on "adult playgrounds," color in "adult coloring books," and read as much YA fiction as their teenage daughters.

Momaste, mid-sage attack

It's a place where 9 out of 10 of the top-grossing films last year were of the cape'n'codpiece superhero variety. It's a place where the average gamer is 35 years old. Where the average Brony (a man obsessed with the My Little Pony franchise targeted at little girls) is 21. Where the average backwards-cap wearer is . . . well, nobody's ever done a study of that. But just trust me and ask your dad to knock it off.

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So it stands to reason that "adult sleepaway camp" would become a thing, as the kids say—though I rarely hear kids say that, just adults trying to sound like them. Even everyone's idea of a forever-young fun maven says so: "We really need camps for adults," Hillary Clinton told an American Camp Association gathering this spring. "I think we have a huge fun deficit in America."

In fact, the American Camp Association reports that around one million adults now attend camp each year. So many, that some camps have even gone niche, such as Club Getaway in the Berkshires, which experimented with a reduced-rate summer camp for the unemployed. There are hobbyist camps, everything from space camp to wine-tasting camp to rock-band camp, where frustrated workadaddies can escape their cubicle farms to reimagine themselves as Jimmy Page.

But there are also scores of more generalized all-purpose camps for adults. Places like Camp Throwback in Clarksville, Ohio, where rejuveniles can experience the summer camp they always wanted, but with Drunk Field Day, Hangover Yoga, and "more sensitive guys around the fire with guitars." Then there's The Woods in Lehighton, Pennsylvania, where campers can enjoy volleyball, a bathing-suits-and-cowboy-boots party, and free HIV testing in a natural clothing-optional LGBT environment, just like when we were kids. There's even Camp Grounded in the redwood forests of Mendocino, a Digital Detox production and no-electronics-permitted analog immersive experience. (Sophisticated kidults are often fonder of having "experiences" than actual fun.) Here, infantilized techies pay camp counselors to make them do what they could have done themselves for free at home (turn off their iPhones), as they play kickball, stargaze, roast marshmallows, and write

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: SOUL CAMP

A session of 'intenSati,' a mashup of yoga, dance, martial arts, and interval training with Stuart Smalley-like affirmations.

letters on old typewriters in an effort to recover what's left of their humanity.

I, however, have come to one of the newer entrants in the field—Soul Camp. When I first heard the name, I thought maybe the camp had hired retired Pips as counselors, who'd show us how to do cool Motown backup-singer steps during "Midnight Train to Georgia." But no, this soul camp is not for aspiring black R&B singers. In fact, it's almost overwhelmingly white (it may need to check its privilege, as the kids unfortunately do say). It bills itself as "adult sleepaway camp for the soul," and it "isn't the doorway to another world, it is the doorway to yourself."

As I open the door to my rental car, I'm greeted by a throng of comely young women—never a bad start—offering bubbly welcomes and wearing tie-dye. Literally bubbly—some actually blow bubbles at me. As they do so, an older woman approaches, the "camp mom," also known as "Momaste" (bad at yoga puns, I miss the play off "Namaste" and cause gales of laughter when mispronouncing her name "mom-mast"). A clinical psychotherapist specializing in "inner child work, shame, and successful aging," Momaste starts waving what looks like a giant, smoking doobie all around me.

I am slightly offended. I'd read all Soul Camp's rules before coming—there are plenty of them. Though this is supposedly a camp for adults who can make their own decisions, the forbidden list includes cliques, gossip ("let's keep this a safe space and container to do the work"), and even flip-flops ("due to the rocky terrain . . . we don't want you to hurt yourself"). Likewise, no chewing gum (so as not to trigger a spearmint allergy?). Nor are we allowed to bring alcohol. Though I smuggle some in anyway, since I'm a working journalist and found another camp-rule that provided a loophole: "Take care of you. . . . You do you, boo."

Still, I have to stash my bourbon in the trunk like a criminal. Why does Momaste get to push her weed right out here in the open? "It's sage!" she says, when I tell her to keep her filthy drugs off of me. As I cough through a cloud of sage smoke, Momaste explains it's a Native American ritual, and she's giving me a blessing. As she does so, another of the welcome crew hands me my tie-dyed Camp Soul T-shirt and asks if I want to fringe it. Not yet, I tell her, I'm trying to ease into the experience. "And I'm trying to move you outside your comfort zone," she says. "Don't worry," I reply, smelling like a roasted chicken, "I'm already there."

It's been a good 30-plus years since I went to camp. And the usual memory mash (tipped canoes, dirt-clod wars, sad cafeteria food) comes back most vividly in smells: that unique alchemy of wood smoke and musty bunk mattresses and fir needles and too much Polo cologne to impress the girls/cover for the showers you won't take since hitting the showers might involve having your clothes stolen or getting your goo-loos whip-snapped with a belt by older, thuggish cabin-mates.

But Soul Camp is not that kind of camp. It has a distinct New-Agey tenor, though nobody involved would dare use the term New Age anymore, as the New Age is now

awkwardly middle-aged, having been around since the 1970s. It's as dated a term as "Space Age"—which usually connotes the midcentury Jetsons version of what we imagined the future would look like before it became the past. Most practitioners now use fresher, less ambitious labels, preferring to say they work in the mind/body/spirit space, the word "space" being more fetishized even than "experience" and almost as much as "intention" (as in, "Please set your intentions while in this space so you can really inhabit the experience").

Looking over the list of Soul Camp's counselors/instructors, I see that everyone has a zingy title like "Intuition Maven" or "Fear Fighter" or "Play With the World Expert." They give talks, or "soulversations," on subjects like "My Journey From Functioning to Flying" and "Cultivating Your Authentic Self." They offer instruction on everything from past-life regression to Pranayama breathing to angel channeling. They are relentlessly sunny and life-affirming. They all seem to wear yoga pants and/or to have blogged on the *Huffington Post*.

Soul Camp was founded just last year by two nice Jewish girls, Ali Leipzig, 28, and Michelle Goldblum, 31 (daughter of Momaste, the sage pusher). For eight weeks each summer as youths, they both used to go to Camp Towanda in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, the very camp that was used to shoot the summer-camp comedy *Wet Hot American Summer*, they tell me as we sit down to talk by Wonder Valley's lake. (The resort, which Soul Camp has rented for the week, is less a stereotypical summer camp than a wedding/conference space, complete with paved roads and golf carts—as opposed to Towanda, a traditional-looking, woodsy summer camp, where the first couple of Soul Camps were held. Both locations will be used in the future.)

Because of the age difference, the girls didn't know each other, Michelle explains. "Well, I knew Michelle," corrects Ali, "because you know all the older girls' names. I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, Michelle Goldblum, so cool!'"

"So flash forward 15 years," says Michelle, "and Ali and I both own companies in the mind/body/spirit space. I have a branding company called I AM.creative, Ali does design branding and is a body confidence coach." I stop the girls to ask what exactly a body confidence coach is. "I help women feel beautiful in the bodies that they're in," Ali says. Does she get in their face with a whistle, telling them it's not okay to have that Hostess cupcake? No, she says. "It's more about just loving where you're at in order to get where you want to go."

"Oooh, Tweetable!" enthuses Michelle.

Anyway, all these years later, Michelle was in a flash mob in Washington Square Park, and Ali, who coincidentally was supposed to be there too but had to miss, went to look up photos of it on Facebook and noticed Michelle. "She used to wear a lot of neon," says Ali. Ali messaged Michelle, they made plans to meet for lunch, but before they could meet, they coincidentally ran into each other at the same breathwork workshop. Kismet! "We were breathing next to each other!" says Michelle. They became instant BFFs. "Ali is my twin flame in many ways," Michelle beams. When they got together, they had this "campy energy, we would be like cheering, and we clap for everything."

"Yeah," chimes in Ali. "We were walking in Williamsburg, this real cool neighborhood, and were like singing camp songs. [Other friends] were like, 'Would you shut up?' And we were like, 'You guys don't get it. Like, this is so fun!'" The girls put their heads together with the director of their old camp and decided they'd have a one-off camp at Towanda for friends, hauling along all the lifestyle gurus and wellness coaches they knew from their day jobs. The girls were so excited they started furiously texting back-and-forth. "Like, oh my gosh, we're gonna put a camp together!" Michelle remembers. "We're writing in hashtags! Like #adultcamp, #camp2.0, #soulcamp. And then we just wrote back over and over: SOUL CAMP, SOUL CAMP, SOUL CAMP!"

An institution was born. The friends brought friends, and now people are coming from all over the country and as far away as Singapore. The girls are even in talks with the Queen of Soul herself to come speak here. No, not Aretha. Better! Oprah!

It's a long way from what Michelle was doing just a few years ago. Working in the pharmaceutical advertising industry, filling the void with cigarettes, alcohol, an Adderall

Ali, right, and Michelle

After filling a void with cigarettes, alcohol, an Adderall addiction, and a codependent relationship that made her feel 'needy,' Soul Camp cofounder Michelle changed her paradigm with an Eat, Pray, Love-type excursion to India. Now she hangs with people in the wellness space who 'are living their dream, and are, like, happy!'

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: SOUL CAMP

addiction, and a codependent relationship that made her feel "needy." That was before she changed her paradigm, transformed her life, went on an Eat, Pray, Love-type excursion to India, and now hangs with people in the wellness space who "are living their dream, and are, like, happy!"

Michelle says she and Ali are friends with a lot of the other kidult-camp directors, like the guy who runs Camp Grounded. But unlike some of the others, Soul Camp goes beyond just unplugging your phone or having Bloody Mary breakfasts or jumping in a lake. Here, campers are returning to childhood in more ways than one: "We have these different workshops all the time. Workshops about transformation. Workshops that, like, bring up memories. Repressed memories of your childhood. There are so many of us, myself included, who have, like, s— happen. In your childhood. We stuff it down and then become these people. 'I am an executive! I have a family! I go on vacation! I'm okay, I'm okay!' But deep down, it is not healed."

Soul Campers tend to their chi, above, and connect, below.

Before the healing can begin, I acclimate myself to camp. Throughout the grounds, there are magic-markered signs of affirmation, what I come to think of as Stuart Smalley graffiti, after the Al Franken self-help character on *Saturday Night Live* whose catchphrase was "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me!" Everywhere are signs: "Swim in your soul. . . . Did you ever know that you're my hero? . . . Today is the perfect day. . . . You're living your story. . . . [And, near the restroom,] What is your intention as you poop, puke, release?"

In addition to food for us meat'n'potato types, the buffet is always stacked with healthful gluten-free, vegan choices. The snack bar and cabins come with Kale Crunch and TeeChia Sustained Energy Cereal. With all the foodstuffs packed with superseeds, quinoa, flax, and hemp, everyone's grateful that the communal latrines are down the hall and not in the rooms, where there could be air quality issues.

Forgoing a private cabin for the full-immersion experience in what look like Spartan military barracks, I call dibs on the bunk next to the air-conditioner to control the fan speed and drown out my snoring. My six cabin-mates are all male (the ratio of the 150 or so Soul Campers is about seven-to-one female-to-male) and insta-friendly. One, who sells advertising for an online company, goes for the hug when I offer a handshake. I relent with a bro-hug, but he turns it into a whoa-hug, holding it out for about four beats too long.

Another is a life coach who also runs a Braveheart Men's Movement retreat in Bermuda, where they provide, among other things, goofy games and physical challenges, "community conversations about masculinity," and "experiential exercises that allow you to connect with yourself more deeply." He's here to glean ideas for his own camp, the camp industry being on the rise since "nobody hangs out with each other anymore." When he was a kid, his father was a Mason. Now the only community most people find is on Facebook or Instagram. So that these days people are subscribing to speed-round, friend-making heightened experiences to replace the physical communities and friendships they once had but sacrificed for virtual ones.

Then there's Pup—his nickname, and an apt one. Athletically diminutive, Pup likes the girls, best I can tell, and they seem to like him back, though he decorates our room with glossy pictures of Humphrey Bogart as Philip Marlowe, and Barbra Streisand, presumably inspiring us to stay in touch with both the masculine and feminine sides of ourselves (the latter not being a problem at Soul Camp, where the energy is decidedly feminine).

Pup, who is pushing 30, lives in the Bay Area and has a "party/live/workspace" in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, as well—when he's home, which isn't often. "To be honest, I just kind of float from place to place." He'd been knocking around Europe for several weeks before coming home for a night, throwing a bunch of clothes in a bag, and making his way to Soul Camp. Clothes that Bogart wouldn't have Big Slept in: stained-glass-colored yoga tights, brightly hued tank tops, blousy MC-Hammer-looking pants his parents picked up for him when backpacking around Thailand. "My dad's like 70, and my mom's like 60-something, but they're like college kids again, backpacking around all of these places."

Pup grew up going to 4-H camps in his home state of West Virginia and kept on going until he was 19. Real camps, he says, "with no kale chips." He spent a year-and-a-half abroad after high school, electing to spend another year of high school in Japan so he could study Japanese and kendo. If I'm giving you the sense that Pup is some slacker kidult, that wouldn't be a complete picture. It's not like he has no ambition. A computer prodigy from a young age, he went to MIT and even taught a course there, which he describes as "Teaching Nerds to Talk," helping awkward techies communicate their ideas.

Pup had a company called Hunch, described as "a collective intelligence decision engine." Much as Netflix has algorithms that recommend movies, Hunch would walk you through steps like a trusted camp counselor for the serially indecisive, helping you determine whether you should get back together with your ex or drop out of school. "I had great aspirations for it," he says with a shrug, "but we sold it to eBay. Now it's used to sell shoes."


Pup, Soul Camper

He has other interests, lots of them. Pup helped start "The Algorithm Auction," billed as the world's first auction of computer algorithms, intended to enshrine the aesthetic beauty of algorithms through, say, drawings of the OkCupid compatibility calculation, signed by its founders. He also runs "Pup's Pool Party," which can rage for days (Pup often DJs himself). The *Daily Secret* describes it as a monthly party for a "highly select crew of young Bay Area super-nerds convened on a secluded compound for a full weekend of coding and craziness . . . like a miniature, more intimate Burning Man, but without the dust."

I listen with fascination to Pup's tales of his varied, weird life. And though he's smarter than I am (I'm still waiting for my call from MIT), I can't help but put him on my psychoanalyst's couch. I point out to him that I see a thread here: He goes to high school even after he's graduated, he's a 29-year-old man who goes by "Pup," his pride and joy is throwing rolling pool parties, he stayed in camp until he was 19 years old, and now he's coming back. "You're Peter Pan!" I say. "You can't become an adult. You're clinging to childhood. Am I wrong?"

Instead of being insulted by the presumptuousness of his new cabin-mate/shrink, Pup strikes a genuinely thoughtful look. "That's interesting," he ponders. "This is the first time that I think someone has just sort of . . . diagnosed it. I think there's a core nugget there." But he also thinks people are giving up "a playfulness" from childhood much earlier these days. Tell that to the geriatric gamers or the 40-year-old Bronies dressed like pastel ponies, I want to tell him, but refrain from interrupting his flow. "Looking out into the world with wonder, excitement for the future," he continues. Instead, Pup says, people are becoming slaves to their handheld isolation chambers that turn on the algorithms he's even helped create. (No argument there.)

Pup's back at camp, he says proudly. And others should be, too. It doesn't matter where. "S—t, go to your anarchist camp. Go to your Soul Camp. Whatever it is you want to do. It's a very positive shared experience in a world where increasingly we're looking down into our electronics. Camp implores you to look out into the world."

Looking out into the world is an admirable pursuit, but at Soul Camp, top of the docket seems to be gazing at our own navels. If Soul Camp had a theme song, it would be R.E.M.'s "Everybody Hurts." Each of us is assigned to a team with a counselor as captain, all with cutesy names like Sunshine Squad and Sparkle Love Monkeys. Mine is Super Soul Squad, and my team captain I call "Sarge."

Despite the *Full Metal Jacket* inference, Sarge has a gentle, maternal spirit: "I just want you to take care of yourselves so I can take care of you." I tell her I need a golf cart, which are allotted only to staff. Can she arrange it? "It might be challenging," she says diplomatically. "But if you need a ride somewhere, we can totally hook you up."

Sarge has us go around the table, sharing our intentions, fears, or fun facts. She starts. Having gone to the first Soul Camp in Pennsylvania, she had a life transformation after an intenSati class taught by instructor Patricia Moreno, intenSati being a combo yoga/dance/martial arts/interval training exercise, all while chanting powerful Stuart Smalley-like affirmations.

Later in the Soul Camp experience, we will all engage in intenSati, including yours truly, though I head for the juice bar early when I can't quite keep a straight face doing hip sashays and throwing air-punches while chanting "I am a creative genius" and "I accept my power / To change this hour." Still, it worked for Sarge. She used to be 318 lbs.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD / MATT LABASH

But after her first workout, then an hour talking to Moreno, then lots of tears (there're always lots of tears at Soul Camp), she decided to change her life, quit her job, and get stomach surgery. She dropped 120 lbs., while becoming an intenSati instructor herself.

From there, we are off. There's the fledgling actress who, as she's turning 30, doesn't know if acting is what she wants to contribute to the world. There's the hairdresser who just quit her job last Sunday and who has had a spiritual awakening (she's met all four of her guardian angels), even as she's found out she's gluten and dairy intolerant. There's the corporate drone who found herself in a meeting recently writing: "This place is sucking me dry. My soul is dying."

It comes my turn, and I suppose I could open a vein and share my personal setbacks like everyone else—the lumps and bumps that are the inevitable cost of being human—but it's gotten so dark around here, I decide to share a fun fact with Super Soul Squad instead: "I used to be a woman. And a very ugly one." Super Soul Squad falls into stunned silence, then realizes I'm joking, and courtesy laughs. "I wouldn't have judged your hair if you were an ugly woman," the hairdresser generously covers.

Throughout camp, the parade of human misery continues. At lunch, I meet women who go on wellness escapes like they're going to the grocery store. They juice and detox and are administered colonics, they are diagnosed with bipolar disorder and schizoaffective disorder, and when their therapist puts them on Zantac they can't smell bleach and they might also have PTSD and they feel like they are "walking bum magnets" because they always attract loser men. (Okay, all of that was the same woman, but since she says she often leaves her body and/or has multiple personalities, I'm counting her as a composite.)

Then there's Cal, Soul Camp's financial adviser, who was a high-earning investment banker, but who left the life and now works advising clients in the wellness space. Cal tells me that I HAVE to get the "SoulPowered Healing" treatment at the network spinal treatment tables-station set up behind my cabin. The treatment involves light finger touches at strategic points on your back and, dare I say, ass that seem to miraculously release energy, which causes a sort of self-healing. When I watch others get it, they moan like wounded wildebeests and involuntarily spasm. But when I get mine done, I feel nothing, even if the hipster in the beanie who applies the magic touch while he plays Krishna-sounding chant music on his iPhone gives me fortune cookie wisdom afterwards, telling me I'm meant to be a leader. He seems like a nice enough guy, and he reportedly treats the likes of Tony Robbins. But I'd have much preferred a deep tissue massage from a Scandinavian woman with power thumbs who'd dig in more and talk less.

I compare notes with Cal, who tells me after his treatment he cried like a baby for the first time in years. "Why?" I ask, puzzled. "I can't pinpoint it," he says. But he knows that "as dudes in this society, we don't cry." What about John Boehner? I suggest. That guy cries at supermarket ribbon-cuttings, and he's a heartless Republican. "That's the exact point," Cal says of me singling Boehner out as a noticeable event. "You're even more suppressed about letting out that cry. . . . Which is what you really need. We all carry stuff from our past that we can't even pinpoint, that happened to us that we don't even remember. . . . Five years old, my dad yelled at me, and I was trying to get his affection ever since." I express sympathy over this childhood holocaust, asking if his dad was a real monster. No, he says, his dad was fine. He was just using that as a hypothetical. His point being that you never know where the pain might come from, and when it does, it has to be released. "I felt like it was okay to cry at that moment," he says. "And because it was okay, I kept crying and let it all out."

Campers bring their anxieties to the Fear-Burning Bonfire.

After full-on exposure to the Emotional Revolution, as Pup calls it, I start getting the feeling that I'm not feeling as much as the other campers are feeling, which makes me feel like an outsider, even though everyone is being over-the-top nice to me. There is, after all, a "no cliques" rule, which is religiously observed. But there's also a "let your internal compass guide you" rule. And my compass is telling me to touch base at home with a fishing buddy I call Cool Refresher. I've known him for 25 years and have never seen him cry, even once. I ask C.R. if I'm missing something. He's a mercenary tech guy and has endured many more touchy-feely management retreats than I have. What on earth is the appeal of adult sleepaway camp, and why now? He emails back:

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Well, not too many of us are blue-collar workers anymore. If you are roofing all day, or framing out a house, you are going to come home exhausted. Shower, a beer, dinner . . . then fall asleep in front of the TV. You are not going to summer camp for grown-ups. I think in the '50s and '60s, most men fit this description. Nowadays, most men sit in a cubicle, an office, or at home on conference calls all day. They stare out the window, well-paid but bored out of their minds. "Wouldn't it be cool to be a fishing guide instead!?!?" Not really, but they imagine it's better than what they're doing. So they live in a fantasy world because they have (1) time, (2) energy, and (3) incredible ennui regarding their pointless lives.

I'm afraid Cool Refresher might be right. But whatever the case, I have a chance to work through my fears at the Fear-Burning Bonfire. The entire camp gathers around a moonlit crackling fire in an amphitheater, and we are told to write down our life intentions and fears. I'm afraid to tell you my intentions. So I'll just tell you my fear: being group-hugged by millennials. I dutifully write it down, as our raven-haired instructor, Julie Santiago (a former Wall-Streeter who is now a certified holistic health coach, life coach, and Vinyasa Flow and Kundalini yoga teacher), pads barefoot around the amphitheater like a seductive jungle cat, cloaked in all-white.

As India.Arie's "I Am Light" plays over the sound system, Julie tells us to sit still, feeling the inside of our bodies. She tells us to rest in "peace and love and coziness," to "take off all the masks, all the hats you wear, all the responsibilities." Camp is not the time for doubt. "The work is done. All you have to do is be. You've arrived. So all the work it's taken you to get here, let it go."

Julie wants us to scan our minds for the words that are getting in the way. "What's the s—t you're telling yourself?" Reasons why we aren't becoming what we need to become. "Write it. Write it like your life depended on it. Because it does. If the snake doesn't molt its skin, it dies. Shed your skin." The caterpillar doesn't know why it climbs a tree, Julie adds, now freely mixing metaphors, "it just climbs the damn tree." So if we're ready to be caterpillars, climbing damn trees, eager to fly like butterflies, we need to "let go of stuff that is weighing you down."

Julie gives us a Sanskrit word, "*svaha*." It's a denouement, indicating we will "let it go." She tells us to approach the fire, with our written fears, to say *svaha*, and to burn them. I do as she instructs. But all this soul-searching has left me famished. I leave the fire/fear behind and get in line for a gluten-free s'more.

In my Past Life Regression workshop, instructor Mira Kelley has us lie on the floor. She uses her hypnotic voice and a muted celestial soundtrack that sounds like Vangelis playing a funeral parlor to encourage us to reach out to our spirit guides and walks us back through our past lives and deaths. I make it all the way back to 1970 (the year of my birth) before I conk out. Listening to tape later, I can hear myself snoring.

Much time has passed since Tom Wolfe wrote "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening." You are 40 years old now, if you were born the year Wolfe documented how the old alchemical dream of changing base metals into gold had been replaced by the new one: "changing one's personality—remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one's very self . . . and observing, studying, and doting on it (Me!) . . . dwelling upon Me and every delicious nuance of *my* conduct and personality."

Though the players have changed—it's been a while since I met anyone who fouled their drawers during a forced marathon encounter session at Esalen—The Music of Me is still everyone's favorite camp song, with all its various remixes.

A walk around the grounds shows just how internal the fun is at Soul Camp. Sure, I catch a few campers skinny dipping in the hot tub late one night, and there're others doing stand-up paddleboard yoga on the lake (though even there, I overhear someone barking, "This shame is not yours! This s—t isn't even yours!"). My Braveheart life coach/roomie and I get several games of foosball in, but there are no takers on the poly-pong table or the pool table, and Pup and another cabinmate are the only two I see hit the trampoline center. I brought a racket, but the tennis, basketball, and volleyball courts lie fallow. The horses whinny riderless in their pavilion. The pool is empty. And the lifeguard at the waterless waterslides says they finally turned off the jets, since no campers were coming.

The real waterworks come when we work it out in workshop—we have multiple choices over five periods per day. I see people cry in my Intention Setting and Prosperity Chant class, when we have to chant a mantra for 11 minutes while banging our hands together in supplication to the universe (they time it, and the tears might just be from exhaustion or repetitive-motion injuries).

In my Ancient Singing Bowls class, intended to "clean the dust bunnies out of your chakras," instructor Kathy Hamer places bowls made out of "seven sacred metals" by

Tibetan monks, the size of Mini Cooper tires, on our solar plexuses. She fills them with warm water, then gongs away with either a mallet or a singing wand until the bowl makes thoracic-rattling vibrations jiggling all of your innards. Kathy warns: "If you snore, if you pass gas, if you laugh or cry, those are carriers of energy. So allow that."

I quickly set my intention—not to pass gas—as Kathy makes the bowl thrum, awakening the plate of turkey bacon I put away at breakfast. No energy is carried. (I'm the Jeb Bush of singing bowls.) But the woman lying on the yoga mat next to me starts sobbing uncontrollably. Kathy applies a calming touch to her forehead. When I later ask the woman why the crying jag, she says she's not quite sure. I'm tempted to give her Cal's number so they can go out for chai teas and a nice weep.

In my Past Life Regression workshop, instructor Mira Kelley has us lie on the floor. She uses her hypnotic voice and a muted celestial soundtrack that sounds like Vangelis playing a funeral parlor to encourage us to reach out to our spirit guides and walks us back through our past lives and deaths. I make it all the way back to 1970 (the year of my birth) before I conk out. Listening to tape later, I can hear myself snoring. Others had better luck.

A large hirsute man—I'll call Jim—made it back through seven lives during my refreshing nap ("most of them were pretty terrible," he says). During share-time afterwards, I nearly cry tears of laughter as Jim matter-of-factly, though hilariously, relates all his grisly deaths. In one, he had both hands cut off for stealing, was tied to a post, and was made an example to his village. In another, a storm shipwrecked him on a desert island, where he had to drink saltwater. In others, he had his heart cut out on the top of a pyramid, drowned in an airplane crash, and was tortured to death on a spinning wheel of fire. "All I know is that I felt hot, and I got dizzy," Jim says. "Neither was very good: You're on a wheel! You're on fire! Enjoy!"

The rest of the sharers, whether Viking warriors or temple priestesses, related tales of treachery and incest and illicit romance that sounded like an awesome TV miniseries. All with tears, of course. Even I squirted a few for the unsung sufferers: Why is nobody ever an insurance adjuster or potato peeler in a past life?

In my Angel Circle, spiritual teacher Laurel Bleadon-Maffei, a curly redhead in a bright blue sequined shirt, channels a group of angels to speak with us, called "Josephus and the Wisdom Council." Before closing her eyes, Laurel warns us that the angels are going to be "filling this room with a lot of love" and "tears may come forward." Hence the big box of Kleenex on the floor. Laurel also warns us that her voice might change. It doesn't really, but soon enough, Josephus and friends are in our midst, though he does all the talking. "Yes! Hello, everybody, we are here," Josephus says through Laurel.

Josephus tells us Laurel wasn't crazy about Josephus and the Wisdom Council's name, "since it sounds like a '50s group," but that's the name they respond to. He quickly opens up the floor for Q&A, telling us there are no bad questions. So I fire off a volley. After all, I'm a lifelong religious guy who believes in an afterlife, and here are angels in our midst. I'm not trying to hog the floor, but there're lots of potential questions about the other side to ask of the angels.

But first, Josephus corrects me: "We are guides that work in the angelic realm. That doesn't mean all of us are necessarily pure angelic beings." I make a note to put "no false advertising" in the camp suggestion box: The camp schedule clearly says "Angel Circle," not "Assistants to the Angels Circle." I still ask several questions, such as "Are there fallen angels?" (yes, basically) and "Do angels feel human emotions like doubt or ambivalence?" (no). When I ask a more technical question about angel hierarchy, Josephus puts the brakes on, saying, "We want to give somebody else a chance, so is it all right if we move on?"

Chakras get a Tibetan scrubdown in the Ancient Singing Bowls class.

I yield the floor. But even with visitors from a distant land, all anyone else wants to talk about is their favorite subject: Me! My mother, my lover, my strained relationships, my career ambitions. Josephus and the Wisdom Council take all comers, essentially reassuring everyone that they're on the right path, with advice about as specific as you get from a Magic 8-Ball. The Kleenex box still gets a pretty good workout.

Not long afterwards, I'm corralled by camp directors Ali and Michelle. They realize that they said they told me I could tape, but they've had some complaints. "It's the angel lady, isn't it?" I ask them. Among others, they say. What I'd like to know is did Laurel complain, or Josephus and the Wisdom Council? The latter was getting a little lippy with

me. They suggest it was Laurel. She's worried that a tape recorder "breaks the sacred container of experience."

I'm not happy about this. My handwriting is lousy, and for any professional news gatherer, accuracy is Job One: I need my tapes. Ali, or maybe it's Michelle (I don't know since I'm not taping), suggests ditching the recorder might lead to a "richer, deeper style of reporting," one without filters. Now, I can just "be."

The new restriction makes me want to cry. Or drink. I opt for the latter, as I do periodically throughout the week when facing a daunting task: like the sing-along competition with Super Soul Squad. Or the exercise in the Bust Anxiety Through Tapping workshop when I have to tap my forehead with my finger while chanting affirmations about how the little boy inside me won't be wounded by my parents. Or my prolonged platonic hug with the poetess who invented the patented therapy system Hugitation™, allowing the subject "to tap your divine source energy and hold that space for the other person." (I last two minutes, before telling her I have to take a leak.)

As I'm standing at my car trunk filling my "water" bottle with Kentucky sunshine, I'm made by a fellow camper. I'm worried she'll rat me out to the camp directors and get me expelled. But she doesn't. She understands. She could probably use a pop herself. As she relates, in what is the only note of skepticism I hear in four days: "I'm totally into New Age stuff, but they can be patronizing around here. Somebody in my workshop said, 'If you're at Soul Camp, you're not happy.' Like everyone is nursing a pet injury. Sometimes, you just got to accept it and f—ing move on!"

I want to Hugitation™ her.

On the last day of camp, there is a grounding ceremony. "What's a grounding ceremony?" I ask Sarge. "I don't really know," Sarge admits. "I think it's to reintegrate? They talk a lot about reintegration around here. Me? I just go home and get back to my life. But a lot of people have trouble, because they come here to find themselves, to try to awaken something, to fix what's broken, find what they feel is lost. So they have a hard time going back, because they're worried how to take it home. They don't really know what they're going to do."

Out in the garden, we get grounded (lots of deep breathing, stretches, affirmations, etc.). And everyone says tearful goodbyes, inserting personalized notes in the little mail pouches with all of our names on them that hang on "the Love Wall." Campers write the things you say when you're leaving camp: Keep in touch. . . . See you next Soul Camp. . . . I want you inside of me.

Even my Love Wall pouch is full. The true Soul Campers can smell that I'm not one of them, but they are generous, sensitive souls. They're in touch with all of their feelings, maybe too in touch. And I wonder, if they felt maybe 50 percent less, whether they wouldn't be better off.

I feel bad, almost churlish, for not saying proper goodbyes. But I can't hit the open road fast enough. For we are in the Sierras, and the mountains are calling. After four days of looking inward, I'm ready to look out. Yosemite is only two hours away, so I head for that magical place, gluttonously consuming the sights: Half Dome and Glacier Point and Yosemite Falls.

Even my own Love Wall pouch is full. The true Soul Campers can smell that I'm not one of them, but they are generous, sensitive souls. They're in touch with all of their feelings, maybe too in touch. And I wonder, if they felt maybe 50 percent less, whether they wouldn't be better off.

The great naturalist and wild man John Muir, who'd ride avalanches for sport, summed up Yosemite's majesty better than I ever could: "No pain here. No dull empty hours. No fear of the past, no fear of the future. These blessed mountains are so compactly filled with God's beauty, no petty personal hope or experience has room to be."

As sunset comes, I pull my car over at the foot of El Capitan, change into my waders, and hit the Merced River with my fly rod, in search of rainbows. Both the drought and the heavy fishing pressure are hell on the trout around here. I throw dry flies, then weighted nymphs, then break out small lead jigs, to start dredging what's left of the deeper holes, where I imagine fish are hunkered down, praying for rain to come and tourists to leave. All to no avail.

Most days, when I fish, I'm all about the river and never look up. Josephus and the Wisdom Council could be playing "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" above my head, and I wouldn't see them. I'm too busy reading water. But today, as I'm fruitlessly fishing downstream, not even seeing the shadow of a spooked fish, I can't help but keep looking over my shoulder at El Capitan, glowing pink in the valley's half-light. That beautiful granite and diorite rock is not concerned about staying young. It has already stood for millennia, and will stand for millennia more. And the best part of all is that it is standing beside me right now, completely indifferent to my successes and failures, reminding me of my own glorious insignificance. ♦

London bookstore during the Blitz (1940)

A Year in Books

True confessions of a serial page-turner. BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

Michael Dirda isn't a scholar, although he has the learning to do scholarly things. He isn't a critic, either, although his writing consistently shows a finely edged sensibility. The man isn't even a writer, strange as that is to say about someone who has written six books, edited another dozen or so, and has a quick and easy prose.

No, Michael Dirda is a reader, down at the root of his being. A man who gained his scholarly knowledge and critical sensibility from reading whatever came to hand as he pawed through the dusty shelves of used bookstores. Writing—well, yes: If you're going to keep from starving as a reader, you've got to find a bookish job, and writing is one of the possibilities, especially writing book reviews. He is, really, only what he claims for himself: Bookman, plain and simple. "An appreciator," he adds, "a cheerleader for the old, the neglected, the marginalized, and the forgotten. On sunny days I may call myself a literary journalist."

Browsings
A Year of Reading, Collecting, and Living with Books
by Michael Dirda
Pegasus, 336 pp., $24.95

In "Armchair Adventures," one of the essays in this new collection, Dirda asks, "Why is it that I so seldom want to read what everyone else wants to read?" As he ages, he finds that it's not the hip new releases he wants to read, but the old stuff: fast-paced adventure tales like those of John Buchan, comic boy-meets-girl stories like those of P.G. Wodehouse, children's books like *The Phantom Tollbooth*, wild modernist classics like *The Master and Margarita*.

Browsings is not as deep as some of Dirda's other works: His 2003 account of his childhood in the Midwest, *An Open Book*, for example; or his study of Sherlock Holmes's creator, *On Conan Doyle* (2011). But this new book isn't intended to be a thick study of anything in particular. Running from around 500 words to 2,000, the essays in *Browsings* began life as a column Dirda wrote for a year, appearing at the rate of

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Joseph Bottum is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard.

one a week on the website of the *American Scholar*. "I hope," he concludes his reflections, "that the past 50 or so columns have reminded readers that the world of books is bigger than the current bestseller list."

Dirda is widely celebrated in the bookish world, winning such awards as the Pulitzer Prize for criticism and the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America. But even though the weekly book columns have now been issued in a print collection, the work he performed over the course of that year of writing deserves greater recognition. It had a kind of turn-of-the-last-century/Arthur Quiller-Couch feel to it, or a 1920s/Christopher Morley sense—a feat of literary journalism as marvelous and old fashioned as the books that Dirda loves best. Its dedication mentions Clifton Fadiman and Cyril Connolly, and in the literary performances of those now sadly faded figures the reader can discern the model Dirda set out to follow.

Along the way, he discusses his preference for old phonograph records above digital music, the ridiculous literary doodads—bobbleheads of authors, action-figures of Sherlock Holmes—he keeps in his office, and his impatience with book collectors who want only high-quality books they then refuse to touch. An "inexplicable feeling of buoyant youthfulness" overtakes him as he browses the selections on used-book shelves and tables, and the old dusty ones are what he wants—the ones whose covers and battered conditions speak of the glamour they once had.

There's some highbrow content here—Proust and Joyce, Augustine and Rousseau—and plenty of the middlebrow trending toward the lowbrow: the heroes in Lord Dunsany and Jules Verne, Fu Manchu and the supernaturally besieged figures in H.P. Lovecraft's stories. Even the Flash and the Hardy Boys. But the key to Dirda's work is the lack of much distinction between the various brows that were once thought to distinguish the educated reader from the great unwashed. Anything that moves a story along can be a good read, and anything that's a good read can prompt Michael Dirda into a fun and interesting set of reflections on books and manners and culture and life.

There's an era of popular literature that its aficionados call the gaslight era after the foggy streets of late Victorian London—although it's a bit of a misnomer since the era really extends from such middle Victorians as Wilkie Collins to authors as late as E. Phillips Oppenheim and the early Agatha Christie in the 1920s. You can see the imputed unity of the era in the conventions of steampunk or in Alan Moore's comic book series *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which unites such figures as H. Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain, Jules Verne's Captain Nemo, Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, H.G. Wells's Invisible Man, and E.W. Hornung's exemplary thief, A.J. Raffles.

This gaslight era remains Dirda's favorite, but we lack any good explanation for the creation of those stories. The authors were writing what (at the time) was considered merely popular entertainment, lacking the accouterments of such acknowledged masters as Henry James or Virginia Woolf; but they created a set of characters that rival Shakespeare's Othello and Dickens's Scrooge in their power to remain in the imagination. From Sherlock Holmes to the Scarlet Pimpernel, from Mowgli to Jeeves, Dracula to Phileas Fogg, the gaslight era somehow gave us the archetypes of memorability, and Dirda is right to show his fascination with these stories.

In fact, so often does his mind turn to them that he promises his next volume will be called "The Great Age of Storytelling," and its writing will allow him to focus his wonderful, bookman's talents on the question of why our imagination is so often drawn back to that moment in literary history. Michael Dirda insists that he retains "the bright enthusiasms and the fresh, unspoiled mental outlook of a slightly inebriated undergraduate." It's a line from P.G. Wodehouse, and that seems appropriate: For readers and bookish types, the meanderings of the columns collected in *Browsings* are exactly what Jeeves would have brought in on a silver tray as a morning pick-me-up. ♦

B&A

The Bonaparte Effect

How Napoleon left Europe shaken and stirred.

BY ANDRE VAN LOON

The experience of being thoroughly beaten can prove to be a key turning point in life. Approached intelligently, a shattering failure can prompt rewarding questions: What could have been done differently? How could defeat have been avoided? Was the failure the result of a weakness or an opponent's undervalued strength? Getting the right answers to these questions may teach one a valuable lesson, potentially bringing success closer the next time.

The forces ranged against Napoleon the Great (as Andrew Roberts has argued Bonaparte should be called) had years to brood over their failures. Time and again, the coalitions mounted against the French were fractured, beaten in the field, and outmatched in peace negotiations. Some of the best responses to these humiliations were the writings of Carl von Clausewitz and the gradual reorganization of

Empire of Chance
The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things
by Anders Engberg-Pedersen
Harvard, 336 pp., $45

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tightly controlled 18th-century armies into larger, more aggressive 19th-century ones.

Napoleon has often been characterized as a gambler, willing to stake everything on his next big victory. To many at the time, and since, his type of warfare was riven by chance: Despite the best planning, actual combat was shot through by innumerable contingencies, a different interplay of which could have led to a different outcome. And yet, against this theory, Napoleon kept on winning, apparently master even of blind luck.

This conception of an unpredictable world, somehow tilted in favor of the French, underpins Anders Engberg-Pedersen's excellent new study. He notes that the victories won (in the 18th century) by Frederick the Great were achieved by small armies operating within clearly defined spaces. And although they could be brutal, Frederick's wars were relatively formal, bound by chivalric codes. By contrast, Napoleon's wars saw armies of unprecedented size battle in terrains stretching from Paris to Moscow. Conceivably, anything could happen when so much had to be delegated, and so many individuals had the opportunity to disrupt events.

Engberg-Pedersen ranges over military theory, literature, philosophy, and cartography, as he traces the conceptual impact of Napoleon's victories. In each of his discussions, the focus is on how the lived experience of war, and especially defeat, informed received ideas about how to fight. In his chapter on military judgment, Engberg-Pedersen investigates how the Prussians dealt with the problem of military education. The issue was how one could condition new recruits to the dangers of the *Grande Armée*, without actually entering them into mortal situations. Traditional teaching relied on geometry and mathematics to teach future leaders how to conceive of clear movements in space and time.

This thinking was developed into virtual exercises, relying on maps, games, and texts. The problem was that these techniques often ignored the elements of danger and fear. One might be excellent at military gameplaying in the classroom, yet crumble under fire. As Clausewitz noted in *On War*, entering a theater of war could induce a state of near-paralysis. His response was to write a text of military theory that did not emphasize order but, instead, could bring his readers as near to the experience of fighting, yet keeping them safe:

> We run toward the hill where the commanding officer is positioned with his large retinue. Here the impact of the cannonballs and the explosion of the shells become so frequent that the seriousness of life shatters the adolescent fantasy. Suddenly a friend falls to the ground—a shell explodes in the crowd and sets off a number of involuntary movements—you begin to feel that you are losing your calm and your composure . . .

In other words, *On War* attempts to capture the new reality brought by Napoleon while explicitly driving its readers (and author) towards a state of battle readiness.

Empire of Chance also features discussions of how realist literature sought to represent the difficulties of understanding Napoleon, with a capable analysis of *War and Peace*. Famously, Tolstoy's Napoleon is a self-important yet small-minded character who does not admit to his own irrelevance. Dismissing any notion of genius in Napoleon, Tolstoy conceives of a world in which the smallest events can have momentous consequences. In such a world, no one can grasp, let alone control, the full significance of historical forces, in which everything is tied together by a multiplicity of causes and effects.

As Engberg-Pedersen goes on to note, Tolstoy's novel is unconcerned with generic unity. Indeed, Tolstoy is openly contemptuous of neat writing, as he combines literary realism with lengthy historical-philosophical passages, which many of his readers seemingly cannot abide. Faced with the problem of trying to understand what really happened during the French invasion of Russia, *War and Peace* splits into a hybrid text, each part of it asking the same questions, but answering them differently.

Despite its inclusion of Tolstoy, *Empire of Chance* focuses almost exclusively on Prussian thought. We follow Clausewitz, his teacher General Gerhard von Scharnhorst, the philosophers Wilhelm Traugott Krug, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and other lesser-known names as they grapple with the challenges posed by an expansionist France. We see how their conceptualizations evolved to allow for actual experience, so that their students could square up to the reality of Napoleon. As Clausewitz noted, one must always allow for a new reality:

> [W]e must regard [our times] and observe it without prejudice. Only in a sensing mind full of drive can the eventful future announce itself; it must be constantly in touch with the present and the past and *unlost in philosophical dreams*.

This is a rich seam of thought to mine, and Engberg-Pedersen does so with great skill. Curiously, though, he is silent about a host of other countries that fought against the French. In a study that stresses the need for a frequent cold shower of reality, it is ironic not to find reflections on several major aspects of how Napoleon was finally beaten. There are no passages on Russian bloody-mindedness—the Russians were willing to sacrifice Moscow rather than negotiate for peace—or on the Duke of Wellington's sangfroid. British thoughts on the new disorderliness of the world are not considered here; but whether the British thought in these terms or not, they continued to foot many of the bills in Europe's efforts to tame France.

Engberg-Pedersen is a charming analyst of a complex subject, and although he does not answer the question of how Napoleon could apparently master disorder—there seems to be little chaotic about winning almost every battle—let us hope he writes more about the philosophies that helped to defeat Napoleon the Great. Including, the next time round, the phlegmatic Britons and ruthless Slavs. ♦

B&A

Losses and Wins

Bridging the generation gap with Ole Miss football.

BY BARTON SWAIM

Stuart Stevens (right) and his father

Stuart Stevens was Mitt Romney's top political strategist during the 2012 campaign. He knows what it feels like to lose, and he can hardly talk about that loss with anyone who hasn't experienced a campaign from the inside:

> It was such an intense, pressured, chaotic process that demanded so much it was inevitable that one began and ended a different person.

A year after the election, he writes, "there were still long periods when I'd lie in bed reading and trying, never very successfully, not to relive the campaign." Emotionally adrift, he decided to spend the fall with his 95-year-old father watching the football team they both loved, the University of Mississippi "Ole Miss" Rebels. This memoir of watching those games is a tender and understated meditation on collegiate football, on life in the South, and—especially—on loss.

The Last Season
A Father, a Son, and a Lifetime of College Football
by Stuart Stevens
Knopf, 224 pp., $24.95

The book's narrative moves easily between the 2013 season and Stevens's boyhood in the early 1960s. The most memorable year was 1962. Stuart was 10. All around, the civil rights movement was turning Mississippi society upside down, the state's citizens regularly embarrassed by reactionary efforts ranging from stupid to sinister. Stevens remembers Governor Ross Barnett trying to force the halftime crowd at the Ole Miss-Kentucky game to sing a specially rewritten state song. The whole spectacle was so awful—the new song was comically bad: *Ross is standing like Gibraltar, he shall never falter*—that Stuart's father left the game.

Real life was not good for Mississippians in 1962, but football made it a magical year: Ole Miss, led by the legendary coach Johnny Vaught, didn't lose a game, beating the Arkansas Razorbacks in the Sugar Bowl to win the national championship.

The Rebels would never again go undefeated or win a national championship: Traditionally, they're one of the Southeastern Conference's good-but-not-great teams, perennially middle-ranked. But Mississippi has changed dramatically for the better during the intervening decades. And much of its progress—this is true in every other Southern state as well—owes itself to high school and college football. Stevens recalls speaking to a man roughly his own age who had been in the stands when LSU first allowed a black player to take the field. "I was just a kid," he tells Stevens.

> Daddy was there and my brother. The first black LSU players, Lora Hinton and Mike Williams, came out on the field. I'd never heard cussing like that. I think it was the first time I heard the *n*-word. People were throwing these little empty bottles of booze out on the field, yelling. Then Hinton intercepted a pass, and everybody is standing up yelling for him. "That Puerto Rican can play! Look at that Puerto Rican sum-bitch."

To oversimplify, white Southerners slowly discovered they loved winning football games more than they feared racial equality, and over the decades, the old bigotries have softened or expired in ways that no one anticipated.

The Last Season is an efficient and frequently moving account of a son's admiration for his father, but it avoids sentimentality altogether. Stevens mentions the melancholy irony that, whereas his father once walked slowly to allow his son to keep up, the son now does the same for his father; but he does not dwell on it. At several points, Stevens slightly misjudges his father's mental and physical capacities in the way busy and preoccupied sons tend to do.

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When his father tells him that the Superdome seats fewer people than the University of Alabama's Bryant-Denny Stadium—more than 100,000 as against the Superdome's 75,000—Stevens asks, "How do you know that?" as if the old man should have long since forgotten so precise a datum. His father looks at him: "It's a secret?" A few pages later, at the end of a passage reflecting on the loss of family members and family traditions, the father announces: "I've been thinking about this a lot and have reached a conclusion."

"About?" asks his son.

"Ole Miss will beat Arkansas."

It's on that subject of loss—loss in the sense of losing a contest—that this book is at its best. Stevens disavows any attempt to understand football as a metaphor for life. "The football that my father and I loved," he writes, "was too good to try to look for some usefulness in it any more than you'd go to church really expecting a limp to be healed. It was good because it was good, and that was enough."

Even so, the fear and regret of loss haunts the author. Southerners, as he rightly notes, can't help returning to the theme: We are a people who will forever be the losers of our greatest conflict. "To win a war is to be free to move on," he writes. "To be conquered is to live with the consequences forever." For Stevens, loss is so painful that victory becomes chiefly a way to avoid it. "I enjoy winning," he observes at one point, then catches himself: "No, I enjoy not losing. I realized long ago that it hurts more to lose than it feels good to win."

The fear of losing seems almost to rob him of any joy in winning. When Ole Miss is leading the heavily favored LSU by a score of 17-0 in the third quarter, Stevens wants to leave. "I know there's pain coming. I don't want the pain. I reject the pain." (He was wrong, incidentally. The Rebels held off the Tigers, though only just: 27-24.)

Part of the reason he wanted to spend the fall watching the Ole Miss Rebels, you begin to realize, is that Stevens lost the biggest contest of his career, the 2012 election. He wanted to experience again the loss-avoiding sensation of victory. In sports, of course, losses can be redeemed next week or next year. In a war, or in a life-defining contest such as Stevens's 2012 election, loss can never quite be redeemed or forgotten or undone. Unlike his fellow Ole Miss fans, Stevens is not likely to get another chance to win the biggest prize.

Of course, if Stevens and his candidate had won that election, he would likely have moved on to other contests—and left this sweetly poignant memoir unwritten. ♦

B&A

Tacitus the Great

How our vision of Rome has been shaped by its chronicler.

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

For a man who delved into the lives of others, not all that much is known about the life of Cornelius Tacitus, historian of Rome under the empire. He was born in 56 or 57 A.D. and is thought to have died around 125 A.D. His family came from Narbonensis (the modern Provence), or possibly from Northern Italy, and so he was not Roman by birth. He was what the Romans called a *novus homo*, or new man. He married the daughter of Gnaeus Julius Agricola, the Roman general, a man of the provincial nobility who conquered and brought under Roman suzerainty large swaths of Britain. Apart from birth, skillful oratory was one of the main avenues to advancement in Rome, and Tacitus' brilliance as an orator, attested in a number of letters by his contemporary Pliny the Younger, was of the highest order.

Tacitus was made *quaestor* (one of the lower magistrates), *aedile* (concerned with the care of the city, its corn supply, water, and games), and *praetor* (young men put in charge of important administrative tasks). He may have led a Roman legion and governed a province, possibly in Germany, and was later suffect consul, and then proconsul, in Asia. He sat for many years in the Roman senate, an institution much reduced in importance by Augustus, subsequently shredded of its dignity by later emperors—"Men ready to be slaves," Tiberius called Roman senators of his time—and all but emasculated in Tacitus' day by the emperor Domitian. He was close to 45 before he turned to the writing of history.

In an infrequent insertion of himself into his historical work, Tacitus, in his *Histories*, wrote: "I must not deny that my public career was launched by Vespasian, promoted by Titus, and advanced by Domitian." The odd locution—"I must not deny"—is owing to the fact that his rise under these men, especially under the vicious Domitian, was not something of which a man could be unequivocally proud. The disclaimer was also meant to imply that this would in no way render him intellectually hostage to those who had promoted his career.

In the *Agricola*, his panegyrical monograph on the career of his father-in-law, Tacitus wrote:

> There can be great men even under bad emperors, and that duty and discretion, if coupled with energy and a career of action, will bring a man to no less glorious summits

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'The Death of Germanicus' by Heinrich Füger (1789)

IMAGNO / GETTY

> than are obtained by perilous paths and ostentatious deaths that do not benefit the Commonwealth.

True, this, of Agricola; less true, probably, of his son-in-law. Only the rule of the benevolent emperor Trajan allowed Tacitus the freedom to speak and write as he wished. "Modern times are indeed happy, as few others have been," Tacitus wrote of life under Trajan, "for we can think as we please, and speak as we think." As Pliny the Younger put it of the reign of Trajan, under which he had himself flourished: "Now at last men's merits bring them official recognition instead of the danger of the past."

Tacitus has had his critics, among them Voltaire and Napoleon; the latter saw nothing wrong with imperial rule in which the emperor answers to no one. Racine, though, called Tacitus "the finest painter of antiquity." Edward Gibbon, known to slay fellow historians in acidulous footnotes, spoke with unremitting praise of Tacitus, referring to "the discerning eye" and "masterly pencil" and calling him "the first of historians who applied the science of philosophy to the study of facts." Gibbon added that "the expressive conciseness of his descriptions has deserved to exercise the diligence of innumerable antiquarians, and to excite the genius and penetration of the philosophic historians of our own times." High marks, these, from the toughest of all historical graders.

Great swaths of Tacitus' writing have gone missing. What parts of his two major works have been lost is a subject of scholarly speculation. Donald R. Dudley, author of *The World of Tacitus*, has asserted that Tacitus' original plan was to cover the years between the principate of Augustus (begun in 27 B.C.) to the last year of Domitian (96 A.D.). This would have accounted for both the Julio-Claudian and the Flavian dynasties.

As things stand, central subjects and events in the Tacitean oeuvre are lost. These include the pages devoted to the maniacal Emperor Gaius, or Caligula. The first six years of the reign of Claudius are absent. The fate of fascinating figures that Tacitus promises to take up later never return because of missing portions of his manuscripts. Of the destruction of Pompeii, all we get is this: "An earthquake also demolished the populous Campanian city town of Pompeii." Gone, too, is the suicide of Nero and the murder, earlier, of Tiberius' cruel henchman Sejanus. Apart from some excoriating paragraphs at the conclusion of the *Agricola*, the immitigably cruel Domitian escapes Tacitus' deft literary scalpel.

Tacitus' two main works are the *Histories* and the *Annals*. The first dealt chiefly with the Roman civil wars of 69 A.D., the Year of the Four

Emperors, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian; the second is a yearly account, beginning in 14 A.D. (the year of the death of Augustus) and ending in 68 A.D., that takes up the leading Roman events, domestic and foreign, as they occurred. Tacitus remarks that he hoped to go on to recount the reigns of Nerva and Trajan, but whether he did or not, we shall never know. He had earlier published his *Agricola* and his *Germania*, the latter a geographical and ethnological study of the German tribes to the west of Rome; "Germany" at that time included what are today the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the Baltic countries, and Scandinavia. In part a paean to the barbaric tribes of Germany as noble savages, the *Germania* was used by the Nazis to glorify the German warrior tradition. Finally, one of his first surviving compositions, the *Dialogus*, is a treatise, in dialogue form, on the rudiments and principles of oratory and on its value for intellectual development and personal advancement.

Modern scholars have found in Tacitus inaccuracies, biases, deep stretches of ignorance—see, especially, his few pages on the Jews—but none of this ultimately has diminished the grandeur of what he wrote. The reason is that Tacitus was as fully a literary artist as he was a historian. His was a style that abandoned the periodic sentence, eschewed the flowery, commanded devastating metaphors, lanced pretensions with exquisite irony, selected the perfect details—a style that meted out the just literary punishment for the multiplicity of egregious crimes of which he was chief chronicler. Sir Ronald Syme, his best biographer, calls Tacitus "the crown and summit of imperial literature," and there is no reason to dispute the claim.

About his own motives as a historian, Tacitus was unambiguous. "It seems to me," he wrote in the *Annals*, "a historian's foremost duty is to ensure that merit is recorded, and to confront evil words and deeds with the fear of posterity's denunciations." Tacitus was, in other words, a moralist, with a pessimist's view of human nature and a talent for describing human nature outraged, which, under the rule of the Roman emperors, it frequently was.

"I shall write without indignation or partisanship," he claimed, "in my case the customary incentives to these are lacking." Tacitus felt no personal disappointments, bore no grudges, took no partisan positions. Yet he was a man of pitiless insight with a strong sense of honor and distaste for hypocrisy. Montaigne, who claimed to have read the *Histories* in a single sitting, held that "Tacitus was a great man, upright and courageous, not of a superstitious but of a philosophical and high-minded virtue." This, *ipso facto*, rendered him a relentless critic of Rome under the emperors.

Tacitus understood (as Syme has it) that, since Augustus, "the Roman constitution was a screen and a sham." He never took seriously the pretensions of Augustus, Tiberius, and other emperors that the Roman Republic was still intact. Under the principate, all power rested with one man, the emperor, and the lure of power and its subsequent attainment, with only rare exceptions, brought its own corruptions. In Tacitus, some emperors are better than others; but most soon leave the path of virtue, and all die unhappily.

Describing life under the Caesars restricted Tacitus chiefly to recording cowardly betrayals, petty rivalries of courtesans and freedmen and slaves, acts of vengeance, and horrific cruelty. Assassination, execution, enforced suicide, regicide, patricide, matricide, siblicide—in the Roman Empire, during the first century A.D., enormity was business as usual. Recounting the relentless executions and suicides demanded by Nero, Tacitus writes that "this slavish passivity, this torrent of wasted bloodshed far from active service, wearies, depresses, and paralyzes the mind."

Tacitus claimed to envy the historians of the Roman Republic. They "told of great wars, of the storming of cities, of kings vanquished and taken captive; and in home affairs, of the contentions of tribunes and consuls, of the land laws and corn laws, of the struggles of the people with the Senate; it was a wide and spacious theme in which they could move with ease." Montaigne disagreed, arguing that in tracing "the lives of the emperors of his time, so strange and extreme in every way, and the many notable actions that their cruelty in particular produced in their subjects, he had a stronger and more attractive matter to treat and narrate than if he had to tell of battles and universal commotions." Most readers would agree with Montaigne.

Not that Tacitus was entirely condemnatory. To quote Syme again, he knew that "an evil man may be a sagacious ruler; an autocrat is not omnipotent; a tyrant or a fool may be guided by wise counselors." Good men crop up in his pages, but they are few. Thrasea Paetus, the Stoic philosopher and senator condemned by Nero, was among those Tacitus seems genuinely to have admired; Germanicus, grandson-in-law of Augustus and the adoptive son of Tiberius, and Corbulo, Nero's successful general, are two others. More than once he apologizes for the grim events he is under obligation to record, but such was life in Roman society, "where to corrupt and to yield to corruption is called living in the fashion of the day."

The degradation of the senate and other political institutions since the time of the republic is a theme that plays through Tacitus. The cause of this degradation was the enlarged powers of the emperors. "From time immemorial, man has had an instinctive love of power," he wrote in *Histories*.

> With the growth of our empire, this instinct has become a dominant and uncontrollable force. It was easy to maintain equality when Rome was weak. Worldwide conquest and the destruction of all rival communities or potentates opened the way to the secure enjoyment of wealth and an overriding appetite for it.

Grand themes interest Tacitus less than shoddy behavior. As a moralist, he is less concerned with economic

development or the conditions of the populace than in the drama of human nature as played out by people in power, the men (and sometimes the women) who led Rome during the dark years covered by his histories. The personalities of princes, their wives, consorts, counselors, and enemies dominate his pages.

During the conga line of emperors in 69 A.D., one finds one's antipathies nicely divided by the comparative wretchedness of each of Rome's rulers. The line begins with Galba, old and feeble, rumored to be brutal and miserly, dominated by counselors whose crimes further tarnished his legacy. Otho ascended the throne after the assassination of the disappointing Galba, who "by common consent possessed the making of a ruler—had he never ruled." Vitellius next contested Otho for the emperorship. Each shamelessly sucked up to the army, which now, in effect, selected Rome's emperors and for whom money was more important than character.

"Here then," Tacitus writes of Otho and Vitellius, "were the two most despicable men in the whole world by reason of their unclean, idle and pleasure-loving lives, apparently appointed by fate for the task of destroying the empire." In any struggle between the two, he notes, "the only certainty was that the winner would turn out to be worse." Not that the populace was likely to notice: So debased had Roman society become that "few Romans had any capacity to judge or real desire for the public good."

Otho ruled for four months and then, when defeated in battle by Vitellius' troops, took his life by stabbing himself. Not long after, Vitellius was stabbed by one of his own soldiers. His final view was of his jeering troops and the sight of his statues being pulled down from the very spot where Galba was murdered. "Thereupon," writes Tacitus, "he fell lifeless beneath a rain of blows. And still the mob reviled him in death as viciously as they had flattered him while he lived."

Tacitus in front of the Austrian parliament

Character sketches drawn with masterly concision supply some of the most brilliant passages in Tacitus. "In the delineation of character," Macaulay wrote,

> Tacitus is unrivaled among historians, and has very few superiors among dramatists and novelists. By the delineation of character we do not mean the practice of drawing up epigrammatic catalogues of good and bad qualities, and appending them to the names of eminent men. No writer, indeed, has done this more skillfully than Tacitus; but this is not his peculiar glory. All the persons who occupy a large space in his works have an individuality of character which seems to pervade all their words and actions. We know them as if we lived with them.

"Of audacious character and untiring physique, secretive about himself and ever ready to incriminate others, a blend of arrogance and servility," Tacitus writes of Sejanus, to whom Tiberius entrusted the running of Rome while he was off in Caprae, "he concealed behind a carefully modest exterior an unbounded lust for power." Tacitus calls Sejanus a "small-town adulterer" and notes that the cause of this vicious man's rise to power "was rather heaven's anger against Rome—to which the triumph of Sejanus and his downfall, too, were catastrophic." As for heaven's anger, Tacitus' theodicy was encapsulated in his belief that "Rome's unparalleled suffering supplied ample proof that the gods are indifferent to our tranquility, but eager for our punishment."

Under the empire, women came to wield greater power than under the republic—not, usually, for the better. Livia, the two Agrippinas (older and younger), Messalina, Poppaea, the empowered Roman women are often subtler, but no less cruel, than the men, and equally shorn of virtue. Men used swords, the women's weapons of choice were seduction and poison. Poppaea, who replaced Octavia as Nero's wife and later plotted her murder, is described by Tacitus as having "every womanly asset except goodness. . . . To her, married or bachelor bedfellows were alike. She was indifferent to her reputation—insensible to men's love and unloving herself. Advantage dictated the bestowal of her favors." Poppaea died, pregnant, when, in a fit of anger, Nero kicked her in the stomach.

Women in Tacitus are also capable of acts of great courage. A woman named Epicharis, indirectly in on the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero, after a day of excruciating torture strangled herself

lest under further torture she betray others. Tacitus writes:

> What admirable courage in a freed slave, in a woman who, doomed to so awful an ordeal, screened by her fidelity people who were strangers, almost unknown to her, while free-born men of a stronger sex, Roman knights and senators, waited not for tortures to betray in mutual emulation their nearest and dearest.

The violence, the sheer bloodiness, of Roman life Tacitus conveys almost by the way. If a company of Roman troops showed cowardice or other dereliction in battle, they risked decimation, in which 1 of every 10 among them was arbitrarily put to death. If a slave killed his master, under Roman law, all the slaves in the household were executed. Such was his rage against Sejanus that Tiberius ordered his friends and all his family executed, including his son and young daughter. Of the daughter, Tacitus reports: "Because capital punishment of a virgin was unprecedented, she was violated by the executioner with the noose beside her."

Tiberius is Tacitus' greatest portrait—a "classic," as Donald R. Dudley calls it, "of denigration." Tiberius is the major figure in the *Annals*, for he reigned for 22 years, longer than any emperor in the Julio-Claudian line except Augustus, who ruled for 40 years. Tacitus' skill at balancing the emperor's cruelty is nicely set off against his deceptive subtlety. Tiberius' paranoia is at the forefront of Tacitus' portrait. Yet he is given credit for his accomplishments: He kept Rome prosperous and at peace. In the portrait provided by Suetonius in his *Lives of the Caesars*, Tiberius is a relatively modest ruler who, once he deserts Rome for Caprae, becomes a monstrous pervert. "Some aspects of his criminal obscenity are almost too vile to discuss," Suetonius writes—and then, of course, discusses them: "Imagine training little boys, whom he called his 'minnows,' to chase him while he went swimming and get between his legs to lick and nibble him." Such, according to Suetonius, was "the filthy old man [Tiberius] had become."

Tacitus reports that it was in the year 23 A.D. Tiberius, then 65, "turned tyrannical—or gave tyrannical men power." On his perversions, Tacitus omits details, noting only that "his criminal lusts shamed him. Their uncontrollable activity was worthy of an oriental tyrant. Free-born children were his victims. He was fascinated by beauty, youthful innocence, and aristocratic birth. New names for types of perversion were invented."

Tacitus was as fully a literary artist as he was a historian. His was a style that abandoned the periodic sentence, eschewed the flowery, commanded devastating metaphors—a style that meted out the just literary punishment for the multiplicity of egregious crimes of which he was chief chronicler.

These perversions, as Tacitus the literary artist knew, were better imagined than described. The brief obituary of Tiberius in the *Annals* is as crushing:

> While he was a private citizen or holding commands under Augustus, his life was blameless. . . . [H]e concealed his real self, cunningly affecting virtuous qualities. However, until his mother [Livia, wife of Augustus] died, there was good in Tiberius as well as evil. Again, as long as he favored (or feared) Sejanus, the cruelty of Tiberius was detested, but his perversions unrevealed. Then fear vanished, and with it shame. Thereafter he expressed his own character by unrestrained crime and infamy.

Attempts have been made by modern historians to rehabilitate the reputation of Tiberius, but Tacitus' portrait lives on, persuasive both as history and as great literature.

"A degenerate ruler," wrote the historian Sallust (86-35 B.C.), "is always supplanted by better men than himself." Sallust did not live long enough to see his maxim refuted under the principate. Of the emperors who followed Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius had much blood on their hands. Nero, who took up rule at the age of 17 at the death of his adoptive father Claudius, brought Roman decadence to new heights. He was the first Roman emperor to live on borrowed eloquence, for his former tutor, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, was his speechwriter. Nero would eventually order Seneca's suicide. No great crime, this, for an emperor who had earlier arranged for the deaths of his stepbrother Britannicus and his mother Agrippina.

Tacitus writes of Nero's reign: "Even in good surroundings people find it difficult to behave well. Here every form of immorality competed for attention, and no chastity, modesty, or vestige of decency could survive." For those who like to discover past history foreshadowing the present, Nero, toward the end of his reign, staged a wedding in which, Tacitus writes, "the emperor, in the presence of witnesses, put on the bridal veil. Dowry, marriage bed, marriage torches, all were there. Indeed everything was public which even in a natural union is veiled by night."

Everywhere Tacitus saw "striking proofs of the nature of fortune, whose treacherous surface combines the peak and the abyss." He held that "the more I think about history, ancient or modern, the more ironical all human affairs seem." The Roman notion of the afterlife, murky at best, held that men lived on only in the memory of their accomplishments or of their evil deeds. Recording those accomplishments and deeds in memorable language has also allowed Tacitus to live on, unsurpassed among Roman historians and, alongside Herodotus and Thucydides, one of the three great historians of antiquity. ♦

Awaken and Sing

Forget the plot. It's the acting that matters.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

There's no upside for me in reviewing *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. If I say anything interesting about its plot, I'll be criticized for publishing spoilers. If I say anything critical, I'll be accused of raining on everybody's parade. If I praise it, I'll be attacked for excessive kindness and sentimentality. So let me just say that I thought it was pretty good, that I enjoyed watching it, and that it has all the strengths and weaknesses of every project with which its cowriter and director, J.J. Abrams, is involved. Which is to say: Its first 45 minutes are sensational; it plays on the viewer's emotions expertly; and it is cast brilliantly.

Good acting is something new for the *Star Wars* franchise. The original *Star Wars* (which I refuse to call "episode 4" or "A New Hope") was, to be kind, indifferently performed except when Alec Guinness and Harrison Ford were on screen (and when James Earl Jones's voice was heard). As for the first two sequels, it should be enough to point out that, aside from Ford, the only decent acting job was by Yoda. And the performers in the second *Star Wars* trilogy were so wooden they made the Petrified Forest look like the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Not so *The Force Awakens*. Not only has Abrams roused a sensationally effective and affecting Harrison Ford from what seems like decades of Rip Van Winkle-like somnolence, his movie is distinguished by the vibrancy three young actors bring to its leading roles. Abrams has an unsurpassed talent for picking unknowns, especially strong and vibrant women. Actresses who owe their careers to him include Jennifer Garner (*Alias*), Keri Russell (*Felicity*), Evangeline Lilly (*Lost*), and Gugu Mbatha-Raw (*Undercovers*). Now Abrams has scored perhaps his greatest coup with Daisy Ridley, who plays Rey, the movie's distaff Luke Skywalker. This 23-year-old with only a few British television episodes to her credit is an absolute knockout—touching, interesting, and tough, all at the same time. Abrams worked similar magic in choosing the buoyant and equally unknown John Boyega to play Finn, her partner in space adventuring.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens
Directed by J.J. Abrams

Finn and Rey begin their battle against the Dark Side of the Force together after he mysteriously breaks free from the lifelong brainwashing of the First Order (the organization that arose from the ashes of the Empire that was destroyed 30 years earlier in *Return of the Jedi*). They are joined now and again by the wonderful Oscar Isaac, the most interesting American actor at work today in the movies, who does a joyously swashbuckling turn as a fighter pilot.

Their nemesis is Adam Driver, the far-from-unknown young actor who has done such remarkable work on TV's *Girls* and in the wonderful Noah Baumbach movie *While We're Young*. He has been given the nearly impossible task of playing an immature and tormented master villain, and as is always the case with Driver, he finds a way to surprise us in nearly every scene.

This is what is exceptional about *The Force Awakens*—that and its rich texture. The sets, the special effects, and a certain lived-in feeling echo *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back* in making it seem like we've been transported to a galaxy out of a fairy tale. (This was not the case with the dreadful *Return of the Jedi*, which was regrettably designed to suggest its teddy-bear freedom-fighting Ewoks were outer-space Sandinistas.)

Truth to tell, there isn't all that much that's actually *bad* about *The Force Awakens*. The political structure of its universe makes no sense, but so what? The movie's job is to take us on a nostalgic joyride through the *Star Wars* universe, and in that respect it is an unmitigated success.

But the one thing J.J. Abrams really can't do—not here, not in his *Star Trek* reboot, not in his *Mission Impossible* reboot back in 2006, and not in the television series he has supervised—is tell a complete story. As ever, he just casts all kinds of plotlines in the water and doesn't reel them in. It's a trick and, as Admiral Ackbar says in *Return of the Jedi*, it's a trap too—because after everybody in the world sees this movie, there will be a million theories about how those plots will be resolved, and their resolution in the subsequent *Star Wars* pictures will inevitably prove a total letdown.

George Lucas did a genuinely nervy thing in 1980 when he let *The Empire Strikes Back* end without resolving the fate of Ford's Han Solo, left frozen in a block of carbonite. That was a violation of storytelling protocol, and it worked because it was so unexpected—and because he had pulled off the storytelling coup of revealing the dark parentage of Luke and Leia minutes earlier.

There are no storytelling coups in *The Force Awakens*. The only true coup here is that Disney is going to come very close to earning back the entirety of its $4 billion purchase of the *Star Wars* franchise from Lucas with this one picture. J.J. Abrams may have cheated the audience out of a genuinely satisfying plot, but he has served his true masters well. ♦

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

"Study finds that political lawn signs have little effect"
—Politico headline, December 28, 2015

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Final Study Reveals: Nothing Left to Study

Last study ever concludes that everything observable has been studied

By LOMAS BANDAM

An alarming new study has found that there is nothing left on earth to study. According to what many believe will be the last study ever conducted, scientists, political scientists, sociologists, and other researchers have exhausted the world's supply of observable phenomena. "We've simply run out of stuff," said Dr. Damian Allenwhaite, Ed.D., lead researcher at the Alliance for Research and Study Enterprises (ARSE) at the University of Wisconsin–Fond du Lac, who spent the last nine months conducting the study with a $700,000 grant from the Department of Education's Office of Inter-Disciplinary Consciousness and Applied Studies Cognology. "It's hard to believe," Allenwhaite continued, "but after last week's study on the impact of political lawn signs, there was nothing left."

Overall, the news has caught the research community off guard, but some predicted this day would come. "Every bubble has to burst," said Arthur Dansbridge, sociologist at the University of Washington-Seattle/Bainbridge Island Ferry. "We hit peak study around 1998, when we got deep into insect sexual behavior studies," he continued. "Hey, the government was throwing money at us! We had to come up with something, so why not the promiscuity patterns of homosexual Cambodian mung worms? After that, it was only a matter of time."

Following the release of the study, many government agencies have already begun cutting research budgets significantly, while many in the academic world have begun to look elsewhere for gainful employment.

"I interviewed for a job, and the MAN asked me how fast I could type, if you can believe that," said My-My Goodwill, former Nina Simone Professor of Gender and Funk Studies at Bard College. "I didn't get the job, but I did get a new slam poem out of it," she said, before clearing her throat. "TYPE? Type WHAT? STEREO-type? Why don't YOU TYPE this HYPE, 'cause it's RIPE

WORKING RETAIL on Page 14

Obama: Troop Withdrawals Not Linked to New Wars

'War happens,' president tells reporters—'It always has. Don't blame me.'

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