the weekly Standard

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO OBAMA
WILLIAM KRISTOL & MICHAEL MAKOVSKY
LEE SMITH

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Pseudo-Socialists & Clueless Capitalists

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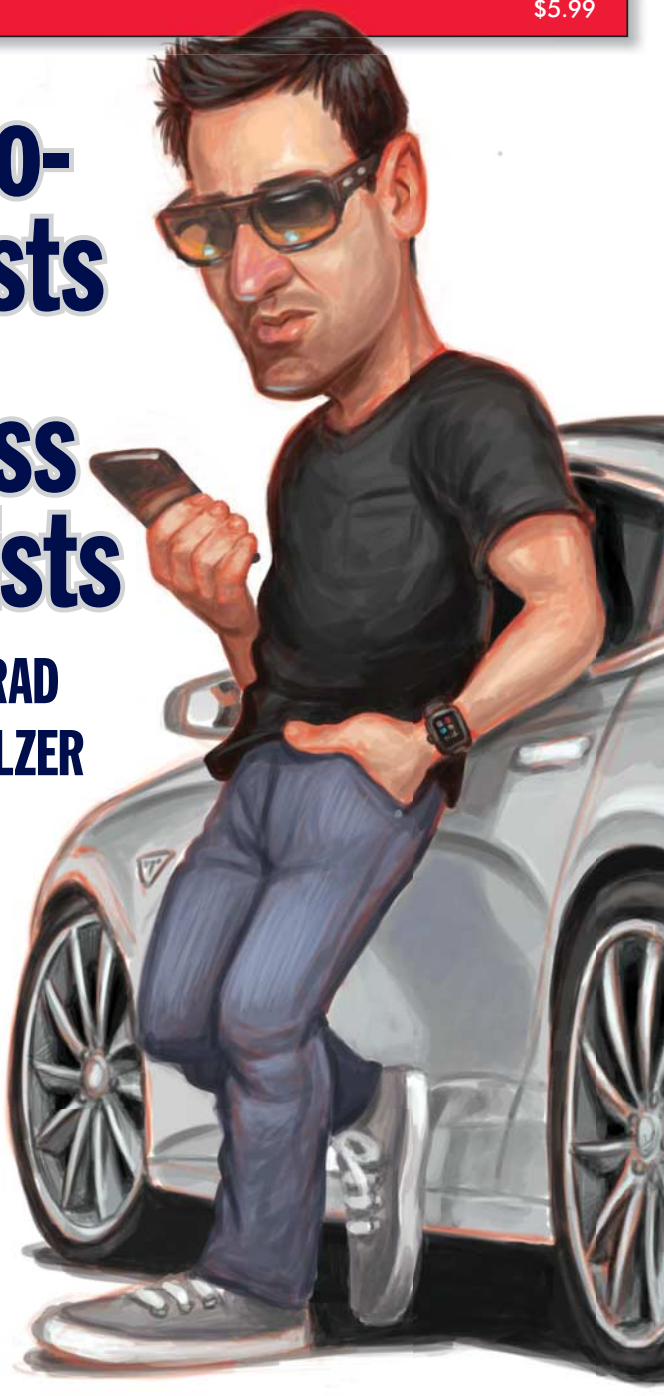

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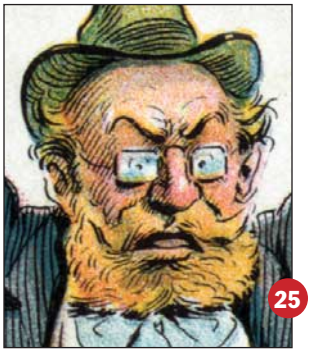

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COVER BY DAVE CLEGG

The Selling of the Librarian 2016

In the good old days, Democrats would complain about the invasion of Madison Avenue into the sacred precincts of politics (see *The Selling of the President 1968* by Joe McGinniss). But those days are long gone; and, in fact, our Democratic friends have long since mastered the techniques of advertising in the service of partisan warfare.

The Scrapbook was prompted to think along these lines last week after watching what must be an unprecedented four minutes of television: a promotional video, produced by the White House and (presumably) paid for with public funds, to support the nomination of Carla Hayden as the 14th librarian of Congress. To our knowledge, no presidential nominee for any position in government has ever before been the subject of a campaign commercial. This would suggest that the White House is either oblivious about the precedent or nervous about Carla Hayden. Perhaps it's a little of both.

What is genuinely surprising about the video, however, is its content. Dr. Hayden is a veteran librarian, a product of the Chicago public library system, and, for the past several years, chief of the library system in Baltimore. She communicates her obvious enthusiasm for public libraries, especially inner-city branches; and as President Obama pointedly mentions in his nominating statement, "She'd be the first woman and the first African American to hold the position—both of which are long overdue."

Of course, the problem is that hardly any of this has anything whatsoever to do with being librarian of Congress. Hayden describes a library as an "opportunity center," a haven for young people, a neighborhood refuge in times of civil strife, a place to "apply for a job" or, better yet, "get the latest Harry Potter." All of that describes the modern urban public library; none of it describes the Library of Congress, which (as its name would imply) is the principal source of information for Congress, a scholarly research institution, and archive. Nobody in Washington walks in off the street to the Library of Congress in search of the latest Harry Potter—which in any case, they wouldn't be allowed to borrow.

As far as The Scrapbook can tell, Hayden seems like a nice person and would probably make a first-rate director of the public library system in any large city. But she's almost wholly unqualified for a post that, in modern times at least, has been reserved almost exclusively for scholars, not librarians. Her immediate predecessor is James K. Billington, the distinguished Russian scholar from Harvard and Princeton who was appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1987. Billington, in his turn, had succeeded Daniel J. Boorstin, the famous University of Chicago historian, who had been named by Gerald Ford. Past librarians of Congress include the poet/diplomat Archibald MacLeish. These were not role models for kids, or race/gender "firsts," or even credentialed specialists in library science.

Indeed, Hayden's appointment seems to emphasize a philistine streak in Barack Obama. While George W. Bush populated such positions with artists and intellectuals, Obama's first director of the National Endowment for the Humanities was an ex-Iowa congressman, and his head of the National Endowment for the Arts was a Broadway theater owner and Democratic bundler. Now, for the principal scholarly/cultural post in the federal government, Obama has chosen to highlight Carla Hayden's gender and race at the expense of her meager scholarly credentials. And produced an embarrassing four-minute promotional video, at taxpayers' expense, which The Scrapbook hopes will be the first, and last, of its kind. ♦

Misbehaving Models

Just three years ago, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted that, by the end of this century, sea-levels will rise somewhere between 1.7 and 3.22 feet. A new report has found, however, that prediction may be off by some 3 feet. "Study jolts sea-rise predictions" the *Washington Post* headlined its article on the research.

And what a jolt it is, a full-blown challenge to "current consensus predictions." After all, if the existing models used by climate scientists put the worst-case scenario at 3 feet of sea-rise, and those models are off by 3 feet, then doesn't that mean the oceans may just stay put?

Of course not. Because if someone had presented research showing that computer models overestimate the consequences of climate change they would have been denounced or ignored. The new research, by contrast, asserts that climate models have been *underestimating* the dire effects. The "startling findings," you see, "paint a far grimmer picture" than that drawn by the current consensus. And so, naturally, it has been praised and highlighted.

Suggest that global warming climate models are possibly faulty predictions and you are lambasted as an antiscience, know-nothing no-goodnik. Even to question the believability of the computer models is to bring an immediate charge of denialism. That is, unless one is asserting that the models have it all wrong because they've been insufficiently apocalyptic.

Still, it's remarkable to discover that the much-vaunted scientific consensus

on the effects of global warming can indeed be wrong—and, what's even more remarkable, that the error can be gladly and openly acknowledged by the very same scientific community that has been telling us that their computer models are unassailable.

The key, as any career-savvy scientist knows, is to find the models to be wrong in a politically correct way. Predict less doom and you are a potentially criminal skeptic putting the world at risk; predict more gloom and your research is fêted on the front page.

It doesn't take a computer model to predict the sort of scientific climate those incentives create. ♦

Just Show Up?

Slate's legal correspondent, Dahlia Lithwick, has had it up to here with Senate Republicans, who are refusing to hold hearings on President Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Merrick Garland, with the presidential election so soon. Something must be done, she claims, and, well, here's something:

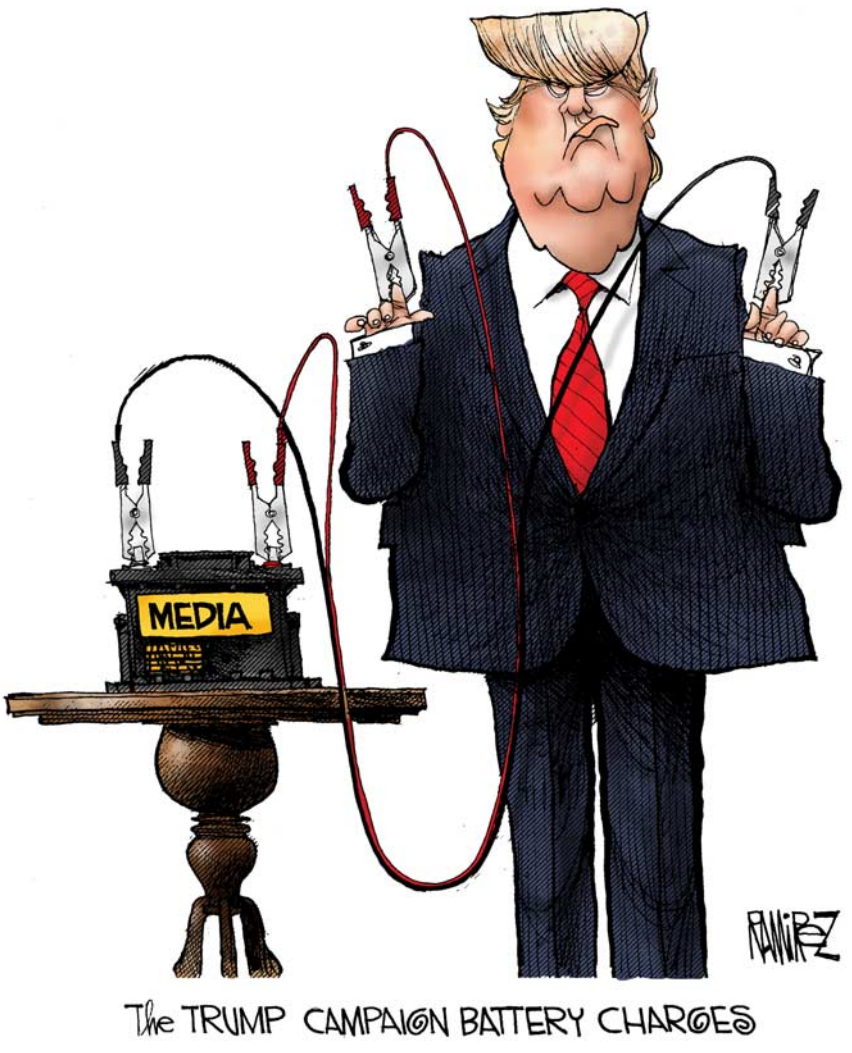
> After a suitable period of time—let's say by the end of September of 2016—Judge Garland should simply suit up and take the vacant seat at the court. This would entail walking into the Supreme Court on the first Monday in October, donning an extra black robe, seating himself at the bench, sipping from the mighty silver milkshake cup before him, and looking like he belongs there, in the manner of George Costanza.

Lithwick reckons if Garland did this "he would be doing his job and highlighting that this is precisely what Senate tantrum throwers are refusing to do." Lithwick further argues such radical gestures are necessary because there's both an "intensity gap" and an "insanity gap" between Republicans and Democrats, such that only Republicans are willing to blow up the Supreme Court nomination process to retain power.

What's baffling about this column is the way it ignores who is really responsible for how judicial appointments became so contentious. After Senator Joe Biden took over the Judiciary Committee in 1987, Democrats, under his leadership and that of Ted Kennedy, proceeded to blow up the nominations of Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas in ways that were positively slanderous. In 1992, Biden personally argued for waiting out Bush's term before confirming any more justices. At the end of George W. Bush's presidency, the Democratic Senate had a backlog of over 200 judicial nominations on which they refused to move as they waited out his term.

The GOP is not immune to the charge of fighting fire with fire. It is, however, historically illiterate to say that Republicans share equal blame with Democrats, who have done far more to destroy comity and deference on this issue. Indeed the problem with violating institutional norms is that once such violations become acceptable, it only encourages more—and more egregious—violations.

In 30 years we've gone from overwhelming Senate consent on most judicial appointments to a process that verges on complete dysfunction. And now when liberal columnists see what the Democratic party hath wrought, they respond by making rather alarming and immodest



proposals that would ignore the Senate entirely in the name of upholding constitutional procedures.

To paraphrase Santayana, those that ignore the United States Constitution are doomed to repeat the very lessons of history that caused it to be written in the first place. ♦

Parsing the President

Over the years The Scrapbook has learned how to read President Obama. In a word, carefully. Consider, for example, a statement he made in the course of nominating Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court:

> I know that Republicans will point to Senate Democrats who've made it hard for Republican presidents to get their [Supreme Court] nominees confirmed. And they're not wrong about that. There's been politics involved in nominations in the past. Although it should be pointed out that, in each of those instances, Democrats ultimately confirmed a nominee put forward by a Republican president.

Note that Obama did not say that Senate Democrats voted to confirm every nominee by a Republican president. Remember Bork, the great Robert Bork, the 1987 Reagan nominee rejected by a Democratic Senate—unjustifiably, though that is a different story. The Bork nomination remains the only one in the modern era dating to the Reagan presidency (which Obama seems to mean by "the past") that the Senate voted down.

If Senate Democrats did not approve every nominee advanced by a Republican president, however, they did vote to fill every vacancy with a nominee chosen by same. Again, we go back to Bork. Recall that Reagan chose Bork to take the seat vacated by Justice Lewis Powell. And then Reagan selected Anthony Kennedy as the nominee for the same seat after the Bork nomination failed. And Kennedy was confirmed. "Ultimately," then, the Powell seat was filled, more than six months after the vacancy occurred. Just as Obama said. ♦

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BPA WORLDWIDE

Laps in Judgment

The invention of the smartphone has resolved a primeval fear of our species: What do you do when you're out in public and forgot to bring something to read? Until a few years ago, the thought of facing a subway train, or the line at an ATM, or the waiting room at the Jiffy Lube, launched a primordial fear shrieking from the deeps of the reptilian brain.

No newspaper, no magazine, no book? Fool! Now you may have to look up from your lap! You may have to make eye contact! Talk to strangers!

The nightmarish possibilities were never far from mind.

With the smartphone, all such nightmares are gone. Its pixels or whatever you call them can store all the books and newspapers and magazines you could ever want to read in a Jiffy Lube.

That's the good part. Yet once in a while I miss the old order of things, and I see the advantage of those simpler, predigital times, back when everyone understood you'd have to be nuts to enter a Bob Evans Restaurant for breakfast without a folded newspaper under your arm if you've only packed one pair of pants.

A case in point. One recent morning I was far from home and needed a quick bite to eat, and across the highway from my motel a Bob Evans Restaurant beckoned, with its Golden Cornmeal Mush Breakfast, its Sunshine Skillet, its Griddle Combo. . .

Soon I was seated at the counter with my back to the other diners, holding a menu the size of the Magna Carta. It shimmered with lurid photos of pancakes dripping syrup and animal fat, of pork sausage rounds sizzling with gristle from the Sunshine Skillet.

The waitress was efficient in the Bob Evans tradition, and before I knew it I was gazing on a platter heaped with fluffy eggs and hash browns. I set aside my smartphone, which was filled with news about major league spring training. In my excitement I reached for the squeeze bottle of ketchup, gripped it in both hands, aimed it hurriedly over the potatoes, and squirted several large gobbets directly into my lap.

As the waitress passed by, I said, "I squirted ketchup all over my pants."

DAVE CLARK

She nodded.

"By accident," I said. "I did it by accident."

"Of course you did, hon," she said. With a quick pirouette she grabbed a fistful of paper napkins and dropped them next to my plate. An extra glass of water appeared, for dousing.

The restaurant was packed with happy customers, and discreetly I went to work scrubbing my lap, recalling that this was the only pair of pants I had bothered to pack for my brief trip. The ketchup smeared sideways and the water from the napkin sank deep into the fabric, and then the napkin began to shred, leaving a layer of paper filament stretched across my front. I rubbed more, hard. I was mid-rub when I thought what I must look like from the back, hunched on my stool and rubbing my lap with both hands, sideways and up and down and then sideways again, and I sat bolt upright.

"The napkins aren't working," I told the waitress.

"It'll dry eventually, sweetheart."

I returned to my farm-fresh eggs with dying enthusiasm. I cast glances at my smartphone but spring training couldn't hold my interest. I ate what I could, paid while seated at the counter, and assessed my lap again. Even as the water dried the stains remained: large, uneven discolorations, centered on the flap of my zipper and outspreading like a map of the Finger Lakes.

Thirty paces and perhaps forty customers separated me from the front doors, which just then swung open. A high school girls' soccer team tumbled in, rosy from morning practice, giggling.

The lesson here is obvious. The digital age has its snares like every other age. In an earlier era I would have brought the *Wall Street Journal* to read at breakfast. Then, after covering my lap in ketchup, I could have folded the broadsheet and dangled it casually over my midsection as I parted my way through the giggling gaggle of girls. I might even have clowned with them a bit, avuncular-like, and nodded warmly as I headed to my car.

And now? "I need a menu to take home," I told the waitress. The menu was as large as a broadsheet, larger than my shorts—a supersize Bob Evans codpiece.

Her friendliness vanished, as if I'd gotten Bob's prize porker in a hammerlock and put a pistol to its head.

"No, you cannot."

So I stood up, smoothed my dampened pants front, elevated my gaze, and walked on, a martyr to the digital age. By the time I reached the door the girls had gone completely quiet.

Andrew Ferguson

the weekly Standard

The Costanza Approach

In a famous episode of *Seinfeld*, George Costanza concludes that every instinct he's had, every decision he's made, has been wrong and that he should henceforth do the opposite of what he had routinely been doing. He implements this new philosophy and promptly manages to entice an attractive woman to go out with him by introducing himself as unemployed and living with his parents. He then gets a job with the New York Yankees by telling off its imperious and temperamental owner, George Steinbrenner.

We've long thought President Obama should adopt the Costanza approach in matters of national security and simply do the opposite of what his instincts tell him to do, since his policies toward Iran, Israel, ISIS, Russia, and others seem textbook studies of how not to conduct foreign policy. But Jeffrey Goldberg's recent *Atlantic* article, "The Obama Doctrine," relating a series of interviews with the president, makes it clear that a form of "Opposition" or "Antitheticalism" (if you will permit a slight butchering of the English language) already defines Obama's foreign policy. For Obama's foreign policy is less about what he stands for than what he rejects—namely, much of what America has stood for and done over many decades. Obama's doctrine, such as it is, consists of a few simplistic ideas that emerge from a shallow and ideological disdain for the American past. It marks a radical departure from the outlook of every recent American president, Democrat and Republican.

In December 2013, after the president had announced the interim nuclear agreement that paved the way for last July's Iran deal, we compared Obama to Clement Attlee, the British Labour party leader and prime minister following World War II. Attlee believed that the history of British foreign policy constituted a "mess of centuries." He thought a new era had dawned, in which guidelines derived from a study of history no longer applied and the old power politics were anachronistic. Attlee quickly sought to move beyond the "mess of centuries" by putting most of his faith in the new United Nations while withdrawing troops precipitously and pell-mell from much of the world.

The Goldberg article makes abundantly clear that Obama is following in Attlee's footsteps. Consider this passage from Obama: "We have history. We have history in Iran, we have history in Indonesia and Central America. So we have to be a mindful of our history when we start talking about intervening, and understand the source of other people's suspicions."

Obama has always betrayed a slim and selective knowledge of American history, but what he does know, or thinks he knows, involves American sins abroad. In his view, American foreign policy for decades has been too aggressive and militaristic and has been on what he considers the wrong side of history, whether in overthrowing Mossadegh in Iran in the 1950s, waging war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, or intervening in Iraq in the 2000s. American foreign policy has been, Obama thinks, counterproductive to U.S. interests and bad for the world. And it has created unnecessary suspicions and enemies.

And so President Obama has sought from the very beginning to reverse many aspects of American foreign policy. He believes it vital that we seek to reassure enemies (made, as he sees it, unnecessarily), while focusing almost exclusively on diplomacy, without resort to threats such as sanctions and military action. The key is to reassure enemies: With Russia that meant a "reset"; in South America it meant reaching out to leftist thug regimes in Venezuela and Cuba; and in the Middle East it meant embracing radical Shiite and Sunni Muslim regimes, whether the Erdogan government in Turkey or its sister Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt headed by Mohamed Morsi or the Khamenei regime in Iran. It has meant a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq and virtual withdrawal after a brief intervention in Libya.

The flip side of this has been Obama's disregard of America's traditional allies, about not one of whom he has a kind word to say. The Europeans and Arabs are "free riders," the Sunni Arabs help foment anti-American terrorism and can't get their own houses in order, a former French prime minister is a braggart, the British prime minister David Cameron became distracted after the Libyan war, the Israeli prime minister was condescending in trying to explain Israel's strategic challenges to a man who rose up from humble roots to become president, and indeed he no

longer likes the demagogic Turkish leader Erdogan (whose country is, if not exactly an ally, a NATO member).

Obama's policy toward Iran is fundamental to his radical approach. For decades, American policy toward the Middle East was founded on three main principles: the security of Israel; the secure flow of oil from the Persian Gulf and support for those key oil-producing Arab regimes; and weakening if not defeating radical Islam. An assertive Islamic Republic of Iran stood in the way of all these strategic objectives. So President Obama reversed course and sought to reassure Iran at the expense of our traditional allies. He sought daylight from Israel and expressed initial support for uprisings in Arab countries that had been aligned with us while opposing the mass antiregime demonstrations in Tehran. As he explained to Goldberg, he wanted Saudi Arabia and Iran "to share the neighborhood," which would suggest an effectively neutral U.S. approach.

Most of all, he sought a deal with Iran, without consultation with our traditional allies who were most threatened by a stronger Iran on a path to nuclear weapons. Obama's announcement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its implementation were telling. When he unveiled the deal last July, Obama declared in his very first sentence that the United States with its partners "achieved something that decades of animosity has not"—apparently ascribing as much blame to the United States and his own predecessors as to the Iranian regime.

The one enemy of the United States that Obama is willing to portray negatively is Vladimir Putin, but this appears more the disappointment of a scorned supplicant than a genuine dislike of a foe of the United States. So Obama emphasizes about Putin, "You don't see him in any of these meetings out here helping to shape the agenda. For that matter, there's not a G20 meeting where the Russians set the agenda around any of the issues that are important." Summit agenda-setting is, it seems, the key exercise of global power in this new age: "The fact is, there is not a summit I've attended since I've been president where we are not setting the agenda, where we are not responsible for the key results." Ceremonial summits are the key battlegrounds in Obama's mind.

Deploying military power, on the other hand, is a sign of weakness: "The notion that somehow Russia is in a stronger position now, in Syria or in Ukraine, than they were before they invaded Ukraine or before [Putin] had to deploy military forces to Syria is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of power in foreign affairs or in the world generally." Of course, that Russian display of "weakness" helped save Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime and strengthened it at the expense of opposition forces we supposedly supported, while making Moscow the go-to player in the region at our expense.

In the Goldberg article and elsewhere, Obama calls himself a "realist." But is it realistic to eschew considerations of strategy and power? Obama thinks so. Thus in 2009 at the U.N., he declared, "In an era when our destiny is shared, power is no longer a zero-sum game. No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation. No world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will succeed. No balance of power among nations will hold."

And so when Obama says that Iran should get an equal share of regional influence, he sees no need for a strategy to ensure Iran doesn't become the predominant regional power. A true realist would note that Iranian ascendancy comes at the expense of the United States and would focus on how to check Iranian expansion in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere. A true realist wouldn't invoke some meaningless "sharing" but would work on pushing Iran back to ensure greater regional stability, the security of our allies, and a restoration of American credibility. But that would require serious deliberation and the study of history.

When Winston Churchill returned to power by defeating Attlee and Labour in 1951, he managed to restore some measure of Britain's world position, through reversing Attlee's anti-Israel policy, restoring closer ties with the United States, and making Britain a nuclear power. But the damage of the Attlee years was essentially done, and the decline in British power was anyway probably irreversible. But at least—and Churchill saw and encouraged this—the United States was there to take the baton from Britain, to check the Soviet Union, and to help construct a liberal world order.

The bad news is that unlike Britain in 1951, there is no other nation to whom America could hand the baton. The good news is that, unlike Britain in 1951, our time need not be past. We can restore our world position—though it will not be easy, after the damage that Obama has wrought. It will take a president inspired by Winston Churchill rather than Clement Attlee—or at least one attentive to the lessons of George Costanza, and determined to do the opposite of what Barack Obama has done.

—William Kristol & Michael Makovsky

Donald the Menace

When we last checked in on Donald Trump's campaign it was still a rolling embarrassment—a near-daily parade of pettiness, ignorance, and farce that was nonetheless en route to an ever-increasing delegate lead.

Trump had held an unusual QVC-style postelection press conference in which he displayed phony "Trump

products" in order to pretend that his failed businesses hadn't failed; he'd announced that he would serve as his own primary adviser on foreign policy "because I have a very good brain and I've said a lot of things"; and his campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, was forcefully denying eyewitness claims that, after a Trump presser, he'd manhandled Michelle Fields, then a reporter for Breitbart News.

Trump's media apologists, being apologists, had eagerly amplified the campaign's deceptions, rationalized the absurdities, and downplayed the misconduct. They had abandoned their attempts to paint Trump as a conservative and begun instead to tout him as a transformational populist candidate who would defeat Hillary Clinton in a landslide.

There wasn't much data to support these claims. But Trump boosters made up for that with enthusiasm and confidence. They disparaged as a de facto supporter of Hillary Clinton anyone who refused to support him.

Now those look like the good old days.

The insulting image Trump tweeted

Over the last couple of weeks, Trump has crassly insulted the looks of Ted Cruz's wife and threatened to "spill the beans" on her involvement in—well, we're still not sure what. When Trump was pressed about his attacks on Cruz's wife, he falsely claimed that the Cruz campaign had been behind an ad targeting *his* wife.

Trump sat for a lengthy editorial board meeting with the *Washington Post* that was a horrifying combination of ignorance and bravado. At one point, he dodged a question on ISIS and tactical nuclear weapons with a jarring change of subject, first to the brilliance of his campaign's attacks on Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush and moments later to the appearance of those interviewing him. Later in the interview, he reiterated his threats against the owners of the Chicago Cubs (for daring to criticize him) and suggested he might take out TV ads exposing their alleged mismanagement of the team.

He called for the United States to step back from its leadership role in NATO and suggested that it might be a good idea to encourage nuclear proliferation. Later, Trump called for punishing women who have abortions, only to reverse himself in the space of a few hours, complaining all the while that the media are treating him unfairly.

And then there's Lewandowski, Trump's top adviser, who was charged last week with misdemeanor battery. Lewandowski, who had previously insisted that he "never touched" Fields, turned himself into the Jupiter, Fla., police department after surveillance video of the incident made clear he had not only touched her but grabbed her by the arm and jerked her backwards. Trump defended Lewandowski, despite his having been caught in a lie, claiming at one point that the pen in Fields's hand might have been a bomb.

This is the Republican frontrunner. Unless the trajectory of the race changes, this is the man who will be the Republican nominee. And perhaps not surprisingly, the latest numbers on his presidential prospects are even worse than the already-grim numbers from just a few weeks ago.

Trump "would start the general election campaign as the least-popular candidate to represent either party in modern times," declared the *Washington Post* on March 31, detailing the results of the paper's latest poll with ABC News. "Three-quarters of women view him unfavorably. So do nearly two-thirds of independents, 80 percent of young adults, 85 percent of Hispanics and nearly half of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents." Trump is "more disliked than any major-party nominee in the 32 years the survey has been tracking candidates."

Last week, the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia put out its first general election projections for the presidential race. Hillary Clinton would win all eight crucial swing states—Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Virginia, and North Carolina. That portends a down-ballot disaster for Republicans. Seven of those eight states have Senate races this fall, five of them where Republicans currently hold the seat. The Cook Report last month changed its projections on ten House races, with each of the tweaks a reflection of better odds for the Democrats.

Could this change? As we've said before, anything is possible. This has been an extraordinarily volatile race in an extraordinarily volatile time. Hillary Clinton could be indicted. The economy could slide into recession. We could have more major terrorist attacks.

But absent some race-altering external event, Trump is likely to win the nomination and then lose disastrously to the Democratic nominee. The consequences for down-ballot Republicans could be dire and the damage to the conservative movement irreparable.

Given all this, we'd think more Republican officeholders and conservative leaders might be speaking out against Trump while he can still be stopped. But with a few notable exceptions—Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Representative Adam Kinziger of Illinois, and Maryland governor Larry Hogan chief among them—party leaders have held their fire.

It's not too late to fight the good fight.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Hobbled Lobby

K Street says it's ready for Donald Trump. It's wrong. BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

Bob Livingston, the former Republican congressman, was among the conservatives who met with Donald Trump in Washington on March 21. Now a corporate lobbyist whose clients include Verizon and Adobe, Livingston liked what the GOP frontrunner had to say. He endorsed Trump as he left the gathering. "Bottom line is he's winning," he told reporters. "He's going to win."

Livingston isn't alone, of course. Over the last few months, prominent consultants and business representatives have made it clear that they prefer Trump to his chief rival Ted Cruz. Paul Manafort, whose client list included deposed Ukrainian autocrat Viktor Yanukovych, has joined the campaign as convention manager. The center of Washington's influence industry, K Street, is far more open to Trump than the rest of the city is. Bob Dole, John Feehery, Rudy Giuliani, and Trent Lott—they're all flacks for powerful interests, and they've all expressed a willingness to work with the real estate mogul. "He's got the right personality," Dole told the *New York Times* in January, "and he's kind of a dealmaker."

This notion of Trump as a dealmaker, as a businessman and master negotiator, is at the heart of his appeal to D.C. lobbyists. Cruz, the thinking goes, would disrupt the capital with his war on what he calls "the Washington cartel." Trump on the other hand would be willing to listen to the thousands of registered lobbyists—and thousands more unregistered public relations and media and crisis consultants. He'd be more likely than Cruz to include K Street's desired tax breaks and exemptions and pork barrel projects in his tax, tariff, and infrastructure bills. Trump, the lobbyists believe, would be a pro-business president rather than a pro-market one. Which makes lobbyists see dollar signs.

The problem? The lobbyists' theory is almost certainly wrong. Trump is no more likely than Cruz to bow to K Street's wishes. His reputation as a dealmaker is entirely self-created and self-interested: Bragging about his business accomplishments is a substitute for the political and government experience he so obviously lacks.

Haggling over licensing fees and favoring marble tile over terrazzo bears very little resemblance to writing, proposing, and compromising over a tax code of 75,000 pages and a budget of $4.2 trillion. Bob Livingston may want a dealmaker in Trump. But he's more likely to get a kingpin.

Trump won't just disappoint lobbyists, however. He is likely to replace the institutions and practices of K Street with something far worse. The influence industry, despite its poor reputation, operates by a set of rules. Registries must be filled out, disclosures must be made, gifts must be recorded. Even the consultants who don't formally register as lobbyists must keep careful track of their time lest they run afoul of regulations.

Unwritten norms govern how much firms charge their clients. And congressmen have been wary of lobbyists ever since the scandals of a decade ago. Indeed, the scandals themselves demonstrated just how boring and petty everyday lobbying is: The crimes of the most infamous ex-lobbyist, Jack Abramoff, were shocking precisely *because* they were an order of magnitude greater and more lurid than the run-of-the-mill and somewhat banal ethical murkiness of hosting a fundraiser for a congressman or taking a journalist out to lunch.

But the one thing Donald Trump has demonstrated in this presidential campaign is his refusal to play by the rules. Nor has he any particular loyalty to K Street. He's rarely used its services in the past: According to federal databases, the Trump Organization and Trump Casino employed registered lobbyists only between the years 1999 and 2001 and for the relatively paltry sum of $205,250.

Most of the lobbyists Trump retained were interested in legislation affecting casino gambling. Former Trump adviser Roger Stone's

GARY LOCKE

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firm, for example, was paid $65,250 over a six-month period in 1999 to influence the "national gaming impact study," the "transportation of gaming devices," the "federal gaming tax," and "tax treatment of gaming losses"—a subject important to Trump because he somehow managed to lose money on his casinos.

Another firm, Dyer Ellis & Joseph, was paid $40,000 in the years 2000 and 2001 to lobby on "issues relating to Merchant Mariner documents" in the Coast Guard Authorization Act. Maybe Trump wanted to lower the cost of importing his menswear line from Guangzhou.

Trump doesn't lobby. He employs an entirely different set of means to bend public policy to his whims. He donates to campaigns to "buy" politicians. He threatens and files lawsuits. He uses the bully pulpit to harass individuals who stand in his way and to intimidate potential critics. He brags, he threatens, he pouts, he bullies. And he relies on a shady network of business associates and fixers. Who needs Patton Boggs when you have Fat Tony Salerno ready to pour the concrete for Trump Tower?

To think that Trump will wheel and deal with Tony Podesta over mohair subsidies is folly: If past is prologue, as president he'll just issue an executive order, sic the Justice Department on his enemies, and hold a three-hour press conference defaming whoever stands in his way.

The Republican lobbyists fooling themselves into believing there is an upside to a Trump presidency are engaged in the same short-term thinking and selfishness that has allowed Trump to get as far as he has. Again and again, Trump has benefited from elites who have underestimated his abilities, dismissed his outrageousness, or erroneously believed his willingness to transgress democratic norms can be put to their advantage. They're like the retiree who signed up for Trump University only to realize too late that he was being fleeced. If you dislike the "Washington cartel" now, just wait. President Trump will give the phrase a whole new meaning. ♦

Without Exceptionalism

Trump doesn't know what makes America great.

BY DANIEL KRAUTHAMMER

"Americans and Europeans alike sometimes forget how unique is the United States of America," Margaret Thatcher said. "No other nation has been built upon an idea—the idea of liberty." This is the essence of American exceptionalism. The American identity and national bond are based not just on a common history or culture or language but, more important, on a set of common ideals and principles, as embodied in the Declaration of Independence: the equality of all individuals, the inviolability of human rights, and the dependence of government's legitimacy on the consent of the governed.

How do these ideas fit into Donald Trump's vision of American greatness? He promises to "make America great again." But where in his declarations can we find the language of the American creed? Think about it. In all his stump speeches, tweets, and debate performances, how many times have you heard him utter the words *liberty*, *freedom*, *democracy*, *Constitution*, *Founding Fathers*, *rights*, *ideals*, *equality*, *opportunity*? Has he ever quoted the giants of our political pantheon—Lincoln or Jefferson, FDR or Reagan? Unlike every other candidate, Republican and Democratic, in this race and in races past, he completely ignores the ideas at the heart of the American experiment.

Instead, he repeats words like *winning*, *great*, *huge*, *beat*, *kill*, *deals*, *successful*, *rich*. He quotes himself and his own books. The central idea at the heart of Trumpism is the idea of winning. And winning, by his definition, means beating a loser. Right now, he says, we're losing to China and Mexico and Japan and all the rest. But he'll change that. He'll reverse the flow of money from foreigners and illegal immigrants back into the pockets of hardworking Americans. Trump's world is a zero-sum game, and Trump's America will start winning again only when everyone else starts losing.

This simplistic thinking defies logic and basic economics. But it does appeal to a certain sense of American nationalism: that "we" as a collective need to rally around a strong leader who will make us once again richer and more powerful than everyone else. Why? Because we're us and they're them. This kind of nationalism, however, is completely unexceptional. The leaders of literally any other country on earth could—and often do—say the same thing to their people and appeal to the same nationalistic sentiments. There is nothing uniquely American about what Trump espouses. There is no American ideal or philosophy providing a moral reason for this national mission to "win."

What has been unique in American political discourse for 240 years is that our ideals have given a higher purpose to our common mission to govern ourselves at home and champion our values abroad. Americans, Jefferson wrote, are "trusted with the destinies of this solitary republic of the world, the only monument of human rights, and the sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth, if other regions of the earth shall ever become susceptible of its benign influence." It fills me with

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pride to belong to the one country in history to have built its foundation and forged its bonds of citizenship on these magnificent ideals. It has given me a deep love for my country—a patriotism I feel in my bones.

Many foreigners find this somewhat mystifying, if not unsettling. My European friends in particular are often shocked when they come to America and see how often and fervently we wave the flag, sing the national anthem, and celebrate our military. They recoil and ask how I can partake in such naked displays of nationalism. In their countries, comparable shows of national sentiment are often linked to racism, xenophobia, militarism, and chauvinism. And not without reason: The history of Europe and much of the world is replete with countless tragic examples of political leaders whipping their countrymen into a nationalistic fury to start wars, crush individual rights, oppress minorities, and even commit genocide.

But America is different, I explain, unique in that our national identity is based on ideas. Without a shared belief in liberty, democracy, and equal opportunity, we would cease to be Americans in any meaningful sense. Our patriotic displays express a shared pride and dedication to those ideals far beyond any brittle bond of race, ethnicity, or narrow sense of nationality.

Donald Trump is chipping away at that truth, reducing American patriotism to an ugly and tawdry nationalism bereft of true American values. He denounces and dismisses allies who share those values—peaceful democracies like Japan, South Korea, Germany, and other NATO members—but compliments and quotes dictators like Vladimir Putin and Mussolini, who dismantled democracies and invaded their neighbors. A core tenet of his foreign policy is to demand our allies give us more money in exchange for our protection. He seems to view the role of the United States and its military in the world not as FDR's "arsenal of democracy," but rather a mercenary force with little higher mission than to reclaim every penny of its cost from other nations.

THOMAS FLUHARTY

In the domestic arena, he demonstrates disdain for our most dearly held freedoms, threatening to "open up libel laws" to sue newspapers that write negative stories about him, joking about killing reporters, and calling them "such lying, disgusting people." He regularly whips his crowds into frenzies of anger and violence completely anathema to the democratic spirit, encouraging them to "knock the crap out of" protesters and have them "carried out on a stretcher." When one of his supporters did assault a protester at a North Carolina rally and followed it up by declaring that next time, "we might have to kill him," Trump praised the man, saying "he obviously loves his country." That Trump confuses such hatred for patriotism is telling. And that this hatred is often directed toward protesters who are members of racial and ethnic minorities—at rallies where Trump's nationalistic rhetoric flirts all too closely with nativist and racist sentiments—makes these episodes even more disturbing. When he leads his crowds in angry jeers of "USA! USA! USA!" to cheer on this vitriolic behavior, he inverts in the most awful way what that chant should mean.

"Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism," George Orwell advised, for "no nationalist ever thinks, talks, or writes about anything except the superiority of his own power unit." Donald Trump, having lived a life devoted to his own enrichment and empowerment at the cost of everyone around him, seeks to become our president by extending that personal philosophy of selfishness to a national level. He has declared, "I'm very greedy. I'm a greedy person. . . . I've always been greedy," and that now "I want to be greedy for our country. . . . I want to be so greedy for our country." Is that who we want to be? No longer Lincoln's "last best hope of earth," no longer Reagan's "shining city on a hill," but Trump's nation of greed?

Trump's vision will not make America great. On the contrary, it will make us utterly ordinary among the nations of the world. This is a time for choosing. We must choose to remember who we are and protect what makes us exceptional. ♦

When No Means No

The principled politics of Paul Ryan.

BY FRED BARNES

Paul Ryan speaks on Capitol Hill, March 23, 2016.

House speaker Paul Ryan is not running for president. That became clear several months after the 2012 election, in which Ryan was Mitt Romney's vice presidential running mate. At two private dinners, a prominent Republican introduced Ryan to a bipartisan group of influential policy intellectuals and potential campaign financiers, not all of them conservatives. Ryan didn't bite.

It's now three years later, and he hasn't changed his mind. Ryan will preside over the Republican convention in July, but he says even if the presidential nomination is contested, he won't seek or accept it. "I actually think you should run for president . . . if you want to be president," he told reporters last week.

The next day, just to nail down his unavailability, Ryan said there are no circumstances in which he would become the nominee. "No, there isn't," he said. "'No' is the answer. Definitively."

Yet Ryan is playing an enormously important role in 2016. He is the chief protector of the kind of conservatism that attracted him to politics and motivates most Republicans. "I'm a Jack Kemp, Ronald Reagan conservative," he declared in February in a speech at the Heritage Action Conservative Policy Summit.

This role involves more than defending conservative ideas and policies. He is committed to sweeping aside the chaos, noisemaking, and rancor that has engulfed the presidential race and thus the Republican party itself. He has advised Republicans to stick to the "higher standard of decorum" to which the GOP has traditionally adhered. "We disagreed—often fiercely so—but we disagreed without being disagreeable," he told a bipartisan group of House interns.

Ryan didn't target Donald Trump by name. He never does. But if Trump—or to a lesser extent, Ted Cruz—thinks Ryan was referring to anyone else, he's mistaken. He may be unaware that Ryan hasn't been changed by the impact of the Trump candidacy, nor by the fury of reckless partisans, talk radio, a few widely read websites, or a clique of conservative organizations.

Rare among Republicans, Ryan has ignored Trump's provocations. After Ryan's "higher standard" speech, Trump scheduled a rally in the speaker's hometown of Janesville, Wisconsin. Asked by reporters what issues he and Ryan might work on jointly, Trump abruptly changed the subject to how foreign trade has damaged Wisconsin. Ryan favors free trade and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) treaty now before Congress.

Nor has Ryan joined those who have announced they will never vote for Trump, even if he is the Republican nominee. Ryan has planted himself on higher ground.

After losing the popular vote in five of the past six presidential races, Republicans may want to copy the tactics of President Obama, Ryan said in December, five weeks after he was elected speaker. "Maybe the way to win the debate is to play identity politics, never mind ideas. Maybe what you do is slice and dice the electorate: Demonize. Polarize. Turn out your voters. Hope the rest stay home. And I would just say, yes, it's possible we could win that way—but to what end?"

Ryan didn't point directly to Trump's campaign tactics. It was two months before the first contest in Iowa. But Trump had been the frontrunner in the GOP race since July at that point. There's no one else Ryan could have had in mind.

In a January appearance on Fox

NEWSCOM

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News, Ryan outlined his priorities for the House this year. They are national security, jobs and economic growth, health care, poverty and opportunity, and "restoring" the Constitution. According to Ryan's plan, what the House does on these issues will be models for a Republican administration, even one with Trump in the White House.

The Ryan agenda matters whether Republicans win the presidency or not. Trump would be an underdog in the general election. In the unlikely event he captures the presidency, however, he would have Ryan as well as Democrats to contend with.

"This country has big problems," Ryan said in December. "But if we do not have a president who will work with us, we will not solve those problems—that is, while they are still solvable." He was talking about a Democratic president, but his concern would apply as well to President Trump.

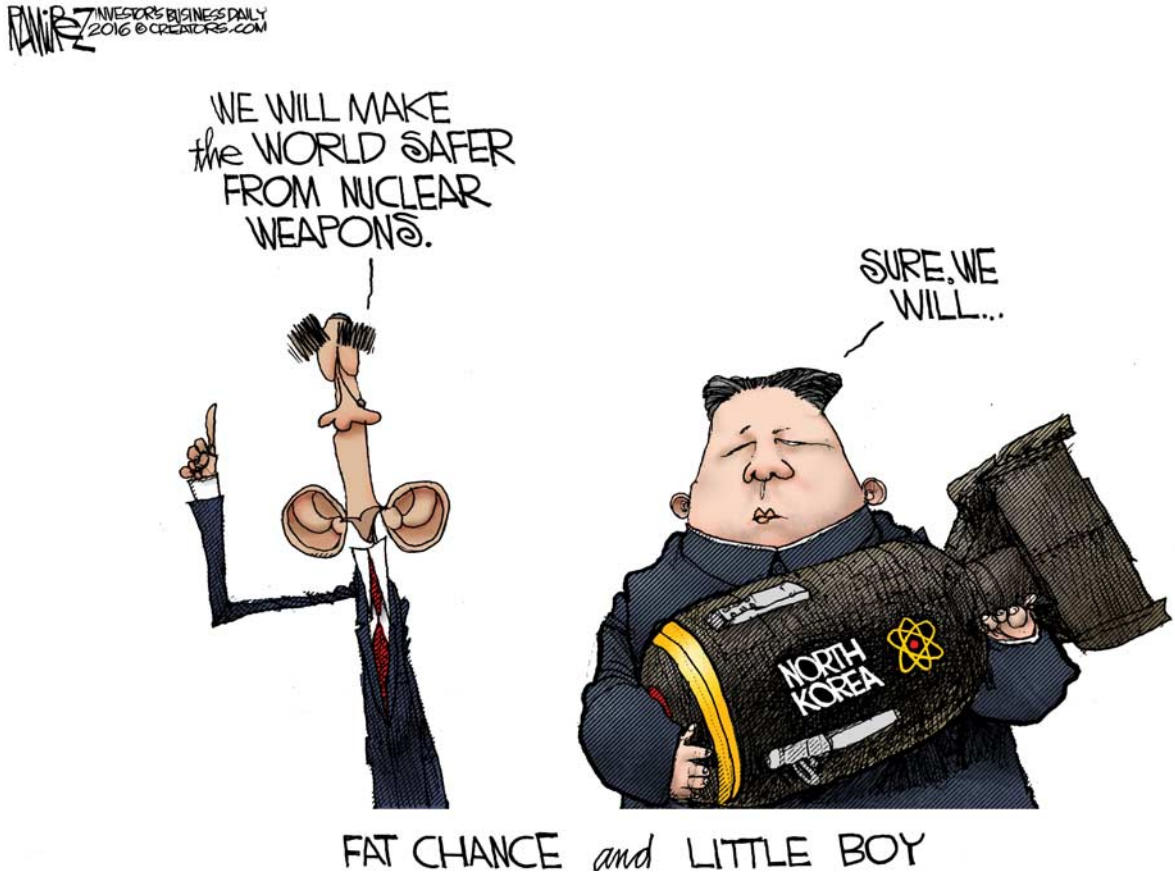
Would Ryan take President Trump's agenda as his own and push for its passage? I don't think so. In exit polls in primary states, more Republican voters than not said they favor allowing most illegal immigrants to stay in America legally. This sentiment, which is also reflected in polls, plus Ryan's support for legalization would make Trump's promise to deport illegals a nonstarter.

Trump would be an underdog in the general election. In the unlikely event he captures the presidency, however, he would have Ryan as well as Democrats to contend with.

On trade, Trump would withdraw from the TPP, which many Republicans oppose. But Ryan would make the case for new trade agreements. "If you add up all the countries that do not have a trade agreement with us, we have a big manufacturing trade deficit," he said in December. "But if you add up all the countries that do have a trade agreement with us, we have a surplus."

Ryan's biggest task would be preserving the conservatism of Reagan and Kemp. It's based, Ryan says, on principles of "freedom, liberty, free enterprise, self-determination, government by consent." More specifically that means lower taxes, less government intrusion, free markets, conservative solutions to poverty, strong defense, and renewed American influence in the world.

Though Ryan's intentions are clear, some of his fans won't give up. Mort Kondracke wrote recently that "the way things are going in the presidential race, I'm going to write in Paul D. Ryan. Join me. . . . If enough of us moderates (Rs and Ds) and independents do it all over the country, Ryan won't get elected, but we can make a ringing statement about the kind of president we want—and don't want." Donald Trump, please take notice. ♦



Vietnam's Agincourt

The fierce jungle battle that brought down an empire. BY MAX BOOT

Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam

Dien Bien Phu is not a battle that looms large in American consciousness. That's hardly surprising, since almost no Americans took part. (The exception was two dozen CIA contractor pilots who delivered supplies to the doomed French garrison.) But for Vietnam, as a recent visit to that small town in the country's northwest reveals, it is the equivalent of Agincourt, Gettysburg, Stalingrad, Gallipoli—a battle that defined a nation.

For 55 days in the spring of 1954, the Vietminh, as the nationalist-Communist independence movement led by Ho Chi Minh was known, besieged the French troops who had built up a seemingly impregnable fortress near the Laotian border. The French-Indochina War may have been primarily a guerrilla war, but the battle of Dien Bien Phu was a siege straight out of World War I. Today, you can wander around some of the remaining French fortifications—concrete bunkers linked by concrete trenches, all of them dug into the gently rolling floor of a valley 11 miles long and 3 miles wide. Here, more than 15,000 defenders—French troops all, but many of North African or Vietnamese origin—were supplied by air from Hanoi, 180 miles away across thick jungle.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, a self-taught soldier and one of the military geniuses of the 20th century, positioned some 50,000 assault troops backed by 50,000 support personnel, on the slopes around Dien Bien Phu. The French expected Giap to rise to the bait—that mass of colonial troops sitting in the middle of nowhere, just waiting to be attacked—and they were sure that they would be able to blast the Vietminh forces, once assembled, with their superior airpower and heavy artillery. But Giap frustrated their plans with an improbable feat of logistics: He managed to move more than 200 artillery pieces supplied by China, through the jungle, using tens of thousands of men to drag them by hand up the hills around Dien Bien Phu, where they were carefully camouflaged in bunkers invisible from above.

Dien Bien Phu was the worst defeat ever suffered by a European colonial power at the hands of its subjects—a defeat that ended not only the French empire in Indochina but the entire era of Western imperialism.

Giap himself took up residence in those hills, with his staff and Chinese advisers. Today you can wander through his simple command post, a thatched-roof hut with only enough room for a mat to sleep on. Next door is a concrete bunker dug into the mountain, where Giap could escape if French airplanes or troops found him—which they did not. The Vietminh commander survived, like his men, on rice and a bit of fish or meat, while the French troops below enjoyed multicourse banquets washed down with wine and brandy and spent their free hours visiting mobile bordellos flown in for their pleasure.

The fun ended on March 13, 1954, almost exactly 62 years before I arrived in Dien Bien Phu, when the hidden Vietminh artillery opened up on the French garrison. "Shells rained down on us without stopping like a hailstorm on a fall evening," wrote a sergeant in the Foreign Legion. "Bunker after bunker, trench after trench, collapsed, burying under them men and weapons."

Things only got worse. The Vietminh quickly closed the exposed French airstrip, making it impossible to evacuate the growing number of wounded who overflowed the aid stations. A French doctor likened "their slow, gentle groans" to "a song full of sadness." The defenders could only be reinforced and resupplied by parachute, and even this proved hazardous, with the Vietminh's antiaircraft guns shooting down 48 French aircraft.

Meanwhile the Vietminh infantry relentlessly pressed assault after assault on the French strongpoints, all of which carried women's names: Dominique, Eliane, Huguette, Claudine, and so forth. (Rumor had it they were named after mistresses of the French commander, Brig. Gen. Christian de Castries, a dashing cavalryman who said he wanted nothing more out of life than "a horse to ride, an enemy to kill, and a woman in bed.") The French fought valiantly, especially the elite paratroopers and legionnaires, but they were overwhelmed by the human-wave attacks. Eventually, in the words of historian Martin Windrow, "one-legged soldiers [were] manning machine guns in the blockhouses, being fed ammunition by one-armed and one-eyed comrades."

The white flag finally went up on May 7. It was the worst defeat ever suffered by a European colonial power at the hands of its subjects—a defeat that ended not only the French empire in Indochina but the entire era of Western imperialism.

Seen from the vantage point of 2016, it all seems slightly baffling. What military commander in his right mind would willingly cede the high ground to the enemy? Yet that is what General Henri-Eugène Navarre, the senior French commander in Indochina, did when he launched Operation Castor,

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as the occupation of Dien Bien Phu was known. The only explanation for this folly—one of the greatest mistakes in military history—is sheer hubris: Navarre had nothing but contempt for his enemies, "Asiatics" who seemed tiny and backward to the heirs of Napoleon and Louis XIV. Navarre did not count on the steely courage and determination that the Vietminh would display—or their willingness to suffer staggering casualties to drive out their colonial masters. The Vietminh lost as many as 25,000 troops in the siege of Dien Bien Phu, while the French lost more than 10,000 men.

It is little wonder, then, that this glorious victory is celebrated in so many monuments scattered around Dien Bien Phu. Everywhere one looks, one finds massive stone representations of heroic Vietnamese fighters and peasants toiling together for the independence of their nation. (What one does not find are decent hotels or restaurants—Dien Bien Phu remains an impoverished, isolated place with few foreign visitors and almost no Americans.)

The Vietnamese are right to be proud of their achievement even if this hagiography necessarily leaves out a few messy details. Like the fact that many of the French soldiers died after being captured. More than 10,000 French troops surrendered on May 7, 1954. Four months later, at the conclusion of a peace treaty in Geneva, fewer than 4,000 were still alive to be released. The rest had perished in a hellish captivity that recalled the Japanese mistreatment of Allied POWs in World War II. There is no mention of the suffering of these surrendered soldiers, just as there is no mention of the heroism many of them displayed in a losing cause.

Another fact omitted: The Vietminh were fighting not just for independence from France—a goal universally popular in Vietnam—but also to impose a Communist dictatorship—a goal considerably less popular. So unpopular, in fact, that Ho Chi Minh and his successors never dared hold a halfway honest election to legitimate their rule.

To this day, the Communist regime in Hanoi, although pursuing capitalist reforms, remains leery of democracy. Two dozen non-Communist candidates risk harassment and even arrest for having the temerity to run for seats in May's elections for the rubber-stamp National Assembly. As in Iran, so in Vietnam: The regime reserves the right to "vet" candidates for office and forbids those who openly challenge it from running.

Top, French soldiers after their surrender; center, Giap's hut; below, a Dien Bien Phu memorial

TOP: VIETNAM NEWS AGENCY / AP; CENTER AND BELOW: MAX BOOT

Any way you look at it, the consequences of Dien Bien Phu were mixed: This military victory led to a divided nation and another 20 years of costly war by North Vietnam against the South Vietnamese and their American protectors. Contrary to Communist mythology, propagated at the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly known as the Museum of American War Atrocities), it was the North that was the aggressor, not the United States. South Vietnam was an independent nation that had little desire to be conquered by Hanoi, not an American "puppet" that welcomed Communist "liberation." The final Communist victory in 1975 led hundreds of thousands of "boat people" to flee and imposed a Stalinist tyranny that only began to loosen its hold in the 1990s when Chinese-style reforms were implemented.

Today Saigon, as Ho Chi Minh City is still generally called, is a bustling mega-city overflowing with cafés and consumer goods, new office buildings and new businesses, cars and motor scooters, and Vietnam is a budding ally of the United States. (The two countries are united by mutual fear of China.) It is a tragedy that history took such a long detour to arrive at this destination, and that even today Vietnam has a long way to go before it achieves the kind of freedom and prosperity enjoyed by countries such as South Korea and Taiwan that under American protection resisted communism.

Yet none of this detracts from the superhuman self-sacrifice of the heroes of Dien Bien Phu—the men who defeated an empire. One suspects that even if non-Communists eventually take power in Hanoi and allow genuinely free elections, they will continue to revere the fighters who secured one of the most important and least likely military victories of the 20th century. ◆

Blind Mistrust

Donald Trump and the federal conflict-of-interest laws. BY ANDREW STARK

Do federal conflict-of-interest laws apply to the president? Do the criminal laws that prohibit officials from participating in any decision in which they have a financial interest apply to the man or woman in the Oval Office?

The prevailing assumption, even on the part of those who have explored the multiple entanglements between Donald J. Trump's financial holdings and the innumerable ways in which presidential action could benefit them, is that conflict-of-interest laws don't apply to the man or woman at the very top. It's anathema to think that any law other than the Constitution can set eligibility requirements for the presidency. As George W. Bush's ethics adviser, Richard Painter, has said, "Constitutionally it's going to be very hard to prohibit anyone from becoming president by making them divest of their holdings."

But in fact it's not clear that the conflict-of-interest laws don't apply to the president. Those who think they don't might have in mind a 1983 U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) opinion, which expressed the view that the conflict-of-interest laws strictly speaking do not extend to the president—although OGE went on to say that "as a matter of policy, the President and the Vice President should conduct themselves as if they were so bound." And every president since the passage of the 1978 Ethics in Government Act has done so. Every president has agreed to put his assets in a blind trust, where they are sold off and replaced by financial instruments whose identity remained unknown to him.

But why did the OGE stop just short of identifying a legal requirement on the president? It was relying on a 1974 Justice Department opinion written by then acting-attorney general (later Judge) Laurence Silberman. But that opinion—and it's only an opinion, not law—was based on an extraordinarily weak argument.

Trumps Eric, Donald Jr., Donald Sr., and Ivanka break ground on a Trump hotel in Washington, D.C., July 23, 2014.

Silberman noted that a 1960 Bar Association report written to aid Congress in crafting conflict-of-interest laws had questioned whether they could apply to the president. Why? The only specific reason the report gave is that a president receives so many gifts from all over the world that he couldn't possibly return them all. Silberman, noting that Congress never expressly disavowed the report's particular observation on this narrow matter of gifts, then concluded that Congress must have sweepingly intended that the law not apply to the president at all, even in cases of vast and inveterate conflicts of interest. That's a stretch, to say the least. The better interpretation is that Congress expressed no clear intent on the matter of whether the law applies to the president.

What about the Constitution? Article II says, "The President shall, at stated Times, receive for his Services, a Compensation, which shall neither be encreased nor diminished during the Period for which he shall have been elected, and he shall not receive within that Period any other Emolument from the United States, or any of them."

That's a conflict-of-interest provision. True, it was designed to prevent a president from conflicts of interest that arise when other branches of government, or state governments—not private companies—might be paying him money. But that constitutional provision shows that a president's sources of financial remuneration can disqualify him from office, and do so precisely because they place him in a conflict of interest. Today's criminal laws that prohibit officeholders from holding certain kinds of private interests can't, then, be deemed inapplicable to the president, simply on the grounds that it's illegitimate to "prohibit anyone from becoming president by making them divest of their holdings." The Constitution does just that.

Trump himself has recognized that as president he would have to take some action to remedy his conflicts of interest. The remedy he has in mind is to have his children manage his holdings. But that is not a remedy for conflict of interest as understood by the law and regulations. An officeholder is deemed to be in conflict every bit as much because of his children's interests as his own. And in any case, while his children might be managing his companies, Trump would still hold his interests in them. And so he would have done exactly nothing to address what he himself acknowledges is a serious conflict of interest.

It's not clear, then, that the conflict-of-interest laws don't apply to the president. Nor is it true that constitutional principle would necessarily bar their application. The law, never having been tested on that question in court, remains uncertain.

PAUL MORIGI / WIREIMAGE / GETTY

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Donald Trump, more than anyone, should realize what a problem that is. After all, as he has said, it would be a tragedy if Americans elected a president, Ted Cruz, who couldn't serve because a court deemed him ineligible for not being a natural-born American. And it's unclear, Trump says, whether Cruz—having been born to an American mother but in Canada—is a natural-born American, since the law has never been tested on that question. Someone, eventually, would take a President Cruz to court on the matter, possibly plunging the nation—so Trump warns—into a governance and constitutional crisis.

A similar risk exists for Trump, who faces his own possibly calamitously disqualifying legal unclarity, although in his case the threat would come from a criminal prosecution that would test the meaning of the conflict-of-interest laws, not a constitutional suit that would test the meaning of "natural-born American." By Trump's own lights, that would place the country in an untenable position. And so, again by his own lights, he faces two choices. He can commit to having his vast holdings immediately sold off and his assets managed through a blind trust if he is elected president. Or he can drop out of the race. ♦

How to Win Friends and Kill People

Strange new respect for Syria's Assad.

BY LEE SMITH

Last week the mayor of London heaped praise on the president of Syria for liberating Palmyra, and thereby saving its prized antiquities from ISIS. In his column for the *Telegraph*, Boris Johnson wrote that he knows "Assad is a monster, a dictator. He barrel-bombs his own people. His jails are full of tortured opponents. He and his father ruled for generations by the application of terror and violence."

Bashar al-Assad

But according to Johnson, "There are at least two reasons why any sane person should feel a sense of satisfaction at what Assad's troops have accomplished." First, as bad as Assad and his forces may be, they're still better than the Islamic State forces they vanquished in the campaign to retake Palmyra. Second, writes Johnson, "the victory of Assad is a victory for archaeology."

Johnson's first reason is arguable. Assad's forces have killed many times more people than ISIS, which entered the war several years after Assad started the conflict by firing on peaceful protesters who took to the streets in March 2011. ISIS is vicious and publicizes its gore on social media, but Assad and allies have done the same abundantly. Indeed, Palmyra is where the Assad regime built a dungeon in the desert decades ago to torture and murder political prisoners. Five years ago, Bashar al-Assad emptied that prison, Tadmor, of its Islamist inmates with the purpose of sowing chaos, and many of them became ISIS figures.

Johnson's second reason for praising Assad—as the champion of archaeology—is evidence that the West has become undone. The mayor of one of the world's greatest cities—next in line to lead Britain's Tories—praises Vladimir Putin for his "ruthless clarity" in helping Assad's troops rescue antiquities. London, which has given birth to some of the great glories of the English language, now publishes encomia to an Oriental despot who saves stones as he tears men's flesh.

On Easter Sunday, a delegation of French figures visited the butcher of Damascus. The group comprised a few well-known antisemites and other right-wing extremists among the visiting politicians, journalists, and intellectuals. They paid their respects, smiled, and posed for selfies with a man responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands. French diplomatic sources warn that this gruesome caravan may be a sign of things to come, with many French policymakers now leaning toward an accommodation with Assad.

This is not how Paris wanted it. French planes were ready to hit Assad in August 2013 when Barack Obama called off the attack. François Hollande was the last European leader who demanded Assad's removal. The French president declined to take part in the anti-ISIS campaign in Syria because he feared it would strengthen Assad's hand. After the massive ISIS attacks on Paris in November, Hollande joined the Obama administration's halfhearted war on the Islamic State because there was no other choice.

So Assad is enjoying a popular revival, praise from figures like Boris Johnson, and reconsideration from EU policymakers, because Europe is cornered: ISIS is on the march and the Obama White House will not lead the West and is proud that it will not.

The ISIS attack on Brussels two weeks ago that left 35 dead and almost 300 wounded merely confirmed for Europe that its major threat is about borders and immigration. It's true that Assad's sectarian campaign against Syria's Sunni Arab population is responsible for the vast majority of refugees, and Putin is manipulating the refugee crisis to his own advantage. But when death comes to the continent, European officials logically label ISIS the

JOSEPH EID / AFP / GETTY

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major problem. They're concerned with their own security, not the big picture—like how to deal ISIS a decisive blow, or contain Iran, or knock Putin back down to size. The Americans are supposed to do the big picture. They have the military, the economy, the prestige to shape a global strategy. After all, they built the post-WWII international order.

And as Brussels burned in the wake of a major terrorist attack, where was the president of the United States? Obama was in Havana watching a baseball game with the leader of a state that sponsors terrorism. If you let the terrorists disrupt your routine whenever there's a terrorist attack, Obama said, then the terrorists win. But that's not the message he sent when he decided to sit next to Raúl Castro rather than stand by Europe.

The message was this: Isolating Cuba for 50 years was wrong. For Obama, even when the Soviets based nuclear weapons 90 miles from America, it was a mistake. It was wrong to make too big a deal out of the differences between communism and capitalism, Obama told an audience in Argentina shortly after his Cuban excursion. Forget these distinctions and go with whatever works, said the American president. The whole Cold War was a mistake, Obama thinks, and all the ideas that came out of it, like enmity with Iran, like NATO, like the international order that America has underwritten since the end of WWII. Who needs Europe anyway? As Obama told a journalist, allies like France and the United Kingdom are "free riders."

Foreign policy isn't poetry. It's not for the solitary genius, but the grinders. It's the hard and meticulous work of many men and women over many generations who understood the world is flawed, as are they and the nation, America, they serve. Still, as they well knew, morality in international affairs is the privilege that American power afforded the United States and our allies. That moment is in jeopardy. To preserve it will require leadership, sacrifice, and humility—all qualities that after the last seven years America will have to rediscover. ♦

Opiates of the Masses

Obama talks smack about the overdose epidemic.

BY JOHN P. WALTERS, DAVID W. MURRAY, & BRIAN BLAKE

Nearly 50,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in 2014, the latest year for which there are statistics, with heroin overdose deaths alone increasing 440 percent over the previous seven years. On March 29, at an Atlanta summit on drug overdose deaths, President Barack Obama acknowledged that more people now die of drug overdoses than die in traffic accidents. In the eighth year of his presidency, we are now in one of the most lethal drug epidemics our nation has ever endured.

What did the president offer as a response? The policy list is familiar: more training for physicians, insurance "parity" for drug treatment, expanded access to opioid-overdose antidote medication, and the expansion of "syringe services" that give the addicted needles with which to continue the pursuit of their deadly habit.

Obama's proposals, some useful, but most misguided, are nearly all directed at the results of the epidemic, not its causes, attempting to mitigate the fate of those already trapped in drug use. In contrast to a true public health approach, Obama's policies do not address the epidemic's spread, do not target the source of the pathogens, and do not prevent new victims from succumbing to addiction. It is an agenda that will neither contain nor reverse the epidemic.

John P. Walters is the Hudson Institute's chief operating officer and former director of drug control policy for President George W. Bush. David W. Murray and Brian Blake are senior fellows at Hudson's Center for Substance Abuse Policy Research, and both served in the Office of National Drug Control Policy during the George W. Bush administration.

Take the administration's promotion of "medically assisted treatment" (MAT) for the opioid dependent—an example of its desire to cope with the disease of addiction rather than healing those who suffer from it. MAT (the prescribed use of synthetic opioids like buprenorphine or methadone as substitutes for opioids) can be an important intermediate treatment to help stabilize the addicted and get them on the path to recovery. But rather than use it as a bridge to full recovery as has been the usual protocol, the Obama administration has declared MAT as the final, long-term solution for what it sees as a "chronic, relapsing disease." Abstinence is dismissed as the wrong goal entirely; instead, the addicted are offered a lifetime of dependence on opioid-substitutes.

Such policies seek to accept and accommodate the epidemic rather than heal it. And what of the drug crisis beyond opioids? Methamphetamine, marijuana, and cocaine, for instance, also present addictive challenges and require treatment. But there is no similar "medically assisted treatment" or overdose antidote for cocaine or meth. Those addicted to these substances were simply ignored by President Obama.

As addiction and the death toll climb across the country, the administration dogmatically pursues an after-the-fact "harm-reduction" ideology, averse to prevention, supply-reduction, or enforcement. They are bending their diagnosis of the opioid epidemic until it fits the available, and ideologically desired, tools of response.

To the extent the president does address prevention, it is in citing the role of prescription pain-pills in

predisposing users to take up heroin. Restricting doctors' prescribing behavior is offered as a way to control the heroin outbreak. There is some validity to this perspective. But we have a dual epidemic of opioid use. One is strictly medical, and it is beginning to wane as doctors take more seriously the risks of addiction. The other epidemic involves heroin: It is in full conflagration and is not susceptible to the medical adjustments that the president proposes.

The administration's own experts at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) have recently presented evidence that the heroin problem cannot be apprehended in the fashion the White House proposes; that is, the "transition" from prescription opioids to heroin has been oversold. In reality, as a NIDA administrator has noted, there is a separate heroin supply "pull" that accounts for the extraordinary increase in both heroin use and overdose deaths in the past several years, particularly accelerating since 2010 and with no end in sight. NIDA experts further note that transition from prescription pain relievers to heroin "is rare."

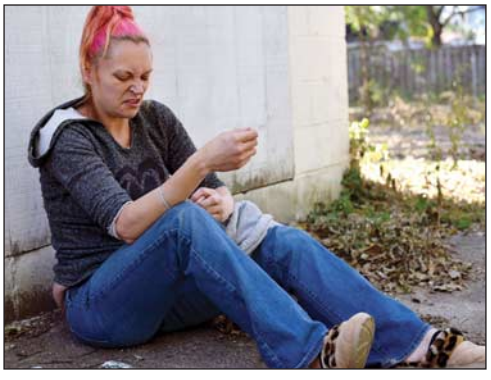
It is the escalating supply of heroin, now flooding in from Mexico, that must be addressed—that and the trade in illicit fentanyl, a highly potent, synthetic opioid that is making the heroin epidemic even more lethal. Fentanyl is available not because it's being diverted from legitimate pharmaceutical sources but because Mexican drug traffickers are producing it.

Fentanyl deaths appear to be misclassified, according to the CDC, wrongly listed as due to prescription drugs when they are actually part of the heroin crisis. Since prescription misuse peaked around 2006 and has been in recent decline, this is an important realization: Driving the epidemic of opioid deaths is the illicit heroin supply, and the administration isn't proposing a single measure to respond to this fact.

The administration's solutions—such as "prescriber education" grants and efforts to "take back" unused medications—are wholly inadequate. They demonstrate a pattern of diagnosing the crisis in a way that fits their preexisting tools and policy predilections, while refusing to acknowledge the true nature of the heroin threat.

Taking the heroin threat seriously would require the president enforce the border with Mexico and check the spread of migrant gangs that have become the cartels' distributors in the heartland. The administration would further have to reconsider its policy of early release for thousands of convicted federal drug felons, 99.5 percent of whom are serious traffickers, including *all* of the 61 inmates whose sentences the president commuted on March 30.

Expanding treatment and distributing antidote drugs like naloxone to trained first responders are useful programs, but they cannot be sufficient in the absence of a dedicated effort to constrict drug supply. When the president declares that "the only way that we reduce demand is if we're providing treatment," he is simply misguided.



Heroin addict Tara, a onetime mother of five in Ohio, uses her hoodie tie to shoot up, October 18, 2015.

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Reducing the supply and availability and acceptability of illicit opioids—making drugs difficult, expensive, and dangerous to pursue—can reduce demand. For example, the cocaine shortage of the last decade was driven by supply-reduction efforts in the source country, Colombia, and interdiction efforts against smugglers. It not only drove down use, but more addicts sought treatment and recovery. Perversely, even this success is now being reversed because of Obama administration neglect. With the supply increasing, expect a cocaine resurgence parallel to the heroin surge.

Drug prevention efforts have collapsed. Legal dope in Colorado and elsewhere has driven down perceptions of risk among young people. Nor has legalization of marijuana cut the cartels out of the action: It is helping them open new business avenues, using the Colorado black market to facilitate the production and interstate smuggling of high-potency dope.

To limit the cartels' power, the president needs to enforce federal drug laws domestically, eradicate their crops in Mexico, aid Mexican officials, seize smuggled drugs, and attack the gangs' organizations and finances within the United States. But none of these is high on the president's agenda. His current budget request cuts funding for international programs and even for treatment, the worst of both worlds. Funding for the successful Access to Recovery program, for example, was allowed to lapse on the promise that the Affordable Care Act would fill the void. Like many Obamacare assurances, it has not materialized.

Well into his Atlanta event, the president made brief mention of prevention, and the audience of experienced drug treatment providers, public health advocates, and public safety officials responded with sustained applause. It was as if they were acknowledging that, in the face of 50,000 Americans dead, the discussion of needles, naloxone, and MAT was neither sufficient nor serious.

But don't expect anything more from Obama. In January, when it was announced he would lead efforts against rural opioid abuse, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack may have revealed the troubling truth about the president and drug policy. He told the *Washington Post* that long-term strategies would inevitably be up to the next president.

There will be a lot of urgent work required before we can turn this around. The president at this point may be just passing through. But his policies will destroy lives for years to come. ♦

The New Red Scare

Are the socialists coming?

By David Azerrad

Based on the delegate counts, it seems we may not feel the Bern past this summer—except in one important regard: Bernie Sanders has made socialism reputable in America. Call it the afterBern.

In the one developed country where, as sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset explained, "It Didn't Happen" and "Socialism Failed," majorities of Democrats and millennials now look favorably upon socialism. Merriam-Webster reports that "socialism" was the most looked-up term on its website last year.

Young Sandernistas rally in Yakima, Washington, March 24.

Bernie Sanders, it is true, did not inaugurate these trends. In the early '80s already, one in five Americans thought the United States would be better off if it moved toward socialism. What the independent senator from Vermont has done is to further popularize and legitimize the S-word.

Conservatives and libertarians are dismayed by the growing support for an ideology they thought had been consigned to the ash heap of history. Writing in *Commentary*, Ben Domenech worries that the "rise of socialism—real socialism" means that we will need to relearn the hard lessons of the 20th century "by repeating the errors of socialism here."

Yet a red dawn is not really upon us. Whatever brand of socialism is gaining popularity in America, it ain't Uncle Ulyanov's brand of nationalized industries and five-year plans paving the way to a glorious future in which the state withers away and private property is abolished. There is almost no support in America for the Marxist-Leninist variety of socialism, which was discredited after we won the Cold War.

Cold War socialism came in two varieties. It was used either to describe the intermediary stage on the way to communism or as a synonym for full-blown, end-of-history communism. The confusion can be traced back to Marx and Engels, who used the terms socialism and communism interchangeably in their writings.

It was Lenin who first distinguished the two regimes. "The scientific distinction between socialism and communism is clear," he wrote in *The State and Revolution*. "What is usually called socialism was termed by Marx the 'first,' or lower, phase of communist society. Insofar as the means of production becomes common property, the word 'communism' is also applicable here, providing we do not forget that this is not complete communism."

Complete communism—the higher and final phase of Communist society—will only come about after the state has withered away. "So long as the state exists there is no freedom," Lenin explains. "Only communism makes the state absolutely unnecessary."

Such visions of a stateless society may appeal to Communists and Rothbardian anarcho-capitalists, but they are sure to fill the souls of our self-styled socialists with dread. Whatever today's socialists support, you can be sure it requires heavy doses of statism.

In fact, it is hard to think of a single area of society in which they don't want the state to meddle (the only exception being the bedroom—so long, of course, as you're not smoking in bed). Contrary to what you may read in certain conservative fundraising letters, our socialists are not Communists.

Nor are they socialists. Real socialists want the government to seize the means of production—the factories, the machines, the land. They want an economy in which there is no private enterprise, everyone works for the state, and the state runs the economy. "Socialized production upon a predetermined plan," as Engels once described it.

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It is true that our "socialists" want the government to heavily regulate the economy. As a result, certain industries will effectively be converted into public utilities (health insurance under Obamacare). Others will have to be regulated out of existence (coal plants if the left has its way). The government will also need to subsidize particular sectors of the economy (solar energy) and operate its own corporations (Amtrak and Freddie Mac).

This sure isn't Adam Smith's natural system of liberty. But it's not Soviet socialism either. It is really just a continuation of liberalism by the same means. In theory and in practice, American-style "socialism" and liberalism are indistinguishable. This explains why neither Democratic National Committee chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz nor Hillary Clinton have been capable of explaining the difference between the two.

Both Bernie's "socialism" and Hillary's liberalism understand themselves in opposition to a caricature of capitalism as sink-or-swim, you're-on-your-own Social Darwinism. Both want to preserve all the government we now have—and add some more. And both realize that it is much more efficient to have the state compel the private sector to do its bidding than have it run everything itself.

This may in fact be the one great lesson that our left learned from the collapse of Soviet communism. Our liberals and socialists are in favor of an awful lot more government involvement in the economy, but their goal is not to have the state actually own and operate factories and corporations. That's why, for example, they are in favor of single-payer Medicare-for-all and not single-employer VA-hospitals-for-all.

It's not that they have any principled objections to the nationalization of industry. They just have found that subsidies, mandates, and regulations will get you where you want to go more effectively. The Soviet Union had shortages. We don't.

Under this hybrid system, the capitalists can hang on to the means of production. But they must play by the rules of the EEOC, OSHA, and the EPA, pay their employees a living wage, provide them with health insurance, and subsidize their contraceptives. And, of course, they must pay their "fair share" of taxes.

Polls confirm that most Americans do not understand socialism to entail the nationalization of industry. A 2010 CBS/*New York Times* poll found that only 30 percent of Americans defined socialism in that fashion. Among millennials, who express the greatest support for socialism, that number drops to 16 percent. When the overwhelming majority of the population understands a word differently than it was once understood, they either are ignorant of its original meaning or the meaning of the word has changed. In this case, it's probably both.

A more recent Reason-Rupe survey found that millennials who view socialism favorably think it means being kind, or in the words of one respondent, "being together." It is worth remembering that the current occupant of the White House, who calls himself a progressive and not a socialist, is fond of saying that "government is us" and that "kindness covers all of my political beliefs."

That same survey found that millennials associate socialism with a more expansive welfare state where "the government pays for our own needs," to quote another respondent. In other words, whatever we're now doing—except more of it. The goal here is not the Soviet Union but Scandinavia (or at least the liberal concept of Scandinavia, which is considerably more progressive than reality).

A recent survey found that millennials who view socialism favorably think it means being kind, or in the words of one respondent, 'being together.'

The United States already provides generous benefits to the elderly (40 percent of the federal budget) and the non-elderly poor (22 percent of the federal budget). Our socialists, led by Bernie Sanders, want to fill the gap and take care of everyone else. They are clamoring for European-style middle-class entitlements to provide all citizens "free" benefits like health care, day care, paid leave, and college.

Appealing as this may sound to liberals and the young, real socialists are not taken in by it. The Socialist Party USA's current presidential candidate, Emidio "Mimi" Soltysik, for one, is not on board the B-Train: "To me, Sanders sounds more like a progressive Democrat/social Democrat," Soltysik explained to the *Socialist*, the party's official publication. "I don't see him putting forth a socialist proposal. I'm not seeing him talk about workers owning the means of production."

In fact, from an orthodox Marxist perspective, watered-down socialism, which aims to improve the lot of the proletariat without calling for revolution, is a sham. In his 1888 preface to a new English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels denounced those "most multifarious social quacks who, by all manner of tinkering, professed to redress, without any danger to capital and profit, all sorts of social grievances."

If our socialists have much more in common with LBJ and Walter Mondale than they do with Marx and Lenin, why have they adopted such a loaded word to describe themselves?

The 2008 financial crisis may be the key to understanding this semantic shift on the left. Though its causes were complex, the left didn't waste any time blaming it on its straw-man caricature of capitalism.

"This financial crisis is a direct result of the greed and irresponsibility that has dominated Washington and Wall Street for years," Barack Obama explained in September 2008. "It's the result of an economic philosophy that says we should give more and more to those with the most and hope that prosperity trickles down to everyone else; a philosophy that views even the most common-sense regulations as unwise and unnecessary. And this economic catastrophe is the final verdict on this failed philosophy."

Obama didn't need to name that failed philosophy. Everyone knew what he meant. In the absence of a simple, conservative counternarrative, the crash became synonymous with capitalism. This allowed "socialism" to present itself as the reasonable alternative to unregulated greed, especially for a generation that had no firsthand memories of the Cold War. Then came the polls asking respondents to choose between capitalism and socialism as the two alternative ways to run an economy.

Unless conservatives succeed in dislodging from the national consciousness the idea that capitalism caused the financial crisis or the economy really starts growing again, "socialism" will remain popular in America.

The fact that this socialism has more modest ambitions than its Marxist counterpart should not detract us from the threat it poses to free markets. The challenge is not to force the state to privatize the companies it owns (though selling a lot of the land it owns out West would not be a bad idea). We need to disentangle the private sector from the suffocating grip of the administrative state.

This may sound like an easier task, but in a certain sense, it isn't. Our government exercises its control over the economy in a much more subtle way than in a socialist regime. Its footprint is harder to detect. No one can truly measure the toll that the government takes on the economy.

More important, statism, bureaucracy, and rampant cronyism are largely concealed from the public eye in our nominally capitalist economy. This allows the government to shift blame to the private sector when things go wrong, thereby justifying ever more stringent regulations. The mess bequeathed to us by Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae is blamed on everyone but the state and leads to the passage of Dodd-Frank. In this regard, our newfangled American "socialism" is more pernicious than the socialism of yore. ◆

Clueless Capitalists

What has happened to the traditional reservoir of support for America's market economy?

By Irwin M. Stelzer

Karl Marx, Joseph Schumpeter, and Irving Kristol have two things in common. All three recognized the extraordinary ability of market capitalism to produce goods, services, and wealth. And they hoped, believed, and feared, respectively, that capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction.

The time may have come when these keen observers of the capitalist system are being proved right. Not because the state will have taken over all the means of production and distribution, as Communists and socialists would have it—or merely the "commanding heights of the economy," as Lenin would have it. The state no longer needs to own the means of production and distribution in order to control the economy, allocate capital to whatever purposes the state deems most desirable, and set prices, including the price of labor. To do that, it needs three things: a willingness to use regulation as a tool of control; the power to tax and subsidize; and a decline in the acceptability of capitalism, especially among the classes that have in the past benefited from its enormous productive power.

Donald Trump sees capitalism as a system in which businesses succeed by buying the approbation of politicians in power, no matter which party. Dollars buy access to those in positions to confer favor, no matter their beliefs. Doing business requires something other than the best product at the best price; it requires favors from the people in a position to grant them. His candor on the subject is not an adequate defense. Hillary Clinton takes a different view. The great wealth produced by capitalism is a sort of honey pot, and the game for a political leader is to figure out how to dip into it. Perhaps it takes getting elected to a high office; or establishing a seemingly charitable foundation; or getting in a position to dole out favors and collect IOUs to be cashed at just the right time; or linking all of the above and shaping it into a single large spoon with which to do the dipping, leaving no trace, as our colleague Daniel Halper lays out in detail in *Clinton, Inc.: The Audacious Rebuilding of a Political Machine*.

To Ted Cruz capitalism is a wonder, as indeed it is, but also a merciless Darwinian process that requires, among other things, deportation *sans pitié*, taxing what workers buy rather than the incomes of the wealthy, abolishing the sensibly porous but nevertheless useful fence that assigns some territory to religion without making it a key feature of democratic government, and featuring disdain for the political process that underpins capitalism but requires pragmatic adjustment and, dare I say it, compromise if it is to continue to play that role.

To Bernie Sanders, perhaps the most transparent of the lot, capitalism is a system to be changed by a "revolution." No, not the bloody sort practiced by his socialist predecessors when he was honeymooning in the Soviet Union. And no, not one engineered by dispossessed horny-handed sons of toil seeking to be freed of their chains, but by a young army of privileged college students who should be forgiven for they know not what they do, owing to the absence of courses in Western civilization and an appalling lack of interest in the work of the Founding Fathers.

In short, no need to seek among the various aspirants to the leadership of our nation anyone with a belief in capitalism as it has until recently been understood: a system in which individual producers compete to offer individual consumers the best product at the best price, staying within the law while doing so, a law that introduces

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into the system noneconomic social values agreeable to a majority of the population. No need to hope that we will find such a one as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a vigorous interventionist but one who sought to save, not destroy, capitalism by making markets work better to produce goods and jobs, and distribute essential benefits such as electricity and decent housing more widely. Or a John F. Kennedy, who understood that the purpose of tax policy was to keep the goose laying golden eggs. Or a Ronald Reagan, who understood that government is more often the problem than a solution, and that it could better provide solutions by making the supply side of the economy more supple rather than by artificially manipulating the demand side. All in their own way, and in all probability well aware of what they were doing, were seeking to preserve capitalism, by reforming it if necessary.

Some overstepped at times, some fell asleep at the switch at times and were too timid to deploy the tools at their disposal, but none sought what Trump, Clinton, Cruz, and Sanders have in mind for us: a stint in office that has no consistent understanding or fondness for the traditional underpinnings of America's functioning capitalist system.

Today, a sales clerk in a department store lives better than most of her customers did in the middle of the last century. If some jobs paid more than others, no matter: With hard work a man (mostly men, then) could earn enough to live decently and to help his children do even better. That was then, and this is now.

No need here to detail the many ways in which government has used its power to regulate by replacing capitalism's market with rules, despite the fact that the problems could be met by greater, rather than less reliance on prices. Consumers are content to have their electricity made by burning coal, yet instead of making them pay for the environmental impact we will simply regulate the industry out of existence. Consumers make it clear in the market that they prefer large to small, European-style vehicles, but manufacturers are instead told what mix of the two they must turn out. Consumers want to buy health insurance policies that do not have premiums inflated with reimbursements for services they neither want nor need, but regulation prohibits the sale of such policies, which insurers would dearly love to make available to consumers who would dearly love to buy them. Homeowners who were led to believe that in a free-market capitalist system their homes were their castles find that government can snatch those homes away to permit developers to build parking lots or shopping malls in order to increase the tax revenues of the government that did the house-napping.

Equally, there is little need here to lay out in painful detail how the power to tax and subsidize has become the power to destroy capitalism's ability to provide consumers with the goods and services they crave. Consumers want cheap electricity; government wants expensive wind machines and solar installations. So it pays well-connected businessmen to build such facilities, using taxes on consumers to fund that wealth transfer. Government thinks we should drive electric vehicles, so it takes money from the paychecks of middle-class workers and hands checks to those wealthy enough to afford $85,000 Teslas. Government thinks you should smoke less and is probably right, so it raises taxes on cigarettes and bans smoking within several hundred feet of federal buildings while the former speaker of the House contentedly puffed away in the office provided him by taxpayers. Travelers are willing to pay for more parking at airports, but cannot express that preference with hard cash because politicians have reserved spaces for themselves rather than bid and pay for them on an open market and taxes travelers to make up for the lost revenues needed by airport operators.

That this creates cynicism there is no doubt. That politicians' personal behavior and ethical bent removes them from the ranks of possible defenders of the capitalist system is equally certain. Which is the least of our problems. More damaging to the sustainability of that system is the behavior of the corporate sector. The deeds of the financial sector are well known: lavishly rewarding the very executives who were not so long ago bailed out by taxpayers; slipping in charges for services that consumers neither want nor knew they were being charged for; foreclosing on loans of men and women serving overseas in the military to protect the livelihoods of the bankers ordering the foreclosures.

But there is more than the banking sector putting people off the system. High-tech billionaires, many of them major contributors to the party in power, demand and get more visas to allow them to import high-tech workers from abroad after engaging in a conspiracy not to compete for domestic workers, thereby keeping salaries down and depressing the supply of Americans who might, were wages set in the market rather than in Silicon Valley intercorporate communications, be available for those jobs. Hedge fund entrepreneurs, surely in the top .001 percent of earners, work the corridors

Chorus of the disaffected, from Puck *magazine (1897): 'The Poor Man, The Socialist, The Dissatisfied Laborer, The Populistic Farmer, The Demagogue, The Chronic Idler, and The Struggling Professional Man'*

of power to arrange to have their compensation taxed as if it were capital gains and not income, something that offends even Donald Trump, perhaps because he was too busy setting up a university to have time to open a hedge fund. General Motors' inattention to quality results in deaths in cars manufactured during a time when it was operating with a taxpayer bailout. Drug companies, clearly entitled to profit from their wonderful research, go a step further and prevent the reimportation of drugs they are willing to sell at lower prices to Canada.

Capitalism has always had its discontents. But the vast majority of Americans accepted it, warts and all, because it produced a dazzling array of goods and services at reasonable prices, while at the same time distributing income in a way that made those goods widely affordable. Air conditioning, refrigeration, washing machines—not to mention the electricity that powered them—became available to almost all Americans, in the case of electricity with a major assist from a government now dedicated to making it more costly for them to use it. Today, a sales clerk in a department store lives better than most of her customers did in the middle of the last century. If some jobs paid more than others, no matter: With hard work a man (mostly men, then) could earn enough to live decently and to help his children do even better. Public schools worked well, and the brightest could get a decent education even if they were the poorest, witness the brilliant products of New York City's public universities.

That was then, and this is now. Capitalism continues to produce a cornucopia of goods and services that makes life ever-more satisfactory. But as Robert Gordon argues in his interesting *The Rise and Fall of American Growth*, the inventions of 1870-1970, notably the internal combustion engine and electricity, had a far greater positive impact on the living standard of Americans than the current innovative output of Silicon Valley. That is debatable, but what is not is that the quality of the public goods that made America a land of opportunity has declined: I ask readers of a certain age to compare the public educations they received with those on offer in Baltimore, Washington,

New York, and other major cities afflicted with teachers' unions, kids coming to class from appalling housing projects and fatherless homes. And it is these public goods on which the middle class, with its incomes stuck, although at reasonable levels by historic standards, must rely as it pursues the American Dream, which, despite reports to the contrary, still lives, although its hold on life is more tenuous than it once was.

That is only in part because the marginal addition to the quality of life by the latest app is less than the addition of electricity. It is because Americans are less willing to accept the distribution of the bounty of capitalism as fair. Here is where both progressives and conservatives have much to answer for. Progressives, with their thousands upon thousands of regulations, have stifled growth, leaving the pie much smaller than it need be. But conservatives, by focusing until recently only on increasing the size of the pie—greater incentives to innovation, freer trade, constraints on trade-union work rules—ignored just how that pie is to be sliced. Yes, freer trade probably increases global efficiency; it also forces unskilled Americans—unskilled in part because the education system failed them—to compete with $1-per-day Asian labor while conservatives extol the virtues of free trade. And placing the burden of enhancing growth on monetary policy, which increases the value of assets held by the better-off at the expense of the value of savings and pensions held by the less-well-off, adds to inequality and loss of faith in capitalism.

Fortunately, Americans complain, and worry, and note that the incomes of the counties around our nation's capital, populated by lobbyists, bureaucrats, and politicians, are among the highest in the nation, but so far are inclined to stick with capitalism if not with the entrenched political class. During the Great Depression, when poverty was rampant—real poverty, not lack-of-a-flat-screen-television-set poverty—and the unemployment rate hit 25 percent, Americans continued to believe that a responsive government, rooted in democratic capitalism, would be more in their interests than the other models on offer—national socialism in Germany, fascism in Italy, communism in Russia. After World War II, when the head of General Motors, then the symbol of American economic prowess, professed that what was good for his company was good for America, cynical guffaws were at a minimum. And when America was called upon to protect not only itself but most of the rest of the world from Communist imperialism, its citizens were willing to bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend in the cause of freedom. Now, corporate America is more tolerated than revered, and any candidate suggesting that we bear a burden in the cause of freedom is quickly retired from consideration.

So, as Lenin once asked in another context, what is to be done? It would be difficult to argue that the solution lies in a new attitude from the self-seeking political class, members of which believe that the long run is the time until the next press conference and the very long run the time until the next election. Rather, the answer must come from those who benefit most from American capitalism, but whose benefits are determined by a system of corporate governance that is seriously in need of repair that would turn over power to the shareholder-owners of the companies: CEO compensation in owner-run companies is well below that characteristic of companies where pliant boards selected from a roster of friends of the CEO set pay and perks.

Note that few resent our self-made billionaire entrepreneurs: Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Sergey Brin, Larry Page, and the late Steve Jobs—these men are more capitalist icons than capitalist running dogs, to borrow a phrase from the rulers of China's 1.4 billion souls, including 3.6 million millionaires. In Irving Kristol's formulation, these are "real person[s] . . . who took personal risks, reaped personal rewards, and assumed personal responsibility for [their] actions." And there seems to be little anger at LeBron James, or Steph Curry, or other sports millionaires.

If corporate compensation could be made legitimate by relating it broadly to performance, profits, and attention to the public interest, and if businessmen could understand that (Kristol again) "the populist temper and the large corporation coexist uneasily in America," they might take a different view of many important issues. Increased minimum wages set by legislatures might seem no more artificial than executive compensation set by friendly directors. Trade agreements that enhance the prospects of exports might be examined for their impact on more vulnerable American workers. Demands that consumers be protected from misrepresentation might seem more reasonable in light of recent history in, say, the banking and auto industries. The long-run survival of the system that sustains them might be seen to require restraint, the recalibration of moral compasses to point in the direction not of what an executive can get away with, but towards what Adam Smith called "the fortune of others."

If that noble thought is not enough to make our corporate chieftains weigh the effect of what they do on the probability of the survival of market capitalism, perhaps an appeal to self-interest will. Let them survey the political scene with a cold eye, and ask where they will be if populism, for which I have great regard, turns really nasty, driven by a sense that the current system has to be destroyed if prosperity is to be more equitably shared. ♦

Detail from 'The Age of Reptiles' (1947) by Rudolph F. Zallinger, Peabody Museum

America on Exhibit

Yale's Peabody and the birth of museums. BY AMY HENDERSON

In *House of Lost Worlds*, Richard Conniff fills an instructive gap in the story of how and why American museums were invented. The creation of Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History is a tale encompassing all three subjects of the subtitle, with the most delicious being the drag-down drama of how dynastic maneuvering helped spark the museum to life. Rooted in the age of Darwin, the Peabody's origin is a creation story itself about the survival of the fittest.

Natural history was the first focus of museum life in America. Thomas Jefferson, infuriated by the French philosophe Comte de Buffon's denigration of New World flora and fauna as "smaller" and "weaker" than Old World specimens, instructed Lewis and Clark to collect animal and plant life on their western expedition. In the large foyer of Monticello, he displayed animal skins, skeletons, and plant specimens that proclaimed the New World's vitality.

House of Lost Worlds
Dinosaurs, Dynasties, and the Story of Life on Earth
by Richard Conniff
Yale, 352 pp., $35

Charles Willson Peale, preeminent portrait painter of the Founding Fathers, was also the acknowledged founder of museums in America. Like Jefferson, Peale was fascinated by the New World environment. And like Jefferson as well, he shared the 18th century's view of the New World as a virtual tabula rasa of civilization compared with Europe and wondered: What came before? What are the building blocks of this vast continent?

Peale began to collect and display specimens from western expeditions at his Philadelphia home. The collection burgeoned, and in 1802, his "museum" took over the top floors of Independence Hall. The Quadruped Room was populated by specimens of bigness (bison, elk, and grizzlies); the Long Room had over a thousand bird varieties, insects, minerals, fossils, and coins; the Marine Room had a huge hammerhead shark and various sea

PEABODY MUSEUM

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creatures. All were carefully catalogued and intended to impart an understanding of science to Everyman.

The atmosphere was meant to be both uplifting and entertaining: Peale charged admission for the public to listen to learned professors giving lectures, but he also installed such crowd-pleasers as "moving pictures," semi-transparent and lighted moving panels depicting Western landscapes that delighted audiences. He was a showman and clearly understood the idea of box office appeal.

When Peale died in 1827, his sons took the museum over until 1842, when it was sold to P.T. Barnum. Barnum's American Museum was a popular mid-century New York attraction that displayed (in his words) a conglomeration of "industrious fleas . . . jugglers, living tableaux, gypsies." Barnum explained in his autobiography, "It was my monomania to make the Museum the town wonder. . . . [M]y 'puffing' was more persistent, my posters more glaring, my pictures more exaggerated."

But at the same time that Barnum was creating museums as entertainment, a more serious approach to displaying "lost worlds" was emerging in the scientific community, and the story of Yale's Peabody Museum was an important catalyst to this movement. George Peabody was a philanthropist who believed in supporting education. He had already helped fund Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology when his nephew, the Yale professor of paleontology O.C. Marsh, convinced him in 1866 to donate $150,000 to establish a Yale Museum of Natural History.

Marsh was a colorful figure whose specimen collections would form the core of the Yale museum. His important collecting began in 1870, when he took a group of graduate students on a western expedition to Nebraska, where they uncovered an ancient boneyard. Over the next decade, fossil remains of early dinosaurs, horses, and camels would be shipped back to Yale by the railroad-car-load. Marsh's discovery of what he called "birdlike Reptiles, and Reptilian birds" helped link birds to dinosaurs and bolstered the idea of evolutionary theory that Charles Darwin had promulgated in *On the Origin of Species* (1859). In fact, Darwin wrote in an 1880 letter that Marsh's discoveries "afforded the best support to the theory of evolution" since his book had been published.

George Bird Grinnell, who had accompanied Marsh on that 1870 expedition, went on to play a major role in the growth of America's conservation movement. In his own western travels as natural history editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, Grinnell noted the disappearance of the buffalo as the frontier expanded westward. He became a leading advocate for national measures to protect the buffalo from slaughter, and for legislation that would bar uncontrolled mining across the Western landscape. He partnered with Theodore Roosevelt, then a New York state assemblyman, to found the Boone and Crockett Club—a group of wealthy East Coast hunters who sought to protect Western wildlife.

The Peabody Museum sponsored an 1877 expedition to Colorado and Wyoming that discovered "miraculous" dinosaur finds: Huge skeletal remains of Jurassic creatures were unearthed, including the "thunder lizard" Marsh named *Brontosaurus*. These incredible discoveries revolutionized field and collecting procedures, generated a startling growth in paleontology as a science, and stimulated great public interest.

The popularity of these dinosaur discoveries also precipitated an infamous Gilded Age scientific feud known as the Bone Wars, a cutthroat rivalry between the Peabody's Marsh and the Philadelphia paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope. As Richard Conniff explains, both men used their wealth and influence to finance competing expeditions to procure fossils. By 1892, the "Great Dinosaur Rush" launched by their feud had led to the discovery of over 140 new dinosaur species, 32 of which remain valid today.

In the 20th century, the Peabody Museum was in the forefront of creating displays that helped museumgoers understand how these skeletal creatures had lived. The museum's barren Great Hall became the canvas for a muralist named Rudolph F. Zallinger, who created an "entire saga of time" spanning 300 million years of life on Earth. He created many other murals to contextualize the story and is perhaps best-known for the 1965 Time-Life book *Early Man*, which contained a foldout in which Zallinger depicted "The March of Progress" from early *Pliopithecus* to *Homo sapiens*.

The Peabody Museum's fame was even utilized in the classic screwball comedy *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), featuring Cary Grant as a mild-mannered paleontologist, Katharine Hepburn as a daffy heiress, and a leopard named Baby. The plot involves the search for an "intercostal clavicle" (a nonexistent bone in real life) and Cary Grant's assembly of a Brontosaurus-like skeleton similar to one displayed at the Peabody Museum.

One of the leading figures in the Peabody's postwar history was S. Dillon Ripley, an ornithologist who combined scholarship with a prodigous talent for raising money. He became director of the Peabody Museum in 1959 and stayed for five years before becoming secretary of the Smithsonian Institution in 1964. Public access and public education were key elements in the Ripley mantra, and as Conniff writes, "he wanted the Peabody to be a source of excitement and to be talked about." Ripley's time at the Peabody gave him a forum for developing "his grand worldview and his sense of mission for museums everywhere."

At the Smithsonian, Ripley would add eight museums and seven research facilities and, along with J. Carter Brown at the National Gallery of Art, create a dynamic "new museum age" rooted in scholarship but enlivened with showmanship. Explaining his philosophy in a 1984 talk at the Peabody Museum, Ripley said that "something about the word 'museum' tends to make people feel very slightly dreary, but this is not a dreary museum and all museums, with my thinking, should be places of life and enjoyment and gaiety and fun because that is what education is all about." ♦

B&A

Word from the Ashes

Chronicling the collapse of Syria and the rise of the Islamic State.

BY KIP EIDEBERG

The Crossing
My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria
by Samar Yazbek
translated by Nashwa Gowanlock and Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp
Ebury, 288 pp., $16.95

My Journey into the Heart of Terror
Ten Days in the Islamic State
by Jürgen Todenhöfer
Greystone, 288 pp., $26.95

It is an ordinary summer day in northern Syria, in 2013. No barrel bombs filled with shrapnel that indiscriminately kill all living things; just a few artillery shells that no one pays much attention to. Suddenly a bomb hits close to a house where members of the Free Syrian Army are drinking tea. The men are thrown violently to the ground. Then they begin to laugh.

"They never stopped laughing, these men," writes Samar Yazbek in *The Crossing*. "It was as though they inhaled laughter like an antidote to death." Yazbek, an outspoken critic of Bashar al-Assad's regime, was forced into exile from her homeland in 2011, only to make several clandestine trips back to war-torn northern Syria in 2012 and 2013. Her language is personal and powerful. She describes acts of horror that are almost too unbearable to process: corpses, crippled children, survivors clustered in shacks and hovels, constant airstrikes from the sky.

"The only victor in Syria is death: no one talks of anything else," she writes. "Everything is relative and open to doubt; the only certainty is that death will triumph."

This is a powerful, moving, and often poetic account of a peaceful uprising that began with much promise only to descend into bloodshed. She conducts long interviews with warlords, men from the Free Syrian Army as well as representatives of the Islamic State. The armed people's resistance brigades, as she calls them, trying to defend their communities, were not strong enough and, ultimately, lacked antiaircraft missiles to protect the civilian population against Assad's relentless bombing campaign. When better-armed and better-funded Islamic extremists moved in, their influence over villages and towns grew, and northern Syria gradually fragmented into independent areas controlled by different rebel groups.

ISIS in Raqqa Province, Iraq (2014)

By the time ordinary Syrians realized what was happening, it was too late. By 2012, a power vacuum had spread across the northern part of that country. It was quickly filled by the Islamic State and groups such as the al Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front, which set up a network of local informants and *sharia* courts to control the population.

On December 6, 2014, a year and a half after Yazbek's last trip to Syria, the 74-year-old German journalist, publisher, and former Bundestag member Jürgen Todenhöfer traveled from Turkey to territory claimed by the Islamic State. He was the first Western journalist allowed into areas controlled by the Islamic State, and his journey is meticulously described in *My Journey into the Heart of Terror*.

Todenhöfer's book, like many other first hand accounts from inside authoritarian regimes, has its limitations: It is not always clear if the story unfolds through the eyes of the author or the jihadists that are all too eager to serve as his guides. He travels with a guarantee of safe passage from the office of the caliph, which is dominated by ex-officers from Saddam Hussein's army and security services. At every checkpoint, before every interview, he flashes the letter and animosity quickly turns to camaraderie. It is all a bit too convenient.

In fact, it is hard not to suspect that Todenhöfer is (or allows himself to be) taken in by his jihadist hosts, who pose with their M16s, sport Bayern Munich jerseys, play video games, and drink Pepsi. But thanks to the courage and commitment with which he reports from deep inside Islamic State territory, the reader is treated to some rare and intimate encounters with Islamists.

A car trip through IS-controlled territory with Jihadi John as driver and Abu Qatadah—also known as Christian E., a sandy-haired former IT specialist from the Ruhr—as tourist guide is a surreal experience. Todenhöfer asks Abu Qatadah if IS has anything to do with religion, and quotes the verse from the Koran saying that whoever kills a person unjustly has killed all mankind. Abu Qatadah calmly explains that all infidels must die, and Shiite Muslims, as apostates, are no exception. "If they do not convert," he says, "then they must die. It sounds crass, but we do not care about numbers. We have no borders, only front lines. The goal is world domination."

At the Syria-Turkey border, Todenhöfer watches as trucks filled with new recruits arrive every 20 minutes. "I just could not believe the glow in their

REUTERS

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eyes," he writes. "They felt like they were coming to a promised land, like they were fighting for the right thing." The would-be jihadists are carefully documented and screened: What are their weaknesses? Who can be blackmailed into remaining with the group? Which addictions can be exploited? The Islamic State operates like any other well-organized intelligence agency during wartime, with informants placed in strategic locations.

In Mosul, the largest city occupied by IS, Todenhöfer meets many Europeans. These are young men and women who, frustrated with life in the West, have been lured to the Middle East by promises of adventure and the good life. (Recent research shows that the vast majority of people who join IS and other jihadist groups are recruited by family and friends; radicalization hardly ever occurs in mosques.) Todenhöfer paints a picture of a vibrant city full of life, where a curious sense of normality reigns. The stores are open; the streets are full of people; father and sons enjoy raisins, ice cream, and coffee as they stroll around the ancient streets. It is like any Western city—except that 1.5 million people are brutally controlled by no more than 15,000 jihadists.

At the end of his journey the façade starts to crumble. Todenhöfer tries on a suicide vest; but when he examines the trigger, the young fighters standing around him quickly put an end to the demonstration. Fear overcomes bravado.

These are two very different firsthand accounts from behind the borders of the Islamic State. Above all, Samar Yazbek bears witness: *The Crossing* is a personal account of her devastated homeland, a chronicle of how Syria has systematically been "hanged, drawn and quartered." Jürgen Todenhöfer's reportage is, at times, tediously admonitory but provides a fascinating account of people little understood in the West. He sets out to understand life among the jihadists and returns with a stark warning: The Islamic State is "much stronger and much more dangerous" than the West realizes. And regardless of who is dropping the bombs, the civilian population is suffering unimaginable horrors. ♦

B&A

High Anxiety

The anguished vision of Edvard Munch and his school.

BY DANIEL ROSS GOODMAN

"Why don't men and women really like one another nowadays?" asks Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Like D.H. Lawrence's creation, the groundbreaking Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) also felt let down by the *ignis fatuus* of true love—that elusive will o' the wisp that too often

'Puberty' (1894-95)

fails to guide its followers to the arcadia of lasting bliss. Munch's pessimism about the possibility of finding everlasting love—his troubled views of sexuality, his persistent melancholy, his expressive use of line and color to transfigure nature, illustrate emotion, and convey inner psychological realities, his unshakable existential anxiety centered upon the ever-present specter of death—emerge in startling fashion through his highly personal, extremely original paintings and innovative prints, many of which can now be viewed at this superb exhibition.

Munch and Expressionism
Neue Galerie, New York
through June 13

Organized in partnership with the Munch Museum of Oslo, the exhibition concentrates upon Munch's affinity with (and decisive impact upon) German and Austrian Expressionists. It displays not only Munch's work but that of those he influenced, from Egon Schiele to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Oskar Kokoschka, and Max Beckmann, persuasively arguing that Munch was "the father of Expressionism."

There are few flaws to be found here, but if one wishes to quibble, perhaps the organizers could have made clear just how distinctive Northern European art was—with its depictions of nature as fraught with peril and its portrayal of the human as a helpless creature fated to live in an inhospitable landscape—from the traditions of Classicism (predominant in Southern Europe) and even Impressionism (predominant in France), in which humans are at home in a placid and serene natural world. Moreover, despite a helpful and informative timeline of Munch's life, the show is not arranged chronologically. We come to *The Scream* (1895) at the end of the exhibition, as if all of Munch's other works were appetite-whetting attractions and *The Scream* is the piping-hot feature presentation—which, undoubtedly, it is. This gives the impression that *The*

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Scream represents the culmination of Munch's career, when in fact it came midway through his journey. Viewers may be led to believe that Munch's art grew darker and more anguished as his life progressed when, in fact, after receiving treatment in Copenhagen for a 1908 breakdown, his art became progressively brighter, cheerful, even life-affirming, a fact most prominently exemplified in *Sunbathing* (1914-15), an oil painting of nude bathers frolicking in a pleasant, sunny, Gauguin-like paradise. Its exuberant use of lush, vivid colors has none of the pessimism and melancholy that characterize much of Munch's mordant earlier work.

Still, despite Munch's emergence from the dark forest in which he'd been lost, he never found the straight path that might have granted him a modicum of peace. He never quite shook off the constant consternation that pierced his heart with forebodings of loneliness and death. So it's appropriate to look closely at *The Scream*, not only as one of modern art's masterpieces but as the defining masterwork of Munch's career.

We see *The Scream* in a small, narrow, dimly lit chamber, giving us the feeling that we've entered a chapel, almost a private confessional, in stark contrast to the wide, spacious room in which Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* (1908) and Schiele's *Man & Woman* (1914) are displayed. It is a fitting space for this iconic image, a painting of an agonized prayer from the depths of the soul.

The screamer is a ghostly, Nosferatu figure of death-in-life, a living memento mori, an animated Yorick's skull perched on a rail-thin figure. In the background, two boats can be vaguely discerned amidst the swirling, hallucinatory lines and lurid colors that encircle the spectral figure, seemingly trapped in a feverish dream. Perhaps the shipboard dream was the premonition of the horrors of the two world wars, much as the plague had arrived from Asia by boat, spread by rats stowed on mercantile vessels. The best description of *The Scream* comes from the artist himself: "I was walking along the road with two friends," wrote Munch, "the sun was setting—the sky turned blood-red. And I felt a wave of Sadness—I paused, tired to Death. Above the blue-black, fjord and city, Blood and flaming tongues hovered. My friends walked on—I stayed behind—Quaking in Angst—I felt the great Scream in Nature."

Or as Connie reflects in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

> All the great words . . . were cancelled for her generation: love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, all these great dynamic words were half dead now, and dying from day to day. . . . As for sex, the last of the great words, it was just a cocktail term for an excitement that bucked you up for a while, then left you more raggy than ever. Frayed! It was as if the very material you were made of was cheap stuff, and was fraying out to nothing.

No one would have agreed more readily with these sentiments than Lawrence's contemporary Munch, for whom the human being was an anguished, anxiety-ridden, sexually tormented creature, at home nowhere in nature, and—like the war-torn Europe of D. H. Lawrence and Edvard Munch's lifetimes—dying from day to day, fraying out to nothing. ♦

B&A

Life Within Lives

Who reads—and who writes—biographies, and why?

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

When I come upon an artist, a philosopher, a scientist, a statesman, an athlete I admire, I find myself interested in his or her background, which is to say in their biography, in the hope of discovering what in their past made possible their future eminence. I find it more than a touch difficult to understand anyone so incurious as not to have a similar interest.

I have myself written scores of biographical essays, but never a full-blown biography. I once took a publisher's advance to write a biography of the American novelist John Dos Passos, a figure now slowly slipping into the vast limbo inhabited by the once-famous but now nearly forgotten. I was 32, Dos Passos was then 73, and would die a year later. After I had signed my contract, I wrote to inform him that I hoped to write his life and sent him some samples of my own published writing. He wrote back to say that he would be pleased to help me in any way he could, though he would prefer I put my liberal politics in mothballs and promise never again to use the word "explicate."

Three great facts, or so I thought, dominated John Dos Passos's life. The first is that he was born a bastard, but— an interesting twist here—an upper-class bastard, the son of a man who was a successful American lawyer and of a mother who was a Virginian of high social standing. He, John Dos Passos, went to Choate under the name John Madison, and thence to Harvard. The second fact is that he wrote a, if not *the*, Great American Novel, *U.S.A.* by title, a work using modernist techniques to explore the pressures that society puts on men and women of all social classes. It is a book that, when I first read it at the age of 19, greatly moved me. The third fact is that Dos Passos underwent a strong political conversion, from a man who in 1932 voted for William Z. Foster, the Communist candidate for president, to a man of deeply conservative principles and views. The work of the Stalinists

Joseph Epstein, a contributing editor, is the author most recently of the forthcoming Frozen in Time: Twenty Stories. *This is adapted from a lecture given at a recent conference on biography at Hillsdale College.*

in the Spanish Civil War, prepared to kill the innocent to gain their ends, not only changed Dos Passos's politics forever but turned such old friends as Ernest Hemingway against him.

A splendid biography of John Dos Passos was there to be written—but, alas, I never wrote it. Life, in the form of demands too elaborate and dull to go into here, intervened, and I was forced to that most odious act known to the professional writer: having to return my publisher's advance. Others have since written biographies of John Dos Passos, but none, to my mind, altogether successfully. Dos Passos's own fame is perhaps now too far faded for anyone of high literary power to take on the task of writing a first-class biography of him. Not that, let me add, at 32 I was myself likely to have been up to the job. I have come to believe that at the heart of any fully realized literary work, apart perhaps from satire and parody and lyrical poetry, is honoring the complexity of the subject; and in the case of John Dos Passos, I am fairly certain that I could not have done so at that relatively early age.

A successful biography is, at a minimum, one that conveys what the world thinks of its subject, what his closest family and friends think of him, and finally, crucially, and sometimes most difficult to obtain, what he thinks of himself. I have lately read two excellent biographies of Cicero (106-43 B.C.), one by the German classicist Manfred Fuhrmann, the other by the 19th-century French classicist Gaston Boissier, and what makes both biographies especially good is the large cache of 900 or so of Cicero's letters that have survived along with another 100 or so letters from his correspondents. These letters reveal Cicero in all the pride, fear, hope, disappointment, vanity, and grandeur of a man engaged in Roman politics at the highest level. Written more than two millennia ago, Cicero's letters, marshaled into pertinent order by brilliant biographers, bring him to life in a far more intimate way than any other figure in classical antiquity.

I read these biographies of Cicero (along with some among his voluminous writings) because Cicero is one of the hundred or so key figures in Western history and my ignorance of the details of his life is one of the many thousand gaps in my own knowledge of that history. I read them because one of the pleasures of biography is reading about men and women who played the game of life for higher and more dramatic stakes than one has oneself or is ever likely to do. I read them also because they reveal Cicero to be perhaps the first example of the intellectual in politics—he is the political intellectual par excellence—a subject of long fascination to me, an intellectual not in politics.

Cicero was a human type of the greatest interest: the man riven by the division between his ideals and his personal ambition. He felt himself drawn to the Roman aristocracy yet put off by its insolence; he felt the natural conflict between the temperament of the man of letters and the politician (for he was both). He was alternately fascinated and disgusted by politics, regularly retreating from them to his library at his villa at Tusculum, then drawn back to the fray at Rome. He was a man who knew disappointment in a mistaken marriage and tragedy in the loss of a beloved daughter when she was 30. He left a bibulous son, in whom the family line petered out. Attempting always to avoid extremes, longing for a return to the glories of the Roman Republic, about which he may have been guilty of fantasizing, Cicero ended up being killed by Marcus Antonius' men, who nailed his severed head and the hands that wrote attacks upon Antonius up in the Forum for all to see.

In Gaston Boissier's brilliant biography, *Cicero and His Friends* (1897), one is offered dazzling portraits of such figures as the financier Pomponius Atticus, of whom Boissier writes: "he was the most adroit man of that time, but we know that there are other forms of praise which are of more value than this." Of Cicero's protégé Marcus Caelius Rufus, Boissier writes: "Those cautious and clear-sighted persons, who are entirely taken up with the fear of being dupes, and who always see the faults of others so plainly, are never anything but lukewarm friends and useless allies." Boissier describes Cicero's brother Quintus playing the "ungrateful and difficult part of younger brother of a great man." He provides portraits of leading female figures of the day, including Clodia, the Lesbia of Catullus' love poems, of whom it was said that "she danced better than it was proper for an honest woman to do." These observations on women are capped off by the remark of Cato "that the day they [women] become your equals they will be your superiors."

I hope you find some of these remarks about Cicero's friends and contemporaries as interesting as I do. If you do, I trust the reason is that you share my interest in human character and in that still, that probably perpetually, mysterious force behind it, human nature. "The proper study of mankind," as Alexander Pope had it, "is man." If there is a more interesting subject than human character, I do not know it. Part of its interest derives from its bottomlessness, its inexhaustible variety. Why does one person, despite all the disadvantages dealt him by the lottery of birth, survive, surmount, and go on to achieve greatness, while another, with every advantage allotted to him, stumbles, falls, goes down? Biography is the most promising place to seek out the answers.

Some people read biography to compare the subject's life to their own. In the cant term, they "identify." One wonders, though, if this isn't a crude way of reading biography. I read Peter Green's biography of Alexander the Great, I promise you, without once thinking of weeping because I had no more worlds to conquer. Nor did I identify when I read E.F. Benson's *Life of Alcibiades*; instead, I marveled at the hijinks of a man who may have been the world's greatest seducer and con artist. I should have to be a fantast of the first water to imagine myself as even in any way comparable to such men.

Identifying with historical figures is reminiscent of Vladimir Nabokov's

remarking on the coarseness of identifying with characters in fiction. The best readers, he felt, identified with the artist. By this I take it Nabokov meant that when a character in fiction gets in a tight spot, don't worry about that character, worry instead about how the artist will get him out of it. One ought to read biographies in roughly the same spirit, with a certain sophisticated detachment; if worrying, then expending that worry not on the life of the subject but on the skill of his chronicler, the biographer, whose task it is to take the measure of the person he is writing about with reasonable exactitude and penetrating judgment, all going to form a persuasive portrait.

Many years ago I read through the five volumes of Leon Edel's biography of Henry James. As a writer, I cannot say that I identified with James, a man infinitely more subtle than I. But I did, I like to think, take a few lessons from Henry James. James wrote a story called "The Lesson of the Master," in which a famous novelist advises a young writer not to marry because it will impede his art. When the wife of the famous novelist dies, he turns round and marries the woman the young writer loves. Might the lesson here be that the best advice is *not* to take advice, at least in matters of the heart?

Edel's biography provides the best account I know of the quotidian life of the professional writer. The biographer recounts James's dealings with editors and publishers, his hopes for popularity and commercial success ("I can stand a great deal of gold," James once remarked, though little enough of it came his way through his writing); above all, his loneliness and the almost certain loneliness of anyone who chooses, as James did, the spectatorial, as opposed to the active, life.

Henry James was both fascinated and repelled by biography. He himself wrote a biography of the American sculptor William Wetmore Story. The biographical question plays out in many of James's own stories, and in none more than in the story called "The Figure in the Carpet." The narrator of that story seeks to discover the animating force behind the work of an older novelist he admires named Hugh Vereker. Vereker allows that there is such a force—"It's the very string that my pearls are strung on," he tells the narrator—but he isn't about to reveal what it is. Another literary critic, a man named George Corvick, claims after long effort to have discovered it, this repeated theme that turns up ever so subtly in Vereker's work, "something like the figure in a Persian carpet." Before revealing it in a book he is writing, Corvick dies in a carriage accident. He had revealed the great secret to his wife, but she, too, is not telling. Vereker himself dies, and the great underlying force propelling his work is never discovered—which, one senses, is fine with Henry James.

James Boswell: 'No biographer has ever rendered his subject a greater service.'

DE AGOSTINI / GETTY IMAGES

The metaphor of the figure in the carpet is wonderfully suggestive, causing us to look into our own lives to discover if there is some repeated pattern or theme that has guided our destiny, made us succeed or fail, brought us contentment or depression. Galen Strawson, the English philosopher, in a chapter of a recent book called *Life-Writing*, thinks otherwise, holding that life is what we make of it, free fall, essentially patternless, leaving us all in the condition not of Persian but of shag rugs. Is this so? If it is, does this not leave us little more than mere bugs in a vast rug of a design beyond all possible fathoming?

About Henry James's strange story one thing is clear: James sides not with his narrator but with his invented novelist Hugh Vereker. In another, more widely known, story, "The Aspern Papers," James writes with contempt about the prying biographer ready to do anything to acquire the letters of a long-dead famous poet—by some thought to be Lord Byron—from his now-elderly lover. Such is the want of scrupulosity on the part of the biographer that James has the elderly lover in the story call him a "publishing scoundrel."

Late in life, Henry James burned a vast quantity of his letters, an act meant to discourage any possible biographers of his own life. An empty gesture, as it turned out, for so charming were James's letters that everyone else saved those he sent to them, with the result that the University of Nebraska, which is publishing all his extant letters, recently brough out its tenth volume of Henry James letters, and this volume goes up only to 1880. James lived on to 1916.

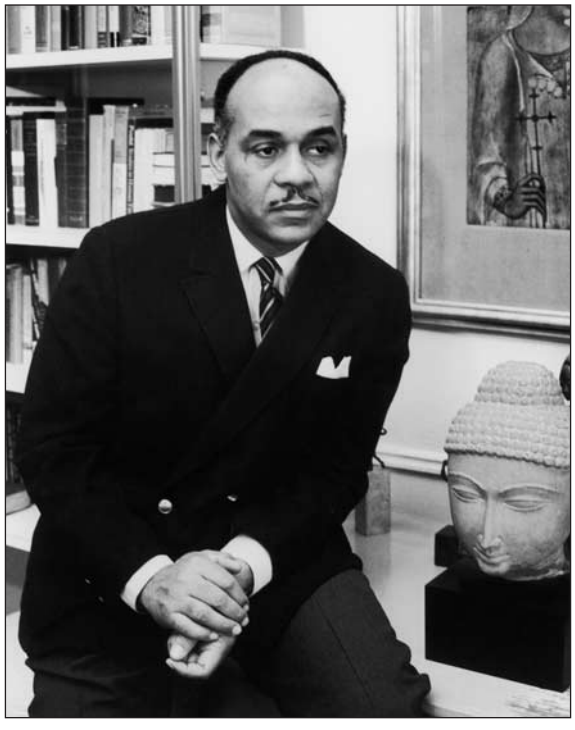
Leon Edel, who much admired Henry James, nonetheless could not resist Freudianizing him. Edel's rather orthodox Freudianism mars but does not destroy his five-volume work. He does not lock James into an Oedipus complex. But he does make great hay out of what he takes to be the sibling rivalry between James and his equally brilliant if utterly different older brother William, even hinting at homoerotic feeling for William on Henry's part. Was the rivalry truly there? My own view is that the

two brothers were so different in their mental makeup—the intellectual note sounding most strikingly in William, the aesthetic in Henry—that rivalry wasn't really at issue. They competed, so to say, at different games: philosophy for William, literature for Henry. Comparing the two is rather like asking who was the better athlete, Michael Jordan or Roger Federer.

Leon Edel does show remarkable restraint—for a Freudian, that is—in not prying into Henry James's sex life. So far as is known, James never had physical relations with anyone, male or female. Anticipating those later biographers and critics who would write in a less decorous time, Edel, considering the possibility that James was homosexual, noted that there is no firm evidence to suggest that Henry James ever engaged in acts of homosexuality and lets it go at that.

Biographers who came after Leon Edel, alas, have not. For some among them, James's homosexuality is presumed; his active pursuit of his true sexual nature is assumed to have been restrained only by his timidity. ("The art of the biographer," James wrote, "that devilish art, is somehow practically *thinning*: It simplifies while seeking to enrich.") *The Master*, a biographical novel by the Irish writer Colm Tóibín, portrays homosexuality as at the center of James's life and has him ogling handsome male servants. The problem here is not just a case of mistaken identification, but the effect this figures to have on skewing the interpretation of James's novels and stories in a homosexual direction. Henry James, were he alive, would have been appalled.

Biography is, of course, subject to other skewings, in our time the political not least among them. The politics of the biographer, if he allows them into his work, can have fatal effect. I first noted this some years ago in Andrew Motion's biography of Philip Larkin. Humorlessly picking his way through the Larkin-Kingsley Amis correspondence and other of Larkin's letters, Motion, with a great display of self-virtue, convicts Larkin of misogyny, racism, and the other standard charges leveled in the court of political correctness. This has since been set right by a recent biography of Larkin by a man named James Booth, who has shown Philip Larkin to be a more than decent man in his relations with women, the people who worked for him at Hull University Library, and everyone else who ever encountered him.



Ralph Ellison: 'a man who later came to regret his own natural sociability'

Years before this, something similar befell H. L. Mencken, who was also brought in by the political correctness police, Anti-Defamation League division. In Mencken's case, to the usual complaints of racism and sexism, antisemitism was added. These charges, too, turned out to be unjust. Mencken, such was the largeness of his heart, married a woman knowing she was dying; he did so principally to bring comfort to her. Mencken's best friends were, in fact, Jews. Dim-witted biographers seem unable to decipher the difference, as in the cases of Larkin and Mencken both, between comically expressed reactionary opinions and lives marked by gracious actions.

A flagrant case of politics ruining biography is that of a Stanford professor named Arnold Rampersad in his biography of Ralph Ellison. I came to the Rampersad biography, published in 2007, with a special interest, hoping he might solve a minor but genuine mystery for me. Many years ago, Ralph Ellison invited me to join him for lunch at the Century Association in New York. I met him there on a sunny winter's day at noon, and departed in the dusk at 4:30 P.M. with the same happy glow as a boy I departed movie matinées. We talked about serious things, gossiped, told each other jokes, laughed a great deal. I enjoyed myself hugely, believed Ellison did too, and departed the Century confident I had made a new friend of a writer I much admired.

Soon afterward I wrote to Ralph (as he now was to me) to thank him for the lunch and an immensely enjoyable afternoon. No answer. A week or so later, I wrote to him again, inviting him to write for *The American Scholar*, of which I was then the editor. No answer. After an interval of another three or four weeks, I wrote yet again to inquire if he had received my earlier letters. Nothing. Puzzled, I wrote to him no more. Had I so misperceived what I thought the reciprocal pleasure of that lunch at the Century Association?

A few years after this, I had a letter from a reader of mine asking if I knew Ralph Ellison. He went on to say that he and his wife had met Ellison and his wife at the Newport Jazz Festival, and the four of them spent a most pleasing weekend together. Afterwards, though, Ellison had answered none of his letters. What, he wondered, as I earlier had wondered, might have gone wrong?

On the strangeness of Ralph Ellison's behavior in these instances, Professor Rampersad, his biographer, sheds

BEN MARTIN / THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION / GETTY

no light. Instead, much of his attention is taken up by finding Ellison nowhere near so virtuous a man as he, Arnold Rampersad, apparently is. Rampersad's charge against Ellison, adding on to his being a bad brother and a poor husband, is that (in Rampersad's words) Ellison's life is "a cautionary tale to be told against the dangers of elitism and alienation, and especially alienation from other blacks."

What Ralph Ellison turns out to have been guilty of is not having, so to say, got on the bus. He was and remained an integrationist and thought the Black Power movement a grave mistake. He insisted on the complexity of black experience in America, and refused to play the victimhood game, refraining from the rhetoric of public rage and demagoguery. He was an artist before he was a politician and, in the realm of art, was an unapologetic elitist, believing in pursuing the best in Western high culture and African-American folk culture to the exclusion of all else. He did not line up to praise young black writers simply because they were black. Art, he held, was color-blind. Nor did he praise established black writers (James Baldwin, Toni Morrison) if he did not think them truly praiseworthy. Rampersad's charge finally comes down to what he takes to be Ellison's pernicious opinions, and the way one knows they are pernicious is that they do not comport with his biographer's opinions.

Left to speculate upon what was behind Ralph Ellison's odd behavior toward me and (I gather) others he had charmed, I have concluded that Ellison was a gracious and gregarious man who later came to regret his own natural sociability. In 1952, at the age of 39, he wrote *Invisible Man*, a novel that won all the prizes and worthy acclaim of its day. Although he lived on for another 42 years and produced two excellent collections of essays, Ralph Ellison never wrote another novel. How this must have worn on him psychologically one cannot hope fully to know. He would go out into the world, his natural charm easily making him friends, and afterwards return to his desk, the scene of decades-long defeat, determined not to waste further time on these newly made friends. Or so I have conjectured.

In his biography of Ralph Ellison, Professor Rampersad not merely wrongly degraded a good man, but in his biography's pretense to definitiveness (the work runs to 672 pages), the book is likely to scare away other Ellison biographers for decades, which is a sadness and an injustice. To be definitive has increasingly become the goal for contemporary biographers. A definitive biography, by current standards, leaves nothing out. Straightaway one sees the impossibility of the goal—unless one does a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute account of a life, definitiveness, defined as utter thoroughness, cannot be achieved.

The greatest biography ever written, James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, which I reread within the past year, is not definitive. For one thing, the book largely shirks Samuel Johnson's early life and concentrates on the 21 years during which Boswell knew Johnson, roughly from 1763 to 1784, beginning when he was 22 and Johnson 54. Nor has any biographer ever intruded himself, in a biography, so completely as Boswell did in his book about Johnson. So much is this the case that some have claimed that the *Life of Johnson* is two for the price of one here, both a biography and an autobiography.

The making of the *Life of Johnson* is, of course, Boswell's emphases on Samuel Johnson's habits, his "inflexible dignity of character," his ponderous physical presence—above all, his brilliant conversation, into which Boswell often all but goaded him. Johnson was an extraordinary writer. The essays from the *Rambler* are among the finest we have. As a biographer, his *Life of Mr. Richard Savage* and *The Lives of the Poets* hold up splendidly. In "The Vanity of Human Wishes," he composed a poem that still lives. His *Dictionary* is one of the most impressive one-man intellectual performances of all time. Along with Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, Samuel Johnson is one of the three indispensable literary critics in all of English literature.

Yet it took James Boswell to bring him to life. Boswell held that, in his biography, Johnson "will be seen as he really was; for I profess to write, not his panegyrick, which must be all praise, but his Life; which, great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect." Boswell claimed that, in his book, Johnson was seen "more completely than any man who has ever yet lived"—and he made good, I believe, on the claim. With all his gruffness, his blunderbuss conversation in which he often "talked for victory," his intellectual bullying, his acts of extraordinary Christian charity, Johnson emerges in Boswell's *Life*, flaws and all, a moral hero. Without Boswell, Johnson would perhaps not have found his prominent place in the pantheon of English literature. No biographer has ever rendered his subject a greater service than James Boswell did Samuel Johnson.

The tendency of modern biographies, under the tyranny of the definitude, has been for them to grow longer and longer. This may have begun with Mark Schorer's 867-page biography of Sinclair Lewis, published in 1961. A recent biography of Bob Hope runs to 576 pages, the first volume of Gary Giddins's biography of Bing Crosby to 736 pages, James Kaplan's recent biography of Frank Sinatra to 992 pages, J. Michael Lennon's biography of Norman Mailer to 960 pages, and the first volume of Zachary Leader's biography of Saul Bellow to 832 pages. Why are these biographies so lengthy? They are so because of their authors' mistaken ambition for biographical definitiveness. They not only want every word redeemable about but the last word on their respective subjects.

Along with being longer, contemporary biographies are less interested in moral heroism (Samuel Johnson) or simple greatness (Alexander of Macedon, Thomas Edison) of the kind that aroused the interests of earlier readers. Modern biographers labor in search of secrets, often ones linked to sexual behavior. Owing to Lytton Strachey's biographical essays in *Eminent Victorians* (1918), modern biographers are as frequently eager to demean as to exalt

their subjects. Strachey undertook to deflate the Victorians, who, with such figures among them as John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, Benjamin Disraeli, and George Eliot, constitute perhaps the greatest intellectual efflorescence of any period in history. The book made great waves at the time of its appearance and had a strong if not necessarily salubrious influence in changing the nature of biographical writing toward the iconoclastic.

Perhaps the best vantage for a biographer is to admire his subject without being chary of recounting his weaknesses. A model of such a book, in my own recent reading, is the Russian-born Henri Troyat's *Turgenev*. Troyat, who also wrote biographies of Tolstoy, Pushkin, and Chekhov, brought his *Turgenev* in at a mere 184 pages. The biography conveys a literary artist's life and character in a lucid and illuminating way. When one has come to its end, one feels that one knows Ivan Turgenev well and has a clearer view of his novels than formerly. If anything is left out, one feels it cannot have been essential.

"The history of the world," wrote Thomas Carlyle, "is but the biography of great men." Not everyone would agree. Sir Ronald Syme, who wrote impressive biographies of Sallust and Tacitus, is among those who would not. "At its worst," wrote Syme in *The Roman Revolution*, "biography is flat and schematic; at the best it is often baffled by the hidden discords of human nature. Moreover, undue insistence upon the character and exploits of a single person invests history with dramatic unity at the expense of truth."

Biography and history are of course not the same, and yet biography is what many among us find most enticing in history: as when Tacitus writes about Poppaea, Nero's second wife, that she possessed "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." Or as when Edward Gibbon writes of the emperor Gordian the younger: "Twenty-two acknowledged concubines, and a library of sixty-two thousand volumes, attested the variety of his inclinations; and from the productions which he left behind him, it appears that the former as well as the latter were designed for use rather than for ostentation." Ronald Syme himself enlivens his history of *The Roman Revolution* with dab biographical touches, as when of a secondary figure named L. Munatius Plancus he writes: "A nice calculation of his own interests and an assiduous care for his own safety carried him through well-timed treacheries to a peaceful old age."

In the end, biography is one of the best safeguards against the conceptualizing of history—"Create a concept," wrote José Ortega y Gasset, "and reality leaves the room"—and the belief that human beings are invariably defeated by the overwhelming forces of history. Biography counters determinism, the notion of history being made chiefly, or even exclusively, by irresistible tendencies, trends, and movements. It reinforces the idea that fortune, accident, above all strong character can rise above the impersonal forces of politics, economics, and even culture to forge human destiny and change the flow of history itself. For this reason, and many more, I say, long live biography. ♦

B&A

Men of Steal

After this, even Ed Wood might ask for a refund.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice
Directed by Zach Snyder

In *Batman v. Superman*, the Caped Crusader and the Man of Steel try to kill each other. In the sequel, they should team up and kill the people who made *Batman v. Superman*. Its filmmakers and the executives who hired them run the gamut from the unspeakably cynical to the astoundingly pretentious without ever bothering to take a pit stop at talent.

They have violated the basic social contract by conspiring to drain the coffers of unsuspecting teenagers by telling said victims that they are going to see a movie rather than a promotional product reel for future promotional product reels. Vigilantism may be required.

Here's what happens in *Batman v. Superman*. Batman becomes concerned that Superman is a vigilante, which is a little like the guy from *Death Wish* being concerned that Mother Teresa was inefficient at washing the feet of the poor. Superman is concerned that Batman is a vigilante, even though he has super-hearing and should be able to tell from listening-in that Batman is a good guy. But he doesn't. Why doesn't he? We're not told why he doesn't.

The plot—I call it a plot just to be nice, because it isn't really a plot, it's more like stereo assembly directions—kicks in when Superman saves his girlfriend Lois Lane from some terrorists in Africa and, because of that, a whole village is wiped out. Why? We aren't told why.

But there are congressional hearings to talk about reining in Superman. During these hearings, the Capitol is blown up. Classic Superman villain Lex Luthor is the one who blows up the Capitol. Why? We aren't told why. Nobody in the world actually seems to care very much that the Capitol was blown up. Why not? We're not told why not.

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

Superman (Henry Cavill) in half-profile

Lex Luthor knows that Superman is Clark Kent and Batman is Bruce Wayne. How? We aren't told how. He also knows that a giant piece of kryptonite is in the South Seas. How? We aren't told how. Bruce Wayne knows this, too. How? We aren't told how. He just doesn't know that Lex Luthor is the guy who found it. Why not? We're not told why not.

Also, Wonder Woman is around. She's been missing from the world stage since the end of the First World War, except that recently she used an ATM machine in France. Why is Wonder Woman using an ATM machine? We aren't told why. And why, all of a sudden, is she in Gotham City? We don't know why. And since when is Gotham City across the bay from Metropolis? We don't know since when. Lex Luthor is aware of her existence as well as the existence of a bunch of other "mega-humans" because he has footage of them on his laptop. How? We don't know how.

WARNER BROS.

Lex Luthor manipulates Batman and Superman into fighting. Why? We don't know why. He need not bother, since he has created a monster from the planet Krypton in a giant tennis bubble in the middle of Metropolis. But instead of housing tennis courts, it has a big spaceship in it. Why? Here I think we're supposed to know why: It's the same ship that crashed at the end of the last Superman movie, *Man of Steel*. Now, I saw *Man of Steel* and I don't remember the ship crashing there. Why not? I can tell you why not: Because of the hundreds of millions of brain cells I once possessed that have committed suicide in despair over the horrible comic-book movies I've taken them to.

I'm not saying that *Batman v. Superman* is a bad movie, but when Ed Wood—the guy who made *Plan 9 from Outer Space*—saw it in Purgatory, he said, "Really, there should be standards." Nor am I criticizing the performer who plays Batman; but after the movie was over, I crossed the street and went into a Lowe's and did notice that all the pieces of wood there looked exactly like Ben Affleck.

It would be unfair to speak ill of the acting of Henry Cavill, who plays Superman, since nothing Cavill does in this movie could be described as "acting." Breathing, maybe. Possessing abs, certainly. Wearing glasses when he's Clark Kent, definitely. Amy Adams plays his girlfriend, Lois Lane. Now *she's* an actress, because she redefines "talking to a brick wall" in this picture when she's in scenes with Cavill—and she almost pulls it off.

And what of Jesse Eisenberg, who plays Lex Luthor? He acts. Oh, how he acts. He says two words and then he twitches; then he says another word and suppresses a giggle and narrows his eyes. He's like Mark Zuckerberg crossed with the guy Daniel Day-Lewis played in *My Left Foot* beneath Meg Ryan's Farrah Fawcett hairstyle from *When Harry Met Sally*. . . I won't have what he's having.

There are setups during *Batman v. Superman* for at least five more comic-book movies in the same vein. Someone. Please. Do. Something. ♦

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NATIONAL ENQUIRER ELECTION 1952

Ten Reasons Why This Guy Should NOT Be Prez

1. First, there's that name: Adlai. Adlai? Do we REALLY want a president calling up Joe Stalin in the Kremlin and saying, "Hey, Joe! Adlai here"? The Commies will laugh until they're red in the face. So to speak.

2. Look, when the guy accepted the Democratic nomination in Chicago, he compared himself to JESUS in his speech. Seriously. Democratic insiders tell us they couldn't believe their ears, and neither could we.

3. Sure, we want a president who's a straight shooter, but not a guy who shoots an INNOCENT neighbor girl with a rifle. Yeah, they say it was an "accident," but do you believe that?

Marin Van Buren, anyone?

4. A president doesn't have to be a genius. In fact, at *National Enquirer,* we'd rather our president wasn't the "genius" type. But flunking out of Harvard Law School makes us look DUMB around the world.

5. People close to Stevenson's inner circle tell us the real reason he stayed in Washington as a civilian during the war is because, deep down, he's got a huge yellow streak. Just what we DON'T need in a commander-in-chief.

6. When the next president goes toe-to-toe with the Red Chinese, wouldn't it be nice if he didn't have a gaping HOLE in the sole of his shoes? That photo of Adelaide—excuse us, Adlai—is embarrassing.

7. People close to Stevenson's ex-wife tell the *Enquirer* that if the American people knew the REAL reason she dumped him, they wouldn't elect him dog catcher.

8. Some Washington columnist dubbed Adlai an "egghead," and the nickname stuck. With good reason: If elected, Stevenson would be our first BALD president since Martin Van Buren, elected way back in 1836.

9. Stevenson waited until the middle of the Democratic convention before actually making up his mind to run. We think *Hamlet* is a great play, but when NATO calls the White House, do we want the Prince himself answering the phone?

10. Okay, so Adlai Stevenson's grandfather was vice president back in the 1890s. BIG deal. On that basis, we should elect Jimmy Roosevelt as our next president, or maybe Bess Truman. Forget it!

HOOVER'S BULGING FBI FILES ON 'DRAG QUEEN' PERVS