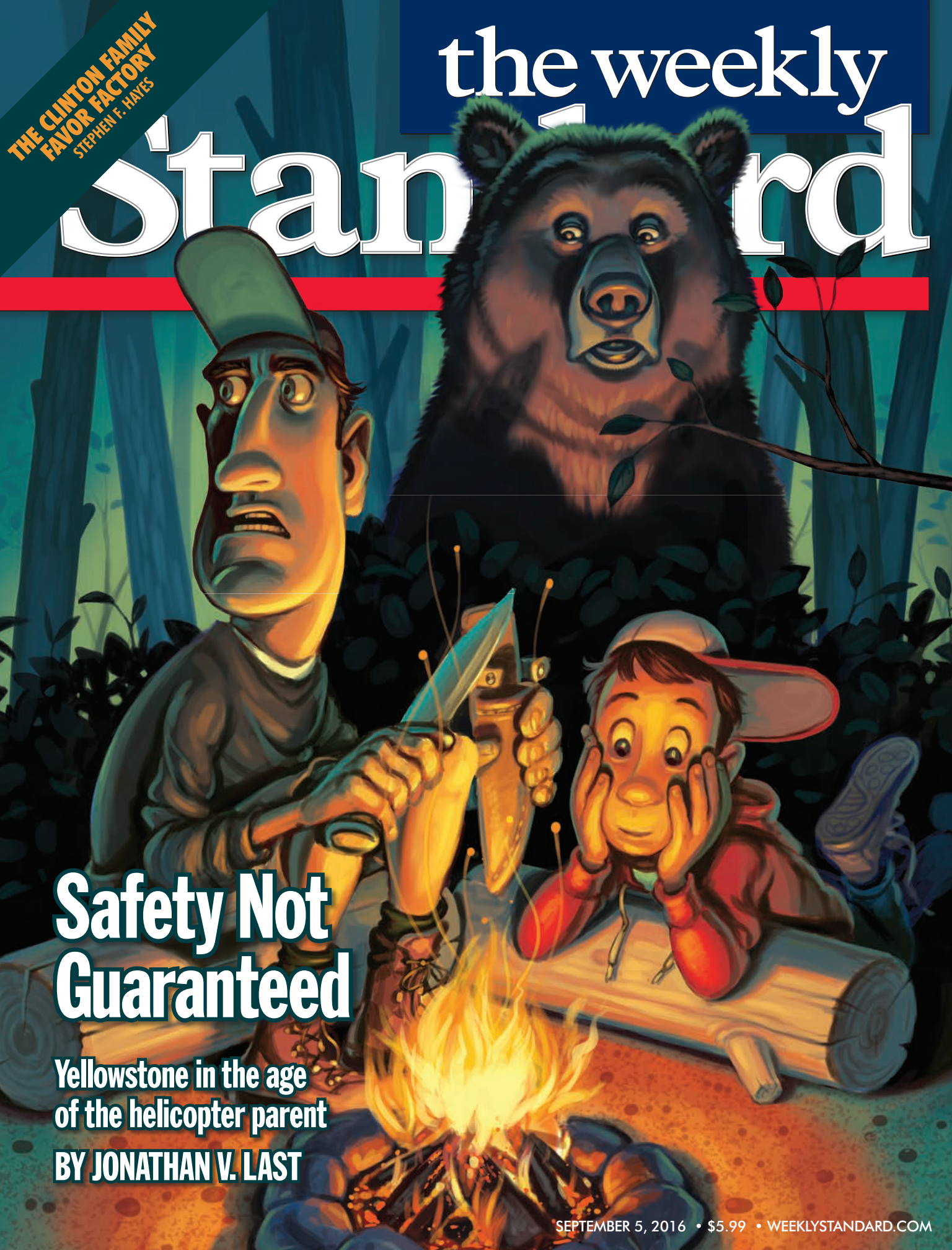
the weekly standard

THE CLINTON FAMILY FAVOR FACTORY
STEPHEN F. HAYES



Safety Not Guaranteed

Yellowstone in the age of the helicopter parent

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

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Put Not Your Trust in Princes

Throughout this tortuous presidential campaign, Donald Trump has regularly embarrassed Republicans with his inability to articulate routine conservative positions on a wide variety of public policies. His most enthusiastic supporters have zealously defended him regardless. The reason can be summed up in a single word: immigration. Ann Coulter concisely exemplified the tendency in one notorious August 2015 tweet: "I don't care if . . . Trump wants to perform abortions in [the] White House after this immigration policy paper."

Examples could be multiplied. Sure, Trump has expressed alarming support for nationalizing the health care system, but *build that wall*. Maybe in the past, Trump had written in his books that he was okay with banning commonly used rifles, but *he's pledging to round-up 12 million illegal immigrants taking jobs from Americans and send them home!*

Of course, over the years (and sometimes even in the same day) Trump has flip-flopped on everything—up to and including his support for Hillary Clinton. So what made his supporters think he wouldn't do the same on immigration? It was no doubt a classic case of the triumph of hope over experience. And to be fair, many thoughtful immigration hawks, rightly concerned about the rule of law and border enforcement, have been fully aware that Trump might undermine their cause.

And in an August 24 town hall hosted by Sean Hannity, that appears to be exactly what he did. Hannity asked if there would be exceptions to his deportation stance, and here's what Trump said: "No citizenship. . . . Let me go a step further—they'll pay back-taxes, they have to pay taxes, there's no amnesty, as such, there's no amnesty, but we work with them." But allowing illegal immigrants to remain in the United States, provided they pay taxes, is precisely what most immigration hawks would describe as "amnesty." In one fell swoop, Trump went from being borderline draconian on immigration to articulating a position on immigration hard to distinguish from that of Marco Rubio or even Jeb Bush. Suffice to say, Trump supporters are not happy.

In particular, Ann Coulter has been on a tear. She had just released her latest book, *In Trump We Trust: E Pluribus Awesome!*, the day before Trump flipped on immigration. If the title doesn't give one an acute case of *schadenfreude*, here's a quotation from the book: "There's nothing Trump can do that won't be forgiven. Except change his immigration policies."

After the flip-flop, Coulter was uncharacteristically sarcastic towards her hero on Twitter and lamented on MSNBC that "this could be the shortest book tour ever." But of course, disappointment and anger are the logical outcomes if you put your trust in Trump. If you believe anything the man says, we've got a bankrupt casino in Atlantic City to sell you. ♦

Antony Jay, 1930-2016

Just as Americans are sometimes mystified by European enthusiasm for certain of our countrymen—Jerry Lewis/France, David Hasselhoff/Germany, etc.—the reverse can be true as well. Case in point: the immense popularity in America of the BBC television series *Yes Minister* (1980-84) and *Yes, Prime Minister* (1986-88), whose creator and cowriter, Antony Jay, died last week at 86.

The appeal of various costume dramas (*Downton Abbey*), sitcoms (*Keeping Up Appearances*), and police procedurals (*Inspector Morse*) on this side of the pond is not difficult to discern, since they add a British accent to certain time-honored theatrical formulas. But *Yes Minister* was not only set in precincts unfamiliar to most Americans—the corridors of power in official Whitehall—its running joke was peculiarly British as well: the manipulation of an earnest, slightly clueless, cabinet minister (the Rt Hon. James Hacker, played by the late Paul Eddington) by a smart, smooth-talking civil servant (Sir Humphrey Appleby, played by the late Nigel Hawthorne).

Sir Humphrey (left) and Hacker (center)

BBC VIDEO

In Washington, the permanent civil service wields nothing like the power of its British equivalent, which is why reformers over here lament the interference of politicians in government. In London, it's the other way around: Politicians, elected by the people, face a permanent civil service

that is perceived as all-powerful, obstructionist, wedded to the status quo. Of course, the perception is not always true; but when Britons refer to ubiquitous "Sir Humphreys" in government, everybody knows what they mean.

Antony Jay

The genius of Antony Jay, and his cowriter Jonathan Lynn, was to convert the abstruse problem of politics vs. bureaucracy into pure comedy—and instructive, not to say timeless, comedy at that. They owed part of their success to the actors involved—Eddington was the master of appearing both stupid and statesmanlike; Hawthorne had the requisite Machiavellian charm—but the stories and, especially, the rapid-fire dialogue in the series cast the eternal power plays and tugs-of-war, as well as the contradictions and hypocrisies, of politics in terms that required no special knowledge of British government.

Like the comedies of classical Greece and Rome, *Yes Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* owed more to the foibles of mankind than to the transient follies of the press, or diplomacy, or labor unions, or that other bureaucracy in Brussels. ♦

Back to School

A tip of The Scrapbook homburg to the University of Chicago, which has let its incoming freshmen know that they should expect an intellectual climate as bracing and exhilarating as the local winters. No special-snowflake treatment. The letter from the dean of students (John Ellison) to the Class of 2020 students is worth quoting at length:

"Welcome and congratulations on your acceptance to the College at the University of Chicago. Earning a place in our community of scholars is no small achievement and we are delighted that you selected Chicago to continue your intellectual journey.

"Once here you will discover that one of the University of Chicago's defining characteristics is our commitment to freedom of inquiry and expression. This is captured in the University's faculty report on freedom of expression. Members of our community are encouraged to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn, without fear of censorship. Civility and mutual respect are vital to all of us, and freedom of expression does not mean the freedom to harass or threaten others. You will find that we expect members of our community to be engaged in rigorous debate, discussion, and even disagreement. At times this may challenge you and even cause discomfort.

"Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called 'trigger warnings,' we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual 'safe spaces' where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.

"Fostering the free exchange of ideas reinforces a related University priority—building a campus that welcomes people of all backgrounds. Diversity of opinion and background is a fundamental strength of our community. The members of

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our community must have the freedom to espouse and explore a wide range of ideas."

Well put, Dean Ellison! And in case you were wondering, these are not the words of an exasperated, grizzled old administrator wanting to make a last stand before retiring. Ellison has only been on the job for two years. Let's hope he has a long and storied career; even moderately brave college bureaucrats are few and far between these days. ♦

A Trip Down Memory Lane

You probably saw the big scoop last week from the Associated Press (Stephen Hayes writes about it elsewhere in this issue). As the AP reported, "At least 85 of 154 people from private interests who met or had phone conversations scheduled with [Hillary] Clinton while she led the State Department donated to her family charity or pledged commitments to its international programs. . . . Combined, the 85 donors contributed as much as $156 million. At least 40 donated more than $100,000 each, and 20 gave more than $1 million."

As with all stories about Clinton World—whether it's the foundation, the speaking fees (Bill's and Hillary's both), or any other variety of buck-raking, the amounts involved are somewhat breathtaking, even by Washington standards.

As it happens, we were also reminded by an old friend last week of a scandal that made big headlines 30 years ago and had Washington and the media all hot and bothered for a season: Attorney General Ed Meese's failure either to divest himself of telephone-company stock or to recuse himself from Justice Department deliberations over the future of the so-called Baby Bells. The precise details are as eye-glazing now as they were then. But the amount of money that caused all the heavy-breathing by Meese's critics is what caught our eye. As the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported in 1988, "Meese's financial-disclosure filings show that at the time he was meeting with the representatives of the phone firms in 1985 and 1986, he and his wife, Ursula, held legal title to as many as 119 shares of stock in the seven 'Baby Bell' companies created by the 1984 breakup of AT&T. The stock was worth about $14,000 when the Meeses sold it late last year."

In case you're wondering, we didn't leave off any zeroes. The figure was fourteen-thousand dollars. Truly, it was a different era, not to mention a different party in power. ♦

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Selfie Abuse

I spent a couple weeks this summer museum-hopping. Art museums, mostly, and while I don't know much about painting or sculpture, I know what I like, and I know what I don't like, and I don't like people who go museum-hopping. Present company excluded.

When I first started going to museums, decades ago, the rap against museum-goers, especially in art museums, was their pretentiousness. The places were crawling with snobs and blowhards, clogging the Early Renaissance rooms, pushing into the Northern European gallery, spilling outdoors into the sculpture gardens. You couldn't avoid them. They appeared to be variations on a theme. It was usually a guy wearing a cable-knit turtleneck sweater and a feathery beard in the company of a tall, mysterious woman standing a bit too long in front of an Ingres painting of a lady taking a sponge bath.

"The light," Turtleneck would say, cocking his head.

"Mmmm," Mystery Woman would say, biting her lip.

"You see how it trifurcates the composition arbitrarily," he would say.

"I see it, yes. It's so … so *tactile*."

Then she would laugh through her nose, and he would turn away, smiling, and they would move to assume their position in front of a David portrait of a dying French patriot, and with a vague look of amused condescension he would mumble something about the brush technique's impact on the chiaroscuro.

I would look from them to the pictures and back again and I would think, What're they smiling about? What's so damn funny? And I would think, I cannot stand museum-goers.

The good old days! I assume the Turtlenecks and their Mystery Women are still around, still sniffing their way through the galleries, though the decline of higher education and the diminished aspirations for the middlebrow have probably cut their number. Not many people aspire to be pretentious anymore. And even if they're still around, they have been overwhelmed by the hordes of Selfie Takers.

Selfie Takers are not snobs, at least as far as I can see. In fact, they seem pretty indiscriminate in their appreciation of works of art. And their way of appreciating art is to approach it aggressively. I mean *aggressive* in a physical sense. They lurch toward a painting, register its existence, and then, by way of appreciation, turn their backs on it. They raise their cellphones aloft and adjust the camera's position to take in themselves and the painting. They mince, they pout, they grin, they tilt their heads and part their lips in a way that is meant (I'm guessing) to be seductive. The photo is snapped and the Selfie Taker lurches forward without a backward glance, to further appreciate man's deepest yearnings as expressed through art. Civilization is really terrific.

GARY HOVLAND

Most of the Selfie Takers are women, from my observation, but young men do it, too, and when they pose as a couple with their backs to, let's say, a van Gogh self-portrait, their conversation is different from that of the museum-goers of decades past.

He: [Adjusts baseball cap and mugs]

She: Eww! Don't stick your tongue out!

He: Okay.

She: My mom's probably going to see this.

He: I said okay. I'm not f—ing sticking my tongue out.

She: Get closer! Smile!

He: There. Let's get the f— out of here.

She: One more!

He: F—.

Van Gogh, meanwhile, stares at the back of their heads, contemplating suicide.

It was inevitable that the Selfie Takers would draw the attention of our social scientists. Disguising their value judgments in a meaningless flurry of regressions and algorithms, social scientists get to serve as the culture's go-to moralizers. A recent study, analyzing an online survey of 1,200 men and women, revealed that Selfie Takers score high on tests of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—that is, self-centeredness, manipulativeness, and obliviousness. Social scientists, the sly moralists, condemn this combination of personality traits as the "Dark Triad."

Harsh. I dislike social scientists almost as much as museum-goers, so between them and Selfie Takers I'm reluctant to take sides—a feeling I remember from the Iran-Iraq war. Any resemblance between the real world and a finding of social science is likely to be mere coincidence.

In this case, I'll buy it. Go to an art museum and see for yourself. The self-absorption, the disregard for other people, the sheer tastelessness—why, it's tactile.

Andrew Ferguson

the weekly Standard

Deal with the Devil

In an interview last week for his new book *The Iran Wars*, Jay Solomon of the *Wall Street Journal* told Andrea Mitchell that Iran in 2013 had threatened to pull out of nuclear talks if the United States hit Bashar al-Assad's forces over the Syrian dictator's use of chemical weapons. The Obama administration quickly denied this. "Not true," tweeted White House aide Ned Price.

Of course it's true. And if it weren't, Barack Obama would have a lot of explaining to do. Why else did he allow Assad to violate Obama's own "red line" with impunity? Why did he jeopardize American interests and endanger allies throughout the Middle East? Why else did he allow a refugee crisis to destabilize Europe? Why has he done nothing to stop the slaughter of nearly half a million Syrians?

Obama himself publicly acknowledged that he won't interfere with Iranian interests in Syria. In a December 2015 White House press conference, the president spoke of respecting Iranian "equities" in the Levant. That means preservation of the Assad regime, a vital Iranian interest since it serves as a supply line for Iranian weapons earmarked for Hezbollah in Lebanon. The White House was so serious about respecting this particular "equity" that it repeatedly leaked details of Israeli strikes on Iranian arms convoys. Obama wanted to show the Iranians his bona fides as a negotiating partner.

A nuclear deal with Iran has been Obama's foreign policy priority since he first sat in the Oval Office. The agreement would pave the way for a broader realignment in the Middle East—downgrading traditional American allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia and upgrading Iran—and thus allow the United States to minimize its footprint in the region. With so much at stake, including his hunger for a personal legacy, Obama didn't dare risk alienating Iran by targeting Assad.

The real deal that Obama made with the mullahs has been clear for some time now: They got to keep their client in Syria, and Obama got his "historic" achievement. So why not just spin the press and claim that laying off Assad was part of the price America paid for Obama's stunning diplomatic triumph? Indeed, last we heard from Ned Price, the White House aide was bragging to the *New York Times Magazine* about manipulating the media. "The easiest way for the White House to shape the news," Price explained, is from the briefing podiums, each of which has its own dedicated press corps. "But then there are sort of these force multipliers," he said, adding, "We have our compadres, I will reach out to a couple people, and you know I wouldn't want to name them—" . . . "And the next thing I know, lots of these guys are in the dot-com publishing space, and have huge Twitter followings, and they'll be putting this message out on their own."

NEWSCOM

So why won't the administration just tap its "compadres" now and get the message out? Because of Omran Daqneesh. He's the 5-year-old Syrian boy whose bloodied and shell-shocked visage was splashed across the international media last week. He was pulled out of the rubble left by a Syrian or Russian bombing run, and then sat in an ambulance in a nearly catatonic state as photographers snapped his picture. Omran instantly embodied the senseless waste of a five-and-a-half-year war that has taken nearly half a million lives, including thousands of children just like Omran. "The babies are dying in Aleppo," wrote the *New Yorker*'s Robin Wright.

Sure—they're *dying*. But who is responsible? Wright left that part out. Yes, the Islamic State has killed lots of people in Syria. Reports last week, however, showed that Russia has killed more civilians than ISIS, which doesn't use planes to kill. Either the Assad regime or its Russian allies are dropping bombs that kill babies so as to prop up Iran's ally, the one Obama left alone to seal his deal with Tehran.

And that's why, in this one instance, the White House has been loath to reach out to its compadres and preen about the tough real-world choices Obama made to get his nuclear deal with Iran. Because those choices were gruesome, and they undercut the image of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize recipient as a man of reason, wisdom, courage, and compassion—an image the press coauthored.

In the narrative preferred by the administration and its media compadres, Obama heroically defied a gauntlet of warmongering Republicans who were akin to the hard-liners of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in their opposition to the nuclear deal. The image of a 5-year-old Syrian boy covered in the rubble left by the IRGC and its allies points to an altogether different kinship. The regime Obama accommodated is party to the slaughter of infants.

The only technique the White House has at its disposal in this case is to lie and deny the facts.

No one who used a position in the press to help sell the Iran deal wants to look very closely at the consequences. But these are the facts. Obama's national security staff advised, almost unanimously, backing the anti-Assad rebels. Obama rejected their counsel. And he did so not out of a judicious desire to keep America out of another Middle East conflict but to make nice with Tehran. He supported the side waging a campaign of sectarian cleansing. The administration shared intelligence with units of the Lebanese Army controlled by Hezbollah. It forced Syrian rebel groups that the United States had trained and armed to sign documents promising they wouldn't attack Assad, the despot ordering the torture and murder of their families and friends. In this way, Obama protected the man who bombs 5-year-olds.

Most tellingly, Obama gave Iran billions of dollars in sanctions relief. The policy could have been to not return the money until Iran withdrew all forces from Syria and support for Assad. Obama could have said, *I don't care if only one American penny from these billions is used to save Assad's scalp, we won't be complicit in the murder of innocents. Iran gets no sanctions relief until they are out of Syria*. But he didn't. No, the White House talking points hold that the tens of billions in sanctions relief, as well as the $1.7 billion in ransom money paid in exchange for American hostages, was all Iran's money to begin with. Money to do with as it wishes.

The price Obama paid to ink an agreement with Iran continues to mount. What's certain is that to get that agreement, Obama made his peace with Assad ruling over Syria and prosecuting a war that has claimed half a million lives so far. For the White House and its surrogates in the media, the moral reckoning for that deal is still to come.

—Lee Smith

Up from Cartoonism

In the past week, Donald Trump has pivoted, as they say, to try to appeal to African-American voters. He's convinced he can win them over. Indeed, he claims his policies as president will be so transformative that, "At the end of four years, I guarantee you that I will get over 95 percent of the African-American vote. I promise you."

Some effort in this direction by the Republican nominee, even if performed in a clumsy way and marred by braggadocio, is presumably better than none. Still, it's hard to dispute the judgment of James Hohmann of the *Washington Post*: "Donald Trump's outreach to the black community is so sudden, so over the top and so ham-handed that it is cartoonish."

And Trump's week of African-American outreach culminated in his charge that "Hillary Clinton is a bigot who sees people of color only as votes, not as human beings worthy of a better future." One does not have to be in any way a fan of Hillary Clinton to say that this personal accusation—that she is a bigot—is, so far as one can tell, untrue. Indeed, it is a characteristically Trumpian way of ruining a legitimate argument. It is certainly reasonable to claim that Democrats have been far more interested in winning African-American votes by demonizing Republicans and conservatives than in pursuing policies (e.g., school choice) that would help African Americans but would antagonize other elements of the Democratic coalition (e.g., teachers' unions). But calling Hillary Clinton a bigot isn't reasonable. And of course it invites this type of response from Hohmann: "This is the same guy who in June paused mid-sentence to point out a black man in the audience before him during a rally in Northern California. 'Oh, look at my African-American over here,' Trump said. 'Look at him.'"

Of course, interpreting the zigs and zags of the Trump campaign as having any lasting significance is like investing great meaning in the changing moods of a 2-year-old. But Hohmann's characterization of this episode is true of Trump's entire campaign: It has been "cartoonish." Needless to say, it's also been successful at winning the nomination of one of the two major parties. Perhaps that's because American politics as a whole has become so cartoonish.

One could say this is no big deal. Hasn't political life always had cartoonish elements? Yes. But surely they've gotten more pronounced in recent decades. The 2012 Obama campaign showcased an actual cartoon—"Life of Julia"—which conservatives justly mocked for its unbelievably simple-minded attempt to appeal to single women by emphasizing their dependence on the welfare state. But for all we know, "Life of Julia" worked. As did the faux-classical-columned backdrop for Obama's speech at the 2008 Democratic convention. As did George H.W. Bush's eating pork rinds in 1988.

And so, in some ways, it has always been: Abraham Lincoln and the log cabin, George Washington and the cherry tree—these tropes were somewhat cartoonish. To paraphrase Winston Churchill (who appreciated the value of cartoons, both literal and metaphorical, in political life), the Muse of Politics must not be fastidious.

Are we doomed to live in a political age of ever-increasing cartoonism? Perhaps not. After all, the original cartoons—Raphael's cartoons for the tapestries intended for the Sistine Chapel, for example—were preparatory sketches for works of fine art. Political cartoons at their best point beyond themselves to fundamental issues and choices.

But when we descend from a politics with cartoonish touches to a politics of cartoonism, we become unmoored. Conservatism in particular suffers, since so many

conservative arguments are appeals to reality against wishfulness and oversimplification. That's why those conservatives who have tried to excuse Trump's cartoonism by claiming that it's an understandable response to Obama's have damaged conservatism more than Obama has damaged liberalism. But the deeper damage has been to our political health and to the cause of self-government. We will spend much of the next four years arguing about liberalism and conservatism. But the more important task may be to lift ourselves up from cartoonism.

—William Kristol

There Is No Fix

With Aetna's announcement that it is pulling out of most government-run exchanges, Obamacare's death spiral has begun to accelerate. Few but the sickest or most heavily subsidized people want anything to do with the (inaptly named) Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act's high-priced, high-deductible, narrow-network plans. Insurers are responding to sicker risk pools and bigger losses by raising rates, which makes the plans even less attractive to the young and healthy—which makes the risk pools sicker, which makes the rates rise further. And the spiral continues, like water circling the drain.

No less of an Obamacare cheerleader than the *New York Times*'s Paul Krugman admits this is "genuine bad news" that shows "some real problems are cropping up." Supporter Charles Gaba calculates that the average requested premium hike in 2017 for Obamacare plans is 24 percent. McKinsey & Company, in an analysis done for the *New York Times*, found that about 1 in 50 Americans didn't have a choice of insurers under Obamacare last year and thereby faced a private monopoly; next year, McKinsey says, it will be 1 in 6. Pinal County, Arizona, is poised to have no Obamacare plan at all.

In its announcement that it is exiting exchanges in all but four states—following similar decisions by UnitedHealth Group and Humana—Aetna emphasized that insurance can't be affordable without "a balanced risk pool," and made clear that too many people are gaming the system and buying "insurance" only when they need immediate care: "Fifty-five percent of our individual on-exchange membership is new in 2016," Aetna reports, and "in the second quarter [of 2016] we saw individuals in need of high-cost care represent an even larger share of our on-exchange population." In other words, the risk pool isn't just bad; it's getting worse.

This was predictable. Last year, Seth Chandler, who teaches insurance law at the University of Houston, wrote

that data released by the Department of Health and Human Services showed "the beginnings of an adverse selection death spiral that threatens the stability of the system of insurance created by the Affordable Care Act." Chandler added, "Private health insurance is fragile. It generally does not well withstand the sort of underwriting regulation imposed by" Obamacare.

Indeed, it doesn't. And that's why Obamacare is unfixable: The coercive mandates on which it relies are incompatible with a vibrant—or even solvent—private insurance market.

President Obama and his congressional allies undermined the core idea of insurance—that one must buy it *before* the thing happens that one is protecting *against*. They mandated that insurers cover all comers, no matter how sick or injured, pretty much at any time, at the same price as those who had been buying insurance all along. And they banned insurance that didn't cover things they thought it should cover, like pediatric dental care for people without children. The combination caused prices to skyrocket.

To try to limit such escalating costs, Obamacare relied on additional layers of coercion. It mandated, for the first time in American history, that private citizens buy a product or service of the federal government's choosing from a private company. It required that taxpayers fund huge subsidies so that a chosen subset of the population—the near-poor and near-elderly—could get heavily discounted, or even "free," plans. And it instituted an insurer bailout, putting taxpayers on the hook for a large portion of insurers' potential losses. This combination of mandates and redistribution was supposed to hold down the rising premiums spawned by Obamacare's redefining of "insurance."

It didn't. The individual mandate, the fine for which is supposed to be at least $695 this year for a single person and more than $2,000 for a married couple with two kids, has proven relatively easy to escape. Thanks to a long list of loopholes and lax enforcement by the Obama administration, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that only $3 billion in individual-mandate fines will be collected this year out of 27 million uninsured people—an average of just $111 per person. The subsidies for the chosen few do nothing to drop premiums for the typical 36-year-old single man or woman making $36,000, as they are too young and too middle class to qualify. Congressional Republicans, meanwhile, nixed the insurer bailout in the 2014 "Cromnibus" legislation—one of the GOP's most important wins in the Obamacare fight to date.

The only way to "fix" Obamacare would be to double down on these same unpopular approaches—by dramatically beefing up enforcement of the individual mandate (to get a lot more young and healthy people into the insurance pool) and ramping up Obamacare's various taxpayer-funded subsidies to insurance companies. Indeed, that's exactly what Krugman calls for. But these "fixes" aren't politically viable. The individual mandate is probably the least popular part of Obamacare—there's a reason Obama isn't aggressively enforcing it. Increasing subsidies for those who already get them—which Republicans won't do—wouldn't do a thing for those who don't qualify for them. And Republicans aren't about to reinstitute the unpopular insurer bailout. So the Democrats' only real hope for "fixing" Obamacare—that is, for making it even more coercive and fiscally reckless—is to regain control of the House and Senate, both of which they lost because of Obamacare.

Even if they were to regain control of both houses (while also retaining control of the presidency), Democrats would focus less on "fixing" Obamacare than on using it as a stepping stone to the government monopoly they have long desired. Already, Hillary Clinton has called for adding a "public option"—a government-run, government-subsidized insurance plan—to Obamacare. And she has called for making 55 the new age of eligibility for Medicare, a program that is already driving us toward bankruptcy.

All this suggests Obamacare is going to be repealed and replaced—either with a conservative alternative that will take things in the opposite direction or the government monopoly to which its supporters always intended it to lead.

The conservative alternative to Obamacare's coercive regime of centralized power is to fix what the federal government broke decades ago, thereby revitalizing the individual market. Those who buy insurance on their own shouldn't be denied a tax break like the one received by those who get insurance through their jobs. A good alternative would offer simple, non-income-tested, refundable tax credits of something like $1,200 for those under the age of 35, $2,100 for those between 35 and 50, and $3,000 for those 50 and over, plus $900 per child. These would be legitimate tax credits, not direct subsidies to insurance companies masquerading as tax cuts. People could use them for the insurance they want and put anything left over in a health savings account.

The American people are clearly on conservatives' side on this issue. Liberals, meanwhile, are looking in vain for a political escape-hatch. After Aetna's announcement, Neera Tanden, longtime Hillary Clinton adviser and president of the Center for American Progress (which works hand-in-glove with the Obama administration), said that Clinton "was hoping we had just moved beyond a fight on" Obamacare. That was pure fantasy. With rates escalating and options shrinking, the truth is that—six years after Obama signed his namesake into law—the Obamacare fight is nowhere near over. If anything, it is intensifying.

—Jeffrey H. Anderson

TIM OGLINE

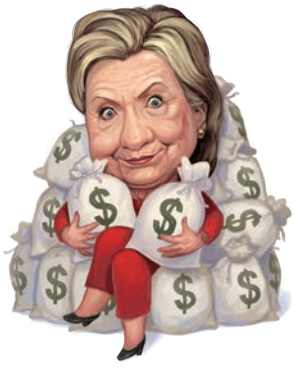
Aiding and Abedin

The Clinton family favor factory.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

As Bill Clinton entered the final year of his presidency, his aides put together a legacy-building trip to South Asia—the first visit to the region by a U.S. president since Jimmy Carter's in 1978. Early drafts of the itinerary featured a notable exclusion: The president would visit India, an emerging ally, but had no plans to stop in neighboring Pakistan.

There were good reasons for this. Pervez Musharraf had seized power there in a military coup six months earlier. His regime was regarded as tolerant of Islamic radicals, perhaps even complicit in their attacks, and unhelpful on nuclear talks with India. Whatever the potential benefits to regional stability, a visit would be seen as legitimizing a troublemaker. Clinton had the support of many in the foreign policy establishment and his decision was popular among liberals in his party. In an editorial published February 18, 2000, the *New York Times* noted, "Pakistan has been lobbying hard in Washington"; the paper urged Clinton to stand firm, absent a return to civilian rule in the country and "concrete progress" on nukes and terror.



Four days later, Hillary Clinton weighed in. At a gathering in a private home on Staten Island, Clinton said she hoped her husband would be able to find time to visit Pakistan on his trip. That she spoke up on a matter of public controversy was interesting; where she did it was noteworthy.

Clinton was the guest of honor at a $1,000-per-plate fundraiser hosted by a group of prominent Pakistani doctors in New York, who acknowledged holding the dinner as part of that lobbying effort. The immediate beneficiary? Hillary Clinton, candidate for U.S. Senate. Organizers were told they'd need to raise at least $50,000 for her to show up. They did. The secondary beneficiary? Pakistan. Two weeks after Clinton told her hosts that she hoped her husband would do what they wanted him to do, the White House announced that Bill Clinton would, indeed, include Pakistan on his trip to South Asia.

Win, win, and win.

The White House naturally insisted that Hillary Clinton's views had no bearing on her husband's decision to change his itinerary. And a subsequent *New York Times* article about the curious sequence of events found "no evidence" she had prevailed upon the president to alter his plans. But that same article, published under the headline "Donating to the First Lady, Hoping the President Notices," noted the "unique aspect" of Hillary Clinton's candidacy: "While her husband still occupies the White House, people may seek to influence his policies by making donations to her Senate campaign."

In fact, people did. The hosts of the event moved it up so that it might take place before a final decision had been made on the South Asian schedule. Suhail Muzaffar, one of two primary organizers of the fundraiser, told the paper: "'We thought it went very well, in terms of the message and the timeliness of it, especially in terms of the president's going to the region." His cohost, Dr. Asim Malik, added: "I cannot deny that the fact that she's the president's wife makes a difference."

A similar dynamic is at play in the growing controversy over Hillary Clinton and the Clinton Foundation: People sought to influence her decisions as secretary of state by making donations to his foundation. And while we cannot yet offer definitive conclusions about the extent to which those efforts were successful, disclosures over the past several weeks make clear that Clinton and her top aides eagerly provided special access to Clinton Foundation donors—and, in some cases, provided that special access *because* they were Clinton Foundation donors.

Such conflicts of interest—perceived and real—should come as no surprise. They were the focus of Clinton's cabinet nomination. "The main issue related to Senator Clinton's nomination that has occupied the committee has been the review of how her service as secretary of state can be reconciled with the sweeping global activities of President Bill Clinton and the Clinton Foundation," said Senator Richard Lugar, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, moments after her nomination hearing was gaveled to order on January 13, 2009. "The core of the problem is that foreign governments and entities may perceive the Clinton Foundation as a means to gain favor with the secretary of state, although neither Senator Clinton nor President Clinton has a personal financial stake in the foundation." The keys, Lugar said, will be transparency and preventing overlap between the work of the State Department and the Clinton Foundation. Large chunks of the hearing were devoted to an extended discussion about whether a Memorandum of Understanding drafted to make clear the lines between State and the foundation went far enough. Republicans wanted more assurances and a more detailed statement of the rules. Democrats, for the most part, were happy to leave things vague. Democrats won.

The recent revelations leave in tatters Clinton's unequivocal claim from July: "There is absolutely no connection between anything that I did as secretary of state and the Clinton Foundation."

DAVE CLEGG

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

There are, in fact, many connections.

In June 2009, Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, the crown prince of Bahrain, sought a meeting with Secretary Clinton. He initially made requests through normal diplomatic channels but they went unfulfilled. Khalifa, a Clinton Foundation donor, got creative. Doug Band, a longtime aide to Bill Clinton who helped create the Clinton Foundation, emailed Huma Abedin, a top aide to Secretary Clinton. Band noted that Khalifa, "a good friend of ours," would be visiting Washington and was seeking a meeting with Secretary Clinton. Abedin responded, noting that she was aware of Khalifa's requests made "through normal channels." She told Band that her boss didn't want to commit to a meeting.

Two days later, the situation had changed. Abedin emailed Band to inform him that Khalifa was on the schedule and would be seeing Secretary Clinton in Washington. "If u see him, let him know," she emailed. "We have reached out thru official channels."

Another email, this one from Dennis Cheng, a fundraiser at the Clinton Foundation, to Abedin at the State Department, reveals that Clinton invited Ukrainian billionaire Victor Pinchuk, a high-dollar Clinton Foundation donor, to a reception at her home in 2012. When Clinton's team was asked about her involvement with Pinchuk in 2014, her spokesman, Nick Merrill, told the *New York Times* that Clinton had never met Pinchuk and the Ukrainian "was never on her schedule" during her tenure at the State Department. (Cheng had been a colleague of Abedin at the State Department before moving to the Clinton Foundation.)

That same month, in June 2012, Hillary Clinton's chief of staff, Cheryl Mills, traveled to New York City to interview two candidates to lead the Clinton Foundation. Mills, Clinton's top aide, appears to have had significant involvement with those at the highest levels of the Clinton Foundation. Laura Graham, chief operating officer of the Clinton Foundation, left 148 telephone messages for Mills between 2010 and 2012, according to State Department records obtained by Citizens United via Freedom of Information Act requests and first reported by James Rosen of Fox News. The tally covers only half of Clinton's tenure at the State Department and does not include calls in which Graham and Mills connected. Still, the 148 messages from Graham were exponentially more than any other individual left for Clinton's top aide.

Many of these recent revelations have come despite efforts by Clinton defenders to keep them from the public. The FBI last week turned over to the State Department nearly 15,000 emails it recovered during its investigation of Clinton's private server. Many of them—"thousands," according to FBI director James Comey—were "work-related" emails that Clinton claimed she had turned over to the State Department. On August 8, 2015, Clinton signed a declaration submitted to the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., swearing "under penalty of perjury" that she'd directed all emails that "were or potentially were" work-related turned over to the State Department.

That plainly didn't happen. Why not? Comey offered several explanations in his July 5 press conference announcing he wouldn't be charging anyone in connection with the scandal. Perhaps they were lost in routine system purges of the kind that any email user might perform. Or maybe her lawyers mistook these thousands of "work-related" emails as "personal" because their search techniques weren't as sophisticated as those used by the FBI.

While the FBI recovered thousands of work-related emails that Clinton failed to turn over, Comey reported that many others had been deleted. The FBI director acknowledged that while the FBI did not have "complete visibility" as to the contents of these emails or a thorough understanding of how they were permanently erased, he nonetheless offered his assurances that "there was no intentional misconduct" in the sorting of the emails.

If Comey's explanations seemed generous when he made them, they seem even more charitable today. In his telling, Clinton's failure to turn over thousands of work-related emails—at least some of which include evidence of coordination between the Clinton Foundation and the State Department that Clinton World was eager to keep secret—was merely the result of incompetence or bad luck. And the efforts her lawyers undertook to delete the others were unremarkable, benign. "We found no evidence that any of the additional work-related e-mails were intentionally deleted in an effort to conceal them," Comey said at his press conference. Yet moments later, Comey acknowledged: "They deleted all e-mails they did not return to State, and the lawyers cleaned their devices in such a way as to preclude complete forensic recovery."

There may be a simple reason the FBI didn't find evidence of intent: They didn't ask. That's the explanation Representative Trey Gowdy offered in an interview with Fox News on August 24. "I didn't see any questions on the issue of intent," Gowdy said, referring to the FBI's notes from its interview with Secretary Clinton.

And the evidence the FBI collected, particularly with respect to how some of Clinton's "personal" emails were deleted, indicates that questions about intent ought to have been among the first ones asked. FBI interviews with the techs responsible for erasing Clinton's emails suggest that her team went to great lengths to ensure the messages would never be seen again. The Clinton team used a technology called "BleachBit" to permanently delete those emails. BleachBit, according to its website, allows users to "shred files to hide their contents and prevent data recovery" and "overwrite free disk space to hide previously deleted files." The techs used additional tools to ensure those emails would be unrecoverable.

So Clinton, who took virtually no precautions to safeguard her emails—"personal" or "work-related"—while they sat on her server, went to great lengths to ensure that the emails she withheld from the State Department could never again be seen by anyone. She did this nearly two years following

her departure from the State Department and only after she understood that the government was interested in seeing her emails. Seems like a lot to do to protect yoga schedules and emails about the grandkids.

The challenge for Clinton is simple: survive until November 8. So she's avoiding the media—265 days and counting since her last press conference—and trying to offer reassurances about the Clinton Foundation.

There's little reason to believe her. This is the same woman, after all, who promised during her nomination hearing seven years ago that she would take extraordinary measures to separate the foundation from her work at the State Department and do her best to "avoid even the appearance of a conflict." ♦

Anti-Hillary Dems

Why aren't there any?

BY FRED BARNES

Hillary Clinton has built-in advantages in the presidential race. The media's liberal bias that benefits her campaign has been on display for months. After her coast-to-coast fundraising whirl last week, Clinton's war chest is overflowing. She "is pushing the boundaries of fundraising further than any presidential nominee ever has," Evan Halper wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*. She is also backed by Barack Obama, the sitting president. Okay, Obama may hurt more than he helps in some ways, but he's good for fundraising.

Deceit? Corruption? Meh.

That's not all. Clinton has other advantages that have largely escaped the media's focus. She is blanketed by scandals involving her emails, the Clinton Foundation, her chronic lying, and her husband's years of womanizing. And that's not the full list. Yet Democrats tolerate all of it without complaint, handwringing, or second thoughts. In polls, 90 percent or more of Democratic voters back her.

This represents a degree of party unity that Donald Trump can only dream about. He faces a revolt among Republicans who promise not to vote for him under any circumstances. An unknown number intend to vote for Clinton.

The result: A united Democratic party has Clinton's back while rebellious Republicans torment Trump. And the dissidents are not a silent minority. They not only attack Trump, they go after Republicans and anyone else who endorses Trump or speaks positively about his candidacy.

We can debate whether anti-Trump Republicans are guided wisely by a moral compass. But Democrats? A large majority of them lack any moral benchmarks at all when it comes to Hillary Clinton. In TV appearances, when asked about her scandalous behavior, Democratic talking heads tend to ignore the question or change the subject as quickly as possible.

Consider how Democrats have responded in polls. Did donations to the Clinton Foundation "influence" Clinton's actions as secretary of state? Only 22 percent of Democrats said yes in a Rasmussen poll. Did her private email system create a "major problem"? Only a quarter of Democrats agree it did in a Morning Consult survey.

Has she been honest in talking about the State Department's role in Benghazi? This time, roughly 30 percent of Democrats told Fox News pollsters she hadn't been. Should Clinton have been prosecuted for jeopardizing the secrecy of national security information in her non-secure emails? Thirty-one percent of Democrats said she should have in a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll.

Was her handling of emails related to what she would do as president? Two-thirds of Democrats said no in a *Post*/ABC survey. More basically, is Clinton trustworthy? Some 66 percent of Democrats believe she is, according to a Rasmussen poll.

Sorry for belaboring this point, but these poll numbers go a long way toward explaining why Bernie Sanders didn't attack Clinton on her lying, private email servers, exposure of classified information, and corruption in general. He knew such an assault on Clinton would backfire. Feminists, the Clinton machine, and liberal interest groups—indeed, a large majority of Democrats—would turn against him, not her.

The same may be true for Vice President Joe Biden. He surely understood what it would have required to take the nomination away from Clinton. He would have had to raise all her scandals and focus on them. Even then, he might lose. And if he did win, he would have been stuck in the same sad situation as Trump: the nominee of a divided party.

Why have no prominent Democrats said they're troubled by Clinton's moral and ethical lapses? Either they're afraid of confronting her, given that she's regarded as the Democrat with the best chance of winning the presidential election, or they simply think her moral and ethical lapses don't amount to much. Either way, they have been profiles in moral timidity.

Victor Davis Hanson has raised a related issue involving Trump and Clinton. He noted that 50 former national security and foreign affairs officials in Republican administrations released a letter declaring Trump unfit to be president. They said he lacked the experience and all the traits

LORIE SHAULL

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

required of a president. The letter was widely circulated.

Hanson asked this in a column: "Is there a like group of past Democratic wise men and women who can commensurately 'police their own' and so warn us about Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton?"

For "unlike Trump," Hanson wrote, "Clinton already has an actual political record as a former U.S. senator and secretary of state." But "no such letter will ever be published," Hanson said.

"Why?" He answered his own question. "Hillary Clinton is a fixture of the foreign policy establishment and thus is considered exempt from being judged empirically on her serial deceit and her disastrous foreign policy record," Hanson wrote. "In the world of elite Washington, crude bluster from an uncouth outsider like Trump is deemed more hazardous than the prevarication, dishonesty and incompetence of a familiar insider."

Frank Cannon of the American Principles Project has cited a separate group of GOP dissidents—70 former RNC officials, House members, and senators—who oppose Trump and urged all RNC financial resources be shifted to House and Senate races. This group too has no Democratic equivalent.

"They publicly bicker about Trump's foot-in-mouth disease," Cannon said. "But the terrible things that Hillary Clinton actually does, and will continue to do as president, should be of far more concern to Republicans. . . . Any effort made to oppose Trump will help drive margins for Hillary Clinton and, by extension, help the Democrats win crucial down-ballot races."

There's still another advantage for Clinton, one that's unexpected. The press demands candidates be available for questioning, and no presidential candidate has ever been more available than Trump or more talkative. Clinton, in contrast, shuns the media and treats reporters like pests.

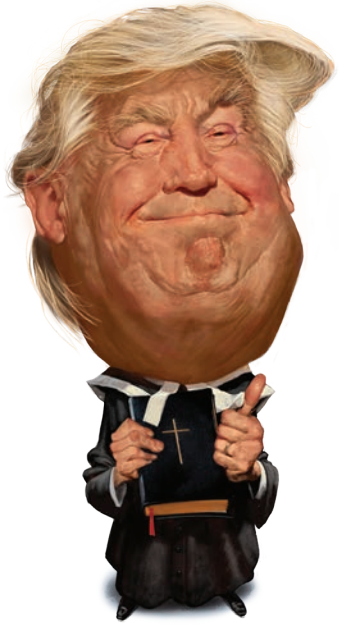
She keeps a low profile while raising money at $50,000-a-person dinners. Trump makes news every day. Guess who wins as the media favorite? An easy question if there ever was one. ♦

Bullying the Pulpit

Do pastors want to play politics?

BY TERRY EASTLAND

Summer ends with Donald Trump having spent the year's hottest months pursuing evangelical voters by advocating repeal of the so-called Johnson amendment. His pursuit of evangelicals is understandable: Trump can't win the White House without them—lots and lots of them. But the Johnson amendment?



THOMAS FLUHARTY

Passed by Congress in 1954, the amendment to the tax code was named after its sponsor, then-senator Lyndon B. Johnson. The amended provision says that a tax-exempt organization may not "participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." In other words, charities may not endorse or oppose candidates for office. An organization found in violation of the law risks losing its tax-exempt status.

Terry Eastland is an executive editor at The Weekly Standard.

Churches are tax-exempt organizations and are thus covered by the provision. But nothing in the (brief) legislative history of the Johnson amendment suggests that the senator and his allies were concerned about pastors and churches endorsing candidates. As sociologist James Davidson showed, Johnson "did not offer the amendment because of anything that churches had done." It was what certain non-churchly charitable organizations might do that motivated him. "His amendment was directed at [nonprofit] right-wing groups such as Facts Forum and the Committee for Constitutional Government" that championed certain "causes and candidates at the national level and in Texas" and thus "stood between him and his [partisan political] goals." Johnson, running for reelection, wanted to prevent those groups from supporting his opponents' campaigns.

Trump's own history with the amendment started no later than February, when he first announced his intention to repeal it. But he didn't begin to make repeal a big issue until late spring, when his nomination seemed likely. Over the summer Trump has used major events to press for the amendment's repeal.

In June, Trump met in New York with a thousand evangelical leaders, many of them pastors. "I think maybe that . . . my greatest contribution to Christianity," he said with characteristic modesty, "and other religions is to allow you, when you talk religious liberty, to go and speak openly, and if you like somebody or want somebody to represent you, you should have the right to do it." What's constraining the exercise of those rights, said Trump, is the Johnson amendment, which has religious leaders "petrified." The amendment is one reason

that Christianity in America has grown "weaker, weaker, weaker."

In July, at the Republican National Convention, Trump managed to make eliminating the amendment a plank in the platform: "Republicans believe the federal government, specifically the IRS, is constitutionally prohibited from policing or censoring speech based on religious convictions or beliefs, and therefore we urge the repeal of the Johnson Amendment."

Trump used valuable time in his acceptance speech to advocate against the amendment. Thanking the "evangelical community" for being "so good to me and so supportive," Trump told them "our laws prevent you from speaking your minds from your own pulpits." The Johnson amendment "threatens religious institutions with a loss of their tax-exempt status if they openly advocate their political views," Trump said, vowing "to work very hard to repeal that language and protect free speech for all Americans."

Come August, Trump was still pushing the issue. In Orlando, he spoke to 700 evangelical pastors and their spouses. Trump's main message was about national decline and how the nation can be renewed—by repealing the Johnson amendment. "You've lost your voice," he said. "We're going to get it back."

However implausible it may seem that the fate of Christianity depends on what is in the American tax code, Trump enters the fall having made repeal of an obscure tax provision a salient issue. No previous Republican party platform has called for repeal of the amendment.

During the primaries Trump attracted just enough evangelical voters to win the nomination—about a third of the total primary vote. Now polls show that his support among evangelicals has risen to 80 percent, par for the course for recent Republican presidential candidates. But that percentage has not always been enough to push GOP candidates over the top. Assuming he gets 80 percent of evangelical voters, Trump will need more evangelicals to turn out and vote than have done so in the past two presidential elections.

And if he is elected and undertakes to repeal the Johnson amendment, Trump would face a Congress that hasn't shown much interest in reconsidering it. A few years ago, Sen. Charles Grassley led an effort to revise the amendment. It got bogged down in policy proposals and position papers by panels of legal experts and religious representatives. A Commission on Accountability and Policy for Religious Organizations, a group formed by the respected Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability, determined that notwithstanding what may seem to some groups a "troubling, limiting, frustrating, and even potentially unconstitutional" prohibition on political and religious speech, the law "should not be repealed."

That's where things stood until Trump took up the issue. A President Trump could try to win the public and Congress over on the Johnson amendment. But if he is unable to turn Congress his way, he might be tempted to do what President Barack Obama has so often done to enact his policies—resort to an executive order or presidential memorandum. But surely the better course for Trump would be to negotiate and compromise to get what he could from Congress.

You could call it the Trump amendment; his name is on a lot of things, you know. ♦

Collection Agency

The CFPB squeezes the 'choke points.'

BY RONALD L. RUBIN

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau just celebrated its fifth anniversary by releasing an outline for new debt collection rules that will encourage consumers to avoid paying their debts.

Nobody likes the stereotypical debt collectors who threaten and harass consumers, but neither the CFPB nor its new rules offer much protection against these shady characters. The bureau's reluctance to investigate sleazy, small-time debt collectors relegates tens of thousands of their victims to its Internet complaint database. Ironically, the CFPB uses the inflated complaint statistics it gathers there to justify new regulations aimed at big companies that buy delinquent debt portfolios.

In 2012, as a CFPB enforcement attorney, I was assigned to lead one of the bureau's first two debt-collection investigations. The targets were chosen only because they were the country's largest debt buyers and collectors. The CFPB's strategy was, and still is, to produce dramatic headlines by suing "choke points"—i.e., the leading firms in every consumer financial business.

The Dodd-Frank law that created the CFPB armed it with a Stalinesque administrative process that guaranteed these two unlucky firms would fork over tens of millions of dollars in fines. After three years of futile protests, both agreed to the same penalty the bureau charges almost all its investigation targets—the maximum they could afford to pay. CFPB enforcement attorneys demand detailed financial information from every target for the sole purpose of calculating that figure.

The investigations had an even more cynical objective. Both companies' settlements required them to adopt expensive procedures that the CFPB wanted to impose on the entire industry. Thus, the two debt collection giants could be counted on to support inefficient regulations so as to level the playing field with their competitors.

Ronald L. Rubin was an enforcement attorney at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and chief adviser on regulatory policy at the House Financial Services Committee.

The other attorney assigned to my investigation had spent many years representing debtors in collection lawsuits. He told me he had no regrets about exploiting legal loopholes to help his clients escape valid debt obligations, because they needed the money more than their creditors. The CFPB's likeminded leaders later promoted him to a senior policy position.

My friend's progressive sentiments may be defensible, but not his economics. In competitive industries, companies don't earn above- or below-average profits, or suffer losses, for long. Lenders ultimately pass increased default and operating expenses on to borrowers by charging higher interest rates. When some consumers dodge lawful debts, all consumers pay the price.

There are two types of debt collection problems. The first is classic bad behavior—using harassment, intimidation, and deception to collect valid debts. These tactics may increase collection rates and reduce litigation, but any benefits are offset by societal harm. Congress struck a balance in the 1977 Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, which outlawed the most abusive practices.

The FDCPA, which predates cell phones, text messages, and email, needs to be updated. However, CFPB director Richard Cordray's promise to "put consumers in control of their communications with collectors" goes much further. For example, one proposal to let debtors end all future telephone communications by asking any collector to stop calling is comically naïve. While technology has changed dramatically since 1977, human beings have not. Debtors still try to avoid collectors; unreasonable communication restrictions inevitably lead to unnecessary lawsuits and damaged credit reports.

The second type of problem—attempted collection of invalid debts—is more serious. Many credit card issuers, medical providers, and other businesses sell their customers' unpaid account balances to collectors. But the account data may be inaccurate. Debtors may have provided false information, moved, or died. Sometimes they made payments that were not recorded. Debt buyers collect on some of the accounts, and in turn often resell the rest. With each resale, the accuracy and collectability of the portfolios decrease. The lowest quality debt collectors tend to buy the lowest quality debt.

Nobody should be charged, harassed, or sued for a debt they've already paid or for someone else's debt. However, the CFPB's proposed solution is a hopelessly complex system of debt validation requirements and procedures—with rounds of notices, statements, information requests, and document transfers between debtors, creditors, and debt collectors. The new rules will create so many loopholes that debtors with lawyers half as clever as my former colleague will never pay a dime, and may even get rich suing collectors.

The CFPB could prevent mistaken debt collection attempts far more effectively and efficiently by creating and maintaining a central debt registry, much like those that record deeds, mortgages, and other real property interests. Before any sale to collection agencies, the original creditors would have to sufficiently validate and register debts. Each debt would have only one owner, and owners would have to update the registry to reflect any payments or resale of the debt.

By enabling easy debt verification, a registry would eliminate most mistaken collection attempts, spare judges hours of document review, reduce litigation costs, and facilitate criminal prosecution of those who engage in abusive attempts to collect invalid debts.

The CFPB won't consider the debt registry solution for two reasons. First, like the bureau's Internet complaint database, it would be a big project. The agency might have to repurpose the tens of millions of advertising dollars it spends promoting itself each year. Second, the registry would eliminate uncertainty and make it harder for consumers to avoid paying legitimate debts. Heaven forbid. ♦

Smack Down

Treat drug addiction like the crisis it is.

BY DAVID MURRAY

The first year of the Obama administration, 3,278 people in the United States died of heroin overdoses. By 2014 (the most recent year for which there are statistics), that number had more than tripled, with 10,574 heroin deaths. Add to heroin the abuse of narcotic painkillers (analgesics such as oxycodone) and the epidemic is staggering: Opioid overdoses killed 29,400 Americans in 2014. The body count continues to rise because President Barack Obama does not have a serious strategy to address the problem.

David Murray is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and served in the Office of National Drug Control Policy under President George W. Bush.

Treatment has been the administration's priority for dealing with drug abuse over the last seven years. The problem, we were told, was the lack of availability of treatment, a problem that was supposed to be solved by the Affordable Care Act. But it hasn't worked out. While traveling in New Mexico this month, the White House drug czar, Michael Botticelli, said that "across the country, I too often hear that people wait weeks or even months to get the [opioid] treatment they need."

Now the administration claims rising addiction and overdose deaths must be met with more federal funding for treatment—and that GOP hesitation to spend more money is

to blame for the death toll. President Obama recently declared, "I am deeply disappointed that Republicans failed to provide any real resources for those seeking addiction treatment to get the care that they need."

But is the problem really a lack of funds?

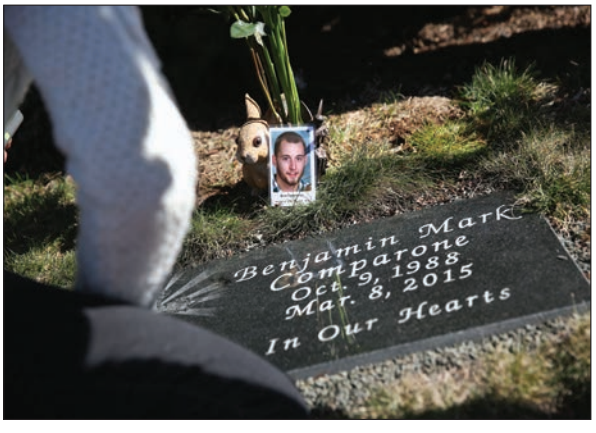
The front-line federal drug treatment agency, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, already spends $1.8 billion a year on substance-abuse block grants that pay for publicly provided drug treatment. But that's hardly the only public money used for treatment: Millions are spent by the Veterans Health Administration, and treatment is also offered in prisons and jails. Nor should we forget the many millions spent for private treatment. And yet somehow this has not been enough.

In February, the president called for $1.1 billion in new, emergency spending on the opioid crisis, with "mandatory funding to help ensure that all Americans who want treatment can get the help that they need." And now, the White House argues that even this total of nearly $3 billion in requested funding is not enough to do the job. Could it be that the problem isn't in *how much* money is being spent but in correctly diagnosing the real treatment challenge? A central pillar of the administration's drug strategy was the Affordable Care Act. Among its mandates for expanded health insurance coverage are provisions for substance abuse treatment. The expectation was that Obamacare would be able to "create or enhance access to coverage for behavioral health services for 62 million Americans, nearly one-fifth of the nation's population." Yet that coverage has not materialized.

In August the White House announced "new funding" of $17 million to be spent in "high intensity drug trafficking areas." This adds to the $250 million already being spent in those areas this year. The new funding is supposed to be used for "public health-public safety partnerships" and a "Science to Action Coordinator." There will also be more money to distribute naloxone, the opioid overdose medication.

But the new $17 million request amounts to just $567 for every one of the nearly 30,000 opioid overdose deaths in 2014—and there are many more at risk today. Add up the estimated 914,000 heroin users and the 4.3 million nonmedical misusers of opioid pain medications, and the $17 million comes out to about $3.27 for every opioid misuser. This is not a serious proposal and it cannot halt the rising number of overdose deaths.

The Obama administration claims rising addiction and overdose deaths must be met with more federal funding for treatment—and that GOP hesitation to spend more money is to blame for the death toll. Could it be that the problem isn't in *how much* money is being spent but in correctly diagnosing the real treatment challenge?



Gravesite of 2015 Connecticut overdose victim

JOHN MOORE / GETTY

Even if the administration requested much greater treatment funding, it would still not reduce the crisis, because the overwhelming majority of the people in trouble aren't seeking treatment in the first place. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, there were, in 2013 (the most recent year for which there is data), 20.2 million people 12 and older with unmet drug or alcohol treatment needs.

But of that population, less than 5 percent believed they needed treatment, and of that already small subset, only a third actually sought treatment. Of that group, a little over a third said they did not receive treatment because of "lack of insurance coverage and inability to afford the cost." Crunch the numbers and we find that lack of money or insurance was the stumbling block in getting treatment for less than 2 percent of those needing help. How much of a difference, then, will be made by spending more money on treatment, the solution offered by President Obama and his drug czar? Without effective outreach programs (including drug courts), without effective measures to reduce the exploding supply of heroin from Mexico, and without a serious effort to discourage drug use the death toll will continue to rise.

Too few of those who need treatment seek it. More funding won't solve the overdose and addiction problem when those at risk do not want the treatment they need. Motivating people to seek help is the critical need, which means rallying the nation to reach out to the addicted and direct them to treatment. Families, schools, health care institutions, workplaces, and the media can all encourage addicts to get help. And where that fails, the criminal justice system can require treatment.

But this change in policy will have to wait for a new president to take office, as President Obama's most significant drug policy achievement has been to make drug use more acceptable. A grim legacy of the Obama years is a drug abuse epidemic with tens of thousands of overdose deaths. ♦

Mrs. Abe Goes to Pearl Harbor

A welcome gesture from an essential ally.

BY DENNIS P. HALPIN

The photo posted on Akie Abe's Facebook account on August 22, showing her paying her respects at the USS *Arizona* Memorial to the victims of the attack on Pearl Harbor, is worth far more than the proverbial thousand words. This was the first visit to the site by the wife of a Japanese prime minister, and no prime minister has ever visited the attack site. (There was speculation in 2009 that the emperor and empress would go to Pearl Harbor during an official visit to Hawaii, but palace officials reportedly vetoed the idea.)

At a time of some alliance uncertainty, amid rising security concerns over a nuclear-armed North Korea and an increasingly abrasive China, Mrs. Abe's gesture is timely indeed. It comes just when America and its Pacific allies need to begin to heal the still festering wounds of a long ago conflict in order to meet the security challenges of a new century.

When asked about Mrs. Abe's unannounced two-hour visit, which included the laying of flowers and a handshake with a Pearl Harbor survivor, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga claimed, according to the *Japan Times*, that Mrs. Abe "was acting in a private capacity before attending a forum on maritime environment in Hawaii." He added that her visit had "no bearing on whether the prime minister will visit the memorial." There had been speculation in the *Nikkei* economic newspaper in May that Prime Minister Abe might go to Pearl Harbor on the upcoming December 7 anniversary of the attack in order to reciprocate President Obama's late-May visit to Hiroshima. Abe did visit the World War II Memorial on the National Mall last year but didn't stop in Hawaii en route to Washington.

Akie Abe at the USS Arizona *Memorial*

In general, Mrs. Abe does not hesitate to go where her husband, out of concern over a backlash from his right-wing supporters, apparently fears to tread. A former radio disc jockey, she is known for outspoken views, at times in conflict with those of her husband. This has earned her the popular nickname of "domestic opposition party." However, it would seem just as implausible to assert that Mrs. Abe was not representing her husband in visiting a memorial as it would be to claim the American first lady were not doing so in analogous circumstances.

In fact, Mrs. Abe's symbolic gesture comes only weeks after her husband reignited concerns over his revisionist views on World War II by appointing to his cabinet the virulently anti-Korean Tomomi Inada as defense minister. Inada, notoriously, has doubted the reality of the Nanking massacre, the Imperial Japanese Army's forcing of tens of thousands of Korean women into sexual slavery, and other Japanese war atrocities. The appointment of the controversial Ms. Inada was seen as a setback to the recently improved defense cooperation between America's two major East Asian allies, Japan and South Korea. Akie Abe, by contrast, is a Koreaphile, known as a big fan of certain South Korean pop culture "Hallyu" actors and a speaker of Korean.

Recent events have made Mrs. Abe's gesture of reconciliation to her country's main ally even more timely. Even as she posted the Facebook photo of her Pearl Harbor visit, China was reportedly lashing out at Japan. According to RT, "Beijing warned Tokyo of a harsh response if it ever crossed a 'red line' in deciding to sail with U.S. warships near disputed waters surrounding China's artificially reclaimed islands under the pretext of the Freedom of Navigation principle." The Chinese ambassador to Japan had delivered this belligerent message on the eve of the Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling last month on the South China Sea. Meanwhile, CNN reported that Pyongyang has threatened a nuclear strike that could turn South Korea into "a heap of ashes" if the United States and South Korea "show the slightest sign of aggression" during a scheduled annual joint military exercise.

Given continued Chinese belligerency and nuclear saber-rattling by North Korea, the adage of Founding Father Benjamin Franklin that "we must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately" seems to apply to the current situation for the United States and its Asian allies. Akie Abe, by her courageous gesture of going to Pearl Harbor to help heal an old wound, has emerged as a key peacemaker among three allies—Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul—who must stick together in the challenging times ahead. ♦

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The Brain Gain

Making room for high-skilled immigrants.

BY HRISHIKESH JOSHI

Donald Trump's overheated rhetoric has made immigration a central issue of this election. There is now a vigorous debate over what to do with America's roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants. Neither conservatives nor liberals, however, have paid much attention to the need for reforming *legal* immigration. The system features many outdated and arcane laws, one of which is Ted Kennedy's brainchild, the green card lottery.

The Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, as it's formally known, is one of those government schemes whose name belies its origins. Sen. Kennedy got it added to the Immigration Act of 1990 to help a group of people who had been coming to America for centuries: the Irish. The "transition period" of the program, from 1992-94, dedicated 40 percent of "diversity" visas to Irish immigrants. That's no longer the case, but Northern Ireland is still treated as a separate state under the law—important because immigrants from the United Kingdom, to which it belongs, are not eligible for the program.

Grads: Let 'em in.

Contrary to its name, there is even now no genuine sense in which the program promotes diversity among America's immigrant population. Through the diversity lottery—"winners" are chosen at random from the applicant pool—the government grants 50,000 permanent residence visas each year. There is a catch, however: Only individuals from countries that have not sent more than 50,000 immigrants to the United States over the last five years are eligible to apply. This sounds like a good idea if the goal is to promote diversity. In practice, it doesn't work that way. Unsurprisingly, larger countries tend to send more immigrants here. But the country thresholds apply on an absolute basis, rather than a per capita basis, so people from countries as diverse as Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh, the Philippines, China, Canada, and the U.K. (among others) are barred from applying.

This makes little sense from a policy perspective. Imagine if the Philippines were to split up into a dozen countries. Would this make its population any more diverse? No. Yet after the split, the resulting countries' native-born populations would be eligible for the diversity lottery. Rather than promoting "diversity," then, the lottery merely favors immigrants from small countries over large ones.

What is even more ham-handed and bizarre is that the "country of origin," for the purposes of determining eligibility, is overwhelmingly the country of *birth*, not the country of *citizenship*. Thus, if somebody born in the U.K. had spent the majority of her life in Trinidad and Tobago, as a citizen of that country, she would be ineligible to apply for a green card through the lottery program. People born in Trinidad who spent their lives in the U.K., on the other hand, could apply.

The other major problem with the green card lottery is that it has effectively no skills requirement. A person only needs either a high-school diploma or two years of work experience to be eligible to apply. Such a policy is not in the interest of the American taxpayer. Whereas immigrants with a college degree or higher level of education generate a net fiscal positive over the course of their lives, those with only a high school education end up receiving more in terms of benefits than they pay in taxes.

A 1997 study by the National Research Council estimated the net fiscal drain per capita for immigrants with only a high-school education at $31,000. Immigrants with higher levels of education provided a net fiscal benefit of $105,000 on average, over their lifetimes. Given the increasing premium education provides in the modern economy, this difference is bound to be even more striking today.

For several reasons then, the diversity lottery ought to be scrapped. In 2012, the Republican-majority House passed a bill that would dissolve the program and use those slots to grant permanent residence visas to immigrants with advanced degrees in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math). The Democrat-controlled Senate blocked the legislation. Their stated reason for rejecting the bill was that the lottery program gives green cards to immigrants from Africa and Eastern Europe who would not otherwise be eligible.

But it's far from obvious that America has special obligations to promote immigration from those particular regions at the expense of others. Besides, the lottery excludes applicants from Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. Even if one could argue that we have special obligations towards those regions, why not promote *skilled* immigration from them? Given that skilled immigration benefits the economy much more than unskilled immigration, this strategy would much better serve American interests.

Getting immigration policy right is extremely important. The kind of labor force we welcome into America will determine the country's trajectory for generations. Republicans, now in control of both the House and Senate, should try again soon to replace the diversity lottery with something more sensible and fair. In a turbulent election year, who knows what will happen come November? ♦

NEWSCOM

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Safety Not Guaranteed

Yellowstone in the age of the helicopter parent

Grand Prismatic Spring

By Jonathan V. Last

It was on Halloween night that I first realized there was a problem. My three children—dressed as Darth Vader, a pirate fairy, and Tinker Bell—were making their way down Lee Street, in Old Town Alexandria, Va. The houses were decked with spider webs and all manner of spooky, expensive-looking accoutrements. Police had closed the street to traffic and hundreds of families milled about. It was Bobo paradise.

My children walked up to a house where a witch sat on the porch with a cauldron of candy. They yelled, "trick-or-treat!" She invited them to choose two pieces each. They huddled around the pot. And then I heard my oldest, Cody, who is 8.

"You can't have that one, it has nuts," he said to his sister with the peanut allergy. "Oh no, don't take that one," he said to his littler sister. "That could be a choking hazard." After a few minutes of fussing around and finding potential dangers in each piece of candy, Cody concluded that prudence dictated they each take a single lollipop.

"But you can have *two* pieces," the witch reminded them kindly. "Thank you so much for offering," Cody answered. "But we'd better stick with these. They're the safest." And with that he led his sisters off the porch and back toward me, a look of relief in his eyes. In that moment, I grasped how fully I had failed him.

Jonathan V. Last is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

All boys have need of some recklessness. If they do not come by it naturally, it must be bred into them. The trick is titrating just enough of the stuff so that they are game for life's adventures but not liable to do something catastrophically stupid, like going to law school. And so it was in this moment, as I stood on Lee Street, that I resolved to put more adventure into his life.

In the end, I settled on taking Cody to Yellowstone for a week of camping and communing with nature in all her brutal splendor. I emphasize that this trip would be for his benefit, not mine. Because while I enjoy nature, in measured doses, I have matured to the point where I have certain needs. For instance, there is only one pillow on which I can sleep—it is almost completely flat, with small indentations perfectly conformed to my neck from three decades of use. Also, I require a double espresso every morning, before 6:30 A.M. This is a partial list of what my wife delicately refers to as my "eccentricities."

But parenthood requires sacrifice—the two words are practically synonyms—so in early June, I packed up my son, and a great deal of gear, and took him to Yellowstone, one of the last places in America where you can still have real adventure.

Real adventure requires real risk, and Yellowstone has that in spades. The week before we got to the park, there were two "geyser accidents." In one, a 13-year-old was burned at a thermal area near Old Faithful. The injuries were severe enough that he was hospitalized.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD / JONATHAN V. LAST

In another, a 23-year-old fell into an acidic, scalding-hot spring near Porkchop Geyser. He died in so grisly a manner that rangers were unable to recover a body.

Over the last decade, 16 people have been burned badly enough at Yellowstone that they've had to be helicoptered to the burn unit at the University of Utah. Lots of minor burns go unreported. "Most people who get thermal burns feel a little sheepish about it" and don't report the injuries to rangers, reports park geologist Hank Heasler.

And the geothermal dangers are just the start. There are steep cliffs and switchbacks on hiking trails. The driving can be harrowing, too. I've been through all 50 states, and Yellowstone's Dunraven Pass (elevation—8,878 feet; lanes—two; guardrails—none) ranks high on the list of roads I never want to travel again.

Then there are the animals. Last year, five visitors were gored by bison. (There are some 4,900 of them shambling about the park.) That seems to have been exceptional. The National Park Service says there are usually only one or two gorings a year—and helpfully includes a video of one of them on its website. In 1995, perhaps sensing that things weren't spicy enough, the NPS decided to reintroduce wolves to the park, the wolves having all been killed off or driven from Yellowstone over the course of the 20th century. The animals have done quite well for themselves: By 2014, there were 104 of them running around.

And then there are the bears.

The brown bear, also known as the grizzly bear or, more perfectly, *Ursus arctos horribilis*, is one of the main features of Yellowstone. There are more than 700 of these large creatures wandering the park, and they are never far from your consciousness. Signs everywhere warn that you are in "Bear Country" and list precautions on (1) how to avoid contact with bears and (2) what to do should you encounter one. There is an average of one bear attack per year in the park; three visitors have been killed by bears over the last five years. As the National Park Service sternly explains, "Your safety cannot be guaranteed." This is something of an understatement.

So much of one that there's an entire book on the subject, titled, charmingly, *Death in Yellowstone*. It chronicles some 360 deaths at the park (this number omits hundreds more from auto accidents), some of them both novel and terrifying. In 1939, for instance, a man working on a road project in Yellowstone's Tower region was killed by hydrogen sulfide gas, which began seeping from the ground without warning. This was not a broken gas line or man-made mistake. It was just nature, in her fickleness, deciding to reach out and kill at random. As is her wont.

The chapter on bear deaths runs to 43 pages, the longest in the book. A sample:

> John Wallace stopped to eat an energy bar, take a drink, or get something out of the pack that was later found not on his back. Probably sitting on a log in his last moments, he must have instinctively raised one or both hands, because there were bite marks on his right hand, large areas of bruising on his left arm, and scratches, lacerations, and punctures on his right forearm—all consistent with self-defense when facing a bear. But these may have occurred after the bear had already hit him, because ominously, "wounds to his neck and back suggest[ed] that the bear came from behind." It probably took very little time for Wallace to die from loss of blood. The bear then fed upon him and cached his body in a partial burial.

Encouragingly, bear deaths have decreased in recent decades, since the park got serious about securing trash and preventing people from feeding the bears. But nothing in Yellowstone is really *safe*. In 1970, after a child fell into a hot spring and was boiled alive, one of the local papers, the *Billings Gazette*, ran an editorial, which concluded, "remember that Yellowstone Park is wild. The Park is raw nature. And it can kill."

Nothing in Yellowstone is really *safe*. In 1970, after a child fell into a hot spring and was boiled alive, one of the local papers, the *Billings Gazette*, ran an editorial, which concluded, 'remember that Yellowstone Park is wild. The Park is raw nature. And it can kill.'

Archaeologists believe that humans first encountered the perils of Yellowstone 11,000 years ago. The first white man to see the place was probably John Colter, a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition who detoured south through the Montana territory to investigate in 1807. He passed through one of the park's geothermal regions and came out describing a vision of "fire and brimstone." No one believed him, and for the next 40 years the area was jokingly referred to as "Colter's Hell."

No real survey was taken until the Cook-Folsom-Peterson expedition of 1869, and even this group touched only a small piece of Yellowstone. It took another two years for Ferdinand Hayden to mount a follow-up exploration and produce a serious map. Hayden's findings about the wonders of Yellowstone led President Ulysses Grant to immediately designate the area a "national park"—the first such entity not just in America but in the world. The idea was to preserve this vast natural treasure for the reunited America, for all generations.

Only it didn't quite work. With no mechanism to

enforce the park's protection, Yellowstone was looted by poachers, squatters, woodcutters, and vandals. So in 1886, the Army encamped at Yellowstone and assumed the job of keeping the park orderly. They laid down the law quickly. By 1903 the situation was civilized enough that Theodore Roosevelt—then the president—went camping in the northeast section of Yellowstone. Today you can stay in primitive "Roughrider" cabins—where you can see through cracks in the boards used for the walls—just a short way from where TR pitched his tent. Spending a night in a Roughrider cabin in June, with the sun out until 10:00 P.M., the nighttime temperature touching the 30s, and the only heat coming from a small wood stove, is less luxurious—and more wonderful—than you can possibly imagine.

Above, a Yellowstone example of Ursus arctos horribilis, *with cub; below, the usual crowd admires Old Faithful.*

The modern Yellowstone takes up 3,468 square miles and contains only a single espresso machine. You can think of it as divided into five distinct regions—the Tower Fall area, the Mammoth Hot Springs, the Lake, the Canyon, and the Geysers—which functionally makes it five parks in one. Kind of like Disney World. Except a Disney World where the rides can kill you.

The most famous section of the park is the Geyser region, which is a bit like Disney's Magic Kingdom. It's here that you'll find Old Faithful (which, to extend the analogy, is Yellowstone's Space Mountain). It's one of the few places in the park where mass crowds of people gather throughout the day. But though it's impressive, Old Faithful is almost a sideshow. What makes the Geyser region unique is that it's the only place on earth that frequently doesn't look like earth.

The Grand Canyon, the Mendenhall Glacier, the Great Barrier Reef—there are plenty of places more awesomely impressive than Yellowstone's Geyser region. But none of them looks quite as alien. In one basin, for instance, sits the Grand Prismatic Spring, a 300-foot-wide, 160-foot-deep pool that dribbles out 560 gallons of 160-degree water every minute. It looks like a large, shimmering eye, with deep blue at the center giving way to narrow bands of green and yellow around the iris and then a shocking orange, which bleeds along the run-off. It looks like something from a *Star Wars* movie.

The color gradations in the Grand Prismatic Spring are the result of the single-celled organism *archaea*, which thrives in the pool's chemistry and produces different hues at different temperature bands as water flows away from the hot center of the spring.

As interesting as it is to contemplate how much the Grand Prismatic Spring looks like something we might recognize from science fiction, I couldn't stop wondering what someone would have made of it 200 years ago, before there was even that fictional context. Imagine living your life seeing forests and rivers and mountains, and maybe the occasional town or city. Everything you see looks like something else. There is little for which you do not have a frame of reference. Even a wonder like Niagara Falls would be recognizable as a mammoth waterfall. But then you happen upon this steaming, shimmering eye of God. It would have been the most remarkable experience of your life because it is completely unlike anything you have ever seen—or will see—again.

At least that's the impression it made on me. Cody, who has seen *Star Wars* movies, was more taken with the Sapphire Pool a few miles away. The Sapphire Pool is much less grand than the Grand Prismatic Spring. It is irregularly shaped and perhaps 30 feet long. Its water is the purest, clearest blue you will ever see and through its placidity you can gaze into the pool's twisting, cavernous depths. "It looks like you're staring into the center of the earth," Cody whispered when he first saw it. In a world full of video games and iPads and *Star Wars*, the Sapphire Pool was so startlingly powerful that we returned to it four more times over the course of the week, at Cody's behest.

An interesting side note: Yellowstone gets a lot of earthquakes—add that to the list of perils—and in 1959 one of these quakes transformed the Sapphire Pool into a geyser which spewed water 150 to 200 feet into the air every two hours or so. This activity gradually subsided and by 1968 the pool had returned to its earlier form.

TOP, VISUALS UNLIMITED / ADAM JONES / GETTY; BELOW, VISIONS OF AMERICA / UIG / GETTY

Like politics, parenting can be understood as war by other means. Yet, while there might be a dozen theories of generalship, there are (at least) a hundred schools of thought on parenting.

Anchoring the two ends of the spectrum are what I think of as helicopter parents and IMINT parents. The helicopter parent is a well-known phenomenon: These are adults who hover in the foreground of their children's lives, watching, directing, applauding, rescuing—taking on whatever responsibility they deem necessary in a given moment.

At the opposite end are the IMINT parents, who are much less common. People often refer to "free-range" parenting, but this is a misnomer. Very few responsible adults would allow a child to actually wander about unmolested by *any* supervision. The truth is closer to IMINT, the abbreviation for "imagery intelligence," which refers to the collection of photographs, mostly from satellites and high-altitude reconnaissance. When people say that they "free-range" their kids, what they really mean is that they watch periodically, from a far orbit, in such a manner as to get high-level snapshots of their children's progress, without being noticed by the child. They then use this intel to make parenting decisions.

I like to think of myself as a Predator-drone parent: always watching, but from a distance. But then, I would think that. The phenomenon of helicopter parenting is the inverse of the French Resistance—everyone insists they *aren't* participating in it, but most people secretly are. Perhaps even me.

I like to think of myself as somewhere in between these two poles, perhaps a Predator-drone parent: always watching, but from a distance, often unseen, and able to call in close-air support as needed. But then, I would think that. The phenomenon of helicopter parenting is the inverse of the French Resistance—everyone insists they *aren't* participating in it, but most people secretly are. Perhaps even me.

Because whenever I reflected on the Halloween tableau, I couldn't stop wondering how Cody had become so reflexively anxious. *From you, Dad. I learned it from watching you.*

As a consequence, I determined that his Yellowstone adventure would be free of excessive worry. I would teach him to understand nature, and respect her power, but not to be fearful.

I started off by getting him a knife.

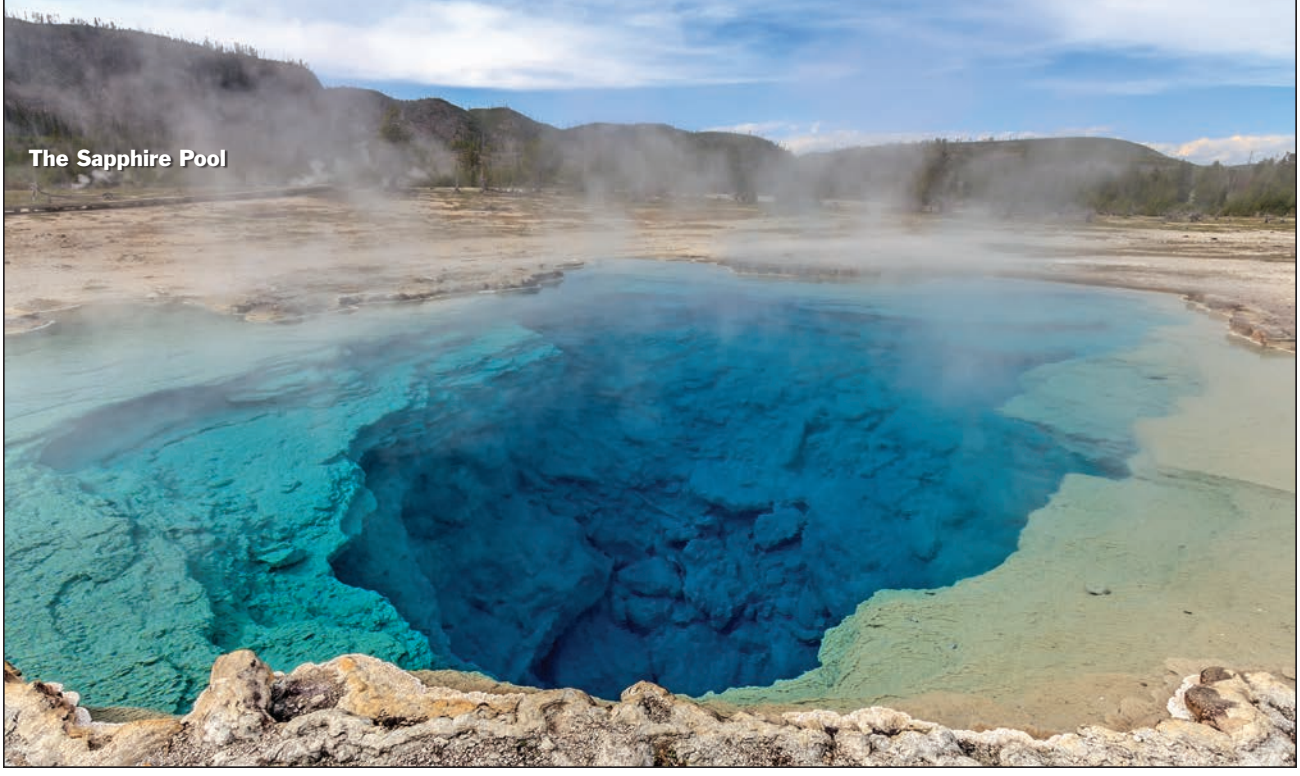
The spiritual connection between boys and pocketknives rivals the intensity of the bond between girls and horses. It is primordial, unfathomable. Give a boy a Swiss Army knife—even a boy who has never before seen a Swiss Army knife—and he is instantly entranced. Cody was. He stroked it, examined it, fidgeted with it. He picked through all seven of its tools, studying them individually, and then splayed them out at once like a peacock. He began inventing scenarios where he might use it: "If a tree falls on our campsite, I could use the saw to cut it apart," he said. "And if a snake bites one of us, I could use the leather punch to drill another hole so we could suck out even more venom," he said. "If a bear attacks us on a hike, I can use the knife to fight him," he said. This last scenario burned so brightly in his imagination that he decided to keep the knife in a sheath on his belt. Just in case. Some evenings I would catch him sitting, gazing at the knife in silent fascination, as if he were staring into a fire.

Fires, of course, are also endlessly seductive to boys. Cody's favorite part of camping is the making and tending of the campfire. He devises needlessly intricate methods of starting the fires. He burns everything he can find—paper towels, sticks, dried pine needles, bits of croissant. One night in Yellowstone he took the cardboard center from a roll of paper towels, stuffed it with pinecones and bits of newspaper, punctured air-holes in it with the corkscrew of his Swiss Army knife, and then dropped it in the fire. His face transformed into something resembling the ecstasy of St. Teresa.

I encouraged, or, more accurately, from Predator-drone altitude, did not *dis*courage any of this. Instead, I tried to let him enjoy the wild. We talked about how to build a fire, keep embers from floating out of the pit, and douse it before bed. But then I let him do with it as he pleased. I showed him how when you whittle at wood with a knife, you always cut away from your body. And then I left him to it. When we explored the Sapphire Pool and the Grand Prismatic Spring and other geothermal features, I explained the importance of staying on the boardwalk paths, and then let him wander without hovering behind his shoulder. And every day we hiked.

We hiked the long, vertiginous trail along the North Rim of the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone. We hiked a straight, flat, and quiet trail out to the Lone Star Geyser. We hiked to the top of the hill overlooking Old Faithful and along a beautiful meadow to the black-sand shore of Lake Shoshone.

On average, we hiked between five and seven miles a day, which, at 8,000 feet above sea level, is enough to tax even the boundless energies of an 8-year-old. Cody and I are both early risers—it is rare that either of us sleeps past 5:00 A.M.—yet we waited until mid-morning to begin our expeditions. That's because, early in the stay, a cheerful



The Sapphire Pool

DUCEPT PASCAL / HEMIS.FR / GETTY

park employee named Julia told me that "if you set out at first light, it's a great opportunity to see wildlife." Which I took to mean "a great opportunity to meet a grisly death." Because no matter where we were, I was, in a decidedly helicopterish way, worrying about the bears.

When I say that Yellowstone is plastered with warnings about bears, I'm not exaggerating. It is difficult to go far without a sign cautioning that you are in Bear Country, that bears are dangerous, that you should travel in groups of three or more, making a lot of noise, and that you should not go anywhere without bear spray. When you enter the park, rangers give you literature about bears. When you check into a campsite, you're given a lecture about bear safety.

The reason for these warnings is a lawsuit. In 1972, 25-year-old Harry Walker and his buddy Phillip Bradberry hitchhiked into Yellowstone, went down to Old Faithful, and then, like a couple of idiots, wandered off the trails into a thermal area and pitched a tent on a hillside, 16 miles from the nearest campground. On their second night, a bear started rooting through the trash and food they kept next to their tent. As I said, a couple of idiots. When they emerged from the tent at dawn they surprised the grizzly. It charged. As *Death in Yellowstone* explains, Bradberry fell down an embankment and then ran for help. By the time rangers got to the scene, "about 25 percent of [Walker's body] had been eaten," including "his entire pelvic region." (It is uncomfortable to report that in many cases of bear attack, the pelvic region is the first to go.)

This being America, Walker's parents sued the National Park Service. And were awarded $87,417.

The decision was reversed on appeal, but it spooked the Park Service into trying to lawyer-proof Yellowstone. Walker's folks insisted that there was no way their son could have known about the danger of bears, or hiking off trails, or pitching camp in the middle of nowhere, or leaving food and trash next to his tent. So officials in Yellowstone set out to make sure that you'd have to be dumb as a rock not to understand the risks of the park. And they got the job done.

Maybe a little too well. I kept thinking that Yellowstone gets four million visitors, and only one or two bear attacks, every year. Those sound like pretty good odds. Except that of those four million tourists, only a tiny percentage make it onto trails in the backcountry, where you're more likely to encounter a bear. So if you're a hiker, that cuts the odds down right quick.

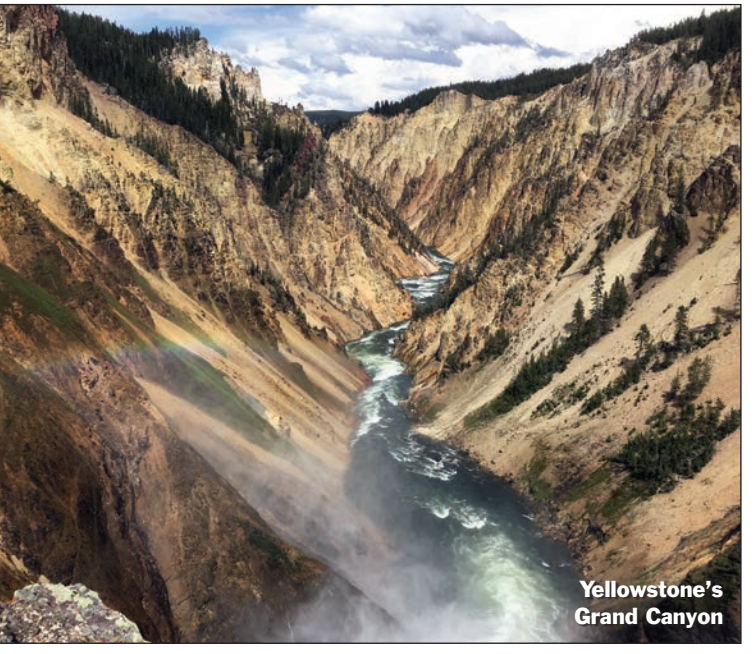
And if you're the worrying sort, it doesn't help that the instructions for dealing with bears can be confusingly contradictory. The official advice says that you should wear bear bells in order to make noise so that you don't surprise a bear. I mentioned this to one ranger and he replied, with a laugh, "Oh sure, the bells are great. We find them in bear scat all the time." If a bear hits you, one set of guidelines posted near trailheads says that you should fall down on your stomach, cross your hands over the back of your neck, and play dead. Another set, which I picked up at a ranger station, emphasized that if a bear hits you, you must "FIGHT BACK!"

At least when it comes to bear spray—essentially an industrial-grade pepper spray—the instructions at Yellowstone are of one mind: Don't go anywhere without it. But down at Yosemite—which also has bears wandering around—bear spray is strictly prohibited. Which calls to mind the lawsuits again: If bear spray actually works—and

isn't just a talisman hikers keep in a hip holster to pretend they're not playing ursine roulette—how could the Yosemite administrators deny the public its protection?

I tried to keep such thoughts tucked away on a high shelf. Meanwhile, I explained the workings of bear spray to Cody and talked him through every scenario I could think of.

"So *if* the bear charges and *if* it's not a bluff *and* the bear spray doesn't work *and* the bear mauls you, *then* what am I supposed to do?" he asked. I told him that in such an unlikely chain of events, he should run back along the trail while the bear feasts on Daddy's pelvic region. He was entirely satisfied with this answer.



Yellowstone's Grand Canyon

All in all, I thought I handled the bear question as well as any Predator-drone parent could. We undertook our hikes with a healthy respect for the situation but not any real anxiety. We even made it something of a game, where Cody would shout "Drill!" and we'd see how long it took me to draw my bear spray and pull the safety. "Hiking in bear country requires constant vigilance," he told me solemnly. I agreed.

We were hiking along the Mystic Falls Overlook trail when it happened. It's a reasonably popular hike that begins just north of the Sapphire Pool in the Biscuit Basin, approaches a lively waterfall, then gains 500 more feet of elevation while going up the mountain and rewards you with a panoramic overlook. From there you can see clear out to Old Faithful, some three miles away. Cody and I hadn't seen any other hikers for the better part of an hour and were walking through a forested patch shy of the summit when we heard a deep growl in the woods. It was perhaps 20 yards ahead and to our right.

We froze and I pulled the bear spray. We waited a moment, my left hand on Cody's shoulder, the bear spray in my right. Then we heard it again. The woods were thick enough that we couldn't see more than a few yards off the trail. The growl had the kind of bass resonance that suggested something large and padded by a lot of meat. Cody yanked his Swiss Army knife from its sheath and stood at the ready.

When the growl sounded for the third time, it had moved so that it was passing us to the right. I elected to take us forward, on an opposing vector, so the distance between us and it would increase. We made as much noise as we could. After a few minutes, when we were clear, Cody looked up at me and said evenly, "Dad, that's the most scared I've ever been in my entire life."

And so I told him that fear is natural and that there's nothing wrong with it. That anyone would be scared in a moment like that. But what's important is that you put your fear to one side so that you can think clearly and do whatever needs to be done.

It doesn't read like much on the page, but it was a good little speech. And the truth is, that growling could have been anything—maybe a bear, but maybe an elk, possibly even a large pronghorn.

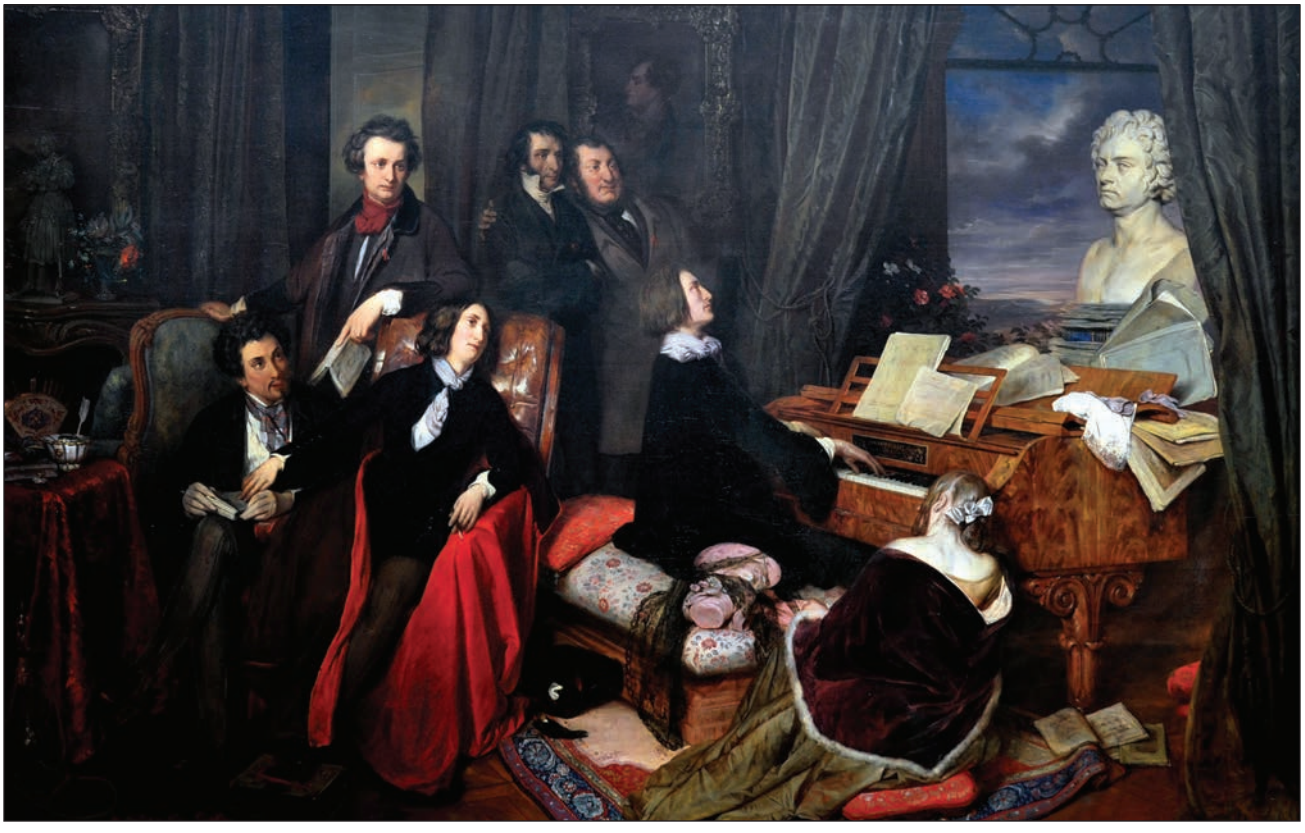
Part of the reason I took Cody to Yellowstone in the first place was that I wanted him to learn about fear—real fear. He already knows about the fears that middle-class kids carry around these days—about making friends and fitting in and achieving whatever it is their parents hope for them. But he knew nothing about real fear. The kind that tingles in your belly. And while being scared is part of life, a good part of growing up is learning how to master your fears so that they don't master you.

This all sounds high-minded, but it's something that used to come as a matter of routine to nearly every boy. That is no longer the case because we have turned our country into one gigantic safe space. On the whole, this is a good thing; probably even a very good thing. But it means that today, in order to acquaint your children with even tiny bits of danger, you need to seek them out. And Yellowstone might be the best place in America to do just that.

Three days later, Cody and I had dinner at the Roosevelt Lodge, near where TR had camped. "Remember when we heard that growling on the trail by Mystic Falls?" he asked. I told him that I did; that it was a moment I was not likely to forget. "Well, I've been thinking about it," he said. "I think we should hike that trail again."

And so we did. ♦

THE WEEKLY STANDARD / JONATHAN V. LAST



'Franz Liszt Fantasizing at the Piano' by Josef Danhauser (1840)

Lisztomania

The composer's life at the expense of his music. BY GEORGE B. STAUFFER

The provocative subtitle of this new biography suggests that the author is going to explore the racier aspects of his subject's life. He does not disappoint: Franz Liszt's flamboyant playing style and unconventional relationships represent a gold mine of sensationalistic material, and this book drills directly down to the mother lode.

Franz Liszt (1811-86) was a controversial figure indeed. A pianist of unprecedented virtuosity, he inspired a frenzy that bordered on religious ecstasy with his carefully staged performances. Strikingly handsome, with sea-green eyes, shoulder-length hair, and a slim countenance, he entered the stage with cloak and gloves that were ceremoniously removed before the music began. He created an aura not unlike that of a rock star, with a similar result: Women fought over his discarded handkerchiefs and cigar butts. The residue from his washbowl was secretly siphoned off and preserved like holy water. The cover on one of his chairs was removed and framed as a precious souvenir. And Liszt's bohemian lifestyle—two long-term liaisons with married women and three children fathered out of wedlock (there may have been more, according to Hilmes)—only added to the mystique.

Liszt's assertive playing style was provocative, too, since it approached musical combat. He routinely broke strings on the fragile pianos of his day and sometimes damaged keys with his strong attack. In Vienna, he once arranged for three instruments to be placed on stage and worked his way through each, with the gusto of a conquering superhero. "My concert has just finished—enthusiasm impossible to describe," he wrote to his mistress Marie d'Agoult after receiving 18 curtain calls and being carried out of the

Franz Liszt
Musician, Celebrity, Superstar
by Oliver Hilmes
translated by Stewart Spencer
Yale, 368 pp., $38

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theater by an impassioned audience. Heinrich Heine termed the delirium that surrounded these events "Lisztomania." Europe had never seen anything like it.

And with the triumphant concerts came adoring women—not just d'Agoult and Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, Liszt's second long-term companion, but also Olga Janina, Agnes Street-Klindworth, Lina Schmalhausen, Charlotte von Hagn, and a host of others—including an unidentified groupie who appeared naked on the balcony of Liszt's hotel room after a recital, apparently to stake her claim. Even George Sand and Lola Montez, two of the most notorious female figures of the day, made cameo appearances in Liszt's life.

Hilmes reports this larger-than-life tale in great detail. He relies upon meticulously documented research, and he uses disclaimers when the narrative moves into the realm of pure speculation ("We simply do not know from whose loins the infant sprang," he states, after making the case that Liszt fathered at least one of Agnes Street-Klindworth's children). In his eagerness to paint a vivid picture, he sometimes lapses into overheated prose, which seems to go naturally with his approach. In speaking of Olga Janina, for instance, he writes:

> Not only did she smoke cigars, but she often turned up for Liszt's piano classes with a revolver in her handbag, spreading fear and terror among his other pupils. As an additional accessory she was also known to carry a dagger whose point was said to be poisoned. In short, Olga Janina was not a woman to be crossed.

Or of Liszt's final days:

> The events that unfolded in Bayreuth over the next two weeks were undignified in the extreme. They amounted to a tragedy, a bizarre and morbidly grotesque dance of death that even today leaves us shaken and profoundly moved.

Thank God for grief counseling!

Liszt was born in 1811 in Raiding, a small village in what was then the Kingdom of Hungary, some 25 miles south of Eisenstadt, where Haydn had served the Esterházy family in the previous century. Hungary was under Habsburg rule at the time, and Liszt grew up in a German-speaking household. (Although he was later hailed as a Hungarian cultural hero, he never learned the language well.) Liszt's father, Adam, an amateur musician, sensed his son's talent early on and, after teaching him the fundamentals of piano-playing and harmony, successfully appealed to local aristocrats for financial support to take the boy to Vienna. There Franz studied piano with Carl Czerny, the foremost pedagogue of the day, and composition with Antonio Salieri, Mozart's alleged nemesis. He made progress so quickly that he was invited to contribute to the set of 50 variations solicited from Schubert, Czerny, Hummel, and other leading composers by the publisher Anton Diabelli. (Beethoven declined to join the group and compiled his own set of variations on Diabelli's theme.) Liszt's variation, written at age 11, already displays the snarly turbulence of his later works.

But even more impressive was the young Liszt's playing, which Adam quickly recognized as an exploitable talent. Father and son soon embarked on a series of highly profitable concert tours to Munich, Paris, London, and other cities, where the teenager was hailed as a "new Mozart" and performed for increasingly high fees. Hilmes reports that a single recital in Manchester garnered £100, the equivalent today of $57,000. But Adam died during a tour in France in 1827, forcing the 15-year-old Franz to take matters into his own hands. He moved to Paris, where he learned the French language that he was to prefer the rest of his life, and prepared for a career as a concert pianist.

On April 20, 1832, Liszt attended a recital by the Italian violinist Niccolò Paganini. He was dumbstruck by the performance, and Hilmes, like biographers before him, views the encounter as a major turning point in Liszt's development. Paganini played with a virtuosity that approached wizardry: It was not just his bravura technique that moved audiences, but also his highly dramatic stage persona. Liszt was deeply impressed and later paid homage to Paganini with a set of piano études based on his violin caprices. His greater debt, however, was the realization that a music recital could be an event: Inspired by Paganini, Liszt became the world's first consummate piano showman.

Three years later, Liszt took up with the first important woman in his life, Marie d'Agoult, who was witty, well read, and unhappily married to a nobleman. She was six years older than Liszt and provided stability to his life. In the summer of 1835, they escaped to Switzerland, where their first daughter, Blandine, was born. Two other children, Cosima and Daniel, followed. In the early spring of 1838, Liszt traveled to Vienna to play a series of recitals for flood victims in Hungary. The response was overwhelming, spurred both by Liszt's playing and the patriotic fervor he inspired.

The Vienna events ushered in what is commonly termed Liszt's "Virtuoso Period" (1839-47), when he crisscrossed Europe from Lisbon to Moscow and Glasgow to Naples, presenting more than a thousand concerts in eight years. He played in the most important public venues and performed before Queen Victoria, the Ottoman sultan in Constantinople, and the czar of Russia. Hilmes shows that his concerts were not only booked but carefully orchestrated by his secretary, Gaetano Belloni. Liszt introduced audiences to a wide range of repertory, from unfamiliar piano compositions by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Chopin to his own ingenious transcriptions of works by Bach, Schubert, Berlioz, and others. But he invariably ended the programs with stirring renditions of his own pieces: dramatic and pyrotechnical études, Hungarian rhapsodies, opera paraphrases.

Up to this time, pianists had shared the stage with vocalists, instruments, and other musicians in potpourri programs featuring a wide variety of solo and ensemble works. Liszt appeared alone, and in so doing, almost single-handedly invented the modern solo recital. "*Le concert c'est*

moi," Hilmes quotes him as saying.

But Liszt's tours took a toll on his relationship with Marie d'Agoult. By 1844, the two had separated, and in 1846, Liszt took up with another married woman, Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, a fabulously wealthy Russian princess. Although short and homely, she possessed a sharp intelligence and, like d'Agoult before her, served to stabilize Liszt's life. In January 1848, after completing a third triumphant European tour, Liszt suddenly pulled a complete about-face and moved with Sayn-Wittgenstein to the sleepy town of Weimar (population 12,000), where he began a new career as *kapellmeister* and master teacher.

As director of the Weimar court orchestra, Liszt presented programs of cutting-edge music, including more than 40 operas and complete festivals of works by Berlioz and Wagner. An exacting conductor, he dedicated 46 rehearsals to the preparation of *Lohengrin*, which he premiered in Weimar in 1850. From this isolated outpost he became the leading spokesman for music of the New German School. As a teacher, Liszt offered free lessons and accommodations to those who qualified, giving daily master classes to the leading young pianists of Europe. Over the 14 years of his stay, his residence became a pilgrimage spot for musicians, writers, and artists.

Then, in another transmogrification, Liszt moved to Rome in 1861 to take up minor orders in the Roman Catholic church, possibly with the goal of becoming music director to the Papal Chapel. Now known as "Abbé Liszt," he wore a long black cassock and composed religious compositions in his modest quarters at the monastery of Madonna del Rosario. There he even gave up his grand piano, making do with a small, out-of-tune upright instrument. Still, he continued to be viewed as a celebrity and was visited frequently by musicians and dignitaries, including Pope Pius IX, who, after listening to Liszt play his latest sacred work, *St. François d'Assise: La prédication aux oiseaux*, joined him at the piano to sing "Casta diva" from Bellini's *Norma*.

Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein had moved to Rome in 1860 in the hope of obtaining a divorce through papal intervention. She received an audience but was ultimately unsuccessful in her quest; and although her husband died four years later, opening the door for marriage to Liszt, the two never wed. From 1869 onward, Liszt divided his time among Weimar, Rome, and Budapest, teaching, composing, and giving benefit concerts. In Budapest, he joined the faculty of the newly established Academy of Music and helped to launch the Hungarian school of music pedagogy.

Even in his twilight years, however, intrigue followed him in the form of his daughter Cosima's affair with Richard Wagner. While married to Liszt's brilliant student Hans von Bülow, Cosima fell in love with Wagner and proceeded to have three children with him, even as her husband was conducting the Munich premieres of *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Die Meistersinger*. After a six-year affair, she finally obtained a divorce from Bülow, marrying Wagner in 1870.

In 1886, at 75, Liszt embarked on a final series of recitals in Vienna, Liège, Antwerp, and London. To Hilmes, the trip resembled a celebrity farewell tour, with large audiences appearing to hear their idol for the last time. And although Liszt was exhausted from his travels, he nevertheless journeyed to Bayreuth to lend support to Cosima, who had taken over the performances of Wagner's operas after his death three years earlier. There Liszt died.

Oliver Hilmes's rendering of these events is accurate and thoroughly footnoted. Abundantly embellished with quotations from contemporary letters, diaries, and newspaper articles, his book gives a good sense not only of the emotion-charged events in Liszt's career but also of the quotidian ups and downs of daily life in the 19th century. Liszt and his contemporaries come alive in the engagingly written text. Another plus is Stewart Spencer's smooth, idiomatic translation of the German original.

The principal shortcoming, however, is that *Franz Liszt* dwells on the seamier side of Liszt's activities to the neglect of his accomplishments as an artist. Once the narrative reaches the virtuoso years, it shifts focus from the pianist's music and music-making to his amorous escapades. And toward the end, when the long list of women has finally played out, the discussion turns to his drinking habits. Portrayed in this light, the elderly Liszt comes across as an aged has-been, plagued by petty problems, rather than a heroic figure championing worthy causes. (His large donation for the erection of a Bach monument in Eisenach in 1883 impoverished him for almost a year.)

In a Postlude, Hilmes quotes the Austrian conductor Felix Weingartner's description of Liszt on his funeral bier:

> His face had fallen in and his hair had been smoothed down—he looked like a little old man, and it was hard to recognize in his lifeless body the man he had been so shortly before, the man who had created the *Faust* and *Dante* symphonies.

Much the same can be said of the Liszt in Hilmes's study: After wading through page after page of social intrigue, one finds it difficult to recognize the musical giant who founded the modern school of bravura piano-playing, trained the next generation of piano virtuosos, and opened the door to the atonal experiments of the 20th century through his own late compositions (such as the *Bagatelle sans tonalité* of 1885). One gets little feeling for the exuberant panache of the opera transcriptions, the impressionistic shimmer of transcendental études, or the iconoclastic gestures of the symphonic poems.

In fact, the transformative *Faust* and *Dante* symphonies are relegated to two short paragraphs, swept aside by the tsunami of scuttlebutt that floods Hilmes's account. Yet in Liszt's time, the shock waves produced by his music had greater impact than the scandals accompanying his private life. The animated dialogue that accompanied the reception of Liszt's forward-looking music is sadly missing here.

A similar, gossip-oriented approach was taken recently by John Suchet

in *Beethoven: The Man Revealed* (reviewed in these pages, June 2, 2014), and one begins to worry about a new trend in music biography: exploring the saucier sides of composers' lives, in the manner of social media, to the neglect of their works. For a more balanced view of Liszt, the reader must turn to Alan Walker's magisterial three-volume biography from the 1980s (*Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811-1847*; *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years 1848-1861*; *Franz Liszt: The Final Years 1861-1886*), which doesn't skirt the darker aspects of the composer's personality but weighs them evenly against his extraordinary achievements. With Walker, we find a pivotal musician who helped change the course of Western music. With Hilmes, we find an often-harried celebrity and superstar who seems to have composed on the side, between road shows and assignations. This makes for lively reading, but one misses the music. ♦

B&A

In Strategic Retreat

Rationalizing the world according to Barack Obama.

BY JORDAN CHANDLER HIRSCH

The Long Game
How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World
by Derek Chollet
PublicAffairs, 288 pp., $26.99

In the first pages of his account of the Obama administration's foreign policy, Derek Chollet likens Barack Obama to Warren Buffett. Just as the renowned businessman is a "proudly pragmatic value investor" who pays little mind to "the whims of the moment" and focuses on "solid investments," Obama aims for "persistent and steady progress" in foreign affairs, ignoring "over-the-top rhetoric and concocted drama" in favor of restoring "balance," "restraint," and "sustainability."

Obama speaks of hitting "singles and doubles" and "steer[ing] the ocean liner two degrees north or south" so often that Chollet's comparison seems to reflect the president's self-conception, if not the reality of his failures. But by the end of *The Long Game*, the Buffett analogy ends up revealing more in its vivid contrast to what Obama truly intended to accomplish.

Many readers of this book will have already parsed Obama's major foreign policy speeches and myriad magazine profiles. Chollet, a self-described "card-carrying member" of the Democratic foreign policy establishment, and former senior official in the Obama administration, thoroughly mines the president's own plentiful words to explain "the intellectual foundations of Obama's foreign policy." The approach can wear, but *The Long Game* usefully synthesizes these many strands into a concise, coherent narrative of Obama's worldview.

Chollet seems most interested in beating back critics who claim that the Obama administration didn't know what it was doing. In that, he succeeds. *The Long Game* exhaustively demonstrates that Obama entered office with a strategy, telegraphed it repeatedly, and followed it throughout. From the Syria red-line debacle to Russia's resurgence, he shows this strategy play out through the major global issues confronting the administration over the past seven-and-a-half years. In each case, he explains the policymaking process, addresses criticisms, and largely concludes that Obama hewed to his grand strategic aims.

What were those aims? According to Chollet, they emerged out of the Iraq war, which came to define Obama's approach to American foreign policy. In 2007, candidate Obama promised to "challenge" the "conventional thinking" that produced the war, which fueled "a media that too often reported spin instead of facts" and a foreign policy elite "that largely boarded the bandwagon" for the conflict and perpetuated bad habits and "outdated assumptions." Obama, Chollet argues, sought to swat down this dangerous hype to "do something" and, instead, play "the Long Game."

Chollet never precisely defines this "Long Game," but the tropes are familiar enough. Obama's strategy, like any good strategy, "reflects the totality of American interests." The president seeks to "project global leadership in an era of seemingly infinite demands and finite resources," and focuses on "bring[ing] countries together to shape outcomes, set agendas," and address problems "in a sustainable way." Chollet argues that by adhering to a "checklist" of principles, such as balance, restraint, patience, and fallibility Obama rescued the United States from "strategic insolvency." The result, without a hint of irony: "in 2016, America is great again."

For evidence of such success, Chollet mostly cites the existence of the strategy alone. If the president "largely remained true to the policies he outlined before taking office," he wonders, "why has Obama's foreign policy performance proven so controversial?" The many fires burning, or near ignition, across the globe might offer some clues. Yet where many see American incompetence and irresolution, Chollet sees limitations—and a president who sagely recognized them and did the best he could.

This perspective helps explain the logic behind Chollet's argument that America's intervention in Libya, as stunning a disaster as they come, "does not undermine Obama's Long Game approach." Balancing European clamor for action with perennial

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concerns about (in Obama's words) "getting sucked into another war," the president proposed an "innovative hybrid approach"—or, in English, "split the difference." Obama, of course, "came up with the idea himself." As Chollet recalls, the president "later observed that he was not entirely surprised" that his primitive, Washington playbook-enslaved advisers "had failed to come up with this option."

The imperious, weary sigh wafts off the page.

Chollet is more circumspect than his former employer about Libya, but ultimately sides with the president: "By letting others share or dominate the spotlight," he contends, Obama embodied "the definition of strength—to bring the world together to solve a specific problem, achieving goals that the United States could not—or should not—get done alone." In Chollet's view, the fact that the Europeans, Arabs, and Libyans themselves did not shine is beyond American control. For Chollet, these "limits" make Libya "more of a tragedy than a policy failure."

This abdication of responsibility is notable less for its unselfconsciousness than for the definition of strength that informs it. Under that definition, results matter less than process. Libya may be a catastrophe; yet the White House nobly bucked the foreign policy consensus and beat its own "innovative hybrid" path based on nostrums of cooperation and sustainability—the modern meaning of strength.

That same definition informs Chollet's analysis of Russia's interventions in Ukraine and Syria. "Yes," he concedes, "Russia has occupied Crimea and holds sway over seven percent of Ukraine's territory," and it "put some points on the scoreboard" by saving Bashar al-Assad. But he approvingly quotes Obama declaring the fact that Putin "invades Crimea or is trying to prop up Assad doesn't suddenly make him a player." Unfortunately, Chollet excludes the next, revealing portion of Obama's comments: "You don't see [Putin] in any of these meetings out here helping to shape the agenda. … [T]here's not a G20 meeting where the Russians set the agenda around any of the issues that are important." Since Russia isn't setting sustainable agendas at global confabs it can only lose in the long run. Chollet sees a Russia facing sanctions in Europe and isolation in the Middle East from its "open alliance with Iran, Hezbollah, and Assad" and scratches his head. Putin's endgame, he says, "is hard to discern."

President Obama meets President Xi (2014).

It is not so hard to discern for Jerusalem, Cairo, and Riyadh, who dispatch emissaries to Putin frequently enough these days to keep the seat warm for their archnemesis, Qassem Suleimani. Nor is it hard to see from Poland and Romania, whom Putin recently warned were in Russia's "crosshairs." These nations recognize that there remains more to international relations than G20 conferences, economic interests, and objective comparisons of military might. There's perception—and preserving strength often depends on a state's ability to shape it. States need more than superior power alone; they must also convince their adversaries of their will to use it. They must earn credibility. A state's capabilities may remain objectively the same. A state's power, however, waxes and wanes based on perceptions of its willingness to use it.

Hence the frequent flier miles accruing on trips to Moscow.

It's not that Obama doesn't recognize this more traditional "perception of what it means to be strong." As Chollet happily reports, he simply rejects it. Obama, he says, is "deeply skeptical of the Washington establishment's obsession with credibility," demonstrating "little tolerance" for what he sees as mere "posturing." In today's world, Chollet declares, the game has changed. Or as Obama put it, "you cannot be a 21st-century power and act like a 20th-century dictatorship." According to Chollet, the president believes "the way you measure strength is by actually being strong, not just boasting that you are strong." The greatest threat isn't an inferior adversary; it's a "trap" set by concerns for credibility.

Under this rubric, Russian, Iranian, or Chinese aggression seems illogical. It sinks economies and risks quagmire for the sake of winning temporary gains in outmoded, irrational realms. To borrow an Obama favorite that Chollet surprisingly fails to cite, these nations are ultimately on the "wrong side of history."

The Long Game boils down to a defense of this view. Barack Obama believes that the 21st century represents a quantum leap in human history and that the concept of strength is far more evolved than that which prevailed for thousands of years. The administration's actions in Syria, Libya, and elsewhere had as much to do with the events themselves as with enlightening the unreconstructed about the new nature of geopolitics.

Chollet describes this notion of strength as a return to humility and proportion. But Obama's grand strategy attempts to edit out honor and perception, two of the most enduring elements of statecraft from time immemorial. That's less Buffett than Bonaparte, and a very long game indeed. ♦

KYODO NEWS / NEWSCOM

B&A

Rome Is Burning

The words and music for a classical grand opera.

BY SUSANNE KLINGENSTEIN

This book is a knockout, a severe blow to the brain and to the gut, having arrived at a time when Europeans and Americans have been thinking hard about the social and economic forces that can unhinge republics. Safeguarding the vulnerable structures that allow large and complex societies to live with a modicum of inner peace becomes harder as groups and individuals within it become more entitled and exploitative. A functioning republic requires self-discipline and commitment to the common good; where self-discipline fails, discipline must be enforced by the powers of the republic.

This truism, belabored by political moralists of varied stripes from Cicero to Machiavelli to Gibbon, may be too obvious to merit reiterating. But just what happens when civic thinking goes to the dogs, and political safeguards fail, is driven home by this riveting account of the devolution of the Roman Republic into the violent cinematic mess we call the Roman Empire.

This is not to imply that the Roman Republic was a mild *civitas* of woolly sheep. The Roman nobles were a pack of wolves, hunting as allies when it was useful and then turning on each other, as their wolf-raised ancestors Romulus and Remus had done, when the time had come to kill those who stood in the way of preeminence and vast possessions. Needless to say, the most persuasive victors, notably Gaius Julius Caesar and his adopted son Gaius Octavius (later Emperor Augustus), committed their bloody deeds to safeguard the republic. But saving it meant transforming it into a functioning top-to-bottom system that controlled the voracious appetites of its men and women.

Dynasty
The Rise and Fall of the House of Caesar
by Tom Holland
Doubleday, 512 pp., $30

Among the many intriguing vignettes here is a description of the *lupercalia*, one of the oldest of the many adrenaline-fueled festivals in the Roman calendar. In 44 B.C. Marc Antony, just over 40 years old, was one of the oiled men, girded only with a loincloth of goatskin, who stood at the mouth of a cave where the she-wolf had nursed the twins, waiting for the signal for the *luperci* to begin their race through Rome, whipping half-naked women along their way with goat thongs to encourage pregnancies and prevent stillbirths. Marc Antony had a job to do. On the rostra, the old speaker's platform in front of the senate house, Caesar, recently appointed dictator for life, was waiting for him in the purple toga of the old kings. Stepping up to the rostra, Marc Antony held out to him "that ultimate symbol of monarchy, a diadem entwined with laurel. A few desultory rounds of applause greeted the gesture; otherwise all was leaden silence. Then Caesar, after a pause, pushed the diadem away—and the Forum echoed to tumultuous cheering."

By declining the diadem, Caesar had pulled back from the brink. But it didn't help him much: By "laying claim to a perpetual dictatorship, and putting his fellow senators so utterly in the shade," Holland explains, Caesar "had signed his own death warrant." Exactly a month later, he was knifed to death in the senate and his murder unleashed another violent civil war from which Marc Antony and Octavian emerged victorious after the bloodbath at Philippi in 42 B.C.

They split the empire: Marc Antony headed east; Octavian returned to Rome, now faced with the task of settling 50,000 battle-hardened veterans each on a plot of land. Expropriation was "the order of the day"; all resistance was brutally crushed. Only after this final internal clobbering were the Romans ready to let go of the Republic and allow Octavian's gradual ascension to the position of *princeps*. Holland narrates the subsequent rise of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. After the calculating strategists Augustus and Tiberius, it netted Caligula, pulled Claudius out from behind a curtain, and exhausted itself in Nero. Holland's psychological portraits, written with the mind of a novelist, attempt to create the *feel* of being alive in Rome and dizzied by the awareness of having absolute power.

Narrative history is what Holland calls his works, and they are best enjoyed by readers already familiar with Rome's history and political structure because Holland's pace is relentless, pounding the reader with event after event, coursing through the bedrooms, sewers, and bloodbaths of Rome with breathless intensity. It's all great fun for the initiated, even if Holland's saturated British style with its excursions into the colloquial ("By 32 B.C., the young Caesar was ready at last to go for broke") calls too much attention to itself and becomes a bit tiring. We begin to find it obtrusive, too.

Still, Holland's sweeping command of his material is ravishing, and the deftness with which he weaves apt or juicy lines by Rome's greatest writers into the flow of his storytelling is among the many pleasures of *Dynasty*. Holland naturally excels at narrative highpoints. But it is in his portrait of Augustus—his gradual change from callow youth and hopeless general, who lay sick in bed during the battle at Philippi, to brilliant strategist of social and political pacification, who understood that social peace depended on abundant water, clean sewers, safe streets, and replenished granaries—where Holland excels.

Susanne Klingenstein is the author, most recently, of a biography of the Yiddish writer Mendele Moykher Sforim.

Ovid grew up during the Pax Augusta, detested life in the countryside, adored the city, and became the "authentic voice of Roman metrosexuality." At a time when laws were passed that criminalized adultery—forcing Augustus to send his daughter Julia into exile and her daughter, likewise, 10 years later—Ovid wrote a guide to the arts of love. For a decade he was thumbing his nose at the princeps. But in 8 A.D., Augustus summoned the poet, interviewed him, and decided his fate: Exile to Tomis on the Black Sea. "Ovid," writes Holland, "exiled to a 'frontier zone just recently and precariously brought under the rule of law', was having his metrosexual nose rubbed by the Princeps in a brutal fact."

> There could be no arts of peace without a mastery of war. It was not, in the final reckoning, good drains or gleaming temples, let alone a taste for poetry, that distinguished a civilized man from a savage, but steel: the steel it took to stand shield to shield in a line of battle, and then advance.

Gaius Octavian, like many nobles, had experienced this as a young man; Ovid had not. Now the princeps made sure that, at the outermost limit of the empire, the poet would crave what he had ridiculed: "It is discipline, strict military discipline, that is the surest guardian of Roman power," wrote the rhetorical hack Valerius Maximus. In Tomis, Ovid wished for more Roman discipline. That was his punishment. ♦

B&A

Critic for Life

What was Auden thinking when he wasn't writing poetry?

BY EDWARD SHORT

"At the beginning of the 21st century," Edward Mendelson writes in his entry on W.H. Auden in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, "many readers thought it not implausible to judge his work the greatest body of poetry in English of the previous hundred years or more." Even allowing for a literary executor's special pleading, this is an extravagant claim: Auden's poetry is full of good things, but it is also full of bad things. And the latter are usually the result of bad rhetoric. That Auden regarded "September 1, 1939," for example, as "infected with an incurable dishonesty" says something for the probity of his criticism. If he was capable of writing nonsense, he was also capable of owning up to writing nonsense.

Some of the bad rhetoric that marred Auden's work can be blamed on his left-wing politics.Valentine Cunningham's *British Writers of the Thirties* (1988) brilliantly supplies the cultural and historical context for those politics. Yet Auden also acquired his rhetorical excesses from William Butler Yeats, whose public persona he initially tried to emulate. One of the virtues of this mammoth, six-volume edition of Auden's prose, which covers his essays and reviews from 1926 until his death in 1973, is that it shows how the poet gradually renounced the public stage for a more self-effacing, meditative, private life, especially after settling in America in 1939 at the age of 32.

The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Prose
edited by Edward Mendelson

Volume 1: 1926-1938
Princeton, 880 pp., $130

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Princeton, 1,024 pp., $87.50

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Princeton, 608 pp., $65

Volume 6: 1969-1973
Princeton, 808 pp., $65

"When the ship catches fire," he wrote in a piece on Rilke, "it seems only natural to rush importantly to the pumps, but perhaps one is only adding to the general confusion and panic: to sit still and pray seems selfish and unheroic, but it may be the wisest and most helpful course." Later, speaking with the *Paris Review* in 1972, he insisted that "a poet, *qua* poet, has only one political duty, namely, in his own writing to set an example of the correct use of his mother tongue which is always being corrupted."

How Auden regarded this duty can be seen in his moving eulogy for his friend Louis MacNeice, "The Cave of Making" (1964), in which he celebrated the demands of the art to which he devoted his life.

After all, it's rather a privilege
amid the affluent traffic
to serve this unpopular art which cannot
be turned into
background noise for study
or hung as a status trophy by rising
executives,
cannot be "done" like Venice
or abridged like Tolstoy, but stubbornly
still insists upon
being read or ignored…

One can agree or disagree with the charge brought by Philip Larkin that Auden's intellectual interests stultified his poetry, but one cannot maintain that the essays in which he pursued those interests are stultifying. They exude zest. There may be much about the writing of Auden's generation that is meretricious. Evelyn Waugh was unsparing about Stephen Spender—"To see him fumbling with our rich and delicate language is to experience all the horror of seeing a Sèvres vase in the hands of a chimpanzee"—yet Auden wrote a sprightly, elegant, witty prose. And if his reviewing paid the bills, it also helped to shape his protean poetry. The relationship between the state and the individual, history and human suffering, cultural vitality and cultural decay, talent and the snares that entrammel talent—these are the constant preoccupations of his poetry, and

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they are abundantly explored in these well-annotated volumes.

Since Auden only published two essay collections, *The Dyer's Hand* (1962) and *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973), there is much uncollected and unpublished work gathered here, and together with the previously published pieces, they reveal a good deal about the poet's inner life. In 1964, for instance, in a review of autobiographies by Waugh and Leonard Woolf, he wrote something of an autobiography of his own in which he gave expression not so much to family or personal history as to the exile's inexorable loneliness. Writing about other artists beguiled his sense of aloneness.

The range of Auden's subjects is staggering: Goethe, Gogol, Hardy, James, Stravinsky, Mozart, Tennyson, Sainte-Beuve, Dickens, Shakespeare, Dante, Kipling, Wagner, Cervantes, Johnson, Beerbohm, Waugh, Wilde, Scott—these and many others make lively appearances here. In a review of a book on Tennyson, Auden relates how the great poet was dining one night with Benjamin Jowett, the master of Balliol, and after reciting one of his new poems, Jowett said to him: "I shouldn't publish that poem if I were you, Tennyson." To which the poet replied: "Well, if it comes to that, Master, the sherry you served us before dinner was filthy."

Journalists will be amused by a long piece that Auden submitted to *Life* in 1966 on the fall of Rome, in which he observed certain startling parallels between the third and 20th centuries:

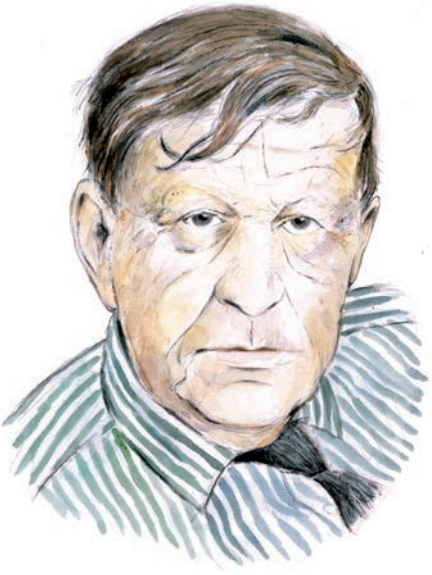
> Instead of Gnostics, we have Existentialists and God-is-dead theologians, instead of Neo-Platonists, devotees of Zen, instead of desert hermits, heroin addicts and Beats (who also, oddly enough, seem averse to washing), instead of mortification of the flesh, sado-masochistic pornography; as for our public entertainments, the fare offered by television is still a shade less brutal than that provided by the Amphitheatre, but only a shade and may not be so for long.

Edward Mendelson points out that *Life* was willing to pay the poet $10,000 for the piece, if only he toned it down. Auden refused, and was paid nothing.

The pieces here on poetry reveal Auden's poetic ambitions. "It is frequently the case," he observes,

> that a minor poet produces more single poems which seem flawless than a major one, because it is one of the distinguishing marks of a major poet that he continues to develop, that the moment he has learnt how to write one kind of poem, he goes on to attempt something else, new subjects, new ways of treatment or both, an attempt in which he may quite possibly fail.

The very versatility of Auden's poetic output—with its restless array of different forms—shows how keen he was to achieve major status, though his stylistically conservative poems tend to be his best. "For the Time Being" (1944) and "The Mirror and the Sea" (1944) may be full of technical virtuosity, but "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" (1939), "A Walk After Dark" (1949), and "On the Circuit" (1965) are more memorable. Nonetheless, Auden has amusing things to say on form: "Rhymes, meters, stanza forms, etc. are like servants," he writes. "If the master is just enough to win their affection and firm enough to command their respect, the result is an orderly happy household. If he is too tyrannical, they give notice; if he lacks authority, they become slovenly, impertinent, drunk and dishonest."



On his fellow poets, Auden is at once generous and insightful. Of Alexander Pope, he observes, "if Wordsworth had Pope in mind as the enemy when he advised poets to write 'in the language really used by men,' he was singularly in error." Pope writes as men normally speak; it is Wordsworth and the Romantics who resort to "poetic" language. In the case of Byron, Auden points out that, while the author of *Don Juan* might have been a master of form, and particularly comic form, he never managed "deep emotions" or "profound thoughts." Why? Auden quotes Lady Byron, who once said of the poet: "He is the absolute monarch of words, and uses them as Bonaparte did lives, for conquest, without regard to their intrinsic value."

Considering the strictures leveled against Auden's own glibness, there was a certain self-knowledge in this unanswerable reproof. Then again, regarding the poet about whose influence he was so ambivalent, Auden says that "Yeats is probably the only poet in [the 20th century] who has written great poetry on political subjects," which was another way of admitting his own poor showing in that usually sterile vein. Of Marianne Moore, he writes, "Those who believe, as I do, that what any poem says should be true and that, in our own noisy, overcrowded age, a quiet and intimate poetic speech is the only genuine way of saying it, will find in *O to Be a Dragon* exactly what they are looking for."

Regarding his publisher at Faber, Auden confesses, with a twinkle in his eye, that while T.S. Eliot was "one of the most idiosyncratic of poets, both in his subject matter and in his technique," and therefore impossible to imitate, he still exerted a salutary influence on a younger poet prone to waywardness:

> None of us, I think, imitated him exactly by taking to a bowler hat and a tight-rolled umbrella, but he certainly taught us it was unbecoming to dress or behave in public like the romantic conception of a poet.

Now that Princeton has completed this superb edition, we can look forward to reacquainting ourselves with a wonderfully discerning, erudite, life-enhancing critic. W.H. Auden may not have been the greatest poet of the 20th century, but he was certainly one of our most enjoyable critics. ♦

KATHERINE MESSENGER

B&A

Are the Kids Alright?

How the dread hand of government is spoiling childhood.

BY GRAHAM HILLARD

Unless I overlooked copies of Hillary Clinton's *Hard Choices*—or Donald Trump's *The Art of the Deal*—*No Child Left Alone* has surely been the most anxiety-producing read at the beach this summer. While my fellow vacationers splashed through the mass-market fiction list, I dove beneath the deep waves of bureaucratic overreach and regulatory aggression. My choice, alas, was not without its costs: As my children ran and played, I found myself keeping an eye out for the police. After all, my 3- and 5-year-olds had wandered 30 feet away from me—then 50, then 70. Would Child Protective Services swoop down like a seagull and snatch them up?

Such are the thoughts any reader might have while enjoying Abby W. Schachter's timely exposé of public intrusion into private childrearing. Like David Harsanyi's *Nanny State* and Philip K. Howard's *The Rule of Nobody*—two predecessors credited by Schachter in her bibliography—*No Child Left Alone* combines a readable tone with moral outrage at the absurdities of overbearing governance. Whereas Harsanyi and Howard aim broadly, however, Schachter examines the specific interplay of family and state: of children, parents, and the "village" doing its damnedest to get between them.

Schachter's genius is for—and this book is propelled by—the perfectly chosen example, from the Florida mother of two arrested after allowing her 7-year-old to walk half a mile to a playground, to a North Carolina 4-year-old whose home-packed turkey and cheese sandwich was confiscated by a "food inspector" and replaced with cafeteria-grade chicken nuggets. On page after page, readers are left with the same frustrating question: How did we, an ostensibly free people, get here?

No Child Left Alone
Getting the Government Out of Parenting
by Abby W. Schachter
Encounter, 280 pp., $25.99

For Schachter, the answer is clear. At every level of enforcement—from the cop on his beat to the social worker hamstrung by mandated-reporting laws—public officials have become bound by standardized procedural regiments that crowd out individual judgment in the name of lawsuit-avoidance and worst-case-scenario-ism. If Johnny swallows a toy, the argument goes, the toy must be banned; if Susie is at risk of obesity, every schoolchild must count her calories.

The consequence of such thinking, Schachter argues, is that Americans have begun to be governed according to "the shocking exception" rather than "the norm." And because "the one-size-fits-all solution is the only one that government can handle"—a point repeatedly demonstrated here —rules crafted in response to those exceptions are inevitably applied wherever government reaches, from daycare operations to the public school system to kids' toys to children's very *weight*. In the most provocative section—a startlingly confrontational look at pro-breastfeeding policies (Schachter might say propaganda)—the author shows that even *nursing* now falls within the state's line of vision.

Of course, standardization is only partly to blame for the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. Borrowing a concept from Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe's *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, Schachter suggests that American society needs to reclaim its "moral will," the common sense with which we used to balance the likelihood of harm against our children's need to take charge, to learn from failure—even failure accompanied by suffering—and to practice real independence.

This last point, it must be said, can take some getting used to at its farthest edges, even among parents who (like me) have a theoretical desire to give our children the freedom of movement and the responsibility that we once enjoyed. Reading Schachter's celebrations of tween subway riding and underage babysitting, I felt my heart beating a little faster, whatever my beliefs. What I hadn't yet considered, and what Schachter ultimately makes clear, is that my response was part of a vicious circle, in which "the overreaction of the nanny state to young people who are allowed to operate independently feeds the already overly developed anxiety of parents regarding their kids' freedom." Because the state has so narrowed the range of acceptable, even *possible* behavior, to strain against those limits even a little feels far more dangerous than it should.

Furthermore, the probabilities and "norms" held up here as an answer to the "shocking exception" are, in many cases, understood too pessimistically. A 2014 Gallup poll found, for example, that 63 percent of Americans said that crime was up despite its long and steady decline since the 1990s. It is in the shadows cast by such mischaracterizations of reality that the regulators of contemporary childhood accrue power with virtually no opposition.

What opposition exists provides Abby Schachter with some heroes: the "Captain Mommies and Daddies" who push back, speak up, and, in extreme cases, risk criminalization rather than ceding their parenting responsibilities to the state. We should read their stories, steel ourselves, and join them. ♦

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B&A

Off-Road Vehicle

A back-country crime picture in the great tradition.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Hell or High Water
Directed by David Mackenzie

Chris Pine, Ben Foster

There's a new bank-robber movie that's good enough to survive what may be the worst title in recent memory: *Hell or High Water*, a name that evokes precisely nothing about the picture even though it refers to a throwaway line spoken in its third act. At least, back in the day, when Hollywood came up with a bad title, it *really* came up with a bad title—like *Dirty Dingus Magee*, *The Fish That Saved Pittsburgh*, *The Great Scout and Cathouse Thursday*, and *The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox*, all names evidently designed to repel moviegoers rather than lure them into theaters. *Hell or High Water* is merely a forgettable title, and I should know, because I forgot it when I was trying to tell someone to go see it a few hours after I'd done so.

Hell or High Water is a throwback to the kinds of sharp, smart, unpretentious crime pictures Hollywood sometimes made in the 1970s, right down to the presence of 1970s kid icon Jeff Bridges in a leading role. He starred in at least two such films then: the wonderful *Last American Hero*, about a kid from a moonshining family who becomes a stock-car racer, and *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, in which he teamed up to pull heists with Clint Eastwood. No longer the feckless boy of Nixon's America, Bridges is here a senior citizen running out of time in Obama's. He's three weeks from retirement, a canny and lonely childless widower terrified of how little his life will matter after he lays down his badge.

Those older movies and others like them—*Charley Varrick* with Walter Matthau, *Gator* with Burt Reynolds, and the no-stars smash of 1974 called *Macon County Line*—all take place in a White America already in the rearview mirror decades before *Breaking Bad*, *Hillbilly Elegy*, or the Donald Trump voter. *Hell or High Water* is set entirely in small towns across the dusty confines of West Texas, including the town of Archer City, where *The Last Picture Show* (with Jeff Bridges!) was filmed back in 1970.

The road signs in these towns promote second mortgages, and buy-backs, and other commercial transaction possibilities following the real-estate meltdown of 2008. Bridges is called in because a pair of robbers are hitting a series of branch banks in these towns. They go in, take only cash from the teller drawers rather than packets of traceable money, and vamoose. Because these third-rate banks are changing over from VHS surveillance tapes to digital systems and haven't gotten the hang of it yet, there are no pictures of the bad guys.

Unlike Bridges, we know who's behind the robberies, because the movie begins with a bravura sequence (the handiwork of the terrific Scottish director David Mackenzie), in which we see the two thieves park outside a bank, rob it in two minutes, and drive away. They're brothers—the quietly brooding Chris Pine (better known as the rebooted Captain Kirk in the recent *Star Treks*) and the insanely intense Ben Foster (whose specialty is playing insanely intense characters in movies like *3:10 to Yuma* and *Alpha Dog*). Foster is just out of prison, and he's signed on to help his little brother Pine, who's collecting money for a purpose we only come to understand later in the picture.

We get a sense of the torment of their lives as we go: a mother who has spent years dying a painful death, widowed by a father so abusive that Foster actually found it necessary to kill him in what is passed off as a hunting accident. Pine is penniless and owes his ex-wife thousands in child support, which has kept him from seeing his sons. They are left behind. But they're smart and interesting, as is the screenplay by Taylor Sheridan. They take their ill-gotten gains to an Indian casino across the border in Oklahoma, use the cash they've purloined to buy chips, and then cash in the chips. They know what they're doing.

The movie cuts between them and Bridges, who begins to see a pattern in their behavior. The robbers only go after the branches of a single entity, Texas Midlands Bank. It's the same bank from which their mother got a reverse mortgage for the ramshackle family ranch—a deal that fleeced her and will leave her sons with nothing. Unless they act. Which they do, with unexpectedly tragic and positive results.

Hell or High Water is not a masterpiece, as *The Last Picture Show* is, but compared with the tiresome and repetitive fare dominating the multiplexes these days—superhero this, comic book that, animated the other thing—it seems extraordinarily fresh and vivid. And it is capped off with a perfectly rendered final scene that might earn Bridges his second Oscar. So go see it, if you can remember the name. ♦

FILM 44

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

"Ryan Lochte Goes on Apology Tour After Robbery Scandal"
—Wall Street Journal *headline, August 21, 2016*

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Lochte: 'Who's sorry now?'

BLAME IT ON RIO

'It's you, not me'

BY ALAN GARNER

PHUKET, Thailand — When asked how his apology tour was progressing, U.S. Olympic swimmer Ryan Lochte said, "It's been a little tense. Now a little to the right, lower—oh yeah, that's the spot." It was unclear if he was referring to the tension following his dust-up with Brazilian authorities or a particular back muscle—the 12-time medalist was in the midst of a traditional Thai massage when he decided to call a press conference.

But why Phuket? "It seems I've offended a lot of folks, not just Brazilians," explained Lochte. "So that's why I am here, to apologize to the beautiful Thai people. A little lower—and careful where you place those hot stones!" After this Southeast Asian beach resort, the next stops on the tour are Jamaica, Ibiza, Amsterdam, and Las Vegas.

Only now, said Lochte, is he ready to speak the truth about his experience in Rio, in which he previously claimed to have been a victim of a robbery by gunmen in police uniforms. "It was all very confusing," he recalled. "Before we went out to the clubs, someone drugged us. The next thing you know, we wake up back in our hotel, there's a baby in the closet and a tiger in the bathroom. Plus we couldn't find Gunnar Bentz, who was stranded on the rooftop. It was just the craziest bachelor party ever. Did I say bachelor party? I meant Olympic Games."

In addition, Lochte claimed his fellow swimmers were obsessed with finding a mysterious golden idol buried deep inside a cave. "Oh man, there were like poison darts and tarantulas and then there was this giant boulder!" When asked about the video showing Lochte and his teammates at a gas station, the Olympian said, "I ran out of gas. I had a flat tire. I didn't have enough money for cab fare. My tux didn't come back from the cleaners. An old friend came in from out of town. Someone stole my car. There was an earthquake. A terrible flood. Locusts! It wasn't my

FAULT CONTINUED ON A6

ORIGINAL: GARETH WILLIAMS

Ryan Lochte gets loose in Thailand on his five-country apology tour.

Clinton Foundation goes legit

Sidney Blumenthal named interim chairman

the weekly Standard

SEPTEMBER 5, 2016