the weekly Standard

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What Happened? What Next?

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Dream On

Tucked among the anguished headlines in last week's editions of the *Washington Post* was this poignant update: "In election's wake, D.C. statehood becomes a dream deferred." The quotation from Langston Hughes was no accident, of course: "Dream deferred" makes it clear that the *Post* regards statehood for the District of Columbia as a civil rights issue, and that the election of Donald Trump—and the retention of Republican control of Congress—can have only one meaning.

The issue, however, is a little more complicated than that. One of the stranger developments in politics, in recent months, has been the sudden resurgence of interest in statehood for Washington, D.C. Until Election Day, the mayor, Muriel Bowser, had made it a priority of her young administration—there had even been a mock constitutional convention to map the future—and the 2016 Democratic party platform declared that "restoring our democracy also means finally passing statehood for the District of Columbia."

The problem is that the United States Constitution is fairly explicit about the status of what James Madison called the "federal district," separate from any state and subject to strict congressional supervision. Article 1, Section 8, Clause 17 of the Constitution advises that "Congress shall have Power to . . . exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over such District . . . as may, by Cession of particular states, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the Seat of the Government of the United States."

In 1800, the aforementioned "cession" was carved from Maryland and Virginia, straddling the Potomac River, and in 1846, the southern portion of the District was returned to Virginia. But the plain fact is this: If Washington, D.C., were to become a state, it would require an amendment to the Constitution—and as Mayor Bowser and the *Washington Post* now realize, that isn't going to happen any time soon.

Which is not to say that the status of the District of Columbia hasn't evolved. Up until the mid-1960s, it really was governed, almost directly, by "District" committees of the House and Senate; but after 1967, and again in 1973, when limited home-rule legislation was enacted, Washington gained a measure of self-government, including an elected mayor, council, and school board, and a non-voting member of Congress. In 1978, an overwhelmingly Democratic Congress did pass a constitutional amendment granting the District a voting representative in Congress, and President Jimmy Carter supported it; but the states didn't ratify it within the seven-year deadline.

And there, for the most part, the matter has rested. Of course, as long as there is a Republican party with any semblance of life in America, statehood for the nation's capital is unlikely to be realized. Washington, D.C., is overwhelmingly Democratic—Hillary Clinton won 93 percent of the vote last week—and, among other things, statehood would add two new Democrats to the Senate. Moreover, District politicians have generally rejected attempts at compromise: Then-Rep. Tom Davis, a Virginia Republican, tried unsuccessfully to broker a deal to facilitate a voting member of Congress for Washington in exchange for a new congressional seat in Utah. And proposals for Maryland to repossess the square mileage where Washington, D.C., sits have always been rejected—by Maryland.

In The Scrapbook's view, statehood is not just a pipe dream but a bad idea. The Constitution is clear about the status of the District of Columbia, and no taxpaying citizen—no teacher, no firefighter, not even the president—is required to reside there. One might also argue that instead of having a single nonvoting "delegate," District residents are represented by every member of Congress.

Then there is the long-term question of precedent and the integrity of the union. If the mid-sized metropolis of Washington, D.C., is entitled to statehood, what about Chicago or Atlanta or Philadelphia? Southern and Northern California might well be tempted to split; Middle Tennessee is very different from East Tennessee; and Manhattanites might well contemplate what, if anything, they have in common with their fellow New Yorkers in Niagara Falls. ♦

Apocalypse Now

After all of the dark speculation in the media over whether Donald Trump and his supporters would gracefully accept losing to Hillary Clinton, the reaction of her supporters to the sudden reversal of fortune inflicted by voters has been something to behold. To summarize: The world is literally ending.

We exaggerate only slightly. Twitter was flooded with apocalyptic angst on Tuesday night and into Wednesday morning. (The planet is now doomed by climate change, and so on.) Then there were, of course, the protests across the country. At one point, protesters in Minneapolis made a big show of disrupting the city's light-rail service—because surely nothing quite discomfits rural blue-collar Trump voters like seeing the disruption of urban public transit boondoggles. And come on, guys—it's 2016. We stodgy patriotic conservatives still object to

flag burning; seeing it on the news, though, is pretty passé these days.

But the rabble will act like the rabble. What's more remarkable is how many well-known figures among the liberal intelligentsia exchanged dignity for despair, not to mention the willingness of respectable publications to let them humiliate themselves. Columnist Lindy West wrote in the *New York Times* that she cried so much over the election that she "left mascara-tinged rosettes blooming black in my cereal milk." It's safe to say she's not going to draw any instructive lessons from the voters' message. "We have proof, in exit polls, that white women will pawn their humanity for the safety of white supremacy," West writes. "We have abortion pills to stockpile and neighbors to protect and children to teach." Liberal "comedian" Samantha Bee struck a similarly self-indulgent chord, declaring that white people had "ruined America. . . . Let's get off the floor and get busy, especially you, white women. We've got some karma to work off." Cable news, as you might have expected, was not a bastion of thoughtfulness. CNN commentator Van Jones declared that the election outcome was the result of a "whitelash."

Aside from blaming women and white people—otherwise known as a large majority of the country—there emerged amid the panic an odd subgenre of liberal men mansplaining democratic elections to their daughters. The *Washington Post*'s Dana Milbank published an open letter to his daughter informing her, and us, that "this is a sad day for our country. I want you to know that I did everything I could to prevent this from happening." Given that the media's approval rating is far below Trump's, Milbank should probably confront the possibility that strident bloviating like this helped elect the man.

But Milbank's letter was nothing compared to Aaron Sorkin's letter to his 15-year-old daughter published by *Vanity Fair*. Aside from being hysterical, it was shockingly crass and ineloquent coming from one of the country's best screenwriters. "I don't think this guy can make it a year without committing an impeachable crime," Sorkin said by way of trying to reassure her. "If he does manage to be a douche nozzle without breaking the law for four years, we'll make it through those four years."

Since we don't want to encourage any more baseless recriminations and panic, we'll end this by referring you to the letter The Weekly Standard's movie critic John Podhoretz posted in response on Twitter:

Dear Daughters,
Trump won.
Signed,
Daddy
P.S. You'll live. ♦

Cowering on Campus

One more unforeseen consequence of Donald Trump's election victory: College students who have been spending too much time binge drinking or binge watching now have a handy excuse for not turning in that required paper on time or for being unprepared for that exam. They can blame it on the election. You see, professor, the prospect of Donald Trump in the White House and the realization that there are millions of Americans out there who have reached their limit when it comes to the nasty little tyrannies of p.c. has just been too much.

The places of higher learning, however, have anticipated this development and actually taken seriously the possibility that the election of Trump might deeply traumatize the delicate creatures they are supposed to be educating. So they have reacted quickly to forestall outbreaks of Trump-induced PTSD. There is, for example, this passage from a letter written by the president of the University of Vermont. (We received a copy from a deep undercover source at UVM.)

"Many on our campus are experiencing a range of emotions, uncertainty, and concerns. As we move forward as a nation and community, many questions remain how the transition and change will affect our lives and society."

The horror . . .

NEWSCOM

So for "colleagues and students, who may be feeling isolated and concerned for personal welfare," the university will be providing "programs and resources . . . for support and encouragement."

At one event there will be "tea and reflections . . . along with meditations (4:15 pm & 6:40 pm) and a structured discussion at 5:30 pm."

The tea is a nice touch and certain to calm the anxieties of those tortured college kids. But if the tea is not enough, there are additional resources, "such as the LGBTQA Center, the ALANA Center, the Women's Center, the Center for Cultural Pluralism, the Office of International Education, the Dean of Students Office, and the Interfaith Coordinator who is the liaison to the Spiritual and Religious Life Council."

The University of Vermont is far from unique in this neurotic response to the election returns. As the *Washington Examiner*'s Ashe Schow reports, students at the University of Michigan-Flint "will be able to visit 'safe spaces' and receive 'counseling' for all their election-woe needs, according to an email sent to the UM-Flint community."

And as our colleague Jenna Lifhits writes at weeklystandard.com, "Barnard, the women's liberal arts college based in New York City, has given professors the opportunity to cancel classes and is offering students counseling after the 'heightened emotions' caused by the election. 'The Barnard faculty is well aware that you may be struggling, and they are here for you,' read an email from the college president and dean."

There are many other examples. And they come from places like Harvard, Stanford, and Yale, where an economics professor saved his students the trouble of coming up with an alibi for shoddy work when he "made his exam optional after students wrote to him expressing 'shock' and sadness over the election results."

Economics professors would, you think, understand incentives, and this seems to be a case of an elite university incentivizing timidity and weakness among those who are, we're told, being trained and educated to lead.

It's hard to follow someone who is hiding under the covers. ♦

Oops

'This could blow up in her face! Hillary Clinton may have lit the fuse for her victory celebration a little too soon—by planning an Election Night explosion of fireworks over the Hudson River, The Post has learned.

"Law enforcement officials and the FDNY have been told to prepare for a barge-launched pyrotechnic display off Manhattan's Javits Center, where Clinton and running mate Tim Kaine will join their supporters for the Nov. 8 vote count, sources said.

"The aerial detonations would last for two minutes, with the triumphal celebration permitted to start as early as 9:30 p.m.—a mere half-hour after the polls close in New York, sources said" (*New York Post*, October 31). ♦

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Unhappy Meal

The other night, my wife and I went out to dinner with our friends Jen and Jay. Ordinarily, we like to keep things simple. We'll head over to their cottage on the Chesapeake Bay. Jay will smoke meat or steam top-neck clams. We'll dig a pit on the beach, gather dried driftwood, and do what grown middle-aged people tend to do: drink and burn things and pee under the stars. (Our wives bypass that last bit, ladies to the last.)

But now that we're living through the Year of Trump, we decided to class things up. So we headed to yet another nearby restaurant that has fallen prey to the small plates revolution. I've always distrusted the term "small plates," nearly as much as I distrust revolutions. It seems to have infected the restaurant world back during the tapas invasion of the early aughts, "tapas" being a Spanish word for "appetizer portions at entree prices."

Small plates are perhaps the most insidious foodie trend of the last two decades. Worse than "architectural presentation," when chefs, for a time, decided to stack all your food in a vertical tower, so that getting to your osso bucco was like playing a game of Jenga. It is more cloying than the cupcakes craze or wrapping everything in bacon (including cupcakes). Only a foodie could ruin something as faultless as bacon.

Since I'm a child of the American century who grew up in the Land of Plenty, small plates are an affront to my national identity. We're Americans. We don't graze like cows. We eat cows. Lots of them. Preferably wrapped in bacon and lacquered in cupcake frosting. We might not make much anymore, but by God, we still make lots of fat people. More of them, all the time. I was reminded of why the other day when filling up at Sheetz and seeing an advertisement above the gas pump for "Mac n' Cheetos"—essentially fried mac and cheese covered in Cheetos dust. "For a limited time," the sign warned, unclear if it was referring to how long you had to get them or how long you have if you eat them.

DAVID CLARK

So before my first coronary, it was high time to give small plates another go. The restaurant was tastefully appointed and well lit, littered with pictures of crab-pickers and oystermen, bygone old salts who'd find it a wee bit pretentious that the family over there in the corner—Mom and Dad and Patagonia and Pumpkin Spice—were ravenously hunched over a plate of curried lamb meatballs with pickled cauliflower and pine nuts, each elbowing their way in (or "sharing" in small-plates parlance), trying to procure one precious lamb puck before they disappeared.

Our waiter, who wore Buddy Holly glasses and looked like he swaps "This American Life" podcast bootlegs with the guys in his PRI discussion group, informed us that small plates are for sharing, so we ought to get a lot of them. We did. But it didn't help, much. Sure, the food was tasty. I really enjoyed my one-quarter of a fried green tomato. The two shrimp I had with the teaspoon of grits was so good, I asked Jen if she was going to pick her shrimp tail.

Even my Old Fashioned was delicious. I almost didn't mind when a server asked if I wanted "bourbon or whiskey" in it. (Silly hipster, bourbon is whiskey.) Instead I just sent him off on an errand of utmost importance to small-plates types ("Could you please ask the bartender what farm this cherry is locally sourced from?") while trying to extract my small pour of liquor from around the gargantuan hand-cut artisanal block of frozen water that made me feel like I was drinking off the Ekström Ice Shelf.

As I finished off my final two forkfuls of chimichurri butcher steak in sweet potato puree, which is to say my only two forkfuls, Jen excused herself to the restroom, then came back with a water-splattered top. "Even their sinks are small," she explained. The bill, of course, wasn't small—about the cost of tuition for a semester at a middling private school. Jay and I split it, as he asked, "So, where should we go for dinner?" We talked of doggy-bagging our locally sourced drink garnishes to make a fruit salad in the car. But the restaurant probably didn't have to-go boxes, since nobody has ever had leftovers. I suggested maybe we should just hit a drive-thru.

Unlike our small plates, it was an idea we all gladly shared.

Matt Labash

the weekly Standard

Do You Hear Me Now?

NEWSCOM

They meant it. There have been five national elections in the past decade. In four of them—2006, 2008, 2010, and 2014—voters gave notice to the politicians who are supposed to lead them. They were different elections and different times, and the results invested power in different political parties. But the message was more or less the same: We want change.

And for the better part of that decade, voters have gotten more of the same. More government, more regulation, more taxes, more doubletalk, more bureaucracy, more corruption, and virtually no accountability. Barack Obama ran as the candidate of "Hope and Change." He promised "change we can believe in" and declared to his supporters: "We are the change that we seek." Immediately upon taking office, Obama issued an executive order on transparency vowing to "restore faith in government, without which we cannot implement the changes we were sent here to make."

He failed.

Faith in government is at all-time lows after nearly eight years of Obama governance. Obama's three legacy achievements—the stimulus, Obamacare, and the Iran deal—are not achievements at all. The United States remains mired in the weakest economic recovery since 1949. Obamacare is collapsing. The Iran deal has put billions of dollars in the hands of the world's leading state sponsor of terror, and if it succeeds even on the terms of its proponents, it will put Iran on the path to nuclear weapons. The national debt has roughly doubled, and Obama's own top national security and intelligence advisers tell us the world is more dangerous than they've ever seen it.

After eight years of dashed hopes and phony change, voters in 2016 sent another unmistakable message: We meant it.

Donald Trump was obviously not our first choice to be the agent of change. We opposed him early and often, and we didn't think he'd win. We lamented his ignorance, criticized his crudity, and catalogued his untruthfulness. We were troubled by his foreign policy noninterventionism, his anti-trade demagoguery, by his lack of discipline and judgment, and also by the likelihood that he would disappoint far too many of his enthusiastic followers, especially those whose policy views we shared.

We don't regret having fully aired all of our many differences. Our concerns about his character and some of his policies don't disappear because he won an election. But he did win an election. The Republican majority in Congress was sustained, arguably because of, rather than despite, his efforts. And more than all of that, he is the president-elect—he is America's president-elect. We want him to succeed.

There are obviously many, many ways in which a Trump presidency will be better than a Clinton presidency, assuming he makes good on his campaign promises. He will shape the future of the Supreme Court; he can roll back President Obama's executive orders and eliminate many of the onerous regulations his energized bureaucracy imposed on American businesses; he can set about the important and urgent business of rebuilding American defenses; he can begin the complicated and critical work of repealing and replacing Obamacare; he can work to redistribute power from Washington to the states.

Wanting him to succeed, we'll offer him good-faith advice. When he governs as a conservative, we'll support him enthusiastically. If we see the old Trump, we won't stint on criticism; and if he rises to the occasion, as all Americans must hope he will, we won't hold back praise.

In short, we were wrong about Trump's electoral prospects, and we hope to be even more mistaken about the kind of president he'll turn out to be.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Onward

The late great Donald Westlake signed letters (and emails) "Onward." This wonderfully opaque valediction leaves altogether unclear the writer's own sentiments toward the addressee or the character of his relationship to the correspondent. What does "Onward" really mean? Presumably we all go onward whether we wish to or not. We move onward in whatever direction fate or providence takes us, whatever our plans and preferences.

Still, doesn't "Onward" convey some sense of hope? Doesn't it seem to suggest an openness to the future, tending even towards a guarded optimism, though combined perhaps with a touch of cheerful fatalism about one's ability really to shape it?

This isn't a bad stance for conservatives in the face of an incoming Trump administration. "Onward" implies resisting the temptation to indulge in a warm bath of nostalgia for the past. It implies resisting the temptation to indulge in lamentations or recriminations or mindless affirmations in the present. It implies resisting the temptation to indulge in the odd attraction of fatalistic surrender to a dark future.

We are conservatives—American conservatives, which means we are classical liberals with both a respect for the wisdom of the past and an openness to the lessons of the present. We are neither progressives with a faith in History nor populists with a faith in Vox Populi. If conservatives today have an orthogonal relationship with the main tendencies in American politics—well, that means the insights of American conservatism are more necessary than ever.

Among those insights is an awareness of the contingencies that shape history and of the challenges and opportunities that characterize democratic politics. We know America has no manifest destiny. We know America does not face manifest doom. We know we do have a manifest duty to our predecessors, our contemporaries, and our posterity. We know America remains an experiment in liberty and self-government that can succeed, and that can fail.

Allan Bloom wrote at the end of *The Closing of the American Mind*,

> This is the American moment in world history, the one for which we shall forever be judged. . . . [I]n politics the responsibility for the fate of freedom in the world has devolved upon our regime. . . . The gravity of our given task is great, and it is very much in doubt how the future will judge our stewardship.

What is not in doubt is that our stewardship will be judged. What is not in doubt is that it would be terrible if we were weighed, and found wanting.

Onward.

—*William Kristol*

The Senate Did Its Job

Soon after Justice Antonin Scalia died on February 13, the battle over who should fill the Supreme Court vacancy commenced. Senate Republicans, led by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, took the position that it shouldn't be President Barack Obama but the next president—whoever Americans choose—who makes the nomination.

Senators differed in their reasons for wanting to put off the selection of the next justice. The most common was that the justice would determine the ideological balance of the Supreme Court, and that voters should be able to take that into account in electing the person who, under the Constitution, does the judge-picking. McConnell announced there would be no hearings on any Obama nominee, no matter who that person might be, and no votes on confirmation. The choice of Scalia's successor would have to wait until after the next president was sworn in.

On March 16, Obama called what he thought was McConnell's bluff, nominating to the Court Merrick Garland, chief judge of the federal appeals court in Washington. But it wasn't a bluff. The Republican blockade held and accomplished its purpose—to the surprise of many. Indeed, Obama and his legal team, as well as supporters in the Senate and media, were certain the McConnell strategy would fail.

Before February had ended Obama told reporters, "There's not a lot of vigor when they defend the position they're taking. . . . They're pretty sheepish about it." He added, "I think it will be very difficult for Mr. McConnell to explain how, if the public concludes that this person's very well qualified, that the Senate should stand in the way simply for political reasons."

The day Garland was nominated Sen. Harry Reid crowed, "Republicans are backing down so quickly that they're already bargaining about what month they will fully cave and confirm Obama's nominee." Reid was one of many Democrats convinced that not only would the GOP cave, voters would "make them pay if they jerk the president around on this."

But months went by and, to everyone's surprise, McConnell and his troops didn't cave. Come May, White House press secretary Josh Earnest said that the Republicans were stalling, that they weren't "doing their jobs," and that they were hoping that no one would notice. "I think, unfortunately, they're going to be wrong about that."

But the White House had a fundamental problem, which is that it had no constitutional means to compel Republican senators to "do their jobs." The Constitution vests in the president the exclusive power to nominate a justice. But for the person to be appointed the nomination must have the consent of the Senate, and the power to consent—or not—is one that rests entirely with the Senate. Under the Constitution, that chamber gets to define how the power is to be exercised, including when to take up a given nomination.

The White House and its allies expected the lack of hearings and votes would become a political issue. It did, just not the way Democrats expected. The ideological balance of the Court became more salient than it otherwise might have been, thanks to the two candidates, especially Donald Trump. He took the unusual step of devising, and making public, a list of prospects for the Court—21 in all. Trump discussed judicial selection often, as did Hillary Clinton, and the differences between them presented voters with a clear choice.

Consider the third presidential debate. Asked how the Constitution should be interpreted, Clinton didn't answer the question, instead identifying causes the Court should advance, among them abortion rights. Trump, by contrast, was clear: Courts should "interpret the Constitution the way the Founders wanted it interpreted. And I believe that's very, very important."

The Senate's no-consent stand, together with Trump's promise to name judicial conservatives to the Court, worked. The former made it evident that the next president would be filling the Scalia seat, and the latter made it clear that if the president was Trump, the nominee chosen would be a conservative.

The issue helped Trump more than Clinton. In national exit polls, one of every five voters said that Supreme Court appointments were the most important factor for them in voting. Of those voters, 57 percent favored Trump, while 40 percent supported Clinton.

McConnell could not have prevailed unless Senate Republicans stuck together. Over the months a few worried that it might be better to confirm Garland than risk Clinton being elected, given that she would likely make a more liberal (and younger, Garland being 63) selection for the Court. In other words, take the bird in the hand.

But most of the Republicans hung tough. And on Election Day the person elected president was not Clinton. And once President Trump picks Scalia's successor, the Senate, still controlled by the GOP, will doubtless move quickly, assuming a bona fide judicial conservative is the choice. There will be hearings, and there will be votes.

But even before that, the Senate did indeed do its job.

—Terry Eastland

Americans Can Unify Around Economic Growth

THOMAS J. DONOHUE
PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

With a divisive and downright strange campaign finally behind us, President-elect Donald Trump and all the candidates who won their elections must now look ahead to the important work of governing. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce congratulates the winners and stands ready to work with the new administration and Congress to address the pressing issues facing our nation and the business community.

As our country turns the page, it is important for our newly elected officials to focus on economic growth. America's growth rate this year is struggling to reach 2%, and we have not had a year of 3% growth in nearly a decade. As a result, many Americans face persistently low wages, dwindling opportunity, and the feeling that they have been left behind by the economic changes of recent years. Broad-based growth will lead to a rising tide that can truly lift all boats.

To strengthen our economy, America needs an agenda of pro-growth policies—and the Chamber is prepared to advance such an agenda. We will work with the new government on helping companies large and small sell products and services around the world; developing all types of American energy so that we can create millions of jobs and reduce reliance on foreign sources; and rebuilding infrastructure so that people and goods can move freely and safely about the country.

Our agenda also includes modernizing our regulatory system so that the rules governing businesses are fair and transparent; reforming our nation's broken tax, immigration, and legal systems; and advancing our country's leadership in technology through reforms that unleash innovation and entrepreneurship. Finally, a pro-growth agenda must include saving entitlement programs, reducing the national debt, and restoring fiscal responsibility in Washington.

With pro-business majorities in both the House and the Senate, we have the opportunity to make progress on these and many other pro-growth priorities. The Chamber will continue to stand with leaders of any party to advance common interests and stand up to leaders of any party when we disagree. We will vigorously promote the reforms necessary to get our nation back on the path to prosperity.

Americans have just lived through a bitter campaign that exposed deep divisions in our nation. But if anything can unite us, it's a stronger economy that expands opportunity for everyone. The Chamber and its members are eager to help our newly elected leaders rally our country around a mission we believe every American can support—driving growth, creating jobs, and lifting incomes for all.

Learn more at uschamber.com/abovethefold.

The Little Guy and the Billionaire

How Trump can meld populism and conservatism.

BY FRED BARNES

Donald Trump, like Ronald Reagan, becomes president as the head of the Republican party and leader of a political movement. For Reagan, joining the party with the conservative movement was painless. They fit nicely. For Trump, merging the party with his populist movement won't be as easy. But it's achievable.

There's a practical reason and a political one for doing this. By emphasizing populist issues like immigration and trade, Trump achieved the impossible for a Republican presidential nominee: He won the Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Adding them to the GOP base delivered the presidency.

That's the practical reason. Would any candidate besides Trump have won these states? That's unknowable. But Mitt Romney didn't win them in 2012. Nor did John McCain in 2008. This year, Hillary Clinton was confident they were hers.

With the industrial belt on board, the GOP has a coalition that includes more than traditional Republicans. It has millions more blue-collar voters and many more minorities. Exit polling showed Trump's support was higher than Romney's among black, Hispanic, and Asian American voters.

However, it's a fragile coalition. To keep it alive, Republicans must embrace two agendas at once—the Republican reforms championed by House speaker Paul Ryan and the populist ideas favored by Trump.

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Two days after the election, the *Washington Post*'s James Hohmann insisted this can't be done. Trump's election is a "repudiation of Ryan's brand of Republicanism, both substantively and stylistically." That's nonsense. Ryan doesn't think so. Trump's anger with him wasn't about issues. It was prompted by Ryan's slow walk to endorsement followed by his refusal to campaign for and defend Trump.

More in common than you think

On most issues—even many foreign and defense issues—Trump ran as a conservative. Before the rupture over the *Access Hollywood* video, Ryan had outlined for Trump the six-part reform program of House Republicans. Trump objected to none of it. He and Ryan are close on entitlement reform. Their plans to slash taxes match. They both believe the rate of economic growth can be doubled to 4 percent. They want to gut the regulatory regime erected by President Obama.

There would be an insurmountable problem with Trump's view on immigration and trade except for one thing: Trump has won the argument. Many, if not most, Republicans are willing to build a wall to secure the border with Mexico, especially if that's the only way to get immigration reform. Indeed it is. And Trump has softened his stand on deportations to apply solely to illegal immigrants guilty of crimes.

Trade is more difficult. Ryan is a free trader, but he recognizes what's wrong with the Trans-Pacific Partnership treaty and why it's now dead. If Trump hasn't ceased loose talk of tariffs on goods from China, he'll have to. They're likely to agree on getting rid of "chain" immigration and the annual lottery.

Ryan and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell believe Trump needs them. They're right. His campaign team was lean on policy advisers and his own ideas fall short of a real agenda. They need him, too. After Obama, Trump is a godsend. Trump is prickly, but Ryan and McConnell are adept at getting along when it's necessary.

Trump was an early advocate of spiking the Republican message with a heavy dose of populism. But he wasn't the first. That was former senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania. In 2014, Santorum spoke to the Republican National Committee about the party's failure to appeal to a working class beset by the loss of jobs to immigrants and the closing of factories as companies moved operations overseas.

Santorum had raised these issues when he ran for president in 2012 (he finished second to Mitt Romney for the GOP nomination). Afterwards, he wrote a book on the subject, *Blue-Collar Conservatives*. Trump read it. Santorum wrote that Republicans should speak up for middle- and lower-income workers and their families. "That's where Republicans need to go," Trump told Santorum when they met.

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And that's where Trump went as a candidate. "He did it better than me," Santorum says. "He proved the point."

He proved it by leapfrogging 16 candidates for the Republican nomination and by winning the presidency last week. The key was his populism, his appeal to those in the bottom half of income earners. Without it, without stressing immigration and trade and vowing to "drain the swamp" in Washington, his chance of pulling off an enormous upset would have been small.

Patrick Caddell, the Democratic pollster, says a populist wind is blowing, dominated by three beliefs. First is that the country is in decline. Second, Americans no longer expect their children to inherit a better America than they did. Third, they believe there are "different rules for well-connected and people with money."

"From the time I was a teenager and a self-starting pollster, I have had an acute interest in the phenomenon of political alienation," Caddell wrote. "In our research, the current level of alienation that now grips the American electorate is staggering and unprecedented."

In a poll, Caddell asked if "the power of ordinary people to control our country is getting weaker every day." Eighty-seven percent said so. And 81 percent agreed with this statement: "The U.S. has a two-track economy where most Americans struggle every day, where good jobs are hard to find, where huge corporations get all the rewards."

For Republicans, the lesson is powerful. If they're allergic to working-class appeals, they'd better get over it. Voters are receptive. This year, the white working class responded. But the goal, says Santorum, is a multiracial coalition with "a strong, solid working class [of] small business, entrepreneurs, and wage earners."

That's long term. For now, Trump and Republicans must redeem the promise to rescue a working class in trouble. That comes first. If that slips, voters are bound to conclude that electing Trump and Republicans didn't matter. Because nothing changed. ♦

Eleven Nine

The day after.

BY JAMES W. CEASER

Americans awoke on the morning of 11/9 to a different political world. There is only one word to explain what happened, and it is called democracy.

The usual claims progressives invoke to deny that real democracy exists in America do not seem to apply in this case. A bought election? Hillary Clinton outspent her rival massively and enjoyed the support of many more of the big donors. There are no Koch brothers to kick around this time. Support from the big organized interests? Major unions, prestigious associations, and the denizens of the most powerful corporate board rooms were overwhelmingly in Clinton's camp, just as Bernie Sanders had charged. Bias for one side by the major media? No contest here; Clinton enjoyed a huge advantage.

Fabulists are sure to discover a few things to confirm their thesis—instances of voter suppression, a right-wing conspiracy in the FBI and the bumblings of Director Clouseau, an electoral system that does not count the national popular vote. But even the most ardent will be hard pressed to deny that the people spoke.

Progressives face a difficult choice. Either they can blame democracy or they can fault Clinton. Much might be learned, of course, if they offered, like America's own founders, an honest assessment of democracy's limits. But it is encoded in their DNA to flatter it, at least in public. Only in the back rooms and among themselves do they define democracy as the rule of the deplorables. It is more likely, therefore, that they will turn their animus against the Clintons and blame them for pulling progressives into their culture of unseemly deals and continuing corruption. The civil war within the Republican party may ebb just as the civil war in the Democratic party begins to heat up. Democrats will need to look for new heroes, as Bill Clinton's luster was destroyed by this campaign and President Obama's vaunted legacy looks more and more tenuous.

The 2016 election reminds many of the election of 1980. Both featured

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a strong reaction on the part of the "little people" against an elite, especially against a progressive intellectual elite. Economic hardship was no doubt a factor in their arousal, but far more important was their anger—anger at being patronized by those professed, or who had once professed, to be their helpers. The uprising of the people was so overlooked that even the scientists of democratic behavior, the pollsters, missed it. Hence the surprise victories in both elections of a Republican president and the much-better-than-expected performance of the GOP in congressional races.

Yet there is this difference. The 1980 movement was made in the name of a guiding set of ideas, conservatism, to which its leader, Ronald Reagan, willingly and publicly tethered himself. This public philosophy both enabled and set limits to the movement. It naturally favored and honored thinkers and intellectuals, who in the aftermath of 1980 came to occupy an important place inside the Republican party. A vast conservative intellectual infrastructure was built, consisting of institutes, think tanks, publishing houses, and journals. (Progressives had so successfully done the same earlier in the century that their movement had become virtually one with the entire culture of intellectual thought.) The movement of 2016 has no such coherent philosophy. It is the product, for now, of raw and powerful sentiments and of a set of discrete and inchoate positions that can change by the day. It has been tied to one person, Donald Trump, who eschewed this entire intellectual infrastructure, less really from contempt than from indifference. Practicing politics (or anything else) by reference to a structure of ideas is to him simply another world, a different way of processing reality, of getting things done, and of managing affairs. His is not the art of theoretical thinking, but the art of the deal. Some in the conservative intellectual class have even taken to seeing this approach as a liberating step, freeing conservatism from what they charge has become a form of modern-day scholasticism.

Progressives and their followers in the media delighted in savaging both Reagan and Trump as incompetent, ignorant, well beyond the pale. The more these men were dismissed, the more many rallied to them in defiant solidarity. To this, Donald Trump added, often in plain sight, a shocking incivility and vulgarity. Undisciplined by any ideology, his different positions wandered into extremes and extravagances, which drifted in and out of a fluctuating agenda. In his flamboyance he more than reflected the collapsing standards of contemporary popular culture, where he has been an avatar of the changes. He clearly understood this realm better than any of his rivals.

Trump's unlikely emergence was akin to that of a party crasher. No one in the GOP initially took him seriously, as he defied one conservative piety after another. Some of his rivals chose to coddle rather than confront him, hoping to absorb his growing support once he was disposed of. If there is blame to be assessed for his rise, much of it goes to his major contenders who, each naturally ambitious for himself, refused to subordinate their personal careers to a larger set of conservative principles that they held, roughly, in common. Consciously or not, Trump followed the age-old strategy of divide and conquer, and his rivals played their part to perfection, offering themselves one by one to the slaughter.

The prospect of selecting Donald Trump as the GOP's nominee led to the so-called civil war within the party, as many leaders refused to countenance his nomination and others endorsed it, with more or less enthusiasm. The conflict grew most acute within the intellectual class, even as that class, like the donor class, saw its influence within the political process collapse. The less power the intellectuals had, the more heated grew the debate. The greater part of intellectuals denounced Trump and joined to stop him by forming a movement of their own, referred to as Never Trump, with or without a hashtag. This group saw the danger of a demagogic candidacy and a threat to democratic norms. Opposed were a smaller number of intellectuals, who jumped in, at first tepidly, to defend Trump, admitting some of the flaws but reminding others that this was not a decision made in a vacuum but a choice between two evils. Vexed by what they thought was a lack of realism and a surplus of moralism among their adversaries, many reached their limit when they observed the same criticism of Trump being parroted by the Sultans of Sanctimony on the left, who pronounced daily on Trump's outrages while referring to any limitations of the Clintons as minor mistakes or flaws.

It was said during the last months of the campaign that this split represented a fundamental cleavage within conservative thought. And as the argument grew more acrimonious, as political arguments invariably do, it came to be thought that fundamental and systematic differences in conservative thinking were somehow the original cause of the division. More sober voices, however, tried to remind everyone that this dispute did not cause the nomination of Trump; on the contrary, it was the nomination of Trump that caused the dispute. Few if any conservative intellectuals had Trump as their first option or favored him as the party's nominee, and there is practically no correlation to be found between the kind of conservative one is and the position one took during this argument. This fact led to the hope that once Trump was defeated, which most thought likely, the "war" would eventually end.

Now that Trump has won, what happens? Can this difference be overcome and is reconciliation possible? Restraint is a quality in short supply, especially among intellectuals, and the temptation to settle scores is difficult to resist. Those who thought themselves subject to being purged if Trump lost may be inclined to seek purges now that he has won. What can be done?

The fate of the relations among conservative intellectuals is certainly not among the top items of concern within the new circles of political power. But its importance for the nation and for conservatism is real, even in the near term. However much a campaign and election can be run, as we now know,

without much input from intellectuals, the nation cannot be governed, or governed well, without their help. Facts have changed, and all are obliged to work in the world we live in, not the one they thought we would live in. For the conservative intellectuals who opposed Trump, they know—and knew all along—that there are many items on his agenda that they favor, from his likely picks for the Supreme Court, to his rebuke of political correctness, to his certainty of eliminating many regulations, to, perhaps, his building of a beautiful wall, to mention only a few things. As the campaign continued, in fact, the list of items on the agenda that included matters many conservatives favor grew, even as other things remained anathema.

None of this will or should matter to conservatives, however, unless Trump's provocations cease and unless he comes to govern as a president, not as a strongman. Donald Trump is the head on paper of a unified government with Republicans in the majority of both houses of Congress and in charge of most of the state governments. This is the dream conservatives have been pursuing for decades. Yet while unified on paper, the party is far from fully unified in fact. Herein, paradoxically, may lie a great opportunity.

On the crucial question of the character of rule, Republicans in Congress must now insist on the importance of constitutionality and adhere to the same principles they planned to adopt had Clinton been elected. This election must not be seen as one Caesar replacing another, but a restoration of a serious balance in our political system. There will be more than enough room in such an arrangement to enact a vigorous program, yet also enough security to assure that America's liberties remain safe. On this basis, conservatives who have opposed Trump should consider coming in from the wilderness and lending their energies and talents to the new administration, reserving their privilege to pull out if things go too far. And president-elect Trump, whether he realizes it now or not, should seek their help, for his good and for the good of the nation. ♦

The Disintegrating Obama Coalition

Barack's no Ronnie.

BY JAY COST

NEWSCOM

'This isn't going to help me at all, is it?' 'Nope—not a bit.'

Political coalitions are tricky things to manage in the United States. Ours is a country of more than 320 million people but only two major political parties—so each side's voting bloc tends to be unstable at the margins, where national elections are actually won and lost. It is hard to build a winning coalition, harder still to maintain it during the laborious process of governing, and hardest of all to hand it off to a designated successor. It takes a politician of the highest caliber—a Roosevelt, a Reagan—to accomplish all this.

As last week's results clearly demonstrated, Barack Obama is not cut from such an Augustan cloth. The political coalition he built in 2008 burst apart in spectacular fashion. His successor will not be Hillary Clinton, his secretary of state, but Donald Trump, the man who accused him of being a foreigner.

No lame duck president has ever had to suffer such ignominy. If Obama were to quietly steal out of town on January 20, as John Adams and John Quincy Adams did upon their defeats, nobody could blame him. Even so, Obama's coalition fell apart because *he* failed utterly to maintain it during his tenure.

For eight years, we have heard stories about Obama's "coalition of the ascendant." Single women, millennials, Latinos and Asians, gays and lesbians, and so on, drove Obama to a fantastic electoral victory in 2008 and would power the Democrats for a generation—or more—to come.

While these blocs were integral to Obama's triumph in 2008, there

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were other, more humdrum factions as well—the typical ones that every Democratic politician, be he as cool as Obama or as boring as John Kerry, has to win over. The suburban women of Florida's I-4 corridor. The blue-collar workers in Dubuque and Erie. The African Americans in Detroit and Milwaukee, who are always counted on to deliver an enormous haul for the party. These voters are not the stuff of highfalutin' think pieces for liberal magazines, but they were nevertheless an essential part of Obama's victory.

They abandoned his successor last week. Not altogether, of course—but enough to serve the Democrats a shocking defeat.

There had been warning signs from virtually the start of Obama's tenure. He won a smashing victory in 2008 by sweeping the traditional swing states and adding new ones to the list—Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. But voters in all these states signaled at some point over the last seven years that their loyalty was not unconditional. Starting with Bob McDonnell's whopping victory in the Virginia gubernatorial race in 2009, then Scott Brown's surprise Senate triumph in Massachusetts, and finally to the Tea Party wave of 2010—it was evident by the halfway point of Obama's first term that personal affection for him did not necessarily translate to support for his policies or other Democrats. Then came 2012, in which the president was reelected with 3.6 million *fewer* votes than he received four years prior. The admonition was repeated in 2014, when the Republican wave that hit the House of Representatives in 2010 wiped the Democrats out of their Senate majority.

Obama's response to these electoral setbacks was to pretend they did not happen. Again and again, he stubbornly refused to change course. When he lost his filibuster-proof Senate majority in 2010, he passed an unfinished version of Obamacare through the budget reconciliation process. When he and House speaker John Boehner were on the cusp of striking a grand bargain on taxes and entitlements in the summer of 2011, he insisted on additional tax hikes at the last minute, skunking the deal. When he won a narrow victory in 2012, he called for extensive gun control legislation, framing the debate in Manichean terms that alienated those Midwestern voters who had the gall to support him and the NRA simultaneously. When the Democrats lost the Senate in 2014, he enacted immigration reform through executive fiat and brokered a highly unpopular deal with Iran.

Last but not least, he handed off leadership of his party to Hillary Clinton. Weighed down by personal and professional issues, she was his opposite in almost every way. During the Democratic primary battle of 2008, she had been a useful foil for Obama, illustrating his point that it was time for a new approach to governance. Now, she was the heir apparent—as if his voters would not care either way. Turns out they did.

Much of the blame for last week's defeat obviously belongs to Clinton, who was a terrible candidate. But one cannot overlook Obama's responsibility in this epic debacle.

Much of the blame for last week's defeat obviously belongs to Clinton, who was a terrible candidate. But one cannot overlook Obama's responsibility in this epic debacle. He blessed Clinton's candidacy early in the cycle, despite the fact that she was under investigation by the FBI. And for years prior, he had acted as though he could do as he wished and retain the loyalty of his voters.

He was wrong. Clinton dramatically underperformed with the white working-class in the Midwest. She did not receive sufficient margins from African Americans in the Rust Belt or the South. And though she had the noxious Trump as her opponent, she failed to make up for these setbacks with swing voters in places like suburban Charlotte or Philadelphia. Nor did she make many inroads with traditional GOP constituencies in Milwaukee and Grand Rapids, who had been turned off by the bombastic Republican in the primaries. Even the Latino vote disappointed, leaving Florida out of reach and Colorado surprisingly close. Only the Harry Reid "machine" in Nevada functioned as expected.

When Obama leaves the White House in two months, the Republican party will hold more public offices than at any point since the Great Depression. The president's greatest political ambition will therefore go unrealized: He is not the 21st century's Ronald Reagan; he is its Woodrow Wilson.

The 28th president was quite a bit like Obama, a cerebral type with unceasing confidence in his superior intellect and moral purity. But Wilson's ambition to recast society in his own image outstripped his political acumen. Elected in a landslide in 1912, he only narrowly squeaked by in 1916. Four years later, his would-be successor lost to Warren Harding, one of the most unspectacular specimens ever to occupy the Oval Office. Wilson tarnished the reputation of progressivism so badly that the GOP would enjoy complete control over the government for the ensuing decade. It was Franklin Delano Roosevelt—a pragmatic man who lacked Wilson's scholarly disposition but had an intuitive grasp of what the people expected of him—who would become modern liberalism's hero.

Maybe some Democrat down the line will re-create Obama's coalition and reshape it in a durable way. After all, Obama *was* on to something back in 2008. There are common interests among working-class whites in the Midwest, college kids, minority voters, and suburban women. Democrats have thought for a decade that this coalition was waiting to *emerge*. Not so, but a gifted politician could unite that group and *build* a coalition for the long haul. Such a leader would have to be more like FDR or Reagan than like Wilson—or Obama. ♦

Once Bitten, Twice Shy

Trump's diffident voters.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

When Election Day came, 'none of the above' broke for Trump.

NEWSCOM

How could they? It's the question being asked by all the world's press and much of our own. How could the American people, after all they have learned about Donald Trump's private vulgarity, his boasting and confabulation, his wild and tacky business career—how could they vote to place him in the highest and most venerable elective office in the world? The explanations generally given—that Trump's voters were either too stupid to see the evidence in front of them or too bigoted to admit what they saw—are wrong.

Americans voted for Donald Trump with their eyes open. Only a third considered Trump honest and trustworthy, according to NBC exit polls. Naturally those people all voted for Trump, just as the bare third who trusted Hillary Clinton voted for her. The election was decided by the unusually large group (31 percent) who didn't consider *either* candidate honest or trustworthy. Such voters had the option of "voting" for Jill Stein or Gary Johnson or Evan McMullin—if one wants to apply that verb to an ambulatory form of sitting out the election. But it is striking how few took it: Of the people holding their noses at the prospect of a Clinton or Trump presidency, 85 percent nonetheless voted for one of the two. And in the aggregate, these people made Trump president. They chose him over Hillary Clinton 45 to 40 percent—and if one doesn't count the ambulatory nonvoters, the nose-holders chose Trump by 53 to 47.

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Other measures illustrate this phenomenon even more starkly. A little less than a fifth of voters expressed an "unfavorable opinion" of both candidates. Trump got 49 percent of these voters, Clinton 29. Again, cut out Stein voters, Johnson voters, and others who mistook what they were doing on Election Day for a school art project, and we find Trump beating Clinton by 63 to 37 percent.

One in seven voters said neither candidate had the requisite qualifications to be president. (They were, strictly speaking, wrong: The qualifications consist of having been born here no less than 35 years ago—but we tally their views as a service to psephology.) Leaving aside the nonvoters, Trump got 82 percent of these people's vote, Clinton 18 percent.

Or consider the seventh of voters who believed both candidates were temperamentally unsuited for the office. Out of those among them who nonetheless picked one of the two major candidates, Trump took 86 percent of the vote.

These are extraordinary numbers. We have long known that people who profess neutrality often lean one way or another. Most "independents" in the United States vote Republican. Most who call themselves "moderates" vote Democrat. But here is an overwhelming preference for Trump among people who condemn him in the strongest possible terms. The specter of Hillary Clinton must be in some way more alarming still.

Whether Americans were right to choose Trump is not yet ours to know. But the fear that led them to do so is undeniable. For years now, Americans have been behaving like a captive nation, afraid in the way that people are afraid in repressive societies. Although people of all political persuasions are jittery about the future—36 percent of Clinton voters and 29 percent of Trump voters said they were "scared" of what would happen if the other side won—the Trump side was probably more motivated by fears about the country as it exists and does business now.

Although Trump won the popular

vote in 30 states, he was endorsed by only two major newspapers (the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and the *Florida Times-Union*). The political philosophers who last summer published the short-lived but widely read *Journal of American Greatness* were not unanimously Trump supporters. But because they were open to figuring out what Trump stood for, they felt they could do so only under Latin pseudonyms. Few prominent political figures allied themselves with Trump during the campaign. You can almost count them on one hand: Giuliani, Christie, Gingrich, Pence.

In staffing his administration Trump may have to choose between allying with the bureaucratic establishment he was elected to oust, or joining with nonestablishment forces (the way Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AK party did in 2002 when it was shocked to find itself taking power in Turkey), or winging it with his nonexpert followers and allowing them to learn embarrassingly on the job (the way Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement did when it took dozens of seats in Italy's Chamber of Deputies in 2013).

The reluctance of the public openly to embrace the candidate it intended to vote for is spooky. He lacks public support not because he is unpopular but because a modern sort of ecclesiastical anathema has been pronounced upon him, and in the public's experience, one offends the clerisy at one's peril. In the past eight years, government has gone to great lengths to punish those who oppose or ignore it: suing nuns over Obamacare, prosecuting bakers over gay marriage, and trying to wreck the economy of North Carolina over transgender bathrooms.

None of this was talked about openly on the campaign trail. In retrospect, one can't have expected it to be. Americans have been behaving like the citizens of a totalitarian country. If you believe they had good reason to, you voted for Trump. If you believe this was sheer paranoia, you voted for Clinton. If you believe the election was about something else, you missed it. ♦

Things Poll Apart

Why everyone was surprised, bigly.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

'It was around 9:20 P.M. when conventional wisdom died," wrote the *Wall Street Journal*'s Neil King on election night. That was the moment when the *New York Times*'s website began projecting that a Donald Trump victory was more likely than not, and it became abundantly obvious that the presidential polls were wrong, in significant and crucial ways.

Of the 16 battleground states where *Real Clear Politics* (*RCP*) produced polling averages, Hillary Clinton won 6. She won only one state Trump had been predicted to win, Nevada, and she overperformed the polling average there by 3.2 percent, close to an expected 3 point margin of error. Set aside Nevada, and in the remaining five swing states she won, her margin of victory was lower than pollsters predicted in all of them, and dramatically lower in Minnesota. Trump, on the other hand, bested the *RCP* average by 8 points in Missouri, 7.5 points in Wisconsin, 6.6 points in Iowa, 5 points in Ohio, and nearly 4 points in Michigan. And significantly, pollsters wrongly predicted Clinton wins in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Those states swung the election. Finally, of those 16 *RCP* polling averages, 15 underestimated Trump's support, even if most of the results were within the margin of error. It sure looks like a systemic failure in the polling industry to accurately measure the level of Trump's support.

While this result isn't quite a bonfire of the pollsters, it is a far cry from 2012, when there was much fanfare over the fact that *FiveThirtyEight* polling guru Nate Silver correctly predicted the winner of all 50 states in the presidential election. Obama's campaign juggernaut was both deploying and validating cutting-edge predictive data, from betting markets to behavioral psychology, and more complex and more accurate polls were thought to be the wave of the future.

But four years is an eternity in politics, and all manner of incidents leading up to 2016 suggested faith in polls was gravely misplaced. The success of the Brexit vote earlier this year stunned observers. The result was close enough that it didn't really suggest the polling was inaccurate. But the horrified recriminations afterward were indicative of a public that has been imbuing poll results with scientific certainty and has trouble coming to terms with the fact they are often the statistical equivalent of an educated guess.

Last year was also bad for polling. The *Real Clear Politics* polling average had Democratic candidate Jack Conway leading Republican Matt Bevin just before the Kentucky governor's election. Bevin won 53 percent to 44 percent. The polls in elections in both the United Kingdom and Israel were also off badly and failed to predict convincing victories by the right-leaning parties in both countries.

And on the night of November 4, 2014, after the Democratic party suffered its historic midterm election defeat, Public Policy Polling tweeted, "Clearly a rough night for us and much of the polling industry and we'll own that and try to figure out what happened in the coming days." In that election, Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader in the Senate, was up 7 in the *RCP* average. He won by 15. Tom Cotton, running for the Senate from Arkansas, was up 7 in the *RCP* average. He won by 17. Virginia senator Mark Warner was up almost 10 points in the *RCP* average; he won by just 18,000 votes and was very nearly upset by GOP challenger Ed Gillespie. And

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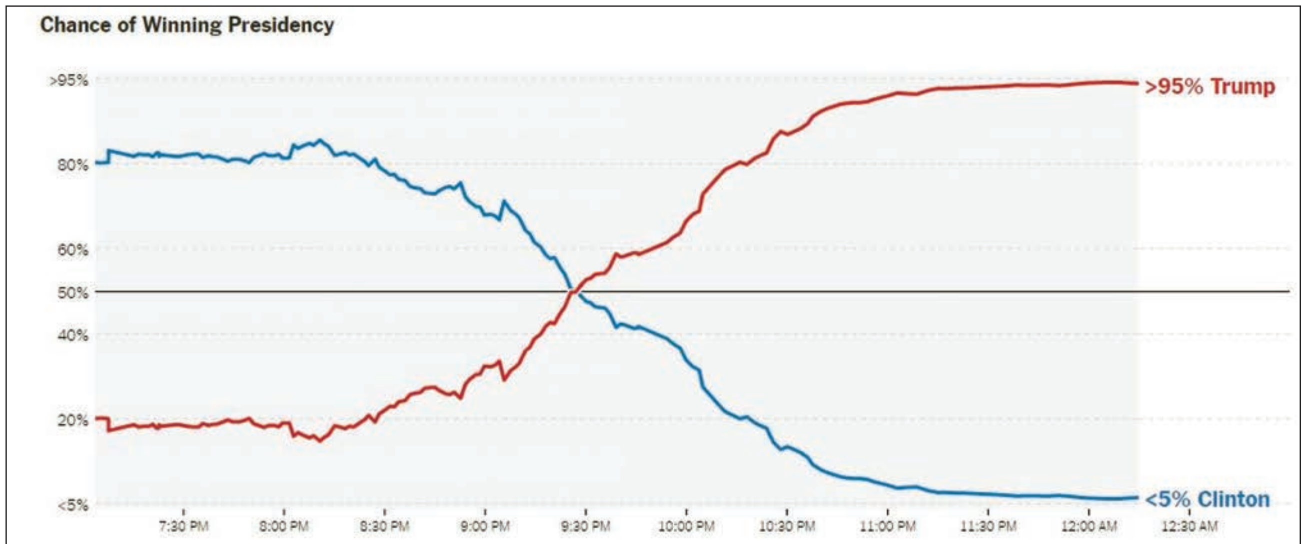

The New York Times*'s estimate of victory odds for Clinton and Trump during the evening of November 8*

there were many more such whiffs.

By and large, "In all these cases, polls seem to have understated actual support for right-of-center candidates and parties while coming fairly close to actual percentages for those left of center," observed Michael Barone, surveying the trends in polling errors in the *Wall Street Journal* last fall. That's also a good summation of the problem this year.

Ironically, the guy in recent years who's been most vocal in sounding the alarm about polling errors is the man who popularized the use and interpretation of polling averages in recent elections: Nate Silver.

Following the 2014 midterm, Silver started excoriating pollsters and warning that polls are less accurate than people believe them to be. He headlined an article on his website following the 2014 fiasco "Here's Proof Some Pollsters Are Putting a Thumb on the Scale." Silver scatterplotted the results of Iowa Senate polls and accused pollsters of "herding." The graph showed polling numbers in Iowa were all over the place a few months before the election. But as Election Day neared, a curious thing happened. The polls started to converge on a consensus that Joni Ernst had a slight lead. (The final *RCP* average had Ernst ahead by 2.3 points, and she won by 8.5 percent.)

This didn't happen just in Iowa. "By the end of the campaign [in 2014], the polls in most states varied only within a narrow range," notes Silver. Herding was inescapable. Across the board, the data were less "noisy" than they should have been—a huge swath of the midterm polls were deeply suspect from a statistical perspective.

As the election drew near in 2016, it looked to Silver like many polls were overstating Hillary Clinton's support, and once again he tried to pump the brakes. This time, something surprising happened. Liberals and the media—no little overlap there—turned on Silver because he was telling them something they didn't want to hear, even though he was still predicting a Clinton win.

It can't be overstated what a folk hero Silver had previously been on the left—he rose to fame providing polling analysis on the liberal *Daily Kos* blog. The protagonist of the popular TV series *Orange Is the New Black* explained her atheism by declaring, "I believe in science. I believe in evolution. I believe in Nate Silver and Neil deGrasse Tyson and Christopher Hitchens."

Silver's final forecast had a 71 percent chance of Clinton winning. This wasn't good enough for the liberal faithful. At *Vox*, Matthew Yglesias wrote "Why I think Nate Silver's model underrates Clinton's odds." *Huffington Post* sowed doubts about his integrity and methodology with headlines such as "Nate Silver Is Unskewing Polls—All of Them—in Trump's Direction." *Huffington Post*'s own model said Hillary Clinton had a 98 percent chance of winning, and that wasn't even the most extreme prediction. Princeton neuroscience professor Sam Wang dabbles in polling analysis, and he went so far as to predict Hillary would win with a 99 percent certainty.

Wang had been spectacularly wrong before. His 2014 Senate predictions greatly underestimated Republican support. In 2004, Wang predicted John Kerry getting a commanding 311 electoral votes to Bush's 227. Despite this less than stellar record, on November 6, a popular post at Silver's old *Daily Kos* stomping grounds was "Five Reasons Nate Silver Is Wrong & Sam Wang Is Right: Hillary Is 99%+ Likely to Win." On November 7, *Wired* magazine ran an article headlined "2016's Election Data Hero Isn't Nate Silver. It's Sam Wang." The next day the American people voted, and to borrow the president-elect's idiom, Wang got schlonged. He predicted Clinton would win with 307 electoral votes. If Trump maintains his Michigan lead as expected, once all the straggling ballots are finally counted, Trump will end up with 306.

Did anyone get 2016 right? Well, looking at the pollsters used to compute the *Real Clear Politics* averages, in the latest polls heading into

the election a single firm had the most accurate polls in Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Colorado, and Georgia—the up-and-coming Trafalgar Group, headed by Robert Cahaly. Trafalgar was also perhaps the only pollster to correctly call Michigan and Pennsylvania for Trump.

Unfortunately, there was as much art as science in what they did. For starters they assumed Trump's support was being undercounted. When Trafalgar was polling voters in the GOP primaries, they started seeing an interesting trend. Voters who responded to automatic polls, i.e., "robocalls," consistently registered support for Trump 4.5 percent higher than when they were talking to a live pollster. This was not a statistical anomaly. "The more I checked, the more there was an undercurrent," Cahaly tells The Weekly Standard.

Cahaly reasoned that since the media was demonizing and caricaturing Trump supporters, and Hillary Clinton was campaigning against them as a "basket of deplorables," Trump supporters would be reluctant to admit their support to strangers. (The phenomenon of people not willing to report their support is well known in polling—when white voters don't want to say they're voting against a black candidate for fear of being judged, it's called "the Bradley effect," for L.A. mayor Tom Bradley, who lost California's 1982 governor's race despite consistently leading in the polls. A similar phenomenon in the U.K. is known as the "shy Tory" effect.)

To counter this perceived unwillingness to register support, Trafalgar started asking a new question. "When you ask them who their neighbor is voting for, they're more comfortable," he says. It appears to have worked pretty well this year.

Trafalgar's clever approach notwithstanding, the reality is that pollsters face a great many challenges. Response rates to polls are now so low that it's undermining the whole practice. Pew Research Center reports that the response rate to polls is now in single digits, compared to a 36 percent response rate in 1997. As a result of no one wanting to answer their calls, most pollsters can't afford or don't have the time to get sufficient sample sizes anymore, so they're just reweighting the few responses they do get relative to their guess about what the demographic composition of voters in a given area or state will look like on Election Day. Many such surveys aren't even technically polls—Silver calls them "polling-flavored statistical models."

Even Silver, who's done his part to add to the phenomenon, will tell you that the compulsive attention to political polls by journalists has reached a point where it's often not healthy for democracy. "The media's obsession with polls, especially national polls, in the early stages of the GOP campaign was pretty nutso," he told me earlier this year. "If someone wants to take a poll in July 2015, well that's fine, but there's pretty much no circumstance under which they should be sending out 'breaking news' alerts about it."

Here's a prediction: Don't expect anyone to heed Silver's advice to exercise restraint in polling. According to a *Politico*/Morning Consult poll done last month, Mike Pence is already the frontrunner for the 2020 GOP nomination. ♦

The Day America Stops Voting

Election Day isn't election day anymore.

by Andrew Ferguson

I skipped out the door of the polling place last Tuesday as I usually do after voting, filled with patriotism and awe and reverence and gratitude for such a privilege—and a tinge of

Early voting in Fort Lauderdale, November 5

NEWSCOM

regret that so many of my fellow voters weren't going to share the experience, because they were too stupid or too lazy or too damn "busy" to make time on Election Day to cast their ballots. They had already done so, probably by mail, or maybe weeks ago shuffling through the office of some county registrar.

Roughly 40 percent of votes were expected to be cast before Election Day this year, according to John Fortier, director of the Democracy Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center. These were not the traditional absentee ballots that were once granted only to people who could prove they would be out of town on business or who suffered some debility that kept them from making it to the polls on the big day. Before 1980, Fortier says, absentee ballots accounted for about 5 percent of votes cast.

In my own case, for instance, when I hoped to cast my first vote in a presidential election, before my hometown election board would send me an absentee ballot they required me to sign a notarized affidavit testifying that I attended college out of state.

The new arrangement is called "convenience voting," properly enough,

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since convenience is now the highest value in most areas of life, from food to banking. Convenience voting has turned Election Day into a kind of last resort, an option for hoary traditionalists or laggards who didn't get around to casting their votes already. Election Day is no longer the day America votes. It's just the day America stops voting.

Like so many terrible ideas, convenience voting originated in California, which introduced "no excuse absentee balloting" back in the seventies. From that point on, voters no longer needed a good reason to avoid their civic duty; they could blow off Election Day just because they felt like it and—literally—mail it in. Once the vote was devalued in this way, it was a small step to in-person early voting. Now 34 states and the District of Columbia let you vote at least a week before Election Day, some up to three weeks. In the rush to convenience, a widely shared assumption was lost: the belief that voting was so important that a voter, when Election Day arrived, really couldn't have a higher priority, at least for the half hour or so it took to vote. If America had a civic religion, Election Day was the day we went to church. We're all agnostics now.

Reforms never work the way they're supposed to, of course. There's some evidence that convenience voting isn't so convenient after all. Consider that hardy perennial of Election Day press coverage, the long lines that are straining the patience of voters. Fortier says the best evidence, collected by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, shows that the longest lines are found not in polling places on Election Day but at voting centers for early in-person voting. And the big boost to voter turnout that convenience voting was supposed to generate hasn't happened. "There were those who hoped that making it much easier to vote in all these ways would just lead more and more people to vote," Fortier says. "And generally that hasn't been the case."

Indeed, the people who do take advantage of convenience voting are people who were already planning to vote and didn't need the encouragement. They tend to be better educated, with higher incomes, than the average voter. The late Curtis Gans, cofounder of the Center for the Study of the American Electorate and a longstanding liberal activist, was a vociferous critic of convenience voting—not on traditionalist grounds but on grounds of class and privilege. All the voting reforms, Gans once told me in an interview, "are for lazy middle-class and affluent people who would normally vote anyway but just want to make it easier on themselves."

But this all avoids the central question. Why, we might ask but never do, is voting supposed to be convenient? The "right to vote" may not be a constitutionally guaranteed right, as some legal scholars (and the Supreme Court in *Bush* v. *Gore*) argue. But it is an obligation. A little inconvenience can be a good thing—a reminder that what you're doing is a bit out of the ordinary, slightly elevated above everyday life, like wearing a tuxedo or a prom dress. (I avoid both.) In fact, you could make the case that a lot of inconvenience, when it comes to voting, would be a good thing, encouraging a salutary process of self-selection in the pool of voters.

Dreamily, I long for the day when the trends of reform reverse, and states move back to the traditional, solitary Election Day—a day when there will be only one polling place in every state, situated on the highest point above sea level or some other similarly inaccessible location. Far from being antidemocratic, such an arrangement would be a triumph for democracy, for it would ensure that everyone who did vote was ardently committed to the preservation of self-government.

Call me a starry-eyed idealist. ♦

The Selling of the Candidates, 2016

Where knocking on digital doors worked.

By Jonathan V. Last

The 2016 election tested a number of questions about American electioneering, among which was how much organization matters in the modern political environment. The Trump campaign had very little organization and no get-out-the-vote (GOTV) operation. The Clinton campaign went big on both. The election should have been as close to a laboratory test of the hypothesis as possible.

We have our answer: Donald Trump won the presidency with little more than a bunch of rallies and a Twitter account. (Plus Facebook and YouTube.) His victory seems to prove that organization is vastly overrated, a conclusion that strikes fear into the hearts of campaign consultants across America.

But the real answer may be more complicated. For one thing, it's entirely possible that Hillary Clinton's loss would have been worse had she forgone the framework. In Nevada, for instance, it was the machinery that put her over the top. "There were 24 people in Nevada doing GOTV for Joe Heck," explained a consultant who worked on the Republican congressman's unsuccessful bid for the Senate. "The Clinton campaign had 12 different *organizations*." Clinton won the state by 26,000 votes. There was a similar dynamic in New Hampshire, where Clinton GOTV almost certainly

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minted her the 1,500-vote margin that allowed her to hold the state.

And at the end of the day, organization bumps up against the limits of the product. Chris Wilson, the data wizard who won the Iowa caucuses for Ted Cruz, puts it this way: "Trump had 6 or 12 data scientists. Clinton had a hundred. But the Clinton operation, you can't be critical of it. They had the world's greatest marketing and sales team trying to sell boxed wine to rich people."

Yet tucked away in the results is a story that suggests organization can actually have quite large effects. Because the data operation built by Wilson and run by the Club for Growth in Wisconsin helped move 345,000 voters into Republican senator Ron Johnson's column.

Johnson's was supposed to be one of the two easiest GOP Senate seats for Democrats to capture. Of the 30 public polls taken during the campaign, Johnson trailed Russ Feingold in 29.

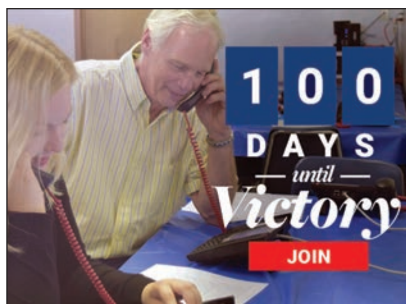
But the Club for Growth thought that Johnson's situation wasn't as bad as it looked. They had surveyed the race last year, and while their private poll agreed that the incumbent was down by 8 or 9 points, they learned that this was partly because he hadn't solidified his conservative support. They also found that voters were open to the possibility that Feingold might be too liberal.

The advocacy group kept an eye on the race and, using pollster Jon Lerner, went back into the field in August of this year. While the public polls showed Feingold with an 11-point lead, Lerner's detailed likely-voter survey suggested the race was much closer. (His poll also showed Trump at minus-11.) Instead of dumping all of their money into broad television ads, the club opted for a data-driven approach.

On September 28, they constructed a large-scale model of the Wisconsin electorate. They began with a 12,000-person survey, which combined robocalls and live interviews. The poll included detailed questions about voter preferences, issues, and demographic characteristics and yielded granular descriptions of two important groups of voters. The first were the "persuadables"—that is, voters who were either undecided or not firmly decided. The second were soft Johnson voters—that is, voters who naturally leaned Johnson but were less likely to turn out and vote.

Club president David McIntosh explains that they then ran a "data match," comparing the results of their survey against voter lists and other pieces of individual information, such as magazine subscriptions. "We identified people with similar characteristics and found a total bucket of persuadables that was 850,000 people. And we also found a bucket of Johnson voters who just didn't show up all the time and needed a different message to motivate them to the polls. There were 55,000 of them in this bucket."

What the group now had was a



A Johnson ad, part of the targeted strategy that delivered Wisconsin

targeted universe of almost a million individual voters—with names and addresses—who were gettable for Johnson. And in early October, they went to work on them.

Now they bought television ads, but instead of simply blanketing the airwaves, they hunted for their persuadable voters. They found that satellite TV providers gave them the ability to target specific houses, which was a boon. "We knew we had money to buy TV messaging in the two biggest markets, Milwaukee and Green Bay," McIntosh explains. "And 70 percent of the persuadables were covered by those markets." That left the 30 percent of the list who were either cord-cutters or lived outside of the two big markets. They went after those voters online, with digital ads.

This digital advertising was targeted specifically to the individual people on the persuadable list who were outside the reach of their TV ads. "We ran four different messages to these voters through our persuasion campaign," says Club for Growth digital director Stacy French. The ads focused on tax increases, government spending, the problems of career politicians, and raiding Social Security.

This process, known as A-B testing, is a way to find which messages resonate best. The club watched the click-through rates in real time and after seeing that the "career politician" and "raiding Social Security" ads garnered the best response, shifted all of its online resources to them. They also tested the efficacy of different delivery platforms against one another—for example, pre-roll YouTube versus Facebook—so that they could maximize their per-dollar impact.

The results manifested almost immediately: Public polls began tightening the first week of October. After two weeks of the digital push, the club did an internal refresh poll. They found that 218,000 people from the persuadable bucket had moved to "likely Johnson."

So they pressed on with the targeted data strategy for two more weeks before pivoting to turnout and early-vote messaging in the final week. Here, too, they A-B tested messages and found that pairing one of their core messages with "don't forget to vote" was more effective than "don't forget to vote" on its own.

By this point, Johnson had moved to within the margin of error in the public polling. The final internal poll showed that the Club for Growth's data operation had moved 344,855 people out of the universe of persuadable voters and into Johnson's column.

Johnson's margin of victory over Feingold was just under 100,000 votes. It's an amazing accomplishment.

And there's one more wrinkle to appreciate: Johnson ran 70,000 votes ahead of Trump. Trump's margin of victory in the state was 27,000 votes. It is entirely possible that the Club for Growth's data strategy didn't just win the election for Ron Johnson, but pulled Trump over the line in Wisconsin, too. ♦

FACEBOOK

The Art of Undoing the Iran Deal

It won't be difficult.

BY LEE SMITH

The election of Donald Trump signals bad news for the Iran nuclear deal, Barack Obama's signature foreign policy initiative. Calling it "the worst deal ever negotiated," the author of *The Art of the Deal* has threatened to tear up the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on day one of his presidency.

Supporters of the agreement and Obama allies warn that shredding the deal will only benefit Iranian hardliners, the very people it was supposed to restrain. "The big winner in the aftermath of a Trump victory is Iran's Supreme Leader," Suzanne Maloney, an Iran expert at the Brookings Institution, told Reuters. Ali Khamenei, she explained, "will be able to walk away from Iran's obligations under the JCPOA while pinning the responsibility on Washington."

Well, it's true that the nuclear agreement is in big trouble, but Trump's election has little to do with it. Indeed, the agreement would likely have collapsed under a Hillary Clinton administration as well. The problem, as the commander in chief-elect correctly noted, is the deal itself. And that's why the Obama administration has gone to extraordinary lengths to protect its "achievement"—by bribing Iran, drumming up business for the clerical regime, blocking Congress from imposing non-nuclear sanctions, and turning a blind eye to Iranian violations of the deal.

Last week, Iran was again in violation of the JCPOA. According to a report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran exceeded the deal's threshold for heavy water, a material used in the production of weapons-grade plutonium. The White House acknowledged Iran had exceeded the limit and then, bizarrely, praised the regime for its forthrightness in "making no attempt to hide" the violation. In other words, the Obama administration is not just protecting the nuclear agreement, but also rationalizing the Iranian regime's violations of it. All that needs to happen for the deal to fall apart is for the Trump White House to do what the Obama administration has refused to do—enforce its provisions.

The investment banker, left, and his client

The history of the agreement shows a series of deceptions by the Obama administration. Just to keep the Iranians at the negotiating table, the White House bribed Tehran. Every month from January 2014 through July 2015, when the JCPOA was signed, the administration facilitated the transfer of $700 million to Iran from its frozen escrow account in the United States.

Since the deal was signed, the administration has given Iran more money to persuade it not to walk away. Among other sums, the White House paid Iran $8.6 million for 32 tons of heavy water after it was found to have exceeded the threshold stipulated in the agreement last February. The purpose was to protect the deal—even as it gave Iran an incentive to keep overproducing heavy water as a revenue earner.

Most spectacularly, the administration paid Iran $1.7 billion in ransom for four Americans illegally detained by the clerical regime. Iran is holding at least two more American citizens hostage and reportedly demanding money in exchange for their release, a deal the current administration will almost surely make in order to keep Iran from trashing Obama's prize foreign policy win. If the Trump White House simply stops bribing Iran, the regime will walk away from the deal.

To justify inking the agreement with Tehran, the Obama administration contended that the sanctions regime was about to collapse. We couldn't keep our European and Asian allies on board much longer, claimed White House officials. Iran was such a promising market and everyone around the world was in such a hurry to get back in that we had to get a deal signed before sanctions started to backfire.

As it turns out, European and Asian banks and corporations have proven very reluctant to do business with Iran. Why? Because unlike the Obama administration, private industry stakes its own money, not that of the American taxpayer. Global financial institutions and companies were concerned that a post-Obama White House might reimpose sanctions, thereby putting their investments at risk. More important, CEOs realized that dealing with a state sponsor of terror developing a nuclear weapon

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and at war throughout the Middle East was a risky investment, regardless of who sits in the Oval Office.

Hence the Iranians are unhappy, because they're not seeing all the money the White House promised would come to them from Asian and European investment. That's why a large part of Secretary of State John Kerry's brief in the last year has been to travel the world to drum up business for Iran. If the Trump administration doesn't act like Iran's investment banker, the regime will walk away from the deal.

The Obama administration told Congress that the deal did not eliminate non-nuclear sanctions, like those related to terrorism, ballistic missiles, and human rights. After it was signed, however, and Iran was emboldened throughout the Middle East, the White House blocked congressional efforts to enforce existing non-nuclear sanctions and impose new ones. If the Trump administration doesn't block Congress from reinstating and imposing sanctions, as member have wanted to do over the last year, the regime will crash the deal.

The same holds for overlooking Iranian violations of the JCPOA. Last week's transgression was a repeat of the regime's February violation of the heavy-water threshold. When the White House coughed up cash for the 32 tons, it legitimized a state sponsor of terror as a nuclear supplier. If the Trump administration merely stops overlooking Iranian violations of the JCPOA, the regime will very likely opt out of Obama's chief foreign policy achievement.

The Obama administration was able to sustain its agreement with Iran only because it repeatedly deceived Congress, the American public, and the press about the deal—it bribed Iran, lied about the imminent failure of the sanctions regime, lied about imposing non-nuclear sanctions, and defended Iran's violations. In the next two months, the Obama administration can be expected to try to protect the JCPOA, perhaps by trying to put Iran beyond the reach of U.S. economic pressure. Still, all the next White House has to do is enforce the strict terms of the agreement, and it is the Iranians themselves, not President Trump, who will undo the deal.

At that point, the next White House will have an important decision to reach, one made even more urgent by the mendacious tactics of its predecessor. What happens if the master of the art of the deal can't get Iran back to the table for an agreement that better suits American interests? What if the regime pushes ahead with its nuclear weapons program? Estimates suggest the Iranians are about a year from a nuclear breakout. Will the next White House take action to stop it or will it, too, push a phony agreement and put American citizens, allies, and interests at risk? ♦

Putting Obamacare Out of Its Misery

Trump's health care opportunity.

BY MICHAEL ASTRUE

Discontent with Obamacare—and with the delivery of health care more broadly—unites most Americans across our other divisions. That discontent creates enormous opportunities and risks for our president-elect.

The new administration would be misguided to start a typical Washington process that brings the usual suspects to town for dull sessions that grind out pablum that no one will digest. On the other hand, they will not inherit a detailed roadmap from congressional Republicans and should not expect that any Health and Human Services (HHS) transition team, no matter how talented and focused, can quickly create a workable plan in isolation.

History provides useful lessons in how to proceed. Donald Trump's opponent in this election created a dreadful first impression with the American people in 1993 by overseeing a justly derided process for reforming health care—a Byzantine cabal, working in secret, that contributed to the collapse of her initiative. Almost two decades later, President Barack Obama repeated Hillary Clinton's mistake, jamming a flawed bill through Congress in the least transparent and most partisan way. It was without parallel in any major domestic reform in American history. Resentment over having "to pass the bill [to] find out what's in it" ignited seven years of partisan bitterness in Congress and, more broadly, increased the contempt for Congress that helped to fuel Trump's historic upset.

The president-elect should begin by following through on a proposal that he embraced in the closing months of the campaign: interstate sale of health care insurance. Letting the market work without the barriers to entry that limit competition should be much easier to legislate than other mind-bendingly difficult details of health care regulation.

Sooner than that—the sooner the better—he might want to schedule a one-day meeting with governors and insurance company chief executive officers (with absolutely *no* substitutions of more junior people). That

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meeting should begin with a firm declaration by our president-elect that interstate sale of health insurance is going to happen and that the only purpose of the meeting is to determine the authorities that the states will retain. This meeting should have the transparency that President Obama promised, but did not deliver, for the drafting of Obamacare—the discussion should be open to the media.

After his opening charge, he could leave the group with a representative (perhaps former Utah governor and HHS secretary Michael Leavitt) to define principles for which there is a substantial consensus. Acceptable principles should then be forwarded to Congress for incorporation into its Obamacare repeal legislation.

This starting point should be an easy win and would have the benefit of focusing attention on the need to restructure Obamacare's "health exchanges." It would of course be easy for Congress to eliminate them—the IT systems were failures riddled with corruption that the highly partisan Justice Department failed to pursue with any vigor. Moreover, the exchanges are limiting consumer choice and driving up the insurance costs of lower-income workers at a disturbing rate.

Despite these issues, the best answer may be to leave the basic infrastructure in place and make the exchanges fully voluntary. States should only have to meet minimal federal standards for their exchanges and should have the discretion to devise innovative approaches for the needs of their own citizens.

Why preserve even this much? Because the new administration will not readily find a more efficient tool than the exchanges for continuing one of the few successes of Obamacare: its mechanism for purchasing individual and family insurance for people who do not have coverage through an employer. Such a mechanism becomes more important if you want to encourage competition, by letting insurance companies sell policies across state lines; without a centralized portal new entrants are likely to be overlooked.

Elimination of compulsory insurance would also allow the Trump administration to put capital into its relationship with millennials. Millennials rightly resent baby boomers, who have enriched themselves at the expense of future generations. Millennials resent Obamacare's fines for failure to buy gold-plated insurance plans that subsidize older Americans. They resent an older generation that imposes far more student debt on today's students than the boomers themselves had to bear. They resent the fact that Social Security is paying out more today than they can expect to receive when they retire. Moreover, when they think hard about Social Security, they resent the Clinton-Sanders proposal that would jack up their taxes and kill their jobs in order to subsidize benefits for today's middle-aged workers.

The sooner the better

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While it is important symbolically for our president-elect to put his stamp on Obamacare repeal legislation, he can also fix many problems—with Obamacare, Medicare, and other programs—by issuing executive orders in his first few days. As examples, he can:

(1) order destruction of the massive secretive MIDAS database of about 10 million exchange users that HHS has unethically and illegally assembled;

(2) order HHS to suspend for 180 days any new directives that burden physicians and to provide OMB within 60 days with a list of Obama administration directives that burden physicians so that OMB can recommend which directives need to be withdrawn; and

(3) order HHS to suspend immediately all sharing of data controlled by Obamacare "navigators" with outside organizations—data that have found their way into partisan organizations for partisan purposes.

The new administration also should take prompt action on the problem of rising drug costs, without engaging in command-and-control regulation. For instance, it could order diversion of resources (particularly travel funds) within the Public Health Service into the FDA's Office of Generic Drugs. This office's lack of resources for reviewers enabled the recent debacle with Mylan's EpiPen; it was so far behind in reviewing competitors' applications that it gave Mylan monopoly pricing power through its bureaucratic inaction. The new administration could also order the FDA to devise a system for prioritizing applications, so that future generic drug applications with a potentially significant competitive impact do not gather dust in cubicles.

Another important step toward controlling drug costs through competition would be to incentivize drug companies to license out canceled drug development programs. Many drug companies are interested only in drugs that will become blockbusters. When they cancel a developmental program that might yet become an important therapy, they often leave it on the shelf because they don't want the embarrassment of seeing another company succeed with their failures—plus no drug company employee wants to be associated with an expensive failure. Drug companies want a variety of benefits from HHS when it comes to reimbursement, technology transfer, and other functions, so it should not be hard to end a

noncompetitive practice that is more cultural than economic.

This topic serves as a reminder that our president-elect can't afford to overlook the FDA, which has become more dysfunctional as it has become more beholden to Ralph Nader's innovation-stifling Public Citizen. Our president-elect should insist that the agency instead prioritize saving dying children. In an article in these pages on eteplirsen, a breakthrough drug for a form of muscular dystrophy, I criticized the agency for refusing to use available rules to approve the product ("Can This Boy's Life Be Saved?" March 24, 2014). Thirty months later, after politicized reviewers and split advisory committee members manipulated data, sometimes nonpublic data, to justify recommending against approval, a tsunami of criticism from patient advocates and experts in the field persuaded the agency to approve the drug. Even then, FDA Commissioner Rob Califf held the approval at arm's length and made it painfully clear that his agency's decision was not his but that of Dr. Janet Woodcock, who runs the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research.

Traditionally, all political appointees submit their resignations to the incoming president, although FDA commissioners have a history of working hard to sidestep that tradition. When Califf's resignation comes, President Trump should accept it and reward the courageous Dr. Woodcock by immediately making her interim commissioner. Patients dying of a wide range of diseases will then have more hope and a better chance of survival—a true pro-life achievement.

Having had a back-row seat to the passage and early implementation of Obamacare, I believe that dismantling Obamacare and replacing it with a more compassionate and effective Republican alternative will be more complicated and stressful than most of our president-elect's advisers can possibly imagine. Firm, strategic action in the initial days will be critical to the mission—and critical to the public's initial assessments of our new president. ♦

The Military-Industrial Party

China's mad, mega defense buildup.

BY REUBEN F. JOHNSON

Hong Kong

One of the more worrying items on the to-do list for the Trump administration will be the People's Republic of China's (PRC) runaway arms-production spending spree. Every two years the overwhelming evidence of Beijing's military build-up is on display in the Guangdong Province city of Zhuhai, home to the Air Show China exhibition and just a short ferry ride from Hong Kong.

Name just about any category of weapon system in existence, and there are more types and models either in development or in production at Chinese defense enterprises than there are in the rest of the world's arms-producing nations combined. And the manner in which they are presented in Zhuhai—in a series of massive, sprawling exhibition halls stuffed to the ceiling with weapons—bristles with belligerence. The PRC's message? It wants all of these missiles, glide bombs, air defense systems, and fighter aircraft to be deployed against the U.S. military.

At this year's event, a former Defense Department official who has attended the expo in the past bore witness to this fact when he asked me, "Does anyone ever pay attention to the videos, the air-sea battle depictions with small-scale models, and the placards that are all over the exhibition stands of these Chinese firms? They show Chinese surface-to-air missiles shooting down American aircraft or Chinese anti-ship missiles sinking U.S. Navy aircraft carriers." The cumulative message: "China hates America and would like to blast us into the Stone Age."

A hostile nation producing weapons that present tangible threats to U.S. soldiers, sailors, and airmen is nothing new—such was the history of the Cold War. But there are two aspects to the PRC's massive armament program that are novel. One is that even to this day, Russian-made weapons are produced from design bureaus and military production plants that are well known to the international community. Which company makes air-launched weapons, which design office is responsible for certain types of radars—these are not deep, dark mysteries, as they are in the Middle Kingdom. Unlike any other event of its kind, Air Show China has become famous for the sudden and unexplained appearance of new weapons that have never been seen or heard of before. Where and when they were built is almost never clear.

What's more, in most cases, there is no one on-site at the show who will claim to work for the companies producing these weapons or be willing or able to say much about the item you are looking at and how it compares with other similar foreign products. On the odd occasion when someone is present as a representative of one of these Chinese arms-makers, they almost always claim to know nothing in detail about these systems being displayed. There is an atmosphere of deception and paranoia, with great effort taken to hide any and all information about the systems on display.

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This is not normal at large air shows. Most of the world's arms manufacturers participate in such shows precisely to interest customers in their wares. They are eager to tell you straight out that "weapon X is designed to meet threat Y." They will describe that threat for you and explain how the weapon is optimized to achieve its objective with the fewest possible casualties. Chinese weapons makers instead appear to be engaged in an endless process of multiplying the ways of indiscriminately killing and blowing up their enemies—real or imagined.

If this were not enough, there is a second unsettling factor: China's industry seems to have no limit to the number of enterprises that turn out essentially the same class of product. There is a degree of overlapping redundancy unusual in the history of modern warfare. Having more than one company that produces aircraft, battle tanks, etc. is not at all out of the ordinary for military powers; it's generally a good idea to have two or three companies turning out a similar product so as to generate competition. But usually there are limits imposed by economies of scale.

Apparently, these kinds of calculations are not being made in China. There are a half-dozen or more separate air-defense systems being built in China, for example, which goes far beyond the PRC's justifiable defense requirements. It is as though the Maoist slogan has been updated: "Let a thousand death merchants bloom."

Just seeing the mountain of arms being pumped out of these Chinese factories on exhibit in Zhuhai does not even tell the whole story. It gets worse. There are also the arms not being exhibited. For example, there are whole production lines in China for those weapons that Beijing still purchases from Russia. Then there are the reverse-engineered illegal copies of Russian weapons that are built in the PRC. And as an added bonus, there are designs and production lines for weaponry destined for export to Iran. These production lines are shipped to the Islamic Republic lock, stock, and barrel so that Iranian plants can churn out anti-ship missiles to be used against U.S. Navy ships in the Persian Gulf or produce other arms to be shipped to Hezbollah.

Above, a model at 2016's Air Show China depicting Chinese missiles being fired at U.S. aircraft carriers; below, an H-6K bomber (a Chinese-built variant of a Russian Tupolev Tu-16), displayed with a variety of as-yet-unseen weaponry.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD / REUBEN F. JOHNSON

During Air Show China, teams of procurement specialists from both Iran and North Korea could be seen in the exhibition halls vacuuming up every bit of information on weapons system design that they could find. Allegedly, the PRC is supposed to have embargoed North Korea from obtaining information that would aid its ballistic missile program. But like other Chinese commitments of this kind, this has turned out to be a joke. There was at least one six-man defense technology procurement team from Pyongyang at Zhuhai, scouring the halls where China's missile and space launch technology was on display.

The two countries' acquisition teams did not even try to hide their presence. The Iranian team appeared to have flown in on an Iranian Air Force Falcon 50 passenger jet that was parked out in the open on the tarmac next to several other aircraft that were there for a flying display. The North Korean team flashed their DPRK passports as they pushed through the crowds at the front gate to register on the expo's first day.

President Trump is clearly going to have to deal with a far more aggressive PRC, with an increasingly well-supplied military that is by all appearances begging for a fight. Conflicts in the South China Sea, the continued problems on the Korean peninsula, China's leader Xi Jinping being handed near-dictatorial powers—none of these bode well for a peaceful, cooperative future. ♦

Voting for . . . Voting

Election Day where I live

By Geoffrey Norman

Dorset, Vt.

In the morning on Election Day, I went up to the school building where people in my town go to vote. When I got there, a little after eight, things were already in progress and, as usual, going smoothly and efficiently. You walk through a door, into the gym, and identify yourself to one of two people sitting behind a table. Each of them has a list of registered voters. There isn't a problem with picture IDs or any of that. Everybody knows everybody.

The person who checks for your name on the printed sheet really doesn't have to. You see each other in church or your kids went to school together. Something like that.

"Oh, hello," she will say. "Haven't seen you for a while."

She gives you the sheet with all the choices printed on it and you step over to one of five tables with curtains on the side. It is supposed to be a secret ballot, after all. You mark your choices on the sheet and then you take it over to a machine where you insert it into a slot to be scanned.

Takes five minutes. Ten, tops.

I spent almost all day at the school.

I suppose I was indulging in a bit of nostalgia. I had cast a lot of votes, over the years, for a lot of candidates, here at the school. I had counted paper ballots late into the night, when I was a justice of the peace, back before the advent of scanners. I had even been a candidate myself on one Election Day. I'd spent several uncomfortable hours standing outside the school greeting people when they arrived. I didn't ask them for their votes, which would have been a vulgar thing to do. But I did say "good morning" or "good afternoon" and call them by name, if I could remember it. So my friends, neighbors, and fellow townspeople punished me for my sins by electing me to the school board.

But I forgave them and kept coming back every Election Day, not merely to vote but to soak up a little of the essence of American democracy. It can be intoxicating and reaffirming, and this year it was almost as though I felt a craving for that. American democracy, you think, has to be more than CNN, *Politico*, campaign consultants, all-star panels, the latest tracking polls, and the entire inflated apparatus surrounding the dismal ordeal of the presidential campaign of 2016.

I had in mind something a little more human, something a little more in the spirit of Tocqueville, when I arrived at the school a little after eight. The day was shaping up to be a beauty. High blue sky, no wind, temperature in the 50s. The sort of weather you can permissibly call "heavenly." My friend Jack Stannard was standing out in front of school at a discreet distance from where the actual voting is done and beyond which campaigning and campaign materials, buttons and the like, are prohibited.

I knew Jack would be there because he was running for the state legislature. Running, in fact, to be my representative in Montpelier, where the laws are written and the money is spent. I knew Jack was running only because someone had told me. I hadn't seen a single lawn sign bearing his name, and lawn signs are important in rural campaigns, even if the big-name consultants for national candidates tend to disparage them.

Jack hadn't called to ask me for my vote. And when we'd run into each other at the post office or Williams Store—our town's answer to Walmart—where he goes for coffee every morning, Jack and I would talk about the usual things. Which is to say, turkey hunting, mushroom gathering, trout fishing, and other affairs of state. Now and then, he would share his thoughts about an article of mine for this magazine, to which he subscribes. On the odd occasion, we would talk about the Civil War. An ancestor of his, Brig. Gen. George Jerrison Stannard, had commanded the 2nd Vermont Brigade at Gettysburg. That unit played a decisive part in turning back the Confederate attack on Cemetery Ridge. Since I come from an Alabama family, this added flavor to our conversations.

Jack is one of those yeoman Vermonters. He is versatile and capable. He ran a family plumbing and heating business until recently. And for years, people around town called him when they had a problem with nuisance animals. These would include the usual coyotes that were preying on pet cats and skunks that were . . . well, being skunks. Just the sort of man, in other words, you want in the legislature—not afraid to handle the messy problems.

Jack is also filled with that sense of civic engagement that is peculiar to New England and, especially, Vermont, with

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its town meeting tradition. Jack told me, when I saw him at the school, that he figured this was the twentieth time his name had appeared on a ballot as candidate for some office or another. I didn't have to tell him he had my support.

But Jack didn't expect to win this one. He had decided to run because nobody else seemed willing to be the Republican candidate. And Jack is the old kind of Vermont Republican. His ancestors were, no doubt, among the voters who made Vermont one of the only two states that went Republican in the Roosevelt landslide of 1936. The other was Maine.

Jack comes from a long line of Republicans, and the idea of an election in which our town did not offer voters a Republican candidate for the legislature offended something in him. Perhaps he saw in that a sign that his party and the party of his ancestors was in danger of extinction in a state that routinely sends Bernie Sanders to Washington. He filed as a candidate and got his name on the ballot but said he would withdraw if someone else would come in and run. That didn't happen. So Jack decided that his Democratic opponent would make a capable legislator and that he would support her.

This confused a lot of people who came up to the school to vote and saw him standing next to his opponent, Linda Sullivan, and holding a sign with her name on it. Many of these people, especially Jack's old friends, were sort of defiant.

"Well, I'm still going to vote for you anyway, Jack," one of them said. "I don't care if you want me to or not."

Jack said that was fine, and Linda Sullivan, who was standing next to him, smiled. I suppose she could afford to, since she had the thing in the bag.

The three of us talked amiably but not much about politics, which was sweet relief. After a while, I went inside to look for coffee. Parents of the school's eighth graders had put out a table of baked things for breakfast. The doughnuts and the brownies were sinful—and expensive. A woman who had stopped to talk to Jack after she had been inside to vote said, "Two dollars for a brownie? Seems awfully dear. I'll go on home and bake my own brownies. Make a whole tray for less than that."

Norman Rockwell's 'Undecided'

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I paid the two dollars, figuring it was for a good cause, namely, a trip to Washington for the eighth graders, whose parents—moms mostly—had laid out the spread and were cheerfully relieving people of their money. I went back later for lunch and it was tough deciding between the mac and cheese and the chili . . . with or without meat. I went with the mac and cheese and it was delicious.

But first I visited with Sandy Pinsonault, the town clerk, who was running the voting operation with her customary efficiency.

"How many on the rolls this year?" I asked her.

"Just over 1,600," she said.

It had been slightly over 900, back when I was counting votes. This was reassuring. The population of Vermont is static and aging. Good to know our little town is growing. But most of the people voting that morning were decidedly *not* youthful looking.

Some, like me, were what they call—not always charitably—"flatlanders." That is, people from elsewhere, usually one of the big cities, who have moved to Vermont for the simpler, pastoral life. And some were wealthy retirees, a breed we see more and more of. And then there were the real Vermonters, people like my friend Jack, who go back some of them to the days of Ethan Allen, who made a lot of his pre-revolution mischief in the hills and valleys around these parts.

A few of these voters could have stepped straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting, which is no big surprise. Rockwell lived in a town about 20 miles south of here, and his neighbors were his models. I knew some of these people. Jack knew them all. So there was a lot of conversation; there was a sort of unspoken agreement that the morning was just too lovely to spoil it with talk of Trump and Clinton or the race for governor or any of that. We'd all had enough of it, thanks very much, and soon would be getting more.

We talked instead about things like those two-dollar brownies. Then, what with winter bearing down on us—and this is serious stuff in Vermont—the talk turned to the price of fuel oil, then to wood stoves and firewood and, inevitably, to chain saws. People in Vermont talk about their chain

saws the way urban people talk about their smartphones.

A neighbor I knew as a clergyman of some sort had joined us and brought up the matter of ethanol in gasoline and the havoc it plays with the two-cycle chain saw engines.

"And you know why that is?" he said. "It's the corn. Out in Iowa, they grow all they can. To get those subsidies."

The government's ethanol program was good for at least 10 or 15 minutes of conversation at the conclusion of which there was agreement that it was a bad thing and entirely typical of the way things got done in Washington. We pay taxes to give money to farmers to grow corn that is distilled into alcohol that we are then compelled to use in our lawnmowers and chain saws, the engines of which it fouls so badly we have to take them in to the shop for repairs. Only the government could come up with something like *that.*

"Good for the mechanics, I suppose," someone said.

The conversation wandered down other paths and people walked by, most of them known to Jack. More greetings were exchanged and I found myself experiencing the kind of neighborliness that Rockwell famously captured and that sophisticates find awkward and phony. I recalled how, when I lived in New York, I had learned to make my way down sidewalks carefully avoiding eye contact. Here, outside the little school where people were coming to vote, I spoke to almost everyone who went by, whether I knew them or not. And they would, inevitably, speak back.

"Morning."

"Good morning. Beautiful day, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes it is. But looks like a weather breeder, I'm afraid."

A couple of people knew me well enough to know about the Alabama connection. So they said things about the game between LSU and the University of Alabama the previous Saturday night. "Your boys looked good. I don't believe the other team could have scored them if they played all week."

Small town small talk. Chain saws. Football. The price of brownies. Nothing about Obamacare and the minimum wage. The stream of voters was steady. Most of them were older, and I guessed them to be retired. They took their time and generally lingered to visit, the way worshipers do after the church service is over. The mood of the people coming out of the school wasn't solemn or grave. But there was an obvious sense of respect for the occasion.

This was probably the big event of the day, or even the week, for many, not to mention the best possible excuse to get out of the house and see some people. But at noon, the look of the arriving voters changed. They were younger and dressed for work in the stores and banks and restaurants. They hurried in to vote and then get back to their jobs. Voting was something they had to squeeze in.

"Seem like a pretty good turnout to you?" I asked Jack.

"Does," he said.

I remembered from my time of counting votes that anything over 50 percent was considered a good turnout. I wondered if my sense that it was heavier today was correct so I went inside and asked. You can do that sort of thing in small towns. Sandy Pinsonault went to the scanner and checked the count. It was nearly 900, including the absentee ballots that had already been counted.

"That's good, right?"

"Very good," she said. "We'll get a big push in the middle of the afternoon when people come to pick up their kids. And another between five and six when people are getting off work. Then it will slow down. Then a few people—the kind who put everything off until the last minute—will get here right before seven, then we close up and do the count."

"I remember," I said.

"Don't you miss it? You should run for JP again."

This, I said, was not happening.

The turnout seemed sort of counterintuitive. This was supposed to be an election that offered a choice between two very unpopular candidates. And this being Vermont, there wasn't much suspense about which unpopular candidate would carry the state. The race for governor was interesting but hadn't seemed to catch fire with the voters. Why would a demoralized electorate in a state that was the furthest thing from a tossup be turning out in unusually high numbers?

"Beats me," Jack said, when I put the question to him. "But I'm pretty sure it is not because people are coming out to vote for me."

"No," I said. "I think we can eliminate that as a possible explanation."

Toward the end of the afternoon, my wife arrived to vote. When I told her about the robust turnout, she was not surprised. I asked why and she reminded me of a conversation she'd had a couple of months earlier at the place where she takes her car for service. It was going to be a while, and the mechanic said that one of his people would drive her to the local mall where she could wait. She took him up on it.

"My driver was a guy who just worked around the garage," she'd told me. He'd been to Vietnam. He had worked some kind of factory job that went away. Now he was running errands at the garage.

"I don't know how we got into it, but we started talking about the election and he said he was for Trump. He wasn't aggressive about it, so I was curious and asked him why.

"He thought about it for a minute or two and then he said, 'Well, you know, people are hurting.' He didn't have to tell me that included him.

"Then he said, 'And I believe that he cares about our country.'"

This was at the point where Trump was the candidate

believed by just about everyone to have no chance.

When she heard that line, my wife told me, she knew that "he might even win."

And that, she said, was what accounted for the turnout I was seeing on Election Day.

"You really think so?"

"What else could it be?"

After she voted, we visited for a while with Jack and some departing voters who were neighbors. The light was fading even though it was not yet five.

She left for home. Jack did the same. I stayed around to see if a late push of voters would materialize and if there was any evidence it had been motivated by Trump.

They began showing up a little after five. Men, mostly. Wearing Carhartts and work boots, with oil-stained hands and fingers and, some of them, with sawdust and wood chips caught in their beards. It would have been hard to read them as Clinton voters.

A few came with their wives or girlfriends. And one or two of these couples had small children with them. During this late rush one of the JPs arrived to do his part. The man's name was Howard, and I'd known him for a long time, ever since, as a volunteer fireman, he had helped put out a grass fire at my house. The fire was my fault. I'd been burning a brush pile carelessly and, worse, I had no burn permit.

I'd expected Howard to write me up but he showed mercy on a hapless flatlander and gave me a pass. We've been friendly ever since.

Rockwell depicts himself at the polls.

NORMAN ROCKWELL FAMILY AGENCY

So we did what I'd been doing all day. We made small talk. The topic of our conversation was bears. My wife and I had seen a sow and two cubs on our driveway a month or so earlier. I told Howard the story. Then he told me about the sow with triplets that he had seen and photographed. There are a lot of bears around town these days, providing lots of material for conversation.

Howard finally had to get to work, checking arriving voters against the names on the rolls. I went to have one last conversation with Sandy Pinsonault.

"We are at almost 1,100," she said proudly, and that put the turnout not simply about 60 percent but at nearly 70.

"It's the best," she said, "that I have ever seen."

Good news, however the vote divided.

She would close down the voting at seven, she said. Then the JPs would look at all the ballots and count the write-ins. There are always some of those. Then she would put the ballots in a secure container and drive them back to her office where she would lock them in a vault.

"We keep them for 22 months," she said.

"And then?"

"We burn them."

"When can I learn the results?"

"Call me tomorrow," she said. "Or look on the town website."

I did just that. Even in the excitement and panic generated by Donald Trump's victory, I was intensely curious to find out what the turnout had been in our little town.

In the end, of those 1,641 registered voters, 1,171 had come to the school and cast their votes. That worked out to 71 percent and change. If the presence of Trump on the ballot had motivated people to come out, then plenty of them had voted against him. Clinton got 740 of the votes cast at the school that day, Trump 334. The rest went to the fringe candidates, and there were a few write-ins. People turned out to vote, I think, not so much in support of either flawed candidate but in support of . . . voting.

In an interesting footnote, Bill "Spaceman" Lee's name was on the ballot as the Liberty Union party's candidate for governor. Lee is a former major league baseball pitcher and a legendary screwball. He got 23 votes.

As for my friend Jack, he had never made a defiant statement of non-interest in being elected. No "if nominated I will not run, if elected I will not serve." Many of the people who had known him for years went ahead and voted for him in spite of his wishes. But not enough to send him to Montpelier. He got 448 of the votes cast at the school that day. His opponent got 681.

The moms who ran the food table where you could buy brownies and cupcakes and chili earned $1,500 toward the eighth graders' class trip to Washington.

And that was how the election of 2016 went where I vote. There will be another, in two years. And another two years after that, when people can vote, again, for president. The ritual will survive the results, as it has for a long time now. All the way back to when that ancestor of Jack Stannard's was leading his men in battle at Gettysburg and the fate of the republic truly was uncertain. ♦

Jackson Pollock's 'Blue Poles' (1952) at the Royal Academy

Opposites Attract

How America synthesized the modern movements. BY DOMINIC GREEN

London

Visiting Venice in 1950, Kenneth Clark saw a notice for an exhibition of an American artist whose name he did not recognize. "I went in," Clark wrote in his unpublished memoir *Aesthete's Progress*, "and for two minutes was bewildered, then suddenly I became aware of an energy and a vitality that had almost faded out of European art. France, to which all earnest lovers of modern art had for so long turned their eyes, was exhausted; a new school had arisen where we had not expected to find it, the USA."

Dominic Green, the author of Three Empires on the Nile, *teaches politics at Boston College.*

Abstract Expressionism
Royal Academy of Arts
through January 2

The unknown American was Jackson Pollock, the new school Abstract Expressionism. In America, Pollock was already more known than understood, following a 1949 *Life* profile that had asked, "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" The Venice exhibition, organized by Peggy Guggenheim and held at the Museo Correr, was Pollock's first European solo show. Over the following decade, a series of traveling exhibitions introduced Europeans to "Ab Ex" figures such as Pollock, Hans Hofmann, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Clyfford Still. The last of these shows, "The New American Painting," toured Europe in 1958-59. Meanwhile, in New York, Leo Castelli was showing Jasper Johns's *Targets* sequence, a harbinger of Pop's eclipse of Abstract Expressionism.

"Abstract Expressionism" at the Royal Academy is the school's first British show since 1959. It is a European equivalent of the 2011 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art—and hence, the first comprehensive European show, because painters like Philip Guston and Joan Mitchell were producing excellent work well into the 1970s. It also offers a European perspective on the sources and course of postwar American art.

Abstract Expressionism is the Baked

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Alaska of modern painting. Abstraction and Expressionism are opposing principles. Abstraction aspires towards the cold rationality of form, but Expressionism trusts in the heat of individuality and subjective content. Both styles had originated in a Europe that had reached, in the title of Arshile Gorky's 1947 painting, *The Limit*. In this sense, Clement Greenberg's publicity was true: Abstract Expressionism was part of postwar America's bravura extension of European inheritances. As the Congress for Cultural Freedom realized, it was an aesthetic Marshall Plan, promising revival to an exhausted Old World. Still, as curators David Anfam and Edith Devaney emphasize, the roots of Abstract Expressionism lie before 1939, and not just in the shadow of Picasso, the challenges of Cubism and Surrealism, or local Abstractionists like Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove. Europe's modern masters knew the Old Masters, and the Abstract Expressionists studied both.

The first room at the Royal Academy shows the 1930s apprenticeships of Rothko and Pollock, and their early attempts to follow Picasso beyond figuration. In *Self-Portrait* (1936), Rothko reprises Rembrandt's pose of 1659. In *Interior* (1936), Rothko frames modern despair in the architecture of one of Michelangelo's Medici tombs at San Lorenzo, Florence. Gorky's ink *Portrait of Willem de Kooning* (1937) evokes Picasso's drawings of the 1920s and, further back, the neoclassicist Ingres. "The idea of an isolated American painting," Pollock said in 1944, "seems absurd to me, just as the idea of creating a purely American mathematics of physics would seem absurd."

The second room shows that the singular, tragic Gorky was ahead of them. In *The Artist and His Mother* (1926-36), Gorky, a refugee from the Armenian genocide, reconstructs a photograph of himself and his mother, who had starved to death in 1919. The depthless Cubist planes of the background, the blankness of his mother's eyes, and the dissolution of her hands into rough brushwork in the foreground have the flatness of nightmare. Memory decays into blurred patches, and personality dissolves into indeterminate outlines.

Deprived of the continuous line of autobiography, Gorky's line digressed into biomorphic forms, organic curves, and obscure orifices—a cryptic autobiography, mixing sensual impulses and perceived forms. Abstraction was caught between the extremities of Kandinsky's flamboyantly digressive colors and Mondrian's grid of lines. In the rich, overflowing brushwork of *Water of the Flowery Mill* (1944) and the bleached shadows of *Diary of a Seducer* (1945), Gorky broke the impasse, expressing the inner extremities of ecstasy and despair.

Jackson Pollock (1949)

THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

Gorky was also ahead in his historical experience, in that his world had already ended. In 1945, America caught up, imaginatively speaking: At Auschwitz and Hiroshima, the imagery of apocalypse leapt from medieval to modern. "Now I am become death, destroyer of worlds," Robert Oppenheimer said after the first atomic bomb test. Abstract Expressionism cohered amid despair—for humanity in general and humanism in particular—and the disorientated reconstruction that became the new polarities of the Cold War. "I am nature," Pollock told Hans Hofmann.

Rothko, a Russian Jew who had immigrated as a child, began to "pulverize" the "familiar identity of things" in search of fragments of redemption. Having toyed with Max Ernst-style Surrealist birds in *Gethsemane* (1944), he became a kind of religious technician, bathing the eye in Kandinsky's palette and mystical ambitions. In large, numinous, and inarticulate canvases like 1949's *Untitled (Violet, Black, Orange, Yellow on White and Red)*, the onrush of tone emulates the encounter with the divine, while the retinal afterimage, like the refusal to title the painting, compensates for its absence. At the Royal Academy, Rothko's substitute religion fills the central, circular atrium.

Pollock's development still astounds. His early 1940s paintings are belligerent yet unresolved, repeating motifs from Gorky and Picasso with rising disgust. In *Male and Female* (1943), he tries to rid himself of Picasso by Jungian analysis. In *Mural* (1943), commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim, he tries to dissolve his problem by diluting it in scale. In *Night Mist* (1945), he tries to crush it by condensation. Finally, in 1947, he throws away symbolic language and technical precedent and becomes Jack the Dripper.

In *Phosphorescence* and *Enchanted Forest* (both 1947) Pollock crosses what Thoreau called "the invisible boundary" where outside and inside, form and feeling, become one. Only an American artist could have produced such metaphysical optimism in 1947. The Europeans were still digesting the war; Orwell was writing *1984* and Sartre *Roads to Freedom*. Only an American artist could, like Pollock in *Phosphorence*, have used aluminum paint. Natural, nocturnal phenomena—the dying light of a shooting star, the luminous rhythms of the phosphorescent ocean—become the perverse beauty of violence in plain sight: the gleam of a Superfortress's metal skin, the hot flash of phosphorus incendiaries. To become death is to be nature: the American Sublime.

And only an American artist could have done this and still ended up on the cover of *Life*. Perhaps, as Auden, mourning Yeats, said, poetry changes nothing; but the business of art changes along with the wider economy.

The celebrity that overtook Pollock, like the market for Ab Ex's trademark big canvases, was the result of postwar prosperity. Disposable wealth, more than the flight of European artists, was what allowed New York to supplant Paris as the world's art gallery.

The Abstract Expressionists endured their early poverty like the 19th-century bohemians, with Romantic *angst*, too much drinking, and more machismo than a bullfighter's birthday party. They endured their success no less conscientiously, and suffered accordingly. It would be droll now, had it not been such a waste. The tragedy of Willem de Kooning was the struggle for traditional authenticity amid the peculiarity of affluence. Gorky's pupil, de Kooning became the Richard Burton of modern painters. The story has it that Burton insisted on performing his party trick, the recitation of entire Shakespeare plays, even when he was so drunk that he forgot large sections or jumped haphazardly from play to play. De Kooning's early eviscerations of the female form, like *Woman as Landscape* (1955), are wildly surgical. In *Villa Borghese* (1960) and *Untitled* (1961), the colors are still strong but the hand is unsteady. By the mid-1970s . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* (1975) has the self-disgust of the drinker who keeps failing to drink himself to death. The candor is appalling, the loss of control embarrassing; in existentialist terms, the wrong kind of authenticity.

In *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan wrote that culture had its hot and cool moods. Perhaps, because we have had so many cool moods in art since Pop, the cooler Abstractionists have aged less well than the hot Expressionists. Through no fault of their own, the slick finishes of Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still have been outdone by the digital image. Newman still talks a good painting, but *Adam* (1951-52), *Eve* (1950), and *Ulysses* (1952) no longer live up to their sales pitch. Now that the giant video screen has changed the circumstance around the pomp of Clyfford Still, *PH-150* (1958) resembles expensive wallpaper.

The hot gestures of Franz Kline, Hans Hofmann, Philip Guston, and Joan Mitchell still convince. The spattered brush strokes of Mitchell's *Mandres* (1961-62), the considered chaos of Hofmann's *In Sober Ecstasy* (1965), and the desperate structural power of Kline's *Andrus* (1961) have the testimonial quality of a thumbprint or voice. After the struggles for scale and expression, the lemon yellows and deciduous greens of Mitchell's four-panel *Salut Tom* (1979) have a pastoral sublimity.

"In the long run," Thoreau wrote, "men only hit what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they should aim at something high." In a time when public life is debased, most art is cynically trivial, and the liberal and humanist traditions of the West are treated as reactionary irrelevance, it is impossible not to see "Abstract Expressionism" without nostalgia and regret. Not so much for a golden age as for one of chrome and aluminum, when American artists aimed, with Whitman-like daring, for (as a 1945 Gorky title had it) *The Unattainable*. ♦

B&A

In the Long Run

The good news is that the 'bad' news is good news.

BY MICHAEL M. ROSEN

The Upside of Inequality
How Good Intentions Undermine the Middle Class
by Edward Conard
Portfolio, 320 pp., $29

As impassioned calls to curb income inequality, including through a growing movement to establish a "guaranteed basic income," have increasingly dominated the political conversation here and abroad, Edward Conard's contrarian argument for pro-growth policies—including those that inevitably increase inequality—couldn't have arrived at a more opportune moment. Billed as a "comprehensive defense of income inequality," Conard focuses his brief on the notion that inequality yields "faster growth and greater prosperity for everyone." He casts his book as an antidote to Thomas Piketty's 2014 anti-inequality bestseller, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century.*

In classical economic terms, Conard methodically, if sometimes ploddingly, elucidates how liberating the capitalist genie from the regulatory bottle grants society's fondest financial wishes, even though (or perhaps *because*) some wishes are more ambitious than others. Contrary to the conclusions of leading leftist economists, the "1 percent," Conard finds, has largely earned its success not "through cronyism or other uncompetitive practices" but by "commercializing successful innovation." Conard begins by fingering not corporate poohbahs but low-skilled immigration as the most significant brake on the growth in median income: The influx of such labor "spreads a given increase in the demand of properly trained talent and successful risk-takers over a greater number of lesser-skilled workers who compete with one another to satisfy that demand." Such competition inexorably drives down wages.

The Upside of Inequality takes a hatchet to five key "myths," beginning with the notion that "incentives don't matter." *Pace* the arguments of legions of progressive economists, redistribution, Conard contends, has "large detrimental effects on risk-taking, innovation, productivity, and growth over the long run." He cites numerous

Michael M. Rosen is an attorney and writer in Israel.

peer-reviewed, cross-cultural studies establishing a clear link between higher taxation and slower growth. Consider the United States, where median family incomes are 15-30 percent higher than in (relatively) high-tax Europe and Japan. The other myths Conard examines—"commonly held beliefs, widely supported by top academics, that crumble under closer scrutiny"—include the supposed unearned nature of financial success, the shortage of investment opportunities, the hollowing-out of the middle class, and the decline of mobility.

That last myth, in particular, he debunks by invoking recent studies showing American upward mobility on a par with that of Europe, including Scandinavia, for all but the poorest quintile. And with respect to the very poor, Conard cites reams of data holding single-parenthood and low high-school graduation rates, not inequality, responsible for impeding movement between social classes.

In his most illuminating section, Conard propounds a way forward that comports with free-market principles and common sense. As a first principle, he cautions against the seductions of sentimentalities, the so-called moral arguments for redistribution, such as the mistaken notion that a highly progressive income-tax structure (and, to a lesser extent, charitable giving) can make a meaningful dent in global poverty. Instead, noting that "America's poor are among the richest people in the world," Conard contends that we can alleviate poverty only by "making investments and producing innovations that increase prosperity."

But how do such investment and innovation percolate down to the lowest quintile? Improving the creaky American education system will prove critical, but Conard dismisses the benefits of preschool and charter schools alike, instead extolling the virtues of vocational schooling, online instruction, and, especially, STEM education and ancillary training in sales, marketing, and management.

Equally critical is what Conard labels "ultra-high-skilled immigration"—that is, workers with abilities in the 95th percentile whose arrival on American shores to fill high-tech positions would also create job opportunities throughout the economy: "The success of these companies and workers will accelerate growth and the accumulation of equity that's needed to underwrite further risk-taking."

Conard also favors lowering—preferably eliminating—the corporate income tax and approvingly cites Warren Buffett's trade-balancing scheme: obliging "would-be American importers to buy a dollar of American-made goods for the right to import a dollar of goods produced offshore." Taken together, these prescriptions will eventually "have large and compound effects on growth, employment, and wages at all skill levels."

Conard's prose occasionally tends to bog down in economic jargon and suffers from a certain defensiveness. It's also not exactly the type of intellectually electrifying book that Piketty's proved to be and is unlikely to earn its warm reception, even on the economic right. Still, *The Upside of Inequality* amply rewards the careful, patient reader with a strong interest in—though not necessarily a deep understanding of—basic economics and provides a handy primer for pundits and politicians who struggle to respond in kind to the anti-inequality screeds of leftist economists. ♦

B&A

Alternate Exodus

The clash of civilizations, antiquity-style.

BY RICHARD TADA

Clio's Other Sons
Berossus and Manetho
by John Dillery
Michigan, 536 pp., $50

An alternate version of the Exodus story circulated in antiquity—one so bizarre it might as well have occurred in an alternate universe. In this version, the pharaoh decided to cleanse Egypt of lepers and other "unclean" people, confining these unfortunates first in quarries, then in an abandoned city called Avaris. The lepers chose as their leader a priest named Osarseph, who proceeded to reject Egyptian culture just as that country had rejected him.

Osarseph ordered his followers to stop worshiping the gods of Egypt, and also to feel free to dine on the sacred animals of the country. Not satisfied with that, he also arranged to have the country invaded by making alliance with the "Shepherds"—a group of people formerly expelled from Egypt, now living in Jerusalem. The lepers/shepherds tag team ravaged Egypt for 13 years before the pharaoh's forces finally overcame them and they retreated to Syria. But before they left, Osarseph changed his name to "Moses."

Charlton Heston would never have accepted *that* role.

The Osarseph story was recorded by Josephus, writing in the 1st century A.D. As a Jew, Josephus was incensed by the tale, which he ascribed to an Egyptian author named Manetho. Josephus hotly denied any association with the leprous Egyptians of the story, declaring that Moses had, in fact, "lived many generations earlier," and denouncing Manetho as "a ridiculous liar."

John Dillery's comprehensive and absorbing study discusses two of the most intriguing figures of the Hellenistic era: the aforementioned Manetho

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and his Babylonian contemporary Berossus. As a result of Alexander the Great's conquests, these individuals—both native priests—found themselves living under the rule of Greek-speaking dynasties: Manetho under the Ptolemies in Egypt, Berossus under the Seleucids, who ruled a vast territory from Syria to the borders of India. As priests, Manetho and Berossus were among the educated elite of their societies; moreover, they both knew Greek and were able to communicate with their new rulers. Sometime in the early 3rd century B.C. they wrote, in Greek, the first narrative histories of Egypt and Babylonia. Dillery, who teaches classics at the University of Virginia, states that their motivation was "to influence their Greek-speaking overlords and to counter Greek misapprehensions or ignorance regarding their civilizations' pasts."

Unfortunately, neither author's work has survived in its entirety. What we now have are fragments, in the form of quotations by other authors. This salvage operation was an unintentionally ecumenical effort, consisting of Josephus and a set of Christian scholars, in particular Eusebius of Caesarea (whose *Chronicon*, written in Greek, survives in an Armenian translation).

Scholarly opinion is divided about the authenticity of the "Osarseph" passage. The authors of an introductory volume about Berossus and Manetho flatly state that the alternative Exodus tale is "not genuine Manetho." In this skeptical view, the story likely stems from an ancient debate between Egyptians and Jews about whose civilization was older—and hence, more likely to have influenced the ruling Greek culture. As part of this dispute, anti-Jewish polemicists rewrote sections of poor Manetho's work, rather as if it were an ancient Wikipedia entry on Zionism.

Dillery, by contrast, makes a case that the disputed quotations are genuine, stating that these are "relatively good representatives of what would have stood originally in Manetho's text." Even if fraudulent material had been inserted into Manetho's history, Dillery thinks that Josephus's critical acumen would have detected and screened out these passages, since he was on the lookout for (in Dillery's words) "internally contradictory or improbable statements."

Titus Flavius Josephus

Dillery's prose is refreshing for an academic work, though there remain some clotted passages. Among other places, these occur when he presents his theories about how Manetho composed his work. In Dillery's view, Manetho assembled texts of various types—including religious/prophetic ones—and shoehorned all of them into a narrative history framework. Hence, the resulting narrative contained inconsistencies of tone (or "inconcinnities," as Dillery calls them). A group of trespassing postcolonial theorists shows up at one point here; fortunately, they are ushered out before they can befoul the premises.

At roughly the same time Manetho was writing his history, Berossus was doing the same in that other cradle of civilization, Mesopotamia—or to be more specific, Babylonia. On the face of it, Berossus, a prominent figure among the local priesthood, wasn't doing too badly: The ruling Seleucids were careful to maintain good relations with the major Babylonian temples, even extending them financial support for building and maintenance.

Yet while Berossus may have reconciled himself to the present, his heart dwelt in the past. He regarded the neo-Babylonian era (626-539 B.C.)—Babylon's last period of independence, extinguished by the Persians under Cyrus—as a golden age. The most prominent neo-Babylonian king was Nebuchadnezzar II, who famously sacked Jerusalem. In his history, Berossus describes Nebuchadnezzar in glowing terms, using Greek words associated with beneficent rulers (as attested by surviving late classical and Hellenistic inscriptions).

In particular, Berossus credits Nebuchadnezzar with strengthening the defenses of Babylon, diverting the course of the Euphrates ito make it impossible for future attackers to gain access to the city. Dillery makes a plausible case that Berossus, by including this information, was taking a shot at Herodotus. According to Herodotus' account, Cyrus and the Persian Army took Babylon in 539 by using precisely that method, one which Berossus insists was foreclosed decades earlier by Nebuchadnezzar.

Both Berossus and Manetho accomplished more than they could have known. When Babylonian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics died—not to be resuscitated until the 19th century—all the voices from those cultures fell silent, save two. ♦

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B&A

Charm Offensive

The night thoughts of Stalin's wartime emissary.

BY ROBERT WARGAS

Winston Churchill, Ivan Maisky (1941)

The Maisky Diaries
The Wartime Revelations of Stalin's Ambassador in London
edited by Gabriel Gorodetsky
Yale, 632 pp., $40

In 2013, when the world found out that Angela Merkel had been the target of American wiretapping, Western journalists seemed ready for the fainting couches. The United States, it turned out, had used its embassy in Berlin to house its eavesdropping operation. But how naïve could these journalists be? Surely official-cover espionage is one of the more open secrets in the intelligence world.

It's also one source of diplomacy's enduring mystique. Its practitioners, whether spies or not, work behind a curtain of intrigue. When they leave a written record, we finally get a glimpse behind it. *The Maisky Diaries* are the legacy of Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to Great Britain—formally to the Court of St James's—during World War II; and this volume, the first of a planned three, comes from primary material Gabriel Gorodetsky discovered in Russian archives.

It covers the period from 1932 to 1943, when Maisky held the ambassadorship in London. The first thing you notice is the stereotypical glamour of diplomatic life: Maisky's tenure was one of cigar-and-brandy sessions and chancery parties. Like Horace Walpole, he seemed to know everyone in London, and though Maisky might have lacked flair and charisma, he could call upon the major figures of politics, the press, business, and the arts if needed.

The entries reveal no mere socialite, however: Maisky was a sage observer of European affairs, seeing clearly what many of his contemporaries could not. While the government of Neville Chamberlain was assuring itself of its own wisdom, Maisky was predicting that Adolf Hitler would grow more aggressive. And his failed push for an Anglo-Soviet alliance against Germany makes him appear an odd but sympathetic figure to the modern reader: a Communist open to cooperation with the West—although we shouldn't forget that another aim in destroying fascism was to secure Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states.

Maisky was wrong on many occasions—days before Hitler invaded Russia he recorded his skepticism about such an attack—but his judgment often proved impeccable. Writing in February 1938 he reflected on the crackdown in Germany's Ministry of Defense, a move that put Hitler in direct control of the Wehrmacht. Maisky's conclusion: "More purposeful attempts to seize Austria and, perhaps, Czechoslovakia are also very probable." Then there's this prescient item, from an entry dated March 1, 1938: "The events of the next six to eight months will prove critical, and future historians may one day mark 1938 as a decisive year in the development of foreign politics in our era."

The quotations are even more jarring when you consider that men like Anthony Eden were assuring Maisky, in private, that Germany would wither on the vine. Winston Churchill, too, in his meetings with Maisky, was confident Hitler wouldn't move against Czechoslovakia. It's frustrating to admit that, on these occasions, a Soviet Communist was more perceptive about one of the great menaces of the 20th century than eminent British Tories.

In the 1930s, British foreign policy was still a matter of balancing the continental powers, particularly France and Germany; and if we avoid the arrogance that hindsight can bring, we should also remember that Neville Chamberlain genuinely thought he was securing a course for peace in Europe. Britain knew how weak its armed forces were—its army, especially—and this knowledge, as Lloyd George told Maisky, was doubtless a factor in Chamberlain's "deal" with Hitler at Munich.

Maisky, however, had nothing but contempt for such calculations, coming across at certain times here as a kind of thirties neoconservative.

Robert Wargas is a writer in New York.

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Indeed, it's hard at times to discern that Maisky was a Communist at all, or that he represented a brutal, totalitarian government. His comportment in these pages is measured; his language free of cant. Even his looks—the well-fed, portly body, the kindly eyes, the authentic smile—will strike the reader as very different from the dour, self-defensive faces of that era's most prominent Soviets.

How much of this was innate in Maisky or due to exposure to other societies? Given Ivan Maisky's background as a Menshevik—that is to say, a revolutionary opponent of the Bolsheviks—it's extraordinary that he landed any significant role in Stalin's service, much less a plum embassy. But when, in 1939, Maxim Litvinov resigned as foreign minister after a forced demotion, Soviet foreign policy turned a darker corner: Now under the direction of Vyacheslav Molotov, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began replacing older, wiser diplomats with younger fanatics.

Maisky remained in place but the nature of his job changed: Ambassadors were no longer charmers with a certain independence; their function became (in Molotov's words) "simply to transmit what they are told to pass on." This foreshadowed Maisky's arrest for treason after the war, an episode in which he only narrowly escaped being shot. If these diaries reveal a man of comparative nuance, it isn't surprising that the Soviet state eventually found reason to ostracize him. ♦

B&A

The Summit of Life

A century on, in pursuit of Jack London.

BY PARKER BAUER

When in doubt, confess. In grade school, assigned to write a theme demonstrating colorful language, I swung into action and, only a few lines in, let flow from my pencil this satisfyingly cynical simile: "a laughter as mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx." The words all but begged to be written. If only they'd been mine, not Jack London's. Fortunately, my teacher, Miss Pickering, had never read *White Fang* (1906). London and I have been in league ever since, although he died a hundred years ago this month and I haven't, yet.

At his death in November 1916, London was wracked by alcohol, morphine, bad kidneys, and possibly lupus, a mixture of afflictions mostly of his own doing. Yet in a photograph taken a few days earlier he looks about as fit as ever: wavy dark hair, floppy tie, riding boots, riddling smile. He was 40—twice married, once divorced, with a wife, two daughters, and a motherly stepsister, all of whom he loved long and generously, also jealously.

Born in San Francisco in 1876 to a mother who staged séances to turn a buck, his paternity a puzzle, London went to work at 10 in saloons and bowling alleys to help support the family. While a teenager he worked the oyster beds of the Bay Area from all angles: first as a pirate looting oysters, then on the "Fish Patrol" out to nab pirates, on the principle that it takes one to know one. He fired boilers, toiled in a cannery and a steam laundry, and shipped on a sealing ship for Japan. During the 1890s gold rush he endured an epic winter in the Klondike and, later on, would sail the South Seas—finding there, like his forerunner Herman Melville, both a purgatory and paradise.

Out of this toil and adventure came hundreds of stories and essays and some 50 books. Jack London became the most-read author in America, though his formal education was spotty at best. He had lasted only a single term at the University of California before his funds ran out. He then schooled himself, unevenly, on a self-imposed forced march through the Oakland Public Library, with an emphasis on Darwinian and Marxist theories and the survival-of-the-fittest positivism of Herbert Spencer. Query: What might have become of him, and what would American letters have lost, if student loans and MFAs had been handy, or literary salons like Gertrude Stein's in Paris? One likes to think that London would have taken a quick look and lit out for the territory.

Philosophically, London shares much with Joseph Conrad, whom he venerated. Their literary themes overlap: the sea, the primitive in human nature, political insurrection. The assertive romanticism of London's life and work recalls the character Stein in *Lord Jim*. When a man is born, says Stein, he falls into a dream as into the sea. If he tries to climb out, he drowns. "The way," Stein insists, "is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up." This code of individualist bravura echoes through London's work, often clashing with his socialist avowals.

The idea plays out in his one sure masterpiece, *The Call of the Wild* (1903). Schoolboys, and maybe girls, used to devour this atavistic canine novel practically whole. I first wolfed it down one evening before bedtime, skipping, on television, *Our Miss Brooks* with the statuesque Eve Arden, who looked not a bit like Miss Pickering. In the novel, Buck, a ranch dog lazing in the California sun, is kidnapped to the Klondike and slapped into sled harness, where he's soon at one with the icy wastes and his primal soul:

> There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. . . . This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame . . . and it came to Buck, leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry.

Parker Bauer is a writer in Florida.

Wolf House ruins, Jack London State Park, Glen Ellen, California

Call me Buck. Was then and still am. The novel is wrongly understood to be only for children. I'm cheered, though, to learn from my cousin, a school librarian, that Buck's saga is still on her shelves, and even on the curriculum for seventh-graders in her district.

The beast yowls again in *The People of the Abyss* (1903), an account of six weeks the author spent in London's East End—donning rags, haunting the workhouses, sleeping on slimy streets. If such misery and squalor were civilization, then

> give us howling and naked savagery. Far better to be a people of the wilderness and desert, of the cave and the squatting-place, than to be a people of the machine and the Abyss.

But his leftist bent is clear in the book; already he had run (and lost) on the Socialist ticket for mayor of Oakland.

How to square London's heady individualism with a forced leveling of condition—how both could prevail, symbiotically—was never settled in his work. By his own lights, he became a socialist during a cross-country trip at age 18 with Kelly's Army of the unemployed en route to Washington. This he recounts in *The Road* (1907), a backhanded compliment to Theodore Roosevelt's creed of the strenuous life. The book is lively, the journey a lark. As a lefty travelogue, it far surpasses John Steinbeck's cramped and crotchety (and partly imaginary) *Travels with Charley.* Diary in hand, London hoboes his way from Oakland to Council Bluffs, Iowa, flamboyantly outfoxing the railways' dogged enforcers. At stops on the way he "throws his feet"—goes begging door-to-door—confiding in the reader that he has no intent of working a lick.

When a duo of old ladies sits him down to eat, he snows them with lurid tales of life on the road, his true apprenticeship as a writer. On the Des Moines River, where Kelly's Army becomes a navy in makeshift boats, shaking down farmers and townsfolk for food, London sprints ahead of the fleet to glom the choicest spoils for his own loyal crew.

Socialism plays no obvious part in these escapades until Niagara Falls, where he's jailed on vagrancy charges. For 30 days he busies himself with yardbird racketeering: dealing tobacco and swindling other inmates. His sentence he considers unjust,

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hence his socialist conversion. By any reckoning of the transcontinental crime spree he's just completed, he merely gets his deserts.

The most political of London's major works, *The Iron Heel* (1908), is also the weakest. A fable of the fascist putdown of a socialist revolution, it stars a hero with a portfolio much like the author's, a lion of the masses with a tumescent name for the ages. Ernest Everhard has not only his radical principles but also a teary lover to narrate his story. It's a humdrum Marxist homily with a procession of grisly visuals at the close, when the mob of the underclass, stripped of the right to bear arms (that much rings true) is massacred in the streets of Chicago by the rooftop machine guns of the oligarchs:

> The reflection from the sky of vast conflagrations made the street almost as light as day. One could have read the finest print with ease.

The literary self-consciousness evident in those lines mars the whole project. What London meant by the book is hard to make out; the dismal ending rattled, even incensed, many of his followers. It does seem to foreshadow his eventual scuttling of socialist tropes.

If jail had made London a Marxist, alcohol made him a "materialist monist." The illusions of God's existence and man's afterlife were shown him by the "white logic" of drink—which turned him back to more drink for succor. So he writes, or preaches, in *John Barleycorn* (1913), the "alcoholic memoir" in whose opening he rides on horseback to cast his vote for women's suffrage in California, hoping that women would bring about prohibition. His materialism clops also through the autobiographical novel *Martin Eden* (1909), depicting the struggle of a self-educated young individualist to become a writer. A literary success at last, the hero, despairing at life's lack of meaning, drops himself off in the sea—the destructive element, in essence an ocean of booze.

With and without the help of drink, so much went wrong. With his wife Charmian, London envisioned a seven-year voyage around the world on the *Snark*, a sailboat he had designed. Out of this troubled trip would come the story collections that most intrigued me, *South Sea Tales* (1911) and *A Son of the Sun* (1912). The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 delayed their departure; then, in the Solomon Islands, they bumped up against the native islanders, still cannibalistic, and the blackbirders, slave ships out to "recruit" labor. In a humid climate dripping with infection, the Londons and their crew fell sick with dysentery, malaria, and festering sores. As related in *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911), they gave it up after only five months, steaming home from Australia.

Jack London (1906)

He had acquired a vast ranch in the Sonoma Valley, or Valley of the Moon—and what was all this adventuring but a quest for home? Wolf House, a kind of rustic precursor of William Randolph Hearst's mansion at San Simeon, was far along in construction when, one night, a fire reduced it to ruins, both Londons watching in tears. His other home, the ramparts, also flamed out: In 1916 he resigned from the Socialist party, soured by its failure to fight for the revolution. What had held him all along may have been the struggle, not the cause.

From then on, his shelter was Charmian alone. She fed and nursed him, detecting his flirtation with Carl Jung's poetics of the collective unconscious. He underlined Jung's paraphrase of the counsel of Jesus to Nicodemus: "Think not carnally or thou art carnal, but think symbolically and then thou art spirit." His late stories, notably "The Red One" published two years after his death, in which a scientist discovers a lethal deity in the Solomons, reflect that stirring.

What, before his decline, was the "ecstasy that marks the summit of life"? I have my own notion. Early in that illusory seven-year voyage, he navigated the desolate 2,000-mile crossing from Hawaii to Nuku Hiva in the remote Marquesas. Only after starting did he discover that the crossing was practically impossible, the currents and trade winds working against it all the way. It took him two months, and he must have felt immense pleasure in the landfall on Nuku Hiva, a primeval nirvana he had longed to see since reading, as a boy, Melville's account of jumping ship there and breaking bread with the chummy epicurean cannibals of the Taipivai valley. The population had now shrunk, and together, the Londons cantered horses up wild slopes of coconut palm and flowering hibiscus, the blue ocean spread out below like a blessing.

Tracking London, as he had tracked Melville, my wife and I made our way a few years ago to Nuku Hiva. With an anthropologist from Easter Island, we hiked along a rocky stream, past stone platforms where Marquesans once had woven their palmy houses, and then climbed a steep trail—kept open mostly by wild pigs—and crossed a ridge and skidded down to a sparse little village with a pink slice of beach and a colonnade of palms. More than once along the way, I'd caught a faraway misty glimpse of a couple on horseback, scrabbling for the ridgetop. I saw what I saw. My wife, not buying it, nudged the anthropologist. With a shrug and a wink, he bent to pick up a shell. ♦

ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

B&A

Strange Interlude

Neither the worst nor the best from the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

There's something reassuring, even comforting, about competence—not genius, but rather the elusive combination of craftsmanship and care that can sometimes be more welcome than the unexpected. Competence is why Marvel Studios, which has been making superhero movies since 2008, has become the most successful motion-picture maker of our time and possibly of all time. Every one of Marvel's 14 movies has been a hit. Only Pixar can boast a similar record of popular achievement.

There is a consistency to the movies Marvel makes, and its enormous audience has learned over the past eight years that its members can enter a theater and be assured they will be provided with two hours of carefully conceived and executed entertainment. I found the latest Marvel smash, *Doctor Strange*, pretty much a snore, but there's no denying the meticulousness with which its creative team, led by director Scott Derrickson, approached the material. *Doctor Strange* doesn't look like its predecessors either in its visual scheme or in the design of its special effects. It is rich, dark, and plummy, befitting a story about an arrogant nerd who basically becomes a superhero by studying ancient books in a well-appointed library in Kathmandu.

When the movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (as these interlocking pictures are called) are fun, they're really fun, and the three outright comedies—*Iron Man*, *Ant-Man*, and *Guardians of the Galaxy*—are among the most delightful pictures of our time. But the

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

Doctor Strange
Directed by Scott Derrickson

other 11 I would have had no problem skipping, and they have largely faded from memory. *Doctor Strange* is not quite a comedy and not quite a melodrama, which is one of the reasons I didn't enjoy it that much. Still, there's no question something remarkable is going on here under the guidance of a visionary executive named Kevin Feige, a comic-book aficionado who got himself a job on the first X-Men movie in 2000 and who has been guiding the Marvel Cinematic Universe since 2008.

The title character of *Doctor Strange* is a surgeon who smashes up his hands in a car wreck and, in desperation, travels to Nepal to seek a cure from a guru. What he discovers is the world of magic, which his rationalist mind finds hard to accept. This is where the movie lost me, because it makes clear that Dr. Strange lives in a universe in which the Avengers and other superheroes are flying around all over the place—one of whom is the Norse god Thor. Why would anyone in this universe doubt the existence of the supernatural or alternate realities?

Even worse, from my perspective, *Doctor Strange* never establishes the rules of magic in a coherent or comprehensible way. All we know is that, in some circumstances, reality can be manipulated so that whole cities bend in on themselves and turn into the workings of a gigantic clock. The effects are astounding, if derivative: We first saw these sorts of images in the wildly underrated *Dark City* from 1998 and then in the overrated *Inception*, with Leonardo DiCaprio. And if that's all you need, fine. But *why* do they bend? How do you bend them? Why is it okay to bend them sometimes but forbidden at other times?

These are the inevitable problems that come when a movie presents us with characters who possess magical powers; the way those powers are limited is always frustratingly arbitrary and makes it very difficult to suspend one's disbelief. Fortunately for *Doctor Strange*, the two characters who know how it works are played wonderfully by Tilda Swinton and Benedict Wong, who make the nonsense palatable for as long as they're speaking and acting.

These objections are beside the point, really. What Pixar and Marvel have in common, aside from the fact that they are both owned by Disney, is a thoroughgoing commitment to excellence. That is not to say that their movies are uniformly excellent. Far from it, in both cases. But both studios figured out that if they're going to make computerized cartoons or superhero films that will draw millions of people to theaters the first weekend, they have to be careful, lavish, and thought-through. Do it right. Don't go cheap. Photograph it beautifully. Be sure to surround it with a memorable musical score (preferably by the miraculous Michael Giacchino). Get the effects right, and make them look novel every time.

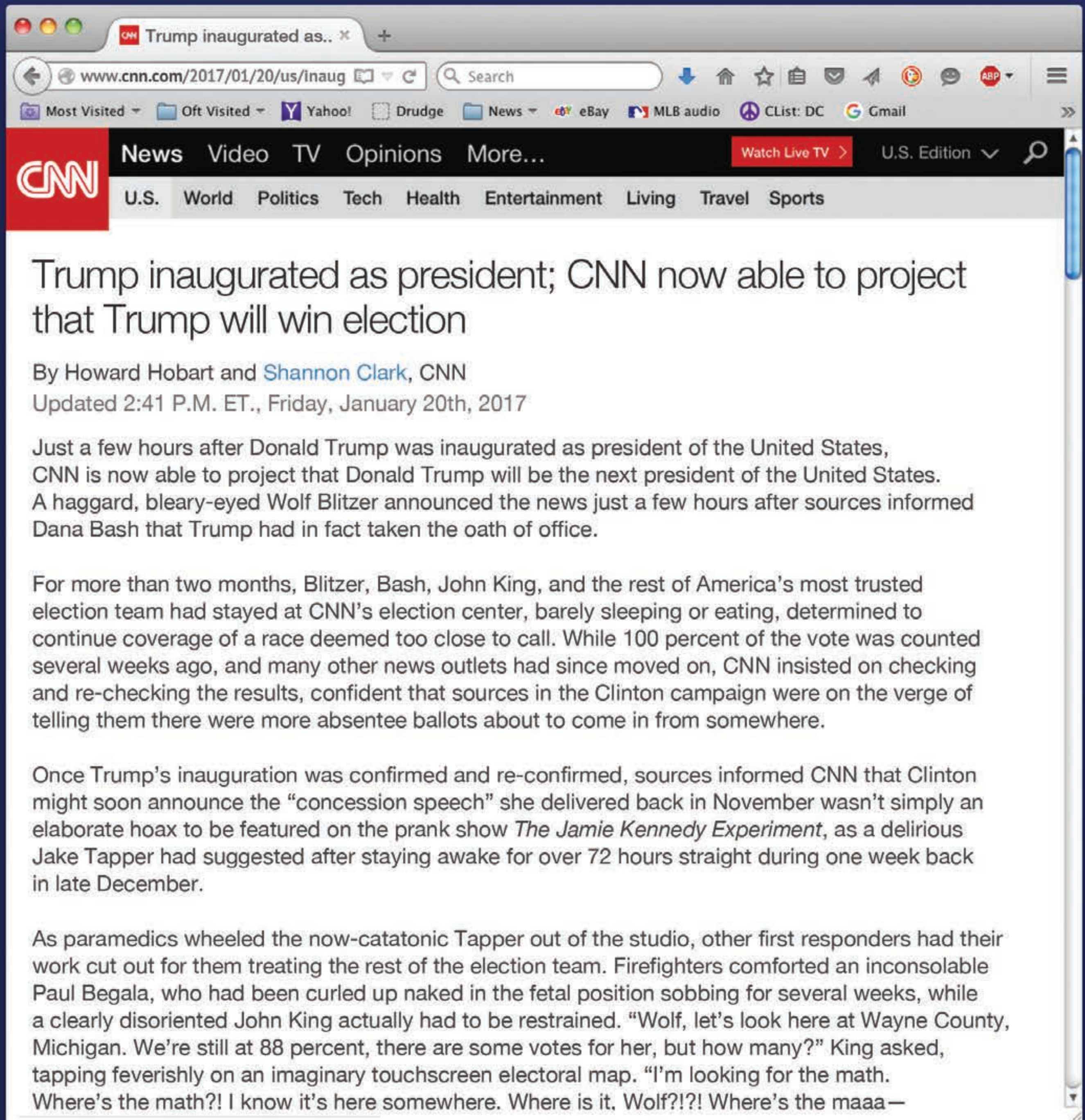
And finally, get the best actors you can. This was the great innovation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe; previously, only the villains were carefully cast in superhero movies while the heroes were largely interchangeable. Here Benedict Cumberbatch, the super-neurotic British actor, makes a dazzling impression in the title role (even with a problematic American accent), aided immeasurably by the ineffably charming Rachel McAdams as his long-suffering girlfriend.

The point is that audiences trust Marvel to deliver the goods, and for good reason. They're not for me, but I'm getting old. ♦

PARODY

"CNN's Dana Bash reports that Hillary Clinton has called Donald Trump to concede the race, per sources."
—CNN, November 9, 2:40 A.M.

"Donald Trump will become the next president in a stunning victory, CNN projects."
—CNN, November 9, 2:47 A.M.



Trump inaugurated as president; CNN now able to project that Trump will win election

By Howard Hobart and Shannon Clark, CNN
Updated 2:41 P.M. ET., Friday, January 20th, 2017

Just a few hours after Donald Trump was inaugurated as president of the United States, CNN is now able to project that Donald Trump will be the next president of the United States. A haggard, bleary-eyed Wolf Blitzer announced the news just a few hours after sources informed Dana Bash that Trump had in fact taken the oath of office.

For more than two months, Blitzer, Bash, John King, and the rest of America's most trusted election team had stayed at CNN's election center, barely sleeping or eating, determined to continue coverage of a race deemed too close to call. While 100 percent of the vote was counted several weeks ago, and many other news outlets had since moved on, CNN insisted on checking and re-checking the results, confident that sources in the Clinton campaign were on the verge of telling them there were more absentee ballots about to come in from somewhere.

Once Trump's inauguration was confirmed and re-confirmed, sources informed CNN that Clinton might soon announce the "concession speech" she delivered back in November wasn't simply an elaborate hoax to be featured on the prank show *The Jamie Kennedy Experiment*, as a delirious Jake Tapper had suggested after staying awake for over 72 hours straight during one week back in late December.

As paramedics wheeled the now-catatonic Tapper out of the studio, other first responders had their work cut out for them treating the rest of the election team. Firefighters comforted an inconsolable Paul Begala, who had been curled up naked in the fetal position sobbing for several weeks, while a clearly disoriented John King actually had to be restrained. "Wolf, let's look here at Wayne County, Michigan. We're still at 88 percent, there are some votes for her, but how many?" King asked, tapping feverishly on an imaginary touchscreen electoral map. "I'm looking for the math. Where's the math?! I know it's here somewhere. Where is it. Wolf?!?! Where's the maaa—