the weekly
Standard

EUROPE AND THE 'TRUMP EFFECT'
DOMINIC GREEN

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CREDIBILITY COUNTS

No matter what Obama and his minions say

BY JAMES KIRCHICK

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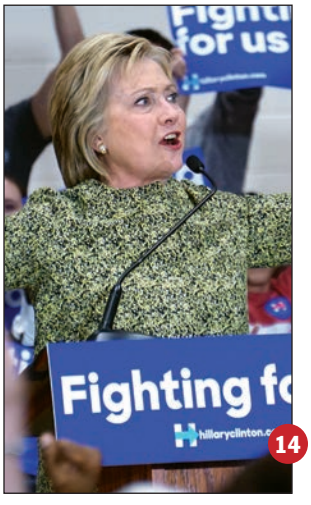

COVER BY DAVE MALAN

More Panic from *Politico* and the *Post*

Last week saw a delightfully breathless editorial in the *Washington Post*, followed by an even more preposterous companion piece at *Politico*, claiming that legislation changing how the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and other U.S. government-sponsored broadcasters are organized is somehow handing dictatorial control of American media to Donald Trump.

Currently, U.S. government-controlled international broadcasters are run under the supervision of a CEO who answers to the Broadcasting Board of Governors, or BBG—a presidentially appointed board made up of four Democrats, four Republicans, and whoever happens to be secretary of state. "A radical change to that system is now coming," warns the *Post*, a change that government-media propagandists "Vladimir Putin and Qatar's emir might well admire." The change is found in legislative language deep in the annual National Defense Authorization Act: The CEO will now have to answer to the president (the BBG will be abolished).

This prompted hyperbole from the *Post*: "If Congress's intention was for U.S. broadcasting to rival the Kremlin's it may well get its wish." And hyperventilation from *Politico*: "Trump is finally getting his Trump TV—financed by taxpayers to the tune of $800 million per year."

According to the *Post*, this nightmare scenario was accomplished in the dead of night, as a sneaky amendment was "quietly inserted" into the larger military authorization. But that would be news to the author of the amendment, House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Ed Royce, who back at the beginning of December put out a press release advertising that his reforms were on their way to becoming law.

The goal of the amendment, Royce said, was to make VOA and the other government broadcasters more efficient and effective in responding to the kind of propaganda being put out by Russia. Royce also, it should be noted, put out a press release in May when the actual amendment was added to the National Defense Authorization Act. In other words, this "insertion" was neither quiet nor even recent.

At least one member of the BBG is wildly unhappy about the changes. Democrat Michael Kempner gave this laughable comment to *Politico*: "Congress unwittingly just gave President-elect Trump unchecked control of all U.S. media outlets." The way that sounds, you'd think that Donald Trump were being given the keys to ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, the History channel, Animal Planet, MTV, and all the others.

But the Voice of America is not a TV network like CNN or Fox News, which broadcast in the United States 24/7. Yes, VOA distributes radio, TV, and online content to millions around the world in dozens of languages. But the U.S. distribution of VOA content is infinitesimal, primarily such things as providing a small amount of Somali-language programming to the expat Horn of Africa community in Minnesota.

It's even harder to argue that the legislation is some sort of Trumpian conspiracy. Not only has the change been in the works for some time, it was a bipartisan endeavor: At the end of its editorial, the *Post* notes, in best Emily Litella fashion, "The Obama administration—perhaps anticipating a Hillary Clinton presidency—supported these changes." *Politico*, too, finally gets around to admitting that the thrust of its article is so much hokum. If you read far enough into the story (and who would, really) you get to a perfectly sensible quote from Jeff Shell, the chairman of the current board: "To have part-time board members to manage something like this is completely unrealistic, so I very much support the empowered CEO [rather] than a board."

In other words, as long as Hillary Clinton was assumed to be Obama's heir apparent, boosting the president's control over government broadcasters was a perfectly reasonable, even enlightened idea. Now that Trump is about to occupy the White House, those very same reforms put the organizations at risk of being run by a "propagandist." Is that because Donald Trump poses a unique danger, or just because when the left is pushing its agenda it never counts as propaganda? ♦

Demoting Shakespeare

To be honest, The Scrapbook is nowhere near as exercised as it might be about the removal, by a gaggle of undergraduates, of William Shakespeare's portrait from its prominent position on the wall of an English department staircase at the University of Pennsylvania. The department had already decided to remove and replace the portrait, in the words of one account, "in order to represent a more diverse range of writers." Mission accomplished.

It shouldn't come as a surprise: Shakespeare, by common consent, is the greatest writer in the English language, and his canonical status is as great a liability as any writer can suffer in the modern academy. His replacement on the wall by a photograph of Audre Lorde (1934-1992)—self-described "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet"—approaches comedy. Audre Lorde wrote more agitprop than poetry, as far as The Scrapbook

is aware; and until the events of this past week at Penn, her name had never appeared in a sentence alongside William Shakespeare's.

Two things, however, did disturb The Scrapbook. First, in the wake of this student iconoclasm, the department chairman, Professor Jed Esty, issued a statement of such supreme fatuousness as to approach self-parody: "Some students," he declared, "removed the Shakespeare portrait and delivered it to my office as a way of affirming their commitment to a more inclusive mission for the English department."

No doubt, Chairman Esty would have described the destruction of statuary and stained glass in Shakespeare's England as "a way of affirming the vandals' commitment to a more inclusive mission for the church"—or some such nonsense. These are exactly the kind of politicized weasel words that pass for academic discourse these days. No wonder Jed Esty has risen to such heights in an otherwise undistinguished English department.

The other point, which troubles The Scrapbook beyond this episode at Penn, is the rise of fascism on America's campuses. One of Chairman Esty's English majors, Mike Benz, was quoted in another account as exulting in the plunder of the Shakespeare portrait: "It is a cool example of culture jamming," he said. It may well be that. It is also a specimen of the violence, verbal and physical, that is now being wielded by undergraduates—with the tacit blessings of the Jed Estys alongside them—against perceived villains, or worse, scholars and students who don't happen to share their authoritarian views.

Kimberly Peirce, the gay filmmaker who directed *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), a pioneering account of the life and violent death of a transgender male, recently spoke at Reed College, where she was greeted by campus progressives with obscene placards, was shouted down as she attempted to speak, and was physically threatened ("F— you, scared bitch"). The spectacle prompted a Reed assistant professor of English, Lucia Martinez, to make this comment:

> I teach at Reed. I am intimidated by these students. I am scared to teach courses on race, gender, or sexuality, or even texts that bring these issues up in any way—and I am a gay mixed-race woman. There is a serious problem here and at other [colleges and universities] and I'm at a loss as to how to begin to address it.

The Scrapbook, long departed from college, has no advice for Professor Martinez. But we wouldn't recommend that she look for guidance from anyone in the English department at Penn. ♦

The New Red Scare

Congressional Republicans agree with Democrats that Russia's hacking of Democratic emails merits investigation. But however troubling Moscow's election-season mischief-making might have been, there's no reason to assume the results of the presidential vote itself were in any way unfair. The real reason we've spent the last few weeks talking about Russian hacking is that Democrats are casting about for a reason—any reason—to explain Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump that doesn't involve acknowledging their candidate's and party's monumental failings.

No less a figure in the Democratic party than Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta gave his blessing to the cockamamie idea of a briefing by the intelligence community on Russian interference for the benefit of the presidential electors, presumably so the Electoral College could upend the results of the election.

Fueling such speculation is mischief-making in its own right. And it's the last thing you should do if your professed concern is the stability of American elections and fear that they are being undermined. There is, as it happens, one fairly recent precedent of politicians secretly working with the Russkies to undermine a presidential election—but the media have not shown much interest in Ted Kennedy's secret plea to the Kremlin to help unseat Reagan in 1984. As former Reagan speechwriter Peter Robinson wrote in 2009, Kennedy proposed to Yuri Andropov "an unabashed quid pro quo. Kennedy would lend Andropov a hand in dealing with President Reagan. In return, the Soviet leader would lend the Democratic Party a hand in challenging Reagan in the 1984 presidential election."

Needless to say, after a long history of Russian attempts to subvert U.S. institutions, it's quite a turnabout to see Democrats accusing Republicans of being soft on the Red Scare du jour. And it's worth noting how selective the left remains when it comes to denouncing Moscow's perfidy. As recently as October 16, three weeks before the election and 63 years after she was executed, *60 Minutes* did a fawning profile on the movement to procure a posthumous presidential pardon for Ethel Rosenberg, who was convicted of spying on America's nuclear program for the Soviets. One of the few critical sources consulted by *60 Minutes* was Weekly Standard contributor and historian Ron Radosh, an acknowledged expert on Soviet espionage. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, we've obtained lots of evidence from inside the Kremlin confirming the Rosenbergs' guilt, and Radosh has been rebuffing attempts to assert the Rosenbergs' innocence for years. Thanks in part to his efforts, among serious people, which is to say outside of the media, the Rosenbergs' guilt is not in doubt.

Then there are the unserious, like former Massachusetts governor and Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis, who has been among those urging President Obama to pardon Ethel Rosenberg. We found this out in a tendentious Boston.com article, which got off on the wrong foot when it called her "an alleged Soviet Union spy" (the word they were looking for is "convicted"). The most precious part of the report is Dukakis proudly citing as a precedent his own proclamation as governor that the notorious left-wing anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, convicted of first-degree murder in 1921, had received unfair trials and that "any . . . disgrace should be forever removed from [their] names."

Ethel Rosenberg

(As they are with the Rosenbergs, Boston.com and Dukakis are proudly ignorant of historical developments in the Sacco and Vanzetti case. Upton Sinclair was arguably the most influential writer in lionizing Sacco and Vanzetti and denouncing their conviction. There's one small problem—in the mid-1990s a letter was found in a California auction house in which Sinclair reveals he was told by Sacco and Vanzetti's lawyer that the two men were guilty and that the lawyer had helped concoct an alibi for the two murderers.)

Ultimately it doesn't matter what excuse Democrats settle on to explain their sweeping losses in November. One day it's fake news, the next it's Russian hacking. History will show otherwise, we suspect. As the durability of the myths surrounding the Rosenbergs, not to mention Sacco and Vanzetti, attest, the next order of business will simply be to rewrite history. ♦

ROGER HIGGINS

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Artificial Intelligence

Flocking. No one outside the millinery trade—ladies' haberdashery—should ever have occasion to use the word, but there it is: a category of artificial Christmas trees. You can get your tree flocked, or unflocked. Made of green nylon, like AstroTurf in the Astrodome, or made of metal, like pink aluminum siding on a split-level suburban house somewhere near Fort Lauderdale. Prelit with twinkling LED lights, or plain, for the do-it-yourselfers among us: the hardy, handy people who prefer putting up their own authentic Christmas lights on their synthetic trees.

Of course, the results can be quite beautiful, with a regularity and soft glow that . . . No, I just can't do it. Can't contemplate artificial Christmas trees without a shiver of despair for civilization and my own sanity. Every year, out here in the Black Hills, my family and I would make a donation to the Forest Service and get our bright orange tree-harvesting tag—then drive up to the edge of the woods. We'd hike on from there, up to our traditional meadow, and begin looking for the tree, the *one* tree, that was calling out to us that particular season. The National Forests ban chainsaws, but a little work with an axe, some back and forth with a bow saw, and we'd be ready to go.

Or almost ready to go. The tree needed its limbs tied up, so they wouldn't tear off as we hauled it back through the forest to the car. Then we'd have to tie it to the roof with blankets to keep the paint from getting scratched. And then the long, slow, careful drive down the snowy dirt roads back to town. And then the getting of it into the house, always scraping the paint on the door jambs.

All that was left, at that point, was setting it up in the tree stand, my wife and I holding it up while my daughter crawled under the branches to tighten the bolts that were supposed to hold the tree in place. Except they rarely did, and the greatest moment of Yuletide anticipation came not on Christmas Day, opening presents, but a few weeks before, as we cautiously let go of the tree to see whether or not it was going to topple. The worst years were when the tree decided to wait till we had the ornaments on it before reenacting its timbery fall.

DAVID CLARK

We'd have to leave the tree in the middle of the room for a day, standing in water to see how much it was going to open. But then we would maneuver it back into its niche between the bookshelves. And . . . those natural trees really were a lot of work, now that I think about it. Besides, they always gave us a rash and clogged up our sinuses. Those steadily growing allergies, worse every year, were what finally persuaded us to consider getting an artificial tree this year. Something that could hold all the ornaments and wouldn't make us sick.

So off we went, searching online and in the stores, to see what was available. This is how I discovered that, like most of us who were alive in the 1970s, *artificial* is still a dirty word. In my imagination, fake Christmas trees sprout on shag-carpet floors—backed by laminate wood paneling and framed by Naugahyde recliners. The artificialities have been around at least since the 1950s, but I always see them as distinctly 1970s things. Perhaps it's disco balls for you, but everything that was inauthentic, weird, and soul-denying about the era is represented for me by artificial trees.

The offerings we saw this year weren't doing much to bring doubters around. A 30-foot Flocked Tree with Warm White Lights runs $16,999 plus $800 shipping. A 15-foot Alaskan Pine Artificial Christmas Tree with Multi-LED Lights—featuring heavy white flocking on 2-inch-wide green pine needles—will cost you only $5,088.74. A 16-foot Bayberry Spruce Memory-Shape® Tree with Dual-Color® Lights, made of polyethylene and polyvinyl chloride—will set you back $4,554.99.

Cheaper alternatives exist, of course. Less expensive ones, too. And after a month of hunting we found a reasonably priced green unflocked lightless tree—that needed only about half an hour to set up. It took all our ornaments, sleigh bells, and lights. It didn't topple over. And it didn't give us allergic reactions.

It even looks pretty good: the exact height we needed, regular without being absurdly precise, and thick with branches all the way around. I feared I would start to hate the way I'd grown so accepting of the artificial stuff of the 1970s, but, no, the tree is a happy thing to have around. I just have to stop myself from climbing up to set a disco ball on top.

Joseph Bottum

the weekly Standard

The Party of Liberty

"At all times sincere friends of freedom have been rare, and its triumphs have been due to minorities, that have prevailed by associating themselves with auxiliaries whose objects often differed from their own; and this association, which is always dangerous, has sometimes been disastrous, by giving to opponents just grounds of opposition."

—Lord Acton, *The History of Freedom in Antiquity*
(quoted by F.A. Hayek in *The Constitution of Liberty*)

Being complacent and short-sighted moderns, we tend to take the triumph of liberty for granted. *Of course* the side allied with liberty won the Civil War and the World Wars and the Cold War. After all, Providence or History would have it no other way.

And *of course* here at home—whatever our problems and challenges—America will remain the land of the free. Freedom seems straightforward and easy. Justice we know to be more problematic. When we pledge allegiance to one nation "with liberty and justice for all," it occurs to some of us to question whether minorities enjoy full justice, and to others to ask whether the unborn do. And we're all vaguely aware of those recent books by distinguished academics quarreling about the meaning of justice.

But liberty? That, we assume, is going to be just fine. To be sure, it's something they worried a lot about in the 19th century. But who really reads the worriers—Tocqueville and Mill and Acton—today? They're not progressive enough for today's left, nor reverential enough for today's right. As for a 20th-century thinker like Hayek, he has his followers, but fewer perhaps than Ayn Rand, whose cartoon case for liberty might be said to give to opponents just grounds of opposition.

Well, one lesson of 2016 is that it's time to worry about liberty again. For to say the least, neither of this year's presidential candidates made liberty a theme. To say more, neither seemed particularly enamored of liberty.

Indeed, to the degree Hillary Clinton's campaign slogan, "Stronger Together," was anything but anodyne, it had a tone slightly hostile and menacing to individual liberty. As for her policies, they were more "progressive" than liberal—more committed to bringing about (enforcing?) "progress" than preserving an old-fashioned liberal polity. Indeed, 2016 seemed to mark the definitive eclipse of "liberalism" by "progressivism" as the banner under which the 21st-century left marches. And that was merely the culmination of the hollowing out of a rights-based and nature-based liberalism in favor of a History-based commitment to a future that *has* to be achieved, punctilious concerns about liberty be damned.

It's true that progressivism has, sometimes, been willing to work to achieve its goals through the institutions of a free society. But when the going gets tough, progressives get going toward illiberalism, not to say authoritarianism. Naïve about History and overconfident about Progress, progressives are easily disillusioned. Instead of learning from their disillusionment and becoming less naïve and less confident, they double down on the project of rational and central control, i.e., *their* control, over what had been a free society.

A Note to Readers

Change is coming to The Weekly Standard!

After 21 years as editor, I'm very pleased to announce that I'm moving over to become editor at large and that my longtime colleagues Steve Hayes and Richard Starr have agreed to take on the responsibility for day-to-day management of the magazine. I'm thoroughly looking forward to the opportunity to work on longer pieces while continuing to write editorials and contributing to weeklystandard.com. With Steve and Richard at the helm, the magazine couldn't be in better hands.

I thank all of you—colleagues, contributors, readers, and friends—who've made my stint as editor of The Weekly Standard such a great experience. When we started the magazine in 1995, we hoped we'd last a while. It's gratifying that we're still going strong a generation later, and I appreciate more than I can say the efforts of all those who've made this possible.

Onward,
Bill Kristol

On the other side, Donald Trump claimed he would Make America Great Again. But very little of that agenda seemed to involve making America freer again. His effective retort to Clinton's creepily regal "I'm With Her" was the creepily populist "I'm With You."

So if the left worships at the altar of History, the right now bows before Vox Populi. If the left's project is one of rational control, the right's response now tends toward impatience with what's reasonable. If the left's progressivism culminates in the imposition of political correctness, the right's populism culminates in the removal of conservative barriers to vulgarity and demagoguery. A left populated by arrogant know-it-alls has produced a right led by a narcissistic know-nothing. The 2016 election featured a contest between authoritarian progressivism and authoritarian populism. The party of liberty had little purchase in either camp.

What is to be done? Can the party of liberty, in its various, often discordant, and even competing elements, assemble itself—more likely informally than formally—on behalf of liberty? Can it acknowledge that yes, of course, liberty is not everything; that yes, of course, there are competing goods, ranging from security to virtue; that yes, of course, the relationships among different aspects of liberty, or between liberty at home and abroad, are complex; that yes, of course, constructing or reconstructing the constitution of liberty is difficult in a thousand ways? Can it acknowledge all of this, but still fight?

To acknowledge complexity needn't mean paralysis. No one was more aware of the difficulties of sustaining and the subtleties of fostering liberty in the modern world than Tocqueville. But that most sophisticated thinker also permitted himself a simple assertion: "I would, I think, have loved liberty in all times; but I feel myself inclined to adore it in the time we are in." In the time we are in, we stand with Tocqueville.

—William Kristol

Who We Are and Who He Is

On March 28, 2011, Barack Obama stood behind a presidential podium at the National Defense University and addressed the nation. His ostensible topic was Libya, and his ostensible purpose was to explain his decision to intervene there. And over the course of his 27-minute address, he did this.

Muammar Qaddafi was poised to attack his own citizens. "His forces," Obama said, "continued their advance, bearing down on the city of Benghazi, home to nearly 700,000 men, women, and children who sought their freedom from fear." If the United States and its allies had waited, he added, Benghazi could have suffered "a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world."

Obama used the occasion, though, to speak on themes much grander than the conflict in Libya at that moment in the spring of his third year in office. He used it to describe his understanding of America's role in the world throughout history. "For generations," he said, "the United States of America has played a unique role as an anchor of global security and as an advocate for human freedom. Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the world's many challenges. But when our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act."

Doing nothing, he argued forcefully, was not an option for a nation as great as ours:

> To brush aside America's responsibility as a leader and—more profoundly—our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are. Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries. The United States of America is different. And as president, I refused to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action.

A betrayal of who we are. Those words echoed in our ears this week as we watched with horror the slow-motion slaughter in Aleppo, Syria. For months, the civilians who remained there have been waiting and expecting to die. And death has found them by the thousands. Some died in attacks launched by the jihadists who have long held the eastern part of the war-torn city. Others perished in barrel

NEWSCOM

bombings conducted by their own government, which has targeted hospitals, schools, and apartment buildings.

Charred buildings sit abandoned. Many streets are impassable, cluttered with rubble, burned-out cars, and, at times, bodies. Clarissa Ward, a reporter covering Syria for CNN, said: "This is actually hell. This is what hell feels like, and there is no way it can get any worse than this."

She was describing Aleppo in 2012.

"It got a lot worse," she said. "Much worse."

Antiaircraft fire in Aleppo

Last week, Syrian regime forces systematically executed civilians left in Aleppo, including children. A brief pause in the fighting between rebels and government forces to allow innocents safe passage out of the city ended when regime-backed militants opened fire on the buses dispatched to fetch those refugees.

There are many complicated reasons that Aleppo has become a hell worse than hell itself. There's also a simple one: Barack Obama allowed it to happen.

Indeed, his decisions encouraged it.

Obama came to office determined to reach a deal with Iran on nuclear weapons at any cost. Obama made clear to the Iranians we'd tolerate their misbehavior in the region, so long as they gave him a deal. He told the Russians that he'd look past their expansionism if they backed the Iran deal. He called for Bashar al-Assad to go, but he made clear to the Iranians that the United States was unwilling to do anything to push their client out.

He was willing to pay any price for his deal, so long as others would bear the burden. And they have. The costs in Syria alone are staggering: nearly 500,000 dead. Millions more displaced. A country in ruins.

There is a horrific irony here. Obama's single-minded pursuit of one legacy-defining accomplishment, the Iran deal, ensures that his legacy will be forever blackened by the tragedy of Syria. His presidency will be remembered as a time when America brushed aside its responsibility as a leader, ignored its responsibility to our fellow human beings, and turned a blind eye to the atrocities in Aleppo and elsewhere.

On this, at least, it will be remembered, in the words of one former proponent of American exceptionalism, as a betrayal of who we are.

—Stephen F. Hayes

It's Frustrating at the Top

A system designed to thwart presidential ambition.

BY JAY COST

As a candidate, Donald Trump promised sweeping change in the way Washington functions. He would tell voters that the system is rigged, it's broken, it's run by losers, and only he could fix it. And yet, for all this rhetoric, it is striking how *typical* his presidential appointments have been: Jeff Sessions, Mike Pompeo, John Kelly, Rick Perry, Elaine Chao, Steve Mnuchin, Wilbur Ross, Andrew Puzder, Nikki Haley, Seema Verma. Most of these appointees are conservative, of course, but they are *conventionally* conservative. It is striking, indeed, that the most controversial appointment so far is Rex Tillerson to the State Department. He is an outsider to the ways of Washington but he is still the CEO of a company with $380 billion in total assets and 75,000 employees. A populist barbarian storming the establishment gate, Tillerson is not!

Little wonder that *Politico* reported last week, "Donald Trump's White House-in-waiting is already being roiled by divisions, with the conservative outsiders who helped power his historic victory colliding with a Republican Party establishment muscling its way in."

Something similar happened eight years ago. Barack Obama promised a major break with the previous practices of both parties. Still, his appointments were conventionally liberal: Hillary Clinton, Tim Geithner, Robert Gates (who was actually a holdover from the George W. Bush administration), Eric Holder, Ken Salazar, Tom Vilsack, Gary Locke, Kathleen Sebelius, and so on. Obama largely sampled from the upper echelon of Democratic politicians and policymakers in forming his cabinet—certainly an ideological change from the Bush era but not a fundamental break from past practices.

The system, as it turns out, is much more resilient than presidential candidates on the trail want voters to believe. Electing a new president certainly changes the course of public policy in Washington, but presidents are nevertheless *constrained* actors. Presidential candidates want us to think they have free rein to make over the government, but the truth is that the occupant of the Oval Office is boxed in from all sides, including in the appointment process.

Trump faces several challenges in using the appointment power to reshape the government. The first is Congress. The Senate possesses the constitutional authority to review certain appointments and reject those nominees it thinks are unfit. This could be why Trump passed over Rudy Giuliani for a cabinet appointment; he may have judged that the confirmation process would be a difficult one for the former mayor of New York City. This might also explain Trump's decision to make Michael Flynn his national security adviser: The Senate does not review or confirm West Wing appointments.

Congress imposes broader constraints as well. The cabinet departments are, after all, legislative creations, and Congress has the power to write legislation regulating which employees are and are not subject to the appointment process. Starting with the passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act in 1883, Congress sharply curtailed the presidential nominating power, setting the overwhelming majority of executive department employees outside the discretion of the commander in chief. By and large, the same civil servants who worked under George W. Bush and Barack Obama will continue to work under Donald Trump, without worry that the president can dismiss them.

John F. Kennedy summarized the limits the president faces better than anybody:

> The fact is that I think the Congress looks more powerful sitting here than it did when I was there in the Congress. . . . When you are in Congress,

THOMAS FLUHARTY

Jay Cost is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

you are one of a hundred in the Senate or one of 435 in the House . . . but from here I look at . . . the collective power of the Congress . . . and it is a substantial power.

Executive appointments are just the tip of the iceberg. When Trump enters office, he will find Congress to be a potentially implacable foe on *any matter* where his will runs contrary to its own.

And Trump—or for that matter any outsider president looking to effect sweeping change—must confront the problem of asymmetric information. The federal government is so complicated that one must possess a great deal of technical, specialized information to manage it properly. The president typically does not possess that information, at least not outside a few policy domains (for instance, as Dwight Eisenhower did with the military). He must appoint officials who possess such knowledge. But where do people acquire this? They usually gain it from participating in the affairs of state—the very same affairs that the president has promised to alter.

There are, of course, experts who are nonetheless looking for big changes—for instance, Rep. Tom Price, whom Trump nominated to head the Department of Health and Human Services, and who came to Congress after a successful career as an orthopedic surgeon, is intent on rolling back Obamacare—but the president still faces a substantial challenge. Oftentimes, those whom he taps to change the system have been longtime participants in sustaining it. This problem is compounded when one considers the large number of lower-level appointments the president is authorized to make, where he can only afford to spend a small amount of face time with his nominees. Quite often, he is forced to trust that the people he has delegated responsibility to will, in turn, make good appointments.

Expertise, in other words, can create a subtle bias for the status quo, which was on full display in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. As Ron Suskind reports in *Confidence Men*, President Obama wanted to reorganize Citigroup in 2009 and instructed Treasury Secretary Geithner to put together a plan. But, per Suskind, Geithner never followed through. As one high-level banking executive explained to Suskind: "The president had us at a moment of real vulnerability. At that point, he could have ordered us to do just about anything and we would have rolled over. But he didn't—he mostly wanted to help us out, to quell the mob. And the guy we figured we had to thank for that was Tim. He was our man in Washington."

The irony is that the president, in many respects, is less able today to fulfill his constitutional duty to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed" than he was in George Washington's time. The Senate constrains him, via its advisory role, as always. But now the vast bulk of the executive branch is outside his aegis, easily able to resist his political or ideological agenda. Moreover, the technical expertise required to manage the government means that the relative handful of appointments he does get to make is often from the "establishment" he ran against.

All of this runs contrary to the image of the presidency that candidates wish to cultivate on the campaign trail. They want voters to think of the president as a kind of superman—able to work his will on any policy issue that confronts him. But this is just not the case. The president, in truth, is a *restricted* government agent, just as all officials are in our system of checks and balances. In this nomination process, we are witnessing an early glimpse of how our system of government will constrain and frustrate Trump, just as it has his predecessors. ♦

The Courting of Pro-life Leaders

What the new president will owe them.

BY FRED BARNES

Donald Trump issued a "Dear Pro-Life Leader" letter in September. "As we head into the final stretch of the campaign, the help of leaders like you is essential to ensure that pro-life voters know where I stand," he said. And he was specific about what "I am committed to."

It consists of four things. He promised to nominate "pro-life justices" to the Supreme Court. He will sign a law ending "painful late-term abortions nationwide." He will stop federal funding of Planned Parenthood "as long as they continue to perform abortions." He intends to make permanent the Hyde Amendment, which bars federal funding of abortions.

The letter was important for two reasons. It helped Trump win the votes of social conservatives, including Catholics and evangelical Protestants. And it marked the emergence of Trump as a full-throated advocate of the antiabortion cause. He had stumbled before in talking about abortion, once saying women who have abortions should be punished. He backtracked on that.

Then came another step in Trump's evolution on abortion. At the third presidential debate on October 19, Trump took on Hillary Clinton on the issue of late-term, partial-birth abortions. She offered excuses why such abortions should be allowed.

"Well, I think it's terrible," he answered. "If you go with what Hillary is saying, in the ninth month you can take the baby and rip the baby out of the womb of the mother just prior

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to the birth of the baby. Now you can say that is okay and Hillary can say that that is okay, but it's not okay with me."

This was a historic moment, though the media didn't notice it. Never before had a presidential nominee described for a national audience what happens in a late-term abortion.

Clinton was unnerved. She accused Trump of using "scare rhetoric." She invoked her travels around the world as secretary of state. "And I can tell you the government has no business in the decisions that women make" regarding abortion. "And I will stand up for that right."

Trump was undeterred. "Honestly, nobody has business doing what I just said. Doing that as late as one or two or three or four days prior to birth, nobody has that."

That the letter and the debate helped elect Trump is indisputable. Without them, he might have lost. In particular, he needed the votes of white, Mass-attending Catholics in swing states. They have been increasingly voting Republican, a trend Trump was eager to spur.

The biggest issue in moving anti-Trump voters, especially Catholics, was the Supreme Court. Late in the primaries, he issued a list of possible conservative nominees "as a guide." But in July, his lead among white Catholics was only 50 percent to 46 percent. In September, he expanded the list and said he "will only choose from it." On November 8, he won among white Catholics by 60 percent to 37 percent.

Was Trump's conversion genuine or merely for political purposes in a close election? At the moment, that is unknowable. As far as I can determine, Trump hasn't made a pro-abortion statement since 1999, when he was interrogated by Tim Russert on *Meet the Press*.

"I'm very pro-choice," Trump said then. "I hate the concept of abortion. I hate it. I hate everything it stands for. I cringe when I listen to people debating the subject. But you still believe in choice. . . . I'm pro-choice in every respect." Asked directly by Russert if he would ban partial-birth abortion, Trump said no.

By 2011, his position had changed. While he was considering a run for the Republican presidential nomination in 2012, he told the *New York Times* he was pro-life. His statement was a preview of where he stands on abortion today.

"There are certain things that I don't think can ever be negotiated," Trump said. "I am pro-life, and pro-life people will find out that I will be very loyal to them, just as I am loyal to other people. I would be appointing judges that feel the way I feel."

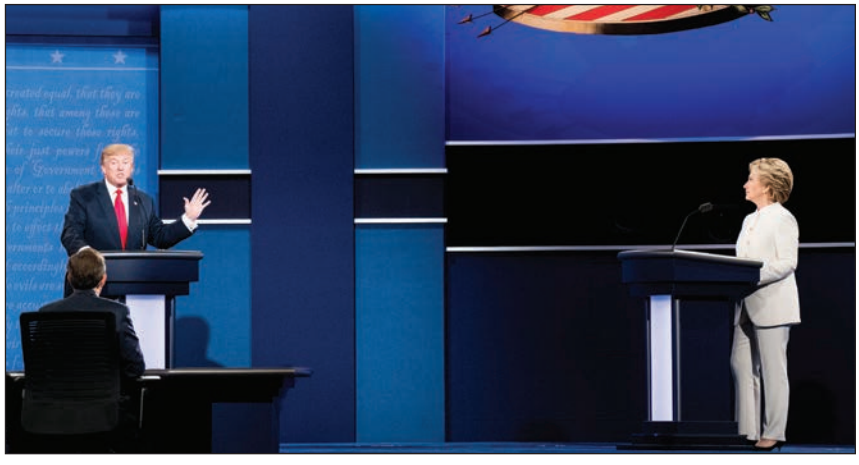
His loyalty wasn't tested in 2012 since he didn't run. As president, it will be. And it won't matter if he is sincerely opposed to abortion. He's committed to a pro-life program, and he'll be judged by how he handles it.

The key player in fostering that agenda was Marjorie Dannenfelser, who heads the pro-life Susan B. Anthony List. She not only arranged for the letter, but also persuaded the campaign to stress Trump's position. Trump himself insisted the letter spell out the "extremism" of Hillary's positions.

The SBA List contacted 1.6 million voters, including 1.1 million at their doors in the swing states of Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio—all won by Trump. "Planned Parenthood expended $30 million to counter our messaging and activity, and it failed just about everywhere," said Mallory Quigley, the SBA List's communications director.

The 2016 election produced "the strongest moment since *Roe* v. *Wade*" for the pro-life movement, Dannenfelser says. "We have a brand new beginning and much stronger muscle" with Trump in the White House and Republicans in control of the House and Senate.

She believes Hillary Clinton, by hardening her support for abortion, created a split among Democrats. Clinton called for repeal of the ban on taxpayer-funded abortions. And she made it clear she would nominate pro-choice justices to the Supreme Court.



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Trump emphasizes his pro-life views in Las Vegas on October 19, 2016.

"Now could be the moment when that [Democratic] realignment could occur," Dannenfelser told me. To pass the ban on abortions once the unborn child can experience pain—the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act—the votes of Democratic senators will be needed. They'll be needed to make the Hyde Amendment permanent too.

But the biggest test will be over Trump's first nominee for the High Court. He is expected to name a successor to the late Antonin Scalia around the time of his inauguration on January 20.

Trump made "nominating pro-life justices" his number-one commitment. He can't escape it even if he wanted to. To overcome a Democratic filibuster, the votes of dissenting Democrats will be required. Recruiting them will be the second-hardest thing Trump has ever done, next to winning the presidency in the first place. ♦

Bioethics in the Age of Trump

An unconventional approach to a contentious issue.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH

The Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues meets, February 28, 2011.

Ever since his unexpected victory, the media have been obsessing over what a Donald Trump presidency will mean for a range of important issues, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, border enforcement, the judiciary, and Obamacare repeal. But one set of crucial concerns—those that go under the general category of bioethics/biotechnology—has received woefully short shrift, both in the campaign and the national discourse. Indeed, with the exception of abortion, these issues went wholly unaddressed during the election—and have certainly received no focus in the runup to the inauguration.

That needs to change. We are entering *Brave New World* territory, with potentially momentous impact on culture and the concept of family. Human cloning has, with way too little fanfare, been accomplished. Researchers are on the verge of creating sperm and eggs from skin cells. Efforts are underway to open the door to the creation of "three-parent" embryos. Transhumanists argue in favor of "seizing control of human evolution" and creating a "post-human species."

Then there are controversies that affect the sanctity and dignity of human life. Assisted suicide has become a major national issue. Prominent voices in bioethics are urging that cognitively disabled people have their organs harvested as if they were dead. Scientists are now arguing to extend the age up to which embryos can be experimented upon from 14 to 28 days. Someday we may even return to the bad old days of live fetal experimentation.

What does our new president think about these and other such morally portentous matters? Your guess is as good as mine. Based on Trump's public pronouncements—of which there are none—it would appear that he has given little thought to bioethical matters, much less pondered the ethical principles that would illuminate administration policy-making surrounding them.

That's politically dangerous. Bioethics issues have the potential to explode suddenly into the public consciousness and grab an administration by the throat. Remember the embryonic stem cell research imbroglio under George W. Bush? Remember Terri Schiavo? A major technological breakthrough in, say, artificial intelligence or a court decision requiring Catholic hospitals to perform abortions could force President Trump and his administration to begin policy deliberations about complex and morally contentious issues with which they are ill-prepared to contend.

That's why I am hopeful that one of President Trump's early public acts will be the appointment of a bioethics advisory commission to help him grapple with these questions *before* they become urgent controversies. Other presidents, including the current one, have had such commissions, of course. Most made barely a ripple. The one exception was the President's Council on Bioethics, formed by George W. Bush concurrently with the announcement of his embryonic stem cell research funding policy in August 2001.

For most of the Bush years, the council was headed by the venerable medical ethicist and philosopher Leon Kass, a profound and eloquent defender of human dignity. Kass gathered into the group mostly conservative deep thinkers—including Robert George of Princeton, my pal William Hurlbut of Stanford, Gilbert Meilaender, Francis Fukuyama, Charles Krauthammer, and other outstanding intellectuals. In the nearly eight years of its existence, the council pondered some of the deepest bioethical issues of the day—ranging from human

COURTESY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION FOR THE STUDY OF BIOETHICAL ISSUES

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cloning, to reproductive technologies, to the brain death controversy.

The President's Council didn't have the public and professional impact its work merited. There were several reasons for this underperformance. First, the media were dedicated to destroying the Bush presidency—as they will be Trump's—and used the stem cell issue as a cudgel, alleging Bush put his religious views above science and relieving human suffering. Reporting fully and fairly on the council's deliberations with a nuanced approach to biotechnological controversies of the day would have undermined that negative narrative.

The council also faced fierce antipathy from mainstream bioethicists, who disagreed adamantly with its generally conservative approach of defending intrinsic human dignity. (One prominent bioethicist even likened Kass to an "assassin" for his desire to ban human cloning.) That granted permission to those outside conservative circles to ignore the council's findings rather than engage with its recommendations in a substantive and respectful give-and-take discourse.

Finally, the issues with which the President's Council grappled were highly political. With people being fed the constant—and mostly unopposed—canard that Bush was "anti-science," most elected officials ran as fast as they could from issues about which the council provided wise counsel.

For a Trump bioethics commission to be more successful than past advisory boards, it would have to break new ground in its approach and be much more visible. Let's call it a "populist" expert bioethics commission.

That need not be oxymoronic. A populist bioethics board would be geared more toward public engagement than past commissions, in which intellectuals mostly interacted with other intellectuals and provided guidance "from on high." What sometimes got lost in that approach was the presentation of digestible information that citizens and elected officials outside bioethical disciplines could comprehend. Thus, a populist commission would include academics and medical/legal professionals but would also welcome serious issues advocates with experience in public discourse and debate, giving the work of the board more energy and flash.

Past bioethics boards have generally reflected the politics of the administrations they served, which allowed political opponents to discount their work. A populist bioethics commission would be as messy as democracy, its ideologically diverse members disagreeing with each other and sometimes the administration itself. Everyone loves a good fight. A commission consisting of social conservatives and liberals, moderates and libertarians, liberal academics and conservative think tank members would both generate media interest and offer the public and government a full range of opinions, helping, through sometimes heated discourse, find areas of common ground.

Third, a populist bioethics commission would broaden its focus beyond offering arcane policy guidance. It should also sponsor public presentations and debates, have members appear on radio and television, and make extensive use of social media to engage the public in bioethical controversies and principles. If the people are paying greater attention to the potentially culture-changing issues within the commission's purview, politicians would have little choice but to follow.

Such a commission could present political risks to the administration, to be sure. But President Trump is, if anything, a risk taker. And he was elected, at least in part, as a way of rejecting technocracy and unaccountable rule by experts. Enabling a populist bioethics commission to act independently of administration policy planning—and, well, rabble rouse—would be unconventional. But it would be fully in keeping with the new era of politics that has been birthed by the next president of the United States. ♦

Don't Blame the Message

Hillary had more than one; they just didn't work.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

Having run twice, and unsuccessfully, for the presidency, Hillary Rodham Clinton is now an official object lesson in how not to run for political office. No doubt, Clinton was a subpar candidate—especially when compared with her husband—but one strike against her is manifestly unfair: that she had no "message."

True, in hindsight, her message was not as compelling as Donald Trump's appeal to working-class voters. And equally true, the hacked emails from Clinton pollster Joel Benenson to campaign colleagues—"Do we have any sense from her what she believes or wants her core message to be?"—make for embarrassing reading. But in fact, Hillary Clinton had three messages: I'm the best-prepared candidate for president in living memory; my opponent is a dangerous alternative; and it's time for a woman president. Of course, none of them resonated sufficiently with voters—not even the appeal to sisterhood—to overcome Trump, but that's not the same as their being nonexistent.

Moreover, if things had gone

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slightly differently in this close election—if she had spent a day or two campaigning in Wisconsin, for example, or had ever been truthful about her private email server—we would now be drawing the opposite conclusion: That the American people voted for familiarity over uncharted waters; that Republicans made a fatal error in embracing Trump; and that the dream of a female president was irresistible to millions of voters. Instead of posing for selfies in the woods around Chappaqua, Hillary Clinton and her well-oiled campaign would be the subject of admiring seminars at Harvard's Institute of Politics.

What, after all, is any campaign's message? Just as most political journalism tends to be wishful thinking, a certain mythology attaches to winning campaigns. We like to tell ourselves, in retrospect, that successful candidates were historically inevitable or, worse, were elected unanimously. Yes, the American people embraced the handsome 43-year-old John F. Kennedy in 1960, but a very nearly equal number embraced his jowly opponent, 47-year-old Richard M. Nixon. It seems unimaginable that anyone might have voted against Franklin D. Roosevelt in the midst of World War II; but in 1944, 22 million Americans (46 percent) did exactly that.

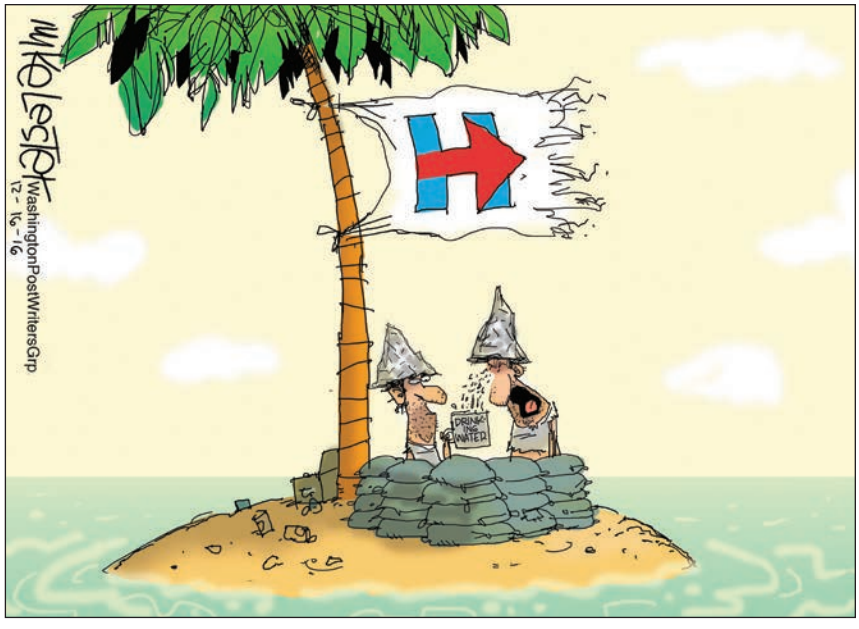
Our most successful contemporary president, Ronald Reagan, is a case in point. It is now generally believed that Reagan was elected in 1980 because of the debacle of the Iranian hostage crisis: Americans were looking for a reason to vote Jimmy Carter out of office, and the Ayatollah Khomeini gave them one. But of course, in the Democratic primaries that same year, when Edward Kennedy challenged Carter, the hostage crisis worked to Carter's advantage. In such emergencies, Americans tend to rally around the commander in chief, and for most of that year, Carter led Kennedy and Reagan in the polls. At the time, political journalists would have explained that economic issues—inflation, stagnation, gasoline shortages, unemployment—were driving

Delivering her message at a rally in Durham, North Carolina, March 10, 2016

CLINTON: NATHANIA JOHNSON

the campaign, not foreign policy. And they would have been right. Reagan's message was not especially sophisticated but was surely compelling: Carter must go, and I'm ready to replace him.

It could be argued that the best "messages" in presidential politics are either simplistic ("Back to normalcy," 1920), self-serving ("Don't swap horses in midstream," 1864), or deceptive ("He kept us out of war," 1916). Indeed, deception is especially effective when overtaken by events. In 1932, FDR never mentioned constructing the American welfare state; he promised a "new deal" for the American people (whatever that meant) and to balance the budget. Yet simple phrases can also be deceptively subtle: When Dwight D. Eisenhower declared, in 1952, that "I shall go to Korea," he managed to convey the idea, in five words, that the Truman administration was bogged down in an unpopular war while reminding voters that he had successfully prosecuted a bigger one seven years earlier.



To which an important corollary must be added: More than a few presidents have been elected to office because voters were determined to un-elect the incumbent—message or no message. Herbert Hoover had grown sufficiently unpopular by 1932 that Roosevelt merely had to smile and wave on the campaign trail, at which he excelled. Ike won in 1952 partly because he was an American hero and largely because the Democrats had occupied the White House for 20 years and grown stale and corrupt. Lyndon Johnson's "message" in 1964 was that the American people didn't want three presidents in one year, and that his opponent (Barry Goldwater) was an extremist. Four years later, Nixon's "message" against LBJ's vice president (Hubert Humphrey) was another throw-the-rascals-out impulse in the wake of an unpopular war.

Of course, the obverse of all this is that—Hillary Clinton notwithstanding—candidates sometimes win because voters *want* continuity. William Howard Taft won Theodore Roosevelt's third term in 1908—although, of course, TR sought to reclaim it four years later. George H. W. Bush was the obvious, and eminently well-qualified, inheritor of Reagan's mantle in 1988, but Al Gore failed to benefit from Bill Clinton's popularity in 2000. Perhaps if Gore's message had been more spellbinding he might have won the electoral vote. By the way, what was Gore's message that year? I don't remember, either. ♦

I Came Here for an Argument

Pay no attention to the scoreboard, we're number one.

BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

The election may be over, but the arguments and recriminations are still going strong. Which brings up an interesting point. You frequently hear people say, "Now is not the time for recriminations," and you think, "Well, sure. Okay. Let's wait a while. There's plenty of time." But you never hear anyone announce, "Okay, now is the time. Recriminate all you want."

If there were such an announcement after the recent election, then it wasn't widely broadcast and perhaps people didn't need to be told. As soon as it was clear that Hillary Clinton had not won, the recriminations began. It took a while for them to form into cogent themes but we seem to be there now. First, there is the argument that she won the popular vote, and the buried premise here is that this is the true victory. That Electoral College stuff is the antiquated and obsolete construction of a bunch of dead white men, many of whom were slaveholders, etc. According to this line of argument, she may have lost on the scoreboard while winning in some more important arena. It's the kind of thing a big-time football coach says when his team has lost to its traditional rival and the alumni are on the warpath and after his scalp.

And then there is the argument that the results were tainted, corrupted, and poisoned, either by the director of the FBI or by the Russians or perhaps both. FBI director James Comey, who must be the most unpopular man in Washington right now, wrote his famous letter to Congress, and this cost Hillary the election. No less an authority than Nate Silver has advanced this one. But . . . she had months, years even, to clean up the email controversy. That there were still loose ends, in the last days of the campaign . . . well, for that the candidate has only herself to blame.

And then there is the matter of the Russians and their hacking of the Democratic National Committee emails. This was the genesis of the WikiLeaks material that found its way into the public realm and was embarrassing to the Clinton campaign. But fatally so? Who knows?

And if Russian intelligence and WikiLeaks fessed up tomorrow, then what? There is no constitutional mechanism for a do-over. Clinton loyalists could console themselves by muttering, "We wuz robbed." That and $4.95 will buy them a cup of coffee at Starbucks.

If there is consolation to be found, they might look to the world of college football. Yes, college football.

Every year, there is a campaign among a couple of dozen candidates to determine which school's team will be number one in the land. The competition should, one thinks, be a fairly straightforward affair. The team that wins the most games, beats the most contenders, wins a showdown game at the end of the season. Simple.

But there are years, lots of them, when it doesn't play out like this, and who gets to say, legitimately, "We're number one" is a matter of considerable and bitter dispute.

For many years, teams did not actually "win" that number one ranking. It was bestowed upon them by, for instance, the Associated Press.

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The sportswriters and editors polled by the AP may not have watched the team that they voted for play a single game. And they may have been subject to all manner of biases. They may have been influenced by the PR engines of one school or another. They may have found more inspiration—for spiritual or patriotic reasons—to vote for Notre Dame or Army than for, say, Michigan State.

The anomalies of this "system" were legion—as, for instance, in the 1964 season when Alabama and Texas were both undefeated and ranked number one and number five, respectively. They played in the Orange Bowl and Texas won a squeaker when it stopped Joe Namath on a late quarterback sneak. Even so, the AP made Alabama its number-one team. Its argument was that bowl games were "exhibitions." Longhorn fans argued that what the game exhibited was that their team was number one. It didn't appear that way in the books, though.

Michigan State and Notre Dame were undefeated when they met during the 1966 season in what was called "The Game of the Century." It turned out to be a pretty dull affair. But with less than two minutes to play and the score tied at 10-10, Notre Dame got the ball in its own territory. There was enough time to move into field goal range. But Notre Dame coach Ara Parseghian chose to run out the clock and, as Dan Jenkins unforgettably wrote, "Tie one for the Gipper."

Neither Notre Dame nor Michigan State played in a bowl game following the regular season. They finished the season with Notre Dame at the top of the rankings, followed by Michigan State. Alabama had gone undefeated and, conspicuously, untied during the regular season and won a prestigious bowl game in a rout. Still, the Tide was ranked number three. There are people in Alabama who still haven't gotten over this injustice though plenty of the same people were fine with Alabama's being ranked number one in 1964, in spite of that loss to Texas.

Eventually, bowl games were included in the determination of final rankings, and the old ad-hoc "system" that sometimes led to split number-one rankings, with the AP naming one team while the UPI coaches' poll came down in favor of another, gave way to the BCS (Bowl Championship Series), which employed a mix of polls and computer-generated ratings to determine which teams should play in one of the major bowl games for the "national championship." This system had some built-in empirical consistency but seemed to produce a lot of mediocre "showdowns" between teams that were supposedly No. 1 and No. 2 and a lot of controversy over who was unfairly left out of the big game. It also produced one "championship" game that was just a rematch of a regular season game, and one was left to wonder just what point was served. Should there be do-overs in showdowns? Among the most debatable of the BCS championship games was the one played in 2001, when Nebraska had lost to Colorado, in the regular season, by a score of 62-36. Still, Nebraska finished ranked second in the nation (above Colorado, among others) and played in the Rose Bowl for the national title. It was, predictably, blown away, 37-14, by the University of Miami.

So pressure built for a better format, and what has emerged is something called the College Football Playoff system, in which a 13-member committee anoints four teams as participants in a playoff. The winner of the final game is awarded the College Football Playoff National Championship Trophy.

As Jeffrey H. Anderson, a contributor to this magazine (and whose Anderson & Hester College Football Computer Rankings were part of the BCS throughout its entire 16-year run) has noted, the final four were no different than they would have been under the old system. But, as always, there is controversy.

Among those final four is Ohio State. The arguments for Ohio State's inclusion are persuasive—unless you are a Penn State fan. In which case you point out that your team beat Ohio State in a football game, as opposed to a poll, and finished first in the conference in which both teams play. So, conference champs and winner in head-to-head competition, that means you should go to the big dance, right? To the fans of Penn State, there is no refuting this argument.

But that is all they will get . . . the satisfactions of the argument. Ohio State will play Clemson in the semis. The winner of that game will play either Alabama or Washington for the national title. That much will be final, but it won't end the arguments.

But that is among the joys of the college game. The argument never ends. Of course, it isn't the Russians and the director of the FBI and the presidency of the United States.

It's a lot more important than *that*. ♦

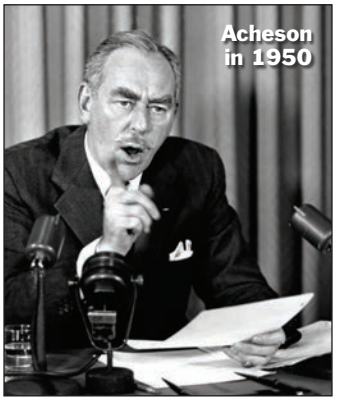
GARY LOCKE

Credibility Counts

No matter what Obama and his minions say

By James Kirchick

On January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivered a speech in Washington, the reverberations of which were felt on the other side of the world. Describing U.S. foreign policy objectives in Asia, a region where both China and the Soviet Union were seeking to spread Marxist-Leninist revolution, Acheson declared that America had established, by force of arms, a "defensive perimeter" that ran "along the Aleutians to Japan and then goes to the Ryukyus." More significant than the territories Acheson included, however, was the one he left out: the Korean peninsula. There, in the northern half, the Soviet- and Chinese-backed Communist regime of Kim Il-sung was preparing to invade its southern neighbor.



Acheson in 1950

Five months after Dean Acheson conspicuously neglected to include South Korea under the American security umbrella, the North did indeed invade the South, at Stalin's urging.

Five months after Acheson conspicuously neglected to include South Korea under the American security umbrella, the North did indeed invade the South, at Stalin's urging. In the first military action ever authorized by the newly established United Nations Security Council, the United States assembled a multinational coalition to defend South Korea from military aggression. After three years of fighting and more than a million deaths, the war ended with an approximate reversion to the pre-conflict borders.

Judging the decisions taken by political leaders is always easier in hindsight, and it would be rash to blame Acheson for the Korean War, the fundamental causes of which were Communist ambition and postwar American retrenchment rather than the words (or lack thereof) uttered by an American secretary of state. No one can argue with any certainty that had Acheson's speechwriters added a line to his address including South Korea under the American aegis, Kim's soldiers would have sat contentedly above the 38th parallel. As Acheson's biographer Robert L. Beisner observed, "No one in Washington then even planned to send more troops to Europe, let alone fight in South Korea." If Acheson committed any sin, it was one of omission, not commission.

Contrast that unintentional (and, to some extent, unforeseeable) blunder with the considerably more deliberate jam in which President Barack Obama mired himself when he declined to enforce his own "red line" regarding Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons in 2013. There, the connection between word and deed was much clearer. A year prior, asked at a press conference under what circumstances Washington might deploy military forces against the Assad government, Obama answered, "We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation."

When, in August 2013, the Assad regime was revealed to have used sarin gas on thousands of civilians in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta, the president sounded ready to act. "It is not in the national security interests of the United States to ignore clear violations" of what he called an "international norm" prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. Over a matter of weeks, however, Obama stepped down from his threat to use military force, first insisting upon congressional authorization that he knew he didn't need, then acceding to an opportunistic and cynical Russian proposal

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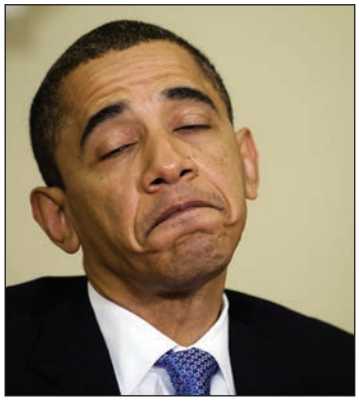
James Kirchick, a fellow with the Foreign Policy Initiative, is a correspondent for the Daily Beast *and a columnist for* Tablet *magazine. His book,* The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age, *is forthcoming from Yale University Press.*

that would spare the Assad regime in exchange for the removal of its known chemical weapons stockpiles. Over three years later—after hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths, a massive refugee crisis threatening Europe's political stability, and a Russian air campaign in support of Assad that marks Moscow's triumphant return as a Middle Eastern military power—the president and his sycophants still insist that reluctance to enforce the red line was not a mistake but a feat of great strategic vision.

According to this chorus, which stretches from the White House to sympathetic journalists and policy analysts, an overextended America has long been hamstrung by its obsession with so-called credibility. From Vietnam to Iraq to Crimea and Syria, denizens of the Washington "Blob," to use deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes's derisive phrase for the capital's bipartisan foreign policy elite, have exaggerated threats to our security and promiscuously asserted an American stake in conflicts that have little bearing on our interests. "Credibility," defined simply as the alignment of word and deed, is the term invoked by critics of the administration's Syria policy who allege that the president lost a great deal of this precious commodity by promising to do something and then breaking his word. In most areas of human activity, credibility is a prized attribute; in diplomacy, it wins friends and cows enemies. But to partisans of the outgoing administration, already engaged in a process of historical revisionism aimed at obscuring the true record of this disastrous presidency, credibility is nothing but a pretext for bellicosity, one that burdens America with unnecessary commitments and perennially leads us down the path of doing, in the president's colorful words, "stupid shit."



With his blasé dismissal of a substantive policy disagreement, President Obama reduced military actions designed to avert mass murder to trigger-happy demonstrations of virility.

According to the Obama brain trust, the United States has repeatedly been dragged into conflicts around the world because its military and diplomatic elite cannot countenance the idea of losing face. "Today's obsession w credibility akin to 19th C dueling & 'affairs of honor,'" tweets former Obama defense official Derek Chollet. The importance placed on credibility by the American foreign policy establishment has earned it only the contempt of Obama and his circle, as revealed in two magazine interviews, both remarkable for their candor. In the first, conducted by Jeffrey Goldberg of the *Atlantic*, the president stated that far from feeling ashamed or embarrassed about his failure to bomb Assad in 2013, he was in fact "proud." He had stood up to the "Washington playbook," which includes the expectation, apparently preposterous, that the leader of the free world will stand by his word on matters of war and peace. "Dropping bombs on someone to prove that you're willing to drop bombs on someone" is how the president, in his characteristically uncharitable way, described the position of his critics. With this blasé dismissal of a substantive policy disagreement, Obama reduced military actions designed to avert mass murder to trigger-happy demonstrations of virility.

As a further demonstration of the playbook's supposed limits, Obama pointed to Russia's August 2008 invasion of Georgia. "I don't think anybody thought that George W. Bush was overly rational or cautious in his use of military force," the president quipped. Yet five years after Bush's "shock and awe" invasion of Iraq, Moscow rolled its tanks to within 30 miles of Tbilisi. Even the most warmongering of American leaders, Obama implied, cannot scare other nations away from behaving in ways they believe secure their national interests. It would thus be naïve to think that Obama's own backing down from an explicit promise to order military action against the Assad regime had any consequences beyond the ruffled feathers of Washington's war hawks. While it's true that the Iraq war had no visible bearing on Russian decision-making in Georgia (a straw-man argument from a president expert at constructing them), what Obama conveniently left out of his history lesson was that Vladimir Putin might have gone even further had the Bush administration not made a strong show of force in the region, dispatching warships to the Black Sea and pointedly sending humanitarian aid in military aircraft to the embattled Georgian government.

A more apposite event to discuss in the context of Georgia would have been NATO's decision, at the behest of France and Germany, to reject Membership Action Plans

JEWEL SAMAD / AFP / GETTY

for both Georgia and Ukraine at the alliance's April 2008 Bucharest summit. Like Acheson's Asia speech, this move telegraphed Western indecision and weakness, effectively leaving these countries in a strategic gray zone, which Putin took as a green light for aggression. Indeed, within six years of that summit, both ex-Soviet states were home to large numbers of Russian occupation troops.

Asked by Goldberg if the refusal to enforce his Syria red line had in any way led to Putin's aggression several months later in Ukraine, Obama dismissively replied, "This theory is so easily disposed of that I'm always puzzled by how people make the argument." No one, however, seriously argues that Russia invaded its neighbor *because* America didn't punish Assad for his use of chemical weapons. Like Kim Il-sung's invasion of South Korea, the origins of Putin's meddling in Ukraine lie in local factors. Yet for the president and his defenders to argue that his about-face on Assad had no effect in emboldening Russian foreign policy adventurism is special pleading. Obama's reluctance to follow through on his insistence that "Assad must go" sent the same message that NATO's rejection of Membership Action Plans for Georgia and Ukraine did in 2008. In both cases, Putin was reassured that he would be pushing against an open door.

The second interview through which the administration conveyed its disdain for credibility was David Samuels's *New York Times Magazine* profile of Ben Rhodes. Throughout the administration's negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program, the White House insisted that a convincing threat of military force was always on the table and that this is what extracted punishing concessions from Tehran. Yet as Rhodes basically admitted, the White House wanted a deal so desperately that it was willing to deceive the public about the nature of the Iranian regime, which it claimed had become more "moderate" following the 2013 election of President Hassan Rouhani.

To push this deceptive narrative, the administration created a media "echo chamber" by feeding talking points to receptive journalists, many of whom, Rhodes sniggered, are "27 years old" and "literally know nothing." With a theocratic dictatorship raring for nuclear weapons on one side of the negotiating table and an exhausted America seeking an exit from the Middle East on the other, you don't need to be a nuclear strategist to deduce the outcome of the negotiations. When Samuels asked Obama's former secretary of defense and CIA chief Leon Panetta if, as Obama had repeatedly insisted, military force would have been used to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb, Panetta admitted "probably not." (According to *Wall Street Journal* reporter Jay Solomon in his new book *The Iran Wars*, one of the main reasons Obama stepped down from his red line threat in Syria was concern that the Iranians would suspend nuclear negotiations should the United States take military action against their client, Assad.)

A Syrian is treated after a government chlorine gas attack, July 30, 2015.

Obama said that far from feeling ashamed or embarrassed about his failure to bomb Assad in 2013, he was in fact 'proud.' He had stood up to the 'Washington playbook,' which includes the expectation, apparently preposterous, that the leader of the free world will stand by his word on matters of war and peace.

Writing at *Vox*—one of the administration's favored new media outlets in selling the Iran deal—Max Fisher channeled White House spin in his denunciation of the "credibility trap" that has long ensnared American leaders. The perception that American behavior in one crisis or region might affect the course of events in others is "disproven" and "demonstrably false," claimed Fisher, citing "political scientists." Fisher pointed to a raft of academic studies to prove his point, as if the sum total of the world's diplomatic and military history, in all its vast complexity, could be quantified and explained by social science methods. Forced to come up with a theory to explain why so many foreign policy analysts and practitioners are consumed by a fervent belief in credibility that is "demonstrably false," Fisher approvingly quoted an international relations professor who surmised that the issue is "gendered," a way for them to flaunt their "manliness." Zack Beauchamp, another of *Vox*'s writers whom Rhodes probably had in mind when he referred to credulous members of the administration's "echo chamber," called the idea of foreign policy credibility "total bullshit."

Revealingly, like many of their liberal peers, Fisher and

AMMAR SULAIMAN / ANADOLU AGENCY / GETTY

Beauchamp subscribe to an entirely conventional view of foreign policy credibility when a Republican is accused of undermining it. After Donald Trump declared on the campaign trail that he might not defend the Baltic states—NATO members all—from Russian attack unless they "fulfilled their obligations to us," Fisher, now of the *New York Times*, intoned, "If Mr. Trump creates doubt about the United States' commitment to defend the region, that will play into the uncertainty and volatility that already makes it dangerous." Beauchamp alleged that Trump's "equivocating" on American treaty commitments "creates a dangerous amount of uncertainty" and accused him of "trashing one of the foundations of the postwar European order." Bullshit for thee but not for me.

Because they're so wedded to the fiction that Obama's red line fiasco was really a brilliant diplomatic victory, the president and his allies have committed themselves to arguing against reality. The much-vaunted effort to remove Assad's chemical weapons was not the great success they once claimed; in October, the State Department admitted that the regime continues to use chlorine gas explosives against civilians. (This somewhat arbitrary focus on chemical weapons, moreover, has obscured the regime's use of conventional arms to massacre far more people.) Ever since Washington paved the way for Moscow's military intervention by making clear it would stay out of the fight, the administration has insisted that Russia was entering a "quagmire." Propping up Assad, Obama told the *Atlantic*, "doesn't suddenly make [Putin] a player. . . . [T]here's not a G20 meeting where the Russians set the agenda around any of the issues that are important." This would probably amuse Putin, who seems to care more about traditional great-power metrics like maintaining a military foothold in the Middle East and shoring up support for a longtime ally than he does global warming or whatever else dominates G20 meetings. Thinking Putin has gained anything with his Syria intervention, the president went on, "is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of power in foreign affairs or in the world generally." Yet by any objective measure—as opposed to those used in Obama's dialectical fantasy world where "progress" moves us all ineluctably forward—it is Putin who has achieved his goals in Syria and the West that has failed miserably.

Pro-Russian rebel forces practice with Russian trainers in eastern Ukraine, March 11, 2015.

MSTYSLAV CHERNOV / AP

Ultimately, the greatest repudiation of the notion that credibility doesn't matter comes from Obama's own hapless secretary of state, John Kerry. At this month's Saban Forum, Kerry admitted that a failure to defend the president's red line "cost us significantly in the region, and I know that and so does the president. . . . It cost. Perception can often just be the reality." America's allies have been saying much the same thing. "This signal was interpreted as weakness from the international community," said French president François Hollande, who blamed Obama's indecisiveness for Russian aggression farther afield. "That's what provoked the crisis in Ukraine, the illegal annexation of Crimea, and what's happening in Syria right now." A former Japanese defense ministry official told me, on a recent visit to Tokyo, "if you are not going to enforce red lines you should not talk about [them]." Washington's inertia, he said, had "undermined" the U.S. position in Asia.

Denying that credibility counts in the world—arguing that it's nothing more than a form of magical thinking designed to embroil the United States in endless conflict—is a willful delusion and recipe for policy failure. It's also a crafty debater's tactic, of which this White House and its minions are especially fond. Challenge this administration's weakness on the world stage, and you will be met with an endless stream of false dichotomies. Those who criticize the president for not doing more in Syria, he and his acolytes allege, want to ignite another war in the Middle East (as if what Syria has been experiencing these past five, dreadful years is not already a war). Those who recommend he send defensive weapons to Ukraine want war with Russia. Those who find fault with his nuclear deal want war with Tehran.

During the 2008 Democratic presidential primary, responding to then-rival Hillary Clinton's claim that his campaign promises amounted to "just words," Obama delivered one of his more memorable speeches. Reciting some of the most famous aphorisms of the American canon, from the Declaration of Independence's revolutionary claim that "all men are created equal" to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," Obama righteously declared, "Don't tell me words don't matter." How sadly ironic that this president, who more than any other in recent memory acts as if his speeches are a substitute for action, was so selective in recognizing the importance of his words. ♦

The 'Trump Effect'

Europe got there first

By Dominic Green

A historian can be wise after the fact, but a political analyst must be wise before it. Most commentators failed to detect the signs of Donald Trump's presidential victory, despite their received wisdom and psephological sensitivity. (The exception seems to have been those relying on that most sensitive of all predictors, the gut.) Since the election, some of the commentariat, straining to get ahead of the next inconvenient fact, have settled upon a new narrative. A concept sufficient to explain all unforeseen, objectionable, and confusing phenomena; an insurance policy so extensive as to forestall any accident of reality: the Trump Effect.

Geert Wilders debates in The Hague, March 29, 2016.

The Trump Effect, the wise now agree, is a kind of sickness in the democratic system. The early symptoms—nativist grumblings, nocturnal tweeting, and disinhibited behavior around women and immigrants—may lead to a crisis, especially in cases where the major parties have left their voters to fend for themselves in a globalized economy. This crisis may continue for as long as four years. Public life may be impaired and civility permanently weakened. Grandiosity and an increase in risk-taking behavior may lead to a rise in the racial temperature and the loss of old friendships. It is not yet clear if the Trump Effect can be remedied by treatment with tariffs, subsidies, and border defenses involving moats and alligators—or if these are actually signs of its terminal phase. It may in fact be incurable, like senility and other symptoms of decay.

Worse, the Trump Effect can jump like a virus from one sick constitution to another. Named for its first appearance in the United States in early November 2016, within weeks the Trump Effect claimed its first European victim. The Italian prime minister was overthrown in a referendum on constitutional reform. In their presidential election, 46 percent of Austrians showed symptoms, voting for Norbert Hofer and the anti-immigrant Freedom party. A full-scale epidemic is expected in 2017, with significant outbreaks of populism in France, Italy, Germany, Holland, and Britain. Further complications may induce the amputation of the southern tier of the European Union.

This is the newly received wisdom of the Trump Effect. Except there is no Trump Effect.

Pundits have correctly diagnosed one thing: the symptoms of America's domestic problems and the possible effects of a Trump presidency on America's global position. But their assumption that Trump's victory makes electoral revolts in Europe more likely is erroneous. Europe's insurrections may arise for similar reasons, and may even take similar form, but correlation, as the analysts hate to admit, is not causality. Europeans and Americans may face similar challenges in a globalized economy, but they are heirs to different histories.

The Trump Effect is in reality a misleading narrative that reverses the current of recent events. Internationally, the Trump Effect is a domino theory of democratic reaction, in which Trump, to use the key term, "emboldens" Europeans to vote for the alt-right flat-earthers for whom they would not otherwise have voted. Yet the sorry truth is that Europeans are already uninhibited when it comes to voting for bigots and xenophobes. Further, the extremity of Europe's "New Right" parties is not uniform, and some of Europe's antiestablishment parties are not of the right at all. As for the alleged domino effect, if any dominoes are falling, they are falling towards the United States, not from it.

If we were to name a political condition after a deliberately controversial populist with a blond bouffant and a fondness for anti-immigrant statements, a more accurate name would be the Wilders Effect. Its symptoms

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appeared in Holland several years before the crash of 2008 and the subsequent rush of blood to the extremities that produced the Tea Party, the Occupy Movement, and the Trump candidacy.

In 2004, when Donald Trump was beginning his career in the entertainment business with the first season of *The Apprentice*, the bleached and bequiffed Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders was expelled from Holland's center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy. As party spokesman, Wilders had repeatedly embarrassed his colleagues with hostile statements about Islam and immigration. The last straw was his refusal to agree that the European Union should start negotiating Turkey's long-promised entry into the club.

Following his expulsion, Wilders launched the Party for Freedom. He combined a Thatcherite economic agenda with strongly nationalistic positions on Islam, immigration, and identity. Almost immediately, he required police protection because of regular death threats from Islamists. As Trump was to do a decade later, Wilders cultivated popular support by mocking professional politicians, the media, and political correctness. A born entertainer, he exploited the media's amoral appetite for drama by discussing delicate subjects in crude language. His rivals made the mistake of responding in equally melodramatic fashion and his enemies the mistake of trying to censor him.

In 2014, Wilders asked supporters at a party rally at The Hague if they wanted more or fewer Moroccans in Holland. 'Fewer! Fewer! Fewer!' the crowd chanted. 'Well, we'll take care of it then,' Wilders replied. His prosecution for hate speech ended in early December with a token conviction—and a significant rise in support for his party.

While the British Parliament would later debate whether to bar Trump from visiting the United Kingdom because of his inflammatory statements about Islam and Muslim immigrants, in February 2009 Jacqui Smith, the Labour party's home secretary, banned Wilders as an "undesirable person." The ban was rescinded on appeal in October of that year. Wilders declared a "victory" over censorship, went to London, and held a press conference at which he called Islam a "fascist ideology."

He starred in a similar drama at home. In 2009, Dutch prosecutors charged Wilders with five counts of hate speech against Islam, Muslims, and Moroccans and other immigrants. The trial, which was widely criticized as a repression of Wilders's right to free speech, ended in 2011 with Wilders acquitted on all charges. Not only did the trial, publicly praised by politicians on the left, fail to cast Wilders beyond the pale of acceptability—it secured him a supporting role in the Dutch government.

Popular support for the Party of Freedom rose during the trial, with a majority of Dutch voters sympathizing with Wilders. In the 2010 election, the Party for Freedom took 15 percent of the vote. With 24 of the House of Representatives' 150 seats, it became the third-largest party in Holland. Wilders's erstwhile associates in the People's party took the largest share of votes, 21 percent, but their 31 seats were sufficient only to form a minority government. Leader Mark Rutte failed to form his preferred coalition with Labour, the second-largest party. Turning right, Rutte partnered with the Christian Democrats, whose support had collapsed by half in the election, and secured a working majority by making an "agreement" with Wilders. The Party for Freedom would remain outside the government, but would vote with it. This "agreement" lasted for two years, until Wilders refused to endorse an austerity budget that, he said, would put the EU's law on budget deficits ahead of the national interest.

This was not the first such European "agreement" between the established parties and a Euroskeptic, nativist newcomer. In 2001, the Danish People's party (DPP) had allied with a center-right coalition without entering the cabinet. In return, the DPP played a role in turning Denmark's immigration policy into one of Europe's strictest. The arrangement lasted until 2011 and resumed after Denmark's 2015 election, this time with the DPP among a right-left alliance supporting the minority cabinet of Lars Løkke Rasmussen and the Venstre (Left) party. The DPP is now the country's second-largest party, with 21 percent of the vote and 37 of the 179 seats in the Danish parliament.

Next door, the nationalist Sweden Democrats became the third-largest party in the 2014 election, more than doubling their share of the 349 seats in the Riksdag to 49. As in Denmark, a left-wing party leads a right-left coalition, this time formed to prevent the Sweden Democrats from entering the government or taking part in a Dutch- or Danish-style "agreement." A similar outcome was averted in the second round of the 2002 French presidential election, when strategic voting by the left kept Jean-Marie Le Pen from becoming France's first National Front president.

In March 2017, the Dutch will return to the polls. Once again, Wilders's campaign has been buoyed by an

Marine Le Pen and France's National Front (left) predated Trump's rise by years, as did Hungary's Viktor Orbán (right)...

indictment. In 2014, Wilders asked supporters at a party rally at The Hague if they wanted more or fewer Moroccans in Holland. "Fewer! Fewer! Fewer!" the crowd chanted. "Well, we'll take care of it then," Wilders replied.

His prosecution for hate speech ended in early December with a token conviction—and a significant rise in support for his party. During the course of the trial, polls showed that backing for the People's party jumped from the equivalent of 27 seats to 36. If Wilders wins that many seats in March, he will be the leader of the next Dutch government. His manifesto includes his longstanding commitments to a moratorium on mosque building, halting immigration from Muslim countries, and—despite his advocacy of free speech—banning the Koran.

Any rise in Wilders's share of the vote is sure to be attributed to the Trump Effect. So will a rise in support for Marine Le Pen in April's first round of voting for the French presidency, a fall of support for Angela Merkel in Germany's parliamentary elections next September or October, and any other unpalatable or unforeseen votes in a year that will test the endurance of the European Union. But European politicians do not need Trump's encouragement when it comes to making extreme statements, and European voters do not need the uninhibiting example of Trump's voters.

Europe's voters have long invited radical populists into the mainstream. In some states, the older parties have worked with them in informal coalitions. In others, the populists have won office more than once. The Hungarians have twice elected Viktor Orbán, an authoritarian democrat who is determined to prevent the growth of Hungary's minuscule Muslim population. If Italians wonder what life would be like if they elected a populist septuagenarian with obscure tax arrangements and an unwillingness to separate his businesses from his political office, they need only recall their four terms under Silvio Berlusconi.

Today, Europe's populist parties resemble its airlines: Every country has at least one. They have built up their market share slowly. That market is an internal, European one. While Americans were enjoying Bill Clinton's post-Cold War dividend, Europe's nationalists were digging in for the long war against the European Union. The Danish People's party was founded in 1995, and the UK Independence party in 1993. Other, more extreme nationalists have roots reaching further back and were seeded by candid sympathy for fascism. Austria's Freedom party was founded in 1956, France's National Front in 1972, and Greece's Golden Dawn in 1985.

It bears stating the obvious: All these parties formed before 2008. Almost all of them prospered by exploiting Europe's multiparty systems and proportional representation, which have no parallel in the United States. All have prospered further since 2008 by exploiting hostility to immigration, Islam, and the federal superstructure of a European Union that seems incapable of fostering economic recovery. Here, the resemblance to American politics is unmistakable, but so are the differences.

Geography alone makes the collapse of states in the Middle East a foreign policy problem for Americans, but a domestic issue for Europeans. History defines membership in the European nations on narrower criteria than membership in the American nation. Economically, America's sluggish post-2008 recovery is a miracle of dynamism compared with the stagnation of the eurozone, where only the German economy has done well. And although Americans have their own tradition of animosity to the federal government, there is no American parallel to the widespread rejection of the European Union. The voters of Arizona and Texas may denounce Washington's immigration

ALL IMAGES: NEWSCOM

. . . Italy's Five Star Movement (left), Alternative for Germany (right), and many other antiestablishment parties and politicians across Europe.

policies, but they are not yet committed to secession.

Europe's problems are of a different order, and they develop by different dynamics. Donald Trump's campaign rejected free trade treaties and promised to erect tariffs. The winners in this year's Brexit campaign, Trump's friend Nigel Farage among them, want to escape the tariffs and regulation of the European Union and increase Britain's free trade, notably with the United States. The Danish People's party's economic policies are indistinguishable from the center-left policies of Europe's Christian Democrats. The National Front is as committed to the glory of the French welfare state as the Socialists it despises as unpatriotic. Beppe Grillo, the leader of Italy's Five Star Movement, may be another insurgent entertainer, and a career in comedy may be an ideal training for life in Italian politics. But the roots of Grillo's movement are on the anarchist, anticapitalist left, not the nationalist or free-trading right.

American politics remains a generally merciless struggle between two parties. The purportedly transformational campaigns of Barack Obama, Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump all occurred within this two-party framework, and the victories of Obama and Trump have affirmed it. The outcomes of the 2000 and 2008 votes inspired claims that the electoral landscape had been changed utterly, in favor of one party and then the other. In both cases, the hope of a new consensus turned out to be illusory. A similar solidity can be seen in Britain, which has had one coalition government since 1945, and where centrist third parties struggle to sustain a significant role. The shock of Brexit is being absorbed by a two-party framework so effective that UKIP, which was vital to the Brexit vote, is out in the cold.

By contrast, in France the National Front has successfully broken the monopoly of the traditional parties of the right and left. In Europe's states, especially in those susceptible to regional tensions and proportional representation, the definition of civil discourse had changed long before Trump's campaign. So, too, the party framework of democratic politics is changing. The traditional parties are on the defensive.

In 2013, the extremists of Alternative for Germany narrowly failed to reach the threshold for entry into the Bundestag. In 2016, they are likely to exceed it. Angela Merkel, who welcomed hundreds of thousands of migrants in 2015, and who responded to Donald Trump's victory with the chilliest and most conditional of congratulations, now proposes to ban the burka in Germany. Merkel is not "emboldened" by Trump's victory. She and other leaders of Europe's established parties are trying to forestall the new parties of the extremes from establishing themselves on the emerging center ground of European politics, a consensus about keeping the welfare state in and the Muslims out.

The people who told us that Hillary Clinton was bound to win may, like medieval doctors with their miasmas, trace unhealthy symptoms in European politics as the malign influence of a Trump Effect. It may be comforting to attribute the world's ills to one person. In a sense, it affirms that an American president could still be that influential. But Donald Trump is not a harbinger of Europe's near future so much as a message for Americans that got delayed in transmission.

Americans, shielded by geography, patriotism, a two-party system, and the world's currency of last resort, were able to delay their reckoning with the electoral consequences of open borders and open markets. Meanwhile, the Europeans have been creating a new politics and a new consensus on national identity. While Trump was talking about walls, the Europeans were already building fences. ♦

The Liberal Ideological Complex

Insidious, powerful, and under the radar

By Jeff Bergner

". . . vast bureaucracies of civil servants, no longer servants and no longer civil." (Winston Churchill)

In 1961 President Dwight Eisenhower warned of the danger of a military-industrial complex. This powerful public-private collaboration, he said, had the potential to exert "unwarranted influence" over America's democratic processes. A half-century later, there are still those on the left who cling to this fear. But it seems that Eisenhower's warning had its intended effect—and perhaps then some. In 1961 defense spending constituted 9.1 percent of the gross domestic product, and there were 2,483,000 uniformed military personnel. Today, defense spending is 3.2 percent of GDP and 1,390,000 men and women serve in the uniformed military. If this behemoth is threatening America's democratic processes, it is not doing so very successfully.

There is, however, another interlocking public-private collaboration that is at once more insidious, more powerful, and more straightforwardly partisan: the liberal ideological complex. We do not always see this collaboration so clearly, because we tend to view each aspect of it as unique and not part of a larger picture. We look, for example, at public sector unions as a labor issue. We look at funding for Planned Parenthood through the lens of abortion policy. We look at EPA regulations and grants in terms of global warming and job destruction. And so on and so forth, down to the smallest, most narrowly tailored grant awards of the federal government.

Yet in each of these cases, the complex functions in essentially the same way. Federal funds are provided for organizations that carry out liberal policies. In turn, these groups employ like-minded staff and both the leadership and the staff of these groups contribute money, time, and services to the politicians who favor this use of federal funds. This creates a vicious circle in which campaign funds are indirectly skimmed off the top of taxpayer-funded organizations, all in the service of liberal ideology.

When progressives helped to replace the spoils system with government by so-called experts, they aimed to professionalize the government. The goal was to put policy decisions into the hands of intelligent and highly trained bureaucrats who would know the interests of Americans better than average Americans did themselves. Here is the basis for the extraordinary willfulness of progressive government, a matter that has been remarked upon frequently.

What has been less clearly observed is the effect of progressive government upon the governing class itself. Training, expertise, and administrative experience, progressives argued, would be in the service of the entire nation and would reflect the good of the whole. Progressive authors and intellectuals did not foresee, or did not care, that bureaucrats and experts would develop a set of interests distinct from the American people they served.

While there was perhaps never any such thing as objectivity in governance, the belief that there was kept executive branch actions within certain bounds and restrained partisanship and ideological predispositions. So too did the traditional idea that except for national emergencies and wars, government spending and government revenues should be kept in rough balance.

This world is gone. Over the past decades, we have seen the rise of executive branch governance in the service of the liberal ideological state. This kind of governance is marked by four characteristics: (1) a bias toward increasing the size and scope of government across every department and agency, no matter which political party controls the White House or Congress; (2) a nonmilitary executive branch workforce comprised overwhelmingly (though in different degrees in different departments) of liberal officials, who are ideologically disposed to support this growth, and who are no longer representative of the populace as a whole;

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(3) a broad support system of direct government funding for liberal groups that reinforces the bias toward ever larger and more intrusive government; and (4) the development of a privileged set of rules and rewards for the governing experts (including compensation levels, bonuses, guaranteed job security, defined benefit retirement systems, and a different set of standards by which to measure their own actions as opposed to those of the governed).

Reform of this system was attempted halfheartedly during the Reagan administration, based in large measure on a very detailed report published by the Heritage Foundation. But these efforts failed both because a heavily Democratic House of Representatives opposed them every step of the way and for want of courage to take the political heat that inevitably comes from such efforts.

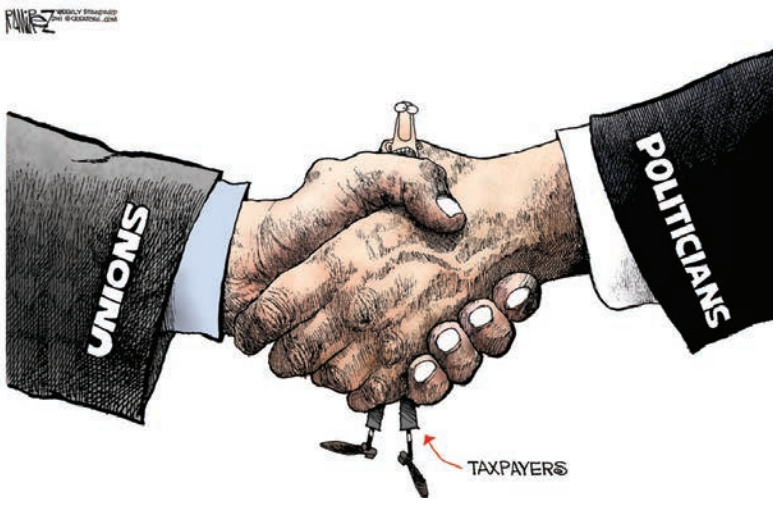
The present moment offers a rare opportunity. Working together, the Republican-controlled Congress and the new administration have it within their power to reduce federal employment levels, to readjust federal salaries, excessive workplace protections and benefits, and to eliminate federal funding for liberal ideological groups. What follows are some concrete suggestions to guide this work.

The more radical approach would be to eliminate federal employee unions altogether. These unions, opposed by Franklin Roosevelt, George Meany, and others of consequence, were first authorized by executive order in the Kennedy administration. These unions have become deeply institutionalized and built into a web of civil service laws. As a matter of general principle, the only people who should sit across the bargaining table from union leaders are people who are putting up their own, and not taxpayers' money. Moreover, there is at this time no demonstrable need for federal government unions when federal salaries and benefits far exceed those of the average American worker. Eliminating federal employee unions, however, would be a very heavy political lift.

A less radical, but still very significant step would be to terminate taxpayer funding for federal union representation work. For example—as unbelievable as it sounds—more than 200 federal employees of the National Treasury Employees Union are paid government salaries—many in excess of $100,000—to do union work. In a perfectly Orwellian formulation, this union work is called "official time." The cost of this taxpayer-subsidized union work, which amounted to 573,319 hours in 2013, was $23.5 million.

Overall, it is estimated that federal government union officials each year expend more than 2.9 million hours, at a cost to taxpayers of $121 million, on "official time." Surely these positions could be defunded. Union members could support their leaders, if they choose to do so, out of freely collected union dues.

The large federal unions—among them the National Treasury Employees Union, the American Federation of Government Employees, and the National Federation of Federal Employees—make substantial and regular political campaign contributions. These go overwhelmingly to Democrats. In the 2016 election cycle, federal union contributions totaled $16 million, more than $14 million of which went to Democratic candidates. Ninety-four percent of NTEU's contributions in a recent election cycle went to Democrats, and the disparities were striking ($156,000 for Democratic House candidates, $1,000 for Republican House candidates). Federal unions also spent more than $10 million in declared lobbying fees to advance their agendas. By law, political contributions must be raised from voluntary contributions from union members, which is proper. However, when the salaries of union officials are provided by taxpayers—as well as office space, travel reimbursement, and other perks—this frees up a considerable source of money that would otherwise be required to support these union officials.



The very same process is at work with Planned Parenthood. Like many liberal not-for-profit groups, Planned Parenthood provides a variety of services. Chief among them of course is abortions: Planned Parenthood in 2013 performed 327,000 abortions, roughly one-third of all abortions performed in America. Planned Parenthood argues that this accounts for a very small share of its services, by equating office visits, the provision of contraceptives, and other simple procedures with abortions.

However, if one were to impute a reasonable cost to these procedures, it would amount to somewhere between a quarter and half of Planned Parenthood's annual budget. Planned Parenthood relies heavily on accounting legerdemain—vastly overstating the value of its contraception and other services—to suggest that federal dollars do not in any way support abortion.

Planned Parenthood receives roughly $528 million from Medicaid reimbursements and grants from numerous federal departments and agencies, including those as far afield as Justice, Agriculture, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Planned Parenthood also receives grants as a "navigator" to enroll people in Obamacare. In all, Planned Parenthood received a total of 268 separate federal grants from the government in 2013-14. These federal dollars free up funds that Planned Parenthood uses to provide abortions.

The Service Employees International Union's online endorsement of Hillary Clinton. A top public sector union, SEIU donated $1,397,233 to congressional Democrats during the 2016 election cycle—and nothing to congressional Republicans.

In the 2016 election cycle, Planned Parenthood's national PAC contributed $1,328,000 to candidates and campaign funds, spent more than $2 million in declared lobbying activities in 2015-16, and more than $15 million in the broad category of electioneering communications. In the 2012 election cycle, 99 percent of Planned Parenthood's political contributions went to Democratic candidates; in 2014, 100 percent; and in 2016, 99 percent. Planned Parenthood officials endorse these politicians, they speak on their behalf, and they organize for them. They may do so out of conviction, but they also know that continued federal government funding is vital to operating Planned Parenthood at anywhere near its current level of activity.

If abortions are really as important as their defenders argue, these defenders can support them with their own money. Republicans have long been fearful of being charged with "shutting down the federal government" if they stand firm on defunding individual items in the federal budget. With control of Congress and the White House, however, the tables can be turned; it would be defenders of Planned Parenthood who would have to threaten to shut down the government to preserve its funding.

This same dynamic operates across almost all federal government agencies. Perhaps the most extreme example is the Environmental Protection Agency, which has raised revolving door employment and grant-giving to an art form. Much of this was detailed in a 2014 report by Senate Republicans on the Environment and Public Works Committee, entitled "The Chain of Environmental Command."

As but one of dozens of examples, consider the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). Like the Sierra Club and other environmental groups, the NRDC receives grants from the federal government both directly and indirectly. In addition, it participates in a process referred to as "sue and settle." It brings lawsuits against the EPA on issues where EPA officials actually have no objection to being sued. EPA and NRDC officials then "settle" these suits, sometimes almost immediately and together, in the form of "consent decrees," write new regulations ostensibly to settle the lawsuits. On many occasions, the EPA also pays the legal fees of the NRDC and similar groups as part of its settlement.

Through its parallel organization, the Natural Resources Defense Council Action Fund, the NRDC in turn lobbies the federal government and supports political candidates. In its first-ever presidential endorsement, the NRDC Action Fund endorsed Hillary Clinton for president in the 2016 cycle. Its officers also make personal contributions to candidates, the overwhelming majority of course to Democratic candidates.

This process operates in virtually every cabinet department and agency. Every single cabinet department from Agriculture to Labor to HHS to Justice to Treasury to State funds numerous grant programs that disproportionately benefit left-leaning not-for-profit groups whose membership in turn reliably funds the left-leaning politicians and policymakers who support their goals.

Consider a relatively small organization called Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ) with headquarters in Washington and chapters in large cities across America. Like many left-leaning grant recipients, some of what AAAJ does is unobjectionable. It provides counsel on voter registration and voter rights. But this is done

in the service of advancing the group's notion of justice. And what is the "justice" for which AAAJ lobbies? These days it includes opposing the nomination of Jeff Sessions to be attorney general in the Trump administration, condemning Trump's naming of Steve Bannon as a top aide, preserving affirmative action for college admissions, opposing measures to require proof of citizenship to vote, and supporting President Obama's executive orders on immigration, among a litany of standard left-leaning policy positions.

AAAJ raises funds for its work from both the private and public sectors, the latter from state, local, and federal grants. AAAJ officials and board members in turn are reliable supporters of Democratic candidates for president, the Senate and the House. Surely private sector donors could fully support the work of AAAJ, if they choose to do so. Is there really any legitimate reason taxpayers should subsidize, even indirectly, AAAJ's narrow and highly ideological notions of justice?

None of this is meant to suggest that this organization is unique or in any way merits special concern. It is not. The point is exactly opposite: It is no different from scores of other such organizations and demonstrates the ubiquity of government funding for such groups.

A particularly egregious practice in recent years is the Department of Justice's bank settlement process, in which banks are effectively coerced to make payments to individuals arguably harmed by lending practices. DOJ typically offers a portion of settlement funds as grants to reliably left-leaning community organizations. The House recently passed legislation to bar funds being allocated in such a way, on the grounds that this process circumvents the sole right of Congress to provide funds expended by the executive branch. One can hope that the House will pass this legislation again next year and that the Senate will do the same.

As older readers might recall, circumventing Congress was an important part of the case against Oliver North's use of unappropriated monies to fund the Nicaraguan contras. And it was the heart of the concern expressed by Senator Robert Byrd when the Bush 41 administration proposed that foreign funds to pay for the Gulf war go directly to the Pentagon in the form of "gifts." These funds, Byrd argued successfully, needed to go to the Treasury, where they would be subject to subsequent congressional appropriation.

Every single cabinet department from Agriculture to Labor to HHS to Justice to Treasury to State funds numerous grant programs that disproportionately benefit left-leaning not-for-profit groups whose membership in turn reliably funds the left-leaning politicians and policymakers who support their goals.

Some federal grants are directed by Congress, but most are not. The latter are provided at the discretion of officials in executive branch departments and agencies. As such, these can be reviewed by the incoming administration and decisions to fund or defund them can be made on the merits. Decisions that encounter pushback—and one can count on this—should require interested members of Congress to protect each grant with a specific line item requirement in authorization or appropriation bills. Protecting these groups' grants will not be so easy in an environment in which earmarks remain out of favor.

Let's be clear here. We are not talking about providing tax breaks to organizations in the form of an IRS designation as a tax-exempt charity. We are talking about groups being given real taxpayer dollars. Many of these liberal ideological groups can afford to maintain themselves without government support. Those that cannot have no reason to be in business.

Nothing comparable occurs on the political right. Taxpayer protection groups, pro-free-speech groups, judicial interest groups, think tanks, and other right-leaning advocacy groups raise their funds from individuals and corporations in the private sector, as is proper. When the Obama IRS went after conservative groups it did not go after conservative advocacy groups receiving direct taxpayer funds, because there are none. It could target conservative groups only indirectly, by making it more difficult for them to raise nongovernmental funds.

In terms of Eisenhower's warning, it is true that the total dollar value of direct funding for liberal groups does not approach the roughly $100 billion of the Pentagon's annual procurement budget. But then again these groups are not providing for the common defense; they are providing for higher government salaries and benefits, for abortions, for additional government regulations and restrictions, and for many narrow partisan, ideological purposes lumped under the murky rubric of social justice.

The federal government should take its finger off the scales and stop paying these groups to advocate for their positions and in turn contribute to their champions. Let's level the playing field, have open and honest policy debates, and remove the latest incarnation of "unwarranted influence." ♦

George W. Bush, Sarasota, Florida, September 11, 2001

Five-Alarm Fire

When the telephone rings at three in the morning. . . BY JEFFREY GEDMIN

Who has time for history, and a guide to managing disasters of the future, when such vast, self-inflicted damage—the legacy of Obamaism, the promise of Trumpism come to mind—must be dealt with at the moment? Here's a wager: Tevi Troy's new book will do well now. It's carefully researched, well written, and draws on Troy's experience in government in a practical and exceptionally refreshing way. (When's the last time you read a book by a former administration official that wasn't at least, in part, a self-branding endeavor?)

Shall We Wake the President?
Two Centuries of Disaster Management from the Oval Office
by Tevi Troy
Lyons Press, 264 pp., $26.95

The rest of the bet? A book chiefly about planning is going to sell like mad one day—after the next mega-disaster hits the United States. Sooner or later, as Troy warns us, the cataclysm is gonna get you. That's the lesson of history, and Troy's survey is a staggering reminder of how, time and again, blind spots and hubris get in the way of saving lives. He cites this little ditty sung by American schoolchildren at the end of World War I:

> *I had a little bird,*
> *Its name was Enza.*
> *I opened the window,*
> *And in-flu-enza.*

A little bird, a not-so-modest health crisis. The Great (or Spanish) Influenza claimed some 50 million lives worldwide. In the United States, the virus infected a quarter of the population, killing as many as 675,000 Americans.

REX / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jeffrey Gedmin is a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and Georgetown University, and senior adviser at Blue Star Strategies LLC.

Of the American soldiers who fell in Europe during World War I, approximately half died from the flu. Was any of this avoidable?

It was the war effort itself that played a major role in spreading the disease. In February 1918, influenza turned up in Kansas's Camp Funston, where it is thought to have triggered the outbreak across the United States. By mid-March more than a thousand troops at Camp Funston had to be hospitalized. It was Woodrow Wilson's own physician Cary Grayson—a Navy admiral—who brought to the president's attention the probability that troop transports across the Atlantic were helping to spread the deadly virus. In October of that same year, 200,000 Americans had perished.

Wilson raised the matter with the Army chief of staff—and was sternly rebuffed. General Peyton March told the president that the idea of halting or slowing down troop shipments was a nonstarter. Wilson accepted the decree and, writes Troy, "unnecessarily sentenced a great many Americans to death." The war was winding down, and was over in two months. Wilson seemed oblivious to the domestic health crisis, neither publicly nor privately speaking to the problem. He failed to mobilize a federal response to contain the spread of the disease, which could very well have alleviated its impact on millions of Americans. When it comes to such disasters, Troy tells us, there are acts of God (health, food, and water crises; economic collapse); acts of man (terrorism, loss of the power grid, civil unrest); and loads of folly in the way we respond. From the perspective of smooth and efficient management, Troy offers kudos for Franklin D. Roosevelt (halting the Great Depression), Bill Clinton (managing Y2K), George W. Bush (working with his cabinet, Congress, and government agencies in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks), Richard Nixon (responding to Hurricane Camille), and Ronald Reagan (reacting to poisoned Tylenol products). In Reagan's case, the president mediated and wisely let Johnson & Johnson take the lead.

In Troy's doghouse, apart from Woodrow Wilson for his underestimation of the Spanish Influenza, we find Herbert Hoover for his handling of the Depression, Lyndon Johnson for failing to grasp the scope of civil unrest in the 1960s, and Jimmy Carter, who failed to respond effectively to the 1977 New York City blackout and ensuing disorder. Carter accepted little responsibility: He blamed power companies for the outage and minority unemployment for chaos in the streets. His refusal to provide federal aid, and his failure to visit the city, gave the strong impression of a leader detached and oblivious.

Troy notes the same of George W. Bush and Hurricane Katrina. The Bush administration was late in responding and disorganized: "Bush compounded the situation," writes Troy, "by flying over the affected area, and the disastrous photo of him surveying the damage from above made him seem callous and out of touch." But Bush had the self-awareness to reflect on his mistakes in his memoir. Which brings us to the present, and going forward.

Troy uses history as a road map for us to plan better for the future. We cannot predict catastrophes. But from his perch in the Bush White House, and later as deputy secretary of health and human services, he has drawn from his experience to share lessons in policy, organization, coordination, and responsibility. *Shall We Wake the President?* even gives advice at the individual level. So will the next administration learn? You have to wonder whether, when disaster strikes, the business acumen and practical savvy of Donald Trump will kick in to assure timely and wise decisions.

There's still no substitute for preparing, however, if we want to optimize our chances of getting things right in the midst of an unforeseen catastrophe. For this reason, let's hope Tevi Troy's straightforward and useful account makes its way to the top of the White House reading lists. ♦

B&A

Talking Heads

The (social) life of the mind in England.

BY ANDRÉ VAN LOON

'Only Connect'
Learned Societies in Nineteenth-Century Britain
by William C. Lubenow
Boydell, 320 pp., $99

Fundamentally, the world of sensory experience is raw and ruthless. Chaos abounds, and events flow into one another without rhyme or reason. There are no clear beginnings or endings; no sense of triumph or despair. There is no Heaven or Hell. At its most innocent, the human mind is overwhelmed easily, subject to the brute forces of nature. Our saving grace, however, is our power of perception: Perception helps us to develop critical and imaginative faculties. These turn into thinking, which can transform the raw materials of the world into dispassionate theories.

And yet, a blessing though it is, thought is also finite. The world is tamed temporarily only; theories fall out of use or are superseded by the strange and unexpected. This permanent precariousness can be faced in many ways, yet surely the most admirable combines good manners, a healthy dose of stoicism, and a probing intelligence.

This, in a nutshell, is the central argument of William Lubenow's study of the 19th-century British learned elite. From the outset and throughout

André van Loon is a writer in London.

Royal Geographical Society, London

'Only Connect,' one senses its author's admiration for a certain kind of Britishness: plain-speaking yet reserved; intellectually curious yet socially courteous. Lubenow ranges over personalities such as Arthur Balfour, Henry Sidgwick, Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, Sir Francis Younghusband—and hundreds of lesser-known names, focusing on the ways these statesmen, philosophers, scientists, authors, and army officers formed learned societies. The full list of these clubs and coteries would overtake my space here, but the better-known include the British Academy, the Cambridge Apostles, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Royal Historical Society.

To Lubenow, social interaction serves as the primary way through which we acquire and refine knowledge. He takes his title from E.M. Forster's famous phrase, which is "not only advice for satisfactory personal lives, it is also a motto that can serve as a clue to the understanding of cognition." It is not enough, Lubenow argues, to have talent and a propensity for learning: Instead, one grows and becomes a better, more rounded, person through active intellectual relationships.

One of this book's many delights is its serious appraisal of friendship. Lubenow gives short shrift to the idea of antagonistic "connections." He much prefers empathetic understanding to heated debates. British learned societies in the 19th century were enclaves where like-minded intellectuals could discuss natural sciences, religion, literature, exotic cultures, or any other subject they wished. And though these discussions tended to be earnest, they were rarely indecorous. More than a century on, there remains much to be said for this style—typically if not exclusively British—and Lubenow is an expert and charming guide to it.

As *'Only Connect'* explains, learned societies formed because the universities trained men—and it was mainly men, of course—for a life of public duty. Societies were more intellectually rewarding and open-minded. They organized reading groups, long conversations about truth, ethics, and God, excursions to domestic and foreign places of interest, and formal lunches and dinners. Their members took pride in being financially self-dependent, tied neither to the landed aristocracy nor the professional classes but constituting a distinct learned elite, answerable to itself alone.

Of course, there were disagreements, but these were mostly restrained; you learned you were disliked by a lack of invitations, correspondence, or encouragement. Alternatively, being treated with utmost courtesy was a sure sign that you had transgressed the society's (mostly unwritten) rules. Still, there were times when good behavior was in short supply:

> At a luncheon for Osbert Sitwell, [Edmund] Gosse found himself in the same room with H.G. Wells, whom he detested. Gosse, Sitwell said, "grew wasp-like, making fierce darts at me, with questions and comments. 'What can the fellow mean, Ossie! How ludicrous!' 'What negotiations?' 'What could he have meant?' 'What nonsense people talk nowadays!'"

Ultimately, Gosse paid for his mercurial temperament: Though a member of the Academical Committee of the Royal Society of Literature, Grillions, the Savile, the Marlborough, and the National clubs, he was blackballed at the Athenaeum. Lubenow quotes the chairman of the Incorporated Society of Authors:

> To introduce anyone to Gosse was a risk; he could be charming and one of the best talkers, but too often he chose to be morose and shockingly ill-mannered. . . . Only to his titled friends was he consistently amiable.

Lubenow has a good eye for the colorful personality or anecdote. Another example is the great Coffee Room revolt at the Athenaeum (1854).

> At issue was whether members themselves should be allowed to carve from the hot and cold joints, whatever their carving skills or appetites, or whether the task should be left to an official carver. . . . The committee, in attempting to impose an official carver upon [the society], was badly defeated at the annual meeting.

Though it might seem petty, even beneath the dignity of a group of learned men to concern themselves with meat-carving rights, there is a valid point here: By and large, freeborn Britons do not like to be told what to do, even (or perhaps especially) about things that hardly seem worth bothering about.

Readers expecting to learn what these men and societies produced, in terms of substantive output, are likely to find disappointment. Lubenow inserts an introductory warning that he will not investigate the intellectual work itself but, rather, the ways in which it was produced through formal friendships. His focus, he asserts, is on the "social history of cognition." There is nothing wrong with such an approach, but Lubenow's motivation is less academic than he admits. ♦

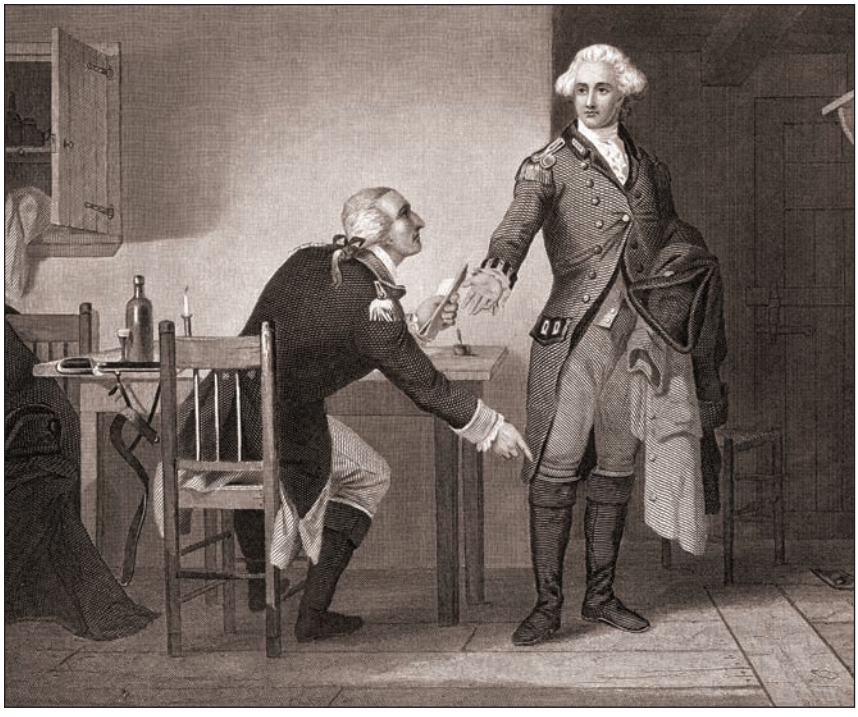
DAVID LEVENSON / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

B&A

Honor and Glory

The distinction can be historically significant.

BY ARAM BAKSHIAN JR.



Benedict Arnold (left), Major John André

After a presidential election year when the word "character" was bandied all over the place—often by people possessing very little of the commodity themselves—history may have something to teach us. So readers interested in a clear definition of character, and its importance as an essential element of leadership, will find many valuable clues in Nathaniel Philbrick's engrossing new study of the lives and tangled interaction of George Washington and Benedict Arnold.

Both were dynamic men of action with unquestioned personal courage; both were driven by passionate ambition from an early age; both were capable of inspiring the men they commanded to acts of extraordinary sacrifice and endurance; both were hot-tempered by nature. Yet, despite all of these superficial similarities, one of them ended up a traitor, the other Father of His Country.

It all boiled down to character, a case of honor versus glory. George Washington was guided by an indestructible sense of honor; Benedict Arnold was driven by a thirst for personal glory and the perquisites it could bring. Both men hungered for greatness, but to Washington, greatness meant subordination of self to cause, learning from mistakes and mastering personal weaknesses. To Arnold, greatness meant the triumph of self over others, victory on the battlefield as a key to wealth, privilege, and the indulgence of personal appetites. For him, causes were merely vehicles.

None of this detracts from the early contributions that Arnold made to the cause of American independence. These included the capture of Fort Ticonderoga—and its cache of crucially needed heavy artillery—that helped drive the British out of Boston in the opening phase of the revolution; an invasion of Canada that, had it succeeded, might have positioned the colonies for a favorable negotiated settlement with the crown in the early stages of the struggle; and an inspired, improvised freshwater naval campaign that, at Valcour Island, inflicted losses on a superior enemy fleet that it set back by a year Britain's strategic plan to drive a fatal wedge between the Northern and Southern colonies.

Most celebrated of all was Arnold's contribution to the true turning point of the Revolutionary War: By seizing the initiative and defying his fainthearted, dithering commanding officer, Horatio Gates, Arnold took the offensive against the British in twin battles that ended in the surrender of an entire British army at Saratoga. It also resulted in a wound that shattered Arnold's thigh and left him semi-crippled for the rest of his life. Besides his wound, Arnold, who never suffered fools gladly and often drank to excess, had accumulated a long list of enemies within the Army and the Continental Congress. His penchant for insubordination and his less-than-meticulous scruples when it came to money matters provided them with plenty of ammunition. When, still recovering from his wounds, he was given what appeared to be a plum assignment as military governor of Philadelphia after it was evacuated by the British in 1778, everything began to go sour. Entertaining lavishly and living far beyond his means, Arnold tried to recoup his fortunes

Valiant Ambition
George Washington, Benedict Arnold, and the Fate of the American Revolution
by Nathaniel Philbrick
Viking, 448 pp., $30

Aram Bakshian Jr., who served as an aide to presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, writes frequently on politics, history, gastronomy, and the arts.

GETTY IMAGES

by engaging in influence peddling and war profiteering. A widower, he acquired a glamorous trophy wife, a young society beauty named Peggy Shippen, whose family was known for its loyalist sympathies and who, during the British occupation, had carried on a flirtation with a young British officer, something of a charming fop, named Major John André.

Her link to André, who would serve as middle man for Arnold's subsequent treason, may have been decisive. In the final analysis, however, it was Arnold's own nature that was key to his betrayal. As the many real and imagined slights and humiliations piled up, he had no core sense of duty or honor to counterbalance personal grievance. It was all about him—and so, as far as he was concerned, treason was just a career move.

Nathaniel Philbrick has taken an interesting piece of history and turned it into a winning mixture of war story and morality tale. Drawing heavily on first-hand accounts, and with a keen eye for the pithy quote, this is more of a colorful, revealing scrapbook than a tightly structured narrative. *Valiant Ambition* dodges back and forth, from one theater of war to another, from the bird's-eye view of the historian to the worm's-eye view of a common soldier, Joseph Plumb Martin, who served through most of the war and left a delightfully candid memoir of his experiences that the author draws on to great effect.

A few quibbles: Philbrick's gifts as a storyteller sometimes lead to hyperbole, such as billing the public revulsion at Arnold's treason as a national catharsis that solidified wavering Americans behind the cause for independence. This seriously exaggerates its (admittedly) real importance. And at times, he can be a bit sloppy about military details, for example, referring to battlefield formations that, at most, qualified as divisions rather than "armies." But he tells a good story and teaches a great lesson along the way: the difference between honor and glory, between force of personality and strength of character—a lesson at least as important today as ever. ♦

B&A

Waugh's Gift

Great novelist, less-than-great human being.

BY ALGIS VALIUNAS

Novelist, travel writer, essayist, and biographer Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966), the 50th anniversary of whose death rolled around this year, celebrated by those survivors who had the misfortune of knowing him at all well, was as wretched and ornery a human being as anyone could be who was not actually moved to suicide or murder.

He also happened to be funny as hell when the mood struck him, or when he was writing his classic comic novels. Cruelty was an ever-flowing font of amusement. He started young and refined his methods into old age—which in his case began around 40. As a schoolboy at Lancing College he delivered a regular verbal flaying to classmates he called Dungy and Buttocks. His last year at Lancing he founded the Corpse Club, "for people who are bored stiff." Boredom would be a perennial affliction for Waugh, and a source of lethal animadversions against all who contributed to his unhappiness: "I am certainly making myself hateful," the Lancing sixth-former wrote in his diary.

At Oxford, eschewing all work, he ran afoul of his tutor and college dean, the historian C. R. M. F. Cruttwell, and avenged himself with rhymes about this ogre's unseemly love of animals that he sang (drunkenly) under the offender's window at night: *Cruttwell dog, Cruttwell dog, where have you been? / I've been to Hertford to lie with the Dean.* Miscreants, morons, and malefactors in Waugh's novels and stories would share the Cruttwell name. During a dreary spell as a schoolmaster, Waugh diverted himself by categorizing his pupils as either "mad" or "diseased," which is to say stupid or pimply. Having married, at 25, a young woman who reputedly had been engaged to nine different men, and having been divorced 15 months later when she fell in love with someone else, Waugh wrote to his friend Harold Acton: "I did not know it was possible to be so miserable & live but I am told that this is a common experience."

In his emotional and moral breakdown he surrendered his soul to the Roman Catholic church and would infect his faith with the snobbery and general loathing for humanity that had bedeviled him before his conversion. To his friend Diana Cooper he would write, "How to reconcile this indifference to human beings with the obligations of Charity. That is my problem." When asked by Nancy Mitford how he could be a Christian yet "so horrible," he replied that, if not for his faith, he would be "even more horrible" and, in any case, would have killed himself long ago.

He could also be a raging horror to friends who violated the tenets of faith. When Clarissa Churchill broke with the church to marry Anthony Eden, who had been divorced, Waugh placed the Christ-killing hammer and nails in her hands: "Did you never think how you were contributing to the loneliness of Calvary by your desertion?" (Waugh himself remarried after securing an annulment on the grounds that his first marriage had not been entered into with all due spiritual gravity—which was, of course, true.) He regaled his old friend John Betjeman, an Anglican whose wife was converting to Catholicism, with the everlasting prospect awaiting him if he didn't wise

Algis Valiunas is a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

up and join her in the only legitimate worship there is: "Awful about your obduracy in schism and heresy. Hell hell hell. Eternal damnation."

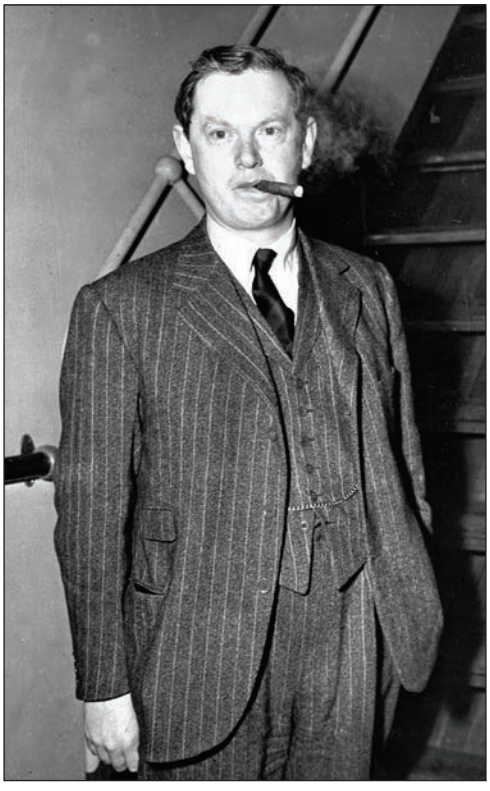
Lesser missteps on his old friends' part could trigger fury amounting to insanity. Henry Yorke (who wrote novels under the pen name of Henry Green) and his wife committed the faux pas of lighting up cigarettes at lunch, after having asked Mrs. Waugh if that would be acceptable. Waugh sent the china crashing to the floor, declaring that smoking at meals was unforgivably vulgar and that his guests must have been consorting with Jews in New York. Then he left the room.

Henry Yorke had offended already by writing novels about the working class, a subject Waugh vividly despised. The jumped-up lower breeds were overrunning one of the last preserves of civilization: literature as it had been practiced by writers who appreciated every nuance of class distinction, "the ramifications of the social order which have obsessed some of the acutest minds of the last 150 years." And the rot was everywhere, starting in the great universities. In a 1955 open letter to Nancy Mitford in *Encounter*, Waugh skewered Home Secretary R.A.B. Butler's Education Act, which "provided for the free distribution of university degrees to the deserving poor. . . . L'École de Butler are the primal men and women of the classless society." To Waugh, the classless society was no society at all.

From the first page of his first novel, *Decline and Fall* (1928), it is clear, as it is in Gibbon's history, that civilization is far from being civilized. The Bollinger Club is having its ceremonial dinner at Scone College, Oxford:

> There is tradition behind the Bollinger; it numbers reigning kings among its past members. At the last dinner, three years ago, a fox had been brought in in a cage and stoned to death with champagne bottles. What an evening that had been!

Waugh unleashes every anarchic impulse in *Decline and Fall*, as he does in the best ones to follow. And when every civilized institution has been definitively laid waste—the universities and public schools, the aristocracy, the military, Parliament, marriage, the great country houses, the Empire—the reader is hard put to think of anything he holds dear that might withstand such withering fire. All that remains is manic laughter. One can still grovel with hilarity amid the devastation.



Evelyn Waugh (1947)

With *Vile Bodies* (1930), the laughter comes between clenched teeth, and the reader still happens upon flashes of inspired lunacy (witness the American religious revivalist Mrs. Melrose Ape's hymn "There ain't no flies on the lamb of God"). But most of the writing is neither witty nor humorous but wince-making in its blunt contempt for all concerned; the *faux-naïf* deadpan style of unrelenting inanity soon wears thin:

> "Darling, I *am* glad about our getting married."
>
> "So am I. But don't let's get intense about it."
>
> "I wasn't, and anyway you're tight."

Wastelandism reigns in every rank and station in *Vile Bodies*: The upper classes are unscrupulous or incapable, and the lower orders are invariably drunk and disorderly. With the memory of the Great War serving as background, and the outbreak of the far greater war that ends the novel, Waugh attempts to endow its inconsequent nattering and erotic futility with apocalyptic significance that the subject matter simply won't bear.

Waugh wanted out, anywhere out of this world, and his travels took him to Abyssinia in 1930 to write about the coronation of Haile Selassie, and again in 1935, to cover the Italian conquest; to British Guiana and Brazil in 1933, to see what he could see, and to Mexico in 1938 to inspect the socialist debacle. He sought out hardship and even ordeal, and traveled a long way for the privilege of knowing unadulterated desolation, as in *Ninety-Two Days* (1934), the account of his South American adventures:

> Then we were out in open country again, flat and desolate as the savannah we had left; more desolate, for here there was no vestige of life; no cattle-track; no stray animals; simply the empty plain; sparse, colorless grass; ant-hills; sand-paper trees; an occasional clump of ragged palm; grey sky, gusts of wind, and a dull sweep of rain.

A half-civilized, half-barbarous Africa provided more opportunity for the drollery which abounds in the Azania of *Black Mischief* (1932)—with its Oxford-educated imbecile Emperor Seth eager to import the latest modern amenities to his benighted nation—and in the Ishmaelia of *Scoop* (1938), with preposterous native fascists and Communists contending for power and European and American journalists scrambling for the big story. In *Black Mischief*, the cannibal stew in which an English rogue unwittingly eats his girlfriend and the human sacrifices that enliven a bishop's consecration give us an idea of Waugh's serious purpose here.

But when Waugh does turn serious, it is to ill effect. *A Handful of Dust* (1934), which takes its title and

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epigraph from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, retails the haphazard adulterous collision of two nullities moved principally by boredom. The story is told in a leaden monotone that aspires to devastating irony but overdoes the moral emptiness.

Brideshead Revisited (1945) suffers from the opposite faults, a cloying over-ripeness in the prose and a soul-killing religious fever to the novel's master idea. There are rhapsodic memories of a homosexual Oxford love affair, replete with strawberries, Château Peyraguey, a magnificent country house, and a teddy bear named Aloysius. There are also memories of an adulterous love affair, evidently on its way to lasting married happiness, with the sister of the earlier beloved. There is doom in the shape of the unholy religious mania that first strikes the young man down with alcoholism and then demands renunciation of the most life-enhancing love Waugh ever imagined. Because the church has rules about these things and souls must be purged of their dross.

The *Sword of Honour* trilogy—comprising *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961)—opens with a vision of inarguable clarity, precipitated by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, for the Catholic hero, Guy Crouchback: "The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cut off. It was the Modern Age in arms." A thousand pages later, Waugh has reduced World War II to a moral fiasco triggered by a near-universal death wish, so that any idea of honor, sacrifice, or heroism is swamped by the monstrous wave of sin—the most wrongheaded understanding of the war this side of *Catch-22*.

These five novels, the serious ones, are widely considered to be Waugh's best. Far from it. He came to see his vocation as instructing a godless world in the true nature of God, when his true calling was as a minor comic master, funny as hell, who could laugh at the most appalling outrages and play jazz clarinet with consummate virtuosity in the devil's band. ♦

B&A

World Apart

The map of Middle Europe, redrawn by Ursula K. Le Guin. BY ERIN MUNDAHL

How do you write about a world you have never seen? It's a strange question for a writer of science fiction to ask, yet this was the spark that led a young Ursula K. Le Guin to Orsinia. Orsinia, "an unimportant country of middle Europe," was where, as a young writer in the early 1950s, she began to wrestle with ways to describe those worlds. She yearned to grapple with themes of government, revolution, and liberty; but having never left the United States, she felt unequal to the task of setting a story in Europe.

So Le Guin created Orsinia, a land striving to be simultaneously plausible and unreal—a country that doesn't really exist, but which *could* exist. It's a strange warping of genre conventions and a foreshadowing of how Le Guin's later novels would blend the lines between science fiction and fantasy.

Ursula K. Le Guin, one of the rare writers to be included in the Library of America during their lifetimes, insisted that the Orsinia works be her first anthology. The resulting volume combines the text of *Malafrena*, Le Guin's full novel, with a collection of *Orsinian Tales and Other Stories*. In *Malafrena*, which she describes writing "in a white heat," the plot follows the struggles of willful, idealistic Itale Sorde, the son of a provincial landholder who goes to the capital for his education and remains there out of a passionate desire to see his country free and independent. The reader has the sense that Le Guin herself is struggling alongside Itale, learning through his story the techniques of fiction—how to develop a character, a plot, a setting. Because of this, the story of the rebellion itself sometimes seems stale, a repetition of other failed revolts led by various literary characters who felt (as Itale did) that they "must succeed, because [their] hopes were so high" and who found, instead, that "it was all air, words, talk, lies: and the steel chain that brings you up short two steps from the wall."

Overall, *Malafrena* has that feeling, as though it were straining to reach something it couldn't quite touch. Le Guin wants to show us that revolution comes

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The Complete Orsinia
by Ursula K. Le Guin
edited by Brian Attebery
Library of America, 700 pp., $35

Ursula K. Le Guin (1985)

BETTMANN ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

at a human cost—even outside of lives lost—but Itale Sorde's yearning for his lakeside mountain home lacks the feeling of emotional realism.

Perhaps the trouble is Itale himself, for the clunky writing disappears after his tale ends. In this volume, the strongest writing appears in the short stories, where Le Guin revisits Orsinia at various points in its history. While *Malafrena* seems bogged down by a sense of righteous purpose, the stories highlight individual lives, using them to show the political realities of the time. Though some are comparatively short, they show a depth of character and setting that *Malafrena* lacks. In 1960, a man wanders away from his minders in Paris, uncertain if this is a plea for asylum or an attempt to gain a moment of freedom. In 1150, a man struggles with the choice between pagan sacrifice and Christian faith as his wife endures a difficult labor. In 1920, a blind man and the woman who loves him vow to leave a miserable life in the provinces in the hope that life in the city will be better.

There are tales of mining accidents and marriages, musicians, miners, and brothers—ordinary people living history one day at a time. The best show the value of relationships in the world after World War II, when Orsinia falls behind the Iron Curtain. Here there is a hint of the sort of fiction that blends politics and prose, and would later win renown for Le Guin. And here, as a writer, Le Guin is able to take advantage of what the Orsinian setting offers: freedom to look beyond the practical details of place and setting to focus her gaze on the characters themselves. ♦

B&A

Eternal Quadrangle

The many versions of 'Les Liaisons dangereuses.'

BY CATHY YOUNG

Les Liaisons dangereuses, the 1782 novel of sexual intrigue by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, has become one of the most adapted literary classics in the two decades since it was reincarnated as a hit play by the British dramatist Christopher Hampton. The 1988 Stephen Frears film *Dangerous Liaisons*, a luxurious star-studded screen version of the play, was followed by Miloš Forman's lightweight *Valmont*, and then by *Cruel Intentions*, transplanted into the world of 1990s privileged American teenagers. Add to this Chinese and Korean films, a 2003 French modern-day miniseries, two operas, and several ballets. A revival of *Liaisons*, imported from London, is currently playing on Broadway, and there is talk of a Christopher Hampton-scripted BBC miniseries based on the novel.

What, then, is this book that acts as such a magnet to the modern imagination? *Les Liaisons dangereuses* was the first, and only novel, by Laclos, an army officer from the minor nobility. It caused an international scandal, and with reason: Its two main characters, Parisian aristocrats the Vicomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil, are amoral libertines who toy with people and ruin lives for sport. Yet in this epistolary novel, their voices largely dominate. Smart, witty, charming, Laclos's villains are almost as seductive to the reader as to their victims. Perhaps no other literary work—except for Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, another scandalous bestseller—does such a disconcertingly good job of taking you inside the mind of a monster (or two) and making you enjoy your stay.

Former lovers, Valmont and Merteuil are secret allies in sexual gamesmanship. At the start of the novel, Valmont is pursuing Madame de Tourvel, a young wife of such renowned virtue that seducing her would be a major coup. The stakes are raised when a tryst with Merteuil becomes his promised reward for success. Meanwhile, the marquise also seeks to enlist him in her scheme to get even with a man who once left her—no man breaks up with Merteuil, unless she wants him to think he did—by corrupting his bride-to-be, 15-year-old convent-bred Cécile.

And so the games begin, escalating inexorably toward their tragic end (spoilers ahead). Tourvel succumbs to Valmont, is brutally abandoned at Merteuil's instigation, has a breakdown, and dies; the used and deceived Cécile retires to a convent. The Valmont/Merteuil alliance frays and turns to war: Valmont is mortally wounded in a Merteuil-engineered duel with Cécile's sweetheart Danceny, but lives long enough to expose and ruin the marquise.

If *Liaisons* has a moral message, as Laclos took pains to stress, it is also a deeply pessimistic one. The good suffer, and is evil truly punished? Valmont dies honorably and is roundly mourned, and his place is quickly taken by another, equally depraved rake. Merteuil's downfall is compounded by losing her fortune to a long-pending lawsuit and her looks to smallpox. Yet she flees with her jewelry and silver, and our only knowledge of her disfigurement is a second-hand report by an often-clueless letter-writer.

The subtler moral of the story may be that its protagonist-villains are undone by the very feelings their libertine philosophy scorns as weakness. Valmont's faked love for Tourvel becomes real, but he will go to any lengths to prove to Merteuil (and to himself) that he is not in love. Merteuil, the master schemer, slips up because of her own twisted love for Valmont. This is a common reading, embraced by the play, and still more explicitly by the Frears film; yet in the novel, it too remains uncertain: Valmont's professions of regret could have

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an ulterior motive, and Merteuil's fury at losing her hold over him could be simply about ego and power.

Such layers of ambiguity and nuance make *Les Liaisons dangereuses* a riveting psychological thriller—a too-modern term, perhaps, but the novel's multiple and frequently unreliable narrators give it a startlingly modern feel nearly two centuries before *Rashomon*. The voices are flawlessly individualized and real. Not only Merteuil and Valmont but the kind, passionate Tourvel, entrapped by her attraction to Valmont and the self-flattering hope of reforming him with her chaste friendship; the airheaded, sexually curious Cécile, and the sentimental Danceny; Valmont's indulgent old aunt and Cecile's fussy mother. Even marginal characters, such as Valmont's snobbish valet.

The novel's themes, like its psychological realism, often feel strikingly ahead of their time. Valmont's and Merteuil's self-images as masters of their fates, rising above the mass of lesser people, has Nietzschean overtones. The sparring between Valmont and Merteuil delves into what can only be called sexual politics: his displays of male privilege—and insecurity—versus her one-woman feminism. Openly critical of women's subjection, Merteuil, who enjoys considerable autonomy as a rich widow, boasts of beating men at their game and even of being "born to avenge [her] sex," despite her most unsisterly treatment of other women. (It is worth noting that Laclos's post-*Liaisons* writings includ three unfinished proto-feminist essays on women's education.)

No play under three hours long can fully capture the book's complexities, but Hampton's *Liaisons* does remarkable justice to its source. Most of the letter-writing is understandably replaced by face-to-face interaction, which mostly works well—with one exception. In the novel, Merteuil directs Valmont's rejection of Tourvel by composing a diabolically cruel breakup letter for him—with the refrain "It is not my fault"—under the guise of telling a story about a man finally ridding himself of an embarrassing mistress. Valmont, taking the challenge, sends Tourvel an exact copy. In the play and film, Merteuil's only cue is the story and the phrase "It's beyond my control" as the man's rebuff to his mistress. Valmont goes to Tourvel and acts it out. Here, letter-writing and reading as a stage device would have been far better: The Hampton version lacks both Merteuil's literal scripting of the breakup and its horrifying coldness. (The late Alan Rickman, whom I saw in the play's Broadway debut, played the breakup scene with such passion that Tourvel surely had to doubt Valmont's claim to be bored with their affair.)

Liev Schreiber, Janet McTeer on Broadway (2016)

JOHN LAMPARSKI / GETTY IMAGES

The current production has offered a superb Merteuil in the stage and screen veteran Janet McTeer, who brings to the part not only glamour, grace, and deviousness but a steely strength and ferocious will: ice goddess, Delilah, and Amazon, all in one. When the marquise, responding to Valmont's warning that refusing him will be a declaration of war, says, "All right—war," McTeer delivers the last word as a battle cry. Next to her, the usually excellent Liev Schreiber pales a little, or at least did in the performance I saw; his Valmont had too much blasé sarcasm and not enough sensuality and danger, though his energy picked up toward the end when Valmont is increasingly at war with both Merteuil and himself.

Besides McTeer, the real star of this revival has been the staging by Josie Rourke of London's Donmar Warehouse and the set design by Tom Scutt. The backdrop is an aristocratic mansion that bears marks of decay and abandonment—crumbling walls, sheets of plastic—with the furnishings and decorations gradually stripped away as the play progresses. (For the scene changes, the stage darkens and the actors and costumed extras move the props while gliding in a dance.) It gives the production a haunting air, as if we were watching ghosts reenact a tragicomedy long past. Two moments are particularly striking: the brilliant choreographed duel, in which Valmont's halting, lurching movements suggest suicide by Danceny; and the prelude to Valmont's more-rape-than-seduction of Cécile, when the sleeping girl, in her white nightdress, lies on her bed completely covered with a plastic sheet, a heartbreaking sacrificial victim.

Les Liaisons dangereuses is still awaiting a truly great adaptation, probably as a miniseries with enough time to give the rich source material its due. In the meantime, the play's return to Broadway, despite its flaws, has made for a satisfying night at the theater. ♦

B&A

A Star Is Born

Damien Chazelle succeeds where bigger names have failed. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

La La Land should have been a disaster. Every American movie musical it resembles has been. The plot of *La La Land* recalls Martin Scorsese's tiresome *New York, New York*, released in 1977; both feature a principled and snobbish jazz musician who falls in love with an overeager novice performer. Its highly stylized use of Los Angeles recalls Francis Ford Coppola's stylization of Las Vegas in the simultaneously overproduced and undercooked *One from the Heart* from 1981. Its use of non-singers and non-dancers as singing and dancing leads recalls Woody Allen's 1996 *Everyone Says I Love You*, which proved to be a cringe-inducing embarrassment for almost everyone concerned.

Legends Scorsese, Coppola, and Allen sought to modernize and refresh the movie musical and, instead, laid eggs the size of the spaceships in *Arrival*. With *La La Land*, a 31-year-old whippersnapper named Damien Chazelle has done nearly everything right. Where *La La Land*'s predecessors were leaden and obvious and as appetizing as fallen soufflés, Chazelle's confection is light and airy. It's fun and frolicsome and playful in a way few movies are these days. But it is far from insubstantial. Once it has completely earned your affection, *La La Land* makes startling use of what it has earned in an inspired, highly emotional extended finale that leaves you simultaneously stunned and transported.

Two hours before that finale, the movie begins in the midst of one of those horrendous midday Los Angeles traffic jams, in which an overpass turns into a parking lot. The camera pans down a row of frozen cars until it stops at a young woman behind the wheel in a yellow dress. Suddenly the woman begins to sing a cheerful samba that is accompanied by a somber lyric about the boyfriend she left at a Greyhound station. She emerges from her car, and then another driver joins in, and another, and in a single bravura shot the entire overpass and all the motionless cars are converted into an impromptu dance floor. The number is called "Another Day of Sun," and the running joke of *La La Land* is that no matter the day, no matter the season, and no matter the condition of the souls and spirits of the characters, the sun is shining.

La La Land
Directed by Damien Chazelle

Two people aren't dancing. One is a young actress named Mia (Emma Stone), who is distracted because she is running lines for her upcoming audition. The other is the driver behind her, Seb (Ryan Gosling), who is annoyed when the traffic finally eases and Mia's car doesn't move. He pulls alongside her, honking his horn, and the two flip each other the bird. When they eventually find each other again, they have no memory of this encounter, but we do, and we're not sure whether we've seen a sweet version of a Hollywood meet-cute or a harbinger of ill tidings.

Mia is having no luck breaking through as an actress and works at a Starbucks on the Warner Brothers lot with a mean boss who has long since given up on her own ambitions. Seb is a struggling pianist probably a decade older than she. His dream of opening his own jazz club was dashed when he was conned out of his money by a shyster. His talent is undeniable but his fundamentalist commitment to classic bebop, and a combative passive-aggressive disposition hidden beneath a sweet smile, has left him all but unemployable.

Throughout the movie, the composer Justin Hurwitz takes the theme we first hear in "Another Day of Sun" and repurposes it in a series of numbers that, as in the best musicals, seem to emerge organically from the thoughts and feelings of the characters. A lovesick Seb walks on a pier and, under his breath, begins to sing words to the tune he calls "City of Stars." On a search for their cars after a party, Mia and Seb sit on a bench below a streetlight in the Hollywood Hills and, suddenly, they're soft-shoeing. In this, as in every scene they share, Stone and Gosling are nothing less than incandescent. They pull off something nearly impossible as they perform "A Lovely Night"—they embrace and even make fun of their own amateurism, enacting a production number in the manner of two movie-musical fans imitating Astaire and Charisse rather than making a foolish attempt to match the matchless pair that danced in the dark in *The Band Wagon*.

In the end, Chazelle isn't trying to evoke *The Band Wagon* or the other great MGM musicals of the golden age. His movie is more in the spirit of Jacques Demy, the French director whose fully sung-through *Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964) features a swoony romance between two gorgeous teenagers that is tempered by Demy's rueful and adult understanding of the questionable durability of teenage love. "I could never live without you," the lovers sing to each other, as her mother watches from the side, sadly aware that life is probably going to prove them wrong. Chazelle's Mia and Seb are not teenagers, and they are not challenged by the nature of growing up. Their love is endangered by the fact that they are, in the end, adults.

Damien Chazelle's first major feature, *Whiplash*, was the best movie of 2014. With the release of this radically different and entirely transporting piece of work, Chazelle has delivered the most startling and impressive one-two punch as a writer and director in modern film history. ♦

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

"Van Jones: Only a 'Love Army' will conquer Trump"
—Rolling Stone, *December 6, 2016*

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Washington in ruins as Love Army topples Trump administration

'TIDE OF HATE' TURNED BACK

Executions planned for those who refuse love

BY RANDALL BAXTER

After six months of protracted and bloody fighting in cities across the United States, Van Jones and his Love Army have conquered Washington, D.C., and overthrown Donald Trump, toppling a Republican administration that many have viewed as a threat to democracy itself.

With the founding of the Love Army back in December, Jones embarked on a mission to spread love across America, going city to city and town to town eradicating bigotry and xenophobia—usually through the violent conquest of areas that were electoral strongholds of former President Trump. With each victory, Trump's hold on power in Washington grew more tenuous, leading many to hope the terror of his presidency might soon be over. Wednesday, Jones's message of love finally reached the Trump White House.

The Foggy Bottom neighborhood of Washington lies in ruins after two weeks of artillery and air attacks by the Love Army.

"Today we turned back the tide of hate," Jones bellowed triumphantly through a megaphone from the top of a burning armored limousine, surveying a field of battle where untold scores lay dead or dying. "We have conquered Trump. At long last we have stopped this vile, wretched mass of humanoid scum from undermining our American values of tolerance, equality, and freedom of thought and expression," Jones continued, to cheers. "And we taught America to love again," he concluded, dragging a shackled, cowering Trump to his cage by the White House gate.

Members of the Love Army spent the rest of the afternoon trying to convince Trump and several captured cabinet members of the error of their hate-filled ideology by pelting them with rotting fruit and

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