

**1776 AND  
ALL THAT**  
ANDREW FERGUSON

the weekly

# Standard

MAY 1, 2017

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## Erdogan's Counter- Revolution

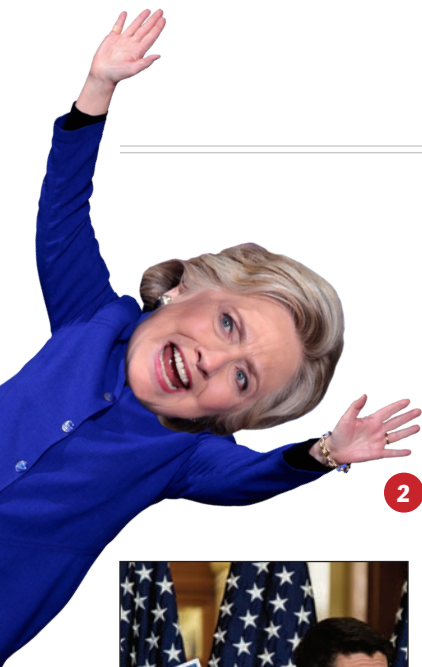
BY ERIC EDELMAN

Recep Tayyip Erdogan,  
president of Turkey

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# Clinton's Towering Fiasco

The September 2016 article in *Politico* championing Hillary Clinton's use of "data analytics" now looks—how shall we put it?—rather *premature*.

*Politico* swooned that computer algorithms "underlie nearly all of the Clinton campaign's most important strategic decisions." Computer guru Elan Kriegel had crunched the numbers for campaign manager Robby Mook, allowing Team Clinton to precisely target her potential voters and thus not waste one dime on appealing to the deplorables.

"Clintonites saw it as their secret weapon in building an insurmountable delegate lead over Bernie Sanders," *Politico* reported. And come the general election the Clintonistas were downright giddy about the edge Big Data was giving them. With the hopelessly old-school Trump team "investing virtually nothing in data analytics during the primary and little since, Kriegel's work isn't just powering Clinton's campaign, it is providing her a crucial tactical advantage." Ah, hubris.

We were reminded of that *Politico* article in reading the first of what promises to be a sizable library of books autopsying the Clinton campaign, *Shattered*, by Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes. The consensus among the Clintonites interviewed is that Mook and Kriegel and all their overhyped whizbang hooley are to blame. Fair enough: That's what

they get for taking their victory lap too soon.

But don't put all the blame on the geek squad: The reason Hillary Clinton lost, first and foremost, is that Hillary Clinton was the dismalest, dreadfulest of candidates. That said, the emphasis on data analytics was of a piece with Hillary's overall awfulness. Understanding the data approach, *Politico* wrote before the election, "is to understand how Clinton has run her campaign—precise and efficient, meticulous and effective, and, yes, at times more mathematical than inspirational." The reporter was more right than he knew.

Still, the Clinton team's overconfidence in data analytics was a typical error made with new technologies. It isn't just overconfidence in what the technology can achieve, it is that the people using the technologies are ever tempted to push out to the edge of what the technologies can do as a way of proving not only the power of the new machines and methods and materials, but the prowess of the technologists themselves.

This tendency not to leave enough room for mistakes and the unexpected is something THE SCRAPBOOK calls the Citicorp Tower Imperative. Students of architecture will remember that, when built in the 1970s, the Citicorp building in New York employed a radical structure allowing a cantilevered corner of the 59-story skyscraper to

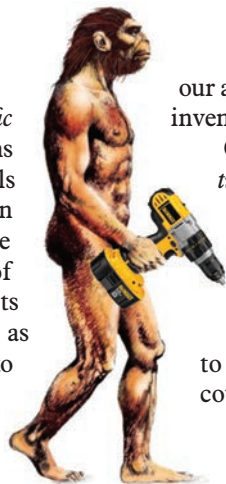


float over a historic church. The margins for error were so slim in the structure's engineering that a seemingly innocuous change by the builder—bolting joints (as allowed by code) rather than welding them (as the architectural engineer had originally specified)—meant a stiff breeze would topple the tower. (Through fortuitous happenstance, the error was discovered and welders were put to work inside the skin of the finished building, saving it from catastrophe.)

The Clinton campaign was similarly seduced by the promised power of the new technology at its disposal: Mook even recently acknowledged that his data, no matter how precise, couldn't stand up to "an overwhelming gale force desire for change." Yes, the Citicorp Tower Imperative in action. Though THE SCRAPBOOK suspects the Clinton edifice was so shaky not even an army of welders could have saved it. ♦

## Consensual Tools

It is the inarguable *scientific consensus* that early humans began developing stone tools between two and three million years ago, when the climate was undergoing a period of rapid change. African forests in the area we now know as Kenya were transforming into grasslands: The only way



our ancestors could survive was by inventing tools.

Or at least that was the *scientific consensus*.

A fascinating story in the May issue of *Scientific American* reveals that the ballyhooed *scientific consensus* has just been blown to smithereens: Recently discovered stone tools appear to

be some 3.3 million years old. That is, they predate the period of climate change that according to the *scientific consensus* had spurred early man to develop tools. That's right—one new discovery was enough to overturn what had been the unimpeachable *scientific consensus*. And the story was climate-related to boot!

Far be it from THE SCRAPBOOK to suggest that the current *scientific consensus* of

HILLARY: GAGE SKIDMORE

anthropogenic global warming might find itself similarly overturned someday. But given that new discoveries have more than once overturned the conventional scientific wisdom—think of the end of geocentrism, the discovery of plate tectonics, and now the rethinking of when hominids developed tools—a bit of epistemological humility can go a long way. ♦

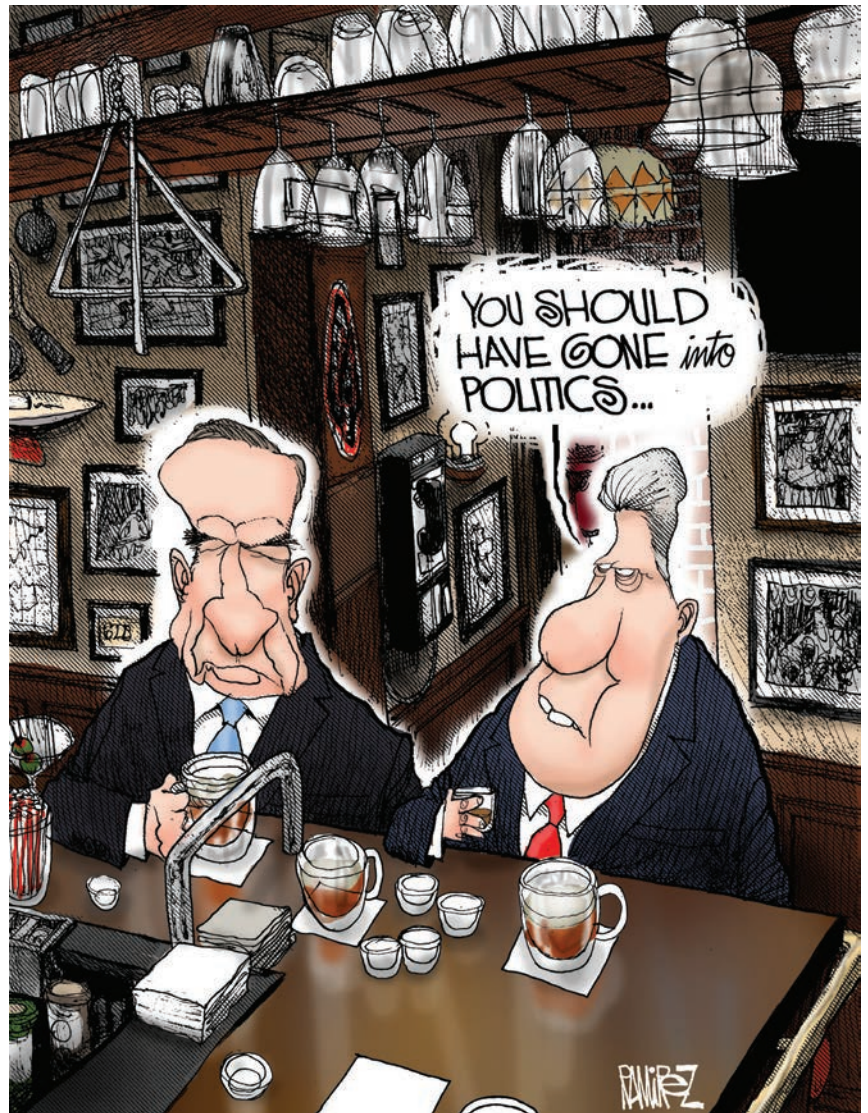
## Baby, Behave!

“Racism motivated Trump voters more than authoritarianism.” That was the headline atop an article in the *Washington Post* in mid-April. At first glance this would seem to be the result of one of those classic lose-lose questions: Asking whether Trump voters are more racist or more authoritarian is rather like asking whether they still beat their wives—any answer is damning. As such, *THE SCRAPBOOK* would be inclined to read no further. But *THE SCRAPBOOK* would be wrong, because the article proves to be a helpful sort of Rosetta Stone for understanding what the left actually means when it impugns conservatives.

The author of the article, Ohio State assistant poli-sci prof Thomas Wood, is most helpful at explaining what he’s up to when he sets out, using the standard methodologies of his trade, to determine the motives of Trump voters.

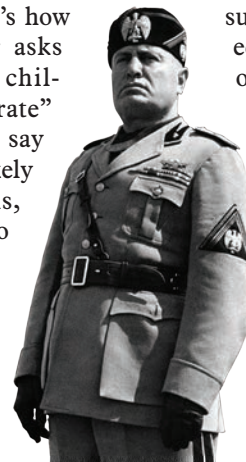
Let’s start with his explanation of “authoritarianism.” Here’s the standard problem social scientists face: You can’t just ask people, “Do you like dictators?” and expect to get a straight answer. So clever researchers have devised ways to dupe their subjects into giving up the straight dope. The first step is to define the term: When experts say “authoritarianism,” we laymen might be forgiven for thinking they mean, well, “authoritarianism.” But that would be a mistake. Political scientists don’t mean by that a taste for fascism, but instead, “a psychological disposition in which voters have an aversion to social change and threats to social order.” In other words, if you’re not temperamentally a goo-goo progressive, you’re authoritarian.

But the academy gets even more



oblique in determining who is and isn’t authoritarian. “Since respondents might not want to say they fear chaos or are drawn to strong leadership,” the good professor explains, the authoritarian “disposition is measured by asking voters about the right way to rear children.” Here’s how it works: The researcher asks you whether you think children should be “considerate” or “well-behaved.” If you say “well-behaved,” you’re “likely more authoritarian.” This, *THE SCRAPBOOK* hastens to add, is not a joke.

*Hey! You kids get off my lawn!*



The same sort of thrice-removed reasoning is at work in measuring racial attitudes. You see, respondents “know that it’s socially unacceptable to say things perceived as racially prejudiced.” So they have to be tricked by well-camouflaged questions, such as “whether racial inequalities today are a result of social bias or personal lack of effort and irresponsibility.” You can guess which answer is considered evidence of racism.

Fancy regression analysis follows, but you don’t really need to do the math to translate

the headline. The *Post*, you'll remember, said, "Racism motivated Trump voters more than authoritarianism." But now we see that what the *Post* was actually reporting was that Trump voters were more likely to think that racial inequalities are the result of irresponsibility than they were to think that children should be well-behaved.

And we're supposed to believe this goes some way to explaining the outcome of the election? ♦

## Potted Politics

Previous American generations might have taken their literary touchstones from writers such as Hemingway, Dreiser, Fitzgerald, London, Twain, and Dickens—or even Shakespeare and Sophocles—but pity the poor millennials, who have nothing to help them understand life's challenges but what Harold Bloom so aptly described as the "cliches and dead metaphors" of J.K. Rowling. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the Harry Potter boy wizard books have become the default cultural lens through which people under 30 view Donald J. Trump.



Typical is the group of grad students at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government who recently created a "Resistance School" to train activists to fight Trump's political agenda. They call themselves "Dumbledore's Army" after the group of Hogwarts students that met in secret to train in combating the dark arts. Theirs is hardly the first student group so named in the age of Trump, and it is sure not to be the last.

Millennial news site *BuzzFeed* went viral with an online quiz, "Who Said It: Steve Bannon or Lord Voldemort?" The *Guardian* touts a browser extension you can install on your computer "that changes any mention of Donald Trump or his cabi-

net to the name of a notable Death Eater. Install it, and your browser will instantly refer to Betsy DeVos as Dolores Umbridge, Jeff Sessions as Antonin Dolohov or Rex Tillerson as Draco Malfoy."

Rowling herself has long been encouraging these comparisons. In 2015, she tweeted of Trump that "Voldemort was nowhere near as bad." A writer at the *Atlantic* called this "notably hyperbolic" given that "Voldemort was a literal mass-murderer; Trump is not." But if we want to put the best gloss we can on her comments, we might allow that the Dark Lord was nowhere near as bad because, *hello*, "he" is a fictional character.

Simplistic metaphors of good versus evil are important, even necessary—for children. Shouldn't we expect Harvard grad students to have similes at their disposal beyond tired references to He Who Must Not Be Named? ♦

## This Week in Trumpoplexy

Three days after the 2016 election, I sat at my writing desk overwhelmed by grief. I was not alone. Like many people (like you, perhaps), I'd had trouble sleeping, and had already engaged in many conversations—with friends and family, students and colleagues, in person and on social media—about the spike in hate crimes, the pain and outrage, the devastation to come. In my grief, I thought about many things. I thought about all the hard-won civil rights gains of the past fifty years, now under a new level of threat. I thought about the many communities—including immigrants, people of color, gay and transgender people, women, Muslims, Jews, progressives from all walks of life—now bracing themselves (or ourselves, for I belong to some of these groups) for an era of increased vulnerability. I thought about climate change . . ."

—Carolina De Robertis  
*Radical Hope: Letters of Love and Dissent in Dangerous Times*

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## Egged On

**M**y wife Cynthia forwarded me two emails in quick succession. The first was from a friend, recruiting volunteers for a cleanup on the Potomac River. It was on a day when I would be out of town. Good luck with *that*, I thought.

The second email was from our next-door neighbors, saying they could not host their usual Easter egg hunt because their kitchen was being redone and they would be traveling just prior to Easter Sunday and, oh, one more thing, they were very sad about not hosting.

Cynthia had added at the top of the message, “We should do this. Don’t you think?” I hoped she was referring to the river cleanup. Fighting pollution in the dirty Potomac seemed to me, in relative terms, much less of a commitment than hosting the Easter egg hunt. For one thing, no one would expect the river to end up clean.

But Cynthia did think we should host the Easter egg hunt. The kids, too, were unanimous that we offer up our house and yard to the elfin little ones on our block for the annual chocolate and candy free-for-all. The egg hunt, I concede, is an adorable, brightly colored display of childish fumbling and sugar consumption. It’s also a social event. While children search the lawn, parents huddle to the side, drinking coffee and eating quiche and French toast and muffins and fruit salad and little desserts, and every year talking about the same thing: their spring-break vacations, a subject I do not look forward to because, as it happens, we never go away for spring break.

As parents, Cynthia and I have achieved a pretty good balance of yes and no. By which I mean a tiny bit of yes and a whole lot of no, as in this recurring conversation: Can we get a

dog? the kids ask. No, your mother’s allergic. A cat? Nope, she’s allergic to them too. A goldfish? No. She’s allergic to goldfish? Yes, she’s allergic to everything, so no—no goldfish.

That’s one yes and four nos with a bonus no for emphasis, perfect.

Having thought it was a good idea to have three kids, I am finally learning to draw the line. And Cynthia is with me except when it comes to cute,



photogenic stuff, the kind of activities that make certain unbearable people say, “Let’s make memories.” You know what I mean. Arts and crafts. Cake decoration. Letters to Santa.

So when the egg hunt comes up, I start by mentioning all the cooking involved, but Cynthia explains it’s a potluck, with everyone bringing a dish. It has always been this way, apparently, I just didn’t notice. Then what about the yard? I ask. We’d have to mow and

rake and clean the whole place up. No problem, the kids assure me. They will do that.

Hearing my kids say they will mow the lawn has an effect on my brain not unlike that of a second martini. My powers of skepticism are instantly gone. Come Saturday, of course, I am out there alone, mowing the grass, raking the winter detritus, and sprucing up the yard. This takes several hours but is briefly interrupted when a car pulls up next door with my returning neighbors.

I look over at John, the husband and father. As he gets out of the car, carrying some luggage, he does not look my way, as if he’s just too distracted by all the bag-carrying he is doing. How odd, I think, why would he avoid my gaze?

The kids come through on one part of the preparations, which is to pack candy into all the plastic egg shells that have accumulated over the years from the egg hunt, but they’re not happy about it. In fact, they’re saying that I had been right all along, that hosting this event is a lot of work. Cynthia and I are up until midnight, cleaning the house, mixing a large quiche, and tending to a number of other details.

At eight A.M., people start to show up, some in their Easter best, some barely out of their pajamas. Children scatter across our lawn, and the party is a success. Our next-door neighbors come by. I can see how glad John is not to be in my shoes. I even tease him about it, confident that, whatever else happens, this is my last time hosting the Easter egg hunt. Afterwards, I take a much-needed nap.

Later in the day, Cynthia and I get a sinking feeling as bags of empty plastic egg shells begin to appear on our stoop. We’re like, Wait, what’s going on here? Even our next-door neighbors return theirs, attaching a card that says, “Awesome job on the Easter Egg Hunt. Here are some eggs for next year!”

DAVID SKINNER

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# Obama's Legacy

As we approach the 100-day mark of the Donald Trump presidency, it is instructive to recall the almost 100 months during which Barack Obama discharged the responsibilities of that high office. While there are reasons to be concerned about President Trump (and reasons to be encouraged, such as the presence of individuals like National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster and Defense Secretary James Mattis), it is obviously far too soon to render judgment on Trump's foreign policy.

But it is not too soon to judge President Obama's. That judgment is increasingly hard to contest: The Obama years have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Severely wanting.

By the end of Obama's presidency, the U.S. standing in the world was weaker—clearly and appreciably weaker—than when he became president. The force of American power was diminished, and freedom was in retreat. By the end of Obama's presidency, was there a single part of the world where the United States was in a stronger position than when he took office? Was there an ally who was more confident or an adversary who was less so? By the end of Obama's presidency, were any important countries either friendlier or freer than they had been when he took over?

The answer to all these questions: no.

Let's push the argument a bit further. Let's compare Barack Obama with his predecessor. Whatever legitimate criticisms of George W. Bush's foreign policy one can make—and we made many contemporaneously and would still make many—let's be clear: Bush basically succeeded. Obama basically failed.

Bush's surge worked in Iraq, and it took Obama's withdrawal in 2011 to give away many of the gains. Obama's surge in Afghanistan also worked, but it was Obama himself who willfully frittered away those hard-won gains. Both Iraq and Afghanistan are in worse shape than they were eight years before.

What about Iraq's neighbor, Iran? Bush could have done more, but the situation only got worse under Obama. Bush at least began the construction of a pretty strict regime of international sanctions against the mullahs, a sanctions regime Obama threw away in 2015. Bush's much-decried commit-

ment to a freedom agenda helped lay the groundwork for the attempted Green revolution in 2009—an uprising Obama pointedly refused to help.

Several bad actors began leading their nations in the wrong direction under Bush. But Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to name two, did more damage to their own countries, and abroad, under Obama. And once the Chinese leaders saw Obama's failure to enforce the red line against Syria in 2013, they went on the offensive in the South China Sea in a way that wouldn't have occurred to them under Bush.

As for Syria, what can one say? Obama's policy has been an unalloyed strategic, political, and moral disaster, with implications throughout the Middle East and beyond. Those implications include the migrant crisis in

Europe—a continent in far worse shape strategically and politically than under Bush.

President Bush should have boosted defense spending more than he did. But President Obama left the military underfunded to the tune of \$100 billion a year, compared with the number his own defense secretary thought minimally acceptable. Bush actually made the case for various national security intelligence programs, and defended them vigorously. Obama didn't, and their support among the public and on the Hill is now more tenuous.

Then there is the unfinished business of both presidencies: the war on terror. Bush didn't pretend that the struggle against al Qaeda and its offshoots would be anything but a long, arduous war. Obama, once he had enjoyed his signal success with the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in 2011, spent the remaining five years of his presidency repeatedly misleading the American people with unwarranted happy talk about al Qaeda being "on the run" and unforgivably scoffing at ISIS as the "junior varsity."

Is this picture a bit overdrawn? Sure. But add all the details you like, and it wouldn't fundamentally change.

Indeed the real question about the Obama legacy probably should be: Has America ever had a worse foreign policy president? We can't think of who that would be.

Looking back at the Obama years, we are reminded—as we so often are—of the words of Winston Churchill. Speaking in the House of Commons on March 24, 1938, he said:



For five years I have talked to the House on these matters—not with very great success. I have watched this famous island descending incontinently, fecklessly, the stairway which leads to a dark gulf. It is a fine broad stairway at the beginning, but after a bit the carpet ends. A little further on there are only flagstones, and a little further on still these break beneath your feet.

Thanks to Barack Obama, the flagstones today lie broken beneath our feet. Whatever judgment we'll eventually make on the Trump presidency, we should bear in mind the unenviable situation he inherited. And hope against hope that he rises to the occasion.

—William Kristol

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## Iran on Notice

Last week the Trump administration sent a letter to House speaker Paul Ryan to certify that the Islamic Republic of Iran is in compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal. On the campaign trail, Donald Trump had called it the “worst deal ever negotiated” and promised it wouldn’t stand if he made it to the White House. What gives?

Trump supporters and others who opposed Barack Obama’s signature foreign policy initiative are now wondering: Was the president just bluffing? Did he plan all along to leave the deal in place and take his chances that Iran wouldn’t go nuclear on his watch? As usual, Washington is abuzz

that the administration is split into rival camps—one that wants to go hard on the Iranians and another that wants to take it easy on the leading state sponsor of terror.

There is indeed a conversation ongoing within the administration, the result of a larger, comprehensive review of Iran policy. According to one administration official, “it is one of the major projects that the government is now embarked on, involving hundreds, maybe thousands of people.”

Numerous federal agencies are carrying out the review—including law enforcement and the intelligence community, the State Department and various embassies around the world, the Treasury Department, Justice, and the Pentagon. The process is being managed by National Security Council staff. The debate over Iran appears to be between those who want to cut them off at the knees and those who want to knock their block off, with arguments over exactly how badly and when.

Is Iran really in compliance with the nuclear deal? Probably not. As David Albright, founder of the Institute

for Science and International Security, told *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*’s Jenna Liphits last week, “Iran is either violating the deal, it’s inconsistent with the deal, or it’s just pushing the envelope.”

By certifying that Iran is in compliance, the Trump White House simply complied with a legislative milestone, designed to keep the administration that brokered the agreement honest. Critics of the deal, eager for stronger action taken more quickly, should probably see certification not as a disappointment, but as a delay.

It does not signal, the Trump official told me, that this White House has concluded the JCPOA serves American interests. Rather, certification is a placeholder during the review process. It is buying time for the administration to muster its resources while it plans how to move forward on Iran. The Iranians might also see it as an opportunity—to get their act together lest they have to be reminded they are no longer dealing with President Obama.

In the last several weeks, the Trump White House has put a variety of Iran’s cronies on notice. Vice President Mike Pence delivered a strong message to North Korea, with whom Iran cooperates on nuclear and ballistic missile technology, warning that the era of “strategic patience” is over. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called out Russia, Iran’s ally in Syria, and said it was either “incompetent” in failing to stop Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons or “complicit.” Most tellingly, Trump ordered a missile strike on the Syrian airfield that Assad, Iran’s Arab ally and conduit to Hezbollah, had used to launch the sarin attack that killed at least 85 people.

Unlike the previous American president, the current one seems unworried about upsetting Tehran. If the mullahs decide to opt out of the deal they made

on Obama’s watch, so be it. This White House does not see Iran as a potential partner in regional stability, as a counterbalance to Saudi Arabia and Israel, as the Obama team did. Rather, it recognizes Iran is a very big problem, and the nuclear program is only one part of that problem. As Tillerson said last week, “We have to look at Iran in a very comprehensive way in terms of the threat it poses in all areas of the region and the world.”

Much of the Iran policy review will rely on resources and capacities that the previous White House sidelined. For instance, Treasury may designate companies affiliated with Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps for supporting terror or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. That would freeze their assets and make it harder for other countries to do business with the designated firms. Says Mark Dubowitz, executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, which provided Treasury with a database of 800 IRGC companies yet to be designated, “Under the Obama administration, the White House prevented Treasury from



Rex Tillerson

designating IRGC entities. With the new administration, the pipeline is full and robust.” In short, “the Trump administration is continuing to put Iran on notice.”

Tehran has no doubt gotten the message. Whether that matters to a regime held together for nearly 40 years only by its anti-American animus is another question entirely.

—Lee Smith

# A Military in Need



There were plenty of worries that President Trump’s “America First” campaigning signaled a further retreat of American power and leadership abroad—a worry not mitigated either by his Inaugural Address or his speech before Congress, in which foreign and defense policy were given short shrift. Those concerns have not completely gone away, given the uncertainty over how this White House goes about making foreign and defense decisions and over who exactly will end up filling the many vacant policy positions at State, Defense, and the National Security Council.

But adversaries and events have a way of forcing a president’s hand. In recent weeks and days we’ve seen cruise missile strikes against a Syrian air base, the “mother of all bombs” released on an ISIS stronghold in Afghanistan, an uptick in diplomatic and military pressure on North Korea, worsening ties with Vladimir Putin’s Russia, increased U.S. military involvement in the fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and plans to add more ground forces into Afghanistan. All of which suggests that the logic behind the president’s desire to rebuild the country’s military capabilities and fix the current massive shortfalls in military readiness is both reasonable and urgent.

While the effort to get a defense appropriations bill for the current year through Congress is long overdue, the military services are in need of an immediate infusion of cash. They can and should be provided with that through an emergency supplemental spending bill for the Pentagon.

The reasons for an immediate supplemental are many. To begin with, funding the military at the levels set for last year through a continuing resolution (as is currently the case) only deepens existing problems in readiness caused by too

few funds, existing operations, and aging equipment. Toss in more demands on the military, as the administration seems to be doing, and the readiness problem is compounded.

But any defense supplemental has to do more than simply fund readiness. Today’s modernization is tomorrow’s readiness, as the service chiefs are fond of saying. And there are no shortage of “shovel-ready” procurement programs on hot production lines that can be cost-effectively accelerated, such as destroyer and cruiser upgrades, Army vehicle improvements, increased procurement of the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35), and munitions buys across the services. Moreover, the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps require immediate expansion in end-strength to meet current mission demands.

President Trump’s own supplemental budget request for the Pentagon was \$30 billion. The figure was based on what the military services thought they could reasonably spend in the remaining months of the 2017 fiscal year. It’s a first step but insufficient.

The U.S. military could easily allocate and absorb another \$45 billion in supplemental FY2017 spending over and above the amount the Trump team has proposed. And to alleviate the issue of spending extra funds before the end of the fiscal year, House Armed Services Committee chairman Mac Thornberry has proposed allowing funds to be obligated beyond the normal September 30 deadline. A supplemental of such size would begin to address the existing hole in readiness accounts, provide greater budget stability for the military services for planning, and allow the defense industrial base to begin heating up its production capabilities by hiring new machinists, welders, and the other highly skilled workers necessary to carry out any buildup.

In short, whether the issue is readiness, modernization, or personnel, a supplemental appropriation of \$75 billion would not go wasted. To the contrary, it’s the essential down payment for the rebuild to follow.

Just as the Trump budget has been stuck on hold for a lack of consensus between Republicans and Democrats on how to overcome the spending strictures imposed by the 2011 Budget Control Act, so too has forward movement on a supplemental appropriations bill. But negotiations over a supplemental could lay the groundwork for a broader compromise for the 2018 appropriations process. The key is coming up with a new defense/nondefense spending ratio that provides an incentive for Democrats to allow an increase in defense spending to advance.

As things stand, OMB director Mick Mulvaney’s attempt to find sufficient “offsets” in the nondefense budgets to match the increase in defense spending dollar for dollar has been a nonstarter with Democrats. Finding that new “golden ratio” will require compromise by House Republicans and Senate Democrats and leadership from a White House that prioritizes national security.

Normally, a supplemental appropriations bill is only that. In this case, it could be, and should be, seen as much more.

—Mackenzie Eaglen & Gary Schmitt

# Immerse Yourself in 1776 and All That

A new museum that's less than revolutionary.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

**A**s the chief historian at the new Museum of the American Revolution, which opened April 19 in this city's historic district, Philip Mead had the job of writing the museum's explanatory labels—those little signs next to an exhibit that tell you what you're looking at. By his own admission, he would sometimes get carried away. He has a Ph.D. in American history from Harvard, and, perforce, he writes like a guy with a Ph.D. from Harvard. He might even use words like "perforce." Not reader-friendly, in other words.

Fortunately for him, he had several chefs peering into the pot of his prose. "They'd say things like, 'You've got room for 75 words and you're trying to get four ideas in,'" he said the other day. "They'd say, 'That's three too many. You only get one.'" The museum's director of learning and engagement ran his every sentence through a pitiless piece of software called Hemingway Editor, which ranks a piece of writing by grade level. In Hemingway, the lower the grade, the better.

"She'd come back and say, 'Hemingway says you're writing at 37th grade level. You have to get it down to 8th grade.'" And so he did. Mead isn't complaining—he says he's glad he mastered the art of writing "short, declarative sentences" and keeping things simple.

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*Philadelphia*



*A tribal representative of the Oneida Indian Nation at the museum opening, April 19, 2017*

Still, a plunge of 29 grade levels might prompt a grumpy critic to complain that the museum has undergone a measurable dumbing-down. Such a critic, whoever he is, will have to get over it. Nearly all attempts to educate the general public, from PBS documentaries to art shows to history museums, are pitched to the level of a slightly dim, constantly distracted middle-schooler. Curators and exhibit designers spend their lives gripped by the fear that they will lose the attention of this mythic museumgoer.

This is why exhibits in modern museums jump and shimmy and flash and roar with every digitized mechanism the budget will allow. The gimmickry is best understood as the frantic arm-waving of designers and curators, hopping up and down and screaming at the top of their lungs, "Hey! Kid! Over here! Look, look, *look!* It goes *boom!*"

At the Museum of the American Revolution, "immersive environments" put you at the Battle of Brandywine, in a room where the floor shakes with the roar of cannon and clouds of musket smoke rise and swirl. And then you're among a noisy crowd pulling down a statue of King George III in high-def Surround Sound. Then you're under the leafy Liberty Tree, lit by lanterns on Boston Common, as hidden speakers replay debates among kibitzing colonials. Turn a corner and you're in a shaded glen getting the hairy eyeball from fiberglass mannequins meant to represent elders of the Oneida

tribe, arguing whether to fight for the Americans or the British. And there's much more. With admission prices ranging from \$12 for children to \$19 per adult, visitors will expect no less.

No other museum aims to cover the entire span of the American Revolution, and it was a long time in the making. Museum officials like to call it a "hundred-year start-up." Its roots stretch back from Philadelphia to Valley Forge, 25 miles away. In 1909 a local Episcopal clergyman named W. Herbert Burk managed to raise enough money to buy George Washington's battlefield tent from the great man's debt-saddled heirs. Then he raised enough money to build the Washington Memorial Chapel as a showcase for the tent and his new Valley Forge Museum of American History. The reverend had a perhaps exaggerated view of Washington's religiosity. Taciturn he may have been, Burk conceded, but Washington's faith in Christ shone like a beacon "in that Dark Age of Deism which welcomed the cheap infidelity of 'Tom' Paine." Burk didn't care much for Ben Franklin, either.

For the next 25 years Burk accepted donations of revolutionary artifacts from families across the country. At his death, in 1933, he had collected several thousand uniforms, muskets, pistols, diaries, pots and pans, Bibles, and anything else that might have survived the revolutionary period. He was, in truth, an overeager and indiscriminate curator—somehow the chapel dedicated to the father of our country became home to the piano Queen Victoria gave to the very small circus performer Tom Thumb. The museum grew cluttered.

The dream of a more professional—a more modern—venue lasted into the first decade of the new century, when a rich Philadelphian named Gerry Lenfest bought 78 acres adjacent to Valley Forge National Park. He hoped to build a large museum dedicated to the revolution that would be supported by commercial enterprises such as a convention hotel, a conference center, shops, and restaurants. Neighbors joined the National Parks Conservation Association

IMAGES: NEWS.COM

in suing to stop construction.

After years of jaw-jaw, Lenfest and his group agreed to swap the acreage at Valley Forge for a ramshackle visitors' center downtown, which the National Park Service had left to rot after the bicentennial celebrations in 1976. The great architect Robert A.M. Stern was hired, the pile was pulled down, ground was broken, and more than \$150 million was raised. Much of it—\$35 million—was extracted from Pennsylvania taxpayers. Lenfest gave \$60 million. The third-largest donor was the Oneida Indian Nation, with a check for \$10 million, plus incidentals.

That would be the same Oneida in the exhibit with the stern-faced tribal elders. The Oneida's donation came with a quid pro quo that is refreshing in its openly transactional nature. Concessions to big-ticket donors are of course routine in every nonprofit project, not only in museums but hospitals too, and performing arts centers, and so on. Long gone are the days when a benefactor like Andrew Mellon could found and endow a museum like the National Gallery of Art without naming the enterprise after his own modest and generous self. Ballrooms and theaters, even toilets and water fountains, carry the names of the donors who made it all possible. Inside or outside the Museum of the American Revolution you'll have trouble finding a square foot of real estate whose naming rights haven't been bought by a big corporation or a civic-minded, guilt-ridden member of the 1 percent.

But buying the *content* of exhibits is seldom so frankly acknowledged. The curatorial attention lavished on the Oneida is almost comically out of proportion to the role the tribe played in the real revolutionary war, and no one I talked to at the museum bothers to argue otherwise. The curators never miss a chance to pay tribute to the benefactor. In a cathedral-like space



At top, an 'immersive' pulling-down of George III; center, a celebration of revolutionary commoners; below, a display of battlefield artifacts.



dubbed the Oneida Indian Nation Atrium, at the head of a grand staircase, a 16-by-19-foot painting of Washington conferring with Rochambeau, called the *Siege of Yorktown*, dominates the room.

The original painting, done in 1835, hangs at Versailles. It shows the two generals surrounded by aides, and it's not clear what relation it bears to the Oneida—until the museum label directs you to a handful of dim figures huddled in the distance. "The American Indian figures in the background

may represent a delegation of Oneida and other Native Americans who witnessed the surrender of British General Charles Cornwallis." Yes, they may. Then again, maybe not.

If you look longer you'll notice something else: Rochambeau commands the center of the painting, gesturing toward the enemy, with Washington to his left, looking to the other side, distracted. All the other officers are French. The lesson taught to 19th-century visitors at Versailles is plain: *It is we Frenchmen who won see Americans their independence, not see Americans themselves.* Special pleading about the revolution didn't begin with the Oneida.

The museum itself is a new chapter in this long tradition of special pleading. The lessons being taught to 21st-century visitors to Philadelphia are plain, too, and entirely predictable, given the obsessions of our contemporary historians. True to the conventions of "social history," the story of the revolution is told more through the lives of "ordinary people" than through the actions of great men. The museum does concede the fragility of the revolution, how easily things could have gone the other way. And we are not discouraged from concluding that the nation's fate rested at a dark hour on the courage of individual human beings whose names we are obliged to recognize, even today.

Yet the visitor is also reminded at every turn of the Founders' weaknesses—their racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and their lack of awareness of their own racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism. This has the happy effect of flattering museumgoers for their own sensitivity and virtue, relative to troglodytes like John Adams and James Madison.

The flattery comes at a cost. "Visitors," says the museum, "explore the personal stories of the diverse range of individuals who were part of establishing our nation, including women,

native people, and free and enslaved people of African descent.” And visitors do so continuously. They have no choice. As the curators pile up one ordinary person after another, the main story, propelled by the choices of the main actors, fades into the background as surely as those Oneida at Yorktown. After a while, some of the greatest Americans who ever lived seem no more or less consequential, historically, than . . . all the other Americans who ever lived.

There’s a Catch-22 to social history: If we had lots of information about the personal story of an ordinary person who lived 250 years ago, it would probably be because he or she had done something extraordinary. Which would mean he or she wasn’t ordinary, and hence not a fit subject for social history. In seeking the stories of people who were known only to family and friends, social historians face a lot of blank spaces. They’re forced to fill them in with educated guesses.

At the new museum, the curators are sometimes frank about this contrivance. One slavery exhibit, for example, promises to relate “the lives of five [enslaved] men and women who followed different paths to seek freedom during the revolutionary war.”

Their stories are told through touchscreens. The details are vivid; the tales are breathless or tragic but always ennobling. After each life story a button appears in the corner of the screen, asking the question, “How Do We Know?” Press the button and the answer is, inevitably, we don’t really know; the five slaves left behind them few or no written records. How could it be otherwise? American slaves were kept from learning to read or write, and they lived in communities that were similarly abject. “The stories,” says the exhibit, “have been dramatized.” *Invented* is a truer word.

Well, drama is a good thing when you’re teaching history. It is better if it’s not made up, though. Here the need to provide political uplift dovetails with the need to make the museum exciting. And the result isn’t really history at all.

The middle-schoolers won’t notice. ♦

# A Disaster That Will Tar the GOP

But it’s still avoidable.

BY MICHAEL ASTRUE

Last year Republicans persuaded a majority of Americans that Obamacare should be “repealed and replaced.” Even Americans who voted for Hillary Clinton expected that President Donald Trump and Republican congressional leaders would promptly offer a viable alternative to Obamacare. The president’s chief of staff rightly acknowledged that “it’s time for the party to start governing,” and an April 4 Kaiser Family Foundation poll about the Affordable Care Act (ACA) confirms that a significant majority of Americans believe that “President Trump and Republicans in Congress . . . are now responsible for any problems with the ACA moving forward.”

Republicans badly disappointed the public with their first effort at “repeal and replace,” and they are paying a price that will continue to go up. Recent polls show that support for Obamacare is rising and that the disarray surrounding “repeal and replace” is shaking public confidence in Republicans.

After the failed first effort to roll back Obamacare, the initial reaction of many Republican leaders was to walk away and move on to other issues. Such a response might make sense if Obamacare were a small or a stable program, but it is neither. Tens of millions of Americans are at risk of having their health care disrupted by the ongoing collapse of Obamacare—lives are literally at risk. Less

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obviously, more chaos in the health care insurance markets will cause dysfunctional decisions that could damage the Trump administration’s efforts to create more and better jobs.

We are careening toward just such chaos. Humana has pulled entirely out of Obamacare. Aetna lost \$450 million last year by participating in Obamacare and has pulled out of all



but four states. Aetna CEO Mark Bertolini claims Obamacare is in a “death spiral” due to fundamental problems in its funding and premium model. The phrase “death spiral” has technical connotations that are not fully justifiable, but the term “meltdown” is apt.

The dwindling number of insurance companies participating in Obamacare’s health exchanges

GARY LOCKE

creates an increasing number of monopolies and an environment ripe for collusion that, in turn, creates problems of cost, choice, and quality. Costs will rise unnecessarily, purchased policies will fail to fit the needs of the purchasers, and people will suffer and die unnecessarily.

Five states (Alabama, Alaska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wyoming) are down to one insurer in their health exchanges, and twelve states are down to two—and many of those remaining insurers are threatening to join the Obamacare exodus. Much of this exodus stems from uncertainty about whether insurance companies will continue to receive payments for subsidized policies, although the nuclear bomb of a sudden court decision seems safely in its silo for now. The May 2016 district court decision in *House of Representatives v. Burwell* held that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) unconstitutionally paid billions of dollars to insurance companies to subsidize policies for lower-income Americans. After the election an undoubtedly relieved appeals court placed the case on indefinite hold—under the guise of giving the parties time to work out their differences.

By stretching its authority in order to prop up Obamacare temporarily, the court of appeals bought time for elected officials to fix the problems on their own. Republican leaders now have one last opportunity to deliver on their promises and to demonstrate their competence. Failure to take advantage of that opportunity will lead to a cascade of disasters and drive voters toward single-payer health care proposals that would be run by the same HHS cabal that bungled and lied about Obamacare.

If Republicans are going to take advantage of their last chance, though, they will have to abandon the cherished fantasy that there is a quick and easy “replace” option for Obamacare. Aside from the inherent complexity of Obamacare’s 2,000 pages, its architects anticipated an eventual Republican backlash and left scores of landmines in the bill to protect their

legacy. Moreover, insurance companies are already setting premiums for 2018 (enrollment is six months away)—so there is nothing fundamental that Republicans can put in place that will create major change before 2019.

Another reality Republicans will have to accept is that they have sent HHS secretary Tom Price into a street fight with water pistols. Obama’s HHS secretaries, Kathleen Sebelius and Sylvia Burwell, turned the top layer of their department’s civil servants, historically apolitical to vaguely left-leaning, into hardened Obamaites—ideologues who blurred

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the lines between HHS “navigators” recruiting people into Obamacare and the Obama grassroots political organization, and who were willing to retaliate against organizations that resisted the blurring. Those people are still running most of the agency, and the slow transition has prevented Price from adding anywhere near the number of political appointees necessary to shape and support any “repeal and replace” legislation.

Ideas consistent with the Trump administration’s pledges will not come from HHS. President Trump needs to take (along with other top advisers) Mike Pence, Mitch McConnell, Paul Ryan, Tom Price, Mick Mulvaney, and Mark Meadows offsite (Camp David?) for several days with a handful of the top conservative health care minds. In that spare and isolated setting they could develop a short-term agenda of

incremental changes that are worthy in and of themselves, and that would lay a foundation for broader reform.

Credit the Trump administration for making a few of these changes already. They eliminated the corrupt “navigator” program and loosened some of the actuarial requirements that were driving insurers away, but there is much more they can do without action by Congress. For instance, HHS can shut down its shadowy MIDAS database, which has promiscuously shared sensitive personal information about tens of millions of Americans with scores of outside groups.

There are important, if not fundamental, reforms that Republicans in Congress could pass quickly. They could reduce costs by passing malpractice legislation they have championed in the past. They could attract disgruntled millennials by eliminating the bronze/silver/gold rating system and simply allow Americans to avoid fines by purchasing catastrophic insurance. They could allow insurance companies to sell their products across state lines; while not a panacea, this reform could boost rural states with noncompetitive health insurance markets. They could try to reduce the preexisting condition problem by encouraging states to experiment with ways to extend the length of contracts between employers and insurance companies.

Before long President Trump would need to call the key actors back to Camp David to draft specifications for broader “replace” legislation that could pass both houses of Congress. All of the participants need to accept the reality that Americans are willing to let other Americans choose to be uninsured, but they are unwilling to let those who want insurance go without it. That reality puts the responsibility on Republicans to design and subsidize high-risk pools in each state for Americans with preexisting health conditions. If Republicans could build a consensus behind a solution to fixing that market failure, other issues would be comparatively simpler to resolve. ♦

# May Poll

The world's most successful conservative seeks a supermajority in Britain. **BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL**

If Britain winds up leaving the European Union, it will be the doing of a woman who was not even publicly identified with the cause when voters approved the referendum for “Brexit” 10 months ago. This week Conservative prime minister Theresa May called a general election for June 8. It will determine whether she can pull off the exit.

One of the wiser observations about politics in this populist age was made by Trump adviser Steve Bannon in February. “If you think they’re going to give you your country back without a fight,” he said, “you are sadly mistaken.” The identity of “they” may vary from country to country but the fight is the same: Brexit=Trump. The British citizens who thought they had won the right to leave the European Union were not quite correct. They had won the right to fight over the matter with their almost unanimously pro-EU elites.

Brexit could easily have unraveled. The “Leave” side had the democratic elation, but the “Remain” side held better political cards. There was a very serious difficulty in translating a referendum—which has no legitimacy under Britain’s system of parliamentary supremacy—into a law. There was a generously bankrolled public-relations agitation to bully Parliament into calling a second referendum. It was suddenly discovered that regional assemblies and the House of Lords had previously unasserted veto powers.

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And there was a divided Conservative party, most of whose members were unsympathetic to the democracy movement that had just triumphed.

May scuttled activists’ hopes of reversing the result, declaring on the day she took power: “Brexit means Brexit.” Despite a majority in the House of Commons of only a dozen or so seats, she rallied her own Tory party behind Brexit. She turned it into a patriotic issue.



Her party didn’t know what to think. After the long ascendancy of Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) and John Major (1990-1997), Tony Blair’s revamped Labour party had drubbed the Tories in one election after another. In 2010 David Cameron squeaked into power with a campaign that sought to “modernize” the party—i.e., to render it understandable to the modern media. He took, for instance, a dogsled ride at the Arctic Circle to show his concern for global warming.

When Cameron was forced to resign in the wake of Brexit, which he had opposed, May seemed an unlikely successor. She had been Cameron’s home secretary, responsible for domestic policy. She was, by temperament, a conservative, but her conservatism was not of the kind that Tories brought up

under Thatcher would recognize. She was not an ideologue for the free market. She shocked her party’s 2002 conference by berating those who were. “Our base is too narrow and so, occasionally, are our sympathies,” she said. “You know what some people call us? The nasty party!”

May was a real Middle-Englander, a perfect representative of the world that Brexit was meant to preserve and protect. She was a clergyman’s daughter who attended a state “grammar school,” a highly competitive charter-type school of the sort that May hopes to restore. She went to church every Sunday while at Oxford. In an excellent biographical essay that appeared in the *London Review of Books* in March, David Runciman reproduced a reminiscence that May had written of her years there. It included this passage: “From sherbet fountains to Corona, from Tommy Steele to *Z Cars*, from stodgy puddings to Vesta curries; and that’s not to mention the education.” Do you have any idea what any of those things are? If so, you are English.

There was always something cosmopolitan and citizen-of-the-worldish about her three predecessors when they appeared at prime minister’s questions. Blair was orotund and idealistic, Gordon Brown haughty and erudite, Cameron wry and snooty. May has a tough, spitting, man-on-the-street earnestness. “That’s the difference between him and me,” she said of Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who had attacked the grammar schools she still holds dear. “Labour put the party first, we put the country first!”

While May was home secretary, Cameron had made vague promises about dropping net immigration to Britain to under 100,000 per year. It remained in the high hundreds of thousands, not counting university students. May has tried (and failed) to get them included in the total, and showed herself willing to sacrifice participation in the European common market in order to block the free movement of migrants into Britain. She refused to commit to the

THOMAS FLUHARTY

beefed-up foreign-aid budget with which Cameron sought to appeal to millennials. And at the end of March she triggered Article 50, which set the clock ticking on Britain's exit from the EU, after securing approval from the House of Commons, in a 498-114 vote. That would seem to be a comfortable enough margin on Brexit. The question naturally arises of why she is risking an election so early in the process.

The short answer is that the Labour party, the Tories' traditional adversary, is now shockingly weak. Jeremy Corbyn represents Islington, a north London neighborhood that is just swimming in latte. His ideology is very similar to that of Bernie Sanders, with all the nostalgic charm and economic irrelevance that implies. Not all Corbyn's ideas are bad. He is right, for instance, that privatization of Britain's railroads has been a failure. But he favors heavier taxes on "the rich"—by which he means those earning \$90,000 a year. And he has never quite figured out whether he thinks the European

Union is a step forward for international harmony or a devious plot to entrench financial capitalism everywhere. A lot of Britons who would have liked to remain in the EU blame him for last year's result.

Corbyn seems unaware that the working-class voters on whom his party's fortunes used to rest have either succumbed or found another political home. Questioned by a journalist about his out-of-touch Islington constituency, he replied, "I am very proud to represent North Islington. . . . It's absolutely true there are people in Islington who buy and drink cappuccino every day. . . . It is also true that there are people living in the streets of our borough." A dozen top Labour MPs have resigned their seats rather than run again under his leadership. A YouGov poll taken for the London *Times* showed Conservatives running at 48 percent and Labour at 24, which would saddle Corbyn with a loss of as many as 100 seats.

May had promised she would not call an early election. She will pay a certain price for her U-turn. But the prospect of Labour's getting a new leader and rejuvenating itself, the way Germany's Social Democrats have done under Martin Schulz this past spring, meant that inaction was more risky than action. Because of May's reliably pro-Brexit stance, the single-issue UK Independence party, which often erodes the Tories' anti-European vote, is weak, too. An improving British economy should be generating inflation in theory—and it is the wiser choice, politically, not to wait until it comes in practice. Finally, if May writes Brexit into the Tory party's governing manifesto, it will place constitutional limits on what the House of Lords—swollen during the Blair, Brown, and Cameron governments by pro-EU human-rights lawyers, community activists, and cultural studies professors—can do to obstruct it. May would have been nuts to delay.

## Trump's First 100 Days Bring Victories for Business

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

This Saturday, April 29, marks the 100th day of the Trump presidency. While critics are quick to point out what the administration and Congress *haven't* gotten done so far, we must not overlook what they *have* gotten done—including the most significant regulatory relief since the Reagan administration, a renewal of America's energy strength, and the addition of an outstanding new justice to the U.S. Supreme Court.

President Trump and the Republican majorities in Congress were elected on calls to shake up Washington and jolt our economy back to life. Neither goal can be fully accomplished in 100 days, but our leaders have made progress on both. And with Congress returning from a two-week break, there is an opportunity to finish the first 100 days with a fresh burst of momentum.

The new government should be proud of its fast and efficient work to

roll back the Obama administration's regulatory onslaught. Congress has used the Congressional Review Act to rescind 12 harmful rules on issues ranging from labor requirements to broadband privacy to federal contracting. President Trump has made equally effective use of his executive authority, ordering the review of regulations stemming from Dodd-Frank and Obamacare and even creating regulatory reform officers in each federal agency.

Some of the most important deregulatory victories have been in the field of energy. The new government has advanced permitting decisions for the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, begun to withdraw the Environmental Protection Agency's Waters of the U.S. rule, repealed restrictions on fracking on federal lands, erased the Department of the Interior's anti-coal Stream Protection Rule, and more. President Trump has signaled a strong commitment to fostering American energy independence.

The president's appointment—and

the Senate's confirmation—of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court is another move that fulfills a campaign pledge and will pay dividends for many years to come. Justice Gorsuch is a champion of the constitutional principles of limited government, and his early appearances on the bench have proven that he was an excellent choice.

As members of Congress return to Washington, they must build off of these early successes and recommit to tackling the toughest issues before us. President Trump has reaffirmed his commitment to getting health care reform passed, and now Congress must overcome its differences to forge meaningful consensus. Then it needs to move forward with a tax code overhaul and infrastructure modernization. As our leaders tackle this daunting to-do list, they should commit to expanding on the successes—and learning from the setbacks—of the first 100 days.



Learn more at  
[uschamber.com/abovethefold](http://uschamber.com/abovethefold).

The election will reflect Britain's new electoral, sociological, and geographical divisions. In the face of Labour's tergiversation, the Tories' former coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, have become the no-two-ways-about-it anti-Brexit party—they could rise as Labour withers. What is more, as Labour comes more to represent urban sophisticates, the Tories become more the party of rural England and its basket of deplorables. "There are Conservative MPs in prosperous urban constituencies," the former Tory strategist Daniel Finkelstein wrote this week, "who will lose their seats in a campaign that centres on Brexit."

Brexit is now underway, but its outcome is unclear. Britain's success at the negotiating table will determine whether it gets a "hard Brexit" or a "soft Brexit." This question has three dimensions: whether Britain will respect European conventions on the free movement of people; whether Britain will remain in the single European free trade zone (the "single market"); and whether Britain will remain subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. A soft Brexit would answer *yes* and a hard Brexit *no* to those questions.

The situation is paradoxical. May appears to want a soft Brexit on trade and a hard Brexit on everything else. It is against her fellow hardliners, though, that she requires the protection of a large majority. Otherwise she will risk seeing an orderly Brexit hung up by purists the way Republicans saw the repeal of Obamacare hung up last month.

"We want a deep and special partnership between a strong and successful European Union and a U.K. that is making its own way in the world," May said when announcing the election. This should be easily achievable. Britain's objections to the EU were the most widespread of any European country's, but they were in many cases pragmatic. There are no Brexit advocates fustigating the whole capitalist system, the way some of the candidates in France's presidential election have been doing.

Some of those who speak for the European Union have been inclined to wield access to Europe's common market as a bargaining chip. They include Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission. They would treat Britain and the continent as bound no more intimately than, say, China and Nigeria; or Taiwan and Brazil. They assume also that the United States would be indifferent to the fate of its most loyal ally in a trade war.

That might have been the case during the last administration, when President Obama warned that a Britain outside of Europe would have to go to the "back of the queue" for any future trade deals with Washington. But it is not the case today, and it ignores the large stock of good will that May has already managed to build up inside the Trump administration. An EU inclined to hang Britain out to dry would be risking a big miscalculation. ♦

# Trump Unbound

The upside of having few principles.

BY FRED BARNES

President Trump has changed his policies in his first 100 days in office more than any president in the post-World War II era—or perhaps any president ever. And for the most part the changes have been for the better.

Russia and China. He was expected by the media and foreign policy establishment to befriend Russian president Vladimir Putin and pick fights with China's Xi Jinping. The opposite has occurred. Trump insists there's "chemistry" between him and Xi.

There's no evidence of any between him and Putin.

Mainstream reporters and columnists are mostly unimpressed with Trump's U-turns. They tend to treat them as mere flip-flops—that is, changes that were not well thought out and based largely on instinct or politics, not knowledge or foresight. And Democrats, liberals, and some Republicans view him as unsophisticated and crass.

Why so many changes? Here's a short list of issues on which Trump has adopted new positions: NATO, currency manipulation by China, the North American Free Trade Agreement, North Korea, torture, intervention in the Syrian civil war, the Export-Import Bank, Wall Street, Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen.

There's a central reason for what Doyle McManus of the *Los Angeles Times* refers to as the president's



Trump with Ryan Zinke, left, and Rex Tillerson

Trump is no longer a raw populist. He hasn't become an internationalist but the idea that he's an isolationist has proved to be untrue. Immigration and trade were two of his biggest campaign issues last year, but his approach to them has changed significantly. His desire to build a wall along the Mexican border is a lonely remnant.

The most dramatic change involves

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

NICHOLAS KAMM / AFP / GETTY

“head-spinning policy reversals.” Trump has no ideology, no central idea from which his stances on policy radiate. This makes it easy to change his mind. He’s not violating any cherished principle. He’s unbound. It also makes him unpredictable.

Another reason is Trump’s lack of knowledge as a candidate. His campaign speeches were loaded with applause lines and rarely included facts or explanations. In debates with Republican opponents and later with Hillary Clinton, his statements were mainly assertions.

As president, Trump already knows considerably more than he did on January 20. He’s learned a lot in a short period of time, especially from “his generals,” as he calls them, from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and from the many foreign leaders with whom he’s held discussions. His economic outlook has been affected by Gary Cohn, his chief economic adviser.

When he met with Xi Jinping, he was lectured for 10 minutes on why China has influence with North Korea but not control. As a result, Trump changed his view of what should be expected from China in the struggle to eliminate North Korea’s nuclear arsenal.

A final reason for Trump’s changes is his reliance on his advisers. He’s the boss, but they’ve created his new policies. General John Kelly, the homeland security secretary, declared there would be no mass roundups of illegal immigrants. That became policy.

On his own, Trump has softened his view of children brought to the United States by parents who entered illegally. He’s unlikely to backtrack and seek to deport these so-called dreamers. But Kelly has said he might have to separate children from their parents in some cases.

Tillerson, Defense Secretary James Mattis, and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster have drawn Trump away from his naïve attitude toward Russia and Putin. They’re strong supporters of NATO and now Trump is.

Peter Baker of the *New York Times*

was troubled by Trump’s explanation for the NATO flip. “I said it was obsolete,” Trump said. “It’s no longer obsolete.” But NATO hadn’t changed, Baker wrote, only Trump had. Trump’s assessment changed because he has learned more about NATO. True, he didn’t admit he’d been wrong earlier. So what? He wound up in the right place.

Trump doesn’t always wind up there. He knew a lot about real estate development but far less about the economy when he took office. The tax plan he ran on was associated with a strong dollar. In recent weeks, however, he’s complained the dollar is too strong. That is what Cohn is reported to have advised him.

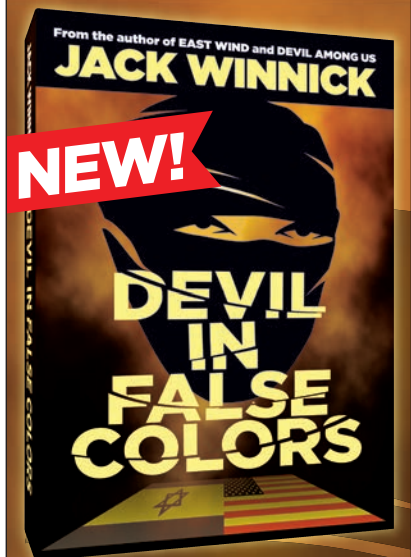
As a candidate, Trump was a one-man band. But in Washington, allies are essential. House speaker Paul Ryan, once scorned by Trump, is now an ally. When the bill to repeal and replace Obamacare failed in the House, the president didn’t blame Ryan. Rather, he wants to try again with a new bill. For that, he needs Ryan.

He also needs Tillerson, who had gotten the reputation for being over his head at the State Department and ineffective. Then, his status “shifted” after Tillerson took “a lead on the administration’s strategy with Syria, Russia, and China,” *Politico*’s Annie Karni wrote. “He’s emerging as Trump’s favorite Cabinet secretary” and “one of Trump’s most frequent White House guests.”

Trump is dependent on Tillerson, Ryan, the generals, Cohn, and a handful of others who are the architects of his new policies. So he isn’t the sole owner of his policies. They are rooted in the experience, skill, and knowledge of his top advisers. Would he spurn their advice and go out on his own as a one-man band again? Would he inform General Mattis he’s decided to bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities? I don’t think so.

Part of the old Trump remains. He’s like a talented basketball player, a great scorer, who’s always in foul trouble. He doesn’t play the game as well as he might. But he’s gotten a lot better. ♦

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# Permanent Crisis

A half-century of hyperventilation about American health care. BY PHILIP TERZIAN

In the summer of 1972, two days after the Watergate break-in, Simon & Schuster published Sen. Edward Kennedy's second book, a scathing condemnation of American medicine entitled *In Critical Condition: The Crisis in America's Health Care*. Composed largely of excerpts from recent testimony before Kennedy's Senate subcommittee on health, it was clearly intended to introduce his proposed Health Security Act, which would replace private health insurance with a government-run system ("Medicare for all") and, in due course, closely regulate clinics, hospitals, the pharmaceutical industry, and the practice of medicine itself—an American version of Britain's National Health Service.

Nearly a half-century later, *In Critical Condition* is of interest largely as an artifact of its times. Even in the ongoing, seven-year debate about Obamacare, few Democrats now would advocate anything remotely resembling Kennedy's 1972 vision of socialized medicine—including Kennedy himself, who conceded in 2009 that he had long since "come to believe that we'd have to give up on the ideal of a government-run, single-payer system if we wanted to get universal care." Much had changed in the intervening decades, not least a steep erosion of public trust in the capacity of the federal government to deliver anything as important as health care.

But the operative word in Kennedy's title is "crisis," and therein lies a tale. For while *In Critical Condition*



is a wholesale Aquarian Age indictment of American health care—in one chapter he declares that "we can no longer afford the health insurance industry in America," in another he threatens that "many physicians will have to give up their solo or single-specialty-group practices"—today's debate is almost exclusively about insurance coverage. In Edward Kennedy's America, doctors



*Kennedy gives a copy of his book to his sister Jean Kennedy Smith during a reception in New York, June 13, 1972.*

are grasping businessmen who pursue clinical specialties in order to "fragment" health care, and hospitals are Dickensian flophouses where patients are simultaneously ignored and overcharged. Nowadays, few people would take Kennedy's diagnosis seriously, but the "crisis" label has stuck. Indeed, it remains a political truism, almost beyond discussion, that American health care is in crisis, has been in crisis since time out of mind, and is getting steadily worse.

That, certainly, was the urgent message a quarter-century ago when Bill Clinton commissioned his wife Hillary and Clinton comrade-in-arms Ira Magaziner to produce their

own version of a Health Security Act: "Millions of Americans are just a pink slip away from losing their health insurance," President Clinton warned Congress in 1993, "and one serious illness away from losing all their savings. . . . Our medical bills are growing at over twice the rate of inflation." When the first lady subsequently testified before several congressional committees, the word "crisis" was routinely, and pointedly, invoked.

It may be useful, at this juncture, to recall that when the Clinton legislation finally collapsed in Congress—having never been brought to a vote—both the Senate and House were in safe Democratic hands. It is certainly true that congressional Republicans had largely opposed the Clinton initiative, just as they

would later resist the Affordable Care Act; and there was a smart, well-organized public campaign against Hillarycare, now largely remembered for the Harry-and-Louise TV commercials underwritten by the health-insurance industry. But among the multiple reasons why Hillarycare failed, the most likely explanation is that Americans believe that while there is plenty of room for reform in the realm of insurance coverage, the American system of health care is not in crisis. And as systems of health care go, in a polyglot nation of 325 million, it is a remarkably good one.

*In Critical Condition* ends, inevitably, with rapturous descriptions of nationalized systems in tiny, homogenous Scandinavian societies (Sweden, Denmark) and Britain's NHS. But while Western European health care may be "free," in the sense that payment is not required on delivery, it tends to be the sort of health care one would expect for free—and practitioners have little financial incentive. Americans have unusually high levels of expectation in health care and would be unpleasantly surprised not only by the quality of medicine in socialized systems—systems now strained to the breaking point by costs and population—but by limitations

*Philip Terzian is literary editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

DAVID PICKOFF / AP

on care as well: waiting lists for major surgical procedures, maximum ages for lifesaving therapies, the chronic shortages and inefficiencies of unionized, government-run programs.

By contrast, the American system is a crazy-quilt, hybrid, evolutionary pattern of private and public care, of public and private standards in education and training, of infinite varieties of finance and delivery—and levels of care far beyond the expectations of sick people in Sweden. You can be hospitalized in a public institution in a rural county in the

poorest state in the union and reasonably expect the latest technology and superior care. Moreover, *In Critical Condition* notwithstanding, America's uninsured do not go untreated because they cannot pay: They are treated, by law—and their treatment is subsidized by those who can pay.

Congress would do well to bear in mind that ours is a health care system, like any gigantic and complex enterprise, in need of adjustment, of adaptation to needs and capacities—of reform, if you will. It was not in 1972, and is not now, a system in crisis. ♦

PowerPoint presentation about the bill in March. “We want to protect people with preexisting conditions. We think that that’s very important. That has actually been a cornerstone of Republican health care proposals all along,” he said. All well and good. But the fund contains just \$100 billion over nine years, much less than what policy experts, including those like James C. Capretta and Tom Miller on the right, have said would be necessary for such an approach to “function properly.” And the AHCA left in place Obamacare’s mandates on insurers for covering those with preexisting conditions, making the fund appear like a supplement to the current law. The former issue could be enough to make moderates uneasy. The latter was evidently enough to make many conservatives oppose the bill.

To the rescue came four GOP lawmakers and Vice President Mike Pence, who has been a facilitator for conversations about how to change the legislation. Prior to the two-week Easter recess, Congressmen Gary Palmer and David Schweikert, both of the

conservative House Freedom Caucus, proposed a federal risk-sharing program to further offset the cost of insuring pricey individuals. It’s a \$15 billion yearly expense from 2018 through 2026, and it could be supplemented by leftover resources from the stability fund. It would come under state control starting in 2020. The idea has party-wide support, according to Republican leadership; it was adopted in the Rules Committee before members flew back home for the recess.

On the issue most pertinent to Freedom Caucus leaders like chairman Mark Meadows, there appear to be the makings of agreement on granting states the power to waive certain Obamacare regulations. The thinking is that this approach could pass Senate muster. According to draft principles of an amendment to the AHCA from Meadows and moderate Tuesday Group co-chairman Tom MacArthur, state governments could seek

# Preexisting Suspicions

Will Republicans agree on a health care reform after all? BY CHRIS DEATON

The word around Capitol Hill is that Republicans are preparing to revive the dormant American Health Care Act after members return from their Easter break. Lawmakers have tried adding some conservative muscle to the bill in an effort to make weight. But a central reason why the AHCA could be back in the ring is that it now has some added clarity.

Take the legislation’s treatment of health care consumers with preexisting conditions—which has come to mean those with an expensive medical issue who might be denied insurance if they weren’t already insured. The original text authorized money for the creation of a “stability fund” for states to directly subsidize such individuals, as well as the insurers who cover them. State

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Ryan and the AHCA: take two

governments could use the money to establish reinsurance programs and high-risk pools, with the goal of sequestering costly patients and their premiums from the broader coverage pool. By design, the burden for subsidizing those with preexisting conditions would be transferred from younger, healthier consumers to taxpayers en masse.

House speaker Paul Ryan touted this plan during a 23-minute

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“limited waivers” from two mandates of particular interest to conservatives: “community rating,” which requires insuring groups at the same price no matter what their individual differences in age, sex, health status, etc., and a portfolio of “essential health benefits” required in all plans. (The amendment still prohibits considering gender in calculating premiums.) Preventing insurers from differentiating premiums based on health status while still forcing them to cover all comers has long troubled conservatives who worry that such policy leads to economic disaster. The Meadows-MacArthur document, first published by *Politico*, retains Obamacare’s “guaranteed issue” of insurance. But tampering with community rating would make plans more expensive for higher-risk consumers. Pumping money into risk pools figures to offset that.

Republicans are playing soft-toss with an egg on this one. A March CNN poll found that 87 percent of Americans support “maintaining the protections offered to people with pre-existing conditions under Obamacare.” The mechanism for those protections is complex and rarely discussed in the mainstream media; it’s unlikely even 8.7 percent of Americans understand the details. But word spread even before last week that the White House and the Freedom Caucus were discussing the waiver idea, and ominous headlines permeated the press. Not just from partisan shills, either: The excellent *New York Times* health care reporter Margot Sanger-Katz, for example, wrote a piece headlined “Republican Health Proposal Would Undermine Coverage for Pre-existing Conditions.” Imagine you’re a GOP lawmaker having to defend why you support “undermining” a major provision of law supported by 9 out of 10 constituents.

Still, waivers offer a selling point to anxious moderates, Yuval Levin wrote in *National Review*. They’re not necessarily just for doing away with Obamacare’s preexisting conditions protections—they’re for allowing states to adopt protections of their own, which presumably could include

forms of community rating and essential health benefits requirements at their discretion.

The Meadows-MacArthur principles imply that states are only eligible for waivers if they can demonstrate to health officials in Washington that their ideas would improve their markets. The waiver approach “tells states they will be given what the Freedom Caucus wants to give them only if they can show that they would use it to

achieve what the Tuesday Group wants to achieve,” as Levin put it.

The Tuesday Group is concerned about access and the Freedom Caucus about cost and flexibility. According to Ryan, the divide between the factions “is narrowing quite quickly.” But that’s still not enough to characterize chatter about an AHCA sequel as anything more than speculation. Republican disagreements were “narrowing” before part one fell apart, too. ♦

## The Evolution of Matt Bevin

From rabble-rousing Tea Party activist to governor of Kentucky. BY FRED LUCAS

When Kentucky governor Matt Bevin warmed up the crowd in Louisville ahead of Donald Trump’s speech in March, he seemed to share the president’s taste for superlatives:

“I defy anybody in the national media, local media, anybody who is a political expert among you to find one state in America anywhere in the history of America that has more profoundly transformed itself ideologically, politically, legislatively,” Bevin said, “than Kentucky in the last year of change.”

That might seem like an overstatement for what is, after all, a conservative state. But Kentucky was, until recently, the rare Southern state that retained a blue Democratic hue. In November, Republicans captured the majority in the state’s house of representatives for the first time in 96 years. And Bevin himself is only the third Republican governor in the last

half-century. When I asked the governor about the extravagant claims in his Louisville speech, he said they were more than justified. Finally having a GOP legislature, Bevin says, “has allowed us the opportunity for policies to be heard in committees that were never heard before, such as the right to work, pro-life legislation, and charter schools.”

Kentucky Republicans have wasted little time, fast-tracking bills in the first five days of this year’s general assembly session. Bevin signed right-to-work legislation, repealed a prevailing-wage law that was driving up the cost of state projects, signed a paycheck-protection bill, and banned abortions after 20 weeks. The governor signed a charter school bill—Kentucky had been one of just seven states with no competition for public education dollars. And in an effort to reduce cronyism, he eliminated 65 separate state boards and commissions.

When the regular session was over (which happens pretty quickly in Kentucky—in odd years, the general assembly has to wrap up normal business by March 30), the governor called legislators back for a special

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*Fred Lucas is White House correspondent for the Daily Signal and author of Tainted by Suspicion: The Secret Deals and Electoral Chaos of Disputed Presidential Elections (Stairway Press, 2016).*

session to address tax reform and pension reform.

Conservatives could only dream of such rapid action from the Trump administration and the Republican-controlled Congress. Bevin blames Congress for the pace in Washington more than Trump. “The guy has been president for just three months,” the governor says. “We have had the same Congress dragging their feet for a while.”

Bevin has been, in some ways, the Trump of Kentucky, a businessman without political experience who came to office to shake things up—though he’s more of a doctrinaire conservative than the president. Bevin grew up in New Hampshire. He served in the Army before a career in finance. In 2008, he took over his family’s bell-manufacturing company.

Bevin, today a polished political pro, entered politics in 2014 as a rabble-rousing primary challenger to Mitch McConnell and very new to the game. He accused the Senate Republican leader of being too accommodating to President Barack Obama and blasted him for voting for the bank bailout. That proved to be an amateur mistake: *Politico* dug up a report to investors of Veracity Funds that Bevin had signed in 2008 supporting the Troubled Assets Relief Program. McConnell had a field day with that.

Bevin learned other hard political lessons in that first campaign. There was the rally fiasco in Corbin, Kentucky: A local newspaper reported that the group he spoke to at the event advocated the legalization of cock-fighting. Bevin said he thought it was a states’ rights rally and later issued a statement in opposition to cock-fighting. But the damage was done. In the May 2014 primary, Bevin got 35 percent of the vote against McConnell. Maybe not so bad, all things considered.

Bevin, it should be noted, describes

his relationship with McConnell today as “excellent,” though not chummy: “We don’t hang out and have coffee.”

The longshot Senate campaign wasn’t for nothing. Taking on one of the nation’s most powerful Republicans built both name recognition and a political base to fight another day. Bevin entered the Kentucky governor’s race the next year, running against three seasoned politicians in the Republican primary. He won the 2015 primary by just 83 votes



*Mitch McConnell, left, and Matt Bevin with the Kentucky delegation on the floor of the GOP convention, July 18, 2016*

statewide. In the general election, he trailed in polls the month before Election Day, but eventually carried 106 of the state’s 120 counties. “I was never an elected official or a political mover and shaker, and people said I had no chance of winning,” Bevin says. “I ran on issues others were afraid to talk about.”

After coming into office in December 2015, he found a conciliatory middle ground on a wedge issue by allowing marriage licenses to be issued without the signature of a county clerk. This defused the controversy involving Kim Davis, the Rowan County clerk who had been jailed for refusing to sign same-sex marriage licenses.

But it didn’t take long for things to become partisan. When Bevin moved to dismantle Kynect, the

state’s version of Obamacare, and pushed budget cuts in other areas, he ran up against Democratic house speaker Greg Stumbo: The longtime state powerbroker obstructed much of the governor’s agenda. But in 2016 Stumbo was one of the casualties as Republicans gained control of the Kentucky house, with the GOP going from just 46 of 100 seats to 64.

With a Republican legislature to work with, Bevin now has a 50 percent approval rating—not great, but a big upswing from his 33 percent approval this time a year ago, when he was fighting with Democrats.

Does Bevin represent a new political balance of power in Kentucky, or is he just another GOP aberration there? The last Republican governor, Ernie Fletcher, was a one-termer. He was a creature of the political establishment, having served in the state legislature, then the U.S. House, before being backed for governor in 2003 by McConnell. Once Fletcher was in office, Democratic attacks paralyzed him. By contrast, Bevin is anything but paralyzed.

McConnell is rightly credited with making Kentucky a two-party system, leading to GOP dominance at the congressional level. But Bevin deserves much credit for the change at the state office level. He also demonstrates how an anti-establishment rabble-rouser can evolve into a successful politician, a lesson that could be valuable for Donald Trump.

“If anti-establishment means cutting red tape and ignoring the hot air, I’m anti-establishment. But, if the establishment includes people working hard for the good of the public, I’ll work with anyone who has good ideas, Democrat or Republican,” Bevin says. “I try to create dialogue and avoid the noisemakers. I don’t watch TV. I don’t sit down with editorial boards who are never going to support me. I go out and listen to people.” ♦

# Erdogan's Counter-Revolution

*What went wrong in Turkey?*

By ERIC EDELMAN

The history of the twentieth century is littered with the carcasses of failed revolutions. Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Mussolini, and Hitler all tried to master modernity—to curb or accelerate it—and all failed. After the attacks on September 11, 2001, it appeared the most consequential revolutionary of the last century might turn out to be Mustafa Kemal Pasha, better known as Atatürk, founder of the secular Republic of Turkey. Amidst the wreckage of the multinational Ottoman Empire, Atatürk emerged victorious, using bourgeois nationalism as a basis for reforming a Muslim country in an attempt to demonstrate that popular sovereignty and Islam could successfully coexist. That proposition remains to be disproven, but the Atatürk revolution itself died on April 16, 2017—the day Turkey's current president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, succeeded in his longstanding effort to transform the country's parliamentary government into an executive presidency.

It is a cliché in Washington to say that a given country or issue is at an “inflection point,” but that hackneyed phrase tells the truth about today's Turkey. Atatürk ruled the republic for about 15 years. So has Erdogan: He became prime minister in 2003 and president in 2014, with an eye to enlarging the power of the latter office. The constitutional changes that Turkish voters approved by the slightest of margins in an electoral landscape most objective observers regarded as unfairly tilted in Erdogan's favor make it possible, his health permitting, for Erdogan to serve as president until 2029 or 2034 (when he will be

80). Should he do so, he will have dominated Turkey's political life twice as long as its founder did—and complete the work of undoing Atatürk's secular revolution, remaking the country in his own image.

Atatürk died relatively young but had put Turkey on the road to what Dean Acheson described as an “imperfect democracy.” As his biographer Lord Kinross noted, he undertook to secure a profoundly liberal end using extremely illiberal means. Along the way, he left many questions about Turkey's future unanswered. What is the role of the military in politics? What is the role of ethnicity in the nation? What is the role of the state in the economy? And, finally, what is the role of religion in society?

Much of the country's subsequent history was an effort to realize this modern, European vocation in the face of such open questions and a Kemalist system that after the death of the founder became rigid and unbending in its insistence on secularism at all costs. Progress was uneven, but there was a goal towards which Turkey was striving. The more

sophisticated Islamists understood this. When Erdogan's Justice and Development party (AKP), which had arisen from the wreckage of confrontations between the secular state and Islamist political currents, came to power in 2002, it rode uneasily on the Turkish public's broad aspiration to join Europe. In those heady, early days of his rule, Erdogan proclaimed that the so-called “Copenhagen criteria” for EU accession should be renamed the “Ankara criteria” because they were touchstones Turkey should reach in any case to become a successful, prosperous, modernized state.

This attitude changed, however, almost as soon as the EU agreed to open Turkey's candidacy for membership in December 2004. Historians will attempt to unravel “what went wrong” for years to come. There is plenty of blame to go around. The Turks bungled the issue of a Cyprus settlement in 2003 before successfully orchestrating what



*Erdogan and his wife Emine greet supporters after his referendum victory, April 17.*

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looked like a winning compromise in 2004, only to have it scuttled by Greek Cypriot hardliners. The EU, in turn, foolishly allowed the Republic of Cyprus into the EU, complicating Turkish accession. Germany and France elected new leaders far less sympathetic to Turkey's case than their predecessors, but truth be told, enthusiasm for EU membership was already waning with Erdogan and his base voters. When the European Court of Human Rights upheld a French law banning the wearing of headscarves in the workplace, many Islamists began to sour on the notion that adopting European norms and rules would open the way to changing Turkey's unyielding laws governing expressions of Islamic piety. Erdogan launched on a totally different trajectory, with important implications for both domestic and foreign policy.

At home, Erdogan's overarching objective became systematically breaking down the restraints on religiosity in the public square and moving society in a more conservative direction. Municipalities controlled by the AKP stopped serving alcohol at public events; all the hotels in town would follow suit. It wasn't even close to the imposition of *sharia*—it was far more subtle and sophisticated—but it clearly aimed at transfiguring the decaying Kemalism of Turkey's state institutions. Koranic instruction was introduced in public schools and religious school graduates were given a form of affirmative action for public-sector jobs. Erdogan provoked and survived crisis with the military, always the torchbearer of Atatürkism, by insisting on a president, Abdullah Gül, with a headscarf-wearing wife in 2007. This would have been unthinkable as recently as a decade earlier. Eventually the ban on headscarves in public institutions was abandoned.

Long years of single-party rule after 2002 allowed the AKP to stock the bureaucracy with supporters (although Erdogan was forced to rely heavily on some cadres of educated Islamists supplied by exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen). The AKP, originally a coalition of “modernist Islamists,” liberal reformers, and refugees from other center-right political parties, began to play more and more to Erdogan's Islamist base. In 2008, after surviving a judicial attempt to close down the party (a fate that earlier Islamist parties had suffered), Erdogan inaugurated, in an uneasy alliance with the Gülenists, a series of conspiracy trials that began not only to eliminate political opponents but ultimately undermined any institution that might provide a check or balance on his power—including the media and the military.

Although the takedown of the military played well with EU audiences, the other deviations from European standards of rule of law and free expression consistently depressed support in Europe for Turkey's candidacy.

Erdogan, with the assistance of his aide Ahmet Davutoglu, later foreign and ultimately prime minister, in fact began to turn Turkey away from its traditional Western orientation. Davutoglu touted Turkey as a potential Muslim superpower that would have “zero problems with neighbors.” When the Arab Spring sprouted in late 2010, however, “zero problems with neighbors” rapidly shifted to nothing but problems with neighbors, and Erdogan's foreign policy took a decidedly Sunni sectarian turn.

Because the Obama administration was bound and determined to do nothing directly about the Syrian civil war that erupted in 2011, it was all too happy to subcontract its policy to the Turks for the first two years of the conflict. Unfortunately, and predictably, Turkey's reach exceeded its grasp. Unhappy with the lack of commitment from the United States and suffering from the flow of refugees into Turkey, Ankara began to support the most radical elements of the Sunni opposition to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, most notably Jabhat al-Nusra, al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria. It also turned a blind eye to the even more violent jihadism of the Islamic State, providing sanctuary for IS fighters and

allowing funds and weapons to flow to the front via Turkey. When IS proclaimed a caliphate in 2014 after the collapse of the Iraqi security forces, Turkey's policies became an enormous source of frustration to the Pentagon, which chafed at Ankara's seeming inability to control its borders, its restrictions on U.S. activity at Incirlik Air Base, and its refusal to contribute much of anything to the fight against IS.

It was around this time—2013 to 2014—that Erdogan's seemingly insatiable thirst for power began to make his domestic political ambitions inseparable from his foreign policy. His quasi-alliance with the Gülen movement came apart over revelations of gross corruption in his government. These “oil for gold” disclosures appear to have come from the Turkish National Intelligence Agency, which had been thoroughly penetrated by the Gülen movement. They revealed that cabinet officials, and perhaps Erdogan and his family members, had benefited from Iran's efforts to evade U.S. sanctions. Erdogan denounced the Gülenists

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### **When the Islamic State proclaimed a caliphate in 2014, Turkey's policies became an enormous source of frustration to the Pentagon, which chafed at Ankara's seeming inability to control its borders, its restrictions on U.S. activity at Incirlik Air Base, and its refusal to contribute much of anything to the fight.**

first as a “parallel state” and then as a terrorist organization.

One casualty of the ominous turn in Turkey’s domestic politics was the one undeniably constructive effort undertaken by Erdogan: the opening to the Kurds and peace negotiations with the Kurdistan Workers’ party (PKK). The latter, as much a personality cult centered on Abdullah Ocalan as a guerrilla movement, had waged a loathsome and violent insurgency against Turkey for 20 years, costing as many as 30,000 lives. Erdogan’s attempt to bring the conflict to a conclusion via negotiations could have ended in a major achievement and a valuable contribution to stabilizing the country’s southeast, which sits cheek by jowl with Syria and Iraq. But Erdogan abandoned it in 2015 after watching with alarm the emergence of a self-administering Kurdish enclave in northern Syria and the growth of a Kurdish political party, the HDP, in Turkey that threatened the AKP’s ability to govern alone, without any pesky coalition partners.

Erdogan pushed Abdullah Gül aside in 2014 after changing the constitution to provide for a popularly elected president, but he had long desired to transform the largely ceremonial and nonpartisan presidency into a fully empowered executive office. He needed to get parliament to change the constitution again. In 2015, he decided to roll the dice and campaign for the changes in the context of a parliamentary election. The results were an enormous setback to his project. In June, voters returned a hung parliament. For the first time since 2002, the AKP did not have a majority and could not form a government on its own. One important reason was the rise of the HDP under the leadership of the youthful, charismatic Selahattin Demirtas. Traditionally, the system had been rigged to prevent significant Kurdish representation in parliament by setting a minimum bar of 10 percent under the country’s complicated system of proportional representation. In the June 2015 election, the Demirtas-led HDP, appealing not just to Kurds but liberals, gays, and other groups marginalized in Turkey, received 13 percent and a record 80 seats in parliament. Davutoglu, now prime minister, prudently sought to put together a grand coalition with the secularist opposition Republican People’s (CHP) and Nationalist (MHP) parties. But Erdogan had different plans.

The president methodically undermined his prime minister, ultimately replacing him with a colorless factotum, the current prime minister Binali Yildirim (who cheerfully advocated abolishing his own position in the referendum campaign). Rather than convene a grand coalition to overcome the country’s divisions, Erdogan sought to make Turks vote again, making another run at a parliament that would make the changes he wanted.

Then he made a series of fateful decisions. After more than a year of dithering, he provided the United States with access to Incirlik Air Base to run operations against

IS, largely a tactical move to silence potential U.S. criticism of his moves at home. More ominously, he ended the ceasefire with the PKK and responded to the predictable terror attacks that ensued with massive military force in the cities of Turkey’s largely Kurdish southeast. This had two purposes. First, it helped him forge ties with the military, whose assistance he needed in the continued rivalry with the Gülenists, whose tentacles into the Turkish police and judiciary constituted a constant source of concern for him. Second, it allowed Erdogan to both depict the HDP as a front for Kurdish terrorism and peel away votes from the nationalist MHP. The formula worked. Erdogan’s AKP in November regained the ground lost in June, racking up 49 percent of the vote.

Erdogan was now poised either to win approval from parliament or take the issue of enhanced presidential powers to the nation in a popular referendum. In the summer of 2016, in the midst of the U.S. presidential election, elements of the Turkish military, apparently instigated or aided by Gülenist sympathizers in the armed forces, attempted a coup. Within hours, the plot unraveled (although one should not underestimate how close the plotters came to success—Erdogan certainly didn’t). Erdogan galvanized public opinion and emerged with a popular wind at his back as he launched his referendum campaign.

Even before the failed coup, Erdogan had created a media environment conducive to his political project. Journalists who wrote critically about Erdogan or his regime were sued and fined or jailed. Media magnates were threatened with outlandish fines and forced to divest themselves of some properties. Newspapers were seized from their owners and turned over to the president’s cronies. Papers that didn’t toe the line before the November 2015 election were beset by mobs of thugs. In that environment, self-censorship became second nature to even some of the very best Turkish journalists. After the coup attempt, the media scene became even more one-sided as criticism of Erdogan could easily be portrayed as sympathy for the coup plotters and the supporters of the so-called Fethullahist [Gülen] Terrorist Organization. It is no wonder that the preliminary election-monitoring report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe begins:

The 16 April constitutional referendum took place on an unlevel playing field and the two sides of the campaign did not have equal opportunities. Voters were not provided with impartial information about key aspects of the reform, and civil society organizations were not able to participate. Under the state of emergency put in place after the July 2016 failed coup attempt, fundamental freedoms essential to a genuinely democratic process were curtailed.

But even Erdogan’s relentless campaigning and the “unlevel playing field” were not enough to ensure victory.

Just hours into the voting, the High Electoral Board authorized ballots that hadn't been certified by local authorities. No one knows how many such ballots were included in the count; some estimates run as high as 2.5 million. YouTube videos began to surface of local election officials stamping "yes" on ballots approving Erdogan's proposed constitutional changes as well as voters questioning why they were given ballots that were already stamped "yes." Statistical analyses of the vote in Turkey's bloody and battered southeast also seem to indicate fiddling of the vote. That some voter fraud occurred is almost irrefutable. Whether it changed the outcome is less clear.

When the preliminary count was completed, Erdogan had squeaked through with a narrow 51 percent majority, far short of the 60 percent margin for which he had aimed. Every major city in Turkey (with the exception of Bursa) voted "no," including Erdogan's home of Istanbul. Opposition parties are challenging the vote, and nightly street protests are occurring in Istanbul and other cities. Erdogan won a short-term victory but at the cost of further polarizing an already deeply divided country and intensifying those divisions. Turkish elections had frequently been unfair in the past (previous governments also manipulated the media playing field to their advantage), but they had always been free and the losers had accepted the legitimacy of the results. That traditional standard has now been breached. At some level, Erdogan is aware that his "achievement" is tainted, but this makes it even less likely that, as some observers have suggested, a satiated Erdogan will now become more pragmatic and inclusive in his politics and a more constructive partner with the United States. On the contrary, the impediments to his accruing more power (the prime minister, an independent parliament, the courts, the media) are all being circumscribed, but his sensitivity on the legitimacy question will be heightened. The combination of empowerment and paranoia is likely to be a toxic mix for Turkish politics.

Erdogan is already insisting that any debate about the vote should cease, railing against the "crusader" nations that opposed him and calling for a return of the death penalty, which would bring Turkey's EU candidacy to an end. He is also planning for a long reign. Erdogan insists that he is not a "dictator" because at some point he will die, but that belies his effort to structure Turkish politics from beyond the grave. He is grooming his son-in-law Berat Albayrak, the minister of energy and natural resources, as his successor. Turkey could end up looking more like the

Arab socialist republics of Assad, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar Qaddafi than the modern, European, secular state to which Atatürk aspired. It will certainly not be the kind of democratic partner in a vital part of the world that the United States has traditionally tried to facilitate.

President Trump made a congratulatory phone call to Erdogan after the referendum—European reaction was far more muted—and scheduled a pre-NATO-summit meeting with him in May. These friendly overtures are almost certainly related to the U.S. government's desire to win Turkish acquiescence to the use of Kurdish forces to liberate Raqqa, the Syrian capital of the Islamic State. But no matter how much President Trump's aides try to spin them, his actions have already been seen in Turkey as providing the U.S. stamp of approval on Erdogan's referendum "victory." The half-life of Erdogan's gratitude for these gestures is likely to be short, though, and the continuing counter-ISIS campaign is sure to roil U.S.-Turkish relations for the foreseeable future.

If there is any shred of hope in this unhappy and dark tale, it is that corruption remains the Achilles' heel of the Erdogan regime. The party was initially elected to clean up the corruption that was rife in 1990s Turkey. The "oil for gold" scandal, however, has shown that after years in power the AKP is as corrupt as its

predecessors in the heyday of Kemalism. Erdogan is well aware that in the wake of the referendum his legitimacy is more open to challenge than ever and the exposure of corruption could become the detonator for intensified popular protests. That is no doubt why AKP officials raised the case of Reza Zarrab, the alleged bagman for Iran in the sanctions-busting scandal, when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Turkey in April. They sought, as have Zarrab's well-heeled lobbyists in Washington, to get the case against him in New York dismissed. At least in the United States the rule of law is still intact.

Turkey is showing the world Hegel's "cunning of reason" at work. Erdogan campaigned for a strengthened presidency on the grounds that he alone could provide stability for the country wracked by terror attacks, post-coup jitters, and the blowback of Syrian conflict. Instead, he has thrown into relief the deep divisions of a society riven by ethnic, confessional, and cultural differences. If he pushes too hard and too fast to implement his post-Kemalist vision in the months ahead, he may simply succeed in bringing the country to the brink of civil war. And that would make what is happening next door in Syria seem like a Sunday picnic in the park. ♦



*An anti-Erdogan protest in Istanbul, April 19*

# The Tax Conundrum

*Why it may be wise to discard the idea of ‘comprehensive’ reform*

BY JAMES PIERESON

Whether it happens before or after health care reform—the White House has been sending mixed signals—President Trump has consistently promised “massive” tax cuts for the middle class and businesses. He told an interviewer a few weeks ago, “It will be the biggest tax cut since Reagan, and probably bigger than Reagan’s.”

The president’s plan is still being worked out, but based upon his previous statements and the “blueprint” for tax reform presented by House Republicans last year, it will likely contain significant cuts in individual rates, a consolidation of income tax brackets from seven to three, a doubling of the personal exemption for most taxpayers, a reduction in corporate income taxes from 35 percent to 15 or 20 percent, immediate expensing of business investment, reductions in capital gains rates along with the rates on income from pass-through businesses, and perhaps some form of a border adjustment tax. These proposals, if enacted, will undoubtedly reduce taxes for most Americans and, according to forecasters, should help to spur GDP growth from 1.6 percent in 2016 to a level closer to the postwar average of 3 to 4 percent per year.

Whether the putative Trump tax cut would be larger or more significant than President Reagan’s is certainly open to debate. After all, President Reagan, with the support of a bipartisan coalition in Congress, reduced marginal rates across the board, indexed tax brackets for inflation, increased the standard deduction, and simplified the tax system by eliminating exemptions and credits in exchange for lower rates. Between 1981 and 1986, the highest marginal rate was cut first from 70 to 50 percent, and then to a postwar low of 28 percent. The tax revolution of the 1980s

set in motion a significant redistribution that drastically reduced the income tax burden on middle- and lower-income taxpayers while increasing the share of taxes paid by earners in the highest brackets.

The lingering effects of the Reagan revolution present today’s tax reformers with a conundrum: how to cut income taxes for middle-class taxpayers when they pay little in the way of income taxes to begin with. The other side of the conundrum is this: how to avoid the charge that any major tax cut will “favor the rich,” given that the great bulk of the federal income tax is paid by those in the highest brackets. In a situation where “the rich” pay most of the income taxes, “the rich” will reap significant benefits from cuts in those taxes.

Some figures from the Internal Revenue Service and the Congressional Budget Office will serve to illustrate the point. According to the IRS figures compiled by the Tax Foundation, 140 million households paid about \$1.4 trillion in individual income taxes in 2014, which covered about 38 percent of federal expenditures in that year. In terms of the distribution of the tax burden, the top 50 percent of income earners paid 97 percent of the total income taxes, the top 10 percent paid 71 percent, and the top 1 per-

cent of earners (starting at \$466,000 in gross income) paid nearly 40 percent of all federal income taxes. The tax system has evolved to a point where the bottom half of the income distribution has been taken off the income tax rolls while the burden of those taxes has shifted heavily toward the top 10 percent of income earners.

In terms of the “middle class,” the Congressional Budget Office estimates that in 2013 the middle quintile of taxpayers—those making 10 percent above and below the mean household income of \$69,700—paid only 4 percent of all federal income taxes, versus 38 percent for the top 1 percent and 88 percent for the top 10 percent. That middle-income group paid an effective income tax rate of 2.6 percent on gross income, compared to 24 percent for



*Trump supporters call for tax reform in Palm Beach Gardens, April 18, 2017.*

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the top 1 percent of income earners and a 16 percent rate for the top 20 percent. The top 1 percent of income earners now pays 10 times the amount of federal income tax (and 10 times the effective tax rate) as the 20 percent of taxpayers in the middle of the income distribution.

This shift in the burden of taxation is the direct result of the tax revolution of the 1980s. In 1980, that middle quintile of the income distribution paid 11 percent of the income tax (versus 4 percent now), the top quintile paid 65 percent (versus 88 percent now), and the top 1 percent paid just 18 percent (versus close to 40 percent today). This dramatic shift in tax burdens occurred despite the fact that marginal rates for the highest brackets have come down significantly since 1980. Contrary to expectations, the reduction in rates has led to a much more progressive income tax system. A 2008 study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development concluded that despite these reductions in marginal rates, the United States has the most progressive income tax system of all 24 OECD countries measured in terms of the share of the tax burden paid by the wealthiest households.

Economists and tax experts have identified various causes of the redistribution in the tax burden. In terms of tax policy, the shift was due partly to steady increases in the standard deduction, reductions in rates, and the introduction of the various tax credits, especially the Earned Income Tax Credit, all of which have reduced taxes for the lower brackets, combined with the Alternative Minimum Tax, whose effects fall more heavily upon those in the higher brackets.

The other important factor has been the evolution in the distribution of income favoring households in the higher income brackets. Across this period, the top 1 percent of households doubled their share of national income from 9 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 2007 and 2008 and 17 percent in 2012. According to estimates from the Tax Foundation, this share increased again to 20 percent in 2014. The top 10 percent of earners also increased their share of national income, though not as much as the top 1 percent, from 30 percent in 1980 to 38 percent in 2013.

There has also been a startling evolution over the decades in the composition of taxpaying households. Increasingly those in the higher brackets represent two-income households while those in the lower three brackets tend to be single filers. In 1960, according to IRS figures

compiled by the Tax Foundation, 68 percent of filers in the middle quintile of the income distribution were married while 32 percent were classified as “single/head of household.” By 2006, those figures had reversed themselves: Just 32 percent of the filers in that group were married and 68 percent were single or heads of households. Among the top 20 percent of earners, by contrast, 93 percent were married in 1960, but by 2006 that figure had fallen only to 82 percent. Since most of those in the latter group are two-income households, they naturally claim ever-larger shares of national income.

Whatever the causes, the wealthy are paying more of the income tax because they are earning more of the income—and since that income is taxed at higher rates,

it provides more revenue for the government than if it were distributed more evenly through the population. Much like state governments that have developed a financial interest in smoking due to the revenues they receive from tobacco sales, the federal government has developed a perverse interest in income inequality because of the greater revenues it generates due to the progressive income tax.

But the progressive income tax plays only a modest role in smoothing out the distribution of income. Over the entire period since 1980, the top 1 percent of the income distribution lost

between 1 and 2 percent of its share of national income due to taxes. In 1980 that group claimed 9 percent of pre-tax national income and 8 percent of after-tax income; in 1990 the corresponding figures were 12 and 11 percent; and in 2012, the figures were 17 and 15 percent. The top 10 percent of the distribution generally lost between 2 and 4 percent of national income shares due to taxes (probably because those households take a greater share of income in salaries and wages than in capital gains, which are taxed at lower rates). These losses in shares of national income paid for modestly increasing shares claimed by those in the lower two quintiles of the income distribution.

There are many reasons why the progressive income tax has only limited effects on the distribution of income, but one of them has to do with the limited role of the income tax as a source of federal revenues. Many believe that the federal government is largely funded by income taxes, but this has never been the case. In 2015, the federal government raised \$3.2 trillion in revenues, of which

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**The Congressional Budget Office estimates that in 2013 the middle quintile of taxpayers—those making 10 percent above and below the mean household income of \$69,700—paid only 4 percent of all federal income taxes, versus 38 percent for the top 1 percent and 88 percent for the top 10 percent.**

47 percent came from income taxes, 34 percent from payroll taxes, 11 percent from corporate taxes, and the balance from a mix of estate and excise taxes. Since the early 1950s, the federal government has consistently relied upon the income tax for between 40 and 50 percent of its revenues. The payroll tax that funds Social Security and Medicare (plus a portion of the Affordable Care Act) has meanwhile made up between 35 and 40 percent of federal revenues (the average since 1990 is 38 percent). As the payroll tax is a flat-rate tax, it does not have the progressive effects of the income tax; and, since it is a large source of revenue, it diminishes any progressive effects of the income tax.

Middle-income groups do pay their share of payroll taxes because they mostly receive their incomes in the form of salaries and wages. Taxpayers in the middle brackets (and in the bottom two quintiles as well) generally pay the full 7.65 percent tax on wages and salaries to fund the nation's old-age pension and health care programs. (The matching share contributed by the employer is also effectively paid by the employee.) This rate is far higher than the effective income tax rate (2.6 percent) paid by the middle quintile of households. According to CBO calculations, payroll taxes represent around two-thirds of all federal taxes paid by that middle quintile of taxpayers. If we add state and local taxes to the equation, then that middle-income group pays an even smaller share of its total tax bill in the form of federal income taxes.

This will make it difficult to enact "massive" cuts in middle-class taxes by reducing federal income tax rates, since the overwhelming proportion of taxes paid by middle-income groups come in the form of payroll taxes plus state and local income, sales, and property taxes. It will also make it difficult to cut those marginal rates without acknowledging that the lion's share of the benefits will go to those in the highest brackets. The Tax Foundation, in a static analysis of the Trump tax plan announced during the campaign last year, found that it would lead to at least a 0.8 percent increase in after-tax income for all taxpayers but to 10 percent higher after-tax incomes for those in the top 1 percent. This static analysis does not take into account the growth effects of the plan and the potential income gains for middle-class taxpayers. When those effects are taken into account, the same organization found that those middle-class taxpayers stand to benefit significantly from tax reform, but mainly through the growth in incomes rather than through cuts in taxes.

This points to the difficulties in trying to pass a

comprehensive tax reform that will provide substantial tax relief for the middle class. For the reasons outlined above, there is no plausible adjustment in income taxes that can achieve that goal. Any comprehensive plan that will cut marginal income tax rates will be vulnerable to attacks that it represents a giveaway to the wealthy. Given the current political environment and the polarization between the parties in Washington, those charges may be persuasive enough to scuttle any comprehensive tax proposal.

**O**ne answer to the tax conundrum is to abandon for the time being the effort at comprehensive reform in order to concentrate on those proposals most likely to win consensus in Congress and spur faster

economic growth and rising middle-class incomes. According to many experts, tax reforms that reduce the cost of capital provide by far the largest short-term boosts to GDP.

This suggests that the business proposals—especially cuts in the corporate tax rate and allowance for immediate expensing of investment—should receive priority attention. According to the Tax Foundation's analysis of the GOP's "blueprint," the proposals (if fully enacted) would boost long-term GDP by 9 percent, with full expensing representing 5 percent, the corporate tax cut 2 percent, and the remainder coming from lowered marginal rates and compression of

income tax brackets. If the principal goals of tax reform are to boost growth and middle-class incomes, cutting the tax burdens on business is the most direct avenue for achieving them. Once the growth kicks in and added revenues pour into the government, it may prove easier to enact other elements of the plan.

The redistribution of the income tax burden over the past three decades has at length altered the debate over tax reform. In the past it was assumed that cuts in personal income taxes were much easier to sell to the public than cuts in business taxes, even though economists have long told us that the latter are much more effective in promoting economic growth. That logic may no longer hold because most households no longer pay much in the way of federal income taxes. Paradoxically, we may have reformed ourselves into a tax system where the easiest taxes to cut are precisely those that are most effective in promoting economic growth. ♦

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**It will be difficult to enact 'massive' cuts in middle-class taxes by reducing federal income tax rates, since the overwhelming proportion of taxes paid by middle-income groups come in the form of payroll taxes plus state and local income, sales, and property taxes.**



Charlton Heston in 'Ben-Hur' (1959)

# The Hero As Actor

*Charlton Heston's public and private lives.* BY MICAH MATTIX

It's a moment that washed-up comedians and humorless TV hosts still use when they're running low on material. On May 20, 2000, Charlton Heston lifted a revolutionary-era style flintlock long rifle over his head at the 129th National Rifle Association convention in Charlotte and announced that if the government (and Al Gore, who was running for president at the time) wanted his gun, they would have to take it from his "cold, dead hands."

Micah Mattix is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD and associate professor of English at Regent University.

**Charlton Heston**  
*Hollywood's Last Icon*  
by Marc Eliot  
Dey Street, 576 pp., \$29.99

I want to say those fighting words for everyone within the sound of my voice, to hear and to heed, and especially for you, Mr. Gore—from my *cold dead, hands*.

He had used the line before; but this was post-Columbine, and the cameras were rolling. The left had been using the shooting at the Colorado

high school to attack the NRA leadership as cold-hearted men who loved guns more than children, and Heston's remark was easily construed. Michael Moore used the clip in *Bowling for Columbine*; in Hollywood, people would ask Heston's son Fraser, "Why is your dad a proponent of child murder?"

Heston had only worked in a handful of films since 1990, going back, instead, to television, where he had gotten his start. After the NRA speech, however, even the TV work dried up. A man who owned fewer guns than some of Hollywood's richest liberals and had played the lead in

CORBIS / GETTY IMAGES

some of the most commercially successful movies —*The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Planet of the Apes* (1968)—became persona non grata in an industry he had done so much to support. And shortly after Heston was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease in 2002, George Clooney happily made fun of the aging actor and his illness. When a reporter asked if that was in bad taste, Clooney replied: “I don’t care. Charlton Heston is the head of the National Rifle Association. He deserves whatever anyone says about him.”

In this excellent book, Marc Eliot notes the irony of Heston’s “graylisting” by the children of blacklisted actors and directors of the 1950s. What’s more unfortunate is how Heston’s defense of the Second Amendment in his final years has overshadowed his accomplishments as an actor, his early support of the civil rights movement, his service to filmmaking, and his staunch independence. Heston was a Roosevelt liberal for most of his life, but what mattered to him in politics was helping others, not advancing a particular ideology. So while many of his fellow actors avoided associating too closely with the civil rights movement for fear it would hurt their box office draws, Heston helped happily and publicly, participating in a peaceful march in Oklahoma City in 1961, at the invitation of a friend, and in the March on Washington in 1963, at the invitation of Martin Luther King himself.

He visited American soldiers in Vietnam to tell them “that America hadn’t forgotten them” (as Eliot writes), not to advance a particular position on the war, which he admitted had “no easy solution.” He saw thousands of young men, many of them wounded, and offered to call loved ones—parents, wives, girlfriends—for them when he returned to the United States. By the time he got back home, he had 400 names, and called every one.

Born John Charles Carter near Evanston, Illinois, in 1923, Charlton Heston’s values were created partly by childhood loss. He was something of a loner as a boy and enjoyed hunting and fishing with his father, and

reading. When he was 10, his parents divorced, and he moved with his mother and her new husband, Chet Heston, to Wilmette, north of Chicago. It was a double loss for the young Heston: He only saw his father once during his adolescence and never returned to the woods he loved dearly. Family and natural beauty would remain important to him for the rest of his life.

In high school, Heston began to act. His first role, he would write in his memoir, “began my life.” He earned a partial scholarship to study theater

by the Broadway producer and director Guthrie McClintic. Then, thanks to his role in *Antony and Cleopatra*, he landed a small role in a CBS production of *Julius Caesar*. It was his first television role and would quickly lead to others. Hal Wallis noticed Heston and signed him to play the lead in Paramount’s gritty *Dark City* (1950), which follows the misfortunes of an out-of-town card player. The movie was panned but Heston’s performance was praised by critics.

His career was transformed when he met the director (and cofounder of Par-



Burt Lancaster, Harry Belafonte, Charlton Heston at the March on Washington (1963)

at Northwestern, where he met Lydia Clarke, also studying theater. After a two-year courtship, during which Heston proposed multiple times, the two married in March 1944. (Heston had been called to active duty three months earlier. A few weeks before he was to be shipped out, he wrote to Clarke, proposing once again. This time she accepted and took a train to North Carolina for a quick ceremony. The marriage would last until Heston died in 2008.)

When Heston returned from the war—he saw little action—he and Lydia moved to New York, where the two struggled in the theater world, Heston working part-time as a model for art students. Heston loved Shakespeare, and his first real break came when he got the part of Proculeius in a production of *Antony and Cleopatra*

amount) Cecil B. DeMille. One morning, on his way to the airport, Heston stopped by Paramount to say hello to a few friends. As he passed through the arched Bronson Gate, Heston smiled and waved to DeMille, who was standing outside his office. As it happened, DeMille was casting for his new film, *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Kirk Douglas had turned down the lead, and DeMille had previously concluded that Charlton Heston was too sinister in *Dark City*. But he told his secretary that he liked the way Heston waved and smiled: “We’d better have a talk with him about the circus manager.”

According to Heston, DeMille would “never say ‘I’m considering you for the part’ or ‘I’m told that you might be good in this. . . .’ He certainly would never have you read for a part. He would merely talk

about it, which left you at a loss for a response. . . . [A]ll I could say was, ‘Certainly is interesting. Sounds like it would make a fine film.’” After meeting with DeMille a half-dozen times, Heston was cast as the lead—what would begin one of the most fruitful relationships in Hollywood. *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952) was a huge success, as were *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben-Hur* (1959), films that made Heston one of the biggest stars in Hollywood.

Heston’s eventual move to the political right was motivated by the left’s radicalization—“America is not spelled with a K,” he once said—and its abandonment of what he regarded as traditional values. He also came to deplore Hollywood’s glorification of promiscuity and cynicism. But he was hardly a doctrinaire conservative. Heston was appointed to Lyndon Johnson’s National Council on the Arts in 1966

and was always a strong supporter of the National Endowment for the Arts. He served as board chairman and, later, president of the American Film Institute. And yet, despite his work over the decades for the AFI, and his own accomplishments in film, the AFI never gave Heston its Life Achievement Award. (It did create a Charlton Heston Award in 2003, but family and friends thought that too little, too late.)

When Heston died, *Time*’s Richard Corliss wrote that he “was a grand, ornery anachronism, the sinewy symbol of a time when Hollywood took itself seriously, when heroes came from history books, not comic books.” Hollywood still takes itself seriously, of course, and there’s nothing wrong with comic-book heroes. But humility and heroism, self-sacrifice and persistence, all found in Heston’s own person and his characters, are in short supply in Hollywood. ♦

At the age of 16, the young guitarist left school and moved to London, where he joined a jazz-folk band that toured Europe and cut five albums. A chance encounter with the Leeds poet Tony Harrison put a different tune in Paterson’s ear: He studied poetry intensively and then began writing on his own. Since then, he has garnered most literary awards available to a British subject and serves as professor of poetry at the University of St Andrews.

Paterson has not let mantles become manacles. His *40 Sonnets* are wide-ranging in subject and voice—from the casual terror of being stuck in an elevator to the guttural jabberwocky at a séance—but they tend toward ordinary life, his metaphysical conceits sandbagged with sardonic wit. In the first poem, “Here,” the speaker tries to rest in the afternoon, tending to a heart condition; but his mutinous body has other plans.

*I must quit sleeping in the afternoon.  
I do it for my heart, but all too soon  
my heart has called it off. It does not love  
me.  
If it downed tools, there’d soon be nothing  
of me.*

In heroic couplets, Paterson imitates the “two-ness” of the heart’s ventricles and the dualism between self and soul, management and labor, mind and biological machinery. Later, the speaker traces his embattled position back to his gestation:

*Long years since I came round in her  
womb  
enough myself to know I was not home,  
my dear sea up in arms at the wrong  
shore  
and her loud heart like a landlord at the  
door.  
Where are we now? What misdemeanor  
sealed  
my transfer? Mother, why so far afield?*

An unborn child knows his lease is up when he hears his mother’s heart-beat knocking “like a landlord.” Yet the reader knocks harder upon the final surprising couplet, where “sealed” and “afield” conjure casket and burial ground, the son estranged from his mother by birth and death alike.



# The Versatile Form

*Don Paterson, master of the sonnet.*

BY HEATHER TRESELER

**T**he sonnet is an architectural fixture as germane to Western thought as the flying buttress, and one nearly as old. Poems of 14 lines, metered and rhymed, came into vogue in 13th-century Tuscany and never quite left the scene. Indeed, sonnets and flowing robes are about the only things in common between poets otherwise as different (and distant) as Dante and Edna St. Vincent Millay. But in the hands of Don Paterson, the contemporary Scottish poet, the sonnet becomes a musical instrument that can carry the tune of a coquette or an old codger; elegize a marriage or a beloved dog; and satirize a cheerful telemarketer or the celluloid charm of Tony Blair.

*Heather Treseler is a poet and essayist in Boston.*

## 40 Sonnets

by Don Paterson  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 64 pp., \$20

*40 Sonnets* proves Paterson a contemporary master of the verse form. He has long been a student of the sonnet, having written a remarkably good commentary on Shakespeare’s sequence and edited *101 Sonnets: From Shakespeare to Heaney* (1999). Here, Paterson aims to add his name to that genealogy. Winner of the Costa Poetry Award, *40 Sonnets* is his first collection since *Rain* (2009), and it reminds us that sonnets take their name from the Italian “sonetto,” or little song, and that music has long been Paterson’s first, enduring love.

In other poems, Paterson hews closer to Petrarchan and Shakespearean patterns, offering contemporary remixes. But he also abandons the rulebook altogether, often to remarkable effect. Readers expect what Robert Frost termed a “lover’s quarrel with the world” in the agonistic dynamics of the sonnet, and he delivers that intensity in “The Foot,” an elegy for a child dying of injuries in a war zone, and in “Sentinel,” an ode for a daughter who sustains the speaker, even when he has failed in his parental duties:

*then the day I lost you in Kings Cross at  
rush hour  
and saw I was the lost one, lost in the  
roiling,  
polyhedral sea of their desire—  
then found you on the edge, with all in  
view,*

*all in hand, tall as a mast of white pine  
to which I had to lash myself or drown.*

Paterson’s speakers search out Homeric moorings in the murky ocean of human wishes. Similarly, in “A Calling,” a narrator recounts his first fall from grace, his book of genesis: He was caught trespassing in a women’s changing room “when I was six, and stood too long to look.” Later, as an adult, he sees his own reflection in a window’s “black glass,” and finds himself *star[ing] right through the face that I deserve / as all my ghost-dogs thrash along the shore.*

Reading his body’s legible wear, Paterson imagines the youthful “ghost-dogs” of his poems playing on the literal and figurative shores for what we hope is a long time yet, as we stand in need of more such little songs. ♦

the Broadway stage and (who knows?) may soon turn up as the mascot of a progressive party. No such fate awaits the man from Braintree.

But now we have something arguably better than an edifice dedicated to the nation’s second president. We have, instead, a monument of scholarship that takes Adams’s political thought deadly seriously. Its author is the perfect person to write it: Former editor in chief of the Adams papers, one of the great editorial projects of our time, Richard Ryerson knows Adams and his life as well as anyone alive. What’s more, he leads readers with an unusually felicitous pen through the thickets of political thought from ancient times to the early 19th century that Adams mastered. The result is a model of contemporary historical scholarship accessible to any who wish to read it.

Though thin-skinned, John Adams was endowed with a confident Calvinist-like personality strong enough to withstand the risk of offending those who disagreed with him. Orthodoxy was not the star by which he guided his life. Yet as Gordon Wood long ago argued, as commendable as that trait could be, it ended up putting Adams outside the community of those who, more clearly than he, saw where the youthful American nation was headed—toward a robust democratic future. Thus, in Wood’s terms, by the time of Jefferson’s presidency, Adams had become “irrelevant” to American political development. Ryerson doesn’t disagree with Wood’s larger point; but the brilliance of his book lies in his explanation of how and why that irrelevance occurred, as well as why he believes that, in the end—meaning in our time—Wood’s characterization, written in 1969, can no longer stand without revision.

Ryerson doesn’t expend many words arguing with Wood. Instead, with stately cadence, he lays out the emergence of Adams’s mature thinking about government, how it differed from contemporary views, and what that difference cost the man. You’d think that a learned, 576-page book about political ideas going back to classical times would be wearying and slow-going.



# Finding the Founder

*What was John Adams thinking?*

BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.

How are we to approach the man? No one has ever gotten him quite right. Benjamin Franklin thought him, in a famous remark, “sometimes, and in some things, absolutely out of his senses.” Thomas Jefferson could never fully figure out what to make of such a witty, learned, emotionally open man. In our own day, historians either write love letters about him (see David McCullough’s gargantuan biography) or, like Gordon S. Wood, whom no one surpasses in knowledge of the founding years, dismiss him as having failed to understand the course of American development even in his own lifetime. Yet it’s hard to imagine the founding years of

*James M. Banner Jr., a historian of the early republic, is writing a book about revisionist history.*

**John Adams’s Republic**  
*The One, the Few, and the Many*  
by Richard Alan Ryerson  
Johns Hopkins, 576 pp., \$60

the republic without him. And were any of the Founding Fathers, save perhaps Franklin, more enjoyable companions over Madeira and dinner?

We’re of course speaking of John Adams, the often forgotten Founder. There are no large monuments to his achievements or memory, nothing to recall him on the Mall in Washington. James Madison has become the darling of the right, with almost every new conservative organization carrying his name. Even more stunning, Alexander Hamilton, the founder of Wall Street, has now apparently been captured by the left with help from

Precisely the opposite: The work's lucidity is exceptional, its easy flow never interrupted.

John Adams started out in the 1770s, as Ryerson emphasizes, as "the first American to openly praise republican government . . . one of the earliest advocates of an independent judiciary in America," the first to advance legal and historical arguments for the colonies' total independence from Parliament, and author of "the finest statement of America's new republican orthodoxy as it separated from the British Empire." Yet being in the vanguard of the movement for independence didn't guarantee that Adams would always agree with his contemporaries. That's where the problem arose.

Most of his contemporaries, their views formed in opposition to Britain, came to fear both executive power (exemplified by the British monarch) and popular rule (what they called democracy). Adams came to view their fears as misdirected. His experiences at home and abroad, as well as his broad and deep reading of history and political thought, concentrated his fears on aristocracy. Not the earned aristocracy of birth, old wealth, carriage, learning, and prudence, but what he viewed as artificial aristocracy, especially an aristocracy of wealth alone. Accordingly, he came to view a strong executive as less of a threat to any polity than an overweening privileged class. In this, he differed significantly with most of his contemporaries, and with none more than Thomas Jefferson.

In a celebrated exchange about the Constitution with the Squire of Monticello, with whom he had a complex friendship, Adams put it succinctly: "You are afraid of the one—I, of the few. We agree perfectly that the many should have a full fair and perfect Representation.—You are Apprehensive of Monarchy; I, of Aristocracy. I would therefore have given more Power to the President and less to the Senate." In another famous statement to Jefferson,



*John Adams by an unknown artist after John Singleton Copley*

Adams went on in a different, characteristically bumptious, vein:

Your aristoi are the most difficult Animals to manage, of anything in the whole Theory and practice of Government. They will not suffer themselves to be governed. They not only exert all their own Subtily Industry and courage, but they employ the Commonality, to knock to pieces every Plan and Model that the most honest Architects in Legislation can invent to keep them within bounds.

With these convictions, Adams also believed in the desirability of what he termed a "republican monarchy." It was needed to tame his aristocracy. But that very term—and probably also "constitutional monarchy," as we'd call it today—was scarcely one to endear itself, or its author, to his contemporaries. It was precisely the attraction to him of a monarchical republic that has gotten Adams into such trouble with so many people ever since. It has even led some of them to struggle, in their perplexity, to make Adams out to be some kind of democrat, albeit one different from the apostle of American democracy, Jefferson. But, Ryerson insists, Adams wasn't a demo-

crat. Despite his youthful revolutionary ardor, Adams belongs firmly (even if not centrally) in the American conservative hall of fame. More significantly, Ryerson leaves no doubt, if there ever has been one, of Adams's position as one of the nation's greatest political, constitutional, and historical thinkers, the co-equal in his time of James Madison.

Even late in life, his earlier views "largely unaltered," Adams was struggling to figure out ways to bring his aristocrats to heel. As he long had argued, one option was stronger executive power—if not through a "republican monarch" or stronger state governors, then by other constitutional and legal devices. Another was to coop his aristocrats up in their own separate legislative house. Both assumed sharp, ineradicable differences between socio-economic groups—an idea anath-

ema to his fellow citizens but one that has a greater resonance today than it did then. In his estimation, the federal Constitution and most state constitutions—even the Massachusetts constitution of 1780, which he helped write—never went far enough to control the upper class he so deeply feared. Since Adams's day (as Ryerson acknowledges) we seem also to have failed to control it—whether by legislation, regulation, or court decision. If for nothing else than his struggle to get the matter right, Adams deserves more honor and attention than he usually receives.

Ryerson's study is a biography of the ideas developed by Adams, not a biography of Adams the man. Little is to be found here of his life and achievements, or of his notable family members, save for what is necessary to explain the emergence and maturation of his political thought. The author's concentration on ideas bears the cost of overlooking the possible inner origins of his subject's near-fixation on aristocracy. It's of course justifiable to assume that this always-thinking man thought, rather than felt, his way into any problem;

but anyone who knows anything about Adams is also justified in thinking that speculation about the emotional foundations of his ideas, or about the roots of his particular sensibilities, would have been warranted and helpful in enriching this superb book.

Yet its brilliance lies in Ryerson's ability to make the historical approach to ideas as riveting as the best full Adams biographies have proven to be. His exegeses of Adams's writings are unsurpassed. Overcoming the inherent difficulty of writing clearly about complex ideas, *John Adams's Republic* moves along with unusual grace.

Ryerson has not written a tract for our times, nor has he tried, except lightly and in passing, to argue with other historians. The book is an explanation of Adams's thought, not an apology for it. Yet one can't help reflecting on the relevance to our own times of Adams's fears about an aristocracy of wealth. If Gordon Wood is correct that Adams became irrelevant to his own day, Adams's warnings about the growth of a rich aristocracy, unmoored from the realities and views of the population from which it emerged, have fresh meaning for our age. What Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison missed, concludes Ryerson, "was the danger, and indeed the existence (which they and virtually all of their countrymen denied), of republican aristocracy." Perhaps not for his doughty independence, his deep learning, or his fierce patriotism does Adams deserve a monument in Washington but, instead, for his prescience about a problem that has bedeviled American government and society from the start.

It's often lamented that political history is no longer at the center of the historical enterprise. Even if that has to be conceded, this extraordinary book suggests that the political history of the United States that is being written today has never been of higher quality, a fact that should be more widely acknowledged. This goes especially for the political history of the opening decades of American constitutional government. Moreover, this book makes clear that old-fashioned subjects—such as the political thought of elite white males—

never fail to yield up fresh understanding when tackled by historians as skilled as Richard Alan Ryerson.

Ryerson's prose gives the lie to the assertion that academic historians can't write readable books. The best of them do, and always have. They surpass nonacademic writers of history in giv-

ing readers more than narratives and rhetorical color. They offer ideas, arguments, and strong points of view. *John Adams's Republic* is exemplary in those regards—an achievement unlikely to be surpassed, one of the finest works about the nation's second president that has ever been written. ♦



## Boys Will Be...

*The unintended (?) consequences of the gender revolution.* BY MARY EBERSTADT

A Texas high school junior who's biologically female takes testosterone to "transition" to the other sex, and wins the state's wrestling championship for girls—even though other female players are not allowed to use performance-enhancing drugs, including testosterone. A secret Facebook group of some 30,000 active and retired Marines posts nude photos of dozens of female Marines—with the result that many men now face criminal charges. A new promotional poster for *The Vagina Monologues* at Marquette declares that "the presence of an anatomical feature, such as a vagina, does not a woman make." What do these news stories from the past few weeks—and plenty of others these days—have in common? All are examples of a critical phenomenon nailed admirably in Ashley McGuire's important new book, and aptly captured by its subtitle: *The Drive to Abolish Male and Female*.

The boutique ideology of "gender equity," born and nursed in the most recondite of academic quarters, has made a great escape and rampages today down Main Street. The result is the lengthening list of logical and

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**Sex Scandal**  
*The Drive to Abolish Male and Female*  
by Ashley McGuire  
Regnery, 256 pp., \$27.99

moral chimeras that make up the pages of *Sex Scandal*—among them, "a new world in which a short white man is a tall Chinese elementary-aged girl [because he says he is], in which performing as a victim of male violence in porn is empowering, in which prostituting oneself to a Wall Street banker is not a win for the patriarchy, but a perfectly fine way to pay for college." And that's just for starters.

McGuire is an adroit and entertaining writer, so despite its intrinsically depressing subject, *Sex Scandal* is an engaging read. Other narrators might have contented themselves with producing a limited (albeit useful) devil's dictionary of numbing absurdities brought on by contemporary gendermania. But *Sex Scandal* delivers something more: a moral indictment of where the denial of essential reality has led.

It is not only that today's blind drive toward androgyny crashes everywhere into culs-de-sac. More urgent is the matter of the wounded—some walking, some not—who are victims of today's refusal to agree on first facts: that men and women differ; and that



Christine Jorgensen meets the press (1953).

denying their difference isn't merely an academic trope. "The willful blindness to basic biological difference under the mantra of equality," McGuire shows, "ultimately disempowers women." That's why this book should be required reading not only for those who have kept their minds during the new gender tempest and are now being blamed for it; but also, and even more, for those welcoming the storm much as the hapless rooftop enthusiasts welcome the spaceship in *Independence Day*. Every progressive now agitating for men bounding into ladies' rooms, or for women in combat, or for any of the other desiderata of the sexual revolution at its most crepuscular, should reckon with McGuire's message.

For example, thanks to the abolition of sex-segregated areas on campus in the name of ideological purity, predatory men have easier access to women on the quad (and elsewhere) than ever before. The mania to admit biological men into bathrooms made for biological women has led to a proliferation of male voyeurs in female spaces; it would take a gender-studies Ph.D. not to have

seen that one coming. Even more damning, because underreported elsewhere, progressive zeal to define human trafficking down into an imaginary consensual "sex trade" risks indifference to the plight of women and girls caught up in, and exploited by, modern slavery. As the author notes, "Human trafficking is overwhelmingly a female struggle," and much of it in the United States involves girls who are started on such supposedly equitable "transactions" when they are 12-14 years old. Yet political standard-bearers such as Amnesty International, ThinkProgress, and a daft raft of theorists continue to insist that trading sex for money is "empowering" to women—thereby tacitly obscuring the reality of all those who are drugged, raped, kidnapped, and otherwise manhandled and victimized while apologists of the left look the other way and pretend that sexual difference is nothing to see here.

The message of *Sex Scandal* should also be amplified widely as so-called women's marches and other late-feminist theater continue to follow a script inimical to, well, women. Who, for example, "is doing an awesome job of promoting the objectification

of the female body for profit"? Not "heteropatriarchy," McGuire observes, but "Women's Studies departments." She cites the example of Miriam Weeks, aka Belle Knox, the Duke porn star who, like other salacious sisters these days, defends "submission," "degradation," "rough scenes," and "kink" as the quintessence of what's good for the XXers among us. *Fifty Shades of Grey*, female celebrities in bondage gear, self-described "feminist" singers who study pole-dancing to make their videos: Yeats observed a while back that women must labor to be beautiful. Some tastemakers today just seem to want women to suffer, period.

The author brings a cool eye to her few personal reflections. Tufts, her alma mater, "was a debaucherous hookup hell." Sex Fairs on campus co-hosted by Planned Parenthood and the Women's Center sported sex toys—but not "so much as a pamphlet about sexual assault." One particular chapter—"Passed-out Girls in Shopping Carts"—could haunt the nights of any parent with a daughter on campus. As is demonstrated, the connections among assaults and date rape and the feminist-applauded, 24/7 sexualization of the world couldn't be more umbilical. As to the question why so many people want so badly to believe something manifestly false, McGuire wisely avoids drilling deeper. The dual accomplishments of *Sex Scandal*—its rendering of what's out there now, combined with truth about who wins and loses from the upended bedrock—are enough for one book.

Since the middle of the 20th century, the sexual revolution has detonated across the world with such force as to render parts of the resulting moral and cultural terrain unrecognizable. With *Sex Scandal*, Ashley McGuire joins other cartographers struggling to map the new ground. Like George Gilder's *Sexual Suicide*, Lionel Tiger's *The Decline of Males*, the collected works of Midge Decter, and a handful of other entries, *Sex Scandal* reveals and illuminates a hitherto-unseen corner of the blasted landscape. ♦

BETTMANN ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

# English Visionary

*Vanessa Bell, Bloomsbury's defiant conformist.*

BY DOMINIC GREEN

When Virginia Woolf wrote that “human character” changed and “all human relations shifted” in or around December 1910, the reason was not politics, the new physics, or female suffrage, but an exhibition at London’s Grafton Galleries: “Manet and the Post-Impressionists.” The show, curated by the critic Roger Fry with help from Woolf’s sister Vanessa Bell and her husband Clive Bell, introduced Manet, Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse, and van Gogh to the land of the hunting print. In 1912, a second exhibition featured Picasso and Braque.

Woolf claimed that “when human relations change,” there is “at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.” But elsewhere she admitted that the change in conduct preceded the artistic breakthrough. On August 11, 1908, Lytton Strachey entered the drawing room, noticed a stain on Vanessa Bell’s skirt, and asked, “Semen?” Was the Bloomsbury group a revolt in art or manners? The suspicion that there was more manner than art in Bloomsbury was voiced at the time. Wyndham Lewis mocked the group as “a pleasant tea-party”—a class-bound coterie who, for all their foreign trips and French tastes, remained smugly, snobbishly provincial. Yet modernism was always a mood before it was a style, and a manner before it was an art. And though modernists, like socialists, liked to talk about internationalism, they were often most successful when drawing on local traditions.

T.S. Eliot observed that Yeats, “in becoming more Irish, not in subject

*Dominic Green teaches politics at Boston College.*

London

**Vanessa Bell**  
Dulwich Picture Gallery  
through June 4



*Virginia Woolf by Vanessa Bell (1912)*

matter but in expression . . . became at the same time universal.” Vanessa Bell, in becoming less French in expression and subject matter, became less universal: Her role in the legend of Bloomsbury has tended to concern English manners, not European art. Her best-known paintings are portraits of Woolf and Strachey. Charleston, the Sussex farmhouse where she lived in a *ménage à quatre* with Clive Bell, the painter Duncan Grant, and Grant’s lover, the writer David Garnett (with regular visits from her ex-lover Roger Fry), is now a museum of the English tea-party at its most unbuttoned.

Yet in the decade after the Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1910, Bell’s experiments in paint were as daring as her domestic arrangements. One of the first British artists to adapt Cézanne and Matisse to local conditions, she was also the first to fulfill Roger Fry’s prediction that the “logical extreme” of modern art would be pure abstraction. *Vanessa Bell*, now at the Dulwich Pic-

ture Gallery, is the first comprehensive exhibition of her work.

English art was not quite as isolated from French modernism, in 1910 as Virginia Woolf implied and Clive Bell and Roger Fry claimed. In 1885, a group of young English painters who had studied in Paris had established the New English Art Club as an Impressionist beachhead in London. In the 1890s, two “New Englishers,” Philip Wilson Steer and Henry Tonks, began teaching at the University of London’s Slade School; they were to train English modernists like David Bomberg, Stanley Spencer, Wyndham Lewis, Augustus and Gwen John, and Paul Nash. French pictorial values also arrived through the influence of Degas on Walter Sickert and Manet on John Singer Sargent.

Still, London lagged behind Paris. By 1910, most of the painters in “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” were dead. One successor movement, the Fauvism of Derain and Matisse, was ending. A second, Cubism, was already launched by Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907). Yet most of the London critics dismissed the “Post-Impressionist” show, some of whose paintings dated from the 1880s.

Vanessa Bell experienced the 1910 exhibition as a “sudden liberation.” The scale of her revolt is visible in the stylistic gulf between the silver and cream realism of *Iceland Poppies* (1908-09), painted when she was studying at the Royal Academy Schools under Sargent, and the semi-abstract *Still Life on Corner of a Mantelpiece* (1914).

The still life is viewed from below, a perspective that distorts the lines of the mantelpiece like the edges of a Cézanne table. A white vase breaks into two distinct forms, one square and the other cylindrical. The green stalks and yellow heads of the flowers are not naturalistic but exist as thick stripes and globes of paint in the space of the canvas, as if illustrating Clive Bell’s doctrine of “significant form.” The reflections in the mirror behind the still life are polarized shadows.

“I believe distortion is like sodomy,” Bell wrote to Duncan Grant in 1914, linking Bloomsbury’s liberations in art and manners. “People are simply

blindly prejudiced against it because they think it abnormal.”

Some of Bell's early experiments have more force than grace, what Virginia Woolf called “rough eloquence and vigor of style.” Others are a kind of reverse engineering of exotic methods and approaches. The dancing figures in *Design for a Folding Screen: Adam and Eve* (1913-14) are modeled on Bell's nude photographs of Lytton Strachey's sister Marjorie, but

the Omega Group workshop with the smoky lushness of Matisse's palette.

In *Bathers* (1911) she returns Gauguin to the complexities of a European shore. A group of women supervise small children on a yolk-yellow beach. One stands beneath a parasol with her back to the viewer. She contemplates the sea and a patch of brooding, fruity purple revealed by the receding tide. Stranded a world away from Tahiti, her silence is more eloquent than primitive inarticulacy.



*Studland Beach* (ca. 1912)

the entire conception is a study after Matisse's *La Danse* (1910). In *Conversation Piece* (1912), the cluttered living room is that of a London townhouse but the lines of the furniture could be from the Arles of van Gogh, and the jauntily cocked foot of one of the conversationalists from the Paris of Toulouse-Lautrec.

Frequently, though, Bell finds what she called a “path forward” from these new influences. A photograph establishes that the farmers of Sussex built their haystacks in the same form as the farmers of Normandy, and the haystack in *Landscape with Haystack, Asheham* (1912) is after Monet's *Wheatstacks: Snow Effect* (1891); but Bell integrates Monet's gleaming precedent into the muddy English landscape. With similar ingenuity, she softens her abstract designs for

This tableau recurs in *Studland Beach* (1912), where a woman and child are compressed into the left-hand corner. The beach is a wide, blank chasm between them and a group of small children, grubbing in the sand. The woman supervising them turns her heavy back and looks out to sea, but her view is blocked by a white tent. Her position in the tent alludes to the pregnant Madonna in Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* (1460); but now, pregnancy having been followed by birth, she is imprisoned in the tent. An oil sketch of the beach from 1910-11 shows how Bell, by discarding elements of landscape and raising the slope of the shoreline, heightened the bareness and emotional tension of the finished oil.

“The medium bends beneath her like a horse that knows its rider,” Walter Sickert wrote in 1916. Yet in the 1920s

and '30s, as the students of Steer and Tonks pushed towards the Neo-Romantic synthesis of English tradition and modernist methods, Bell did not follow. By the time she painted *Studland Beach* she had two sons, Julian and Quentin, from her open marriage with Clive Bell. A third pram in the hall appeared in 1918, with the birth of a daughter, Angelica, by the otherwise homosexual Duncan Grant. The work of motherhood aside, Bell now had Charleston.

The modernists emptied out the Victorian clutter, then hedged themselves in with Georgian revivalism. “Mr. Strachey is the 18th century grown up,” Aldous Huxley wrote of the character assassin of Victorian heroism, “he is Voltaire at 230.” The English country house is the heart of the village rituals in Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). The *ménage* at Charleston, like Cecil Beaton's interwar idyll at Ashcombe, was as much the last breath of Georgian libertinism as the first draft of the modern manner. Bloomsbury began as a European avant-garde movement, but it ended up as English as Marmite.

In the catalog for the second “Post-Impressionist” show, Roger Fry had claimed that modern artists “do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent to life.” At Charleston, Bell created an equivalent of creativity, but it was not sufficient to sustain her art—nor, following the death of her son Julian in the Spanish Civil War, her happiness. Her eloquence lost some of its roughness, and her style much of its vigor. The exaggerated slope of the shore in *Studland Beach* recurs in the sloping windowsill of *View of the Pond at Charleston* (1919). The window frame closes down the horizon, and an ocean contracts into an English garden.

When Alexis de Tocqueville visited John Stuart Mill in 1835, he noticed that English radicals, unlike French radicals, were “recognized as gentlemen.” As the defiant conformists of Bloomsbury showed, only in Great Britain did the modern intelligentsia conform to the ruling class rather than rebel against it. Vanessa Bell took the well-travelled path of manners, and that made all the difference to her art. ♦

COURTESY OF DULWICH PICTURE GALLERY

# Monster Mash

*The footsteps heard 'round the world.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ



Jason Sudeikis, Anne Hathaway

It's nearly 24 hours since I saw the new movie *Colossal*, and I'm not sure what I think of it. I've never seen anything like it, and trust me, neither have you—so for that reason alone *Colossal* might be worth your time. The question I can't seem to answer yet is whether its originality makes *Colossal* legitimately good or just surpassingly weird.

So Gloria (Anne Hathaway) is a hot mess of a New York party girl. In a beautifully written scene—the screenplay is by the film's Spanish director, the wonderfully named Nacho Vigalondo—Gloria arrives at the apartment she shares with her boyfriend Tim (Dan Stevens) with a drunken cock-and-bull story about having stayed out all night because she had to go to “the loft” with Stephanie. An enraged Tim says he doesn't know what loft she's talking about, or who Stephanie is, and announces he's packed her bags and is throwing her out.

Crushed by Tim's anger, and unemployed due to having done something offensive on social media, she retreats to her hometown in upstate New York and

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

## Colossal

Directed by Nacho Vigalondo



runs into her childhood friend Oscar (Jason Sudeikis). She begins to hang out with him at the bar he inherited from his father. Oscar is charming and kind, and they banter engagingly; *Colossal* appears to be a romantic comedy in the making. It's light and kind of sweet, a “damaged girl goes home and finds love and healing with the boy next door” story.

Only, no, not really, because Gloria wakes up after blacking out during another in the endless series of drunken nights that have ruined her life to discover that, well, a 200-foot monster has appeared in the South Korean capital of Seoul and has killed thousands.

What's more—and this is where the movie takes a running leap into uncharted territory—Gloria comes to realize that the monster is literally a manifestation of *her*. It only appears in Seoul when she sets foot in a kiddie playground near her house at exactly 8:05 A.M. She is its puppeteer. Its arms follow her arm motions; it walks when

she walks. The playground beneath her feet functions like an invisible scale model of Seoul.

None of this constitutes a spoiler, because this is the point at which *Colossal* gets *really* weird. Gloria may be a wreck, but she's a decent person and she's horrified by all this. But the guys around her—Oscar and two denizens of his bar, the wastrel Garth (Tim Blake Nelson) and the handsome dullard Joel (Austin Stowell)—are thrilled by the discovery that something earth-shaking is happening in the small town from which they have never managed to escape.

Her efforts to end the monster's reign of terror in Seoul are stymied when another giant error manifests itself in Seoul—and when her old boyfriend arrives in town to try and get her back. Gloria comes to realize that she inevitably ends up in the company of men who act nominally helpful, even paternal, but are in fact belittling and controlling. She is trapped both by her own self-destructive behavior and by the emotional battery to which she is subjected by the men in her life.

Anne Hathaway, an actress of exceptional gifts who has spent years being oddly maligned for her excessively cheery off-screen behavior, here builds on the stunning performance she gave as a brilliant family disaster in the terrific 2008 film *Rachel Getting Married*. She is onscreen in nearly every moment and never makes a false move. But the revelation here is the comic actor Jason Sudeikis, once a *Saturday Night Live* stalwart. His Oscar is a character of many shadings, and Sudeikis shifts tone and spirit on a dime without ever being anything less than utterly compelling and believable.

So, as I've been writing this very article, I have convinced myself that, yes, *Colossal* is a very good movie. Even though he seems a little infatuated with the movie's own strangeness, Nacho Vigalondo not only succeeds in holding our attention but takes us through narrative and character turns we do not expect—and manages to keep us from rolling our eyes at *Colossal's* infinitely absurd premise. This is one feminist empowerment movie even a mansplainer could love. ♦

**"Trump reversal on NATO: 'It's no longer obsolete'"**

—Washington Post, April 13, 2017

**PARODY**

**"Mr. Trump said he no longer wanted to label China a currency manipulator—a week after telling the Financial Times that the Chinese are the 'world champions' of currency manipulation. . . . In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, the president said he no longer wanted to eliminate the Export-Import Bank."**

—New York Times, same day

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# TRUMP AT BORDER: 'MR. NIETO, TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!'

*Reversal leaves Mexican officials baffled*

By **PETRA TRUITT AND ZANE MARCOSKI**

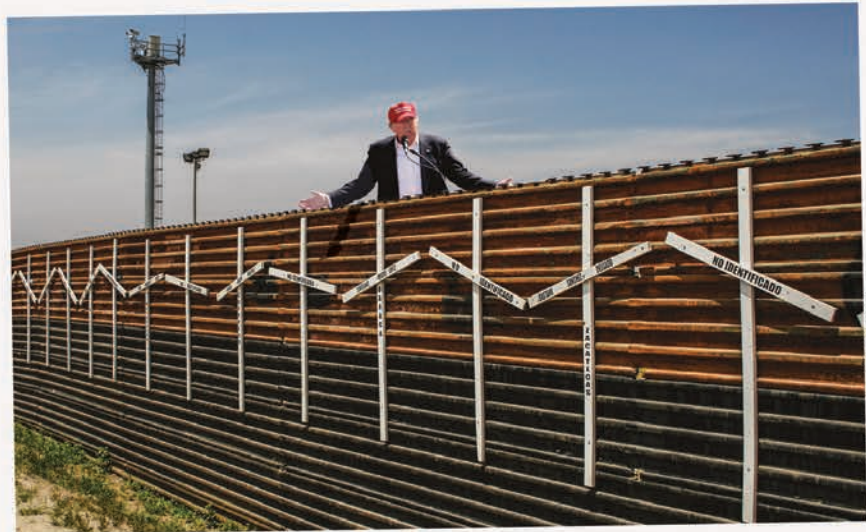
SAN DIEGO — Standing on a podium in front of the razor-wire-topped border fence along "Smuggler's Gulch" between San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, President Donald Trump yesterday called for the Mexican government to dismantle the barriers that separate it from the United States.

Latino immigrants, along with representatives from La Raza and other activist groups, cheered as the man who had once called Mexicans drug dealers and rapists described blocking the free movement of peoples across artificial political boundaries as an affront to human decency.

"Nobody has the right to stop any other person from looking for a job to feed his family," the president declared. "Nobody should be able to keep mothers and fathers, many of them with children and babies—little babies!—from seeking a better life."

Then, in an echo of Ronald Reagan's Cold-War-era speech at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, the president issued a stirring challenge: "Mr. Nieto, tear down this wall!"

In fact, it is not so simple as that. Although the Mexican government did eventually



TOMAS CASTELAZO; TRUMP, GAGE SKIDMORE

Donald Trump makes his plea yesterday at a portion of the U.S.-Mexico border wall covered with memorials to migrants who died attempting to cross.

agree, in the face of U.S. military threats, to pay for more than 600 miles of additional border fencing, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto cannot remove either the new section of the border wall or the older sections; technically, they are the property of the U.S. government and are located

on U.S. territory and not inside Mexico.

But such fine points received little notice among the crowds waving the flags of the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador,

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