

**THE
EXPERTOCRACY**
BARTON SWAM

the weekly

Standard

MAY 22, 2017

\$5.99



**YOU'RE
FIRED!**

**FRED BARNES
TERRY EASTLAND
STEPHEN F. HAYES
MICHAEL WARREN**

Former FBI director James Comey

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

Contents

May 22, 2017 • Volume 22, Number 35



2

The Scrapbook *Hysterical history tour, crazy cat cafés, & more*

Casual *Eric Felten, song and dance man*

Editorials
Comey, Trump, and the GOP BY STEPHEN F. HAYES
A Sense of Responsibility BY WILLIAM KRISTOL

Articles

10 The Firing That Misfired BY MICHAEL WARREN
Why did Trump dump Comey? Choose your story

12 Trump Gets Himself in Hot Water—Again BY FRED BARNES
And Democrats dream of Watergate II

13 Investigations and Prosecutions BY TERRY EASTLAND
The institutionalist critique of James Comey

15 Blue on Blue in Virginia BY ANDREW FERGUSON
An unexpected Democratic race

17 Reflections on the Scandal at Choate BY LEE SMITH
What were they thinking? What were we thinking?

19 The Higher and Higher Cost of Higher Ed BY JIMMY SENGENBERGER
A \$1.4 trillion calamity—and how we can fix it



17

Features

23 France Picks a Novice BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL
The 'français de sushi' beat the 'français de souche'

26 The Expertocracy BY BARTON SWAIM
What if they don't know as much as they think they do?

Books & Arts

30 How Cool Was That? BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN
Not especially, in retrospect

34 Coming Apart BY MICHAEL M. ROSEN
The stresses and strains of a Europe besieged

35 Call It Sleep BY KATRINA GULLIVER
Culture and biology unite to yield slumber

36 Circus at Sunset BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN
What we will miss when the Big Top leaves town

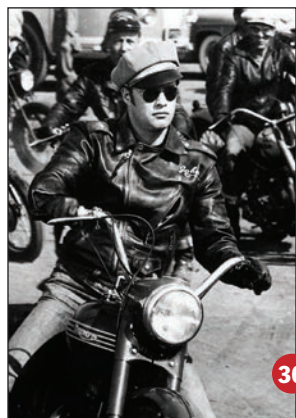
38 A Modest Proposal BY STEPHEN MILLER
In the Trump economy, everything old can be new again

39 Go With It BY JOHN PODHORETZ
The willing suspension of disbelief is mandatory here

40 Parody *Bill Clinton's Mary Sue*



26



30

And the Oscar Goes to...

Barack Obama took a break from his packed schedule of playdates with billionaires last week to go to Boston, where the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Foundation presented him with its ever-so-prestigious “Profile in Courage Award™.” Yes, the JFK folks have trademarked “Profile in Courage.” Come to think of it, *THE SCRAPBOOK* isn’t even sure we’re allowed to write “Profile in Courage.” Perhaps a license is required, or maybe the payment of royalties? We trust the JFK people will set us straight.

But as for the JFK prize for the former president, our biggest question is “Doesn’t he have a few of those already?” It’s awfully behind the curve to be celebrating the transformative politics of Obama—what is it now?—eight years after the Norwegian Nobel committee coughed up a preemptive Peace Prize. It’s been even longer since he collected his Grammy (for Best Spoken Word Album) and a Daytime Emmy was awarded to a video made from his campaign speeches. Still, better late than never, and we fully expect the Profile in You-Know-What Award (that’s one way of working around the trademark) will open the floodgates.

There are so many obvious citations, awards, prizes, and trophies Obama deserves that the awards com-

mittees should hurry up and start working out the scheduling for all the ceremonies. Not only is it about time for another Nobel Peace Prize (this one for having averted a humanitarian catastrophe in Syria), the Norwegians’ colleagues over at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences will no doubt be eager to present the former president with a Nobel in economics for the brilliant success of the stimulus, Obamacare, or both.

Then there are the literary awards. It goes without saying that when published, Obama’s memoirs will be on a short list of one to sweep the Pulitzer Prizes in History, Biography, and General Nonfiction—with a Special Citation thrown in for good measure. He is sure to win a National Book Award, a Bancroft Prize, and even a Dos Passos Prize. (Small-minded literalists will cavil that the Dos Passos Prize is supposed to go to an “under-recognized” writer, but surely no amount of acclaim will be sufficient for Obama to be properly recognized.)

The world of sports presents many opportunities for honorifics appropriate to the man. Obama, having famously declared, “I’m LeBron, baby,” deserves his own NBA championship ring from last year’s playoffs. The International Jet Sports Boating Association, having reviewed footage of



the former president’s recent Jet Ski exploits, is considering an honorary freestyle trophy. And word has it that Obama’s in the running for a special Cy Young Award for having thrown the first pitch at a Nationals game in 2010 and having gotten the ball, sort of, to the catcher.

THE SCRAPBOOK doesn’t have room to discuss at length all the huzzahs and hosannas in store for Obama, but we can offer this sadly truncated list of the many wonderful possibilities: the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award; *Time*’s Man of the Years; J.D. Power Award for Best Initial Quality; ABC’s Person of the Millennium; Most Improved Swimmer (Kalorama Community Pool); the Victoria Cross; the Sarah Siddons Award for Distinguished Achievement; induction into the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame. ♦

Hysterical History Tour

The U.S. dollar is strong and the British pound is weak these days, meaning that now is an advantageous time for Americans to visit the United Kingdom—rarely has the country been cheaper for us Yanks.

Unless, that is, one travels with the *New York Times*.

The Gray Lady has just announced a “Brexiter Means Brexit!” trip to London this October. For the low, low cost of \$7,930 (not including flights), *Times* readers can enjoy five days of Brexit goodness. (But take heart—for double



occupancy rooms, the price drops to about \$6,000 a head.)

Many questions will be explored, the *Times* promises, such as “Did the voters really know what they were voting for?” (Translation from *Times*-ese: *Those idiots!*) Guests will enjoy edifying activities, such as a “walking tour of Westminster” led by a “history graduate from the London School of Economics” as well as a “typical pub lunch” (insert your own joke here). They’ll also queue up with the rabble to hear a debate in Parliament—\$8,000 does not, alas, seem to get one a priority space in line. And they’ll visit the

ABOVE: TWS ART; BELOW: MAX FERCONDINI AND STEPHEN WEST

British Library, too. (Which, if *THE SCRAPBOOK* recalls correctly, is free to enter.) It all seems a bit dear, but, hey, we get it: The *Times* needs to recoup some of the losses it suffered when subscribers quit en masse to protest the audacity of the editorial page in hiring a mildly conservative columnist last month. (Yes, this happened.) Oddly, the tour never leaves London, even though the capital city was one of the few places in England to vote strongly *against* Brexit.

Still, the *New York Times* seems to be on to something. Perhaps the *Times* of London can return the favor and offer a Trump tour of the United States. It would make stops in Youngstown, Ohio, and Scranton, Penn. Or maybe Moscow. (Idaho—what did you *think* we meant?) ♦

Making the Grade



For decades, universities have measured the performance of instructors in part by asking students to grade their professors. This has created a Yelp-y tyranny where teachers live in constant fear that their “clients” might torpedo them with one-star reviews. But not being dummies—at least for the most part—the professoriate long ago figured out how to keep the kiddies happy: good grades.

Professors who care about academic standards have long complained about rampant grade inflation—a phenomenon at the Ivies perhaps even more than at Big State U. The Gentleman’s C has become the Gentleman’s B+.

One might attribute this to any number of things: general slippage of societal standards (*THE SCRAPBOOK*’s favorite all-purpose complaint); or perhaps it is just in keeping with how

the little darlings have been treated since kindergarten, when they got their first participation trophies.

But the Ph.D. crowd has had a more particular theory: Tough graders get dyspeptic “evaluations” from students. Professors have been of the belief that the path to positive teaching reviews is paved with easy-As. And now there is new research showing that this anecdotal view is backed up by Data.

Education-policy scholars at the University of Michigan looked at thousands of students taking math classes at the University of Phoenix. Because that for-profit school’s classes are standardized, researchers were able to compare student performance and assess the impact of good teaching compared with average instruction. They found students learn more from better teachers. And yet, effec-

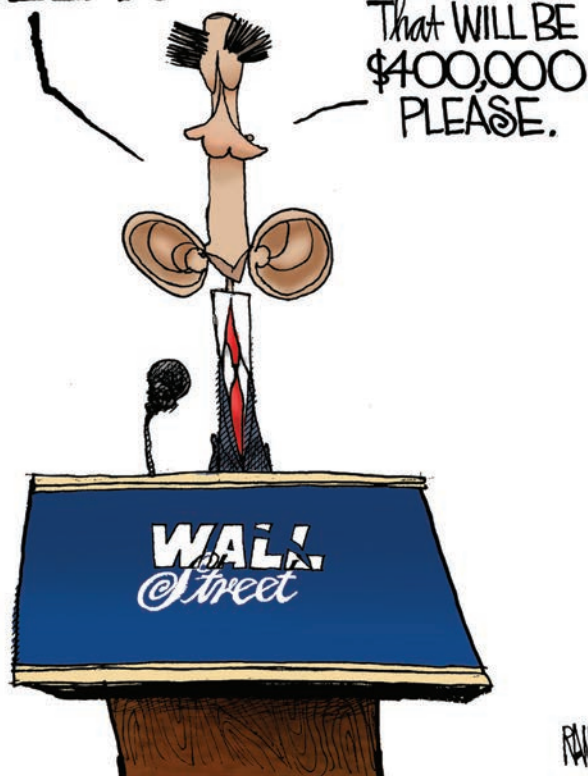
tive teaching didn’t correlate with higher teacher evaluations. No, there was another factor that seemed to determine how professors get rated: “student evaluations of their instructor’s performance are most positively correlated with their grades in that class,” the researchers found, “suggesting that instructors may be rewarded through higher evaluations for high course grades.” You think?

Which means that those teachers who would be modern Mr. Chipses would be well-advised to hand out the As like candy. ♦

Here, Kitty, Kitty

Have you ever sat in Starbucks and thought you might enjoy your latte more if you were surrounded by cats? Dozens of them? No?

OCCUPY WALL STREET!





Then it's a good thing you don't live in Berkeley Springs, W.Va., which was bracing for the opening this month of what's touted as being the world's largest "cat café," according to the *Martinsburg Journal*. Cat cafés, which originated in Asia, are sprouting in this country. They allow patrons to unwind alongside felines who are often available for adoption. Many locations have names that are puns, like KitTea or the Seattle Meowtropolitan.

But the new West Virginia operation, Give Purrs a Chance Cat Café, ratchets things to a disturbing new level. The *Journal* says it will feature "up to 40 cats running free in the large Victorian house" and will "be the first cat cafe to hold numerous weekly yoga classes, to have acoustic music nights with the cats and to offer dance night with the cats." (We'll hope that the acoustic music isn't produced on fiddles with catgut strings.)

As you might expect nowadays, the trend alarms some animal rights activists. "Living with multiple cats and having people pet them for over eight hours, you can imagine the level of stress on these cats," a Japanese critic told the *Japan Times* last year. Tokyo authorities shut one location that was less a cat café and more a cathouse: Frisky felines had bred uncontrollably, resulting in 62 cats in a space licensed for 10.

We'll leave it to readers to draw any larger conclusions about what the rise of these places means for America. But a country wealthy enough to indulge in yoga classes with cats can't be in that bad a shape—right? ♦

Fashionable Doubletalk

THE SCRAPBOOK likes to think it's open to new experiences. For instance, we have concluded that the designated hitter rule won't destroy the institution of baseball. THE SCRAPBOOK is worldly.

So worldly that, recently, we visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in upper Manhattan for a day of cultural edification wandering through the various rooms and collections. We lingered in the European galleries, outside of which a crowd was gathering as if for a rock concert or a Science March. In fact, it was for the latest Costume Institute exhibition: "Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between."

Now, THE SCRAPBOOK is no philistine when it comes to fashion. We once hung around the Condé Nast building for a few years, and watching the *Vogue* staffers get on and off the elevators is equivalent to an associate's degree from the Fashion Institute of Technology. Rei Kawakubo, founder of the Paris and Tokyo fashion house Comme des Garçons, is a great designer with a unique sense of style and wit, whose dresses are like a perpetual reinvention of Japanese visual tradition—perfect for a postmodern Three Little Maids.

The show, however, gave THE SCRAPBOOK a foretaste of what the bad place in the afterlife might look like. Hundreds of people jammed into a circular room taking selfies under a glaring white light from which there was no escape.

And that seems to be the point. According to the press release, the show is

about "establishing an unsettling zone of oscillating visual ambiguity that challenges conventional notions of beauty, good taste, and fashionability." And, for whatever it's worth, it succeeded. ♦



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Out of Tune

It's been over six years since IBM's Watson bested a pair of *Jeopardy!* champions, and now another venerable game show is getting the man-vs.-computer treatment. Starting this month contestants will battle a music-recognition app on *#BeatShazam*, a digital-age update of *Name That Tune*—a show I found myself on back in 1978.

I didn't ask to be on *Name That Tune*. I was happily away at summer music camp when a counselor told me I was wanted at the front office. My school in Phoenix was fielding a three-person team for a special "School Showdown" on the popular TV show, and I had been chosen to go.

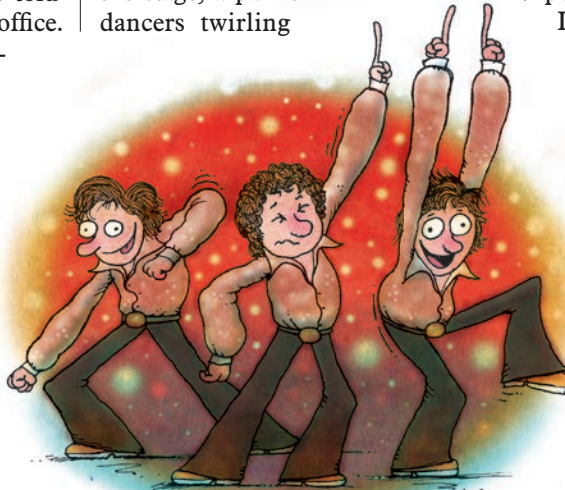
I guess it made some sense to pick me—I was a music-obsessed 13-year-old. But the music I was obsessed with—I was a bebop-besotted trombonist—wasn't the sort that usually ended up on *Name That Tune*. I was unlikely to know songs that were current—more my speed were the sort of standards favored by Miles Davis in the '50s. And indeed, I would draw a blank on the themes from *Rocky* and *Baretta* and was clueless about "Peg," "Southern Nights," and "Dreams."

But first I had to get to Hollywood, a trip that didn't get off to a particularly glamorous start. I was put on a Trailways bus from Flagstaff to Phoenix; the only seat available was next to a vagrant old man who followed each tubercular cough by spitting into an evil Styrofoam cup.

Things were better once we got off the plane in L.A. The waiting limousine took us to the Hamburger Hamlet on Hollywood Blvd., across from Grauman's Chinese Theatre. With a limo at the curb and a show-biz burger on my plate, I thought I was

halfway, and maybe just a bit more, to becoming a movie star.

The next day we were at the studio and soon the cameras were rolling. The year 1978 was the high-water mark of disco, and the production was as bloated as the Buicks of the day. There were yellow and orange lights flashing everywhere, two frantic bands (a small studio orchestra and a rock group that featured Mel Tormé's son), and on a platform above the center of the stage, a pair of dancers twirling



wildly. Strangely, after the show-open the dancers only appeared once more—not dancing but demonstrating a couple of prize pinball machines.

Out jogged host Tom Kennedy, an old game-show hand. I think I flummoxed him a bit. When we were pushed on stage he roared, "*How y'all feelin'?*" I answered with a prim "Quite well, thank you."

Not only was I a stiff, I went through the show in a slack-jawed daze. I'm the sort of Magoo who can't find his glasses without his glasses on. And I wasn't wearing them.

Adolescent vanity may have been enough for me to forgo my glasses—well, that and the deluded notion I was on the cusp of fame. But there

was a proximate cause: the lovely Patty. She was on the other school's team. Introduced at a pre-taping practice round, I learned that at her Los Alamitos junior high she was co-leader of the band's auxiliary flag-carriers. She had a deep ochre tan and a bright smile silvery with braces; her blond hair was feathered in a full Farrah Fawcett. I was smitten. I put my glasses away.

Patty and her team were dressed like normal people, but those of us from Phoenix had been told to wear our band uniforms, which, in keeping with the times, were unspeakable—bell-bottom pants in chocolate polyester and tan satin pirate shirts.

In these get-ups we jumped up and down like maniacs. We had to—it was demanded of us, a demand enforced by production assistants who stood by each camera bounding about and waving frantically at us to do the same. They were, of course, just a blur to me, except during commercials, when they got in our faces, pleading with us to jump, grin, and gesticulate like degenerate dog-track gamblers with a 30-1 greyhound coming down the home stretch.

After trailing most of the show, we did manage to win. To give my team the lead, I buzzed in with one of my few correct answers—I knew "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" when I heard it.

As the credits rolled we were told to dance around. I soon exhausted my limited repertoire of disco steps (a not-so-funky chicken, a left-footed Hustle) but the credits weren't done. The wranglers wanted more. They urged us to try Travolta-isms. It is, in my memory, excruciating.

And then it was over. I did not become a teen heartthrob. I never saw Patty again. But at least I got more airtime dancing than the official *Name That Tune* dancers.

ERIC FELTEN

Comey, Trump, and the GOP

President Donald Trump fired James Comey just as the FBI director moved to expand and intensify the bureau's counterintelligence investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and the possible collusion of Trump advisers in those efforts.

That development alone ought to give pause to Republicans inclined to go to the barricades for the president. But there's more. The White House's after-the-fact explanations of the Comey firing were inconsistent and internally contradictory—and even, at times, demonstrably untrue.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions and President Donald Trump, respectively the man who recommended Comey's dismissal and the man who executed it, had been on record praising Comey for the very thing they cited as the chief reason for terminating him. Trump, who had been critical of Comey's refusal to prosecute Hillary Clinton, offered effusive praise when the FBI director announced days before the election that he was reopening the probe. "What he did, he brought back his reputation—he brought it back," Trump said at a rally. "He's got to hang tough because a lot of people want him to do the wrong thing. But what he did was the right thing." The president was still defending Comey's conduct in an interview last month with Maria Bartiromo of Fox Business. Sessions, who on May 9 formally recommended that Trump fire Comey for his conduct, told Fox News in November 2016: "FBI Director Comey did the right thing when he found new evidence. He had no choice but to report" his findings to the American people.

The recommendation from Sessions was not just inconsistent; it was subterfuge. After Comey was fired, the Trump administration sought to portray the dismissal as something Trump acted upon but did not conceive. The White House released the letter Trump sent to Comey, along with letters from Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein laying out the case against Comey. Trump wrote Comey that he had "accepted their recommendation" to fire him. Hours after that letter was made public, Trump spokesman Sean Spicer held an impromptu press availability outside the White House. Spicer answered a few questions, but redirected many others to the Department of Justice because, he said, "they're the ones that made the recommendation." The next day, Vice President Mike Pence defended "the president's decision to accept the recommendation of the deputy attorney general and the attorney general to remove Director Comey." But this is not, in fact, what happened. As White House sources

told THE WEEKLY STANDARD at the time, and as Trump later made explicit in an interview with NBC News, the president was "going to fire [Comey] regardless of the recommendation." By Trump's own telling, he would have fired Comey even if Sessions and Rosenstein had recommended keeping him—a direct contradiction of the White House line of the previous two days.

The pace of the inconsistencies was dizzying. One day before firing Comey, Trump tweeted: "The Russia-Trump collusion story is a total hoax. [W]hen will this taxpayer funded charade end?" On Tuesday, shortly after Comey's termination, spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders declared: "It's time to move on." But in the aftermath of copious reporting that Comey's termination came because of Trump's frustration with the FBI's Russia probe—not the Hillary Clinton email investigation—White House officials did another 180. By Thursday Sanders was saying, about Trump's view of the Russia investigation: "I think he would love nothing more than [for] this investigation to continue to its completion."



Protesters against the firing, May 10

On it went all week—one Trumpian argument after another falling apart. And yet Republican officeholders mostly stuck by their president. Some of them praised Trump. Others avoided comment. Still others focused exclusively—reflexively, predictably—on the (very real) inconsistency of Democrats.

It's an understandable impulse. The Democrats, after all, *are* being monumentally hypocritical—from last summer until this week, they had been calling for Comey's head, blaming his handling of the email investigation for Hillary Clinton's defeat. There are cogent arguments, as well, that Comey deserved to be fired long ago. And there are legitimate questions about the FBI's Russia investigation; the Trump administration is not wrong to be concerned about the many leaks related to these matters.

There is, too, a laudable inclination to want President Trump to succeed. He is the president, and the country will be better off if he's a successful one.

We understand these arguments. We've made some of them. But there are times, when the stakes are high, that self-respecting officeholders need to lead, even if it's politically risky, rather than circle the wagons.

One who did last week was Representative Mike Gallagher (R-Wisc.). He expressed his unease, fittingly, in a series of tweets on May 10:

Like many Americans, I have serious concerns and unanswered questions about the timing of Director Comey's dismissal. It is imperative that both Congressional and FBI investigations into Russian interference in our country continue unimpeded and unaltered. As I've discussed, Russia is no friend to the US. Its malicious activities here and abroad must not go unanswered. As we continue these critical investigations, we must ruthlessly pursue the [truth], wherever it may lead. We must put the sanctity of our democracy far, far above partisan interest. This goes for my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. The American people deserve the truth, not politically-driven talking points. The next steps from the President, the Department of Justice, and the Attorney General will say a great deal. What we need now is a fearless, strong, and independent Director for the FBI. We must keep the faith with the American people. Americans deserve a full, fair, and honest account of what happened. They deserve the confidence that their government is telling the truth. We cannot afford any lingering questions. The legitimacy of our democracy and the sanctity of the rule of law is too important.

He's right. It's worth noting that Gallagher is a freshman member of the House, 33 years old. Where are the senior statesmen among congressional Republicans?

—*Stephen F. Hayes*

'A Sense of Responsibility'

Donald Trump is an embarrassment. It would be better for the country if he were president for at most one term. It would be desirable that his manner of governing go down in history as an aberration; that his form of conservatism be judged a detour from the broad path of a mostly praiseworthy movement; and that his type of Republicanism be seen as a cul-de-sac from which the GOP finds an honorable exit.

But he is our president and presumably will be our president for the next three and a half years. Many individuals we admire have joined his administration, or have stayed on since his taking over the reins of the executive. They therefore work, if only at times willy-nilly and at very different degrees of remove, at his direction. These individuals signed on or stayed on only incidentally to work for Donald Trump. They signed on or stayed on to serve their country.

These honorable men and women have a tough job. The Trump presidency is deficient in conception and problematic in execution. Those who would be truth-tellers or guides have to contend with a host of flatterers and enablers. Conservatives have to deal with devotees of various forms of Trumpism; the public-spirited have to beat back those seeking the advancement of their careers rather

than their country. Those who seek to serve the public while employed in the Trump administration do their best—and then worry that they've not been able to do enough.

We recently happened to spend some time, in different contexts, with some of these honorable men and women. They are patriots—real patriots, in contradistinction to the juvenile “patriots” of cable news and talk radio. They deserve encouragement, support, and gratitude. And we hereby take a break from our usual editorializing on policy, personnel, and process to express it.

We do so in part because they get little appreciation from anyone else. Trump loyalists are suspicious of them. Some Never Trumpers indulge in an indiscriminate loathing of everything that is in any way connected with the Trump administration, and can't distinguish the public-spirited from the rationalizers and opportunists.

And of course progressives lack all appreciation for these public servants. This lack of appreciation is not just a matter of disdain for anything associated with Donald Trump. It is a function of the progressive cast of mind.

This is nowhere better captured than in George Orwell's great essay on Rudyard Kipling, written in 1942. The anti-imperialist socialist had complicated views of the imperialist Tory. But Orwell was particularly impressed by one aspect of Kipling's attitude towards politics—and towards life:

because he identifies himself with the official class, he does possess one thing which “enlightened” people seldom or never possess, and that is a sense of responsibility. The middle-class Left hate him for this. . . . All left-wing parties in the highly industrialized countries are at bottom a sham, because they make it their business to fight against something which they really do not wish to destroy.

Later in the essay, Orwell returns to Kipling's “sense of responsibility”:

Although he had no direct connection with any political party, Kipling was a Conservative. . . . He identified himself with the ruling power and not with the opposition. In a gifted writer this seems to us strange and even disgusting, but it did have the advantage of giving Kipling a certain grip on reality. The ruling power is always faced with the question, “In such and such circumstances, what would you do?”, whereas the opposition is not obliged to take responsibility or make any real decisions.

When, after Trump, the party and nation reemerge into the sunlit uplands of a happier politics, those who took responsibility during these difficult years will have a role to play. Like Anthony Eden and Duff Cooper before them in the Great Britain of the 1930s, these men and women should serve in office as long as they can do good. If they find it necessary to leave as a matter of principle, they should of course do so. But in either case, they will deserve the thanks of their fellow citizens.

—*William Kristol*

The Firing That Misfired

Why did Trump dump Comey? Choose your story.

BY MICHAEL WARREN



Trump greets Comey at a White House reception for law enforcement, January 22.

The firing of FBI director James Comey was a long time coming, to hear the insiders of the Trump administration tell it. But the final actions that put it in motion took place over the course of slightly more than 24 hours—light speed by government standards, and the hastiness and improvisation showed.

On Monday, May 8, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and his deputy, Rod Rosenstein, arrived at the White House for a meeting with President Donald Trump. Trump wanted to know what his two top Justice Department officials thought of Comey and his performance. When Rosenstein, to whom Comey directly reported, told the president of his concerns about the director, Trump told

Rosenstein to put down his thoughts in writing. In just one day, Rosenstein put together the memo that would become the White House's public justification for sacking Comey.

"The current FBI Director is an articulate and persuasive speaker about leadership and the immutable principles of the Department of Justice. He deserves our appreciation for his public service," Rosenstein wrote. "As you and I have discussed, however, I cannot defend the Director's handling of the conclusion of the investigation of Secretary Clinton's emails, and I do not understand his refusal to accept the nearly universal judgment that he was mistaken."

Rosenstein's three-page memo, which has the subject line "Restoring public confidence in the FBI," leans heavily on the July 5, 2016, public statement from Comey that he would

not be recommending prosecution of the case against Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. In that appearance, Comey said that while there was no "clear evidence" Clinton or her staff had knowingly violated laws about the handling of classified information, the former secretary of state had been "extremely careless."

According to Rosenstein, this was inappropriate behavior that amounted to usurpation of higher Justice Department authority by the FBI director. The deputy AG noted that several past top DOJ officials from both parties agreed with his assessment—unsurprisingly so, since the FBI's institutional role is to conduct investigations, the results of which are conveyed to the Department of Justice, whose leaders then decide whether to prosecute or not.

"The way the Director handled the conclusion of the email investigation was wrong," Rosenstein wrote. "As a result, the FBI is unlikely to regain public and congressional trust until it has a Director who understands the gravity of the mistakes and pledges never to repeat them." The memo is dated May 9, as is a subsequent letter from Rosenstein's boss, Attorney General Sessions, to President Trump. "I must recommend that you remove Director James B. Comey, Jr. and identify an experienced and qualified individual to lead the great men and women of the FBI," Sessions wrote.

That gave the president the justification he needed to pen his own letter to Comey the same day, informing the director he was "hereby terminated and removed from office, effective immediately." That afternoon, Trump called several leaders in Congress, including House speaker Paul Ryan, Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, to inform them of his decision. Trump's former bodyguard Keith Schiller, now an assistant to the president, set out to deliver the letter in person, before discovering that Comey himself was not at the FBI headquarters in Washington to receive it. The White House was apparently unaware that Comey was visiting

Michael Warren is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

agents and employees at a field office in Los Angeles. Comey first heard of his firing from TV reports.

The quick, messy execution of the firing reflected Trump's ad hoc style, and naturally prompted rampant and ongoing speculation about the timing and seeming urgency of the decision—which came 10 months after the ostensible cause, and while the FBI is in the midst of an investigation that could implicate associates of the Trump campaign.

The subsequent, conflicting arguments from the administration's spokespeople in the hours and days following the firing added to the sense that the decision must have been made for undisclosed reasons. Deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump had been considering letting Comey go "since the day he was elected." Which is curious, considering that on October 31, just days before he was elected, Trump said Comey had "brought back his reputation" and had done "the right thing" by announcing in an October 28 letter that the FBI had reopened its investigation into Hillary Clinton's email server. (Clinton herself, and untold numbers of her followers, credits that letter with dooming her campaign.)

Then, in the days after the election, with Democrats still seething about Comey's 11th-hour surprise, amid speculation that Trump might not want to keep him on as FBI director, the president-elect praised Comey. "I respect him a lot," Trump told CBS on November 13, adding that he wanted to speak to the director before making a decision about whether to keep him on. Two days after his inauguration, on January 22, Trump blew a kiss and physically embraced Comey at a reception for law enforcement at the White House. "He's become more famous than me," Trump joked of Comey.

Except, it seems, as the months wore on, Trump stopped finding it funny. According to several news reports, the president began to compile a long list of reasons for wanting to fire Comey. Among them: Comey's unwillingness to push more

aggressively on investigating executive branch leaks, Comey's public statement that there was "no information" to back up Trump's claim the Obama administration had ordered a wiretap on his campaign, and Comey's insufficient effort, as Trump saw it, to publicly bat down talk that the president and his campaign were being investigated for possible

The president began to compile a long list of reasons for wanting to fire Comey. Among them: Comey's unwillingness to push more aggressively on investigating executive branch leaks and his public statement that there was 'no information' to back up Trump's claim the Obama administration had ordered a wiretap on his campaign.

ties to Russia during the election.

Reports from CNN and the *Wall Street Journal* suggest a more sinister explanation: that Comey and the FBI were ramping up the Russia investigation, seeking additional resources to look at more evidence of possible collusion between Russian agents and Trump campaign associates. A spokeswoman for the Justice Department says reports that Comey had recently

asked for more money for such an investigation are "totally false."

But elsewhere in the investigations of Russian interference, the heat appears to have been turning up. The Senate Intelligence Committee, which is conducting its own investigation, subpoenaed Trump's former national security adviser Mike Flynn last week, seeking documents related to his business dealings with Russian interests. And a federal grand jury has issued subpoenas for business associates of Flynn.

The *New York Times* says Comey's most recent appearance before a congressional panel in early May was the last straw:

Mr. Comey's fate was sealed by his latest testimony about the bureau's investigation into Russia's efforts to sway the 2016 election and the Clinton email inquiry. Mr. Trump burned as he watched, convinced that Mr. Comey was grandstanding. He was particularly irked when Mr. Comey said he was "mildly nauseous" to think that his handling of the email case had influenced the election, which Mr. Trump took to demean his own role in history.

Trump reportedly fumed over this latest case of disloyalty during a weekend at his New Jersey golf resort. Back at the White House on Monday, he had decided: It was time for Comey to go. And the Justice Department's advice, it turned out, didn't really matter. As Trump told NBC News's Lester Holt on May 11, "I was going to fire regardless of recommendation." ♦

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Trump Gets Himself in Hot Water—Again

And Democrats dream of Watergate II.

BY FRED BARNES



Senate minority leader Charles Schumer calls for a special prosecutor to investigate any relationship between the Trump campaign and Russia, May 9.

Among the swirling parts of the controversy over President Trump's firing of FBI director James Comey, there's one that matters most. It stands in the way of the naming of a special prosecutor, the creation of a bipartisan, joint House-Senate committee to investigate the Trump-Russia connection, or the impeachment of the president.

It's the lack of any known evidence of collusion between Trump and Russia in a plot to defeat Hillary Clinton in last year's election. Unless such evidence—incriminating evidence—comes to light, Trump is likely to be off the hook, at least for now, and the uproar over canning Comey will begin to fade.

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

None of the current probes has found any, so far as we know. Dianne Feinstein (D-California), a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said recently that the committee's inquiry hadn't. Adam Schiff (D-California), ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said he had discovered evidence that isn't merely circumstantial. Yet he hasn't revealed it.

The FBI investigation, the most extensive of the probes, has been looking into the Trump-Russia relationship since last July. If it had come up with evidence of malfeasance by Trump, we wouldn't necessarily have heard of it. But given the likelihood of leaks, we probably would have.

The absence of evidence has put Democrats in a weak position in calling for an "independent" investigation.

Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), in a press release, noted the Comey firing occurred "right in the middle of an investigation into White House ties to Russia. Coincidence? Maybe. . . . Now more than ever, we need an independent investigation."

Coincidence isn't evidence, though Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) thinks it is. "Comey was fired because of the Russians," she told MSNBC. "The timing makes this, I think, entirely clear."

Democrats have thrown around words like "treason" in talking about Trump and his campaign team—without evidence to support it. In an editorial, the *New York Times* said Comey was fired "because he was leading an active investigation that could bring down a president." Again, no evidence. The FBI, by the way, is not conducting a criminal investigation. It's a counterintelligence investigation—into, presumably, Russian activities—and its very existence and whatever it does is classified, for what that's worth.

The firing prompted fears that the FBI investigation, with Comey gone, would be diminished or short-circuited. The idea was that his successor would worry about losing his job if he kept the investigation going at full speed and would therefore slow things down.

Acting FBI director Andrew McCabe assured the Senate Intelligence Committee last week this would not happen. He said the White House hasn't tried "to impede our investigation to date." If it does, he promised "absolutely" to inform the committee.

McCabe was asked by Senator James Lankford (R-Oklahoma) if he needed "somebody to take this away from you and somebody else to do it." In other words, should a special prosecutor take control? "No, sir," McCabe said.

His most important testimony knocked down the story that Comey had sought additional funding to expand the investigation of the Trump-Russia connection. The *Washington Post* had headlined the story across the top of page one: "Comey

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sought more resources for Russia probe.” Democrats reportedly were told by Comey of this request.

But Comey had also met with Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on May 1. Rosenstein was the logical person to address such a request to. But the Justice Department insisted Comey had not asked for more funds to expand the probe.

McCabe’s testimony was crucial on this point. He said he was “not aware of that request, and it’s not consistent with my understanding of how we request additional resources.” He said the “Russia investigation is adequately resourced.”

The story had excited Democrats, giving them another reason to call for a special prosecutor. Without compelling evidence of wrongdoing, however, the work of the prosecutor—or “independent counsel”—would consist of a prolonged fishing expedition. Democrats would love that. It would keep the issue of Trump’s ties to Russia alive for months or years.

At the Justice Department, it would be up to Rosenstein to appoint a special prosecutor, and Democrats are pressuring him to do just that. They shouldn’t get their hopes up. Congress could name one too, but Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell has ruled that out.

In effect, Comey had become a special prosecutor without the title. He took over the investigation of Hillary Clinton’s emails and later announced she had been “careless” in handling classified information but wasn’t guilty of a crime.

With Attorney General Jeff Sessions having recused himself from involvement in the Trump-Russia issue and no deputy AG on board till April 26, Comey was on his own. He angered Trump by refusing to declare publicly that the president isn’t a target of the investigation, a petty offense at worst but a big deal to the president.

Once Rosenstein was confirmed, Comey was in trouble. The new deputy provided the case for getting rid of him. The case was legitimate—he’d overstepped his authority in deciding

Clinton’s fate—but it wasn’t the real reason for Trump’s decision. The president wanted Comey out, period.

Trump had the authority to order the firing. It wasn’t an abuse of power. It wasn’t a coup. Presidents are allowed to discharge people who work for them.

It was politically problematic, though. The timing was bad. Trump’s prospects of getting his health care and tax reform agendas enacted this year may suffer. But there was no good time

to fire Comey. Whenever Trump did so, it would cause a firestorm.

The controversy has been likened to Watergate, the 1970s scandal that forced President Nixon to resign. Indeed, they are alike in superficial ways—with one big difference. There was plenty of evidence implicating President Nixon.

Not so in Trump’s case. Yet the investigations will continue for months, and we don’t know what they will yield. It won’t take mountains of evidence to push him out of office. ♦

Investigations and Prosecutions

The institutionalist critique of James Comey.

BY TERRY EASTLAND

The three people involved in effecting the termination of FBI director James Comey last week were President Donald Trump and the two highest officers in the Justice Department, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. The Constitution vests in Trump the executive power, which he employs in fulfilling his constitutional obligation to take care that the laws are faithfully executed. He works through subordinates in exercising his power, and only he may fire them.

Thus did Trump, in a brief letter to Comey, fire the director: “you are hereby terminated and removed from office.” Trump told Comey he was taking that action after receiving letters “recommending your dismissal” from Sessions and Rosenstein.

In his letter to Trump—one paragraph long—Sessions said that “a fresh start is needed at the leadership of the FBI,” and he endorsed Comey’s removal “for the reasons

expressed by the Deputy Attorney General in the attached memorandum.” “It is essential,” he added, “that this Department of Justice clearly reaffirm its commitment to longstanding principles that ensure the integrity and fairness of federal investigations and prosecutions.”

This brings us to the third person in the trio, and by far the least known: Rod Rosenstein, author of what Trump called a letter and Sessions a memorandum. This memorandum (Rosenstein’s choice of words) was three pages long and had to be, since it dealt in detail with Comey’s “handling of the conclusion of the investigation of Secretary Clinton’s emails,” in which the director said the case should be closed without prosecution. Rosenstein had four things to say about the matter.

First, in Comey’s press conference last July 5, “the Director was wrong to usurp the Attorney General’s authority . . . and announce his conclusion” about the case. Rosenstein explained that it’s not the function of the director to make such an announcement. Justice may do that, but the FBI may

Terry Eastland is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

not. “At most, the Director should have said the FBI had completed its investigation and presented its findings to federal prosecutors.”

Second, Comey “compound[ed]” that error “by ignoring another longstanding principle: we do not hold press conferences to release derogatory information about the subject of a declined criminal investigation.” Such information is sometimes disclosed in the course of criminal investigations and prosecutions, “but we never release it gratuitously.” Noting that during the press conference, Comey effectively made a closing argument, but without a trial, Rosenstein called it “a textbook example of what federal prosecutors and agents are taught not to do.”

Third, at a congressional hearing, the director defended his remarks by saying that his “goal was to say what is true. What did we do, what did we find, what do we think about it.” Rosenstein took issue with this kind of thinking. The “goal of a federal criminal investigation is not to announce our thoughts at a press conference” but to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to justify a prosecution. If that conclusion is reached, a prosecutor who exercises authority delegated by the attorney general may make a prosecutorial decision and, if prosecution is warranted, “let the judge and jury determine the facts.”

Also of concern to Rosenstein was Comey’s October 28, 2016, letter to Congress, in which the director cast his decision “as a choice between whether he would speak about the FBI’s decision to investigate the newly-discovered email messages or ‘conceal’ it.” Observed Rosenstein, “‘Conceal’ is a loaded term that misstates the issue. When federal agents and prosecutors quietly open a criminal investigation, we are not concealing anything; we are simply following the longstanding policy that we refrain from publicizing public information. In that context, silence is not concealment.”

Trump, of course, is not a lawyer. Sessions is, and was both a

U.S. attorney in Alabama and the state’s attorney general. It is Rosenstein, however, who has had truly long experience in the law, most all of it in the Justice Department.

A graduate of Penn and Harvard Law, Rosenstein, 52, worked in various capacities in the criminal division during the Clinton administration. He also served as prosecutorial co-counsel in the trial of three defendants in the Whitewater independent counsel investigation that ended in their convictions for fraud. During the Bush administration, he was in the department’s tax division,



Rod Rosenstein at his Senate confirmation hearing on Capitol Hill, March 7

where among other things he coordinated enforcement activities of that division, the U.S. attorneys’ offices, and the Internal Revenue Service. Unanimously confirmed in 2005 as the U.S. attorney for the district of Maryland, Rosenstein served in that position until last month, when he became the deputy attorney general. He is regarded as a straight-shooter and nonpartisan.

Rosenstein is an institutionalist, meaning, in the context of the Justice Department, someone who defends the department’s traditions against dubious innovations and seeks their restoration when they are violated. Rosenstein’s institutionalism is evident in his memorandum. It concerns a subject—investigations and prosecutions—that is at the heart of the department’s and the bureau’s work, and thus of deep interest to

institutionalists. And in his memorandum, as befits an institutionalist, Rosenstein makes clear that his views are thoroughly mainstream.

“My perspective” on Comey’s handling of the Clinton emails, he writes, “is shared by former Attorneys General and Deputy Attorneys General from different eras and both political parties.” Rosenstein quoted what a number of them have said on the matter. George W. Bush’s attorney general Michael Mukasey declared that Comey “stepped way outside his job in disclosing the recommendation” not to charge Hillary Clinton; the FBI director “doesn’t make that decision.” President Obama’s attorney general Eric Holder said that Comey “violated long-standing Justice Department policies and traditions,” and a deputy attorney general under George H.W. Bush, Donald Ayer, called Comey’s move a “departure from the Department’s widely-respected, non-partisan traditions.”

Rosenstein saw a choice that must be made: “We should reject the departure and return to the traditions.” He not only cannot defend Comey but seems almost personally disappointed by the director: “I do not understand his refusal to accept the nearly universal judgment that he was mistaken.”

In his letter to Comey, Trump wrote, “While I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation, I nevertheless concur with the judgment of the Department of Justice that you are not able to effectively lead the Bureau.” Trump greatly appreciated that the director had repeatedly informed the president that he was not under investigation, though not enough to keep Comey on. The investigation not identified by Trump but dominating the news media involves Trump campaign contacts with Russia, an investigation that presumably does not focus on the president.

The officer in the Justice Department overseeing the investigation is not the attorney general, who has recused himself on account of several conversations with Russians he had in 2016—it’s Rod Rosenstein. ♦

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Blue on Blue in Virginia

An unexpected Democratic race.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



Ralph Northam, left, and Tom Perriello shake hands after a debate in Richmond, May 9.

Arlington, Va.
It wasn't supposed to be this hard. The party elders had got all their Democratic ducks in a row, merrily quacking, to escort Ralph Northam, Virginia's lieutenant governor, to victory in this year's gubernatorial primary on June 13. Both of the commonwealth's United States senators endorsed him. His boss the governor endorsed him, and so did nearly every Democrat in the state legislature. Even the state's hard-charging and ambitious attorney general, his only plausible rival for the Democratic nomination, had been persuaded not to run. The field cleared. Everybody loved old Ralph.

And then Tom Perriello showed up. Perriello spent a single term in

Congress, from 2009 to 2011. Those two years constitute his only experience in Virginia politics. On January 4, Perriello phoned Northam and told him he was going to run against him in the primary.

The timing of the call was ingenious, belying Perriello's image as a political innocent. A week later, the state legislature would convene for a session certain to last two months. As it happens, the sole constitutional obligation of a lieutenant governor is to preside over the legislature when it's in session. While Northam was stuck in Richmond, babysitting bellowing lawmakers, Perriello had the rest of the state to himself—popping up at coffee klatches, Rotary Clubs, NARAL meetings, fundraisers large and small.

By the time the legislature shut down at the end of February, Perriello was tied with Northam in the polls.

By mid-April, he had copped endorsements from both Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. (In his ringing speech, Sanders called the candidate "Tom Perrioli," as if he were endorsing a new form of pasta.) The most recent polls show Perriello with a small lead.

And now here they both are, at a joint appearance—the Progressives' Forum, it's called—in the bluest county of this newly blue state. Ralph Northam is taking questions, and he is getting an earful.

Most of these Arlington progressives (when can we call them liberals again?) are agitated that Northam has accepted a \$25,000 contribution from Dominion, the state's aptly named power company. When it comes to Virginia politics, Dominion writes *everybody* a check—Democrats and Republicans, left-wingers and right-wingers—if he looks like he might have a chance to hold political office. Among progressives it is often said that the state government is a wholly owned subsidiary of Dominion.

So when the audience lines up at the microphones, the subject of corporate cash, and Dominion cash in particular, comes first. "Do you support banning corporate contributions?" "Would you support real campaign finance reform?" "Can you tell us what contributions you have turned down on principle?"

"I make my decisions based on what's in the best interest of Virginia and not what my contributions are," Northam says, looking slightly peeved. He points out that he had "stood up" to the once-powerful tobacco companies to ban smoking in Virginia restaurants. "So don't you tell me that contributions from corporations influence my decisions."

But it is part of the progressive creed that corporations control American politics, and so the audience presses the point until Northam grows exasperated. "I hope you would agree with me that, number one, I'm an honest person. I was on the honor board at VMI [Virginia Military Institute, his alma mater]. It's very important to me. And number two, I just stood here and told you that I won't

STEVE HELBER/AP

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

let money or contributions influence my decisions, and I have always been true to my word.”

It was a sensitive moment. Understandably insulted by the insinuation that he'd been bought by a power company (and for only \$25,000!), Northam has a collateral problem: His acceptance of Dominion's donation marks him as a figure of the establishment—a paragon of politics-as-usual—to a leftish electorate that feels increasingly alienated and isn't happy about it. Along with most of Virginia's Democratic hierarchy, Northam supports an oil and gas pipeline that Dominion hopes to build in the western part of the state, despite objections from environmentalists who don't live in the western part of the state. Thus corporate greed, environmental calamity, and the possibility of political payoffs combine to prime the paranoia of any committed liberal. I mean progressive.

Perriello evidently saw it coming, this estrangement of the base from the party's upper reaches and its anointed leader-in-waiting. He continues to make a centerpiece of his campaign his own opposition to the pipeline and his disavowal of all corporate contributions, including Dominion's. He and the lieutenant governor make for a marked contrast. Both raised in Virginia, Northam has a thick drawl and Perriello speaks with a technocrat's patter. (If elected, Northam would be the first Virginia governor to have a southern accent since the election of John Dalton 40 years ago.) Northam speaks with pride about VMI while Perriello, calling himself a “pragmatic populist,” is less vocal about his undergraduate and law degrees from faraway Yale. Northam is a pediatric neurologist who enlisted in the Army and served for 12 years, rising to the rank of major. Nowadays, in addition to a flourishing private practice, he volunteers as director of a hospice for terminally ill children.

For his part, the 42-year-old Perriello has spent his professional life as a left-wing activist, making his résumé of do-goodery much less impressive. With money from the creepy global financier George Soros, Perriello spent

the George W. Bush years launching one nonprofit organization after another. These often reflected his Catholic upbringing. Faithful America had the goal of organizing the religious left against the religious right. Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good was dedicated to advancing a home-cooked version of the church's social teaching. A global network of activists called Avaaz was a spawn of Soros's think tank Res Publica. Perriello's relationship with Soros continues to pay off. According to figures compiled

The surge of young Obama voters from the University of Virginia lifted Perriello to victory in a historically conservative district in 2008. His win, he has said ever since, proves that he has the power to romance conservative downstate voters. What it really proved was that Barack Obama could get an unprecedented number of college students to vote for him.

by the Virginia Public Access Project, at least 25 percent of his campaign money comes from Soros, his family, or organizations Soros controls.

In 2008 Perriello moved back to his hometown of Charlottesville to run for Congress. The surge of young Obama voters from the University of Virginia lifted him to victory in the historically conservative district. His win, he has said ever since, proves that he has the power to romance conservative downstate voters. What it really proved was that Barack Obama could get an unprecedented number of college students to vote for him. Two years later, with Obama absent from the head of the ticket, student turnout cratered and he lost his seat by 3.8 points. He returned to Washington to oversee the partisan arm of the liberal think tank Center for American Progress.

Eventually Obama gave him a job in the State Department.

No one should doubt Perriello's liberal bona fides, but Ralph Northam wants Virginians to do so, however implausibly. Perriello's sins are two. In Congress he voted for the infamous Stupak amendment to Obamacare that aimed to ban federal funding of abortions. Luckily his vestigial Catholicism has taught him the power of penance. The day after he announced his campaign for governor, he made an abject confession on Facebook. “I want to be very clear that I regret my vote,” he wrote. “This vote caused real pain to constituents and other women.” He has since pledged to eradicate “gender-based discrimination” further by exempting feminine hygiene products from sales taxes.

Perriello's other act of deviationism was to vote against a federal ban on “assault weapons.” The vote earned him an A rating from the NRA, which endorsed him for reelection—prompting him to call the group “the epitome of people-powered politics.” Now when he's asked about the NRA—as he often is, thanks to Northam supporters—he calls it “an extremist nut-job organization.” To show that his reeducation is complete, he uses the phrase “the Resistance” a lot.

Despite his wicked dalliance with Dominion, Northam doesn't want anyone to doubt his liberal bona fides either. “It's easy to think he's more conservative than he is,” says Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University. Earlier this year Northam made the mistake of telling a *New York Times* reporter he had voted for George W. Bush—twice. He now blames this idiocy on his inattention to politics while he built his medical practice. Maybe, but a joke has been going around the Richmond statehouse for years: “The first Democrat Ralph Northam voted for was himself.”

To demonstrate his liberalism, he brutalizes the NRA on the campaign trail and frequently boasts of his lifelong support for abortion rights. This helpfully draws attention to Perriello's former heresies. Northam likes to

call President Trump a “narcissistic maniac.” Of course this doesn’t prove anything: Lots of Republicans call him worse than that. Still, says Kidd: “At his core he’s very progressive, and his record on issues like abortion and health care proves it.”

Before Perriello’s surprise declaration, Northam’s campaign was geared toward a general election against a Republican. It has now been retooled to blow away a rival who is, on all important matters, his ideological twin. Northam controls all the resources of the state party, including most of the left-wing groups that endorsed him before anyone heard a peep from Perriello.

Battalions of these pro-Northam activists showed up at the Progressives’ Forum here, the pro-abortion women

wearing purple NARAL T-shirts, the anti-gun women in red. Their target was Perriello. They pestered him repeatedly on their respective issues. He responded by insulting the NRA with ever-greater vehemence. He told the ladies in purple he had supported *Roe v. Wade* his whole life and had never wavered, not once. “I don’t think you can have economic justice without reproductive justice,” he told them. Even this cutting-edge catchphrase seemed to leave them unappeased.

And so goes Virginia, a state known not so long ago for moderate and even conservative Democrats. Now rival candidates attack each other only from the left, pulling each other in the same direction—away from the more measured past and into the new blue Virginia. ♦

faculty and staff engaging in acts with them that included intimate kissing, intimate touching, and sexual intercourse. Other graduates told us of contact that they recognized as abusive at the time, including forced or coerced intercourse, as well as other incidents of unwanted contact that led students to feel betrayed by faculty or staff they had trusted and admired. Regardless of how the graduates felt at the time, many reported to us that these physical or sexual encounters with faculty or staff, who had occupied positions of authority and trust, disturbed them throughout their adult lives.

In other words, they’ve been carrying it for most of their lives.

It was only in 2013 that this ugly history began to catch official attention. A male student from the class of 1963 recounted in an entry submitted for a reunion yearbook how a male teacher had sexually assaulted him. The same year, a female student from the class of 1988 reported that a male teacher had sexually abused her.

Child sex abuse scandals were already in the news. In 2011, Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky was arrested and charged with 52 counts of sexual abuse of young boys. A year later, the *New York Times Magazine* published a story about male teachers’ rampant sexual abuse of students at Horace Mann, a private school in Riverdale, the well-to-do Bronx neighborhood. Choate wanted to get out in front of a looming problem.

The school appointed associate headmaster Kathleen Lyons Wallace to serve as “point person for receiving reports of past or present sexual misconduct.” In March 2016, a *Boston Globe* reporter queried the school for a story regarding a female student who said that two teachers had sex with her while she was at Choate in the early 1990s. Wallace reached out to the former student, and then encouraged other former students to come forward to report cases of abuse. In October 2016, the *Globe* published its article, and soon after Choate ordered a more comprehensive investigation. Anyone “with possible knowledge of sexual misconduct by faculty or staff”

Reflections on the Scandal at Choate

What were they thinking? What were we thinking?

BY LEE SMITH

Wallingford, Conn.

The Lanphier Center, dedicated in 2015, is the latest addition to the campus of Choate Rosemary Hall, one of America’s most prestigious prep schools. Choate has educated leaders and figures across the American spectrum since its founding in 1896, from John F. Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson to Paul Giamatti and Ivanka Trump. The new multi-million-dollar facility for mathematics and computer science even houses a robotics lab. It was donated by Edward Lanphier (class of ’74) and his wife, Cameron. The two met while they were both teaching at the school after college. I went to Choate, and Lanphier nearly failed me in biology. He

gave me a break, he told me on graduation day in 1980, because, he reasoned, I wasn’t there for biology. He, too, went on to other things, making a fortune in the biotech industry. Not all my teachers made good.

Last month, Choate released a report written by a former federal prosecutor hired by the school to investigate charges of teachers sexually abusing their students. It is a sad and distressing account of adults, heterosexual and homosexual, preying on children over more than half a century.

One paragraph from the report sums it all up:

Certain Choate graduates described themselves as having been flattered, at the time, by attention they received from faculty or staff, but told us they later recognized that the conduct had been abusive. They described Choate

Lee Smith is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

was urged to contact the school, and 42 graduates, parents, and current and former faculty members responded. Investigators were able to corroborate reports of 12 teachers sexually abusing students.

The oldest case involved a classics teacher, John Joseph, whose career stretched from 1944 to 1977, the year I arrived. Students always spoke of him as a great teacher and a kindly man, wise and knowing. His course in etymology was legendary, and the school named its student activities center for him after his death in 1984. He taught generations of Choate boys, at least three of whom, according to the report, he molested.

William Cobbett taught art history and economics from 1969 to 2010 and pressured a 17-year-old girl to sleep with him. When he drove her to his house for sex, he told her to hide under a blanket. He knew what he was doing was wrong.

The worst incident involved a Spanish teacher, Jaime Rivera-Murillo, who raped a female student on a study abroad trip to Costa Rica in 1999. Choate fired him, but did not report the crime or even notify other schools where he applied for work about the reason for his firing. Several schools hired him because an institution designed to produce the country's leaders didn't tell them that he had raped a child.

School authorities frequently offered abusers an easy exit. I suspect this is why two of the school's former headmasters were compelled to resign from the board of trustees. It is one of the questions I wanted to ask Wallace, who according to alumni who know her is an excellent teacher and a tough administrator—yet another woman, said one alumna I spoke with, tasked to clean up after dangerously

irresponsible men. The school's communications department decided it was better she not speak with a journalist. I was invited, as an alumnus, however, to make a report if I knew about some case of sexual abuse.

Sure I knew. Everyone knew.

Chip Lowery was my soccer coach. He was in his mid-30s, built like a

gift—after life, it is the greatest gift one human can give another, and the recipient is grateful for life. Lowery was one of my English teachers, and two of my siblings had him and agree that he was one of their favorites.

As the report explains, “it was known among certain students that certain teachers were having sex with students’ and that Lowery was one of these teachers.” Certain students? “But what were we supposed to do?” one schoolmate asked me recently. “We were going to go to senior faculty and say that Mr. Lowery has all these girls hanging around the dorm?”

There were always teachers who had girls hanging around them. A schoolmate who returned to teach at Choate once he finished college began to see more clearly why the girls had ignored us as students and swarmed the younger male teachers. “We had nothing to offer girls our age. Teenage girls are much more sophisticated and more graceful than boys the same age. You remember what we were like at 15,” he said, chopping his arms in the air like a robot.

It was a matter of fact

that the girls preferred older boys—the seniors, the postgraduate students recruited to play hockey or football, college students. For 16-year-old boys, there may seem to be no real difference between a 19-year-old dating an attractive girl in our class and a man in his early 30s dating her. And this is one reason why teenage boys are not charged with designing the social fabric.

But what about the administration? Why didn't the people who were supposed to enforce the borders step in? I am sure there are many reasons, all recognizably human, that they didn't: from weakness and vanity to lust and cruelty and friendship and love. There



Tarnished idyll: Choate's Archbold building, women's crew

medium-size teenager with a beard and thinning hair. In retrospect, it's not hard to see why teenage girls might have been attracted to his intense gaze, focused somewhere off in the distance. It's emblematic of a certain kind of mystery easily accessible to kids raised on Westerns and detective shows. Only later do you learn that the long stare means someone isn't entirely present, perhaps distracted by an old hurt. The girls were too young to see the warning sign.

Lowery was a brilliant teacher of literature and writing who helped his students find things in themselves they could never lose. Teaching is an act of love. To help someone know is

VIA CHOATE.EDU

are, of course, high school girls who run off with their teachers and form a couple who cherish each other their whole lives. The newly elected president of France is celebrated for his marriage to a woman he met when she, a quarter-century older, was his teacher. And yet it is hard not to believe that among the many now gushing over Emmanuel Macron's devotion to his older wife are parents who have had to sort through the wreckage of a teenage child's intimate entanglement with an authority figure.

The cost is high, not just to the children who were targeted and their families. Graduates I spoke with told me that since publication of the report last month they'd been reflecting on their time at Choate. They remain respectful of the privilege—financial and social—afforded them in attending such a prestigious school, and they cherish the friendships made

there, including among the school's many gifted and generous teachers and administrators. But there are doubts where there weren't before.

One alumna described to me how difficult it was for girls to get the attention of the most popular teachers, invariably male. Usually they were also the coaches of the most successful sports team and attracted large cult followings of male athletes. The only way the girls could win the attention of these esteemed elders was by their schoolwork—and they were almost always better students than the boys—with their intellectual charisma, their happy and outspoken ambitions to achieve all sorts of things in life, and their plain and joyous determination to make it all come true. This was the glory of the school for her. But maybe, she says now, some of those teachers were just sizing her up, seeing if she'd have sex with them. ♦

proposals may be, we all know what paves the road to hell.

For many years now those very same good intentions have paved the road to rising higher education costs. The concept of the feds stepping in to help make college more affordable for the average American is nothing new, but research shows that this very intervention is one of the driving forces behind the student debt mess.

In a July 2015 report, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York observed a direct correlation between student borrowing and tuition levels, noting that “higher tuition costs raise loan demand, but loan supply . . . [relaxes] students' funding constraints.” The Fed spoke of a “pass-through effect on tuition,” whereby for every dollar received in subsidized federal loans, tuition rises 65 cents. They report similar findings for Pell Grants (55 cents) and unsubsidized loans (30 cents).

As the Fed study indicates, student debt isn't rising simply because college is too expensive. Rather, school is too expensive *because* of rising student loans and grants. Research by economist Richard Vedder, director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, bolsters this argument. He found that “when someone other than the user is paying the bills, those bills tend to explode since the buyer is not sensitive to price.” In other words, the expansion of student loans and other third-party payments for college leads to higher prices by insulating students from the actual cost of tuition. This vicious cycle leaves many low-income students (who are supposed to benefit the most from financial aid) priced out of attending college.

While it would be impractical simply to end federal student aid and expect students to afford already-overpriced colleges and universities, there are reforms that might help reduce both the cost of college and the crushing burden of student loan debt.

For one, Congress could consolidate its student loan offerings into two, simplified programs, one for students and one primarily for parents. A new Student Loan Program could be phased in over three years and replace

The Higher and Higher Cost of Higher Ed

A \$1.4 trillion calamity—and how we can fix it.

BY JIMMY SENGENBERGER

It's that time of year again: Graduating high school students, consumed by “senioritis,” are making that all-important decision of which college or university they will attend. And their parents, consumed by anxiety, are aghast at the ever-growing cost of higher education.

College tuition alone has shot up by more than 500 percent since 1985—more than health care, gasoline, and food prices. Student loan debt now totals more than \$1.4 trillion and surpasses all other forms of consumer debt. The College Board

reports that tuition and fees for the 2016-2017 school year averaged \$9,650 for in-state residents and \$24,930 for out-of-state residents attending public four-year institutions, and \$33,480 at private four-year colleges—plus nearly \$11,000 in room and board. The average 2016 undergraduate left school \$37,172 in arrears.

These numbers are staggering, and they're behind New York governor Andrew Cuomo's and Vermont senator Bernie Sanders's support for tuition-free public education. On the surface, it's a sympathetic viewpoint. But as any economist will tell you, there's no such thing as a free lunch. Well-intentioned though such

Jimmy Sengenberger is president and CEO of the Millennial Policy Center, a think tank based in Denver.

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The new loan program would be coupled with an income-based repayment plan. Moreover, student loans should be less difficult to discharge in bankruptcy (it's almost impossible to do so now). As the AccessLex Institute proposes, "education loans [should] be considered on equal terms with other unsecured debt in a bankruptcy proceeding if the loan in question has been in repayment for at least seven years (exclusive of deferments or mandatory forbearances)." Higher ed institutions, though, should have some skin in the game in the case of bankruptcy discharge. The school would continue to get its money up front for each loan disbursed, but it would become, in effect, a co-signer of the loan. Were a student to default, the school should be liable for 5 percent of losses on the value of the loan.

The U.S. tax code currently offers three different higher education tax credit and deduction options, but a 2006 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that these credits didn't make it more likely for a student to attend college and that those who were most likely to benefit were already likely to go to college. These tax credits "provide tax savings only if students attend college, increasing the demand for college and thus college prices," the NBER paper reported. The best option would therefore be to eliminate the tax credits altogether. Alternatively, the three tax benefits could be consolidated into a single tax credit, such as the Higher Education and Skills Obtainment Credit proposed in 2013 by Senator Marco Rubio and former congressman Aaron Schock.

Congress could also replace the Pell Grant with a voucher that subsidizes students, not institutions.

As currently structured, Pell Grants flow directly to colleges without ever passing through students' hands. This shields schools from price-conscious students, resulting in higher prices. By transforming the Pell Grant into a Pell Stipend, which would offer a set amount for eligible students each term, money would go

Student debt isn't rising simply because college is too expensive. Rather, school is too expensive because of rising student loans and grants, which insulate students from the actual cost of tuition. This vicious cycle leaves many low-income students (who are supposed to benefit the most from financial aid) priced out of attending college.



Exactly: NYU student-debt protester, February 21, 2012

directly to students to cover the costs of higher education. This would force institutions of higher learning to become sensitive to the costs they impose on students—especially the most disadvantaged.

There's one other key step that is essential to reducing college costs through increased competition:

accreditation reform. Accreditation determines eligibility for federal funding, including loans and grants, through one of six accrediting agencies of which select higher-ed institutions are "members." Former Colorado senator Hank Brown, a past president of two major Colorado universities, concluded in an American Enterprise Institute study that these membership organizations are "regional monopolies that control access to federal funding for virtually every type of college and university in their geographic area. . . . [T]he colleges and universities they oversee fund the accrediting body through dues and fees."

More disturbingly, Brown reported that most of the accreditation work is done by "hundreds of volunteer faculty and staff from the very institutions being accredited"—making it difficult, if not impossible, for new institutions to get the accreditations they need to compete. The playing field needs to be leveled.

Solving this challenge may lie in the 2015 Higher Education Innovation Act proposed by Senators Rubio and Michael Bennet. This bill proposed keeping the old accreditation process but would have created a second, data-driven means to access federal student aid. Participating institutions would have to "demonstrate high student outcomes, including student learning completion, and return on investment." By creating two accreditation pathways to access federal student aid, Congress would inject healthy competition into the higher education marketplace and empower students to more easily make educational decisions for themselves.

The fact remains that the nation's higher education system today is a complex and expensive mess that needs meaningful change. The financial aid system must be fundamentally revamped and accreditation reformed to open new doors to choice and opportunity for students. Both measures should use natural market forces to bring down costs and boost quality—all while minimizing the federal government's role in the higher education system. ♦

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France Picks a Novice

The ‘français de sushi’ beat the ‘français de souche’

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

‘E’veryone said it would be impossible to do what we did,” France’s new president, 39-year-old Emmanuel Macron, told a crowd of politely applauding supporters in the courtyard of the Louvre shortly after the polls had closed on May 7. “But they didn’t know France!”

Almost none of what he said was true. Last year, Macron defected from the unpopular Socialist party to found his own political movement, En Marche. He had served as the economics minister of the very unpopular president François Hollande. But he had a seductive power on the stump that was visible almost immediately. Since January, every poll of the French electorate had shown him advancing to the run-off in France’s two-round presidential elections. After it became clear in April that he would square off against the nationalist Marine Le Pen, whose National Front opposes both mass immigration and the European Union, his victory was not just possible . . . it was inevitable.

Le Pen represented the *français de souche*: the people who were born there and whose parents built the country’s millennia-old culture. As Le Pen sees it, immigration, globalization, and membership in the multinational European Union have cost France most of its good working-class jobs and much of its culture, and will eventually mean the end of the country itself. She had sought to purge her party of the extremism that marked it when her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, founded it in the early 1970s. That turned out to be an Augean job. Speaking or writing in favor of the National Front, leave aside voting for it, remains taboo.

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Macron loves all the stuff she hates. He represented those one might call the *français de sushi*, or as he described them to a business magazine, “those who experience globalization and the big transformations underway as an opportunity.” The vindication of France’s globalizers on May 7 was stunning. Macron did not just beat Le Pen—he destroyed her, taking almost two-thirds of the vote, beyond what even the polls predicted. He won across virtually the whole of France, but it was in the rich, powerful cosmopolitan cities that he did best. In the center of Paris, he beat her by 90-10. Among French people living in United States, he won by 92-8.



Emmanuel Macron joins outgoing French president François Hollande at a ceremony in Paris, May 8, 2017.

Although Macron was never in danger once he squared off with Le Pen, it is easy to understand why newspapers around the world have been talking about “the markets” or “Europe” or “the world” breathing a “sigh of relief.” Something very big has indeed happened in France. It has to do with the scale of Le Pen’s defeat and with generational change. French politics, which seemed to be undergoing a transformation congenial to populists and democrats throughout the world, has in fact *not* been so transformed. This is the first sign that the democratic tsunami that has been moving towards all Western elites since the Brexit vote last summer might pass some of them by.

For the past generation, France’s conservative party, the Republicans, have represented the winners of the old economy, Socialists the winners of the new. Voters, sick of the system the two had put in place, threw both parties out in the first round. The Socialists were thrown out in name only. A large part of the party’s hierarchy has been able to use the Macron candidacy as a lifeboat. And while it was next to impossible to see how Le Pen would win this time, it was anyone’s guess what French politics would face in the coming years. Maybe some kind of populist uprising. Maybe Le Pen herself would be president in five years’

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time. Consider: On top of her base of 21 percent of the vote, she seemed in a good position to take half the Catholic right (about 10 percent) and half the post-Communist left (another 10 percent), along with a few unaffiliated patriots of various descriptions. That would have placed her above 40 percent. A scandal, an illness, a war, an economic downturn—she would be a hiccup away from the presidency.

Macron, who understood this dynamic better than anybody, is now going to suffer for his successes. He had hoped to turn En Marche from a movement into a party that could replace the Socialists. With a little luck, it might even replace both main parties—since, in the face of populist movements, establishment parties in Western countries have tended to collude rather than compete. France’s legislative elections are next month. Macron insists that politicians who want to run as En Marche candidates must resign their party memberships. Former Socialist prime minister Manuel Valls has already done so. But Macron has inflicted a bit too much damage on Le Pen. Those Gaullists who might have been induced to accept a seat from Macron to fend off a “fascist threat” if the result had been a close-run thing now lack a pretext. There is no fascist threat. At 34 percent, Le Pen may have set a record for her party, but she is not a hiccup away from anything.

The question is whether her party has had its day. The French still mostly hate globalization. She is the most full-throated foe of globalization and the things that come with it: “free markets, hire-and-fire economies, sell-offs, vested interests, and identity politics.” Macron represents those things, which is why he gives even many of his voters the creeps. As Arnaud Leparmentier of *Le Monde* noted, 10 of the 11 candidates in this presidential election, all except Macron, had voted at some point to pull France out of the European Union. The leftist Jean-Luc Mélenchon—a more *salonfähig* anti-globalist than Le Pen—would not endorse Macron over Le Pen. But something has failed in Le Pen’s project of washing away the National Front’s historic traces of anti-Semitism and hostility to the French state. Le Pen is an impressive, intelligent, and sophisticated person. Nationalist she is, and given to jingoistic accounts of France’s role in the world wars, but she gives no evidence of being a bigot.

The problem is that her party has for a long time been an institution for a different kind of person. When at the end of the first round, Le Pen resigned her party chairmanship, there was nothing unusual about that: Since

Charles de Gaulle founded the Fifth Republic, the French presidency has been officially “above party,” and so must its claimants be. Nor was it unusual that she would announce secretary general Jean-François Jalkh, a long-serving party regular, to replace her. What was unusual was Jalkh’s having wondered in a 2000 interview whether Zyklon-B gas was sufficiently toxic to have been used in the Nazi gas chambers. It would be an embarrassment if anyone in the party ruminated in this way—but the *new top guy*? Who would take a risk on such a party?

In private, not even Le Pen herself. Her need to wall herself off from certain of her party’s former leaders must have turned her six years as leader into an endurance test. As government has become more bureaucratic and complicated,

politics has come to require more teamwork. Working out a candidate’s position on, say, the optimum level for eurozone interest rates, or whether France’s retirement age must rise, takes days of work and consultation. Macron, the Socialist Benoît Hamon, and the Republican François Fillon all had entire committees of economic experts working on that stuff. Le Pen had almost no one, save a political consigliere named Florian Philippot. She was winging it, relying on nothing but her ideology and her wits, rather as Donald Trump had done in his campaign. This

made her, like Trump, the single most impressive personality in the race. It also made her operation, like Trump’s, look erratic and reckless to a majority of voters.

And ultimately there was a disconnect between Le Pen and her own voters. Unlike the campaigners in the Brexit referendum, unlike Trump, she refused to address the public’s most visceral fears—about being swamped by millions of immigrants alien to their culture. In fact, she scarcely mentioned immigration at all until the final days. She focused instead on the weaknesses of the euro, the common currency of the European Union, and on the means (a referendum) by which she would extract France from the union. Quite possibly history will absolve her—the euro stands a good chance of collapsing, and bringing the whole European Union down with it. But right now that kind of subject is more useful for filling lecture halls than campaign rallies.

Nor did Le Pen tap into any of the mostly Catholic conservative movements that have arisen since 2013, when President François Hollande’s legalization of gay marriage

Le Pen is the most full-throated foe of globalization and the things that come with it: ‘free markets, hire-and-fire economies, sell-offs, vested interests, and identity politics.’ Macron represents those things, which is why he gives even many of his voters the creeps.

brought millions of protesters into the streets. Le Pen didn't join those protests. Some have blamed Le Pen's advisers for her reluctance to address voters who were there for the taking, but a simpler explanation is this: She is young enough that she cannot see why anyone would care about the definition of marriage. A biography released in February calls her *une bobo chez les fachos*—a yuppie among fascists.

In a sense, Le Pen's inability to convince her father's loyalists is a variation of the tragedy that tribunes of the people have faced in all times and places. When people of distinction have children, they belong to society's elite. This is true even when their distinction comes from attacking elites. We can see it in the United States. Should the Trump presidency end badly, one senses it will have something to do with the fact the president's two most trusted advisers, his daughter Ivanka and her husband, are members of the class that he was brought to power to tame. The people on whom he depends for votes are invisible to the people on whom he depends for advice.

Most of Le Pen's arguments against Macron are more true than not. Macron's plan really is a rattlebag of businessman's bromides from the Reagan era. His solution to everything really is "more Europe," and that really does mean less France. In fact, his manifesto calls for common European budgeting, which would mean the end of France as anything but a local cultural authority.

It is hard to say what Macron stands for, aside from a poorly defined centrism. In the French press lately, centrist means "not Hitler." Macron has taken advantage of this low bar, though his own rhetoric is always strange, often in a Nietzschean way. Those who shrink from the challenges of globalization are weaklings, in his view. He mocked them during one of the debates, chirping: "Oh it's *so* hard, globalization!"—and promised to bring "the real spirit of French conquest" to the international economy. He says everything and its opposite. Pressed during the debate to define his position towards Donald Trump, he said his policy would be in the line of former presidents Charles de Gaulle and François Mitterrand, arch-foes for two decades. "Gaullo-Mitterrandien" was the word he coined for it. This is rather like promising a Nixon-McGovern defense budget or a Bush-Obama approach to the Middle East.

The press was unanimously on his side. One of the debate moderators, Nathalie Saint-Cricq, won the scorn of Le Pen's supporters by cutting her off just as she was laying into Macron about the hypocrisy of running against the record of a government he had served. Two days before

the vote, the En Marche email servers were hacked, leading Rachel Donadio of the *New York Times* to note the breadth of the consensus in deciding not to publish them:

That reticence stretched across the landscape of newspapers in France, regardless of political leaning—including *Le Monde*, the country's leading daily, which generally takes a center-left stance, and the conservative daily *Le Figaro*. Several weekly newsmagazines—the conservative *Le Point*, the centrist *L'Express* and the left-leaning *L'Obs*—also held back.

These shades of left and right are interesting, and all the establishment papers may have had particular reasons for not releasing information damaging to Macron, but it would have been worth mentioning that they all backed him, too.

One would need to cast one's mind back a decade to find a world leader who came to office with such a combination of inexperience and adulation. The risk is that the adulation will give free rein to the inexperience. In the days

after Macron's election he and his representatives took the first steps to carry out his program—the battle against climate change, the "moralization of our public life," parity between men and women in legislative posts, pro-business reforms that are too urgent to await the say-so of a dawdling legislature. What about the traditional preoccupations of the French state? What about democracy?

"The France you are defending isn't France," Marine Le Pen told him at one point in the debate. What person born before 1975 could disagree? The change here might be less ideological than generational. Most of

us have noted the way, in all of our Western countries, the levers of power are slipping from the hands of citizens and into the hands of bureaucrats and businessmen. But we have always had a sense that we can reclaim them any time we want. Surely power eventually comes back into the hands of "the people," to whom it "naturally" belongs. Surely this kind of election, which winds up pitting an unsavory nationalist against a cynical globalist, is just an exception. Right?

We forget that the Cold War has been over for a generation, and it has now been a quarter-century since French voters chose, by a razor-thin majority, to ratify the Maastricht treaty that established the EU. It turns out that when a country surrenders its sovereignty, it launches itself onto a fast-flowing river. France has traveled a long constitutional distance since then. Today there are people in politics who can talk your ear off about "synergy" and "inclusion," but if you tell them about patriotism or freedom of speech they will give you a blank look. The torch has been passed to a new generation, the generation of Macron, who at the time the Berlin Wall fell was 11 years old. ♦



The Expertocracy

What if they don't know as much as they think they do?

BY BARTON SWAIM

It's constantly surprising to me how promiscuously Americans use the term "expert." An expert is someone who has comprehensive knowledge of a subject or total mastery of a skill. We all recognize such people—the guy who repaired my roof last year is an expert, I think, because you can't perform the job better than he did. But the sheer variety of people termed "experts" today is enough to make you ponder the term's meaning. A quick Google News search suggests there are experts on pets, human rights, security, technology, travel, housing, North Korea, climate change, and education. One recent news story began this way: "In authorizing the use of the 'Mother of All Bombs' against ISIS, some experts believe President Trump could be focusing more on making statements than leading policy." The term is meaningless here; no form of specialized skill or mastery of process can enhance the authority of such an unverifiable opinion: The experts' claim would have just as much validity in the mouth of a bartender or hamburger-flipper.

But by the lights of the American news media, ours is a nation teeming with experts of every variety, a nation dominated and governed by experts: an expertocracy. You could probably chart its rise by documenting the spread not of the word *expert*, but of its rough equivalent, the word *professional*. At one time there were only three professions: law, medicine, and the church; the word "profession" signified the solemn declaration or promise you made in order to practice in these fields. Now the term is synonymous with *livelihood* or even *job*. So everybody is a professional—an expert—at the thing he or she happens to do from 8:30 to 5 on weekdays.

Whatever can be studied and done well must also be

Barton Swaim is the author of The Speechwriter: A Brief Education in Politics. He is writing a novel about political consultants.

an area of expertise, a specialized field requiring degrees and licenses and institutional protection. Hence the spread of licensure in most states' regulatory codes. In my state of South Carolina, for instance, there are quiet efforts, which sooner or later will succeed, to require licenses for music therapists and locksmiths, and for decades you've needed a license to earn income by cutting someone's hair. These codes are put in place in the name of "public safety," but many, if not most, are dreamed up by practitioners of these activities—the music therapists and locksmiths and

barbers—simply to limit competition from those willing to perform the services for less money. But what sort of mindset must one adopt in order to believe that your barber should have to be certified by the state before he or she takes scissors to your hair?

Then, of course, there are the universities—institutions that turn out credentialed experts, or pre-experts, in a constantly multiplying array of disciplines and sub-disciplines, many of which were invented solely, it would seem, for the purpose of training experts to train more experts. You can earn postgraduate degrees in public relations, retailing, and risk management. (Risk management is more commonly known as insurance.) You can earn a bachelor's

degree, a master's degree, and a doctorate in a field called hospitality tourism—degrees enabling you to manage hotels with various levels of expertise.

There are a few overlapping phenomena in what I'm describing, all of them more or less regrettable—the rise of credentialism, the hegemony of higher education, hyper-specialization in academic discourse, and so on. Underlying them is the propensity to apply the concept of expertise where it doesn't belong, and concomitantly to trust those deemed "experts," not on a basis of sound arguments or a record of success, but because of an institutional imprimatur.

There's a case to be made that expertise, especially expert knowledge of particular subjects, has come under attack by the forces of postmodern relativism and general



cultural dissolution. Many of us have read with horror the words of apparently literate people—I'm thinking especially of the commenters beneath web articles—who feel no shame in fulminating at length on subjects of which they are utterly ignorant. And then there are the shockingly stupid pronouncements on political subjects by celebrities who show no awareness that those subjects might have more than one dimension. Tom Nichols, a professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College, expressed the apprehensions arising from this unhappy trend in a sharp 2014 essay for *The Federalist* website—"The Death of Expertise"—in which he lamented "a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between professionals and laymen, students and teachers, knowers and wonderers."

So popular was the essay that Nichols turned it into a book, recently published by Oxford University Press under the same title. *The Death of Expertise* is a highly readable and entertaining broadside against a cultural trend toward the rejection, as the author thinks it is, of all forms of expertise. Not coincidentally, Nichols was a fierce critic of Donald Trump from the beginning of his candidacy, and judging from its Amazon sales rankings the book has touched a nerve among people who worry about the new administration's attitude toward experts and professionals.

One problem with Nichols's argument, though, is that he does not distinguish between areas of study and activity that lend themselves to expertise and those that don't. In his introduction, for instance, he explains that the division of labor is what allows our society to produce enormous wealth and complexity and beauty.

While there was once a time when every homesteader lumbered his own trees and built his own house, this not only was inefficient, but produced only rudimentary housing. There's a reason we don't do things that way anymore. When we build skyscrapers, we do not expect the metallurgist who knows what goes into a girder, the architect who designs the building, and the glazier who installs the windows to be the same person. That's why we can enjoy the view from a hundred floors above a city: each expert, although possessing some overlapping knowledge, respects the professional abilities of many others and concentrates on doing what he or she knows best.

Surely, though, there is a categorical difference between expertise in glazing and expertise in, say, foreign policy or housing policy. There is a right way and a wrong way to

mount a glass panel onto a building; the subject admits of very little argument. Maybe there are technical aspects of glazing over which glaziers disagree among themselves, but this is not an area in which there would seem to be a lot of room for views or interpretations or schools of thought. Glaziers don't establish magazines around "isms" or hold conferences with grandiose thematic titles.

It makes sense, in other words, to apply the idea of expertise to tasks that require high levels of technical knowledge and manual skill. But to call a foreign policy official or a sociologist an "expert" sounds like an attempt to cut off an argument. There is an unearned peremptoriness about the word—if he's an expert, who are you to say he's wrong?—and it often fits badly in more abstract and conceptual areas of activity that need argument and counterargument in order to flourish. Government policy is such an area: diffuse and often imprecise and, like a soft science, in need of interpretation and persuasive expression.

It's hard to see how the concept of expertise is appropriate in a field in which the most influential figures consistently take contrary positions. If two "experts" in education policy disagree with each other on fundamental questions, one of them must be basically right, one of them basically wrong. Yet the latter is deemed as much an "expert" as the former:

The news media and our political institutions defer to both of them.

The courts have been forced to grapple with the issue of expertise, since legal battles can quickly degenerate into displays of dueling expert testimony; in *Khumo Tire v. Carmichael* (1999), for example, the Supreme Court unanimously gave judges wider discretion in, as Justice Antonin Scalia put it, excluding "expertise that is *fausse* and science that is junky." In the political sphere, by contrast, it's much harder to place meaningful limits on expert opinion. Indeed, for most Americans, it's hard even to know what expertise is. What they do know is that the entire apparatus of the federal government is run by people with impressive academic degrees and extensive specialized experience—by people who, in 2008, brought the nation to the brink of economic disaster and, over the last half-century, put the government nearly \$20 trillion in debt; by people who were allotted billions for the eradication of poverty but failed to do much of anything beyond the creation of a few expensive and

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inextinguishable government agencies; by people who claimed to know how to lower the cost of medical care but managed to raise it dramatically.

Americans might wonder, understandably, what the point of all this peremptory expertise is supposed to be. They've grown weary of watching highly credentialed experts of all kinds assert major claims about consequential government policies, get those claims spectacularly wrong, and return a few months later to assert yet more claims, their credibility seemingly undiminished.

These people saw and heard something in Donald Trump that, maybe, despite qualms about his obvious failings, they rather liked. They heard someone who, whether he's right or wrong on the point at issue, literally doesn't care what a phalanx of experts says about it. Trump's rise to power is as much an epistemological phenomenon as a political one: an insistence that experts in the realm of policy and politics only have the authority to tell us what the facts are, not how to interpret them. It's a declaration of war on the American expertocracy.

The first stage of the war was Trump's campaign. His was everything political strategists would have told him a winning campaign can't be. Compared to the consultant-driven bid of Ted Cruz, a notoriously disciplined campaigner and strategist, Trump had no strategy other than to get in front of as many people as he could and talk about whatever he wanted to talk about—which was usually something about how the people who've run the United States for a generation were total losers and, all their prestige and smooth talk notwithstanding, didn't know what they were doing.

The Trump campaign, despite all its slapstick zaniness and allegedly catastrophic missteps, made fools of those who claim to be, and derive large incomes from being, experts in the art of politics. The experts got it wrong because—to put it plainly—you can't be an expert in politics. Politics is an area of human activity in which most of the rules of success aren't rules at all because they change from place to place and from day to day; what works at one time for one candidate won't work in any other circumstances. The main requirements to succeed in politics are fortuitous timing (also known as luck), an ability to exploit connections and raise money, and a tacit feel for what voters might respond to at the moment.

Since his victory, Trump has mounted a brutal

assault on Washington's culture of expertise. He's hired some experts, to be sure, but he has also appointed people to key positions who, whatever their capabilities, do not speak the language of the agencies over which they have authority. He has done this, I assume, deliberately. Ben Carson, now the secretary of Housing and Urban Development, never pretended to know much about housing policy. The current secretary of the Department of Energy, former Texas governor Rick Perry, once said he thought the agency should be abolished, so foreign is he to the customs of energy policymaking. Rex Tillerson had

never been a diplomat until he was confirmed as secretary of state. In her confirmation hearings Betsy DeVos, the secretary of education, simply couldn't answer some technical questions about education policy—an inability that horrified many education specialists and news reporters but not, I suspect, most ordinary educated Americans, who, like DeVos, had little idea what the questions meant.

The experts are appalled. This was the theme of a March essay in *Politico Magazine* titled “Trump Takes on The Blob”—“the Blob” being a term for

Washington's foreign policy experts who do things their way and only their way, and whose traditions a succession of presidents have deferred to. Whether Trump will meet even partial success in changing the Blob is unclear, but its members certainly feel he will. They're terrified. One of them, Tom Countryman, a Foreign Service officer with vast experience, was told by the administration to leave his post as acting undersecretary for arms control to the dismay of his colleagues. He delivered a speech at his going away party in which he remarked, as a kind of polite complaint on the way out, that foreign policy professionals should serve the administration if they can, since “a foreign policy without professionals is—by definition—an amateur foreign policy.”

There is a circularity about the remark—professionalism is good and right because it's not its opposite—but it touches on the painful and dangerous part of this revolt against the expertocracy. Expertise, whatever it is, is bound up with experience, and experience is almost always a benefit and rarely in itself a disadvantage. Experience may be less valuable in, say, public health policy or immigration policy, fields dominated, respectively, by stultifying academic jargon and bureaucratic groupthink, but it is extremely



You can't be an expert in politics. Politics is an area of human activity in which most of the rules of success aren't rules at all because they change from place to place and from day to day.

valuable in international diplomacy. In a reaction against experts like the one we are experiencing, however, experienced professionals get thrown out along with the ideological cranks and cant-spouting careerists. As they say in the hyperbolic local car ads, everything must go.

There is more at issue here than policymaking in Washington, though that is the focal point. The expertocracy is a cultural problem as well as a political one. And it's a cultural problem that ordinary Americans have themselves generated and inflamed—we send our children to overpriced universities, well aware that they might not actually learn anything but reasonably happy in the knowledge that they'll at least have credentials conferred on them; we demand licenses for our own fields of work, even as we complain about the high prices that result from excessive licensure in other fields; and we stupidly believe the findings of every university-funded study to come along for the simple reason that this is what the experts say: Coffee is good for you, coffee is bad for you, no, it turns out that coffee is good for you.

Cultural problems can't be solved by tidy and elegant formulas that fit nicely into the concluding paragraphs of essays like this one. They can only be affected by a mass revolt or declaration of war—revolution and warfare being

only clumsy metaphors for the kind of gleeful havoc and antagonism we're witnessing in the Trump movement. There are signs of a revolt outside the political order, too, especially on the home turf of America's expertocracy, higher education. The costs of a college education are rising sharply and have been for two decades, even as college enrollment is incrementally decreasing as many Americans, rightfully dissatisfied with the product, are opting out of the whole system. The higher education "industry" (as it's now frighteningly called) is due for a terrible reckoning.

The experts whose job it is to interpret political trends—the pollsters, pundits, and political scientists—have so far been flummoxed by the meaning of the Trump phenomenon. It's not about policy: Trump has never been clear about what his policies are, and in any case his policy reversals don't seem to bother his supporters. It's not about white supremacy: The election returns don't bear out that thesis, much to many journalists' frustration and disappointment. And only the most tendentious commentators insist Trump's victory was the outcome of Russian election-fixing.

What the experts haven't yet realized is that the Trump phenomenon is ultimately about something quite simple and close to home. It's about *them*. ♦

It's Time to Build

THOMAS J. DONOHUE

PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Shipping goods across the country, powering our factories and stores, trading with other nations—many of the most basic functions of business require efficient infrastructure. It's the physical platform of our economy, yet America's decades-old infrastructure is crumbling. But thanks to new government leaders and a surge in bipartisan support, we now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make progress toward infrastructure modernization. And the business community is ready to help.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has been a long-time advocate for revitalizing and restoring America's infrastructure. We're an original founder of Infrastructure Week, an annual week of nationwide education and advocacy, which kicks off today with an event at Chamber headquarters in Washington, D.C. At this gathering, and throughout the coming debate, the Chamber will urge our leaders to focus on three core priorities for infrastructure modernization.

The first is to undertake major projects that support long-term economic growth by connecting our nation and making it competitive. We should focus on highways, bridges, railways, airports, intermodal connectors, and seaports. We must build pipelines, modernize the power grid, and expand broadband. Many of these projects could take a decade or more to complete. And while they may create some jobs and provide an initial economic boost, their real value will be as long-term investments in our economy—and we should select and manage them accordingly.

Second, any infrastructure reform bill should draw from a diverse toolkit of public and private financing options. Funding and financing should be tailored to each specific project and, where possible, utilize existing federal programs. At the same time, it will be necessary to find a long-term sustainable funding source, particularly for federal highway and transit projects. One idea is a modest increase to the federal gas tax—which President Trump recently expressed an openness to considering.

The third priority is to update regulations and permitting requirements to promote accountability, innovation, and speed. It shouldn't take longer to approve projects than to build them! Moreover, the rulemaking and permitting processes must move quickly to keep up with rapidly advancing technologies, such as autonomous vehicles, that will increasingly impact our 21st century transportation system.

In Washington and across the country, there is a growing consensus that it's time to rebuild America. Few investments would have a greater positive impact on our economy than infrastructure modernization—especially on small and midsize businesses that rely on efficient transportation of goods and reliable access to customers. For businesses, communities, and families, the economic benefit of modernization will be profound. It's time to get it done. We must not let this moment pass us by.



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



Remnants of the Rat Pack: Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra (1988)

How Cool Was That?

Not especially, in retrospect. BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

*I don't blow but I'm a fan.
Look at me swing, ring-a-ding-ding.
I even call my girlfriend 'man.'...*

*Every Saturday night with my suit
Buttoned tight and my suedes on
I'm getting my kicks digging arty French
Flicks with my shades on.*

—“I’m Hip”
lyrics by Dave Frishberg

The first distinction required in treating Joel Dinerstein’s exhaustive—and slightly exhausting—book is that between hip and cool. To be cool is, in Dinerstein’s words, “associated with detached composure as well as artistic

Joseph Epstein, a contributing editor to *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*, is the author, most recently, of *Wind Sprints: Essays*.

The Origins of Cool in Postwar America

by Joel Dinerstein
Chicago, 352 pp., \$40

achievement,” while to be hip “is to be knowledgeable and resourceful,” above all about those who are cool. Something there is a touch uncool about being hip, a camp follower or chronicler of cool. Joel Dinerstein is the hippest of the hip. To paraphrase Dave Frishberg, he was doubtless “hep when it was hip to be hep.”

The Origins of Cool in Postwar America is a lengthy work, 25 years in the making. Its author was curator of a 2014 Smithsonian exhibition called “American Cool” (see “Strike a Pose:

The Unbearable Lightness of Being Cool,” July 28, 2014) and has written *Coach: A Story of New York Cool* (2016), which is not a book about the New York Knicks under Red Holzman but about the luxury brand of purses and leather goods. During the past 15 years he has taught a course on the history of cool at Tulane, and is interested in (as he puts it) “the intersections of modernity and popular culture, race and American music, and literature and ethnicity.” How cool is that? I’ll leave it for you to decide.

A larger, more complex question that Dinerstein’s book raises is: How cool is cool itself? Is the phenomenon of cool at all significant in our day? Was it ever? For Joel Dinerstein, cool is an apotheosis, elevating those who possess it to the secular equivalent of near-divine status.

ERIC RISBERG/AP

The major figures in his cool pantheon are the jazz musicians Lester Young, Miles Davis, and Charlie Parker; the film noir actors Humphrey Bogart, Alan Ladd, and Robert Mitchum; the writers Richard Wright, Jack Kerouac, and Ralph Ellison; the existentialist thinkers Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir; the singers and actors Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Clint Eastwood, and Elvis Presley; and the playwright Lorraine Hansberry, whose career, for Dinerstein, in some ways marks the end of postwar cool.

In its origin, cool was a creation of African-American jazz musicians to face the pressure of Jim Crow arrangements during a time when the United States was an unembarrassedly racist white society. At various points in its history, cool was, in Dinerstein's language, "the aestheticizing of detachment," "an emotional mask, a strategy of masking emotion," "a public mode of covert resistance," "a walking indictment of society," "relaxed intensity" played out through the jazz musician, who was "global culture's first non-white rebel."

The first figure of cool Dinerstein takes up is Lester Young, the great tenor saxophonist. Born in Mississippi, Young met with Jim Crow at its most intense. He later moved on to Kansas City, where he played in Count Basie's orchestra. Drafted during World War II, he was caught with marijuana and booze in his possession and clapped into a brutal Army jail in Alabama, from which, after a year, he was dishonorably discharged.

Lester Young is the first to have invoked the word "cool" to mean "relaxed and under control." Young also used it to apply to a musical aesthetic that Dinerstein describes as combining "flow and understatement, minimalism and relaxed phrasing, deep tone and nonverbal narration." The guitarist B.B. King, greatly influenced by the playing and personal style of Lester Young, called him the "King of Cool." The blues singer Billie Holiday referred to him as "Prez." Dinerstein provides a telling anecdote about Young remarking to the

young drummer Willie Jones III: "You have good technique, Lady Jones, but what's your story?" What he meant, Jones recounted, is that the jazz musician uses music "to project the particular philosophy he subscribes to." Whitney Balliett, that most lyrical of writers on jazz, wrote of Lester Young in performance that "his relation to the band in a solo was that of a migrating bird to a tree: he circled, perched briefly, preened, and moved on; he enhanced the band, but it did not alter him." Every jazz solo, as Dinerstein puts it, "is an artistic transmutation



Lester Young (ca. 1950)

of personal experience processed into sound." Lester Young died at 49, of liver disease and malnutrition brought on by alcoholism.

The incarnation of cool Dinerstein considers after jazz is film noir, those stark movies, some about Western outlaws and urban gangsters, most of them detective stories—many made from Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett novels—whose representative actor was Humphrey Bogart. Cool is of course not a word that the Bogart—or the Alan Ladd or the Robert Mitchum—character in film noir would ever use, let alone call himself; but cool he indubitably was, though in a distinctly different way from the jazz musician's notions of cool.

In his film noir roles, Bogart was usually a private detective, with a dreary office, a furnished room, a sin-

gle suit, and, of course, his ubiquitous fedora, kept on even during fist fights. His form of cool had nothing to do with adapting a mask to confront an unjust society but everything to do with retaining his integrity in a society that was thought to work against integrity itself. The noir films are distinctly short on happy endings: "Well, I'll have some rotten nights after I've sent you over [to the police]," the Bogart/Sam Spade character says to the Mary Astor/Brigid O'Shaughnessy character at the conclusion of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), "but that'll pass." And we are confident that it will. What will remain intact, though, will be Bogie's iron-clad integrity. Cool.

So big was Humphrey Bogart in his day that, Dinerstein reports, Albert Camus was pleased to be told he resembled the actor, not knowing apparently that Bogie wore a hairpiece and, according to Billy Wilder, emitted spittle when he spoke. (Jean-Paul Sartre, I was amused to learn from Dinerstein's book, fantasized that he was Gary Cooper. A better example of what is known as "a stretch" is unavailable.) Camus, who as a member of the French Resistance to the Nazis was a genuine, and not merely a movie, hero, was frequently photographed in the standard film noir trench coat, a half-smoked cigarette pending from his mouth—pure Bogie à la française.

Camus, Sartre, & Co. get a lengthy chapter in *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America*, under the title "Albert Camus and the Birth of Existential Cool." But how cool was existentialism, which had a vogue in the 1950s, a time when American intellectuals looked to France for their cultural enrichment? "Existentialism was a theory," Dinerstein writes, lapsing into the abstraction to which he too often falls victim, "of individual response to both religious hypocrisy and the randomness of the universe, both the failures of European superiority and the collateral damage of corporate capitalism."

As a body of philosophy, if anything so muddled and vague could qualify as such, existentialism "found resonance in the United States with intellectuals, artists, rogue leftists,

college students, theatergoers, and self-conscious rebels.” Existentialism, the philosophy of the absurdity of existence, provided grist for the darkness of Samuel Beckett’s plays, Richard Wright’s later novels (Ralph Ellison thought Wright “had lost himself, his art, and his culture by casting his lot with the alien philosophy of existentialism”), and much of the higher-falutin’ gibberish of Norman Mailer. Dinerstein labors, not entirely successfully, to connect what he calls “an organic American existentialism” to

stein neglects to mention that Sartre was one of the world’s true savant-idiots: one of those brilliant minds that gets all the important things wrong, in his case the beneficence of the Soviet Union, the cure for anti-Semitism, and much else. He was also, in his spare time, an earnest lecher: 5 feet tall, with a bulging right eye and less than scrupulous about hygiene, with Beauvoir’s help Sartre lured various young women into his untidy bed; some first had lesbian affairs with her. Sartre and Beauvoir, though never married, were

literature.” He holds that the literary success of the Beats was due in part to their calling out “the West’s dysfunction: the distinction between its claimed religious precepts and its immoral actions, between its soapbox morality and pragmatic capitalism, between its abstract Enlightenment values and its seeming technological death wish.”

The fact is that the Beats formed no “synthesis for American literature,” and they achieved nothing like a literary success. Taken up by *Time* as gaudy good copy, they belong (as was said of the Sitwells) less to the history of literature than to the history of publicity. Surely no single figure was less cool than the boisterous, needy, publicity-hungry Allen Ginsberg humming Zen mantras in a soiled sheet.

Joel Dinerstein has a regrettably strong taste for abstraction. Such a taste is needed to commit such sentences (and many similar ones pop up in his pages) as “With the temporary evisceration of economic uncertainty came a rejuvenation of national confidence and American triumphalism” and “Here we see the rise of a neoliberal ideology that combines or conflates technological rationalism with a neo-Christian ethos and telos.” He is big on Marxian “commodification” and seems to be much worried about “the consumer society,” as if in the modern world there were any other kind. The words “charisma” and “valorization” get a good workout in his pages, and if I had \$10 for every time Dinerstein uses the word “iconic,” my great-grandchildren would never have to work.

“Frank Sinatra,” he writes, “became the primary avatar of cool renewal for the wartime generation and shifted its cultural imagination from past to future with the onset of national prosperity.” Dinerstein has gathered much amusing material about Sinatra. The bandleader Harry James, for example, wanted him to change his name to “Frankie Satin.” Sinatra became the hero of “swingers”—not an entirely enviable, let alone cool, audience to have in thrall.

“Dean Martin,” Dinerstein writes,



Marlon Brando in *'The Wild One'* (1953)

African-American blues, soul, later jazz, and rock 'n' roll.

Women get short shrift in *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America*. But then, cool is not a standard female quality, nor a much desired (or for that matter needed) one. Dinerstein mentions, almost in passing, Barbara Stanwyck, Lauren Bacall, Lena Horne, and Anita O'Day as exemplars of female cool. He gives more attention to Billie Holiday—first called Lady Day by Lester Young—whose life, much sadder than it was cool, ended when she was 44, cirrhosis her killer.

Simone de Beauvoir is the woman who gets more attention than any other. She and Jean-Paul Sartre were, of course, in Dinerstein’s phrase, “existentialism’s first couple.” But the closer the camera bears in on their lives, the less cool they seem. Diner-

stein thought to have an open arrangement; but in later years her job was to lure young women, students, and others who had fallen under her influence into sexual relations with the troll-like Sartre. They would later recount these adventures in detailed letters to each other. Simone de Beauvoir, in fact, functioned as (in the cant phrase) Sartre’s “enabler.” More precisely, she was his pimp—not cool, not in the least; squalid, rather, sordid in the extreme.

The Beats, for Dinerstein, are notably cool, with Jack Kerouac’s writing, a form of “blowing,” or jazz performance. Dinerstein is high, if such an adjective may be called into service on this subject, on Jack Kerouac. “Kerouac,” he writes, “brought together Zen concepts, jazz practice, blues poetics, and European modernist ideals into a new synthesis for American

“played an equal role in shifting a generation’s ideal from the solitary consciousness of Hemingway’s existential cool to the swinger’s playboy bacchanalia.” On the cool scale, Dean Martin weighs in more heavily than Sinatra: Utterly independent, he genuinely seemed not to have given a rat’s rump about anything. This would include his friend Frank Sinatra’s propensity to suck up to the powerful—the Mafia, the Kennedys, finally the Reagans—which Martin pointed out and claimed simply not to understand. But anyone with any knowledge of Sinatra’s life without a microphone in his hand will find it difficult to think well of him, for the stories of his bullying, his meanness and cruelty, are manifold. “Frank saved my life one night in a parking lot in Las Vegas,” Don Rickles joked. “He said, ‘That’s enough, boys.’”

The next wall in Dinerstein’s gallery of the cool consists of Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Elvis (last name available on request). Cool, in other words, is now to be found in jeans and leather jackets and often seated on motorcycles (*varoom, varoom*). Cool becomes openly, though not very precisely, rebellious. When in *The Wild One* (1953), the Brando character is asked what he is rebelling against, he answers, “Whaddya got?” James Dean’s great breakthrough was in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). The problem, according to Dinerstein, now shifts to “the tensions of [the] inner life.” Cool suddenly has a psychotherapeutic side. Marlon Brando cries in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)—something, surely, Humphrey Bogart never would have done. Dinerstein refers to Brando as “therapeutic man,” noting that, among the cool, “neurosis was no longer suppressed but expressed, a sign of how deeply psychoanalysis had penetrated aesthetic and intellectual communities.”

James Dean and Elvis apparently were in awe of Marlon Brando, as Bob Dylan and John Lennon would come to be of Elvis. Brando and Dean, Dinerstein reports, “were gay icons and had bisexual relationships.” Brando would in later years take on enough weight to pass as Orson Welles’s twin; Elvis ended his days a pillhead nearly

too fat to squeeze into his glittering stage costumes. These new cool rebels did not grow old coolly. James Dean, after appearing in three dud movies (*Rebel Without a Cause, East of Eden, Giant*) made the savvy career move of dying at 24 by crashing his speeding Porsche, and thus allowing Dinerstein to call him “postwar cool’s Keats or Rimbaud”—minus, he neglects to add, the talent. Cool would henceforth remain an option open exclusively to the young.

The strongest chapter in *The Origins of Postwar Cool* is that on Lorraine Hansberry, author of *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), who sounded the buzzer signifying the end of cool. She attacked the Beats, saying “they have made a crummy revolt, a revolt that has not added up to a hill of beans.” She wrote a play, *Les Blancs*, mocking Jean Genet’s *The Blacks* for its ultimate emptiness. And while she was at it, she claimed that Samuel Beckett, Norman Mailer, and Albert Camus, with their literary existentialism, were artistic failures. She felt that the *angst* about the specter of nuclear war, which supposedly affected entire generations, was a fraud: “As a playwright, civil rights activist, and feminist,” Dinerstein writes, “Lorraine Hansberry represents the end of existential cool and the onset of a period of participatory social change often just called the ‘60s.” Perhaps only a black, bisexual woman married to a Jewish husband could have brought all this off.

If one didn’t look too closely at the squalor behind the scenes during his White House days, John F. Kennedy would seem to have qualified as cool. In a famous-in-its-day *Esquire* article, Norman Mailer, who perhaps wrote and said more stupid things than any writer in the past century, styled Kennedy “Superman Comes to the Supermarket.” Dinerstein calls Kennedy’s death “the most transformative” of all in the postwar era. It now begins to look as if all that John F. Kennedy (who preferred to go hatless) transformed was the sale of men’s fedoras.

The hippie revolution was implacably youthful—“Never trust anyone

over 30” was one of its shibboleths—and the heir of the coarser remnants of cool. “In the mid-1960s,” Dinerstein writes,

the mask of cool exploded out of its black and Beat phases [and] the inflection of rebellion moved away from African-American culture towards a new counterculture and its emphasis on drugs, a value on personal authenticity, and an earthier lifestyle.

Yet the leaders of the counterculture—Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis—were not cool in any way that Lester Young, the phenomenon’s inventor, would have recognized.

Dinerstein’s final definition of cool is the muzzy one of “a subconscious method for negotiating identity in modernity through popular culture.” Yet in the realm of popular culture, perhaps the last figures to qualify as cool were Steve McQueen and Paul Newman. Brad Pitt, with his sloppy marriages, certainly isn’t cool, nor is George Clooney. No rapper I know of qualifies as cool, including the fellow who calls himself LL Cool J. Yet, Dinerstein holds,

Cool has not faded, but its meanings have morphed with every generation . . . and to consider or call someone cool remains the supreme compliment of American and global culture—even as it has been nearly emptied of generational and ideological conflict, of artistic risk and vision, of old transgressions and social change.

The Origins of Cool in Postwar America, though written to vaunt the richness of the concept of cool and its possessors, has had, at least on this reader, quite the opposite effect. Apart from those early black jazz musicians who required the mask of cool to face a cruelly hostile world, cool turns out to have been the preoccupation, chiefly, of less-than-first-rate writers, shoddy thinkers, and poseurs generally. Undreamt of in the philosophy of those who have ardently strained after the appearance of cool, courage, kindness, generosity, and natural refinement are the things that are, and always have been, truly cool. ♦

Coming Apart

The stresses and strains of a Europe besieged.

BY MICHAEL M. ROSEN

Do Brexit, unbridled immigration, Russian aggression, and mounting nationalist sentiment augur the imminent end of the European project?

In this well-researched and tightly reported study, James Kirchick presages calamity for the continent if such trends aren't reversed. "We are on the cusp," he cautions, "of witnessing the end of Europe as we have known it for the past seven decades: a place of peace, stability, prosperity, cooperation, democracy, and social harmony." To arrest this descent—no mean feat—Kirchick calls for a restoration of Europe's "muscular liberal center."

Proceeding geographically from east to west, Kirchick begins his journey in Russia, where long-held grievances, economic frustrations, and revanchist ambitions stoked by Vladimir Putin have largely reversed the political and social freedoms inaugurated by Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. One common scapegoat is NATO, whom Putinists and American realists alike finger as a proximate cause of the new Russian military adventurism. But *pace* academics like John Mearsheimer and pop-foreign-policy types like Thomas L. Friedman, Kirchick posits that "the enlargement of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe has been one of the few unmitigated success stories of American foreign policy as it consolidated democracy and security on a continent once scarred by total war."

Few nowadays recall that Gorbachev once waxed poetic about the Soviets' joining the "common European home" and that Yeltsin sought

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

The End of Europe
Dictators, Demagogues,
and the Coming Dark Age
by James Kirchick
Yale, 288 pp., \$27.50



James Kirchick

Russian entry into "greater Europe." Yet Vladimir Putin, presiding over a "criminal regime," in Kirchick's memorable phrasing, "whose idea of peaceful coexistence includes coercion and invasion of its neighbors," has forsworn Europe, or at least any version of the continent's democratic values recognizable to the West. Instead, in his quest to restore his country's glorious past, Russia's strongman has deployed martial might, cyberweapons, and disinformation techniques to destabilize former Soviet republics militarily and politically and, more broadly, to "sow confusion and defeatism in the West by poking holes in its narratives while ridiculing and upending the very notion of objective truth."

Things are hardly better among the old Warsaw Pact countries, where memories of 1989 and the liberal trans-

formation it promised have faded fast.

From Hungary's reactionary Fidesz party and its charismatic, irredentist prime minister Viktor Orbán, to Poland's upstart Law & Justice faction, to the populist leaders of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Central European nationalism and hostility to liberal Western values are ascendant, with many former Soviet satellites now relapsing into a Russian embrace. Even Germany—lately given to outrage at American spying, reluctance to participate in certain NATO exercises, and energy deals with Gazprom—has found it difficult to resist Russia's gravitational pull, as its traditional (though never fully rooted) *Westbindung* gradually yields to a nostalgic revival of *Ostpolitik*. Kirchick attributes this trend to Germans' "utopian yearning for neutrality," a dangerous and unrealistic ambition in today's turbulent foreign policy world.

Liberal European values also find themselves under attack by the ever-growing menace of Islamism, which takes many forms. Postmodern multiculturalism has hollowed out these values, just as a newly assertive political Islam fills the void from Scandinavia to Sicily. Meanwhile, seemingly uncontrolled Muslim immigration has inflamed nativism throughout Europe, thus empowering extremists and fraying bonds between allies. As Kirchick correctly observes:

Rising support across Europe for xenophobic, populist parties is partly the result of a constricted political discourse in which decent, ordinary people are told not only that plainly visible social phenomena don't exist but also that voicing concerns about these allegedly nonexistent phenomena is racist. By stifling discussion on questions related to migration and national identity, European elites have only fed the monster they hope to destroy.

Europe's surge in Islamic fervor, nationalist backlash, and illiberal reaction, coincides (not surprisingly) with a spike in anti-Semitism. Ever the canary in the coal mine, Europe's Jewish population has endured intensifying physical and social threats that have inspired many Jews—most

prominently in France—to migrate to friendlier climes, thereby further impoverishing the culture of the societies they flee. “Assailants first struck at symbols of free speech and then at Jews,” Kirchick notes, describing attacks like the *Charlie Hebdo*-Hypercacher massacres two years ago, “a bloodily and unambiguous signal that the fates of European liberty and Jewry are inextricable.”

Meanwhile, across the English Channel, British integration with Europe finds itself increasingly imperiled not only from the right, by Nigel Farage and his stunningly successful Brexit campaign, but also from the left, by Jeremy Corbyn’s radically remade Labour party—which Kirchick labels “a personality cult” and “the most influential anti-Semitic institution in the Western world,” following a scandal of viciously anti-

Israel screeds by many notable party members. (For the record, Kirchick isn’t exactly enamored of the EU itself: He considers it, with apologies to Winston Churchill, “the worst system of governing Europe”—apart from all the others.)

Yet not content merely to be the Eeyore of European decline, Kirchick remains hopeful that the continent can cohere around core principles, even if such unity requires sharply curtailed levels of immigration and a more “cohesive and robust” approach to Russia and foreign policy in general.

He also insists, contrary to some in the Trump administration, as well as its critics, that “the values and interests uniting Americans and Europeans are far more numerous, and of greater import, than anything which divides us.” Let us hope he’s correct. ♦

is castigated for his privilege, an appeal to diversity can’t be far behind—in this case “a testament to sleep’s amazing diversity.” Reiss is a literature professor, so he guides us through the historical attitudes to sleep via literary examples. The result is that much of the book is only indirectly about sleep. We are treated to lengthy passages on topics as disparate as the life of Henry David Thoreau, the history of coffee-houses, and Victorian anxieties over childhood masturbation.

More than a quarter of *Wild Nights* is devoted to children, and how their sleep has been arranged and theorized. A child’s sleep, like every other aspect of the infant’s life, is a locus of anxiety among the privileged classes, and Reiss guides us through some of the conflicting advice in today’s growing library of books telling parents they’re doing it wrong.

Much of the counsel is focused on the goal of having children sleep through the night, in their own bed. Herding little Timmy offstage so that Mom and Dad can open a bottle of wine and watch HBO is a standard of middle-class life, although Reiss is keen to point out that historically, Timmy would have been in his parents’ bed—or at least, on the floor nearby. Putting children in their own beds, away from parents, is an artifact of the industrialized West. No doubt this is true, but I came away unconvinced that this makes it undesirable.

Reiss takes the view that co-sleeping—this has a blurry definition, meaning either sharing a bed or just sharing a room—is healthier, at least in training people to sleep despite noises and interruptions around them. He apparently learned this when staying on a kibbutz in the 1980s, where the young people had been raised in a dormitory, sleeping away from their parents. How much this system sprang from ideas of how children sleep best (as opposed to how to best rationalize the group’s child-care situation) is unclear. It also encouraged the peer group to bond, which was part of the kibbutz’s aim. But it was hardly original: Raising children away from their parents as a



Call It Sleep

Culture and biology unite to yield slumber.

BY KATRINA GULLIVER

Some years ago, I read Roger Ekirch’s *At Day’s Close*, a book about the history of sleep. Ekirch discovered that before the arrival of artificial light, English people had customarily had two sleep periods each night. People retired soon after dusk, and rose again at dawn. But their nights were divided into two sleeps, with a waking interval between.

I became curious, and found to my amazement that I could trigger the pattern in myself. I went to bed earlier, and suddenly waking at 2 A.M. wasn’t a source of anxiety, but an opportunity. I would stay awake for an hour or two, reading or musing, then sleep again till rising for work. I was stunned by the

Katrina Gulliver is the author of Modern Women in China and Japan: Gender, Feminism and Global Modernity Between the Wars.

Wild Nights
*How Taming Sleep
Created Our Restless World*
by Benjamin Reiss
Basic Books, 320 pp., \$28

ease with which my body slipped into this rhythm, my DNA recalling the lives of the weavers and wheelwrights of Ekirch’s study.

So I was interested to read *Wild Nights*, which Ekirch has praised. In it, Benjamin Reiss sets out to chart the Anglo-American cultural history of sleep.

In his introduction, Reiss talks about privilege. He writes from the perspective of the privileged, educated classes who make up his readers, those who have the luxury of worrying about their sleep practices. Of course, it is axiomatic that the moment a reader

form of social engineering goes back to the Spartans.

In the American middle classes, it hasn't been common for children to share beds for over a century, but it was normal until quite recently to share a bedroom with a same-sex sibling. Today, even boarding schools and colleges are less likely to offer shared rooms or dorms in favor of private bedrooms—another contributing factor in spiraling college costs. If Timmy has grown up with a private bed and bath, he's not inclined to settle for a four-bed dorm and a shower down the hall.

We grow up sleeping in our own space, and as adults, we have to train ourselves to cope with a partner's snores, flailing legs, or blanket-stealing. Perhaps true "privilege" is not even having to do that: A recent *Wall Street Journal* story detailed the trend towards houses with two master bedrooms.

Yet our sleep is more disrupted than ever, by round-the-clock job demands and various glowing screens messing up our brains. Reiss demonstrates that sleep advice, and sleep anxiety, also emerged with industrialization. To think of sleep much at all—let alone worry about whether you're doing it correctly—is a luxury indeed, and one not afforded to many in human history. Sleep is one more human process, like eating, drinking, and sex, that can be dissected and advised upon, creating anxiety about facets of our lives that our ancestors would barely have considered.

Meanwhile, we don't do enough exercise or manual labor to fall into our beds exhausted, for a well-earned rest. Sleep as a luxury that ought to be *earned* has long been part of the Protestant worldview, but it's something Reiss barely hints at in his study. Nonetheless, the Christian moral framework—sloth as deadly sin, early rising as a moral duty—still lingers in the background of our attitudes to sleep. Telling late-slumbering children to get up because they are "wasting the day" conveys the belief that any wakeful activity is a more "worthy" way of spending our time than sleeping. Even as we understand that sleep is a neces-

sary biological process, we think of it, on some level, as a self-indulgence that willpower can resist and admire high achievers who can get by on five hours a night.

According to one study cited here, not everyone has the same built-in sleep chronometer. But that doesn't stop us judging. And our sleep anxiety itself is a sign of our advanced, privileged neurosis. As Reiss demonstrates, we are not that far from the Victorian view that insomnia was a sign of intellectual activity or emotional delicacy: Only dullards slept like logs.

Nor did all pre-industrial societies sleep in the same way as those early-modern English people of Roger Ekirch's research. Climate affects our sleep cycles as much as ambient light, and tropical communities slept differently from those in northern Europe. As Reiss himself acknowledges, a single platonic ideal of sleep may be a chimera: How humans slumber has always been culturally and environmentally contingent. But we can exercise our privilege to read books like this, and learn more about what sleep meant at other times. ♦

BCA

Circus at Sunset

What we will miss when the Big Top leaves town.

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

On May 21, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus will perform for the very last time, ending a 146-year run. As of this writing, you can still buy tickets on the Internet for some of the final shows at various East Coast venues. The Ringling website also features a photo of a dazzlingly costumed female performer perched on the hooked trunk of an elephant—which is odd, because you won't be seeing any elephants at any of those final shows. The pachyderms gave their last performance on May 1, 2016, retiring more than a year before the rest of the circus thanks to more than three decades of pickets, protests, videos, outraged letters, and lawsuits on the part of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. PETA takes single-handed credit for shutting down Ringling Bros. for good—although dwindling ticket sales owing to entertainment competition are a more obvious cause.

When I saw the posters—elephant-

less but crammed like vintage circus posters of yore with images of trapeze fliers, ringmasters, lions, and clowns—on a subway train in February, I was filled like a swimming pool with nostalgia. I'd been a 10-year-old fourth-grader the last time I'd seen a Ringling circus. So when my husband bought us tickets to see the circus at Washington's downtown Verizon Center as a birthday present for me, and we rolled up in a taxi to a street jammed with parked trucks vividly decorated with circus adverts, I was thrilled.

During the early 1950s—I'm that old—the circus still performed outdoors in an enormous, glorious canvas tent—the big top—blazoned with pennons like the site of a medieval jousting tournament. My father had pulled my two younger sisters and me out of school for the afternoon, something almost unheard of in those conscientious days before weeklong family jaunts to Walt Disney World smack in the middle of a semester became the norm.

Under the big top, while we glued our lips together with tufts of cotton candy, a literal, not a metaphorical,

Charlotte Allen is a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

three-ring circus unfolded: human pyramids of acrobats at one end, bare-back horseriders at the other, while in the center ring a top-hatted, tail-coated ringmaster barked a terrifying spectacle in which a bare-chested, whip-flicking wild-animal tamer persuaded lions and tigers to leap from one pillar to another. Trapeze artists swung overhead, and painted and bewigged clowns piled in and out of cars high-tailing it along the periphery of all three rings.

There really *was* sawdust on the floor of the mammoth big top, and there really *was* a rancid fake-buttery smell of popcorn hanging in the tented air. The only thing we didn't get to see that afternoon was the freak side-show—discontinued by Ringling Bros. during the late 1960s—because my father didn't think that tattooed midguts and bearded ladies were suitable entertainment for children.

My circus imagination had been formed by one of my favorite childhood movies, Cecil B. DeMille's Best-Picture-winning *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), in which—besides an all-star cast that included James Stewart, Cornel Wilde, Betty Hutton, Dorothy Lamour, and a late-twenties Charlton Heston warming up for his starring part in that other DeMille classic, *The Ten Commandments* (1956)—the 1,400 performers of the Ringling Bros. 1951 circus played central roles. They weren't simply background extras; they *were* the Greatest Show on Earth, without whose presence in supporting roles the plotlines acted out by the Hollywood star performers would have looked silly and meaningless.

All 1,400 of those troupers, or some approximation thereof, were still around for the Ringling circus I saw as a child a few years later, and the sheer hugeness of the cast was what made for the dizzying three-ring experience in which it was impossible to take in any one act in its entirety at any given moment. A Heisenberg principle of showmanship was at work, creating a near-magical effect of continuous, varying motion.

Because of the sheer size of the Ringling cast, and the logistical dif-



ficulties of moving all of its employees—plus hundreds of animals and more than 100 rail cars along the circus touring route, which then as now involved its own mile-long trains—the Ringling circus, a creature of the merger of smaller circuses, some of whose origins dated back to the 1870s, had been in a continuous state of financial difficulty since the Depression, which shrank its audience drastically. As early as 1956 it abandoned the big top to perform in fixed locations (typically sports arenas like the Verizon Center) where it could save money by not having to erect its own tent and build its own grandstands. There was a series of sales and resales, with the Mattel toy company briefly owning the circus during the 1970s. (It currently belongs to Feld Entertainment, based in Ellenton, Florida, near the circus's longtime headquarters in Sarasota. There hasn't been a Ringling family owner since 1967.)

Furthermore, the Ringling circus has been badly bruised by what I call the Cirque du Soleil effect. Cirque was started during the 1980s by Montreal street buskers, and it has to this day all the features that marked its mime origins: fey costumes, acts

distinguished as much by their artness as by their performers' acrobatic skills, and a continuous story line to give each of its spectacles a unified "theme." Cirque's clowns were more redolent of classic Continental *commedia dell'arte* than of Ringling's brash and broad-brushed—and thoroughly American—caricatures, such as the "Weary Willie" hobo created by Emmett Kelly (1898-1979), the most famous clown in Ringling's history.

Cirque did away with the Ringling "rings," and it also did away with animals, so there were never PETA problems. Pitched at upmarket urban types who consider themselves a notch more sophisticated than the Middle American rustics who constituted Ringling's core audience throughout much of its history, Cirque, which now has a permanent presence in Las Vegas, has given Ringling a run for its money.

The Ringling circus I saw at the Verizon Center was a duly reduced affair, downsized to perhaps 500 performers and crew members in all, and featuring just a single ring plus some side entertainments. An obviously Cirque-inspired story line titled "Out of This World," and involving spaceships, planets, and a wicked

intergalactic queen, seemed hokey and superfluous. Cringeworthy jokes by ringmaster Johnathan Lee Iverson could seem funny only to the hordes of glowstick-waving children in the audience, and a clown act of basketball players on unicycles stretched out for what seemed like light years.

Still—I admit it—I was dazzled. That was because, at its core, Ringling had managed to preserve intact the virtuoso human spectacles that make a circus a circus: trapeze swingers, high-wire walkers, pyramids of acrobats atop pairs of horses galloping the ring at 25 miles an hour. Hand-walking contortionists displayed in silvery globes descended from the ceiling. Eight brilliantly clad motorcyclists zipped around the inside of a giant steel-mesh ball just inches away from each other. Big-cat tamer Alexander Lacey coaxed

tricks out of at least a dozen lions and tigers, and a herd of performing dogs, donkeys, llamas, and pigs almost (although not quite) made up for the missing elephants.

And that's what strikes me as saddest about the imminent demise of Ringling Bros.: These were superbly skilled athletes carrying on acrobatic traditions dating back thousands of years of human history. You can see their counterparts somersaulting along the backs of bulls on the frescoes at Knossos, and on one of the facades of the 12th-century Rouen Cathedral a stone-carved Salome dances on her hands for the head of John the Baptist. These dozens of talented performers will soon be out of work—and where will they go? Something more than the greatest show on earth may well be dying. ♦

good old days, when women cooked and cleaned while men sat on porches and spat.

A revival of the sedan chair would be an even greater boon to the American economy. The sedan chair, as every English schoolboy used to know, is a type of litter: i.e., a wheel-less human-powered vehicle that carries a person from one place to another. The sedan chair, mounted on poles, is carried by four porters known as "chairmen." Various kinds of litters (known as palanquins in France and India) were popular in the ancient world and were popular until a hundred years ago in South and East Asia. But they were never popular here, which is a shame because they make a great deal of sense as a vehicle for urban use. They are easily manipulable in traffic; they emit no exhaust fumes; and they don't make any noise (except for an occasional grunt). Clean energy! Best of all, their resurrection would provide jobs for thousands of strong young Americans who lack the skills or interest to sit in an office and stare at a computer screen all day.

Surely there are other dead products that could be resurrected, giving a boost to the American economy. What about the antimacassar? It is a cloth that was placed over the backs or arms of chairs, or the head or cushions of a sofa. It was popular in Victorian and Edwardian times because so many men used greasy macassar oil on their hair. That oil no longer is used, but some men still use greasy stuff to make their hair look good—and so do some women. Let's bring the antimacassar industry back! And what about service jobs that have been phased out? New Jersey still has gas station attendants. Why can't all states have them? Why not bring back movie theater ushers, restroom attendants, and itinerant peddlers who sharpen knives?

To make America great again we cannot only support dying industries. We need an imaginative industrial policy that includes tax breaks for dead industries and services, but only those that are labor intensive and good for the environment. Spittoons and sedan chairs, which meet both criteria, are a start. ♦



A Modest Proposal

In the Trump economy, everything old can be new again. BY **STEPHEN MILLER**

In his address to Congress, President Trump promised that "dying industries will come roaring back to life." I think the president should be even more ambitious: He should seriously consider bringing back industries and services that have already died. And I can think of two "dead" products that would create thousands of jobs and also improve the environment if they were resurrected: spittoons and sedan chairs.

Spittoons—aka cuspidors—were once mainstays at hotels, offices, train stations, and banks. You can find references to them in the novels of Mark Twain, Henry James, and William Dean Howells. Oscar Wilde was

amazed by America's spitting culture: "America is one long expectoration," he remarked during a speaking tour. But spittoons disappeared in the 1930s, which is a shame because American men have no place to spit except in toilets and sinks (few carry handkerchiefs or tissues).

To be sure, the need to spit was more urgent in the days when so many men chewed tobacco; but every man (and every woman!) needs to spit occasionally. According to the latest scientific studies, it's unhealthy to swallow phlegm, and it's not gross to spit in public if it's done discreetly by sidling up to a spittoon and letting go. Nowadays people spit on sidewalks or out car windows. Disgusting. But the revival of spittoons would create thousands of manufacturing jobs. Would spittoons sell? I think they would. Americans like products that remind them of the

Stephen Miller is the author, most recently, of Walking New York: Reflections of American Writers from Walt Whitman to Teju Cole.

Go With It

The willing suspension of disbelief is mandatory here.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

This discussion of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* will feature spoilers, so I don't want to hear any whining from any of you nerds. Read on, or don't; I get paid either way. Anyway, if you do complain, you're being silly because (a) this movie isn't a mystery, and (b) there aren't really any big "reveals" that will "change everything you've believed" about the *Guardians of the Galaxy* movies.

First of all, the new *GotG* is only the second one, and let us recall that the original *GotG* was a joyous and lovable surprise back in 2014 not because of its plot (which I can barely remember) but because of the memorable characters it created and the tone of devil-may-care insouciance that succeeded in keeping a multiplanet space opera as fleet as Donald O'Connor pratfall-dancing throughout "Make 'Em Laugh."

The sad thing about *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* is that it's just not that much fun—which is a problem, because movies like this should be fun, especially when the first one practically defined the word "fun." The galactic fixer Peter Quill (Chris Pratt) is back, along with the warrior Gamora (Zoe Saldana), the strongman Drax (Dave Bautista), the hyper-intelligent squirrel Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper), and the sentient tree called Groot, now regressed into an adorable sapling.

In the first movie, we watched them begin as antagonists, become allies, and end as beloved friends—and it was surprisingly touching and involving. This time, though, writer-

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2

Directed by James Gunn



director James Gunn has them fighting throughout. They seem to have forgotten that they even remotely like each other. They squabble and annoy and irritate one another; the whole thing is uncomfortably like eavesdropping on a squabbling family at the next table at the Cheesecake Factory. You just want them to shut up and eat the nachos, already.

Indeed, Gunn has apparently decided that since they are not really friends but "family"—a word deployed peculiarly here, as in the *Fast and Furious* movies, to describe people with no familial connection whatever—they should display as much dysfunctionality as possible. And that's where his bizarre plot kicks in. For the beating heart of the action of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* is nothing less than patricide.

The father who has to be killed off is Peter Quill's. The first movie began with Quill as a 12-year-old boy being stolen away from Earth just after his mother has died from brain cancer, hallucinating about his absent father being a creature of pure light. Well, it turns out that his father is a living planet who looks like Kurt Russell (just go along with it) who wants to destroy the universe entirely. He's called Ego, by the way, in case you like subtlety.

For some reason, Ego needs more power to do the job, and so he locates Peter and brings him to his planet, even though he *is* the planet. (I told you to go with it, so shut up.) Of

course, Ego doesn't tell Peter his aim, but Peter's friends figure out that Ego is up to no good when they find tens of thousands of skeletons in a cave on Ego's planet—which is, of course, actually Ego himself, so how he lets them find the skeletons isn't clear. (I know, I'm supposed to go with it, so *I'll* shut up.) Then Ego reveals (for no good reason) that he gave Quill's mother brain cancer (for no good reason) and therefore killed her (for no good reason).

So now Quill wants to kill Ego, and when he figures out Ego's scheme, it's his duty to kill Ego. And he does it with relish in a scene that will bother me even more when I am compelled to take my children to see this dud of a picture about which they are very excited because they so loved the first one, as did I. I don't want to give them any ideas is what I'm saying.

Oh, and if *that's* not enough patricide, another character gets to deliver a monologue about how *she* wants to kill her father—she has good cause because he kept cutting off various limbs of hers and replacing them with machinery—and is going to make it her life's mission to do so. So now we have not one but two patricides to contend with.

James Gunn tries to deflect this odd kill-the-father fixation of his by having Quill discover that while Ego is his genetic father, his *real*, emotional father is the intergalactic Mafioso named Yondu (Michael Rooker, terrific here as in the first) who stole him from Earth at Ego's direction. Yes, I know: In 21st-century America, your family is the family you assemble, not the family you were born into; but since Quill spent years thinking Yondu might *eat* him, he should probably not be as upset as he is when Yondu buys it at the end of the picture.

When it comes time to make the third *Guardians of the Galaxy* movie, maybe James Gunn could just have Chris Pratt and the green lady and the tattooed guy and the squirrel and the tree try to steal stuff, and then save the universe pretty much by accident, the way the whole business started.

Make 'em laugh, Gunn. ♦

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

“Former president Bill Clinton and best-selling author James Patterson are collaborating on a political thriller called *The President Is Missing*, to be released in June 2018.”

—Washington Post, May 8, 2017

PARODY

THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING

because it was clear now that the FBI needed some serious help. The president was missing... and there was only one man who could find him.

Robert Madison Clifton left the White House a hero twenty years earlier. Bob, as he was known to his many friends, cut a dashing figure: tall, athletic, with a dusting of silver in his full head of dark hair. He looked every bit the commander in chief he had been for those eight prosperous years back in the 1990s. President Clifton had taken a struggling nation and returned it to its former glory. And as that glory slowly faded over the next two decades, the people longed for his return to power.

But that life was no more. Despite the wishes of the people, the Constitution prohibited another term. And besides, he was enjoying his new life as a citizen after eight years of endless headaches in the White House. Bob lived a quiet existence now, playing golf, writing books, and spending quality time with his wife, Olympic beach volleyball player Vanessa Clayborne.

Clayborne, of course, was his second wife. And while she was quite well-known, the whole world knew his first wife, the noted entomologist Edna Coldsnoogle, as well as all the details of their marriage. Edna had always stood by his side, despite the machinations of Bob's political opponents. There were always rumors of affairs, of amorous liaisons with movie stars and supermodels. It was easy to believe, what with Bob's looks and charm and power. Indeed, what beautiful woman wouldn't be drawn to such a man? But Edna knew in her heart what all the Beltway gossipmongers didn't: that through it all, Bob was always true to her.

Tragically, however, Bob's life had been turned upside down ten years earlier, when Edna was hit by a bus and died instantly

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