the weekly Standard

THE SUICIDE OF MERITOCRACY
HARVEY MANSFIELD

So You Want to Be a Social Media Star

DAVID DEVOSS on summer camp for aspiring online celebrities

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Contents

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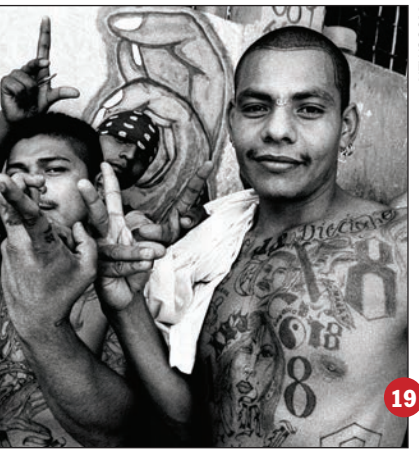
2


NEWSCOM
19


22


26

Articles

Feature

Books & Arts

COVER BY GARY LOCKE

Of Corn Cribs and Soybean Sandals

"The battle to feed all of humanity is over." The opening line to Paul Ehrlich's 1968 jeremiad *The Population Bomb* is a sober one. "In the 1970s the world will undergo famines—hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death."

Ehrlich wasn't alone in his doom and gloom. The decade saw a gaggle of hippie professors mustering to announce that the extinction of the human race was imminent.

Fast forward to 2017. The human race is still here. Not only has worldwide famine failed to materialize, but we now have more food than we know what to do with. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that American farmers are struggling to cope with record surplus crops. Demand is high, but it can't keep up with a superabundance of corn and soybeans.

In response to this crisis (a pleasant one, as crises go), farmers are looking for alternative uses for their products. Food scientists have turned the cornucopia into everything from seat cushions to moisturizers to mattresses.

Just lie back and think of crop subsidies.

Reebok now makes sneakers from corn and Lego is considering molding toy blocks from corn and wheat.

Meanwhile, vast amounts of corn are converted to fuel. Currently, 38 percent of American corn gets turned into ethanol, up from less than 1 percent in 1980. Research for how crops could replace petroleum has been given new urgency by the current surplus.

And it's not just corn and beans—a month ago, the government bailed out the blueberry industry by purchasing $10 million worth of surplus berries, the second such purchase in as many years. Obviously, those giant blueberry muffins at Starbucks aren't nearly big enough.

Such are the problems of plenty—the sort of problems that Ehrlich failed to anticipate. In the face of dire warnings from enviro-scolds, it's always worth remembering that one of the wrongest men ever was an enviro-scold.

Wild predictions of eco-apocalypse make for a good fright, but they usually don't amount to a hill of soybeans. ♦

Boy, Oh Boy

The Scrapbook is far too jaded and worldly wise to be shocked by the article in the *Washington Post* headlined "Transgender man gives birth to baby boy." But we were taken aback by one outrageous, insensitive, gender-autonomy-denying detail: The poor infant is called a "boy." How could they possibly know? It's not like they were able to ask xer. Once the child can talk, xe will make xer preferences known. But why "assign" a gender in the first place? It's an insidious act to impose society's outmoded binary construct on children, who should have total freedom of gender fluidity. What could possibly have led these parents, who should know better, to call their child a "boy"? They and the *Washington Post* should be ashamed for harboring such retrograde attitudes. ♦


Transgender man gives birth to baby boy. 'Love is possible,' he says. So is 'being a loving family.'

By Derek Hawkins August 2 at 6:25 AM

Transgender man gives birth to baby boy

Play Video 1:38

Parents Trystan Reese, left, and Biff Chaplow in the Post

It's Baaack

Google Glass, the wearable robot eyeglasses rejected by consumers as a creepy invasion of personal privacy, has quietly been making a comeback, *WIRED* reports. Developers have made sure to keep their progress a secret this time, perhaps cowed by the proper thrashing they received from Matt Labash in these pages ("Through a Google Glass, Darkly," April 28, 2014).

Glass, now named Glass EE (Enterprise Edition), has found a use on factory floors. Though just as charmingly borg-like as its predecessor, Glass EE is a professional tool. What was once an irritating plaything for the social media crazed

TOP: TWS PHOTO ILLUSTRATION; FIGURE AT TOP, BIGSTOCK

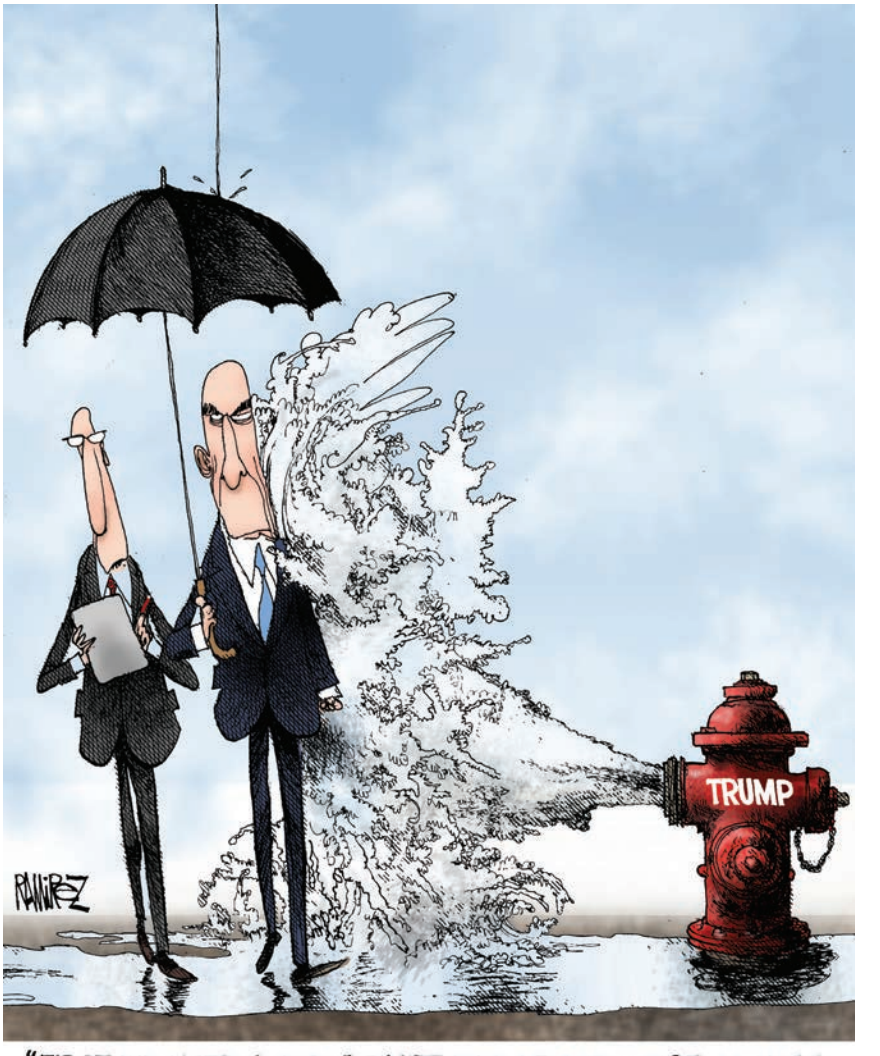
has been repurposed for people on the job who need real-time information, hands-free.

General Electric says warehouse workers who use the devices are 46 percent more efficient, helping to avoid the need to automate more jobs. "There's been concern about machines replacing human workers," the company reports. Their experience "shows that, for many jobs, combinations of human and machine outperform either working alone." Which sounds like a rare bit of good news for the endangered American worker, a way to stay relevant in this brave new world, with such robots in it.

Glass EE still has the potential to be creepy. There are doctors who have taken to wearing the spectacles, live-streaming their patient examinations to medical transcriptionists halfway around the world. Supposedly this frees them to spend less time on data entry and more meaningful face-to-face time with sick people. And no doubt everyone's quite confident that all that live-streamed personal information is 100 percent secure and fully hardened against hacks. Yes, quite confident indeed.

Relax—it's only Google.

Astro Teller, head of the division in charge of the project at Google's parent company, Alphabet, has said "none of us have given up on the idea that over time Glass will become less and less intrusive, and that more and more people will use it." Or perhaps, more and more people won't have a choice but to wear the nasty things. Will the only way to beat the machines be to become one yourself? ♦



"FIRST, WE NEED *to* DO SOMETHING ABOUT THESE LEAKS."

You're Retired!

The *Washington Post* outdid itself last week in the dog-bites-man department, trumpeting one of those yawn-inducing nonevents that have come to be hyped in the age of the Trump resistance. Here's the ballyhooed breaking news item: A longtime EPA employee is retiring. Yes, that's the story. Elizabeth Southerland, after a 30-year career at the Environmental Protection Agency, is retiring from her $250,000-a-year job. She'll now be eligible for government retirement benefits.

"68-year old bureaucrat retires" rivals "worthwhile Canadian initiative" in the boring headline sweepstakes. But, give her some credit, Southerland made her routine retirement a significant national event. How? You guessed it—by blasting Donald Trump. So now it's big news.

"EPA won't be able to do the 'right thing' under Trump, says latest protesting official," read the *Post*'s headline. On announcing her departure, Southerland criticized the president's proposed budget, which slashes funding for the EPA. Of course, his budget hasn't taken effect—and has almost no chance of ever being implemented. And lest we forget our elementary civics, it is Congress that writes budgets.

As for Southerland's courageous protest? She may have left federal

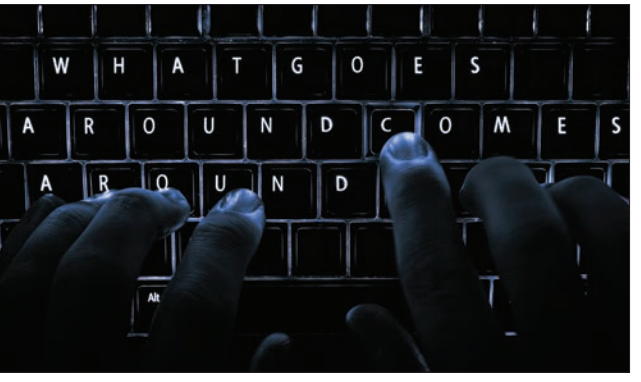
BOTTOM: TWS PHOTO ILLUSTRATION; FIGURE AT BOTTOM, BIGSTOCK

employ but didn't leave behind her nice, fat government pension. Brave, brave stuff, that. ♦

Leaving Their Mark

Maybe those ever-so-secretive Russian hackers aren't nearly as clever as we, or they, thought.

A 2011 presentation by Canada's NSA equivalent described the Russian hacking system MAKERSMARK as "designed by geniuses" but "implemented by morons."



According to the report, recently obtained by the *Intercept*, Canadian counterintelligence was able to trace a slew of online attacks to Russia despite the hackers' sophisticated system of track-covering countermeasures. This was because while they were online, the hackers also checked personal email and social media accounts. Canadian officials were able to determine individual hackers' "interests" and "hobbies."

They were so compromised they fell victim to the worldwide "Gumblar" botnet virus in 2009, which pushed pharmaceutical spam.

The Scrapbook likes to imagine what sort of messages the Kremlin's computer guerillas had to wade through each morning before settling in to a long day of spear-phishing Western politicos and businesses: "Boris! Click here to lern the 7 secrets makers of Viagra are not wanting you to know." And "Ivan! Your AOL account has being compromatized! Click here to log on at AOL.kp for resetting of passwerd." ♦

Must Viewing

Don't miss the latest edition of "Conversations with Bill Kristol," in which The Weekly Standard's editor at large engages economist and *TWS* contributing editor Irwin Stelzer in a far-ranging discussion on politics, culture, and, as one might expect, economics.

Stelzer is skeptical of modern mathematical economics: "I snuck out of graduate school before the wave of mathematics," he says of his days at Cornell University.

His remarks on climate change are particularly refreshing and suggest a way of thinking about the question that is more practical than what one is likely to get from the true believers: "They think they are right, they *know* they're right. I think I am right, but I am not sure I am right," Stelzer says. "So then the question is, what policy is appropriate that will do the least damage if I am wrong?"

Stelzer takes note of the growing societal problems of income inequality and limited upward mobility. But not being a doom and gloom man, Stelzer reminds us, "This is the greatest economic system ever invented. Not because of the goods and services it produces, but because of the freedom that it has produced that is associated with it."

Watch the whole interview online at ConversationswithBillKristol.org. ♦

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BPA WORLDWIDE

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New Yorkers

Enough, already! It is time for the commentariat to stop attributing every vulgarity erupting from this administration to the fact that the president, like his now-defenestrated potty-mouthed spokesman, is a New Yorker.

Sure, the president was brought up in Queens and Anthony Scaramucci on Long Island. But that makes them no more New Yorkers in my book than someone raised in Rochester or Schenectady. When I was a teenager, to go to Long Island or Queens to fetch a date was a sign of an inability to find one in Manhattan.

This is not a mere matter of terminology. It is a matter of whether bad behavior can be explained by saying someone is a New Yorker. Start with vulgarity. Sure, those of us born and bred in Manhattan used an occasional bad word, sometimes out of anger, sometimes to provide emphasis to an otherwise limp statement. But never in the presence of grown-ups, or girls. We didn't rant uncontrollably, spouting our entire vocabulary of curse-words to show—well, to show what I cannot imagine. That wasn't cool.

And we didn't whine incessantly about some slight or other. In three-on-three basketball games in the schoolyard—no referee—players called fouls. Not the pathetic kind—"I missed the shot because you pushed my hand." Do that too often and you would never be invited by two other guys to take on the winners of the previous game. The New Yorker rule was simple: "No blood, no foul." Compare that to this administration's standard grievance that its critics are "unfair." We might consider retaliation if really offended, but not complaining.

Nor did a New Yorker "love" his heroes. We respected them. We emulated them. We rooted for them. And most had large numbers on their backs, so we even expanded our definition of a New Yorker's turf to include Ebbets Field and Yankee Stadium.

Some were gentlemen, like Joe DiMaggio and Joe Lewis. Others weren't. Leo Durocher comes to mind. They might not have been native New Yorkers, but they were the sort of immigrants we welcomed for their faithfulness to who they were. No excuses. No dissembling. No "I can't help myself, I'm a New Yorker and therefore not responsible for my behavior." And we didn't switch loyalties just because a hero ran into a bad streak. We still don't. Witness the sellouts at Madison Square Garden despite the performance of today's real deplorables, the Phil Jackson-created New York Knicks.

Some New Yorkers did have nicknames, although "Mooch" (definition: "to ask for and get things from other people without paying for them or doing anything for them") was not among them. Fiorello La Guardia, the mayor who knew all about populism before academics made careers out of attempting to define it—he read us kids the comics over the radio when the newspapers were on strike so that we wouldn't miss any episodes of our fictional heroes—liked being called "The Little Flower." But most of our politicians preferred a bit of dignified distance from the voters before pandering became the modus operandi. Democrat Herbert Lehman graced the governor's mansion and the Senate, Jack Javits (he allowed that corruption of Jacob) was a gentleman practitioner of the political arts, Manhattan D.A. Robert Morgenthau retired with reputation intact. One recent governor made it a practice of never being photographed with drink in hand.

Basketball in Manhattan, circa 1950

ARCHIVE IMAGES / GETTY

This recitation is no nostalgic review of the way we were. It is aimed merely at those who use the label "New Yorker" to explain bad behavior that might be the result of values acquired somewhere along the way, but certainly not by virtue of being New Yorkers as that term is understood by real New Yorkers. Ted Cruz may not like "New York values," wink, wink, but whatever he meant when charging Trump with possessing those values was off-base for more than one reason. Whining is not a New York value; disloyalty to past supporters is not a New York value; contempt for "losers" is not a New York value; refusing to pay off on bets gone bad is not a New York value.

As Orwell warns us, language can corrupt thought. To allow the label "New Yorker" to excuse bad behavior is a travesty. Writers using that label should remember: We know where you live.

Irwin M. Stelzer

the weekly Standard

Playing Defense

President Trump, addressing the Boy Scouts

Two days after the 2016 election, we had this to say about Donald Trump's stunning victory:

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

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

We went on to list the number of ways a Trump presidency would be better than four years of Hillary Clinton in the White House and ended by hoping that just as we had been wrong about Trump's electoral prospects, we would turn out to be even more mistaken about the kind of president he would be.

It is a little more than six months into the Trump administration, and there have been things to praise. The president has begun rolling back the aggressive regulatory state that grew up under Barack Obama; enforced his predecessor's red line in Syria; abandoned the failed North Korea strategy of the last three administrations; and appointed strong conservatives to the lower courts along with, of course, Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court.

These stand out because they are exceptions to the daily turmoil and dysfunction of the Trump White House. As president, Donald Trump has not risen to the occasion. There was no pivot to normalcy after his turbulent campaign. No hidden statesman has emerged from inside Trump, and he has not, as he recently suggested he might, become "more presidential" than anyone other than "the late, great Abraham Lincoln."

So far, the president is the picture of a failed leader. His administration is a disaster.

In just the past two weeks, Trump only reluctantly signed a Russia sanctions bill that passed overwhelmingly in both houses of Congress (98-2 in the Senate, 419-3 in the House). He tweeted a policy reversal on transgender individuals serving in the U.S. military that neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff nor the secretary of defense knew was coming. He allowed his communications director falsely to accuse his chief of staff of committing a felony by supposedly leaking a document that was already officially public—and then, after the fallout consumed his administration, dismissed them both. He repeatedly attacked his attorney general for his necessary decision to recuse himself from the probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election. He gave a highly inappropriate speech to 40,000 boys participating in the Boy Scouts' 20th National Jamboree—a speech for which the organization felt compelled to apologize. He followed that up with a speech to law enforcement officials in which he suggested it was okay to rough up accused criminals. Police departments across the country and the acting director of the Drug Enforcement Administration publicly rebuked the president.

These sorts of fiascos and misadventures began the moment this presidency began, with the new president's bizarre insistence that his inaugural crowds were larger

NEWSCOM

than Barack Obama's. Despite majorities in both houses of Congress, his policy agenda is at a standstill. Hundreds of high-level positions throughout the administration remain unfilled. Members of Congress report to us that the president can't hold a conversation at even a rudimentary level about issues supposedly high on the president's agenda—tax reform, for instance, and health care. He lies about matters both large and small and is obsessed with perceived slights in the news media.

And then there is the unceasing stream of developments on Trump and Russia. The saga has grown too complex to easily recount, but some highlights include Trump's disparaging of the U.S. intelligence community and its leaders in an Oval Office meeting with Russian diplomats; his abrupt dismissal of FBI director James Comey; the G20 summit in Hamburg where Trump proposed (and then quickly dropped) a joint cybersecurity task force with the very government U.S. intelligence officials believe tried to interfere in last year's elections; Jared Kushner's attempt to create a backchannel between the White House and Putin using the Russian embassy; and Donald Trump Jr.'s enthusiastic interest in opposition research seemingly offered by a hostile foreign power. This last has been characterized by Don Jr.'s shifting accounts of his meeting with purported representatives of the Russian government.

Then, last week, the *Washington Post* reported that the president himself dictated on Air Force One the deceptive statement his son originally issued to explain away his inappropriate meeting. This came after repeated and emphatic denials of any presidential involvement. NPR also reported that senior White House officials, possibly including the president himself, worked with conspiracy theorists to push to Fox News a fake-news story about murdered DNC staffer Seth Rich with the goal of deflecting attention from the Trump-Russia scandal. It was also reported that special counsel Robert Mueller had impaneled a grand jury, a sure sign that his investigation into interference in the 2016 election and the possibility the Trump campaign had colluded with Russia was growing in scope and intensity.

It's tedious to summarize. And easy to overlook how dangerous it's becoming.

These are almost certainly the good old days, unfortunately. Trump's problems so far have been of Trump's own making. They will not remain so. While America's enemies are testing and probing the new administration, we haven't yet seen the kind of crisis that requires leadership at home and statesmanship abroad. Every president eventually faces such a crisis.

Recent weeks saw aggressive provocations from the Chinese (their fighter jets buzzed a U.S. spy plane in the East China Sea), the Iranians (they threaten to retaliate for unnamed U.S. violations of the 2015 nuclear deal), and the North Koreans (they tested a missile that they claim can reach the West Coast). The Russians are in a hurry to reconstitute the old Soviet empire. Al Qaeda and ISIS continue to target Americans and American interests. Trump is escalating his attacks on federal law enforcement and once again publicly dismissing the findings of the U.S. intelligence community. He is also reported to be considering firing Robert Mueller.

The Associated Press reported last week that two of Trump's top advisers, Secretary of Defense James Mattis and then-Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, have long understood the risks of the Trump presidency. "Mattis and Kelly also agreed in the earliest weeks of Trump's presidency that one of them should remain in the United States at all times to keep tabs on the orders rapidly emerging from the White House, according to a person familiar with the discussions."

This is a profound commentary on the man who serves as de facto leader of the free world. Kelly is now Trump's chief of staff, which has some weary Republicans once again hoping for change. But Trump is still president. So the Mattis-Kelly plan strikes us as a good model for all Republicans. Play defense.

Trump's inability to lead means the likelihood of a conservative agenda's emerging during this administration is low. And the likelihood of catastrophic decision-making seems higher every day. If there is a chance at comprehensive tax reform, seize it. But Republicans' overriding concern ought to be limiting the long-term damage Trump can do. Day to day, this means speaking truthfully and forcefully about the administration and its decisions.

Short-term political incentives have pushed many Republicans to a full and unqualified embrace of Trump. And as Trump's failures become impossible even for die-hard Trump supporters to explain away, Republican voters have mostly stuck with him.

But Republican legislators have recently shown some inclination to put the interests of the country above political calculations. The House and Senate passed the Russia sanctions bill despite furious lobbying by the White House. There has been public criticism of Trump's backpedaling on the Iran deal. Rep. Trey Gowdy unloaded on the Trump administration for its repeated misrepresentations on Russia, saying, "this drip, drip, drip is undermining the credibility of this administration." Several GOP senators offered public warnings to Trump not to fire Mueller or Jeff Sessions. Judiciary Committee chairman Charles Grassley said that he wouldn't even consider a replacement for Sessions if the attorney general were cashiered. And Senator Tim Scott said last week, "we don't work for the president."

Short-lived White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci was an utterly forgettable political hack. But he said one thing before he was dismissed that's worth reflecting on: "There are people inside the administration that think it is their job to save America from this president. Okay?" Scaramucci was right about that. We know these people, and we admire them. We wish them every success.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Meanwhile . . .

What a week! Newly minted White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci goes nuts; White House chief of staff Reince Priebus gets fired and is replaced by retired Marine general John Kelly; General Kelly fires Scaramucci; Kelly then reassures Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who had recently been under unprecedented public assault from the president, that Sessions won't be fired (which presumably also means special counsel Robert Mueller won't be fired).

Meanwhile the Republican attempt to repeal and replace Obamacare collapses in the Senate. National security adviser H.R. McMaster engages in some serious housecleaning at the National Security Council. And we learn that the president personally helped craft, on Air Force One, a false statement about a meeting of his son, son-in-law, and a top campaign strategist with sketchy Russian emissaries during a presidential campaign in which Russia intervened in unprecedented ways.

And there's more!

Of course there is. It's the Trump presidency.

But last week also saw headlines like these: "Facebook's Artificial Intelligence Robots Shut Down after They Start Talking to Each Other in Their Own Language." And "In Gene-Editing Advance, Scientists Correct Defect in Human Embryos." And "U.S. Slams North Korea Missile Test as Kim Claims 'Whole U.S. Mainland' in Reach." And "The War America Can't Win: How the Taliban Is Regaining Control in Afghanistan."

Some of these headlines are surely misleading or hyped. Still, it's obvious we face serious challenges—challenges posed both by the march of modernity and by those who reject modern liberty and modern civilization.

It would be nice if we could pretend the second, deeper set of problems is of no urgency and can be dealt with when we're blessed with a more serious president and a more substantial public discourse.

It would also be nice if we could set aside worrying about our president and the distractions of our current politics in order to focus on the more serious challenges. But dealing with serious problems requires presidential leadership and serious decisions arrived at through political discussion.

So we're stuck. We need to deal with both urgent and important challenges, and we don't get to call a timeout from one to cope with the other.

It's tough. At least those who worried, after the end of the Cold War, that history would present neither interestingly fundamental nor urgently existential challenges can now stop worrying. The challenges are here. The choices are real. And inaction and delay are also choices with real consequences.

Ages ago, back before artificial intelligence and robots and nuclear weapons, Alexander Hamilton observed in *Federalist* 1 that "it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice." That question from the 18th century is no less pressing, and its answer is no less certain, in the 21st century. And as it was then so it is today: "a wrong election of the part we shall act may . . . deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind."

In other words: The temporary misfortune of a demagogue in the Oval Office, the broader problem of an unenlightened populism, the perhaps even deeper challenge of a blind and destructive progressivism—none of these excuses us from the urgent responsibility and inspiring opportunity to vindicate the capacity of mankind for self-government.

—William Kristol

A Promise the GOP Can Still Keep

We now live in an era when news cycles are lucky to last a full 24 hours, so please take a moment to clear your mind as we travel back in time to two long years ago.

It's July 2015 and, yes, the cable news networks are already obsessively talking about Donald Trump's month-old presidential campaign. But the other big news story, at least in the conservative media, is the revelation that Planned Parenthood has been selling the body parts of aborted babies to for-profit biotech companies.

"I'd say a lot of people want liver," said Deborah Nucatola, Planned Parenthood's senior director of medical services, in an undercover video released by the Center for Medical Progress. "We've been very good at getting heart, lung, liver, because we know that, so I'm not gonna crush that part, I'm gonna basically crush below, I'm gonna crush above, and I'm gonna see if I can get it all intact," said Nucatola, who added that the most difficult thing to get out intact is "the calvarium—the head is basically the biggest part." At a lunch with undercover activists posing as buyers from a biotech company, Nucatola sipped wine, nibbled on a salad, and explained that Planned Parenthood's nonprofit affiliates charge $30 to $100 "per specimen" because they "want to break even. And if they can do a little better than break even, and do so in a way that seems reasonable, they're happy to do that."

Hillary Clinton called the videos "disturbing," and in

early August 2015 a majority of the Senate voted to defund Planned Parenthood—an effort first championed in the House in 2007 by then-congressman Mike Pence. The GOP Senate was thwarted by a Democratic filibuster, so many voices in the Republican party, not just the conservative movement, said more drastic measures were necessary.

"I don't like a government shutdown," John McCain said in an NPR interview. "But this is a clear case of totally improper use of taxpayers' dollars. I have an obligation to the taxpayers of Arizona."

"If [Democrats] want to stand before the American people and say that they support this practice of dismembering unborn children, then that's their privilege," McCain added.

There was not a government shutdown—indeed, there was good reason to believe a shutdown would have been a counterproductive failure—but Senate Republicans did lay the groundwork to defund Planned Parenthood by figuring out a way to include the provision in a budget reconciliation bill, which couldn't be filibustered by Senate Democrats. Congress passed that bill in December 2015, but President Obama vetoed it.

Now that Republicans control the House, the Senate, and the White House, budget reconciliation remains the only realistic hope for avoiding a Democratic filibuster of any measure to defund Planned Parenthood. "We think reconciliation is the tool because that gets it into law," House speaker Paul Ryan said about the effort to defund Planned Parenthood this spring. "Reconciliation is the way to go." But the budget reconciliation bill was stopped in its tracks on July 28 when John McCain gave his decisive thumbs-down, killing the so-called "skinny repeal" that would have made a handful of changes to Obamacare and redirected Planned Parenthood's federal funding to community health centers.

McCain's vote shouldn't be seen as a betrayal of his pro-life principles because the Planned Parenthood provision was entangled in a complex debate about health care policy. Some critics derided McCain as voting to win praise from Democrats and the media, but there were legitimate concerns regarding policy and process that could have reasonably justified a "no" vote. Even New Jersey congressman Chris Smith, perhaps the most committed pro-life member of Congress, voted against the House's "repeal-and-replace" bill this spring because he thought its Medicaid reform was too extreme.

After McCain cast the deciding vote to kill "skinny repeal," he called on Congress to come up with a bipartisan solution to Obamacare's problems. It may be overly optimistic to think Democrats will be interested in any solutions for Obamacare other than a bailout for insurance companies. At the very least, McCain and his GOP colleagues should remember that there are some principled disagreements between Democrats and Republicans on which there will be no compromise.

Congressional Democrats today believe, almost uniformly, that liberty entails the right to abort an unborn child at taxpayer expense. Elected Republicans today believe, almost uniformly, that liberty does not permit the intentional taking of innocent human life.

McCain's speech upon his return to the Senate following his diagnosis of cancer was widely praised in the press for its calls for bipartisanship, but McCain was at his best when he testified to the principles that make America great. "We are the servants of a great nation, a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," McCain said. "What greater cause could we hope to serve than helping keep America the strong, aspiring, inspirational beacon of liberty and defender of dignity of all human beings and their right to freedom and equal justice?"

If McCain and the rest of his pro-life colleagues want to honor their commitment to the dignity of all human beings and cut off federal subsidies to abortionists like Planned Parenthood, they will only be able to do so through a budget reconciliation bill that can't be filibustered.

Though the "skinny repeal" measure died, the reconciliation bill is still viable—but only for a limited period of time. Legislative experts aren't entirely in agreement on when the reconciliation bill expires, but many have suggested it will die at the end of the fiscal year on September 30.

There's no reason for Republicans to let the fiscal year end without passing a reconciliation bill that keeps their pro-life promises. They can defund abortion providers and attempt to cut off subsidies to Obamacare plans that cover elective abortion (though it's unclear the Senate parliamentarian will permit the latter measure). The bill would need to achieve a minimal amount of deficit reduction required by reconciliation rules, but it wouldn't necessarily need to include big changes to Obamacare. Most of the Obamacare provisions in the "skinny repeal" bill—increasing Health Savings Accounts limits, suspending the employer mandate and the medical device tax, expanding the state waivers program—were largely uncontroversial and could be enacted without disrupting the health care system. The only controversial piece of the so-called skinny bill was the repeal of the individual mandate. Absent other regulatory changes, that last provision would lead to further market destabilization, and there can be good-faith disagreements about whether such destabilization is unacceptable or a price worth paying to free people from an unconstitutional and burdensome mandate.

But there is no good reason for Republicans to break their pro-life promises. If they can't reach consensus on Obamacare by the end of September, they needn't let the budget reconciliation bill go to waste. They can address Obamacare through regular order and a bipartisan bill, or they could write a new Republican-only reconciliation bill for next year. But at the very least Republicans ought to honor their commitment to the right to life this year. They don't need to shut down the government to do it, they just need to pass a bill.

—John McCormack

The Suicide of Meritocracy

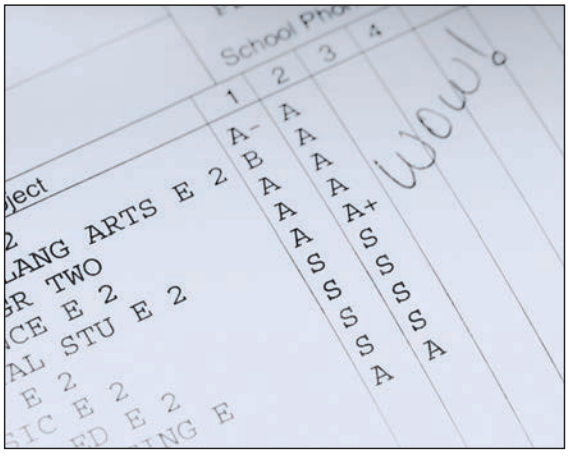
An A+ in self-destruction.

BY HARVEY MANSFIELD

Grade inflation has popped up again in the news, this time with the disclosure that it has spread to American high schools. High schools, public and especially private, now serve up 50 percent A's to their students, just like the universities. It's part of the college preparation track in high schools to keep graduates from being shocked by the flattery they are about to receive from the college of their choice.

We have reason to believe that the high schools are inflating grades because scores on the SAT (test of aptitude) have dipped slightly as grades have gone up. It is easy to attempt too much refinement in quantitative measures of human behavior and easier still to attempt to gain trust for the results. But the new standard of high schools and the most prestigious colleges is to give more straight A's than any other grade. Just to hear that is enough to know that something is wrong in American education.

How deeply wrong? I have been speaking against grade inflation most of my career, and the longer I continue, the deeper I think the wrong of it goes. The last time I raised the matter at a Harvard faculty meeting, I was greeted by embarrassed silence. The faculty senate considered it for a while—and decided to do nothing, not even to deplore it. President Drew Faust has to my recollection and in my hearing never said anything about it. Among the Ivy League universities Princeton decided a few years ago to take measures to reduce grade inflation, hoping to be followed by others. But after getting no response other than student complaints, a new president rescinded Princeton's modest reform.



Wow, if true

Almost nobody tries to defend grade inflation. Some try to excuse it by saying that students are smarter than they used to be. I doubt it, but suppose it is so: Are students smarter in the way that the whole top half deserves the same highest grade? In this distribution, quantity swallows quality as the B performance, or even the B-minus one, becomes unified with the B-plus, the A-minus, and the straight A. The "fairly good" B-minus becomes as good or almost as good as the best.

When the top grade is given to half the students, not extraordinarily but normally, the academic standard by which all grades are given is either disregarded or rejected. Not only are distinctions among the top students lost but the distinction between an "honor grade," traditionally B and above, and an average grade disappears. Today a C is received as would be a sword thrust into one's vitals, and it is given only reluctantly and not for an average but for a bad performance. Hence the notion of "self-esteem" has come to be established as an entitlement to equal dignity for all rather than reserved for estimable persons.

No longer does American education uphold a distinction between average students and the elite. In practice there is and must be a distinction that no teacher can ignore between the two groups, but we deprecate it and do not *uphold* it. The idea of "elite" does remain, especially for sports, where it is sanctified in the celebrity of the extremely well-paid best players. In colleges it is also kept for the *summa* or highest academic graduates. But with grade inflation, the margin of the best over the pack has to be razor-thin, as most everyone is deemed close to the best.

Grade inflation is hardly grading; it yields marks with little or no gradation. With so many high grades there is flattening not only at the top but throughout. The "honor grade"—signifying what one would praise—is extended to cover the average performance that one would accept as satisfactory. B becomes A and C becomes B. This phenomenon, known as "grade compression," is widely regarded as a vice, but the harm it does is underestimated. It may seem to be merely a failure of measurement hardened into routine because most everybody likes easy grades. But it is more: It shows disregard for the special ambition of modern, and particularly American, democracy.

At its founding America was established as a "republic" rather than a "democracy," meaning pure democracy (see James Madison's *Federalist* 10). Today we have dropped the distinction of name between the two, but the difference can be seen still in the

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phrases "constitutional" or "liberal" democracy, as opposed to pure democracy. A pure democracy does not tolerate differences of ability and status, but a prudently qualified democracy encourages excellence of performance and permits inequality of status.

The combination America has sought of respect for excellence and insistence on equality has always characterized American education. Such a combination is necessarily tense and difficult. Its classical expression can be found in Thomas Jefferson's assertion in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal versus his acknowledgment that our democracy must make a place for the "natural aristocracy" of "virtue and talents." The first was addressed to the world, the second occurs in a private letter to John Adams in 1813. One must be careful about announcing the need for an elite, but the need is all the more compelling as it is harder to defend.

Today the tension between equality and excellence is shown in attacks on "elitism." This aversion would naturally arise in people who believe that they gain no advantage from excellence because they do not have it themselves. They share the spirit of democratic ostracism in the Athenians, who exiled Aristides because he was too just. In this view excellence is a source of danger to the people because it will be used to exploit them rather than benefit them. Or if excellence is not a danger, it is an irritation and its mere existence a slight to average folk. Anyone better than you has a claim on your admiration that your vanity may find irksome.

"Elitism" means taking the side of the elite against the rest. Those opposed to elitism alternate between denying the worth of any elite and alleging that people suffer under an unjustified, existing elite that is harmful. These anti-elitist folks are at present in charge of American education. They are themselves an elite, an elite united against elitism.

The elite of anti-elitists could have satisfied their opposition by giving the same average grade to all students, thus enhancing democratic equality. In so doing they could have vaunted the virtues of ordinary citizens, who are more good-hearted than hard-driving ambitious types and less pretentious than intellectuals. But instead they have chosen to swamp the elite by bestowing elite grades on average students. It is as if elitist pretension could be cured by universalizing it, forcing it on those without pretensions.

Grade inflation has become an issue between the parties, with liberals in favor or not opposed and conservatives standing up for academic standards. In the universities there are a few liberal professors who resist grade inflation, but most welcome it. Conservative professors resist it but ineffectually, since they are too few to matter and to grade strictly would be punishing their own students.

The elite of anti-elitists presently in charge of American education have chosen to swamp the elite by bestowing elite grades on average students. It is as if elitist pretension could be cured by universalizing it.

An earlier generation of liberals thought and acted otherwise. They came on the scene after World War II and included in their number many Jews who for the first time were getting the university admissions and appointments they deserved. They came upon incumbent faculties of largely conservative old fogies by whom they were mostly welcomed—yet whom they replaced. These liberals emptied the most prestigious colleges of the "gentleman's C," using the SAT exam and more vigorous recruiting methods to find able prospects outside the usual prep school sources and legacy families. They were liberal Democrats almost to a man, but their principle was meritocracy. These were the professors who taught me at Harvard (graduating in 1953), and they would have been appalled by 50 percent A grades.

This generation in academia was conscious of being an elite and proud of having replaced an inferior elite. They understood that the principle of excellence that they had espoused, and which of course benefited them, was one that had to be applied to their own students and to their own families as well. Within the elite the principle of merit was as necessary as outside it. There had to be an average at Harvard as well as outside it. The great goal of admission to a top university having been realized, one had to join a new competition and be judged by a much higher standard than before.

Liberals today, however, have a new principle of inclusiveness that is not so friendly to merit. They believe in affirmative action to include overlooked groups, as did the earlier liberals, but these are groups of the vulnerable and the oppressed, neglected and forgotten, rather than "virtue and talents." Vulnerable groups no doubt have merit and outstanding qualities, but they are sought out because they are held down rather than for what they can contribute. So for the sake of inclusiveness, they must all be given high grades rather than average or low grades. It is no accident, in sum, that affirmative action and grade inflation in the universities came on the scene together, during and just after the late sixties.

Our democracy needs an elitism of merit, of Jefferson's "virtue and talents," in combination with its relentless drive toward equality. It wants to include everyone, but to do this accurately and well, it must discover and nourish the merits that distinguish individuals within that "everyone."

Americans can be aroused against an elite, as we have seen in the rise and reign of Donald Trump, but they are not determined enemies of all elites. Grade inflation disgraces our schools and universities today. It was born and it thrives not by demand of the American people but through the feckless administration of American education by our present-day liberal elite. ♦

Bill de Blasio, Culture-meister

The mayor's problematic plan for the arts.

BY BARTON SWAIM

Last month, New York City mayor Bill de Blasio unveiled the city's first-ever "cultural plan." Although the details are murky, he hopes to tie funding for arts organizations to the "diversity" of their staffs and boards of directors. The city's commissioner of cultural affairs, Tom Finkelpearl, explained the plan this way: "Today's announcement requiring diversity reporting from city-funded groups is the next step, building on everything we've learned to date to work toward a cultural sector that is fairer, more equitable, and looks like the city it serves."

The plan, titled CreateNYC, doesn't explain who will decide which institutions are sufficiently diverse or by what criteria such a thing could be discerned. The section on "implementation" mentions "increased funding for cultural programming in low-income communities," "increasing support for people with disabilities as audience members, artists, and workers at cultural organizations," and so on, but the mayoral arts czars steer well clear of any explanation of "diversity." If a board member at one of the city's museums has a Norwegian mother and a Cambodian father, for example, would he count as white or a "person of color," in the mayor's opinion?

Of course, the plan isn't cultural but political. De Blasio—by sharp contrast with his immediate predecessors, the arts philanthropist Michael Bloomberg and the opera fanatic Rudolph Giuliani—is not known for artistic and cultural sensibilities. He is better known for skipping high-profile cultural events than attending them. His proposal to make cultural production subservient to identity politics is a fine instance of the way in which cultural funding in the absence of any firm definition of culture—or any attempt at definition at all—is political advocacy under a fancier name.

Who knew? 'Saving' requires government funds.

You would think New York City's arts scene was already pretty diverse, but evidently you would be wrong. It's too white and too male. The mayor's announcement, as the *New York Times* noted, "puts pressure on the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Carnegie Hall, the American Museum of Natural History and other preeminent institutions that are led largely by white male executives and power brokers from Wall Street, real estate and other industries." Cultural institutions are not self-supporting; their boards are filled with the people able to write big checks, more often than not older white men. The battle shaping up between the city's arts bureaucracy and its preeminent institutions won't be easily resolved.

One obvious question: Why should institutions run and governed by wealthy people need help from government? New York's city council doles out millions every year to a vast array of cultural programs and institutions, many of which maintain sizable budgets apart from any public aid. In 2015 (the most recent year for which information is available), the Metropolitan Opera received $754,000 from the city to pay for its fly-rigging system, which allows the raising and lowering of sets and curtains on-stage. The Met's budget that year was $310 million—not enough to fund as many performances as its board would like, no doubt, but a pretty nice sum all the same. Any organization that can raise $310 million can raise another $754 grand without taking it from roads and bridges and subway systems used by millions of people who don't care about opera.

But the most important question raised by the de Blasio plan is this: Why does the government give money to the arts at all? Lots of things in life are edifying and worthy, but it's advisable for government to fund only such things as are likely to produce definable positive outcomes. Proponents of arts funding articulate lots of different societal benefits supposedly brought about by artists and arts organizations, but their arguments rarely hold up under scrutiny. A recent academic study published in Britain by the Arts and Humanities Research Council considered an array of common claims made for the arts—that they help to produce engaged citizens, that they encourage reflectiveness and empathy, that they foster community, that they promote economic vitality, and so on—and found them all to varying degrees either unprovable or disprovable.

Even assuming "the arts," however we define the term, really do foster community and encourage empathy, and even assuming government funding actually advances the arts in the long run—both highly problematic

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assumptions—how could we prove such things with empirical data? Of course, we couldn't. Which is why local and state governments as well as the federal government have been funding cultural and artistic endeavors without any empirical justification or clear criteria for doing so. Mayor de Blasio's "diversity" criterion may be laughably unworkable and a plain attempt to further radical political aims, but at least it is a criterion. Ordinarily there is none.

This state of affairs hasn't changed at all in the 27 years since Samuel Lipman published "Backward & Downward with the Arts" in *Commentary* magazine. Lipman was writing just after controversy erupted over funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for exhibits featuring the still highly offensive photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano. On the one hand, Lipman argued, the United States has no cultural policy; politicians and policymakers have no definable or compelling aim in appropriating money to arts organizations and cultural institutions. On the other, the United States very much does have a cultural policy, though an unstated one; and that policy, he wrote, "is based on three elements: affirmative action, that is, the preferential hiring of women and minorities to fill both administrative and non-administrative positions in the humanities and, especially, the arts; a bias toward 'multiculturalism'; and, finally, public advocacy and financial support of so-called cutting-edge art."

With de Blasio's new diversity-driven guidelines on arts funding, we're witnessing the unstated policy Lipman described in 1990 become explicit. The new policy isn't new, and it isn't about "art" or "the arts"; it's an old policy, more candidly executed.

This is what happens when government funds a thing without a clear sense of what it is or what makes it valuable. Such a common understanding has existed in the past—say, in ancient Athens or in European societies of the 18th and 19th centuries, although for much of that time wealthy patrons did the work government would arrogate in the 20th. A common or at least commoner understanding of art and culture existed in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, when American culture was far more consolidated than it is today. This was all swept away by the counterculture of the late '60s and the '70s. But cities, states, and the federal government persist in funding artistic endeavors today as though we're all more or less agreed on the nature of beauty and the definition of art.

The problem with public-arts funding is roughly analogous to that of publicly funded higher education.

The problem with public-arts funding is roughly analogous to that of publicly funded higher education. The stated aims are vague to the point of meaningless, and so both enterprises have become vehicles for radical politics.

Obvious differences aside (higher education has the advantage that people need degrees for practical reasons and are therefore willing to pay thousands of dollars to public institutions in order to get those degrees), the two correspond in one important way: that no one knows what the overarching purpose is. The stated aims are vague to the point of meaningless, and so both enterprises have become vehicles for radical politics.

The political hue of present-day arts funding is impossible to miss. Searching the NEA's grant database for 2016, one finds a $10,000 grant for an LGBT chorus festival in Denver; a $10,000 grant for an "interdisciplinary arts festival" in Iowa City that "explore[s] diversity in literature along lines of gender, sexuality, race, nationality, class, ability/disability"; a $25,000 grant for a "national fellowship program for social practice artists"; and a $15,000 grant for a tour of *The Missing Generation*, "an evening-length production" that "give[s] voice to the early survivors of the AIDS epidemic and explore[s] the contemporary impact of the loss of much of an entire generation of gay and transgender people to AIDS in the 1980s." The far less egregious National Endowment for the Humanities, in the same year, allotted $4,128 for the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Philadelphia; $5,860 for a project called "Speaking Out: Preserving the LGBT History of the U.S. Midwest"; and $50,400 for a "book-length study on the employment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual people in the U.S.'s late 20th-century work force." No one outside the confines of today's "arts community" would assume these and many similar efforts to be the sorts of things the U.S. government ought to finance.

The United States still has no avowed cultural policy because the country doesn't have the kind of consolidated, self-assured culture such a policy requires. Some Americans might think an LGBT chorus festival sounds like a worthy recipient of public money, but many, probably a majority, will think it sounds like a trivial indulgence in identity-obsession or maybe just a lame attempt to *épater les bourgeois*. The former might be right, but the latter can't fairly be asked to pay for it.

Instead of a consolidated culture and coherent views on public arts funding, we have an unacknowledged *Kulturkampf*—a slow bureaucratic insurgency in which one cultural faction gets access to government largesse simply by claiming to promote "the arts" or "the humanities."

President Trump's proposed budget for 2018 advised eliminating both the NEA and the NEH, but the spending bill that cleared the House Appropriations Committee in late July had $145 million each, only a slight decrease from 2017. The president's proposal was the right one, but not because we can't afford to fund art (although we can't) or because these agencies fund a lot of garbage (although they do). The reason to eliminate "arts" and "humanities" agencies is not political but definitional: These terms have lost their meaning. ♦

Why So Expensive?

The real reason Obamacare premiums have gone up so much. BY FRED BARNES

Ron Johnson, speaking, with colleagues during the GOP health care meltdown

The failed Republican effort to kill Obamacare had a saving grace. It's small but significant. We now know the chief cause of skyrocketing health-insurance premiums since Obamacare was activated in 2013. And it's not the "essential benefits" everyone is forced to buy, though they've often been blamed.

The culprits—guaranteed issue and community rating—are more prosaic. They happen to be two of the more popular provisions of Obamacare. Together they drive up premiums nearly 10 times as much as essential benefits do.

This is a surprising fact, largely unknown to those who pay the premiums. When asked in a poll for the Hudson Institute earlier this year, 63 percent preferred lower premiums and 27 percent favored Obamacare's protections of preexisting conditions mandated by community rating.

Guaranteed issue requires insurance companies to offer policies to all applicants. Community rating forces them to charge the same premium to everyone, regardless of one's health status (including preexisting conditions) or how much medical care one uses.

The impact of Obamacare's mandates was studied by McKinsey & Company, the management consulting firm, for the Department of Health and Human Services. McKinsey focused on the hikes in premiums in Tennessee, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

The increased risk for insurers from guaranteed issue and community rating caused between 73 percent and 76 percent of the rise in premiums in Tennessee from 2013 to 2017, between 44 percent and 52 percent in Georgia, between 53 percent and 62 percent in Pennsylvania, and between 41 percent to 50 percent in Ohio.

For a 40-year-old male in Tennessee, the monthly premium increased from $104 in 2013 to $431 in 2017 (for the Obamacare silver plan). The increase was from $94 to $323 in Georgia, from $119 to $373 in Pennsylvania, and from $102 to $264 in Ohio.

Those are not bland results. HHS learned of them in May but was nervous about releasing them. They might have created a problem for congressional Republicans. The House and Senate had already accepted guaranteed issue and community rating in their proposed replacements for Obamacare.

And Republicans had often cited the package of essential benefits as a likely cause of soaring premiums. They had also found preexisting conditions a difficult issue to deal with.

We have Senator Ron Johnson (R-Wisc.onsin) to thank for making the McKinsey study public. After learning of it, he requested documentation of the findings. "They wouldn't give it to me," he told me. When he asked again, they still wouldn't. This was the response of the new Republican-led HHS.

Then Johnson sent letters to HHS secretary Tom Price and McKinsey, asking again for the study's results. That worked. But before HHS handed over the documentation, all the McKinsey and HHS markings were removed.

"Had we never passed Obamacare, premiums should be somewhere in the $300 per month level versus $574," Johnson said in a Senate floor speech in July. "This is the damage done by Obamacare. And this, I'm very sad to report, is what we are not adequately addressing."

Johnson said the "good news" in the "root cause analysis" by McKinsey has been ignored on Capitol Hill. "The good news is you can actually cover people with high cost and preexisting conditions without collapsing insurance markets. They're called high-risk pools."

A second study by HHS examined the impact of Senator Ted Cruz's amendment to allow insurers to sell policies without all the essential benefits. Cruz handed out copies

REX FEATURES / AP

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at The Weekly Standard.

of the study to the 49 Republican senators who gathered last month for lunch at the White House with President Trump.

"The results are remarkable," Johnson and Senator Mike Lee wrote in a "dear colleague" letter. If insurers "were to offer Obamacare-compliant plans and non-Obamacare compliant plans there would be a significant decrease in premiums," they wrote.

Monthly premiums in the individual health insurance market would reach an average of $845 by 2024 under Obamacare, the HHS analysis found. Under the Cruz amendment with two risk pools included, premiums would be 30 percent lower for a 40-year-old man with an Obamacare-compliant plan.

"Premiums for non-Obamacare compliant plans are estimated to be as much as 77 percent lower," Johnson and Lee noted.

Cruz said HHS found that his amendment would expand insurance coverage by 2.2 million people. And what it does for premiums is "powerful," he said. "HHS found that it will reduce premiums by over $7,000 a year. If you're a single mom, if you are a schoolteacher [or] a truck driver, $7,000 a year is a lot of money."

The thrust of the two studies, taken together, is to buttress the case for deregulation of health insurance. With more risk pools and other protections for preexisting conditions, community rating could be abolished. And people would be free to buy the level of insurance they want, not what is required by the federal government.

But they wouldn't be able to wait until they get seriously ill to buy insurance. That would be like buying home insurance as your house is burning down.

What about the impact of "essential" benefits—everything from "breastfeeding coverage" to "wellness services"—on premiums? In Tennessee, they're responsible for less than 2 percent of the rise in premiums. In Georgia and Ohio, it's 5 percent to 8 percent, and in Pennsylvania it's 7 percent to 11 percent. The answer: not huge. ♦

RYAN M. KELLY / THE DAILY PROGRESS / AP

The Persistently Misleading Media

No, college students accused of rape are *not* almost all guilty.

BY KC JOHNSON & STUART TAYLOR JR.

The Trump Education Department's plan to change the Obama administration's policy on campus rape accusations—a policy that has helped expel countless students who were innocent of any sex crime—set off a frenzied attack by interest groups. In joining this attack, major media outlets have continued a pattern of misrepresenting statistics to justify presuming guilt.

Famously false: UVA in 2014

The *Washington Post* led the way by implying that more than 90 percent of students accused of sexual assault are guilty, and that procedural fairness in campus disciplinary proceedings is therefore unimportant—or even harmful to victims.

A July 14 *Post* editorial proclaimed that "the prevalence of false accusations has been estimated at between 2 and 10 percent." A chorus of other publications and groups has made similar claims: "National research indicates no more than 8 percent of rape accusations are false," wrote Jeremy Bauer-Wolf of *Inside Higher Ed*. "[A] meta-analysis has shown false reports are extremely rare, constituting only 2-8% of complaints," declared more than 50 advocacy groups led by the National Women's Law Center.

So deeply has the almost-all-accused-are-guilty myth become entrenched in the conventional wisdom that even *National Review Online* published an otherwise astute article by Tiana Lowe, who wrote, "Statistically speaking, false sexual-assault accusations constitute a minority of all claims, maybe 10 percent at most, but likely closer to 5 percent."

These assertions are unsupported by serious evidence, as the imprecision in the purported upper limit of false reports in the items above indicates. More important, they reveal nothing about the percentage of campus allegations that are true or likely true.

It's fair for critics of the president to point out his own ugly history of boasting about grabbing women by the genitals and the claims of at least a dozen women that he sexually assaulted or harassed them.

But it's an abuse of journalistic power to use misleading statistics to dismiss well-founded criticisms by Education secretary Betsy DeVos of the guilt-presuming Obama policy. DeVos's criticisms are similar to those voiced for years by dozens of prominent liberal law professors from Harvard, Penn, and elsewhere, leading advocates of campus civil liberties, families of railroaded innocent students, respected journalists, and others.

Even if more than 90 percent of accused students—most of whom were never reported to police—were

KC Johnson and Stuart Taylor Jr. are coauthors of The Campus Rape Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America's Universities *(Encounter Books).*

guilty of sex crimes, it would not justify presuming guilt in individual cases. "Fairness is important regardless of the truth or the falsehood of allegations," in the words of Harvard law professor Jeannie Suk Gersen.

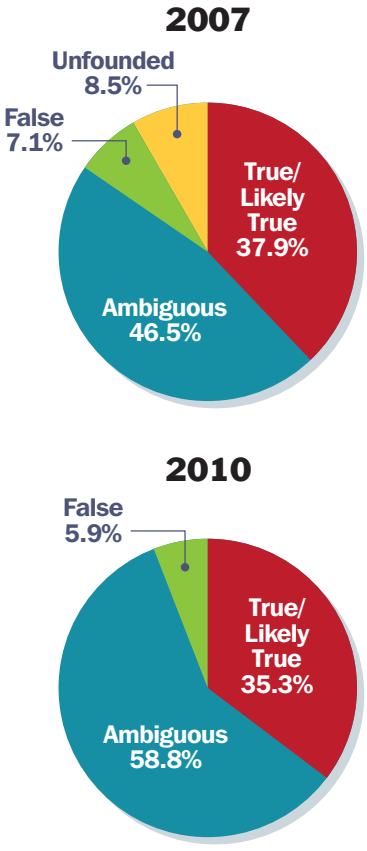
More to the point, people who may be tempted to embrace the de facto presumption of guilt decreed by the Obama administration should know that studies do not show the vast majority of accused students are guilty—that's a myth.

First, as even Michelle Anderson, one of the most prominent academic defenders of the Obama-era campus sexual assault policies, admitted in 2004, "there is no good empirical data on false rape complaints either historically or currently. . . . As a scientific matter, the frequency of false rape complaints to police or other legal authorities remains unknown."

The reason is that research on false rape report rates, which involves scholars or activists reviewing files prepared by others, is so subjective as to be of very limited reliability—even in cases that proceed through the criminal justice system, much less the due-process-diminished campus tribunals. The best-known recent studies on false rape report rates, in 2007 and 2010, seemed designed to dramatically understate the number of accused parties who actually were not guilty. Both studies, in which victims' advocates played major roles, found that the majority of cases were neither true nor false, but instead were incidents in which the accusers abandoned the complaint, or the police dropped them as unsubstantiated, or the evidence was inconclusive.

Both studies also listed as "not false" cases in which an accused student would clearly have been found not guilty of sexual assault even by a campus tribunal. The 2007 study put false reports in a different category from "baseless" claims that did "not meet the elements of the offense." Its 2010 counterpart, in which the lead researcher used *only victims' advocates* to review the case files, similarly counted as "not false" cases in which the accuser alleged something that "did not meet the legal elements of the crime of sexual assault."

Here's how the two studies look in visual form. (The second chart has only three data points because the researcher, without explanation, chose not to separate out how many cases did not meet the definition of sexual assault.)



The lead researcher of the 2010 study, University of Massachusetts Boston professor David Lisak, put his own bias on display when he asserted that he wouldn't describe the 2006 rape claims against Duke lacrosse players as false. This opinion contradicted the conclusions of all serious students of the Duke lacrosse case, led by the North Carolina attorney general, who used DNA, electronic evidence, and a minute-by-minute reconstruction to prove in 2007 that accuser Crystal Mangum's claims were fabrications.

Moreover, most false rape rate studies analyze complaints to police by nonstudents, not complaints to colleges by students. The distinction is important for at least two reasons. First, deterrence against false campus claims is all but nonexistent, since in the current climate it would be professionally suicidal for an administrator to charge a student with such an offense. Second, college women are often encouraged by campus bureaucrats and by activists to file complaints about legal sexual behavior, such as sex while drinking, that schools increasingly have chosen to classify as "sexual misconduct" *by the males*. Additionally, none of the studies cited by the media defenders of the Obama policies analyzes cases adjudicated through campus tribunals after the Obama administration unilaterally reinterpreted Title IX in 2011, dramatically ramping up the chances of wrongful findings of guilt.

No wonder such studies have been convincingly and repeatedly discredited as misleading by critics (including us) in articles and books that activist groups and much of the media have ignored. No serious analyst of the data could assert (and even the study authors themselves avoided *explicitly* asserting) that *all* or even most of claims in these inconclusive or baseless cases were *true* simply because not conclusively proven to be lies. Yet that's precisely what countless journalists and activists have asserted.

The one mainstream publication willing to follow the evidence was the *New York Times*, which previously had a very poor record in covering issues related to campus sexual assault. After it published an article on July 13 asserting that "national studies show that only a small percentage—between 2 and 8 percent—of students are wrongfully accused of sexual assault," several critics pointed out the dubious nature of the claim. The *Times* within days removed the sentence. It also, correctly, added a note stating that "an earlier version of this article erroneously included a reference to studies of false reporting of sexual assaults. The studies examined false reports of sexual assault to the police; they did not examine false reports by college students to campus authorities." ♦

THE WEEKLY STANDARD

MS-13 members upon arrival at a maximum-security prison in El Salvador, June 22, 2017

A Glimpse Inside a Violent Gang

The MS-13 file.

BY TONY MECIA

Six years ago, on a July Tuesday in Los Angeles, members of MS-13's downtown cell got into a fight with a rival gang. "Porky," its leader, was none too pleased.

As the "shot-caller" for the Centrales cell, Porky had a lot of responsibilities. He managed its drug trafficking, oversaw the collection of extortion payments, and represented the group at the regular leadership meetings with his counterparts from MS-13's 20 other L.A. cells.

But on that night in 2011, court documents suggest, Porky wanted revenge for the altercation. He brought together other members of the Centrales cell and handed one of them a gun.

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The following day, in a residential area near downtown, the group found the rival gang member and shot him in the chest. He died at a nearby hospital. But Porky's work wasn't done. He later returned to the home where the rival was shot and told the woman living there never to talk to the police. Otherwise, he said, "MS-13 would harm her children."

This dramatic anecdote is part of a blockbuster 127-page federal racketeering indictment unsealed in May. That month, federal and local authorities conducted one of the country's largest-ever sweeps against MS-13, a Latino gang that started in Los Angeles more than 30 years ago and today operates up and down both coasts and in Texas. In pre-dawn raids, police arrested 21 suspected gang leaders and members. Another 20 MS-13 leaders were already in jail facing federal charges.

There are hundreds of gangs in the United States, but MS-13 stands out for its extreme violence. Members have been blamed for killing two high school girls on Long Island with machetes and baseball bats, stabbing a Baltimore teen 153 times, and beheading a victim in Northern Virginia. President Trump has repeatedly pledged to "destroy" MS-13 and take down the "animals" that constitute the gang, most recently in a high-profile speech to law enforcement in late July.

The L.A. indictment is an inside glimpse of the gang's operations. Pieced together from years of investigative police work and the testimony of at least eight informants, the document spells out precisely how MS-13 is structured in Southern California and just what it does. Some of the incidents are the stuff of action movies, with kill orders issued and drive-by shootings planned. But many show the more mundane side of thug life, as gang leaders grapple with challenges of how to manage supply chains of crystal meth, administer finances, and rein in hotheaded colleagues.

MS-13 is no simple group of violent street toughs, but neither is it a highly organized, top-down cartel. Rather, it is a loose confederation of small and connected groups with similar operational structures and some common practices. Members have nicknames and follow initiation rituals. The MS-13 leadership grants cells exclusive rights in clearly defined territory, much as you would find in a franchise agreement.

"It is neither completely disorganized nor highly structured," says Jorja Leap, an anthropologist at UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs who studies gangs. "When we go beyond the main story and look at processes and the dynamics and the hierarchy, MS-13 is very reminiscent of a fraternity or a start-up business."

Obviously, there are major differences. MS-13 works in the roughest neighborhoods of the county's biggest cities, not in an office. Its products—narcotics and weapons—are illegal.

NEWSCOM

Its methods—intimidation, beatings, and murder—are ruthless.

The gang's high-profile attacks have bolstered the Trump administration's efforts to crack down on illegal immigration. Building a wall, stepping up deportations, and stripping funding from sanctuary cities are a far easier political sell if there are illegal immigrants on the loose who are cutting off heads and carving up victims with machetes. In Los Angeles, about half of the MS-13 gang leaders charged in May were determined to be here illegally.

When the charges and arrests were announced, local officials went out of their way to avoid offering any credit to the Trump administration. The crackdown had been in the works for months and was the result of years of effort by local and federal law enforcement, they noted. The Los Angeles police chief said the cooperation of victims, many of whom are here illegally, was essential.

At the center of MS-13's activities in Los Angeles in recent years is Porky, identified in court documents as Jose Balmore Romero, age 44. It's unclear how he got his nickname, but jail records may offer a clue: He is listed as 5′6″, 300 pounds.

He was the shot-caller of the Centrales cell, or "clique," but assumed leadership responsibility for the entire region in 2013 and 2014, law enforcement officials say. Porky and the other shot-callers held regular meetings and functioned as a leadership council that managed the wider gang business. They had occasional contact with MS-13 colleagues on the East Coast but ran their own operation.

There was a lot to do. The key relationship for MS-13's L.A. leaders is with an umbrella organization known as the Mexican Mafia, a sort of league of Latino gangs operating in Southern California. Like other Latino gangs, MS-13 collects dues from its members—known as "rent" or "taxes"—and remits them on a regular basis to the Mexican Mafia. This guarantees the safety of MS-13 members in prisons and keeps other gangs from moving in on assigned territory. "Failure of MS-13 to pay its tax to the Mexican Mafia will result in a 'green light' on MS-13, that is, a general order from the Mexican Mafia to assault or kill any incarcerated MS-13 member in any facility controlled by the Mexican Mafia," the indictment says.

And so MS-13 leaders find themselves facing an age-old business question: debt collection. The indictment depicts a lot of handwringing about who should collect the rents, just when they are due, and how members might best be prodded to pay. At one point, the leader of MS-13's Pasadena cell complains that a planned April 2015 meeting had to be canceled because the only gang member with the details on who was paid up could not be present. Shot-callers debate whether to collect the $600 due annually from members or to offer a payment plan of $50 a month.

There are hundreds of gangs in the United States, but MS-13 stands out for its extreme violence. Members have been blamed for killing two high school girls on Long Island with machetes and baseball bats, stabbing a Baltimore teen 153 times, and beheading a victim in Northern Virginia.

The consequences of not paying can be severe. In a March 2015 conversation detailed in the indictment, two cell leaders discuss what to do about "Triste," an MS-13 member who was behind on his rents. If Triste didn't pay, they agree, then he would be "courted," or subject to disciplinary action. In MS-13, courting typically consists of beatings by three or four gang members that last 13, 26, or 39 seconds—all multiples of 13.

Such discipline is frequent. One Pasadena member receives a 26-second beating in April 2015 for being disrespectful to another member's girlfriend. One Coronado member, nicknamed "Bestia," receives a 39-second beating in October 2014 after getting into a fight with a fellow MS-13 member in L.A.'s Koreatown.

Some infractions are more serious. If MS-13 leaders see evidence that a member is cooperating with law enforcement, they issue a "green light" for that person to be killed on sight.

MS-13 members are beaten for 13 seconds when they join the gang, an initiation ritual known as "jumping in." If someone is voted out of an MS-13 cell, he is "jumped out," or given another 13-second beating. In some cases, a gang member "jumps out" of one clique and then "jumps in" to another one, receiving a beating each time.

The bulk of MS-13's profits, according to court documents, come from the sale of narcotics, and the indictment refers repeatedly to drug deals: who has drugs, who wants them, and how much they will pay. In one conversation in December 2014, a gang member asks Porky about acquiring methamphetamine. But there's a hitch: The supplier is on vacation. Porky tells the gang member a larger order would get filled more quickly. The two agree to place an order for a half-kilo.

At another point, gang leaders gripe about a new medical marijuana dispensary that opened up near the University of Southern California and how they wish it would move somewhere else. Sometimes, gang members dabble in their own horticulture. In a March 2015 conversation, the shot-caller of the Pasadena clique, "Droopy," tells a colleague he had received marijuana clones from his cousin and asked advice on whether "to grow his marijuana plants with direct sunlight or in a room under a light bulb." The next month, the indictment says, Droopy received a call from somebody who had seen on Facebook that Droopy had marijuana for sale. Droopy said he'd give the customer "a good price." The FBI notes that many gangs have moved aggressively into social media in the last few years.

Another big source of income for MS-13 is from the management of "casitas," which resemble modern-day speakeasies. They typically operate 24/7 and offer gambling, prostitution, drugs, and alcohol. The indictment details plenty of drug deals going down at the casitas. MS-13 collects a portion of all the proceeds from the illicit activity at a casita. In a November 2016 raid of an MS-13 casita two miles west of the Staples Center, police found 20 grams of meth, a half-gram of cocaine, digital scales, several pistols, a rifle, a shotgun, and 100 rounds of ammunition.

There's plenty of violence described in the indictment, too—a drive-by shooting, a plot to kill two prison inmates accused of sex crimes, an attack on three people at a Salvadoran nightclub, the killing of a rival gang member outside an Internet café in the San Fernando Valley. Then there are incidents like the one in which a gang member nicknamed "Criminal" robs a victim in 2010, yells "We are MS, motherf—er!" He then "removed a firearm from his waistband and shot one round into the air."

Most of the action takes place in rough neighborhoods. Leap, the UCLA gang expert, says MS-13 mostly menaces other gangs, not innocent people. She also says its numbers are declining. Years of turf wars and police crackdowns on gang leadership have taken their toll, and inner-city gang-prevention programs are dissuading a new generation of teens from joining.

In announcing the federal charges in May, the acting U.S. attorney for Los Angeles said, "The gang's power is widespread—power which it maintains with severe acts of violence. Today's charges and arrests, however, will deal a critical blow to the top leadership of this criminal organization and will significantly improve the safety in neighborhoods across the region."

Today, Porky remains in Los Angeles County's Men's Central Jail. He's due in court on the murder charge next month. ♦

NEWSCOM

The Biden Trial Balloon

Revenge of the septuagenarians.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

Joe Biden speaks to reporters while visiting the U.S. Senate, July 11.

In the past half-century, there have been two presidential elections that Democrats should have won by a landslide but did not.

The first was in 1976. If there ever was a year when the stars were aligned to scuttle the Republican candidate, our bicentennial year was it. The economy was in chronic stagnation and inflation—a condition then known, but since forgotten, as "stagflation"—and Richard Nixon and his vice president, Spiro Agnew, had both resigned in disgrace. By grace of the recently enacted 25th Amendment, the executive branch was governed by two men (Gerald Ford, Nelson Rockefeller) neither of whom had been elected to their respective offices; and in 1975, the Vietnam war had come to its ignominious end. Even Ford's 1976 running mate, the caustic Sen. Robert Dole, was probably a drag on the GOP brand.

Two years earlier, in the aftermath of Watergate, Democrats had gained 49 seats in the House, propelling their majority above the two-thirds mark. And in the Senate, five new Democrats had been elected, leaving them with a comfortable 61-39 imbalance of power.

In the presidential primary campaign, aspirants ranged from Jerry Brown and Morris Udall to Henry Jackson and George Wallace—and the ultimate victor, Jimmy Carter, was arguably the most conservative Democratic nominee in modern times. Yet Carter, the media favorite, barely squeaked by the stolid Ford: He was elected with a bare majority (50.1 percent) of the popular vote, reflected in a close Electoral College ballot (297-240).

The other election, of course, was last year's. Like most journalists—and,

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I suspect, most Americans—I expected Hillary Clinton to prevail. Long before her stunning loss in November, there was a bipartisan consensus that Clinton was a maladroit campaigner waging an uninspired campaign; but Donald Trump was, and remains, Donald Trump. The only inkling that there was anything amiss was reflected in a certain mystification about opinion polls: If Trump was as vulgar, dangerous, and incompetent as the press daily reminded us, why wasn't Clinton 20 points (or more) ahead of him?

The answer, in retrospect, was twofold: Clinton's ineptitude was a genuine liability, and Trump's appeal was unprecedented. Which is why, even as President Trump lurches daily from gaffe to "scandal," the Democrats should probably avoid that smug feeling. For while the not-especially-loyal opposition ought to be generating a wealth of plausible challengers for 2020, it is not.

Among other things, the Democratic party seems to be suffering from sclerosis. Seventy-five-year-old Bernie Sanders may or may not run next time around, but he and his followers seem to be largely on the offensive against fellow Democrats. Jerry Brown, who will be 82 in 2020, might be considering a fourth run for the White House but seems to have little appeal outside California. Even the youth contingent—Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts (68) and Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York (59)—seem to repel more voters than they attract.

This may explain, last week in the pages of the *Washington Post*, the inaugural appearance of former vice president Joseph Biden's trial balloon. Roxanne Roberts is a veteran of the *Post* Style section and wrote a suitably affectionate profile: The bumptious Biden, she reported, is "America's favorite uncle [and] arguably the most popular former vice president in history." But while the question in her title—"Is Joe Biden ready to run?"—was clearly rhetorical, she didn't avoid mentioning Biden's liabilities: His limited popularity on his party's resurgent left, his history of plagiarism and minor family scandals, and, not least, his age.

In January 2021, an incoming President Biden would be the same age as our oldest president (Ronald Reagan) was at the end of his second term. To be sure, people are living longer these days, and given the baseline, Biden's mental capacity is not likely to be noticeably reduced by that time. But the two most recent "popular former vice presidents" who ran for the White House—Richard Nixon, who was 55 in 1968, and Walter Mondale, 56 in 1984—were practically a generation younger than Biden will be four years hence.

In the Age of Trump, none of this suggests that a Biden candidacy is unlikely or even implausible since, as Roberts reminds us, voters "don't really care about conventional wisdom anymore." Yet even as Biden, who clearly regrets last year's decision not to run, sends the customary smoke signals into the air—a memoir about to be published, a fundraising PAC (American Possibilities), even academic sinecures (the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement at the University of Pennsylvania, a Biden Institute at the University of Delaware)—the only surprise is that Biden's inability to withdraw from the limelight is also the only sign of life in current Democratic ranks.

For as Georgia's would-be congressman Jon Ossoff learned in June, it's not enough to point at Donald Trump, gasp in horror, and expect to win. ♦

Both Sides Now

A Washington oppo shop's curious Russia connections. BY MARK HEMINGWAY

In July, when news broke that Donald Trump Jr., Jared Kushner, and Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort met last year with a Russian lawyer and a former Russian intelligence officer who promised dirt on the Hillary Clinton campaign, there was a media feeding frenzy. After months of speculation about collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia, this meeting was something concrete.

However, there was one detail about the meeting that the media and Democrats in Congress have decidedly *not* been in a frenzy to feed on. The Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, was also collaborating with Fusion GPS, an opposition research firm that has mainly done work for interests aligned with the Democratic party. Fusion GPS has denied any role in setting up the Trump Jr. meeting. However, the firm has worked with Veselnitskaya in her lobbying to lift U.S. sanctions aimed at Putin and fellow Russian kleptocrats who are squirreling away billions in Western financial institutions. Aspects of this issue—Moscow's 2012 ban on American adoptions of Russian children, in retaliation for the sanctions—were reportedly discussed during her meeting with the Trump campaign.

Here's where it gets weird: Fusion GPS is the same firm that was hired to put together the infamous "dossier" on Trump's alleged ties to Russia. The dossier is said to have been commissioned by the campaign of a Republican primary opponent before the project was taken over and funded by some unidentified Democratic client after Trump won the GOP nomination. It contained a wild mix of allegations, some salacious, some provably false, many of them hard or impossible to corroborate. Despite questions about the document's reliability, the FBI relied on it in part to procure a

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warrant from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to eavesdrop on Carter Page, a former national security adviser to the Trump campaign.

In short, it appears Fusion GPS was simultaneously on the payroll of Democratic interests seeking to discredit Trump on the basis of his ties to the Russian government even as it was working on a lobbying effort whose beneficiaries would be Vladimir Putin and his billionaire cronies.

All this was sordid-looking enough for the Senate Judiciary Committee, which was investigating the Trump meeting, to seek testimony from Fusion GPS founder and former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Glenn Simpson. He balked, and negotiations reportedly foundered on his unwillingness to reveal the client who had been paying for the Trump-Russia dossier. After the threat of a subpoena, Simpson eventually agreed to speak to the committee privately.

That Fusion GPS no doubt has things to hide doesn't necessarily mean it is part of some grand Russian conspiracy. There are sharks lurking in the murkier waters of the fabled Washington swamp: very profitable and mercenary firms that specialize in the dark arts of opposition research and media manipulation. They tend not to be picky about clients and grow less picky as the clients grow more lucrative. That could conceivably explain Fusion GPS's role in all this.

Fusion GPS has been in the news two notable times in the last five years. In 2012, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Kimberley Strassel reported that the firm was behind a smear campaign targeting conservative donors to Mitt Romney. The outfit had even dug up divorce records of one Idaho Republican who had donated $1 million to a pro-Romney super-PAC. Simpson didn't deny his firm was behind the effort and told Strassel the donor was a "legitimate" target.

In 2015, after Planned Parenthood was embarrassed by videos in which its officials discussed the sale of fetal body parts, Fusion GPS was hired to produce a report exonerating the abortion provider. The report was covered extensively by the media. The headline in the *New York Times* was "Planned Parenthood Videos Were Altered, Analysis Finds," and Fusion GPS was antiseptically described as a "Washington-based research and corporate intelligence company." (Despite the way in which it was used by the *New York Times* and other media outlets friendly to Planned Parenthood, the report conceded that there was no "widespread evidence of substantive video manipulation." That line didn't make it into the *Times*'s article.)

Above, Glenn Simpson of Fusion GPS; below, Natalia Veselnitskaya

Of course, it's the firm's foreign clients that are the source of the most controversy. The Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony on July 27 from Bill Browder, a former investor in Russian markets. In 2005, Browder was deported from Russia for exposing financial corruption by Russian officials with ties to Putin, and 18 months later all of the documents relating to his investments in the country were seized. Browder hired a Russian lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, to look into what was going on. Magnitsky reported back that legal documents from the companies Browder owned in Russia weres being used to misappropriate $230 million in taxes the company had paid the Russian government.

Shortly after this discovery, Magnitsky was imprisoned. He would die in prison under suspicious circumstances—but not before he had smuggled out over 400 complaints via his lawyers of torture and beatings. In 2010, Browder used Magnitsky's story to appeal to senators John McCain and Ben Cardin to pass legislation denying visas to and freezing the assets of Russian officials tied to human rights abuses. The Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012 eventually passed Congress with overwhelming bipartisan majorities. The law infuriated Putin, and the Duma responded by voting for the adoption ban. Veselnitskaya has long been advocating for the repeal of the Magnitsky Act.

Browder's Senate testimony made two explosive accusations. The first is that Fusion GPS has failed to "indicate that they were acting on behalf of Russian government interests, nor did they file disclosures under the Foreign Agent Registration Act" (FARA). However, it's not clear that the two Russians in the meeting with the Trump team in June 2016, Veselnitskaya and former Russian intelligence officer and naturalized American citizen Rinat Akhmetshin, were acting on behalf of the Russian government.

For her part, Veselnitskaya denies doing so, though she did represent the son of a senior Russian government official who ran afoul of the Magnitsky sanctions in an attempt to purchase some Manhattan real estate and has also represented state-owned enterprises. Adding to the mystery is that Fusion GPS was hired by Veselnitskaya through the law firm Baker Hostetler. Using a law firm as an intermediary means that all business between Veselnitskaya and Fusion GPS is covered by attorney-client privilege, and therefore totally opaque.

The second accusation from Browder is that Fusion GPS was hired for the explicit purpose of "conduct[ing] a smear campaign against me and Sergei Magnitsky in advance of congressional hearings on the Global Magnitsky Act"—an extension of the original

BELOW, NEWSCOM

Magnitsky legislation that passed in December 2016.

Browder's story about Fusion GPS was reinforced by some shockingly similar testimony provided to the Senate Judiciary Committee. Thor Halvorssen, president and CEO of the Human Rights Foundation, also accused Fusion GPS of violating FARA, owing to its work representing Derwick Associates, a Barbados-based company whose principals are Venezuelan.

The Venezuelan government awarded a dozen power plant contracts to Derwick in exchange for millions of dollars in kickbacks to Venezuelan government officials, Halvorssen alleged in his testimony. Halvorssen also provided detailed allegations that Peter Fritsch, another former *Wall Street Journal* reporter and partner at Fusion GPS, was instrumental in killing a *WSJ* investigative report on Derwick's corruption in 2014, as well as stories on the matter in other publications such as Bloomberg and the *Economist*. Halvorssen further claimed that Fusion GPS's efforts to spike stories on Derwick's corruption included running smear campaigns on various whistleblowers and investigative journalists looking into the matter.

Fusion GPS for its part responded to the Senate testimony with a statement: "It is a matter of public record that Fusion GPS worked for and under the supervision of an American law firm to provide support for civil litigation in New York. It was not required to register under FARA, and it did not spread false information about William Browder or Sergei Magnitsky."

What do clients get by hiring a firm like Fusion GPS? Among other things, a firm with former top reporters would certainly know how to push the buttons of top news editors. Aside from Simpson and Fritsch, Fusion GPS's principals include other notable former reporters from the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*, all with storied investigative careers and extensive contacts. If any firm in Washington has the institutional expertise on how to both feed the media manufactured news and scare editors into deep-sixing potentially damaging stories, it's Fusion GPS.

Reporters have always been somewhat dependent on dubious leaks from lawyers and prosecutors and lawmakers, all of whom have genuine investigative powers—subpoenas, search warrants, and the like—that reporters don't enjoy, no matter how much they flatter themselves by calling their work "investigative journalism." In financially strapped modern newsrooms, dependence on the use of such sources has probably only grown. The temptation for reporters needing their next big scoop is to turn to firms like Fusion GPS for one-stop information shopping. An unfortunate side-effect is the disinclination of many major publications to scrutinize and report the role of firms like Fusion GPS in shaping major stories. There's a strong likelihood they would be implicating their own reporters, not to mention biting one of the hands that feed them.

The Trump-Russia scandal may not be going away anytime soon, but the more we learn about the role of Fusion GPS and how they operate, the more it suggests there may be a related media scandal just waiting to break open. ♦

Will Minnesota Finally Go Red?

A liberal stronghold no more.

BY BARRY CASSELMAN

Minneapolis

When Donald Trump stopped off in Minnesota the Sunday before the election, it raised eyebrows. No Republican had won the state since Richard Nixon in 1972. But two days later, the outcome was in doubt until late in the night. Hillary Clinton's 1.5 point margin over Trump was the narrowest victory for her party there since Walter Mondale barely won his home state over Ronald Reagan in 1984.

What had happened to this hyper-blue state? This is a state that was reliably liberal for decades after the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party, the DFL, was created in 1944. A succession of DFLers were sent to Washington, reaching a high point with Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale, both of whom became vice president and then their party's nominee for president. But the GOP won a statewide upset in 1978, electing two U.S. senators and the governor. And ever since, control of state offices has passed back and forth between the DFL and the GOP.

Last year brought the latest reversal, with the GOP keeping control of the state house and retaking the state senate. More revealing was the closeness of the presidential race. The much-heralded DFL get-out-the-vote operation almost came up short in delivering the state for Hillary Clinton (who had lost there to Bernie Sanders in the primary/caucus season).

Trump's strong showing came in the rural and blue-collar exurban areas, which responded to his antiestablishment message, and in the northeastern Range area, usually a DFL stronghold, where the vote was as much anti-Clinton as it was pro-Trump.

So the statewide and congressional elections in 2018 promise to be highly contested. The race for governor

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already features five major Democratic candidates to succeed the DFL's Mark Dayton, who is retiring after two terms. At least one more major DFL candidate is expected to enter the race.

On the Republican side, at least one well-known conservative figure is reportedly considering the race. The 2016 results and the state's history of changing gubernatorial parties after two terms give conservatives reason for optimism.

The biggest political news so far, though, came from two potentially formidable candidates, one in each party, who announced they were not running. Republican Rich Stanek, sheriff of Hennepin County, decided for personal reasons to skip the governor's race and run for reelection instead. Stanek would have been an early favorite for the GOP nomination because of his success in the state's largest county (home to Minneapolis), which is heavily DFL. In spite of his party affiliation, Stanek has won election and reelection by large margins against DFL opponents. A lifelong law enforcement officer, he would not have carried the area in a gubernatorial race, but he would have done significantly better than any other GOP nominee at cutting into urban DFL margins that have enabled liberals to win recent statewide elections.

On the DFL side, Rep. Rick Nolan, who represents the state's northeastern 8th District, also announced he would pass on the governor's race after earlier expressing a keen interest in it. Nolan is in his third term but served a southeastern Minnesota district for several terms in the 1970s, and at 73 is also well-known in the Twin Cities, where he has some union support. But Nolan, who barely won his two most recent races in MN-8, would probably have conceded the district to a GOP winner in 2018 if he had chosen to run for governor.

This is exactly what is happening in the Minnesota's 1st Congressional District, where incumbent Tim Walz has decided to leave Congress to run for governor. Like Nolan's, Walz's reelection margin in 2016 was very close, and in 2018, Republican Jim Hagedorn will start as the favorite. Walz, a former schoolteacher, is not very well-known in the rest of the state but is a strong campaigner.

He will face numerous well-known liberal figures for the gubernatorial nomination. The large field probably means there will be no DFL party endorsement. Even if there were, the primary would still likely be bitterly contested.

The Republicans likewise have no frontrunner. One major potential gubernatorial candidate is state speaker of the house Kurt Daudt, who is expected to announce very soon. Formally in the race are 2014 gubernatorial nominee Jeff Johnson and state legislator Matt Dean. Other legislators and two prominent businessmen are considering a run. None of these announced candidates is very well-known statewide.

Pawlenty: Will he enter the field?

The one candidate who could clear the GOP field at this point is former governor (and 2012 presidential candidate) Tim Pawlenty, who has been a highly paid industry association executive in Washington but is known to miss electoral politics. Pawlenty won each of his terms as governor with a plurality in three-way races. Pawlenty has maintained his residence in the state and is considered an especially articulate campaigner. The former governor is likely to delay his decision until later this year.

While Minnesota has an unusual number of competitive congressional races, including that likely GOP pickup in MN-1, races could obviously be affected by President Trump's standing in 2018. Republican Erik Paulsen represents a suburban swing district (MN-3). He did not endorse Trump in 2016 and won reelection by a wide margin even though Hillary Clinton carried the district. First-term GOP congressman Jason Lewis in the 2nd District could be vulnerable next year. He represents a swing exurban district. Republican Tom Emmer (MN-6) and the DFL's Collin Peterson (MN-7) both seem to be holding safe seats, although "blue dog" Peterson represents a very rural and conservative district that will likely go Republican when he retires. In MN-8, Republican Stewart Mills, who twice came close to defeating Nolan, can easily wait until the end of the year before deciding if he wants to run for a third time.

The DFL's Amy Klobuchar is running for a third U.S. Senate term in 2018 but is not expected to have a serious opponent. She is the most popular elected official in the state. Republicans with their eye on the Senate seem willing to wait for 2020, when Al Franken faces reelection and is likely to be more vulnerable.

Republicans control both the state house and senate. No state senators face election in 2018, and the GOP margin in the house indicates they will likely retain their majority.

Divided state government has produced some epic clashes, the most recent being Governor Dayton's line-item veto of the entire budget passed by the legislature for the next two years. Republicans have sued the governor over what they assert was his unconstitutional use of the veto. The state supreme court will hear arguments later this month. Voters next year will try to resolve this stalemate.

Does Minnesota still deserve its national reputation as dependably "blue"? Probably not. Though next year is expected to be a good one for Democrats nationally, this might turn out to be the only state where Republicans could flip the congressional lineup from blue to red. ♦

DAVE MALAN

So You Want to Be a (Social Media) Star

Summer camp for aspiring online celebrities

By David DeVoss

Los Angeles

It's a beautiful day, and I'm standing in a courtyard of a private university east of L.A. surrounded by 40 teenagers, most of them desiring to become the next Internet sensation. The youngest are here for SocialStar Creator Camp, which is designed to turn them into social media superstars able to produce content that will attract adoring followers and corporate sponsors willing to pay top dollar for Internet "influencers" to promote their products. And then there's me, the analog guy who has yet to post a YouTube video.

My fellow campers are from all over. There's a 13-year-old singer from San Francisco and a 13-year-old boy from Sonora, Mexico, here to learn about vlogging (video-blogging), a 17-year-old South African who needs help with video editing, and a Puerto Rican, back for a second summer, who believes Internet fame will help him become a DJ and party planner.

Campers from Virginia, left, and Sonora, Mexico, right, listen to Los Angeles actress and camp instructor Angel Payne, center.

In the shade of a dormitory breezeway, two teens from Idaho are flirting with a 12-year-old from Sweden who likes shoes and plans to start a YouTube channel that reviews footwear. They soon are joined by a young comedian, who hopes the skits she posts on YouTube will lead one day to a job on *Saturday Night Live*, and a fashion-conscious 14-year-old whose goal is to make time-lapse videos that show her designing and making casual clothes.

Most parents, it seems fair to generalize, would rather their kids spend less time, not more, on social media. They obsess over how much "screen time" to allow their children each day. And many no doubt see summer as a prime opportunity to wean their adolescents from the all-consuming devices that seem increasingly to rule their lives. They remember when summer meant riding horses, canoeing, and learning to tie knots (save for the humbling sheepshank) at a camp named after some dispossessed Indian tribe. The more zealous among them would probably recoil in horror from a camp that doubles down on social media. It would strike them as going over to the dark side.

But then most parents also look for small shoots of ambition among their offspring that they can encourage and nurture. And that's decidedly the case with the campers I'm meeting here. Kids like 12-year-old Ryan Hildebrand, an A-student from Seattle. "Ryan has an entrepreneurial spark and social media is his passion," says his mother Kelli. "We just wanted to help him express himself more creatively." Oregon mother Stephanie Rosenaur, who grew up in Michigan and loves to go camping, says her A-student daughter Aria, 14, lives in a social media world where teenage girls don't even talk on the phone anymore. "They just text," she sighs. "She works so hard we can't complain, and her whole generation is trending this way."

Camp officially begins in a nearby auditorium named after film star Mary Pickford with inspirational remarks by social media personality Michael Buckley, author of *Help! My Kid Wants to Become a YouTuber*. "How old were all of you when YouTube started in 2005?" he shouts. "Four," respond several young actors here to learn how to better promote themselves. "Well, now is the time to start growing your following on YouTube," says Buckley, not missing a beat. "You're an entrepreneur by nature. Learn skills here that will help shape your brand."

Buckley, 42, strongly believes post-millennial kids

IMAGES: DAVID DEVOSS

David DeVoss is editor of the East-West News Service in Los Angeles.

belonging to the Generation Z cohort no longer grow up wanting to be doctors or firemen. They want to be YouTubers, he insists, before turning to the assembled campers and exhorting them to follow their dreams. "You'll face doubters," he cautions, "but they are like those people drinking champagne on the top deck of the Titanic. You are the iceberg."

Facebook is still the largest social network, with 2 billion monthly users, 1.32 billion of whom log in every day and spend 20 minutes online. But YouTube's 1.5 billion users make it a formidable runner-up. Roughly a billion hours of its content is being watched daily around the world. YouTube's video format is especially popular with advertisers because the level of engagement of its users (38 percent female, 62 percent male) can be easily quantified. Imagination and a smartphone are the only things necessary to make a good YouTube video, which is why 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute.

Social media is more than a duopoly, of course. Snapchat (approaching 200 million users) and Instagram both publish photos, captions, brief videos, and conversations sparked by all of the above, though Instagram with 700 million users appears to be winning the race. About 328 million people around the world regularly use Twitter in 35 languages. (LinkedIn also qualifies as social media, though most of its 500 million members use the site only as a repository for their digital résumés.)

In addition to serving as an exchange for photos, videos, and messages, social media's affordability makes it an advertising favorite. "Companies are constantly looking for social media influencers who can engage a large following so that subscribers to the channel will promote the product through word-of-mouth marketing," explains Barika Croom, 32, a co-founder of B3 Media Solutions in Los Angeles. Croom manages social media for Hyundai and Toyota. "Analytics are so precise that we know how many people see an influencer video, how long they watch, who they tell, and whether the video changes the public conversation."

After lunch, Croom lectures campers as young as 10 on how to monetize content on different social media platforms. She then gives them 30 minutes to create a product and shoot and edit a three-minute commercial on their phones. The winning entry, about a cell phone that can be charged by holding it next to a tree, is conceived by a 12-year-old Little Leaguer from Seattle.

When former Los Angeles social worker Nichelle Rodriguez began planning the SocialStar Creator Camp two years ago, it primarily was geared toward teenage actors who believed a social media presence might help them land roles. Before long, parents of younger kids already on YouTube and Instagram began asking for classes that would help their children create better content. "Huge amounts of money breed intense competition in social media," says Rodriguez. "Technical and business skills taught here provide the extra push toward success."

Pundits spent most of 2016 insisting that America's youth strongly support Bernie Sanders. This may be the case when it comes to reducing poverty and making college affordable. But not when it comes to the socialism part: The kids at social media camp are committed entrepreneurs fully invested in Western capitalism. Their goal is business success, not Hollywood stardom.

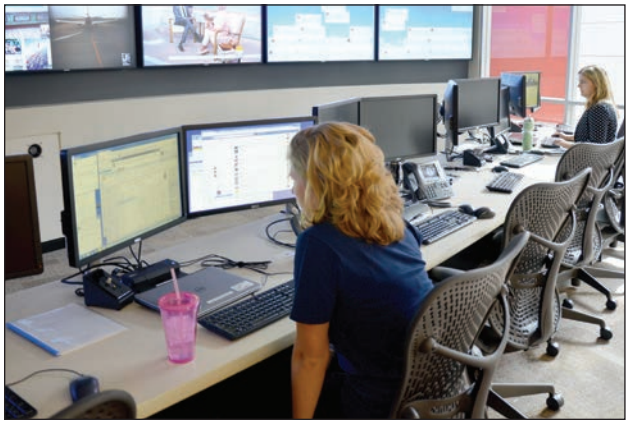
Above, video producer Fernando Chocano demonstrates the placement of lighting on a set; below, teenaged campers shoot selfies and practice uploading to their YouTube pages.

Workshops at the camp ranged from set lighting and video editing to web series production and Internet security. By the end of the third day, campers had learned how to shoot a music video and build an in-house recording studio.

These courses may seem more appropriate for the USC

and NYU film schools. In fact, most campers have logged more time behind and in front of a camera than any incoming film student of decades past. Certainly they have the money to pay university tuition.

Sophia Montero, a 13-year-old singer from Miami who is known online as "Angelic," has a YouTube channel with more than 900,000 subscribers. At age 9 she covered an



Above, campers learn how to make patterns for use on an online fashion channel; below, staff in the Listening Center at Southwest Airlines' Dallas headquarters monitor social media.

Ariana Grande song called "Problem" in an upload that has since attracted 32 million views. Her music videos have been viewed more than 150 million times. While she was at camp, her immigrant parents from Venezuela were house hunting in the San Fernando Valley.

"I'm just a normal kid who rides bikes 'n' stuff," she smiles. "I don't care about money. I just want Mom to have everything and for us to lead a full life."

Spend time browsing social media and it becomes clear why so many consumers are cutting the cable cord. Most YouTube videos may not have the structure or production values of commercial television, but many of the channels are weirdly addictive. "Bad Lip Reading" spoofs film, TV, and political news clips by overdubbing hilariously incongruous vocals that match the lip movements. Grant Thompson's "The King of Random" confronts weekend projects and humorous experiments in videos that meld *MacGyver* and *MythBusters* with *Watch Mr. Wizard*.

YouTube's two richest content creators are radically different. One is a foul-mouthed Swede named Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg who goes by the online pseudonym PewDiePie. PewDiePie is a gamer whose irreverent clips—most giving the viewer a look over his shoulder as he plays video games and comments on them—have earned him around $90 million and attracted more than 56 million followers he calls the "Bro Army."

YouTube's biggest star was profiled on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* earlier this year under the headline "Every 20-Something Knows This Woman; Do You?" Her name is Lilly Singh and her 610 video riffs on social foibles have been viewed over two trillion times. Singh, 28, earned $7.5 million last year, according to *Forbes*, thanks to hilarious videos like "If White Walkers Were Teenage Girls" and "5 Things Guys Do That Girls Love."

Singh credits her seven years on YouTube with helping her get two film roles, fund a touring variety show, and publish a book. Says Singh: "When I walk into an audition, the casting agent knows that I bring a very large online audience with me and that my audience is ready to support me in my future projects."

It's exactly that sort of synergy that prompted Alyssa Lebarron, an aspiring 15-year-old actress from Denver, to attend social media camp. "I was in one Subway commercial, but I've missed other roles because I lacked a social media presence," she confides. "Casting directors always are looking for web stars because they are easier to promote."

The road to stardom used to start with a lucky break. After getting into a bar fight, a noticeably bruised Mel Gibson agreed to drive a friend to an audition the next morning where he was spotted by a director who thought he might fit into a dystopian movie called *Mad Max*. Charlize Theron was approached by a casting director in a bank after she got into an argument with a teller who was reluctant to withdraw money from her South African account. The pathway to fame now begins at YouTube.

Exhibit A: The HBO comedy series *Insecure*, starring Issa Rae, which began its second season last month, was born six years ago on YouTube under the title *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl.*

The entrepreneurial spirit of the campers is reciprocated by corporate America, which is embracing social media as a way to reach a younger generation that communicates in ways their baby boomer parents find utterly foreign. Recent studies by Georgetown linguistics professor Deborah Tannen show that today's

IMAGES: DAVID DEVOSS

students prefer to transact all business online, are reluctant to seek information on the phone, and, perhaps most surprising, text each other even more once they become roommates.

For all the benefits it offers to marketers, though, social media remains a two-edged sword. "Unlike traditional advertising, which is a one-way communication, social media allows a dialogue with the customer," says Larry Light, CEO of Arcature, a marketing consulting firm, and author of *Six Rules for Brand Revitalization*. "You have to remember that your dialogue is not private. The whole world is listening and your good intentions can be misinterpreted."

That's what happened last March when after the Boston Marathon Adidas emailed to race participants, "Congrats, you survived the Boston Marathon." Within minutes the Twitterverse exploded, criticizing Adidas for its insensitivity just four years after the 2013 marathon bombing.

Adidas rebounded from its gaffe with a quick apology. United Airlines is still suffering from its muddled response to a video of its forcible removal of a passenger.

Two trillion views: YouTube queen Lilly Singh

Southwest Airlines hopes to eliminate misunderstandings before they happen by keeping a Listening Center at its Dallas Love Field headquarters staffed around the clock with employees who monitor social media looking for complaints they can respond to in real time. "Social listening to live tweets is an early-warning system that lets our ground staff know there may be a situation," says social business team manager Ashley Mainz.

Back in Los Angeles at the SocialStar Creator Camp social media's next generation has less weighty concerns. Brazilian Sophia Fuchs, 15, from the suburbs of São Paulo is excited about what life has to offer. Her videos about teenage life have been viewed over 1.5 million times during the past three years, and now she's starting to do commercials about school supplies. "I get invited to beach resorts and people stop me on the street to take pictures," she smiles brightly. With a combined 450,000 followers on YouTube and Instagram, does she want to be a social media superstar, I ask? "I don't know," she says. "I like math and science a lot." ♦

VIA YOUTUBE

Gene Kelly demonstrates a balletic grand jeté in this stroboscopic studio study (1944).

A Man in Motion

Gene Kelly's moves, music, and movies. BY PIA CATTON

Of all the unanswerable questions in the universe, there's one that brings the brightest minds of Broadway and Hollywood to their knees: What makes one musical or movie musical a hit and another a flop? A veritable ocean of cocktails flows over this question. But during the 1940s, the Hollywood folks with the magic touch were in the so-called "Freed Unit," the division of the film studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer from which producer Arthur Freed turned out some of America's greatest movie musicals.

Pia Catton is editor of Dance.com.

He's Got Rhythm
The Life and Career of Gene Kelly
by Cynthia Brideson and Sara Brideson
Kentucky, 560 pp., $39.95

Freed's keen eye saw that a Broadway hoofer named Gene Kelly could be a star—and that his charm could create screen magic with Judy Garland. And so began, with the 1942 film *For Me and My Gal*, Kelly's prolific MGM career, glittering prominently even in an age of gold. The Freed Unit was a rotating team that included directors Busby Berkeley and Vincente Minnelli, plus a roster of stars from Fred Astaire and Frank Sinatra to Kathryn Grayson, Esther Williams, and of course Garland. Kelly could sing and dance—and write—but he also choreographed and directed films, most memorably *On the Town* (1949) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), with Stanley Donen.

From this creative hotbed came the hit movie musical *An American in Paris* (1951)—produced by Freed, directed by Minnelli, choreographed by and starring Kelly. The picture, with Gershwin tunes and an original screenplay by the celebrated Broadway pen Alan Jay Lerner, was a hit: It grossed nearly $7 million and was

GJON MILI / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY

nominated for eight Oscars, more than any other musical before it, of which it won six.

Three years later, another Freed-Minnelli-Kelly collaboration hit the big screen with a proven story by Lerner, who wrote the show's songs with Frederick Loewe. But the film version of *Brigadoon*, based on Lerner and Loewe's 1947 Broadway hit, was an unmitigated flop, losing the studio $1.5 million.

How could proven material and an all-star team possibly fail? How! (Bartender, make it a double.) The reasons—behind this and other fluctuations in Kelly's career—are detailed with care by the sisters Cynthia Brideson and Sara Brideson in their new Kelly biography, *He's Got Rhythm*.

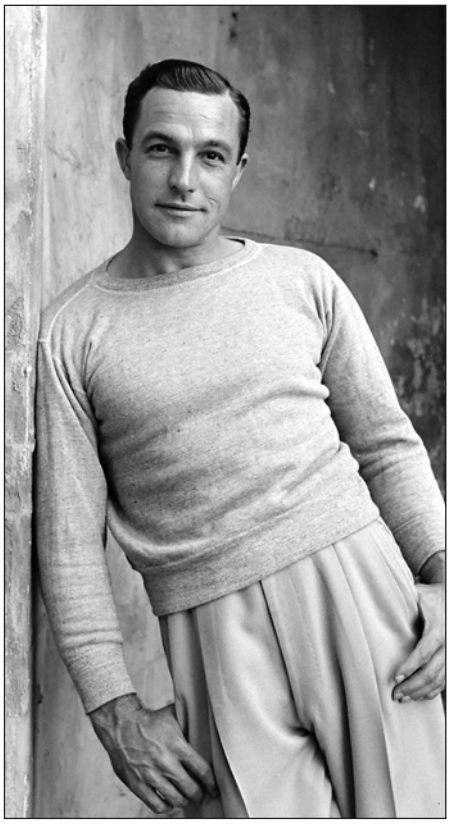
While the Bridesons don't ignore his missteps, they focus so tightly on Kelly's lesser projects that the deciding factor in whether a show was a hit or flop seems, in their telling, generally just to be the timing: Was the audience in the mood for what even at the time seemed like nostalgia?

The taste for the good old days (whatever they were) matters a great deal to the Kelly legacy. He so often portrayed wide-eyed, cornball optimism that no matter the setting of the film, his characters seem to hail from a more blissful bygone era. *Singin' in the Rain* looks back at the transition between silent films and talkies; *An American in Paris* uses music Gershwin premiered in 1928; *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949) harks back to turn-of-the-century baseball (though curiously only the women seem to be dressed for 1910).

Kelly was born in Pittsburgh in 1912, the third of five children to parents James, a phonograph salesman, and Harriet, who sent the children to dance classes and later turned them into an act called the Kelly Five. Gene was an athletic, if accident-prone, child whose energy for dance and sports was initially about equal.

Decades later, Kelly would recall that "every day was a happy day when I was growing up." While every day may or may not have been happy—he was beaten up for taking dance class, and his father, a heavy drinker, was wearied by the Great Depression—he worked hard to jump onto the show-biz ladder.

During Gene's college years he performed in a duo with his younger brother Fred. This was with the encouragement of their mother, who once scored them a gig filling in for the dancing Nicholas Brothers, who were to perform with Cab Calloway at an all-black club in Altoona, Pa. The club manager was surprised to discover two white tap dancers on his doorstep.



ALFRED EISENSTAEDT / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY

Posing for Alfred Eisenstaedt in 1949

Kelly also taught dance as a college student and, with family members, ran a dance school in Johnstown, Pa., all of which diverted him from his original plans to attend law school.

By the late 1930s, he had exhausted Pittsburgh and was ready for Broadway, where he struggled initially before landing the lead in *Pal Joey* (1940). Along the way, he met his first wife, the actress Betsy Blair, and they were soon Hollywood-bound.

Kelly and Blair had one child and for several years enjoyed an idyllic Los Angeles lifestyle, though they later grew apart and divorced in 1957 after 16 years of marriage. He married twice after Blair and had two more children.

The Bridesons take care to emphasize that Kelly was more than just a dancer, and they extol his bristling against racial and ethnic prejudice. They also correct the assumption that because he and Fred Astaire were constantly compared, they were necessarily rivals. The two were different—Astaire known for ethereal ease, Kelly for a muscular energy—and they worked together in their heyday on only one feature film, *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946). But they were friends, and Kelly was responsible for bringing Astaire into projects twice. When Kelly dropped out of *Easter Parade*, he suggested Astaire replace him in the 1948 film. Much later, when Kelly was directing his last film, *That's Entertainment! Part II* (1976), a nostalgic look at classic dance numbers, he brought Astaire, who was 13 years older, out of retirement to star in the film alongside him. Producer Daniel Melnick is quoted as describing the two as close: "Gene was devoted to him."

When covering Kelly's flaws, the Bridesons let playwright Arthur Laurents do much of the dirty work, quoting his bitter takedowns and general puncturing of lore. Laurents's sourest juice is saved for, of all things, Kelly's backyard volleyball games. Kelly and his first wife Betsy Blair disliked formality and glamour, so they created a relaxed, clubby scene at home for their clever friends. At one point, Kelly wanted to put in a swimming pool, but Blair rejected it as too Hollywood. They installed a volleyball court instead. And Kelly proceeded to terrorize friends with his McEnroe-esque competitive streak. Here is Laurents describing Kelly when angered by sudden frivolity on his team:

> Roaring at the top of his high tenor, he thrashed his way back to the house, flung open the kitchen door, and swiveled for one final curse … and like Rumpelstiltskin stamped down so hard on the doorsill that he broke his ankle.

Dancer-choreographer Bob Fosse was also not a fan: "I'd never seen anyone

so fierce about a so-called friendly game in my life." No matter. Kelly found willing sportsmen by bringing in local college basketball players for his backyard volleyball games.

Such vignettes are plentiful in *He's Got Rhythm*, which sweeps along from Kelly's days as a dance teacher in western Pennsylvania to his status as an international symbol of American spirit. The Bridesons give special attention to his World War II years, which may be the most interesting part of the book. In the Navy, Kelly was commissioned to create instructional films, such as *Combat Fatigue Irritability* (1945). To explain the symptoms of what would today be considered post-traumatic stress disorder, the song-and-dance man found an opportunity to stretch and use real dramatic skill playing a returning solider, Bob; he lashes out brutally at his family, then in a therapy session shakes with anger as he confront memories and collapses.

For fans of musical theater and dance, *He's Got Rhythm* is an enthusiastic guide to Kelly's career beyond his best-known hits. The Bridesons clearly relish sharing observations about what makes Kelly's cinematic choreography so successful. The authors lavish attention on the "Nina" number from *The Pirate*, a 1948 film with Garland. They're right to call attention to the scene: Kelly roves around the set using props and platforms so much that it would be impossible to re-create the dance on a flat stage.

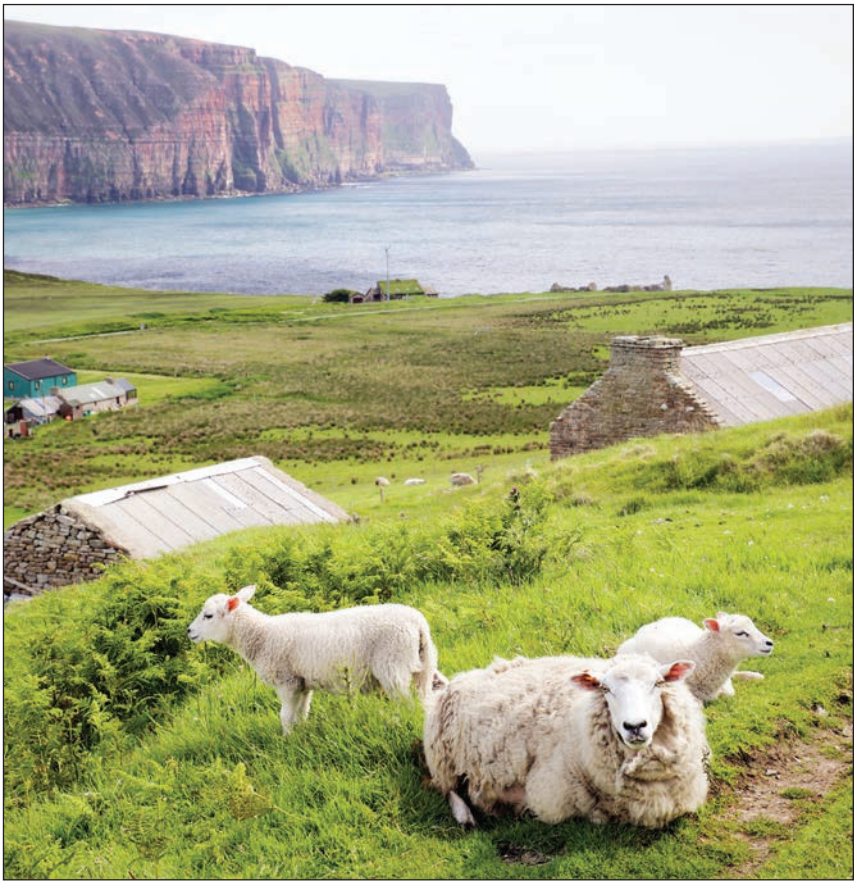
The Bridesons' book handles unpleasant realities in Kelly's life as distant dots on a timeline. He had a few brushes with an untimely end that apparently had no psychological effect. Betsy Blair was an open Communist, but if that had an impact on her husband's career, it is not apparent. Kelly's final years were curiously controlled by his much-younger third wife, Patricia Ward Kelly, who in the years since his 1996 death has functioned as a self-appointed custodian of his legacy.

And then, there's *Xanadu*. Which is maybe best left a dot on the timeline anyway. They can't all be hits. ♦

B&A

Lyrical Isles

Listening again to the distant music of the Orkney Islands. **BY SARA LODGE**



IMAGES: SARA LODGE

Orkney, Scotland

Orkney, an archipelago of some 70 islands—20 of them inhabited—lies 10 miles north of the northern tip of Scotland. I first visited the islands when I was 11, on a school trip. The roads shimmered in the intense midsummer heat. The white nights were like waking dreams, with the sky blue even at 11 P.M. Neolithic standing stones were circles of fire in the blazing red sunsets. We took jaunts on brightly painted lobster boats. I spied the poet George Mackay Brown—the Robert Lowell of Orcadia—sitting on his accustomed bench in Stromness harbor. I was entranced. With the fervor of childhood, I swore to return and live there. But I broke the engagement.

Now, 30 years on, I am back for the first time, attending the island's annual music festival. When I exit the twin-prop plane at Kirkwall Airport, the islands look as different as I do. The temperature is in the mid-50s and it's raining. Three-armed wind turbines cartwheel maniacally in the low fields. The sea is sullen. Pebbledashed houses hunker low to the ground. My hotel has

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1970s-style wallpaper and carpets in which the colors of red wine, tea, cigarette ash, and Guinness vie in a blotchy collage. The shower makes a noise reminiscent of the plane's engines. Suddenly, Kirkwall seems like a frontier town, gray and gritty. The liquor store models triple-glazed replacement windows. Beermats in the bar urge the suicidal to seek help. I wonder briefly if I am foolish to revisit the scene of my youthful adventure. But once I have found my way to the first of many musical gatherings, my mood lifts. And over the week that follows I fall in love with Orkney all over again.

The St. Magnus Festival, held each June, is a series of concerts, talks, plays, exhibitions, poetry readings, and workshops. According to one of its cofounders, the composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, it was born in a phone box on the island of Hoy. From such beginnings it has grown in eminence and ambition: New work is regularly premiered; collaborations are fostered; music lovers fly in from all corners of the world; young composers and conductors study with internationally renowned artists.

Charles Peebles, who leads the conducting course, told me that Orkney's remoteness was one of the factors that made it musically powerful: People have to travel to come here, and the journey often stimulates an inner progress toward psychic readiness. Orkney also provides neutral ground for the motivated, competitive young conductors; they get to know one another on equal terms. I sat in on a three-hour session and was fascinated to see how differently the eight conductors led the same orchestra. One danced on the balls of his feet, his hands fluttering butterflies. Another was rhetorical, scarcely moving from the waist down but gesticulating with punchy vigor. Another nodded his head in open-mouthed exhortation, hands making the motions of kneading bread or folding laundry. Peebles refers to the conductor as the orchestra's "fusebox," and I began to appreciate conducting as akin to electrical conductivity: the transmission of invisible energy, in this case through the thin and light shaft of the baton.

Festival concerts take place all over the islands, but the principal venue is the 12th-century St. Magnus Cathedral, a massive Romanesque red-sandstone edifice that is, once you sit inside it, a surprisingly intimate space with warm acoustics. The nave is narrow, with a ceiling like an upturned longboat. The columns are vast in circumference, and warm light falls from the stained glass high in the walls to bathe them yellow, pink, and orange. Hearing a late-night concert in the cathedral, with sunlight still pouring through the glass, is like being in a beating womb of sound. My favorite concert was called "Octets and Quartets in the Round": Two string quartets joined forces to play together in the heart of the cathedral, surrounded by the audience. Like a witches' coven, the strings squabbled, chased each other's notes, threw in ingredients, and in their fury concocted something so exciting that the very air felt changed as after a thunderstorm.

St. Magnus Cathedral

When I wasn't at concerts, I was often deep in the past. Orkney is exceptionally rich in ancient sites. To live here is to be aware of strata of settlement that go back over 5,000 years but are still very near the surface. Skara Brae, Europe's most perfectly preserved Neolithic village, was uncovered in 1850 by a ferocious storm. It lies by a beach and resembles a mini-golf course. There are sandy bunkers and grass-topped mounds. Look a little closer and you can see that the bunkers are in fact rooms, all designed to the same pattern, with two inset beds that would have been lined with animal skins, stone shelves for storage, and a hearth for cooking. The rooms were connected by covered passages. The outer walls were insulated with refuse—animal bones, shells, plant material—that tells us a good deal about how varied a diet these early people had. They ate fish and shellfish, deer, birds, boar, and sheep. They made tools, heather ropes, intricate jewelry, and dimpled stone balls—a bit like sea urchins—that may have had a ceremonial purpose. Most died young; the oldest were in their 50s. They suffered from arthritis and impacted wisdom teeth, and they cared for members of the community with disabilities (the skull of a woman in her 30s with congenital blindness was recovered at one of Orkney's sites). They were gifted engineers. And they marked the solar and lunar calendars with complex structures.

One such structure is Maeshowe, a chambered cairn, reachable by ducking through a long, low tunnel into a hill. Once inside, you are in the middle of a perfectly square chamber. On

three sides are rooms that would likely have contained human bones. The entrance tunnel is precisely designed so that during the winter solstice, the setting sun between distant hills sends a shaft of light to illuminate the back wall, transforming it into a door of shimmering gold. Pure stone-age ritual cinema. In 1153, several millennia after Maeshowe was built, a party of Vikings got stuck in a snowstorm and sheltered here. We know because the bored men carved runes into the walls. The graffiti they left to posterity is hilariously banal: "I carved this with an axe"; "I carved this very high up"; "call the widow Ingeborg if you want a good time." However, they left us one tiny artistic gem: a dragon with its head turning toward its tail as it, perhaps, feels the blade of a finely wrought dagger in its back. You can practically hear the Vikings stamp and blow, the men cursing and bantering, the chink of metal on stone.

Maeshowe is only accessible with a guide, but you crawl yourself into the Tomb of the Eagles, another chambered cairn, located above a bay of seals on the island South Ronaldsay, facing east to the rising sun. By midsummer the farmland is hazy with wildflowers: myriad buttercups, yellow irises and birdsfoot trefoil, pale pink thrift and purple orchids. The place immediately provokes that thrilling childhood sense that you are among buried treasure, that you might stumble upon a prehistoric artifact: a perfectly carved hematite axe, a ring, a pot. Kathleen MacLeod, whose father Ronnie discovered the tomb in the 1950s, remembers vividly how impressed she was as a child when first the local doctor, then the local policeman arrived to look. For years, her family lived with Neolithic skulls under the stairs. They came to know them as "the ancestors"—familiar characters with nicknames: Jock Tamson, Charlie girl. The tomb is remarkable for the number of sea-eagle talons it contains; others have predominantly deer antlers or the bones of dogs or songbirds. MacLeod theorizes that the different tribes of Neolithic Orkney may each have had their own totem animals.


Downtown Rackwick Bay on the island of Hoy

I am lucky and, during the week of my stay, the weather changes. Sunlight turns the sky the deep blue I remember from my childhood trip. The fields, drenched in long daylight, are brilliantly green. I take a ferry to the island of Hoy to visit Bunnertoon, the croft (farm cottage) owned by Peter Maxwell Davies, known here simply as "Max," who died last year at 81.

As the ferry docks, I inhale deeply. It is stunning here. Where most of Orkney is gently rolling, Hoy is mountainous. The land rises abruptly to peaks where sea eagles nest. The island's Rackwick Bay is sublime—and, when I get there, empty. There is no shop, no bar, no street lamps, only the faded red phone box in which grass is growing a foot high and a sign warns visitors that if they attempt to hike the path that passes the Old Man of Hoy (a spectacular natural column of stone near the shore) they should allow three hours each way and understand that there is no trained professional on the island to rescue them if they get stuck. This is remote.

The St. Magnus Festival exists within a year-round framework of social music and creative collaboration. Nurturing fresh talent with limited resources through the long winters takes time and commitment. Orcadians are exceptionally good at teaching music as a language to all their children; they value the arts as oxygen vital to the breath of the community. Local schools offer free, high-quality instrumental lessons. Folk musicians pass on the many dialects of the oral tradition. As gifted local musicians Jennifer and Hazel Wrigley told me, "You have to live your practice" so that it becomes not an interruption to your day but intrinsic to the social flow of your existence.

I climb up to Max's croft and picture him trundling a wheelbarrow up here with provisions. It is steep. There are streams to wade through. But the view is worth anything. Immense pink-red sandstone cliffs, stacked like the library of a clumsy giant, drop down to white sand, pink and gray stones as large and smooth as mangoes, turquoise shallows, and harebell-blue deeps. The bubbling cry of curlews rises out of the peat; redstarts and pipits chide on every fencepost; skuas ride the wind down to the sea. Max said that he used to walk his music when he was composing. It is little wonder that Orkney has produced generations of musicians: The landscape is lyrical—I think one would wake, work, and dream music here. ♦

SARA LODGE

B&A

The Russian We Need

The absurd appeal of satirist and poet Dmitry Bykov.

BY CATHY YOUNG

An America thoroughly fed up with both politics and political correctness slogs through a surreally dirty, bizarre, and finally insane election season—and, when the dust settles, finds itself in the grip of Kremlin strongman Vladimir Putin.

No, this is not a tinfoil-hatted take on Donald Trump's 2016 campaign and its alleged Russian connections. It is a satire very loosely based on the 2000 election and called "How Putin Became President of the USA"—the title story in a 2005 book of "new Russian fairy-tales," or political fables, by one of post-Soviet Russia's preeminent writers and public intellectuals, Dmitry Bykov.

Today, with the Trump/Russia scandal clearly here for the long haul, Bykov's fable has an eerie relevance—especially since American political life has lately taken on unnervingly Russian hues of profound cynicism, absurdity, and gallows humor. With his knack for exposing the absurdities of modern Russian life, Bykov is the Russian writer for our time.

Once, Russian literary idols with a political bent could find some fame in the United States. A half-century ago, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, the cautiously semi-dissident Soviet poet who died earlier this year, hobnobbed with the likes of Robert F. Kennedy, Allen Ginsberg, and William Styron and headlined a performance in the theater at Madison Square Garden. Bykov, a figure of somewhat comparable moral ambiguity, has lectured on Russian literature at some top American schools, most recently UCLA—but outside of Russian immigrant communities and departments of Slavic studies, he remains nearly unknown in the United States.

This is partly due to the decline of literary culture—in America but also in Russia, where Bykov is well known but not a Yevtushenko-level pop star—and partly to the fading of Russia from America's radar, at least until recently. It also has to do with the nature of Bykov's *oeuvre*. All literature gets somewhat lost in translation, but much of Bykov's writing is particularly Russia-specific. Some of his most widely read works are satirical poems on current events—essentially, columns in verse—that are Russia-focused, riff on classic Russian poetry, and abound in Russian cultural references (with some Western ones, from Shakespeare to *Beavis and Butt-Head*, thrown in). When Bykov's 2006 epic novel *ЖД* was published in England in 2010 as *Living Souls*, a *Financial Times* critic declared it "utterly baffling" to non-Russians—though allowing for its appeal to a "determined reader." And yet one such reader, British writer Steve Finbow, called the novel a masterpiece of "satire and magic realism rolled into one," invoking Tolstoy, Martin Amis, and Gabriel García Márquez for comparison.

Bykov, who turns 50 in December, has a "How does he do it?" kind of résumé. He has penned 23 novels and short-story collections, 16 books of poetry, several plays, 4 biographies (including a nearly 1,000-page tome on Boris Pasternak), and several collections of essays. He is a prolific pundit in the independent Russian press and the surviving pockets of dissent on Russia's radio and cable television, and an equally prolific public speaker and lecturer. He also teaches literature courses for high school students, which he has sometimes described as his most important job.

Living Souls is Bykov's flawed but brilliant magnum opus. (The original Russian title has many possible meanings; Bykov's stated preference is "living souls," alluding to Gogol's 1842 epic *Dead Souls*.) Like the Putin-in-America fable, the novel has an oddly prescient feel, depicting a somewhat futuristic world in which old paradigms are crumbling.

In the future depicted in *Living Souls*, a newly discovered combustible substance has made fossil fuels obsolete, and Russia with them. Now the world's forgotten poor relation, it is torn by a chronic, farcically senseless civil war between two groups: Varangians (Vikings), who champion authoritarian traditionalism, faith, and militarism, and Khazars (a medieval Turkic people believed by some to be related to European Jews), who stand for secular liberalism, reason, and commerce.

Bykov's grand concept is that these twin invaders have vied for control of Russia for centuries, keeping it trapped in a cycle of tyranny and thaw, revolution and reaction. (The true natives are mostly assimilated and oblivious to their ancient roots; many have an affliction that turns them into child-like, helpless drifters known as *vaski*—"Joes" in Cathy Porter's translation, a close equivalent but also a somewhat jarring Americanism.) Since Bykov's shrewd Khazars are clearly Jews while the brutish Varangians are the mass of Russians, the novel has been branded both Russophobic and anti-Semitic—charges that Bykov, who has a partly Jewish background, has only half-jokingly confirmed.

The sprawling plot includes a Varangian-Khazar double agent who is really a native seeking out others of his race; an adolescent girl's travels with a wise, gentle elderly "Joe" she has befriended; and two star-crossed couples—a Varangian officer of native blood and a fiery Khazar fighter, a cynical provincial governor and a native shamaness—one of whom may have a child whose birth is prophesied either

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to end the world or to break the circle of Russian history. There are also two mysterious villages that may represent Life and Death.

Living Souls sometimes verges on cliché, especially in its portrayal of the natives' peaceful, nature-loving ways. But it is also full of wonderfully inventive material, from darkly funny social satire—such as the "Salvation Plan" inviting people to adopt "Joes" as human pets—to fantasy steeped in fairytale and folklore. Porter's translation is a mixed bag, but then, the book is a translator's nightmare, given its poetry and wordplay, including the "native" dialect that gives new meanings to many Russian words. It is a challenging read, but for those interested in the intellectual landscape of 21st-century Russia, a rewarding one. (A less daunting sample of Bykov's prose in English, a creepy supernatural/sci-fi short story titled "Mozharovo," can be found in the 2012 anthology *Read Russia!*, online at readrussia.org.)

Bykov's political poems, or poetical political columns, which can show him at his most brilliant and versatile, are almost all untranslatable. A rare exception is a recent one called "Ritual." Occasioned by the infamous rumor of Donald Trump hiring Moscow prostitutes to defile a hotel bed where President Obama had slept, the poem (here in my own translation) gives this unsavory subject the unexpected twist of a reflection on Russian politics: "Yes, we have drunkenness, and crime, and need, / and vast dysfunction in our justice system— / but peaceful power transfer's guaranteed / once the preceding ruler has been pissed on." Noting that "there's never been in Russia a regime / that wasn't pissed on when its time was up," Bykov concludes by predicting the same fate for the current regime—with "no shortage here of whores" for the task.

Like Russia itself, Bykov is full of paradox. While he belongs to the liberal opposition, he has a habit of saying things that rattle fellow dissidents—for instance, that Russia's

Dmitry Bykov

Communist revolution deserves some admiration as a grand idealistic project, or that the Stalin era had more integrity and character than the late-Soviet and post-Soviet years, with their flabby corruption and cynicism. Some of this is *épater les bourgeois*—Bykov likes to repeat a reader's remark that he sees it as his life's work to "run into a church screaming that God doesn't exist"—but the contrarianism also reflects a genuine ambivalence.

The same ambivalence pervades Bykov's attitude toward the West: While he paints a dark and grotesque picture of Russian life and scorns nationalist claims to superior Russian spirituality, some of his comments reflect a view of America and the West in general as dominated by dull, pragmatic rationalism in contrast to Russia's inspired madness. Yet some of his more recent writings, such as "Ritual," hint at a convergence of the absurd. At a poetry reading at a Russian-American club in New Jersey in January, Bykov was asked if he would have voted for Trump or Hillary Clinton if he were an American citizen. He quipped, "I would have asked for political asylum in Russia, where we are relieved of such choices."

On a few recent occasions, Bykov has also hinted that he might settle in the United States if the climate in Russia grows too repressive. Who knows? Perhaps someday, Bykov will give us a great semi-fantastic, satirical Russian-American epic novel. ♦

B&A

To Love Another

A philosopher on the longing missing from modern life.

BY TIM MARKATOS

Before his untimely passing earlier this year, political philosopher Peter Augustine Lawler offered up some timely reflections on Allan Bloom's "souls without longing," the elite students who comprise the bulk of Bloom's study in his 1987 bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind*. As Lawler describes them, these souls are racked with longing and hunger for something they know not how to name. "Not only are love of God and romantic love alien to these young people, it would seem," writes Lawler, "so is any form of heart-enlarging experience that would threaten one's independence and personal survival. They are, deep down, social solitaries, and that fact informs every facet of their lives." They are the victims of a great flattening that has turned the "polymorphous

The Agony of Eros
by Byung-Chul Han
translated by Erik Butler
MIT, 88 pp., $12.95

Tim Markatos is a writer living in Washington, D.C.

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

eros once thought to be characteristic of human beings as such" into something entirely one-dimensional.

I don't know whether to be surprised, reassured, or frightened to find so many echoes of Bloom and Lawler's diagnosis of the spiritually hollowed-out modern soul in the cloistered world of continental European philosophy, yet the parallels abound in *The Agony of Eros*, a slender philosophical tract first published in German in 2012 and translated into English this year by MIT Press in its new "Untimely Meditations" series. The author, Byung-Chul Han, is a German academic by way of Seoul billed by the publishers as "one of the most widely read philosophers in Europe today." I can't help but wondering who it is who's reading Han—serious philosophers? University students? Young urban professionals attempting to cultivate an air of erudition?

In any case, it's easy to see the allure of a writer who treats with such intellectual seriousness the claim—common to think pieces, self-help books, podcasts, and prestige TV sitcoms—that love in our time is in crisis. Conventional wisdom has it that modern love is most endangered by the personal freedom and limitless variety of options that technology have placed at our disposal; Han has a thesis to the contrary. "The crisis of love does not derive from too many *others*," he begins, "so much as from the erosion of the *Other*." And so in the dense and breathless pages that follow, Han will go on to synthesize an argument with materials as wide-ranging as the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber, observations about social media, and remarks on the plot of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It's a strange mélange—one that, true to the allusive style of continental philosophy, barely pauses to interpret or engage any of the thinkers cited, save for a brief and pointed jab at Foucault—yet it offers a different kind of language for articulating the very problems that concerned Bloom and Lawler.

Han relies on highly specific terminology, but his writing is not impenetrable. Central to his philosophy is a concept of the Other, which he, following Levinas and Buber, defines as that which is necessarily outside of the realm of the self. Relatedly, eros is the force that brings us outside to make experience of the Other possible. A threat to eros is therefore a threat to relational love, and Han sees no greater oppositional force arising to challenge the power of eros than depression. Some of Han's most scintillating thinking happens around this topic. He finds the roots of modern depression in narcissism, the "overwrought, pathologically distorted self-reference" that flourishes in cultures that valorize personal achievement and consequently flatten out our relationships by changing how we think about other people: as mere sources of validation at best, objects to compare ourselves to at worst.

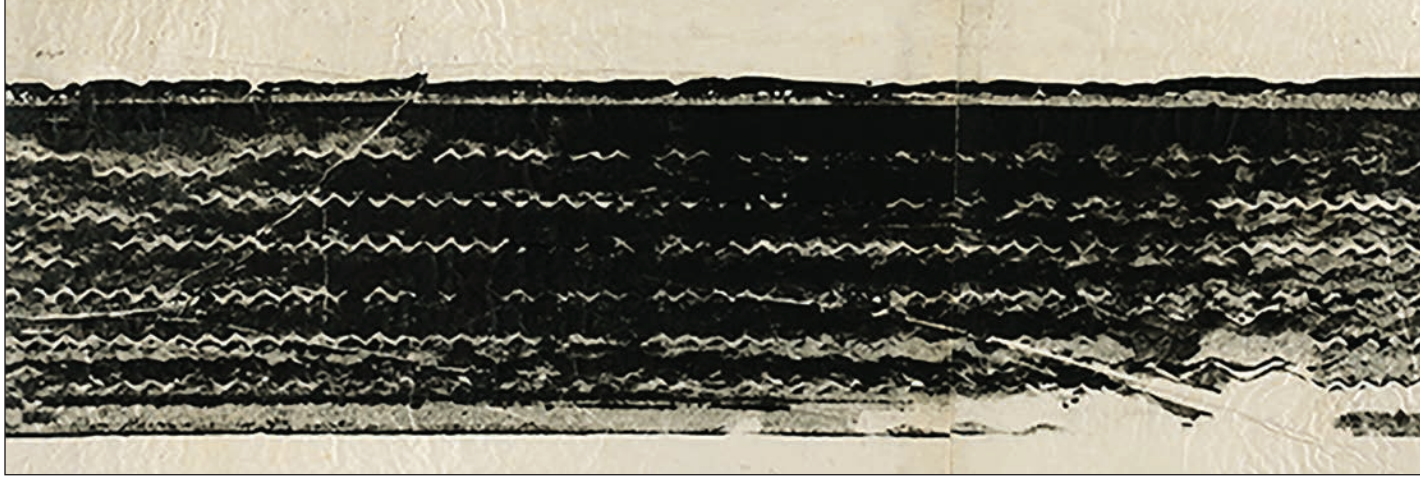
His line of inquiry produces many such brief moments of enlightenment on hot-button topics. Take, for instance, Han's digressions on pornography. Because porn is a necessarily self-serving venture, it poses an existential threat to true eros by reframing sex as simply one more commodity to be put on display for comparison and consumption. "What is obscene about pornography," he writes, "is not an excess of sex, but the fact that it contains no sex at all." Devoid of the spiritual dimension of a properly understood, other-centric sexuality, the sexuality on display in pornography is nothing but a shadow of the real thing. Yet the wide availability of pornography today is quickly erasing this distinction, for as Han notes, "even real sex is turning into porn."

The emptying out of spiritual and other-centered meaning that Han finds at work in pornography extends to other aspects of life as well. In modernity, man's metaphysical purpose has been redirected from pursuit of the Other to pursuit of accumulation and growth as bulwarks against physical death; therapy replaces theology, health fetishists multiply, and tourism takes the place of sacred pilgrimage. In such a world, certainty, routine, and information counter mystery, spontaneity, and fantasy at every turn.

Han isn't in the business of offering solutions or proposing plans of action, but he does send his readers out from the world of ideas with a renewed spirit of curiosity and intellectual vigor. Most readers probably will not find much solace in his concluding exhortation to redirect our aimless erotic longings toward philosophy. I at least was inspired to rethink a passage from literature that had always struck me as both astonishingly beautiful and astonishingly simplistic. It occurs near the middle of E. M. Forster's 1910 novel *Howards End*, in one of those grandiloquent narrative asides not unusual in Forster's writing:

> Looking back on the past six months, Margaret realized the chaotic nature of our daily life, and its difference from the orderly sequence that has been fabricated by historians. Actual life is full of false clues and signposts that lead nowhere. With infinite effort we nerve ourselves for a crisis that never comes. . . . [O]ur national morality . . . assumes that preparation against danger is itself a good, and that men, like nations, are the better for staggering through life fully armed. . . . Life is indeed dangerous, but not in the way morality would have us believe. It is indeed unmanageable, but the essence of it is not a battle. It is unmanageable because it is a romance, and its essence is romantic beauty.

Our knowledge of what followed in the century after Forster's writing—two world wars and rampant politicization of life's every little conflict—might seem to render the life-as-romance worldview blissfully naïve. But perhaps he really was onto something, and perhaps we owe it to ourselves to step outside of ourselves and think more carefully about what it truly means to live and to love. Han, to his credit, acknowledges that to love is to open oneself up to mysteries beyond the realm of cognition. "To be able to think," he writes, "one must first have been a friend, a lover." Donning the sword and shield of philosophy may help us to confront life's challenges, but only by loosening our armor can we open ourselves up to love in the first place. ♦



B&A

Rebel's Reward

From disruptor to honoree, Rauschenberg never quite satisfies. BY JAMES GARDNER

Robert Rauschenberg
Among Friends
Museum of Modern Art
through September 17

If an award were given for winning awards, it would surely go, by acclamation and universal consent, to Robert Rauschenberg, the most beribboned figure in the history of art. Not only did he win almost every award you can think of, but others were invented so that he could win those as well. Had the Nobel Prize been given to painters or sculptors, he would have won it, and because it wasn't, the magniloquently named Praemium Imperiale came into being, and then he won that.

Let it be said on Rauschenberg's behalf that he does not seem to have sought out these awards or even to have valued them unduly, and if he continued to accept them long after he ceased to need the money or acclaim, that was largely because he was an affable extrovert who didn't like to say no to anyone. But there is a paradox at the heart of his career, and it is implicit in every work on view in his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (a show that began at the Tate Modern and moves hereafter to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). Rauschenberg (1925-2008) was, if nothing else, the most sincerely radical figure in the history of American art. Inspired in equal measure by Dada and the hyperformalism of the New York School, he seemed game for anything in his quest to expand the accepted boundaries of visual culture. In the 1950s his embrace of chance and spontaneity led him to drive a car over some sheets of typewriter paper and declare that the residual tire tread was a painting. On another occasion, with the consent of Willem de Kooning, he took one of the older painter's drawings and erased it and then claimed the erasure as a new work of art. A decade later he was pioneering performance art by racing around a stage in roller skates and a spacesuit, with a parachute flapping at his back.

Traditionally, such a person might plausibly end up selling aluminum siding. And yet, after a few lean years at the very beginning of a career that spanned six decades, the honors started to pour in. They never stopped. By the time he hit 50, Rauschenberg was smiling, under a banner reading "The Joy of Art," on the cover of *Time*, that pillar of American mid-cult.

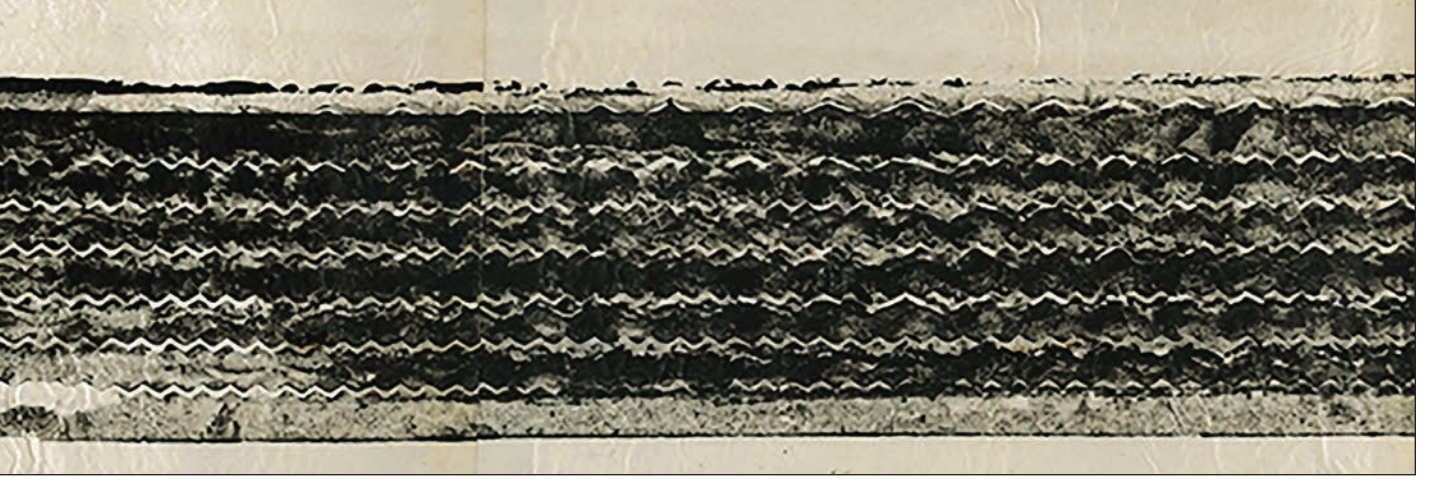
How can it be that an artist as disruptive as Rauschenberg should be so promptly embraced—and not only by the artistic mainstream, but also by the general run of American museumgoers? That is a mystery the MoMA exhibition does not even acknowledge, let alone dispel.

Part of Rauschenberg's success had to do with his persona. Unlike such fellow vanguardists as Jasper Johns, who preferred to let his severe, repressed canvases speak for themselves, and the extraterrestrial Andy Warhol, whose very insubstantiality was his shtick, Rauschenberg united the prestige of the avant-garde with an all-American folksiness that reached beyond the borders of the art world. A native of Port Arthur, Texas, who never lost his southern twang (as Johns did), Rauschenberg could be seen as a Whitmanesque character, a bohemian and probably a lefty, but at least an all-American lefty. For all his forays into Buddhism and all his visits to China and Italy and Morocco, he was committed, as few artists before or after him, to recording the American scene. In the silkscreen paintings that are probably his best-known works, he sought to capture and record the hyperkinetic visual bombardment of modern American life, juxtaposing images of a bald eagle and a lunar module, army helicopters and JFK poking the air, in a matrix of tasteful abstract-expressionist gestures and smudges.

Few figures in postwar art have left behind a legacy as abundant, as varied, or as perplexing as Rauschenberg's. If, on a scale of spiritual and visual consequence, the

DON ROSS / ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG FOUNDATION

James Gardner's latest book is Buenos Aires: The Biography of a City.



two antipodes of postwar American art are Warhol and Rothko, then Rauschenberg stands somewhere in the middle: If he never sought the luminous beauty of Rothko, with his spiritual longings, neither was he a lightweight like Warhol. You don't need to be one of his most fervent admirers to suspect that there is something to his art and that it is important.

Yet even if you are a fervent admirer, it is difficult to overlook, amid all his spasmodic hyperactivity, a hit-or-miss quality. Despite an intermittent and fortuitous harvest of pleasant visual effects, Rauschenberg's work ultimately fails to satisfy.

Some of his achievements are—to this critic, at any rate—undeniably fine. Perhaps his best single painting is *Yoicks!* from 1954, a work that recalls, and may have influenced, Johns's American flag paintings, begun in the same year. It is very much a work in the manner of the New York School, the school of Pollock, Motherwell, and de Kooning, in the cadent intervals of orange and ochre stripes, and in its painterliness, the textured richness of its painted surface. And yet its restraining of gesture presages a future rebellion against that school, an allusive quest for something beyond the act of painting itself that, in the context of that time, hinted at dangerous heresies.

This early painting could stand as the gateway to Rauschenberg's entire career. Artistically, he embodied something of a divided self, appealing simultaneously to two mutually exclusive factions of the art world. Emerging as he did out of the New York School, he could produce lovely square feet of painterliness, such as you find in *Curfew* and *Summerstorm*, from 1958 and 1959 respectively. At the same time, in some of his silkscreen paintings, and especially in the three-dimensional works, his clamorous need to communicate some message, however inarticulately, or his Dadaist leap into absurdity itself represented a brutal and total rejection of form.

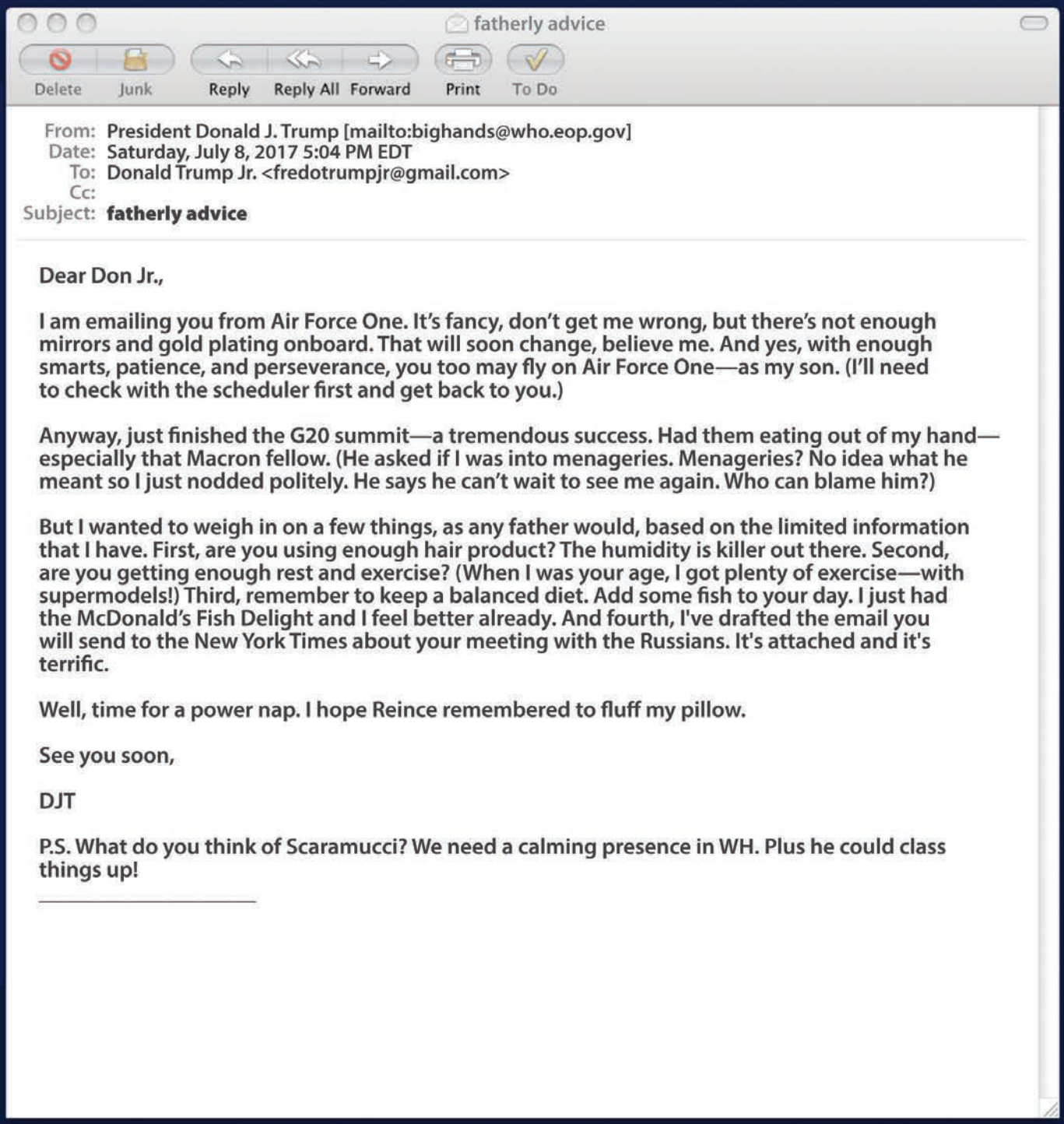
DAN BUDNIK / ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG FOUNDATION ARCHIVES

Rauschenberg in his New York studio in 1958; on the left is Charlene, *one of his best-known works. Top: a detail from* Automobile Tire Print *(1953).*

But the MoMA exhibition was not mounted to question or examine Rauschenberg's achievement so much as to celebrate it. And although the MoMA exhibition does contain a substantial body of work, the viewer must be constantly on guard to determine to what extent that substantiality is real and to what extent it is a function of familiarity. Put another way, we must ask ourselves whether we are merely responding to the fact that these works, icons of recent art history, look famous and expensive. Having passed repeatedly through the rooms of this exhibition, I find that although Rauschenberg did indeed achieve beauty, it was too intermittent to support the reputation he enjoys, and that such beauty as he achieved, in comparison with that of Pollock and Rothko, was not, in the end, beautiful enough. ♦

"Look, the statement that Don Jr. issued is true. There's no inaccuracy in the statement. The president weighed in as any father would, based on the limited information that he had."
—White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, August 1, 2017

PARODY



fatherly advice

Delete Junk Reply Reply All Forward Print To Do

From: President Donald J. Trump [mailto:bighands@who.eop.gov]
Date: Saturday, July 8, 2017 5:04 PM EDT
To: Donald Trump Jr. <fredotrumpjr@gmail.com>
Cc:
Subject: **fatherly advice**

Dear Don Jr.,

I am emailing you from Air Force One. It's fancy, don't get me wrong, but there's not enough mirrors and gold plating onboard. That will soon change, believe me. And yes, with enough smarts, patience, and perseverance, you too may fly on Air Force One—as my son. (I'll need to check with the scheduler first and get back to you.)

Anyway, just finished the G20 summit—a tremendous success. Had them eating out of my hand—especially that Macron fellow. (He asked if I was into menageries. Menageries? No idea what he meant so I just nodded politely. He says he can't wait to see me again. Who can blame him?)

But I wanted to weigh in on a few things, as any father would, based on the limited information that I have. First, are you using enough hair product? The humidity is killer out there. Second, are you getting enough rest and exercise? (When I was your age, I got plenty of exercise—with supermodels!) Third, remember to keep a balanced diet. Add some fish to your day. I just had the McDonald's Fish Delight and I feel better already. And fourth, I've drafted the email you will send to the New York Times about your meeting with the Russians. It's attached and it's terrific.

Well, time for a power nap. I hope Reince remembered to fluff my pillow.

See you soon,

DJT

P.S. What do you think of Scaramucci? We need a calming presence in WH. Plus he could class things up!