the weekly Standard

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THE JOY OF DESTRUCTION

JOSEPH BOTTUM on the toppling of the statues

The fallen statue of a Confederate soldier in front of the old Durham County Courthouse, Durham, North Carolina, August 14

Contents

September 25, 2017 • Volume 23, Number 3

Articles

Features

Books & Arts

COVER: NEWSCOM

The Shelter of Mother's Little Helper

Now it's the losers who write history.

The Scrapbook will admit to a certain fascination with Bill and Hillary Clinton. We've read and enjoyed—if enjoyed is the right word—all their mammoth autobiographical works. The latest addition, by the former first lady, senator, and secretary of state, is titled *What Happened*. It seeks to recount and explain her loss to Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

We won't assess *What Happened* here (the eminent Noemie Emery will do that in next week's issue). But we do want to bring attention to a few short sentences early in the book, where Clinton recounts the sadness and lassitude she felt after her shocking November loss. "Friends advised me on the power of Xanax and raved about their amazing therapists," she writes. "Doctors told me they'd never prescribed so many antidepressants in their lives. But that wasn't for me. Never has been."

The image of sophisticated urban progressives seeking out therapy and medication in the aftermath of Hillary Clinton's loss is a touching one. But we seem to remember this happening before. After John Kerry's loss to George W. Bush in 2004, the liberal socialite Tina Brown, then a columnist for the *Washington Post*, reported a dramatic increase in the demand for therapy among her liberal New York friends. A psychiatrist friend told Brown that Kerry's loss had "plunged many of her patients into near-catatonic distress."

"In my whole 40 years of practice here," the psychiatrist said, "I have never heard patients as bereft by a result as this."

We hope our progressive friends have managed to get through this latest crisis. It wasn't easy for us, either. We can't help pointing out, though, that it's an awfully brittle worldview that shatters after every unpropitious election. ♦

A Face in the Crowd

Plenty are the benefits of new technologies, but several news items in the last week are making us yearn for the days of Rolodexes, Polaroid photos, and library card catalogs with actual paper cards.

First came the news from a pair of Stanford University researchers that computers are now able to determine one's sexual orientation with astonishing accuracy using only a photo of one's face. It's a high-tech version of "gaydar," a colloquial term that describes the ability of some people to recognize others as gay or straight just by appearance. The anti-science left criticized the study, paradoxically, both as "junk science" and as science that could be used to discriminate against gays.

In response to the criticism, one of the researchers responded that artificial intelligence someday will be able to do much more: "Using photos, AI will be able to identify people's political views, whether they have high IQs, whether they are predisposed to criminal behavior, whether they have specific personality traits and many other private, personal details that could carry huge social consequences," according to the *Guardian*.

The new iPhone gets poop-faced.

So who would want to participate in such technologies? Lots of us, apparently: Apple unveiled a new iPhone that has built-in facial recognition that will be used to unlock the phone. And you'll pay for that, bigly: The iPhone X starts at $999.

If it's insufficiently overexposing to give tech companies access to your face—which could be used for all manner of nefarious purposes, such as marketing—hackers might also find a way. News emerged last week that hackers stole personal information on 143 million Americans from credit reporting bureau Equifax.

In sum, you could shell out big money for a phone that will recognize your face, which might be used by artificial intelligence to make snap judgments about you, judgments which might then be stolen by hackers. Being a Luddite never sounded so tempting. ♦

A Bridge Too Far

By now there have been quite a few movies made about the Kennedys, and naturally we assumed that *Chappaquiddick*, which just premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, would be another brazen attempt to make craven excuses and burnish the legend. However, early reviews suggest it might be an honest-to-God reckoning with Ted Kennedy's heinous

TOP: TIMOTHY A. CLARY / AFP / GETTY; BELOW: YOUTUBE

crime. After calling the film a "meticulous docudrama [that] rivetingly recounts the tragic car accident and its aftermath," *Variety*'s reviewer went on to offer his thoughts on liberal America's excuses:

> Forty-eight years later, let's be clear on what the meaning of Chappaquiddick is. Ted Kennedy should, by all rights, have stood trial for involuntary manslaughter, which would likely have ended his political career. The fact that the Kennedy family—the original postwar dynasty of the one percent—possessed, and exerted, the influence to squash the case is the essence of what Chappaquiddick means. The Kennedys lived outside the law. . . .
>
> I don't say any of this as a right-wing troll. But those are the facts, and they are facts that liberals, too often, have been willing to shove under the carpet. And they have paid the price. Ted Kennedy became known as "the Lion of the Senate," and did a lot of good, but when you try to build a governing philosophy on top of lies, one way or another those lies will come back to haunt you. (Hello, Donald Trump! He's an incompetent bully, but his middle name might be "Liberal Karma.")

BETTMANN / GETTY

Ted Kennedy's car in the water

While we don't know about the contention that karma was the X-factor in Trump's election, it was certainly something to hear Democrats screaming about how Trump's behavior was disqualifying after decades of excusing the Kennedys—not to mention running as their presidential candidate Bill Clinton's enabler in chief.

But don't get used to fair-minded politics in Hollywood. Another recent article in *Variety* informs us there's a Dick Cheney biopic in the works. It's being directed by Adam McKay, best known for directing *Anchorman* and *The Big Short*. McKay is also well-known for his left-wing diatribes at the *Huffington Post*. We're reasonably confident that if *Chappaquiddick* evinces a pang of liberal conscience in Hollywood, it's only temporary. ♦

Co-Opted by Co-Eds

The statue wars continue: Last week protesters at the University of Virginia draped a tarp over a bronze of Thomas Jefferson, declaring the monument "an emblem of white supremacy" and demanding that the students of Jefferson's university be subjected to racial reeducation.

There is, however, a better way to engage with statuary honoring figures one considers problematic. The Scrapbook was recently in Dublin and took the opportunity to visit Trinity College. On the school's main quad, next to the central campanile, is seated a white marble likeness (well, a likeness if the man had a tendency to grimace) of George Salmon, provost of the university from 1888 to his death in 1904.

Salmon is perhaps best remembered not for his scholarship as a mathematician and theologian but for his intransigent opposition to women being admitted to the school. The joke has it that he said women would be admitted over his dead body, and he promptly

expired after coeducation was approved for Trinity.

Given Salmon's retrograde opinions, why hasn't he been pulled down from his plinth? Because the women of Trinity College, Dublin, have a better way of expressing themselves. According to The Scrapbook's student guide, upon graduation, Trinity women make a point of having their pictures taken with the dyspeptic figure. Instead of tearing down the remembrance of someone whose views are anathema to modern sensibilities, they cheerfully engage with the statue to celebrate their victory. It's a refreshing alternative to the victimology so popular this side of the Atlantic. ♦

2017: A Space Idiocy

Every time The Scrapbook is cut off in traffic by a Tesla—it seems to be happening more frequently these days for some reason—we deprecate Elon Musk under our breath. It's no doubt highly irrational on our part: Musk owns the company but he's not driving the car. And what we mind even more than the bad driving are the huge government subsidies that have flowed to the electric-car maker. But is the government's irrationality Musk's fault, either? He may be selling moonshine but legislators don't have to buy it.

Our colleague Gregg Easterbrook reminds us that, however maddened we are by our neighborhood Tesla drivers, there are reasons to wish Musk well in his endeavors. Here's the relevant chunk of Easterbrook's "Tuesday Morning Quarterback" column at *weeklystandard.com*:

> The full title of [Stanley] Kubrick's famous flick was *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In that year—33 years into the future to Kubrick—there are colonies on the moon, an expedition en route to Jupiter, and a really far-out sci-fi concept: Pan American Airways still exists. The sequel was set in 2010, and depicted a world in which the United States, Russia, and China all launch gigantic manned spaceships to Jupiter.
>
> Now it's 2017 and nothing remotely like this is in prospect. There will be no expeditions to the outer planets, to say nothing of a manned landing on Mars, absent a propulsion breakthrough. I'd be happy if Elon Musk's Falcon Heavy simply works, which would return space access back to where it was 50 years ago, when the big rockets of the Apollo program were flying.
>
> Merely putting expendable rockets into the sky—something done routinely and flawlessly a half-century ago—has become an impossible goal for today's process-and-delay obsessed government. . . .
>
> Please join me in rooting for Elon Musk to disrupt this business.

Even if you're uninterested in football, you should be reading "Tuesday Morning Quarterback" every week as other fascinating topics frequently break out in the midst of the gridiron talk. ♦

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Golfing Alone

Long before I ever even picked up a golf club, I wanted to be the kind of person who golfed regularly. A Real Golfer, in other words. Even as a child, I loved the manicured, tightly controlled aesthetic of golf courses—just the right (which is to say, minimal) amount of "nature" for my sensibilities. And then there were the outfits: utterly delightful. (This might be because I grew up during the heyday of Payne Stewart.) The entire bourgeois sensibility appealed to me, really. I wanted to be the kind of man who, after 18 holes at the regular club, regales his buddies at the clubhouse over gin and tonics with tales of the splendid lob he hit on the 8th hole. And did you see that tee shot on 12?

I played a few times in my youth—I never could seem to get the ball through that darn windmill—but only decided this year to pursue the game in earnest. And I'm still pretty shabby—not quite a Real Golfer just yet. More a Real Duffer.

And I love it.

I mostly play public courses in the District of Columbia. These are not the plush clubs of my youthful fantasies—the aesthetic is more midcentury municipal than Second Empire, and you're more likely to drink a Bud Light than Boodles after a round. But the upside is these courses are cheap: You can play 18 holes for $25 if you walk, as I do (and as all golfers should). And the public courses here have a charmingly demotic nature. Contrary to the usual stereotypes, D.C.'s golfers are highly diverse, both racially and in terms of age.

I've also discovered the joys of golf tourism. On a work trip to Guam, I played the glorious Country Club of the Pacific. (I was one of the only non-Japanese on the course and enjoyed a bowl of ramen at the clubhouse after my round.) While at a conference in Cabo San Lucas, I took time for my first official round of Mexican golf. Judging by my performance that day, let's just say that when America sends their amateur golfers, they're definitely not sending their best. I also just recently played the Key West Golf Course which, well . . . I hope still exists.

DAVID CLARK

I mostly play alone—golfing has joined reading books and drinking hard liquor in the pantheon of things I prefer doing solo. I leave my pesky smartphone in the car and try to concentrate solely on the game. There are distinct benefits, besides the Zen-like solitude I achieve, to solo-play, as well: I feel less guilty when I cheat and pick up my ball to give it a better lie after a bad hit, for example. But that's not really that important, because let's be honest: Like all golfers, I play better when nobody—save for the deer who hang out at my regular Rock Creek Park Golf Course—is watching. Honest!

But I sometimes golf with others. And occasionally, that's not by choice. Early on in my "career," as I arrived at the first tee one sunny morning, I was forcibly paired with two golfers who actually knew what they were doing. After briefly contemplating faking an ulcer and begging off while clutching my stomach in mock agony, I ended up playing nine with them. Not only were they patient with my (very) subpar play, but they gave me some helpful tips. There's also a colleague whom I play with regularly. I'll keep him anonymous for the sake of his dignity—after all, I beat him every time we play.

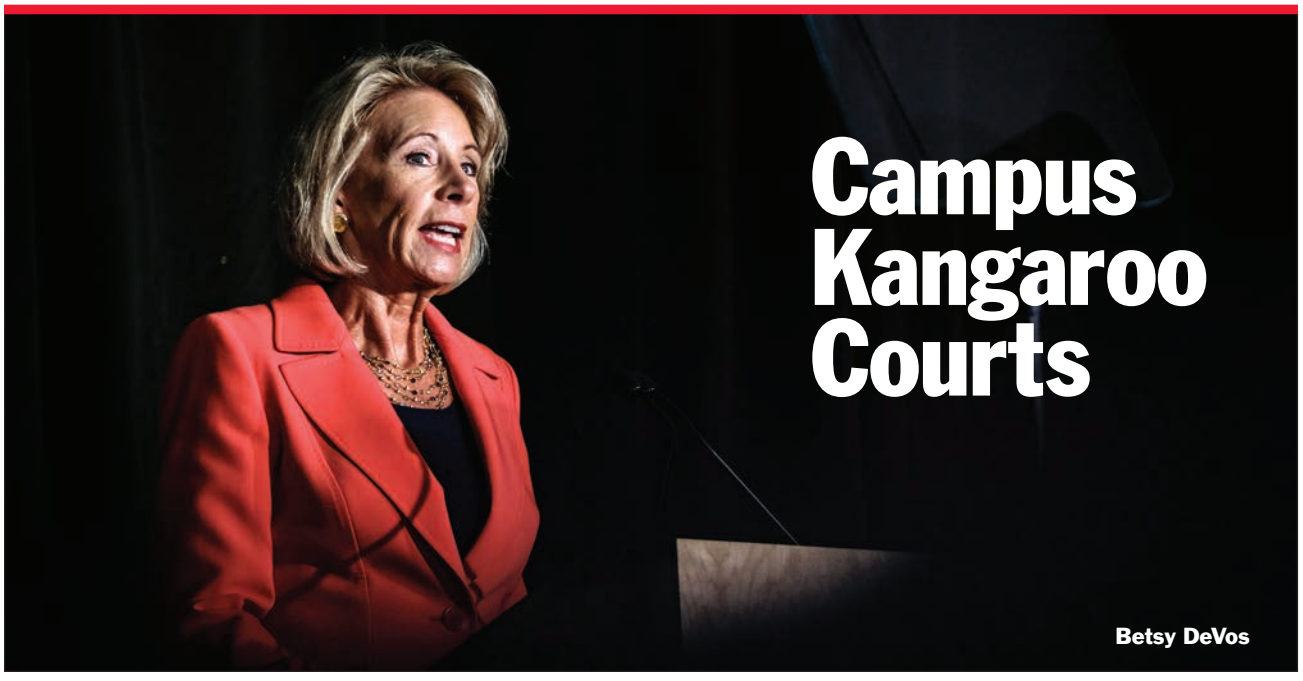
I can't quite put my finger on what I like so much about the game. It's utterly frustrating, to be sure: There's the way a tiny, even imperceptible, adjustment to one's stroke can produce vastly different results. But in any round, there are also, as the cliché has it, those few shots that make you come back again. If only I could find a way to replicate them—another source of frustration. Why does yesterday's magnificent straight, long drive become tomorrow's lazy fly ball into the woods?

I suppose that most of all, I simply enjoy the game at some sort of sub-intellectual level. I'm hitting a ball with a stick—what's not to like? Indeed, it's one of the few challenging activities I enjoy *while* I'm doing it—and not merely the sensation, hours later, of *having* done it. Whether that makes me a Real Golfer or a duffer, well, what could be better?

Ethan Epstein

the weekly Standard

Campus Kangaroo Courts



Betsy DeVos

WASHINGTON POST / GETTY

American liberals think of themselves as champions of the excluded and ill-treated, friends of the little guy persecuted by the system. Their instinctive sympathy for the disadvantaged and overlooked is evidence of a charitable worldview and a peculiar inheritance of Christian humanism. For a variety of reasons, however, many liberals find it difficult to acknowledge certain kinds of victimhood, even though the victims are victims in the truest sense: wronged by lawless courts and subjected to perverted justice.

We're referring in this instance to university policies that assume the guilt of anyone—generally any man—accused of rape. In recent years many institutions of higher learning have begun handling rape allegations themselves rather than allowing law enforcement to investigate them. This has resulted in tribunals in which the accused does not get to face his accuser and in which the judicial process is predisposed to arrive at a verdict of guilty.

These campus kangaroo courts did not originate in the Obama years, but his administration abetted and all but required their expansion. In 2011, the Department of Education issued a "Dear Colleague" letter urging schools to address the problem of "sexual violence" on campus more directly. The letter did this by explaining that Title IX, the 1972 law barring discrimination on the basis of sex in publicly funded schools, applies to "sexual violence" of all kinds—"rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, and sexual coercion." How, one wondered, is "rape" different from "sexual coercion"? And might not any sexual encounter be susceptible to description as somehow "coercive"?

In assessing and deciding cases of sexual violence, the letter said, moreover, schools should no longer use the criminal code's more stringent criterion "beyond a reasonable doubt"; henceforth it would be sufficient to convict the accused based on a "preponderance of the evidence." Probably guilty would now mean guilty.

The administration's unspoken message: If schools receiving federal funds wish to keep receiving those federal funds, they'd better stop letting cops handle rape cases and start doing something about the rape epidemic on their campuses.

Even if this "epidemic" is real, universities aren't justified in denying due process to those accused of a crime. And yet this is what they've done, and often to innocent people. The stories of students being expelled from colleges on the mere word of their accusers are shocking and heartbreaking; the marks against them are permanent records, unexpunged and in many cases inexpungible.

But the epidemic isn't real. For a decade, feminists and victims' rights advocates have claimed "one in five" college women are subjected to sexual assault. The statistic is based on a 2007 study, but its authors insist that their work doesn't purport to prove a national average. They readily concede that there is evidence the actual rate may be far lower. For the feminists and anti-rape campaigners, however, that doesn't signify. For 10 years they've been repeating the one-in-five stat and will presumably do so forever.

All of this led Betsy DeVos, President Trump's secretary of education, to declare her agency's intention to reconsider the Obama-era Title IX guidelines. On September 7, in a speech at George Mason University, she announced a policy change everyone knew was coming. "The failed system

imposed policy by political letter," she said, "without even the most basic safeguards to test new ideas with those who know this issue all too well. Rather than inviting everyone to the table, the department insisted it knew better than those who walk side-by-side with students every day. That will no longer be the case." In an interview later that day, DeVos confirmed that her department would "revoke or rescind" the guidelines.

Anti-rape campaigners were swift and predictable in their responses, making ever more preposterous claims and sounding for all the world as though sexual assault had been completely legal until Barack Obama outlawed it in 2011. The feminist writer Jessica Valenti, for instance, dismissed as petty and irrelevant the complaint that the campus rape tribunals deny the accused due process. "There is no scourge of innocent young men being unfairly targeted," she wrote. "Only 2 to 10 percent of rape accusations are shown to be false, and rapists themselves are rarely punished: Only 0.6 percent ever spend a day in jail, less than a quarter of college rapists are expelled, and less than half are suspended."

The argument is mind-bogglingly stupid—on the order of saying only a small fraction of accused criminals didn't commit the crime of which they were accused, so why give anyone a fair trial? The more serious problem with her argument, though, is that it's based on unknowable data. Studies purporting to quantify true versus false rape allegations rely heavily on official conclusions reached by law enforcement. But the police generally only render such a decision if the accuser confesses to lying or if some evidence arises that disproves the crime: pretty rare outcomes. The real number of false rape accusations—even assuming there is a clear line of distinction between what's rape and what's not—is almost certainly much higher than any empirical study can reveal.

And that brings us back to the underlying problem of rape on campus, and by extension rape more generally when the accused and the accuser are known to each other. It is a crime difficult to prove, involving as it often does the private interface of two people and the inarticulate exchange of signals that may be misinterpreted or ignored. Over many years, law enforcement has become more adept at finding the truth and securing just convictions. University administrators are wholly incapable of performing this task.

That the Obama administration in essence pressured schools to assume this role is a piece of folly of which the 44th president and his education advisers ought to be ashamed. The universities themselves, however, bear most of the blame: No one forced them to become so utterly reliant on federal largesse that they would abandon basic constitutional principles at the mere threat of a federal bureaucrat.

This episode in our history—a sadly memorable instance of well-meaning liberals searching so zealously for victims to defend that they created new ones in the process—will now, we hope, draw to a close. ♦

The Unaccountable IRS

To understand the pragmatic realities of federal governance in the 21st century, one must recognize the existence of a fourth branch of government: the administrative state. We have some two million federal bureaucrats with extraconstitutional legislative powers. Not only do they write the reams of regulations that order our lives, they have the authority to enforce them capriciously. And thanks to absurd civil service protections, it is exceedingly difficult to hold them accountable for abuses of power, even when Congress demands it.

Of course, you can't censure federal bureaucrats for their crimes if you don't even try. On September 8, Donald Trump's Justice Department announced it would not be reopening an investigation into the conduct of Lois Lerner, the IRS official responsible for targeting and harassing conservative groups in the 2010 and 2012 elections. That investigation had ended in 2015, when Barack Obama's Justice Department stated it would not be charging Lerner or anyone else at the IRS because it "found no evidence that any IRS official acted based on political, discriminatory, corrupt or other inappropriate motives that would support a criminal prosecution."

Lerner herself admitted "absolutely inappropriate" targeting had taken place but blamed it on "front-line people." Soon after, she pleaded the Fifth in testimony to a congressional committee and was placed on administrative leave by the IRS. Emails later confirmed Lerner had a strong personal bias against conservatives (she called them "crazies" and "a—holes"), and there was an extensive and credible series of accusations that she harassed conservative groups when she worked for the Federal Election Commission in the 1990s. If all this doesn't suggest motive and criminality, it's still an outrage that Lerner, whose leave was never revoked, eventually retired from the IRS with a full and generous pension.

President Obama declared on national television during the height of the scandal that there was "not even a smidgen of corruption" in the agency. That's laughable. But then, when it comes to policing executive agencies, his administration was arguably the most lawless in modern history. In 2014, 47 of the 73 federal inspectors general signed a

public letter accusing the administration of intimidation, stonewalling their investigations, and generally interfering in their "ability to conduct our work thoroughly, independently, and in a timely manner."

The promise of the Trump administration, especially in contrast to Hillary Clinton's flagrant disregard of classification laws, was a return to accountability. Jeff Sessions, a man committed to judicial integrity, was supposed to be just the man to restore respect for the rule of law. But the attorney general seems to be missing in action. The House Ways and Means Committee asked the Justice Department earlier this year to reexamine Lerner's case. Committee chairman Kevin Brady told the *Washington Post* that the department's decision to decline "sends the message that the same legal, ethical, and constitutional standards we all live by do not apply to Washington political appointees," who "now have the green light to target Americans for their political beliefs and mislead investigators without ever being held accountable for their lawlessness."

Lois Lerner

Of course, Congress has also shown inaction in the face of wrongdoing here. After the acting IRS commissioner resigned during the scandal, President Obama made John Koskinen the new head. Koskinen failed to act on a congressional subpoena and let the agency delete as many as 24,000 of Lerner's emails. He waited four months to reveal the emails were missing and told Congress the agency had confirmed there were no accessible backups. That was not true: The inspector general's office subsequently recovered a thousand of Lerner's emails.

Worse, Koskinen hasn't taken steps to reform the agency and ensure such misbehavior doesn't happen again. The Government Accountability Office concluded in 2015 that the IRS still had weaknesses that increased the risk it "could select organizations for examination in an unfair manner—for example, based on an organization's religious, educational, political, or other views." Yet Koskinen remains IRS commissioner. Some Republican House members filed a resolution to impeach Koskinen in October 2015, but Congress never followed through.

The Trump administration hasn't moved to replace him since taking office, either—though it recognizes executive action can be taken to curb corruption. Some 500 Veterans Affairs workers have been fired since January in response to the department's deadly negligence and substandard care. The IRS and other scandal-plagued federal departments and agencies should face similarly serious consequences. It would remind an overwhelmingly liberal unionized bureaucracy that it is required to serve all Americans fairly. And it would reassure the public that those who wield the power to threaten their livelihoods and right to expression are not above the law. Let's hope accountability at the VA proves to be the template, not the exception. ♦

Same Old, Same Old

"I will immediately terminate President Obama's illegal executive order on immigration. Immediately." That was Donald Trump speaking on the day he launched his presidential campaign: June 16, 2015. The executive order he was referencing was the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA. It allowed the children of undocumented workers to remain in the United States since they had come here through no intention of their own. A year later, as the GOP nominee, Trump hadn't backed down: "We will immediately terminate President Obama's two illegal executive amnesties, in which he defied federal law and the Constitution to give amnesty to approximately five million illegal immigrants."

Trump with new pals

The second of those two orders, a 2014 expansion of DACA, was blocked by the courts. But the first wasn't terminated on January 20 when Trump became president, and it hasn't been terminated in the eight months since. And it appears it won't ever be terminated. On September 13, the president met with House and Senate leaders and struck some sort of agreement with Democratic leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer. "We had a very productive meeting at the White House with the president," the Democrats said in a joint statement after the meeting. "We agreed to enshrine the protections of DACA into law quickly, and to work out a package of border security, excluding the wall, that's acceptable to both sides."

Excluding the wall? On its face, that looks like two crucial campaign promises broken: the rescission of DACA and the construction of a wall along our border with Mexico.

The White House doesn't accept that interpretation. Asked about the Schumer-Pelosi statement the next morning, the president said "the wall will come later." Asked about DACA, he insisted nobody's talking about "citizenship" or "amnesty": "We are not looking at citizenship. We are not looking at amnesty," he said. "We are looking at allowing people to stay here. We are working with everybody." And the wall? "If we don't have the wall," he said, "we are doing nothing."

It now seems pretty clear: DACA will not be terminated but codified, and Trump's strategy on border security is to make deals with a party implacably opposed to all of his campaign promises.

Strictly as a matter of governing, the president's moves strike us as pragmatic and defensible. Many a responsible leader would make the same move in a similar situation. The wall was an impractical idea to begin with—a campaign metaphor that somehow transmogrified into a literal policy proposal. And no American president was ever going to round up people who'd grown up here and deport them to places they knew little or nothing about. Even some immigration hawks don't favor that approach.

So it appears we have an altogether practical president ready to strike a deal, any deal, even if it means dropping fundamental campaign pledges. That sounds an awful lot like the sort of politician Trump supporters were sick of—the sort that makes extraordinary promises, quietly drops them once in government, and blames everybody else for his failure.

We make no complaint on policy grounds; not in this instance, anyway. But if we had to have a president in the usual promise-making, promise-breaking tradition, we would have preferred one sans all the managerial incompetence and wild infantile blustering.

Trump's most fervent supporters—including several prominent entertainment-conservatives—insisted that it didn't much matter whether he was a conservative or not. What mattered is that he would be a different kind of president, one who would "fight." That was enough.

We suspect these members of the Trump personality cult would support him even if he pushed for single-payer health care and negotiations with al Qaeda. The question is how will those who took Trump's campaign promises literally respond? We suspect that some of them will terminate their support. Immediately. ♦

NEWSCOM

Details, Details

The president discombobulates friend and foe.

BY FRED BARNES

In President Trump's politics, "the overall impression matters more than the details," writes Newt Gingrich in his book *Understanding Trump*. This is not only true and insightful, it also explains Trump's conduct of late.

Out of the blue, the president made a deal with Chuck Schumer, the top Senate Democrat and an old pal from New York, to support a brief lifting of the debt limit. Trump got practically nothing tangible in return from the minority leader.

But that was merely an insignificant detail. For Trump, it wasn't the point of the deal. The favorable impressions he generated were. He embraced bipartisanship, which most Americans say they like. He jilted congressional Republicans, who fare slightly worse than he does in polls. And the media accounts of the deal were generally positive, a rare phenomenon in the president's case.

Several days later, Trump invited a bipartisan group of House members to the White House. Before they met, he insisted the wealthy "will not be gaining at all" from his tax plan. If tax rates on individual income "have to go higher, they'll go higher, frankly."

Shutting out the rich is not a new theme for Trump. When economists Larry Kudlow and Steve Moore put together his tax proposal in last year's campaign, he told them he didn't want to be accused of lining his own pockets. So in his plan, the gain from a rate reduction would be offset by eliminating deductions for top earners.

In April, the White House put out a statement that promised cuts in the tax rates for business and individuals. But now he's talking up either no tax cut for the well-off, or even a hike for them. This would have repercussions, weakening incentives for private investment and lowering economic growth and job creation. It might not even bring in more revenue.

GARY LOCKE

The impression Trump is creating is that he's sensitive to the need of the middle class for tax cuts, the rich be damned. I think he's sincere about this. Still, the chances of a deal with Democrats are slim. And it would involve a slew of details. The impression is more important than the bill.

Then came the president's dinner at the White House with Schumer and his counterpart in the House, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, after which Democrats claimed Trump had agreed to quick passage of a law to treat 800,000 "dreamers"—the offspring of illegal immigrants—as legal residents.

Trump aides denied there was a deal, but the president said the parties are close to one. They're working on details. The president had been alarmed by hostility to his plan to require Congress to pass a law legalizing the dreamers in exchange for new border security measures with Mexico. Building a wall would not be part of the deal.

As with the debt-limit accord, Trump would get very little in exchange for protecting dreamers from deportation. But an actual law isn't necessary to create a favorable impression of Trump's role. His public sympathy with the fate of dreamers is enough for that.

Even discussing a deal on dreamers, however, is risky for Trump. Prominent supporters reacted angrily to reports of a deal. Some cited his failure to insist on building the wall as the price for reaching a deal. The president tweeted limply that the wall "will continue to be built."

Trump's usual tactic is to blame House speaker Paul Ryan or Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell when failures occur. He never accepts blame. Since Ryan opposes deporting the dreamers, it would not be surprising if the president said Ryan and other Republicans had forced him to negotiate with Democrats.

Steve Bannon, Trump's chief strategist before departing the White House recently, said on *60 Minutes* last week that Ryan and McConnell oppose the Trump agenda. Breitbart News, which Bannon now runs, is a longtime Ryan antagonist.

Yet the House voted to repeal and replace Obamacare, de-federalize Medicaid, fund the border wall, and use the Congressional Review Act to kill more than a dozen regulations imposed by President Obama.

Trump allies accuse Ryan of favoring open borders, though he doesn't.

Fred Barnes is an executive editor at The Weekly Standard.

The president has called for immediately taking up tax reform in the House, as if Ryan and Republicans are dragging their feet.

But the culprits are Trump and his advisers. They haven't made up their minds on a final version of the tax bill. Just last week, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin was talking up different tax rates for companies with factories and those, like accounting firms, that provide services. Meanwhile, the president can't make up his mind on taxing the rich.

Trump has tweeted his unhappiness with McConnell over the Senate's failure to pass the Republican health care bill. It lost by a single vote. The rule of thumb in Washington on a close vote is that the president can produce the final vote or two needed to win. Trump didn't deliver on that.

McConnell is responsible for the most dazzling success of Trump's presidency, the confirmation of conservative Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. He blocked Obama from putting a nominee on the Court in the final year of his presidency. Democrats howled, but McConnell didn't flinch. He delivered for Trump.

Where is all this leading? If Trump isn't careful, he'll blow his chance for a mighty success that few presidents could claim, one more immune to compromise with Democrats than tax reform. Trump can fill the federal courts, from the Supreme Court down, with conservatives. There are plenty of vacancies and even more impressive conservatives to nominate. But he'll have to work effectively with McConnell and quit attacking GOP senators whose reelection is necessary to keep the Senate in Republican hands. On this as on much else, details matter.

Trump's growing alienation from Republicans doesn't suggest a promising future. He can't switch parties because Democrats loathe him. If he were to break entirely from the GOP, that would mean running as an independent. I suspect Trump has thought about this. It might even work. Never again should anyone say Donald Trump can't win. ♦

Let Trump Be Trump?

History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

Reagan in 1981: already a disappointment to the true believers

For those of us who wish (or hope) that Donald Trump may ultimately settle into something resembling a conventional president, his ex-chief strategist Stephen Bannon offered a glimmer of encouragement last week.

Bannon, of course, was removed from his White House perch last month by Trump's no-nonsense chief of staff, General John Kelly, and has retreated to Breitbart News to resume the struggle that first brought him to Trump's attention. For a populist insurgent, Bannon's venue for his first post-White House appearance was unconventional—an interview with Charlie Rose on CBS's *60 Minutes*—but the message was not just conventional but historic.

Bannon, an ex-naval officer, regards loyalty as a cardinal virtue in politics, and not without reason. He argued to Rose, and with justification, that members of the White House staff who (anonymously) criticized Trump's comments on the Charlottesville riots did their boss no favor and ought to resign. But the real enemy, in Bannon's estimation, is not Trump's nominal and numerous antagonists but the Republican establishment—specifically Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell and House speaker Paul Ryan—which is "trying to nullify the 2016 election." In effect, let Trump be Trump.

The irony of Bannon's argument may have been lost on Charlie Rose, and Bannon himself seemed oblivious as well. For during his brief tenure in power, Bannon seems to have expended much of his considerable energy and talent on waging (anonymous) behind-the-scenes campaigns against colleagues he considered insufficiently loyal to Donald Trump. Indeed, more than anything done or not done by Paul Ryan or Mitch McConnell, it could be argued that Bannon's guerrilla warfare did much to shape perceptions of a chaotic, ineffectual Trump White House. And by pledging to *60 Minutes* to man the barricades, Bannon echoed an earlier, and unsuccessful, insurrection.

It's largely forgotten now, but when Ronald Reagan was elected president a generation ago, he had to contend with

DAVID HUME KENNERLY / GETTY

Philip Terzian is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

some earlier incarnations of Stephen Bannon. Political activists such as the direct-mail mogul Richard Viguerie, gadfly commentator John Lofton, and columnist Kevin Phillips and publications such as *Human Events* and *Conservative Digest* were not just determined to keep Reagan true to their faith but equally persuaded that Reagan was immersing himself in a Republican establishment determined to nullify the 1980 election.

Let Reagan be Reagan, they argued. And unlike Bannon, they didn't wait until Inauguration Day to express their discomfort. The addition of George H. W. Bush to the national ticket had the same disheartening effect on certain conservative activists as John F. Kennedy's choice of Lyndon Johnson in 1960 had on their liberal equivalents. And in particular, the postelection appointment of James Baker as White House chief of staff, along with the recruitment of certain Ford and Nixon veterans, left *Human Events*, for example, feeling "somewhat distraught. . . . The euphoria in the conservative community is already dissipating." That was in February 1981.

Here it may be useful to pause and consider the importance of one basic distinction between Reagan and Trump. Ronald Reagan had come of age politically in the 1950s and '60s as an outsider-insurgent; but by 1980, he had also served two successful terms as governor of the nation's largest state and seen the Republican establishment evolve in his direction. In other words, Reagan was a talented and experienced politician who understood from the outset that the success of his presidency—a political upheaval more profound than Trump's—depended on skill as well as disruption. Reagan was shrewd enough not only to engage with critics on all sides—including his let-Reagan-be-Reagan right flank—but to surround himself with pragmatists as well as true believers.

The political landscape now is significantly altered. Much of what made Reagan so traumatic to the left—free-market economics and a robust foreign policy, expressed without apology—has since gone mainstream. And social media, which exacerbates division and discord, didn't exist. At the same time, President Reagan faced obstacles unfamiliar to President Trump: a legislative branch firmly (and historically) in opponents' hands and a narrow, exclusive, and reliably hostile press. One of the many paradoxes of the Trump presidency has been his inability, or unwillingness, to exploit the advantage any Republican president enjoys on Capitol Hill and, thanks to the Internet, reap the benefits of an infinitely larger, and more expansive, media.

In that sense, the defenestration and exile of Stephen Bannon is a net benefit, along with Bannon's pledge of disloyalty to conservative principles. The architects of policies that transformed public opinion, ended the Cold War, and successfully engaged the challenge of radical Islam enjoy Bannon's "complete and total contempt." And the two politicians able and willing to make Trump look good—McConnell and Ryan—will be held "accountable" if they fail to satisfy Stephen Bannon. Or put another way: Let Trump be Bannon.

As always, the opportunity to miss this opportunity rests in the hands of President Trump. The question is whether the first nine months of his presidency are prologue or a prelude to the Great American Second Chance. ♦

A Lack of Ideas Has Consequences

Adjusting to a novel political era.

BY JAMES W. CEASER

Something has gone missing from American politics. Since the beginning of the new administration in January, public debate focused on general ideas has largely disappeared. Yes, President Trump has a few issues he consistently supports, such as limitations on immigration and lower taxes; and yes, some members of Congress remain strongly wedded to a general theoretical position, which they sometimes promote at the tail end of news shows. But the existence of an integrated set of ideas stemming from a single principle, what some used to call "ideology," is absent. In its place is the daily run of news stories and commentary focused on assessment of the president's personality and character, on charges of misdeeds and scandals, on personnel battles and rumored changes of White House staff, and on temporary reactions to decisions that change with each particular policy. There is no public discussion about these matters that fixes a framework of debate, no connective tissue of thought that links what happens on one day to the next.

The mass media lead the way. Coverage concentrates on breaking stories and revelations that are fueled by inveterate ideological motives one day and aberrant tweets the next, but the content of the accounts has nothing to do with any ongoing theoretical conflict. Everything is an alleged report of one kind or another, meant to stir a sense of drama that will portend ill or good for the fate of the administration. A brief initial period of partial thematic orientation linked to Steve Bannon faded as he slowly saw his influence dwindle and his position

James W. Ceaser is professor of politics at the University of Virginia and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

finally terminated. There remains a new intellectual journal out there, founded to promote Trump's revolution, but *American Greatness* has little to no guiding influence over administration policy debate. This is a presidency that has a few choice policy positions but no sustained ideological direction.

President Trump's turn in early September on the debt ceiling, in which he joined with newfound Democratic congressional chums Chuck and Nancy is just one more instance of the same thing. Moving beyond the partisan boundaries to which he had previously adhered, the president perhaps opened a broader field on which to maneuver. For weeks, he had been attacking Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, signaling (or venting) that he had had enough with the dabbling of Republicans, who could not, with a razor-thin Senate margin, hold together to repeal Obamacare. This shift leaves the administration with even less connection to an imputed ideological consistency, though more terrain conceivably on which to seek deals and bargains. The president can try, if a few Democrats soften toward him, to put together new coalitions, though those espousing one principle or another may well ask to what end.

It was not so long ago that President Obama could be counted on to offer yet another iteration of his arc of history speeches, capped with a soliloquy on "who we are." His arguments would restate and promote evolving progressive positions. A set of principles was usually at or near the center of these events. The president's efforts were in turn invariably met by responses from those representing different branches of conservatism. Commentators, too, would play their part, rallying to one side or another by supplying whatever sophisticated arguments they could summon. Everything in the ongoing splits between progressives and conservatives could be fit within a framework of ideas, and even where there were pleas for compromise and deviations from expected positions they would need to be explained against the prevailing ideological backdrop.

Commentators today are mostly struggling, finding themselves outside their comfort zone of writing about the realm of ideas. They have no choice, they say, but to try to figure out psychological motives and discern moral dispositions, topics on which they have little expertise. An analysis of political thought is secondary, if it counts at all. Some have concluded that it is government by sheer impulse, and even when the president has on one issue swung over to their side there are more grounds for suspicion than trust. Others have come to the view that the president has no clue what he is doing, pure and simple. As difficult as it is to fathom, America's position can be one thing one day, something entirely different the next. Those on the other hand who continue to search for a guiding logic to the president's positions, even if not one grounded in firm ideology, are split in their conclusions. Some see beneath the to-and-fro a malevolent inclination to further far-right populist instincts. Others insist we are watching a masterful strategist, a genius of popular communication, bidding to shake things up and open up politics to a new set of relations beyond the old ideological rigidity.

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What does one say in the face of this novel and unsettling situation? For the moment, it is next to impossible to divert one's eyes from the main show. The president's large or, as Vice President Pence likes to say, "broad-shouldered" persona forces itself willy-nilly on everyone and everything. Might he ever become, as Jimmy Carter did on so many days, irrelevant and uninteresting? In today's world, especially with the colorless figures leading the House and Senate, it is difficult to imagine that this is possible. Most are accordingly unable to turn their gaze elsewhere, and they focus the greater part of their attention on the president. All this is understandable, though perhaps not very helpful.

To readjust to the climate and circumstance in which we currently live is the challenge political commentators face. If Donald Trump is not going anywhere soon, meaning that he is unlikely to be pushed out of office, it is fair to ask those in the commenting business, in particular those on the conservative side, to begin to make their own pivots. It may be, as so many say again and again, that there is not a good match between the president and the office to which he has been elected. While there is no harm in repeating and elaborating on this point as occasion suggests, it is important also to consider the gains that have been made.

In response to progressive thinkers who have no interest except full-scale opposition and who want to bully those to their right into virtue-signaling by repeating, daily, the president's deficiencies, it is time politely to decline the offer. Conservatives who do not, as some few of them do, wish to lionize everything Donald Trump does can say that they have expressed their reservations and will speak again on their own schedule. Meanwhile, they can look for possible benefits. Donald Trump is not Hillary Clinton, and beneath the mayhem on display at the top there has been a fairly strong attempt within some of the cabinet departments to undo large parts of the obtrusive state that has been strangling business and crushing parts of civil society. And maybe, just maybe, the overly rigid ideological disposition that captivated so many in the past will finally be relaxed. Even if we are not sure of the direction, altering the style of politics may in the end produce some good. There will in any case always be time to revisit this approach. ♦

The Nuclear Deal Is Only Half of It

Our Iran problems run far deeper, thanks to Obama. BY LEE SMITH

The Trump White House has yet to roll out its much-anticipated, comprehensive, government-wide Iran policy review, but administration principals have met over the last few weeks to iron out details regarding the nuclear deal with Iran, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. On September 14, as expected, Trump renewed the waiver that provides sanctions relief to Iran under the JCPOA's terms, while the Treasury Department at the same time imposed new sanctions targeting supporters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

That recipe—waive nuclear sanctions while imposing other sanctions—is in keeping with the administration's larger message about Iran, namely, that the problems the Islamic Republic poses go far beyond the nuclear program. These include support for terrorism and criminal enterprises, threats to strategic waterways, and ballistic missile development. The question still outstanding is whether that big picture will come to affect U.S. policy towards Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, where the Islamic Republic is further entrenching its position.

The next Iran deal milestone comes October 15 when the president must again certify to Congress—per the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act—that Iran is meeting the conditions of the JCPOA. Trump, who criticized the deal during his presidential campaign, is reportedly keen to decertify. In July he told the *Wall Street Journal* that "if it was up to me, I would have had [Iran] noncompliant 180 days ago."

So far, though, he hasn't done so, blaming his secretary of state for keeping him from making a command decision. And Rex Tillerson is trying to do so now. According to an Associated Press report last week, the State Department has already urged the president to certify Iranian compliance again and then go to Congress to fix the deal.

"The secretary of state and his staff have been working since the transition to play Trump for an idiot on Iran," says one veteran Iran hand closely involved in the decertification debate. "During the first round of waivers and recertifications in April, they tried to slip it by the president as just a minor 'technical' issue that he didn't have to worry about. The next time certification came up in July, they simply denied him any other option. This time they're trying to entangle him in process." (The 2015 law requires certification every 90 days.)

To ensure that Trump certifies in October, the State Department had tried to push a diplomatic process to tighten aspects of the deal, in partnership with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Europeans. But they predictably rebuffed State's efforts, as did Iran. The point of that proposal, as with the latest initiative to "fix" the deal, is to tie Trump down in a process that will prevent him from decertifying—the first step in dismantling the deal entirely.

So what are the president's options for October? He can still tear up the deal entirely, a scenario endorsed by John Bolton and previously promised by Trump. Another option would be to decertify Iran's compliance with the deal but not reinstate sanctions, not yet anyway. "Trump can decertify on the condition that the JCPOA is not in the U.S. national interest," says Mark Dubowitz, executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a leading expert on the deal. "Then it goes to Congress for debate for 60 days where the president needs to lay out a persuasive case that this is not the time for Congress to reinstate sanctions and abrogate the deal."

According to Dubowitz, this tactic not only puts Iran on notice but gives our European allies plenty of advance warning to develop a common policy on how to fix the fatally flawed nuclear deal. The preference is do this together. But everyone needs to understand that the United States is prepared to reimpose sanctions instead of giving Iran patient pathways to nuclear weapons and ICBMs. "Europeans would prefer a common approach on Iran. They will always choose access to the $19 trillion U.S. economy over a $400 billion Iranian one," says Dubowitz. "American coercive financial power, especially under Trump is real."

On the other hand, says Dubowitz, "if the president certifies [Iran's compliance with] the JCPOA again next month, he'll lose credibility—with Democrats, Europe, never mind Iran and other interested observers, most notably North Korea and Russia. If he does certify yet again, he will have an uphill battle going forward to demonstrate that he is prepared to walk away and use all instruments of power to pressure Iran and permanently cut off its pathways to atomic weapons."

It's not clear, however, which instruments the administration is willing to use. The White House is concerned, as Trump officials told Reuters last week, that "a more muscular military response to Iranian proxies in Syria and Iraq would complicate the U.S.-led fight against Islamic State." And the president himself has affirmed that ISIS is his top regional priority.

Lee Smith is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

"We have very little to do with Syria other than killing ISIS," Trump said.

But as Henry Kissinger wrote last month, a campaign dislodging ISIS from the Fertile Crescent could also lead to "the emergence of an Iranian radical empire." How so? Because in spite of the many nuances and complications of Middle East politics, the conflict now burning from Baghdad to Beirut has devolved into a zero-sum game. Once the United States eschewed a heavy footprint on the ground, Iran could only profit from the anti-ISIS campaign, which props up its friends and clients in Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut. Fighting ISIS, at this point, means assisting the Islamic Republic in achieving its long-cherished aim of a land-bridge linking Tehran, through Baghdad and Damascus, to the eastern Mediterranean.

Since firing missiles at Assad's and Russia's positions in Syria in April, the Trump administration has taken a hands-off attitude toward the regime in Damascus. It's worse elsewhere. In Iraq, American forces are teamed with an Iraqi military that works in close coordination with Popular Mobilization Forces under control of the IRGC. Trump's national security adviser, H. R. McMaster, has reportedly "directed the NSC staff to look at ways the U.S. can be more aggressive in its posture towards Hezbollah" in Lebanon. Meanwhile, though, the administration continues to fund the Lebanese Armed Forces, which are little more than a Hezbollah auxiliary these days. The United States has not partnered directly with Iran, Assad, and Russia but rather acted through cutouts. Still, the effect is the same.

How did America wind up hand in hand with a soon-to-be-nuclear rogue state? After all, fighting the Islamic State was not always a vital U.S. interest. Indeed, Barack Obama called ISIS the JV team and lamented that it had forced him into action by beheading American journalists. Understanding the zero-sum nature of the region-wide war, though, Obama saw that an anti-ISIS campaign would consolidate his own pro-Iran policy preferences. And of course ISIS is a horror show, threatening Americans and our allies in the region as well as Europe. The issue, however, isn't who is worse or more violent—Iran or ISIS? Rather, it is how to balance the demands of meeting a strategic threat against those of executing a counterterrorism policy.

As Reuel Marc Gerecht put it in these pages last week, counterterrorism "is the easier route to take when confronting the Middle East's manifold problems" but has become "a liability for policymakers trying to work through the big issues that revolve around the regional heavyweights." The anti-ISIS campaign obscures the pressing strategic concerns that touch on vital American interests in the Middle East and elsewhere. A terrorist group is dangerous but it is not a strategic threat like Iran—a large nation with state institutions, including a growing military and a nuclear weapons program, allied with states adversarial to the United States, like Russia, even as it supports a terrorist organization, Hezbollah, every bit as deadly as ISIS.

Kissinger sees the danger because it is in keeping with his classical worldview of statesmanship, in which the primary concern is managing the conflict between states over vital resources and territory. During the Cold War, terrorism, from this perspective, was a second-order threat. This distinction is apparently lost on Trump officials, though not all of them are unaware of it. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, famously hawkish on Iran, made plain several years ago when he was still a Marine general on active duty that toppling Syria's Assad would constitute the "biggest strategic setback for Iran in 25 years." The map Mattis read so clearly then has not changed. Iran is still the deep threat.

Obama, it's abundantly clear, painted his successor—whether it was to be Trump or Hillary Clinton—into a corner, one colored in the hues of the Islamic Republic. The question is whether Trump is capable of charting a way out. ♦

Not Racing for the Cure

The FDA old guard backtracks on rare diseases again. BY MICHAEL ASTRUE

Once again officials within the FDA are proposing to put other interests over the needs of dying patients, predominantly children.

For more than three decades a group of FDA civil servants aligned with Ralph Nader's Public Citizen has fought accelerated review of breakthrough drugs for devastating diseases. In the mid-1980s AIDS activists were the first to loosen the grip of this unholy alliance. Without the persistent campaigns of ACT UP and other activists, the FDA would not have approved the first AIDS treatment, AZT, in 1987. More significantly, the FDA's accelerated approval of AZT stimulated the biotechnology industry to invest in better drugs; these drugs have not cured the disease, but they have saved millions of lives and made the disease manageable for many people.

The FDA's old guard reacted to this success by trying to find a way to declare AIDS unique, so that it could continue the risk-averse approval process it preferred—a process more devoted to data collection than helping the desperately ill. When I was general counsel at the Department of Health and Human Services, the Council on Competitiveness executive director David McIntosh and I convinced FDA commissioner David Kessler that there was no moral difference between a patient dying of AIDS and a patient dying of any other disease for which there was no treatment. With that principle established, in 1992 the FDA promulgated its first regulations to allow for accelerated drug approval more broadly.

The frontline employees of the FDA tried to undermine the implementation of the new regulations, but they were overruled time and time again by their supervisor, David Finbloom. His courage and respect for the accelerated approval regulations saved the lives of millions of people with multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, lysosomal storage diseases, and many other fatal conditions.

When Finbloom died in the late 1990s, the old guard led a successful retreat on rare diseases. The FDA responded to competing breakthrough products for Fabry disease and muscular dystrophy by slowing down approvals in order to create a fictitious "level playing field" that would allow them to pick the best in class. Excessive clinical trial requirements and blatant disregard for its own conflict-of-interest rules slowed down approvals even further.

Perhaps there is hope to speed things up once more. The FDA's new commissioner, Scott Gottlieb, has a record of being more sympathetic to the ideas of David Finbloom than those of Ralph Nader. The problem is that the old guard has created a sneaky tactic to try to box Commissioner Gottlieb into policies whose inevitable result will be avoidable suffering and deaths.

The FDA and its European counterpart are proposing a new regulatory regime for Gaucher's disease, a rare illness in which an enzyme that cleans out toxins is missing from cells. That regime would explicitly seek to stifle competition and turn most clinical trial design decisions over to the two regulatory agencies. The stunning thing about this announcement is that it is more than a quarter of a century late. In 1991 the FDA approved a naturally derived enzyme missing in Gaucher's patients as the first treatment. It subsequently approved three recombinant forms of that enzyme and two small molecules with a different mechanism of action. Now, with the problem for patients being primarily one of cost not therapeutic benefit, the FDA wants to "help."

Far-left politics, not science or patient needs, is driving this proposal. In the long term, gene editing and gene therapy may create better and cheaper treatments for Gaucher's disease, but there are no promising treatments on the immediate horizon. The FDA and its European counterpart cynically picked Gaucher's disease solely because it has become a rallying point for left-wingers who want to control drug pricing. The plan, then, is for the FDA old guard to jam this heavy-handed proposal through for a politically vulnerable disease in order to set a precedent for applying progress-killing principles to all experimental treatments for rare diseases.

The Europeans have already released their version of the proposal, and the FDA has indicated that it will be releasing its version for public comment in the next few months. The mere release of this document will make things worse. As happened during the "Hillarycare" debate in 1993-1994, venture capitalists will hold back funding and biotech companies will shelve programs until the regulatory landscape becomes clear.

Contrary to the expectations of those who opposed Commissioner Gottlieb's nomination, he has slapped down pharmaceutical companies that needed to be slapped down. He has also made significant

Michael Astrue is a former general counsel for the Department of Health and Human Services and biotechnology CEO. He sits on the board of a rare disease advocacy organization, but the views expressed here are entirely his own.

progress toward cleaning up the Obama administration's generic drug review backlog, a backlog that unnecessarily aggravated health care inflation.

A typical FDA commissioner would let this Gaucher's proposal become the subject of public comment, then put a finger in the air to decide whether to push back against the agency's hardliners. A great commissioner would shut down the agency's disingenuous power-grab now, then start a genuine discussion about how the agency can best help the desperate and dying. ♦

Trump's Democracy Man

Running USAID in the age of America First.

BY JENNA LIFHITS

Mark Green, the administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is a firm believer in fostering democracy abroad.

It would be difficult to say the same of the man who appointed him: President Donald J. Trump.

It's a rare point of foreign-policy consistency for the president. As a candidate, he railed against "nation building": "We're trying to force democracy down their throats," he said during a September 2016 rally. "We are spending trillions of dollars, and they don't even want it."

The disdain remained steady after Inauguration Day, even as Trump shifted on other foreign-policy issues. In August, he announced that he would keep troops in Afghanistan, a move he acknowledged as a reversal. But he vowed: "We will no longer use American military might to construct democracies in faraway lands, or try to rebuild other countries in our own image. Those days are now over."

Green hopes that's not true for development and foreign assistance. With a slight Midwestern twang, the clean-shaven 57-year-old tells me that he sees the spread of democracy as integral to global stability and American prosperity. Before heading up USAID, he was president of the

Mark Green

International Republican Institute, a nonprofit organization that seeks to support and encourage democracy overseas. Now, in what ought to be his dream job, he is serving a president whose foreign policy prioritizes military force and security at home.

The Trump administration has signaled broad skepticism about soft power. Its May budget proposal featured a 30 percent cut in the State Department and USAID budget, with a specific 32 percent cut in funding for democracy-promotion programs, according to the Congressional Research Service.

"It is not a soft power budget," Office of Management and Budget director Mick Mulvaney explained in March. "This is a hard power budget. And that was done intentionally."

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said that values must be subordinated to American interests. "In some circumstances, if you condition our national security efforts on someone adopting our values, we probably can't achieve our national security goals or our national security interests," he observed in May.

These are rocky shoals for a head of USAID to navigate. But Green has an arsenal of experience behind him. For one thing, he has been on the other side of the dais. A four-term Wisconsin congressman (1999-2007), he describes himself as a "known quantity" on Capitol Hill. His reputation there allowed for a breezy confirmation with heaps of bipartisan praise. Green says he leaves politics at the door with his Hill friends, preferring instead to talk Packers football and hunting. (A Wisconsin cheesehead sits atop a bookshelf in his light-filled office in the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center.) Even so, his relationships on the Hill could prove helpful if tensions with the administration bubble over.

"What's going to be interesting to watch is when he has conflicts with his own administration. How much is he able to—either behind-the-scenes or more overtly—find allies on the Hill and work with them?" says Scott Morris, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development. "Does he see himself doing battle with Mulvaney at OMB, arm-in-arm with people like Lindsey Graham?"

Even the most hawkish of lawmakers side with Green on the value of development. Graham, chairman of the Senate appropriations subcommittee that oversees foreign aid, slammed Trump's budget proposal for "destroying soft power" and diminishing

BILL O'LEARY / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY

Jenna Lifhits is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

American leadership. "I believe, after 42 trips to Iraq and Afghanistan, we're never going to win this war by killing terrorists alone," the South Carolina Republican told Tillerson during a hearing. "I believe, as the generals do—if you don't believe me, listen to the generals—that the State Department's role in the war on terror is very important . . . just as important as any military power we have."

Whether Trump grows to embrace soft power may be irrelevant; Congress controls the purse strings, and lawmakers have soundly rejected the administration's foreign-assistance cuts. "They may just put the money in the account and say we don't really care what you guys want to do," says Andrew Natsios, who headed USAID under George W. Bush. "If you don't do what Congress wants, let me tell you—there's hell to pay."

Soft power in action: Laura Bush in Dar es Salaam, 2005

But there is also room to hope that the president will have a come-to-Jesus moment on development.

Green recalls a scene shortly after the presidential election. "The team at IRI were wondering what's next for democracy work, for development work, for foreign assistance?" And rightly so: Trump had not been shy about his "America First" outlook.

In the midst of this uncertainty, one of Green's senior staffers stood up and read a statement from the president. "It said we really need to focus everything back here at home, we shouldn't be doing so much around the world," Green remembers. The staffer then revealed that the words were from President George W. Bush's early days.

"It was just a reminder that every president inherits a complicated world. I would suggest this president has inherited a particularly complicated world," Green says. "As time goes on, they begin to think more and more about what makes up our leadership—what is the juice of our leadership. In many parts of the world it's what we do here at USAID."

Green has been upfront with both Trump and Tillerson about his development philosophy and his belief in fostering democracy. "I gave them examples of how I believe that our tools in development, including democracy promotion, can really help them achieve their objectives of national security, economic security," he recalls. "They've been nothing but supportive since day one."

He can also take comfort in the fact that Trump has not been consistent on foreign policy. Despite signaling on the campaign trail that he would limit engagement abroad, he has either made military moves or threatened to do so in Syria, Venezuela, North Korea, and Afghanistan. He has also shown signs of reflexive humanitarianism, particularly with his military response to Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad's chemical attack on Khan Shaykhun in April. "When you kill innocent children, innocent babies—babies, little babies—with a chemical gas that is so lethal . . . that crosses many, many lines, beyond a red line," Trump said after the attack. "I now have responsibility."

Some see discord between Trump's denunciations of democracy promotion and his military moves overseas. "I'm confused by the messages from the White House on these issues," Natsios says. "One day, they're opposed to democracy programs and they don't care about human rights. The next day, they're announcing military intervention because of an abusive dictatorship in Venezuela." "They bombed the chemical site in Syria, which I applauded—but why did they do that? What's the geo-strategic purpose in that if you're a hard realist?" he continues. "To try to take their statements and translate it into an aid program would be chaotic because there appears to be no strategy."

Green seems comfortable cutting through the noise. His commitment to international development stems from the late 1980s, when he and his wife moved to a small Kenyan village to teach English. Years later, he returned to Africa as ambassador to Tanzania under George W. Bush. It was that experience, curiously, that Green says president-elect Trump appeared most interested in during their first meeting.

"It wasn't 'Mark, would you like to head up USAID?' That wasn't the conversation," he says. "Instead, he was asking me: What was Tanzania like? What did you see? What were the challenges?"

The most rewarding aspect of his ambassadorship was implementing programs that he had a hand in crafting in Congress. That includes the successful AIDS initiative started by Bush and largely implemented by USAID. Such programs bolster his faith in the positive impact of developmental aid.

It is a progression as he sees it: "helping countries go from recipients, to partners, to fellow donors." "We should always be looking at helping people to help themselves," Green explains, "working with those who wish to rise." Foreign assistance, he adds, is not inevitable or an entitlement: "The purpose of foreign assistance is to end the need for its existence." ♦

CHARLES OMMANNEY / GETTY

The Joy of Destruction

What explains the sudden mania for toppling statues?

By Joseph Bottum

Josh Cobin seems a good enough guy. A little pudgy, maybe, with his hair thinning on top and a beard borrowed from a Civil War officer—one who forgot to get a trim before Mathew Brady showed up to take the battalion photograph. At 29, Josh is probably a little old for the sloppy look he affects. A little old for his baggy shorts and ball cap. But he's got a steady job at GoDaddy, the Internet registration firm, down in Scottsdale, Arizona, where they're too cutting edge—too Age of the Internet—to care about the old corporate uniform of jacket and tie. He's kind to dogs, concerned with making the world a better place, all that sort of thing. Plus, he told a television interviewer, he's got a great sense of humor.

The moment of glory for Josh Cobin (left)

Anyway, one hot August day, he saw in the discussion feeds he follows online that plans were being made to fight the fascism of Donald Trump by rallying against the president during a scheduled trip to Arizona. And though he would later insist that he is not a member of antifa, the loose-knit organization behind the rally, Josh decided to join the self-proclaimed anti-fascist forces. So he put a few supplies, water bottles and whatnot, in a backpack, hid his face behind a gas mask, and marched off in his baggy shorts to protest the president's August 22 speech at the Phoenix Convention Center—where, caught up in all the excitement, he got second-degree burns on his hand trying to hurl a tear-gas canister back at the police. And when he attempted to kick another as it spun along the pavement, he was hit with yet a third shot from the police: a ball of pepper spray that doubled him over and knocked him to the ground, clutching his privates in agony.

The blow to the groin soon showed up on video, of course, the way many things do these days. And, the way many things do, it quickly became an Internet meme, with Twitterers, Facebookers, and Instagrammers adding comic comments and song fragments to the scene that looked just like the hackneyed movie trope of a man hit between the legs.

The story might have ended there, but Josh seemed to like the attention. He posted on a Reddit thread some pictures of the protest, to prove that he really was the figure in the video and to tell readers that he hadn't been hurt too badly. His lawyer would later reverse field, insisting her client had "serious injuries" that required significant medical treatment. But she had to argue *something* at his bail hearing—because, unsurprisingly, the hapless Josh was soon arrested. Once his pepper-shot video spread, a local television station, 3TV/CBS 5 in Phoenix, tracked him down through his Reddit postings for a live interview—an interview in which he apparently thought he was being cagey by showing his face but asking the station not to air his name.

"I don't equate kicking or putting back tear-gas canisters as attacking police," he told the television audience. Sadly, the police did equate all that with attacking the police, and they had no trouble identifying him from his postings and his television interview. On August 24, Joshua Stuart Cobin, 29 years old, of Scottsdale, Arizona, was arraigned on three charges of felony assault.

Nearly every part of this saga would have been unintelligible 20 years ago, mostly because nearly every part of it is driven by computer connectivity. Josh learned about the protest online, probably even before he learned about the presidential trip that was the occasion for the protest. The image of his taking a pepper ball to the groin spread because of online video sharing. And he boasted about his deeds in a popular online discussion thread, an odd modern form of confession.

YOUTUBE

Joseph Bottum, a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, *is professor of cyber-ethics and director of the Classics Institute at Dakota State University.*

Most of all, Josh Cobin's story shows the strange social merging of virtual life and real life. The accusation that Trump is a fascist started as a typical bit of Twitter hyperbole, and now it stalks America in the form of a GoDaddy employee in a gas mask. To arrive at the notion that hurling things at the police isn't attacking them, Josh had to confuse what one can get away with saying on a Reddit feed with what one can get away with actually doing on the streets of Phoenix. He looked like a cartoon figure in the online video—he bumbled his way into an online confession of his acts—in confusion about consequences offline. Joshua Stuart Cobin burned his hand because he didn't know that recently fired tear-gas canisters really are hot, unlike the computer keyboards on which he typed his virtually hot protests against President Trump.

The glory of the Internet is that it allows like-minded people to find one another. And the horror of the Internet is that it allows like-minded people to find one another. Coin collectors, baseball-card enthusiasts, and used-book readers have all benefited from the opportunities offered by online connection. So have neo-Nazis, child-pornographers, and Communist agitators. Where they were once connected only by the sickly sweet smell of the ink from the mimeograph machine clumping away on the kitchen table, the forces of anger now have instantaneous links.

And that instantaneity allows a radicalizing more rapid than the world has ever seen. Back in a 1999 study called "The Law of Group Polarization," legal scholar Cass R. Sunstein suggested that discussion among people with similar views causes a hardening of opinion. "In a striking empirical regularity," he wrote, "deliberation tends to move groups, and the individuals who compose them, toward a more extreme point in the direction indicated by their own predeliberation judgments." It hardly matters whether the groups are pro-gun, pro-abortion, or pro-anarchy. With sufficient group discussion on one side of an issue, everyone involved takes a step toward the extreme: The mildly supportive become strongly supportive, the strongly supportive become wildly supportive, and the wildly supportive become fanatical psychopaths.

In such books as *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) and *The Scapegoat* (1982), the French-American theorist René Girard offered an explanation for this kind of thing, developing his ideas about scapegoating and what he called "mimetic rivalry." Against Freud, Girard argued that human desires do not always come packaged in predetermined forms. We create many of them in imitation of others. We learn to want by watching what others want, and we catch desire the way we catch a disease.

More recent years have seen some attention paid to the concept of "competitive victimhood." A fascinating 2017 trio of surveys by Laura De Guissmé and Laurent Licata, for example, pointed out that a group's empathy for the victimhood of others is significantly decreased whenever the group expands its own sense of victimhood. But Girard was there first, warning that the idea of victimhood, stripped of its Christianity, would itself become a device of cultural violence, with people competing for the status of victim even as they trample those who oppose them or merely fail to support them sufficiently.

If that sounds like the current protesters—if that sounds like too much of our current political agitation on both left and right—it should. Trying to understand antifa, the *Washington Post* recently described the amorphous group as a collection of "predominantly communists, socialists and anarchists who reject turning to the police or the state" to achieve radical ends, preferring to pursue their radical ends through violent confrontation on the streets. The disorganized organization could not have existed before the Internet—or, at least, it could never have found so quickly people like Josh Cobin to march alongside it, before such leaderless collectives were made possible by computerized communication.

The group polarization of online discussions, the mimetic rivalry to show oneself more pure than others, the Twitterized brutality toward those who fail to show enough purity, the outrage on the hunt for something to be outraged about: The Internet sometimes seems to have been invented for the sole purpose of proving the social-contagion theories of René Girard.

It's doing a bang-up job.

Perhaps the clearest example of Internet-fueled social contagion can be found in all the agitation these days about America's statues and monuments. A statue of Robert E. Lee, for example, stood at the center of the clashes that left three dead and dozens injured on August 12, when a set of white supremacists met a counter-protest in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In response to the events in Charlottesville, protesters in Durham, North Carolina, chose another statue as the target of their ire, toppling the town's Confederate Soldiers Monument on August 14 while shouting, "The people united shall never be defeated"—an odd chant for a destructive act born of divisive social condemnation but of a piece with the conviction, possessed by both the white supremacists and their radical protesters at the Unite the Right rally, that they represent the *true* will of the people. A different group of protesters vandalized the statue of Robert E. Lee at Duke University's chapel on August 17. Yet another toppled a Confederate memorial in a cemetery in Columbus, Ohio, on August 22.

Even in the absence of protesters and vandals, many municipal, county, and state governments began

Workers at the Washington National Cathedral prepare to remove stained-glass memorials to Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

WASHINGTON POST / GETTY

preemptively eradicating memorials to the Confederacy after Dylann Roof's racial massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston in 2015, and the trend accelerated after the Charlottesville riots. The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island removed plaques commemorating a tree that Robert E. Lee had planted when the Army posted him to Brooklyn before the Civil War, and the Washington National Cathedral added an announcement on September 6 that stained-glass memorials to Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson would shortly be taken down.

Joining in, the mayor of Lexington, Kentucky, demanded that Confederate statues be hauled away from the courthouse. Baltimore's mayor ordered a midnight raid on Confederate statues on city property "to preserve public safety." On and on the list goes. Bradenton, St. Petersburg, and West Palm Beach, Florida. Annapolis and Ellicott City, Maryland. Kansas City, Missouri. Franklin and Worthington, Ohio. Austin and San Antonio, Texas.

Locations one wouldn't suspect of having Confederate sympathies acted quickly to avoid the chance of social upset. Los Angeles tore out a Confederate monument from a cemetery, and San Diego pulled a plaque identifying Jefferson Davis Highway. In Brunswick, Maine, a Confederate marker was quietly relocated by Bowdoin College. On August 17, Madison, Wisconsin, removed a graveyard plaque commemorating Southerners who had died at a prisoner-of-war camp in the area. On August 18, one day after a city council vote, Helena, Montana, dug up a Confederate memorial fountain.

The list of removed statues and memorials seems mostly to prove what busy beavers the United Daughters of the Confederacy were from the 1910s through the 1960s. The South played a role in the 1892 election of Grover Cleveland, the only Democrat elected president between 1860 and 1912. But it was with Woodrow Wilson in 1912, and especially with Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, that Southerners became central to the coalition that formed the Democratic party.

And since even Northern Democrats had to make excuses for their Southern brethren, there seemed no one able to say boo to the Daughters of the Confederacy as they seeded the American landscape with memorials to what they called the War Between the States. Stonewall Jackson once slept here? Jefferson Davis once passed through? Robert E. Lee visited? A Confederate veteran spent his twilight years nearby? Up went a plaque. Last year, in response to the cultural turn against the Southern markers, Vanderbilt University renamed Confederate Memorial Hall, for which the Daughters of the Confederacy had raised funds in 1933—and the university was forced to shell out $1.2 million to the Daughters in recompense.

Quite how such things were supposed to be rallying points for racism was never clearly explained. Even the Unite the Right march in Charlottesville began as a protest

against the *removal* of Robert E. Lee's memorial, a statue generally unnoticed by the town's white supremacists till the municipal government decided to make a point of it.

But that doesn't mean the authorities in Virginia were wrong. Many of the grander memorials (the gigantic bas relief on Stone Mountain, for example) date from the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1910s and 1920s, and many of the rest were erected during the civil rights protests of the 1950s and early 1960s. And though the proclaimed purpose was memorializing the figures of the Lost Cause without seriously attempting to undermine the United States in a revival of the Confederacy, the barely concealed agenda was intimidation of Southern blacks—as though to say, *We will oppress you, just as our forefathers did*. The Confederate flag was raised over the South Carolina statehouse in 1962, 102 years after secession, for a racist reason, and its message was clear. Why shouldn't such things go?

The defense of American memorials—if defense there is—has little chance of gaining purchase in the midst of the current social contagion. Several writers have suggested that we be wary of the slippery slope that destroying Confederate statues sets us on. Even that formulation underestimates the steepness of our descent. Every schoolteacher knows the state of American knowledge about history is abysmal, in the literal sense of the word: It opens on an abyss. The abolishment of old memorials isn't a slippery slope. It's a slippery cliff. And once we fall off the edge, there's no apparent social consensus, no visible ledge, that might stop us.

On August 18, in response to the Charlottesville riots, the Maryland statehouse removed from its grounds a statue of Roger B. Taney, chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court—even though Taney had stayed true to the Union, opposed the Confederacy, and generally supported Abraham Lincoln's prosecution of the Civil War. His sin was authoring the despicable *Dred Scott* decision in 1857, which ought to have prevented the erection of his statue in 1872. But why take it down now, along with statues of Davis and Lee? In Ohio, a statue of William Crawford was decapitated, in yet another response to Charlottesville, for the apparent reason that the colonel from the American Revolution looked as though he might have been a Confederate to someone not able to distinguish the uniforms of the revolution from the uniforms of the Civil War. Francis Scott Key joined the list on September 13, with red paint splashed across a Baltimore monument to the man who wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner" during the War of 1812.

This spring, responding to protests that began after Dylann Roof's murder of nine black churchgoers, New Orleans hauled away four major monuments only to have a city council member demand that the Confederate statues be not merely removed but melted, to ensure that they never be displayed again. Meanwhile, "Tear it Down," the motto of the protesters, was spraypainted in black across the base of a golden statue of St. Joan of Arc in the French Quarter. "Joan of Arc is not on our radar," the head of the local chapter of the anti-Confederate organization "Take 'Em Down" tried to reassure New Orleans residents—a less comforting line than he appeared to realize.

Earlier in the year, Pepperdine University decided to remove a statue of Christopher Columbus. "For years the story of Columbus and the fascinating exploration that brought him to the new world was taught in schools across America. It was heroic and exciting," the college president wrote. But now, long after those benighted times, "for many, including those within our campus community, stories of conquest and the art associated therewith are painful reminders of loss and human tragedy." Thus the statue has to go, lest students suffer painful reminders. (If you want to know when those dark times of historical blindness occurred, Pepperdine has helpfully given us a date: The statue of Columbus was erected in 1992.)

On August 16, New York's mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the city would conduct a 90-day review not just of the small handful of Confederate memorials but of "all symbols of hate on city property." He suggested the city start with the sidewalk-embedded plaque honoring Philippe Pétain for his military leadership during the First World War, because Pétain went on to collaborate with the Nazis during the Second World War. Activists quickly added a demand that the 76-foot-tall statue of Columbus be removed from the eponymous Columbus Circle and that the New York Academy of Medicine's statue of J. Marion Sims, "father of modern gynecology," be taken away because he honed his medical techniques operating on slaves.

The mayor's promise seems only to have increased the contagion. On August 28, a statue of Columbus in Yonkers was decapitated by vandals, its head thrown in a nearby trash can, and another statue in Queens was spraypainted with the slogan "Tear It Down: Don't Honor Genocide." On September 11, yet another Columbus was vandalized, this one in Central Park. Even New York's many memorials to Teddy Roosevelt are under attack—in a city in which residents are sensitive enough to report feeling unsafe this year when the guitar intro to "Sweet Home Alabama," Lynyrd Skynyrd's bouncy 1974 Southern rock anthem, was heard over the Muzak speakers of a Brooklyn grocery store.

Meanwhile, New Jersey's Stockton University has hidden away a bust of its namesake, Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence who owned slaves. In Philadelphia, activists (including several members of the city council) want to tear down a statue of Democratic mayor Frank Rizzo because he ruled a police force brutal

to minorities in the 1970s. In Boston, yet more activists are demanding a new name for Faneuil Hall, a cradle of the American Revolution, because Peter Faneuil had commercial connections with the slave trade. In New Mexico, protesters have denounced a statue of the Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate. In Chicago, they want the memorial to Italian aviator Italo Balbo erased.

As the cultural contagion grows—pushing us down the slippery slope, dropping us off the slippery cliff—it will not be halted by pointing out the absurdity of trying to eliminate references to the commerce of Peter Faneuil and the airplane flights of the mostly forgotten Italian fascist Italo Balbo. The idea that a mention of Marshal Pétain on a New York City sidewalk is a "symbol of hate" ought to seem silly enough to discredit the entire movement. For that matter, there exists, at least in theory, a principled stopping point, limiting our current wave of iconoclasm to the Civil War, for the Confederate memorials are generally in praise of those who tried to break the Union for the sake of slavery.

The Internet generation, however, tends to lack much sense of historical detail—and nonetheless to believe it possesses the complete key to American history in the knowledge that all the past is a tale of oppression. What need of nuance with that conclusion already in hand? Indeed, indulging nuance gives countenance to evil. If people point out that General William S. Harney helped keep Missouri from joining the Confederacy, they are accused of whitewashing the role he played in the Indian Wars, a role that recently caused South Dakota's Harney Peak to be renamed Black Elk Peak. If people point out that Joan of Arc was dead long before American colonization, they are accused of lacking respect for the sensitivities of those who feel no connection to the French Catholic saint.

This historical absolutism, this sanding away of distinctions to reveal the unblemished skin of historical evil, makes possible the Internet-driven contagion that has brought down monuments across the country in recent weeks. After toppling the Confederate soldiers' memorial in Durham, the North Carolina protesters took—and posted online, naturally—video clips of themselves kicking the fallen statue, as if to more fully prove their hatred of racism.

In one way, their enthusiasm to rid the nation of symbols of the rebel slaveholders is to be applauded. In another way, their enthusiasm is hard to distinguish from the zeal with which the Afghan Taliban dynamited the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001. Or the destruction of

Baltimore's vandalized monument to 'Star-Spangled Banner' author Francis Scott Key

the old regime's symbols at the beginning of the Russian Revolution and again at the end, when the Soviets in turn became the old regime. Or the destruction of Christian symbols in the 1905 revolutionary *journée* in Limoges, "the Red City" of France. Or, for that matter, the stripping of the altars in 15th-century England. Or the work of Byzantium's iconclasts, with "whole towns and multitudes of people . . . in considerable agitation over this matter," as Patriarch Germanus complained early in the 8th century.

All iconoclasm looks alike not because its targets or long-term effects are identical, but because its practitioners share a certain manic joy—a sense of grievance at last finding focus, given physical expression, and set free to rage through the world. Nathan Bedford Forrest is a good example of someone with monuments that should never have been erected: a man whose abhorrent work founding the Ku Klux Klan abolishes any need to memorialize him as a brilliant Confederate cavalry leader. But it's not a long psychological step from removing statues of the Civil

War's General Forrest to beheading statues of the Revolutionary War's Colonel Crawford. All it requires is a social contagion that calls into existence both the opponents of racialist fascism and the racialist fascists to be opposed. And the Internet, of course, to make it run like lightning.

Consider the example of Heather Franklin, a 33-year-old mother in Oregon who found a Confederate-flag rug hanging in a Portland discount store's carpet rack this spring. Her response was to pull out her video camera and begin filming herself wailing uncontrollably while accusing the sketchy store's boorish clerks of racism. And then, of course, she posted the video online.

Within a week, the video had spread enough for the local chapter of antifa to use its Facebook page to encourage a protest—which brought dozens to the store, demanding the firing of the store clerks who had dismissed Franklin's complaints. In short order, the store manager had apologized, removed the rug, and promised to schedule his employees for sensitivity training.

The psychological disturbance, however, remains the most fascinating element of the incident, for to watch the video is to sense something both profoundly false and profoundly true. The filming is like a fast-frame account of a person working herself into a frenzy, while keeping self-conscious and calm enough never to stop recording it all. In her narration, she exaggerates every detail (even the ones her own video shows to have been fantasized), and she indulges her frenzy with two young, frightened-looking children in tow. The falsity we sense comes from the resulting cold-blooded image of a woman who has deliberately decided to be offended beyond measure. And the truth we sense derives from the same purposeful commotion: She appears psychologically damaged enough to latch on to an occasion, any occasion, for Internet fame and the moral stature of an antiracist—even if it has to be ginned up. Even if it has to happen in front of children.

And, of course, it worked. In a nearly perfect example of mimetic rivalry, Heather Franklin, a 33-year-old mother in Portland, Oregon, imitated the opponents of racism and claimed a place for herself in the sun. What matter that she had to blame the salesclerks of a discount store? Her moral image is worth it, and her video brought out the Internet-informed protesters before whose outrage the store could not stand. In René Girard's terms, we find the greatest unity with our fellows by scapegoating selected examples of those we can get away with naming our foes.

Columbus in Central Park, after being doused with red paint on September 11

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / GETTY

Every human situation is like a vase with two handles, the wise old Stoic philosopher Epictetus once wrote. If you have quarreled with your brother, you can pick up the relationship by the handle that is the fact that you have quarreled or by the handle that he is your brother. The protesters against the old Confederate monuments have taken the handle of the quarrel: They are offended because they choose to be offended.

Yale abolished the name of its residential hall Calhoun College this winter when the university elected to picture the 19th-century politician as a theorist of slavery rather than as a famous alumnus. Columbus Day was established in 1892, as the nation recoiled from the horror of 11 Italians lynched in New Orleans in 1891, and the statue in Columbus Circle was set on its New York pedestal as part of the same rejection of bigotry. The current refusal to see Columbus as a symbol of national unity begins with a decision to find the explorer divisive.

And perhaps those who take to the streets in protest are right in their choices. Perhaps they are right to pick the angrier options. But so many of our recent stories—Josh Cobin's online boasting about the shot to his groin and Heather Franklin's calculated videoing of her frenzy for the Internet—look like proof of Girardian accounts of cultural breakdown.

Social contagion does not need to be historically accurate, or philosophically wise, or even immediately practical. Why would it, when a sense of outrage lures us into mimetic rivalry and rewards agitation with a feeling of moral superiority—all delivered at the speed of the Internet? The local governments moving quickly to preempt protest may buy themselves a little time by hauling down memorials, but the protesters will soon lock on to new targets. The point of their protests, after all, is not correctly choosing what to be outraged by. The point is the outrage itself. The point, as Epictetus would have understood, is the quarrel. ♦

What's the Story?

Liberals have one; conservatives need one

By Joseph Epstein

If I were a Republican strategist, which I'm pleased to say I'm not, I would pay especial attention to Shelby Steele's op-ed "Why the Left Can't Let Go of Racism" in the August 27 issue of the *Wall Street Journal.* Toward the close of his article, Steele writes that "the great problem for conservatives is that they lack the moral glibness to compete with liberalism's 'innocence'"—innocence, in this case, from the evil of racism and social injustice generally. Steele then goes on briefly to suggest that "reality" should be the "informing vision" of conservatism." By "reality" I take him to mean more than arguments countering the unreality of the empty utopianism of much liberalism.

What Shelby Steele holds in his op-ed is that liberals have a story and conservatives do not. The liberal story is an old one, in many ways a false one, but it works for them, and, as he points out, they are adamantly sticking to it. Their story—nowadays the approved word is "narrative"—is one of impressive simplicity: They hate social injustice in any form, despise capitalism for its selfishness and blame it for the despoiling of the environment and the planet generally, and cannot find an ethnic or sexual minority they don't wish to help. Through this program, they have, or at least feel they have, cornered the market on virtue. To put the liberal story in two words: They care. This has left conservatives in the unattractive position of not caring.

Like most simple stories about the motorforce of human behavior—the class struggle, the Oedipus complex—the side-effects of the liberal story, which go unmentioned, are sometimes as pernicious as the disease. Liberals, in recent years, have a lot for which to apologize. Thus, owing to the successful attempts at implementing an essentially liberal program of diversity and giving way to every possible strain of multiculturalism, the contemporary university controlled by liberal ideas has been so badly watered down in its humanities and social sciences divisions as to dilute the quality of higher education itself, with political correctness, trigger-warnings, and microaggressions putting on the finishing touches. Thus, in their relentlessly reassuring African Americans of their continuing victim status—ignoring the more deadly tragedy of black-on-black gang murders in the inner city—the liberal program on race has ensured bad feeling all round and brought on the worst in black leadership. As Shelby Steele himself remarked some years ago, if racial progress in the country is ever admitted, Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton would be out of business.

The liberal story lost credence for me when I began to teach at a Middle Western university. There I discovered young professors, good liberals all, sleeping with their students and older professors backing down before radicals who openly proclaimed they had no use for free speech—never have I witnessed such cowardliness when there was so little to fear.

A liberal in good standing through my late 20s, the liberal story lost credence for me when I began to teach at a Middle Western university. There I discovered young professors, good liberals all, sleeping with their students, older professors backing down before radicals who openly proclaimed they had no use for free speech—never have I witnessed such cowardliness when there was so little to fear—and behavior so grasping (and for such very low stakes) that it made the Robber Barons look like an order of Dominicans. Liberals, as is well known, are much better at proclaiming than living up to their ideals.

If liberals frequently turn out disappointing, conservatives are uninspiring. Conservatives don't have a story, or at least an impressive one. They are left only with their insistence on the unreality of contemporary liberalism, which when proclaimed is usually turned against them by charges of racism, blindness to the beauty of idealism and the larger project of the good of eminently improvable humankind, and insensitivity generally. Conservatives need a story of their own. But what might it be?

Joseph Epstein, a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, *is the author, most recently, of* Wind Sprints: Essays.

Economics has long been at the heart of the conservative story. Friedrich Hayek correctly held that the loss of economic liberty soon results in the loss of other, more essential liberties. The prime example here is the Soviet Union, whose leaders, having captured the means of production, for 75 brutal years promptly closed down the means of decent life itself.

Unarguably true though it is, the conservative insistence upon the importance of free markets is not necessarily useful as an arguing point for winning the good opinion of independents. The emphasis on free markets in current-day conservatism is more likely to convince them, and reconfirm liberals in their fixed belief, that conservatives merely wish to preserve the status quo—preserve, in other words, the wealth of the One Percent and all that. The conservative story ought somehow to show that conservatism itself is not identical with, is richer and more complex than, business interests. The business of America, they need to emphasize, contra Calvin Coolidge, is greater than mere business.

My friend Edward Shils once remarked to me apropos of Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Gary Becker, and their colleagues in the University of Chicago economics department that they were decent men, honorable and obviously highly intelligent, but "insufficiently impressed by the mysteries of life." Those mysteries need to be part of the conservative story. While endorsing free markets as the most efficient arrangement known under successful capitalism, the conservative story must not allow a belief in the importance of economics to block out the more significant elements in life. In defense of his own Communist politics, Bertolt Brecht said, "first grub, then ethics." Through an undue emphasis on economics, conservatives convey essentially the same skewed message.

As Chesterton is supposed to have said, "when a man chooses not to believe in God, he does not choose to believe in nothing, he believes in anything." In the realm of economics, confirmation of Chesterton's aphorism is available at Exhibit A: the invisible hand of the market.

On the subject of God, liberals and conservatives are divided. Those liberals who profess religious belief feel that their belief impels them to join the fight for social justice. Among religious institutions given over to politics, the Episcopal church, once the citadel of the East Coast social establishment, appears to have been captured by liberalism. Unitarianism has for decades seemed an appendage of liberalism. Reform Judaism, it has been said, is little more than the Democratic party platform, with holidays added. True, evangelical Christians have supported the Republican party in recent years, but they have done so chiefly because they felt their faith under attack by the social arrangements promoted by secular liberalism.

In this melee of religious passion, conservatives do well to present themselves as defenders not of the Faith, but of faith itself. (I have, in this connection, a conservative friend who calls himself a "pious agnostic.") By this I mean conservatives ought, insofar as possible, to defend all respectable religious worship while stressing that religion is above mere politics and as such does best wherever possible to steer clear of direct involvement in political activism.

At the heart of the liberal-conservative argument is a dispute about human nature. Liberals find human nature infinitely malleable, conservatives view it as hardily resistant to change. Liberals see humanity as on a relentless march of progress, conservatives see civilization itself as inherently fragile, a beautiful but thin construct always in danger of tearing.

The attack on Big Government has long been another part of the conservative story. However high its truth factor, this, too, has a commensurately low persuasion quotient. The closer it gets to impinging on personal life—in the realms of health, setting and reinforcing social norms, and the rest—the more inept, not to say interfering, Big Government does indeed seem. Yet to be against all Big Government is to chew much more than one should bite off. The need for FEMA, the FDA, ICE, and the other of the lettered federal agencies that comprise the alphabet soup of Big Government has if anything grown greater in recent years. The conservative argument ought not to be against Big Government per se, but on the underlying assumption that government is the greatest force available for bringing about human welfare and happiness.

The insistence on free markets and the attack on Big Government and the retreat into tradition that takes the form of disparagement of advanced-guard social behavior (gay marriage, abortion, and the rest) come to little more than a melancholy and defeatist creed, when what is missing and much needed in the conservative story is an affirmative philosophy.

At the heart of the liberal-conservative argument is a dispute about human nature. Liberals find human nature infinitely malleable—"A path out of poverty and poor

health" runs the happy headline to a story about a recent study conducted by psychologists and developmental scientists—conservatives view it as hardily resistant to change. Liberals see humanity as on a relentless march of progress, conservatives see civilization itself as inherently fragile, a beautiful but thin construct always in danger of tearing.

In his one strongly political novel, *The Princess Casamassima*, Henry James has a character, Madame Grandoni, the companion of the radically chic princess, remark in a manner to which most conservatives would, I think, readily subscribe: "I take no interest in the people; I don't understand them and I know nothing about them. An honorable nature of any class, I always respect it, but I will not pretend to a passion for the ignorant masses." Conservatives are not, like liberals, under any obligation to take up the cause of supposed victim groups en masse, but only that of individuals of honorable character. Hyacinth Robinson, James's hero in the novel, a boy born poor, orphaned, and raised in the London slums, undergoes an inner revolution and gives up the outer revolution to which he had been committed, abandoning his political resentment and anger and falling in love with "the beauty of the world." Later in the novel James remarks about the limits of politics, a limit conservatives need to make part of their story: "The figures on the chessboard were still the passions and jealousies and superstitions and stupidities of man, and their position with regard to each other, at any given moment, could be of interest only to the grim, invisible fates who played the game—who sat, through the ages, bow-backed over the table." Such thoughts do not make for simple political messaging, but, conservative at their core, they can supply the philosophy behind a persuasive conservative story.

The conservative English novelist Evelyn Waugh once jokingly remarked that he was never again going to vote for the Tories as they had been in power for eight years and hadn't turned the clock back one minute. Neither should American conservatives expect their political representatives to have any better luck with turning back the clock. Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. held a cyclical view of American history, with liberal changes sweeping the board for a time, at which point, having exhausted itself, liberalism is replaced by conservatism. Thus do Democrats and Republicans shuffle in and out of power, though with the changes made during the liberal years generally accepted and becoming part of the status quo.

But the most recent liberal changes seem unacceptable, and not to conservatives alone. The identity politics that, along with an inept campaign, cost Hillary Clinton the presidency have also gone a long way to destroying the universities, made race relations more jagged than ever, and left American foreign policy in a great muddle of indecision. So demoralized had the nation become by liberalism that in Donald J. Trump it elected a man richly unprepared for the job whose only attraction was his promise that he could put a stop to the business-as-usual of liberal identity politics and foreign policy dithering and, you should pardon the expression, Make America Great Again.

With a good conservative story in place, the Trump presidency, with all its unnerving volatility, might have been avoided. But none of the candidates who opposed Donald Trump in the Republican primaries was in possession of that story or any other moderately convincing story, leaving them all seeming little more than men and one woman in business for themselves.

I myself do not have that much-needed conservative story, but I do have a strong sense of what its general lineaments ought to be. The conservative story ought to be respectful of business but not dominated by its values. It ought to be sympathetic to those who have fallen or are otherwise unfit to compete in a competitive society and relieve their misery wherever possible. It ought to recognize the centrality of immigration in our history and do all in its power to turn recent immigrants into true Americans, not merely people who have come here seeking work and the enjoyment of superior consumer goods. Connected with this it needs to recognize that the United States is no longer a dominantly white country, which statistically it isn't, and to give up any false notions of our having an aristocratic class ("Ah," said the Italian to the Englishman who was bragging about his lineage, "when your people were still painting their behinds purple and baying at the moon, in my family already we had homosexuals"). Finally, in a hard world, conservatives ought to be good-humored. As for that world, permit me to allow Henry James, in a passage from an essay on Turgenev, to have the last word:

"Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places, people of sense in small, and mankind generally unhappy. But the world as it stands is no illusion, no phantasm, no evil dream of a night; we wake up to it again for ever and ever; we can neither forget it nor deny it nor dispense with it."

Nothing cheerful about that, to be sure, but it seems impressively realistic in the way that Shelby Steele called for "reality" to be "the informing vision" of conservatism and to help furnish conservatives with a powerfully persuasive story of their own. ♦

The Spy Who Loved Animals

The eccentric Brit agent runner who inspired Bond's 'M.'

BY HARVEY KLEHR

The Cambridge spies—Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, and John Cairncross—who burrowed into the heart of the British establishment and betrayed its secrets to the Soviet Union have been the subjects of dozens of nonfiction books and inspired numerous novels, including some by the great John le Carré. Henry Hemming, in his new book *Agent M*, offers the flip side of the United Kingdom's battle with internal subversion: the story of the government moles who infiltrated Communist and fascist organizations. They have largely remained anonymous, unlike the notorious Philby and his comrades, and Hemming's herculean efforts to link codenames to real names in British archival records are welcome, even if few people will ever find these individuals as fascinating as their traitorous counterparts. For most readers, however, the charm and interest of Hemming's book will come from learning about the eccentric man who directed their activities.

Ian Fleming used Maxwell Knight's moniker, M, for James Bond's superior. Le Carré, who worked for Knight in MI5, based one of his characters on him and provided sketches for one of Knight's naturalism books. Neither author wrote about Knight's oddities, perhaps because in this case, reality was stranger than fiction. A highly successful spymaster who operated for years with little oversight from his nominal superiors, Knight overcame a sketchy political past and bizarre personal habits. In fact, these very attributes, Hemming shows, contributed to his success.

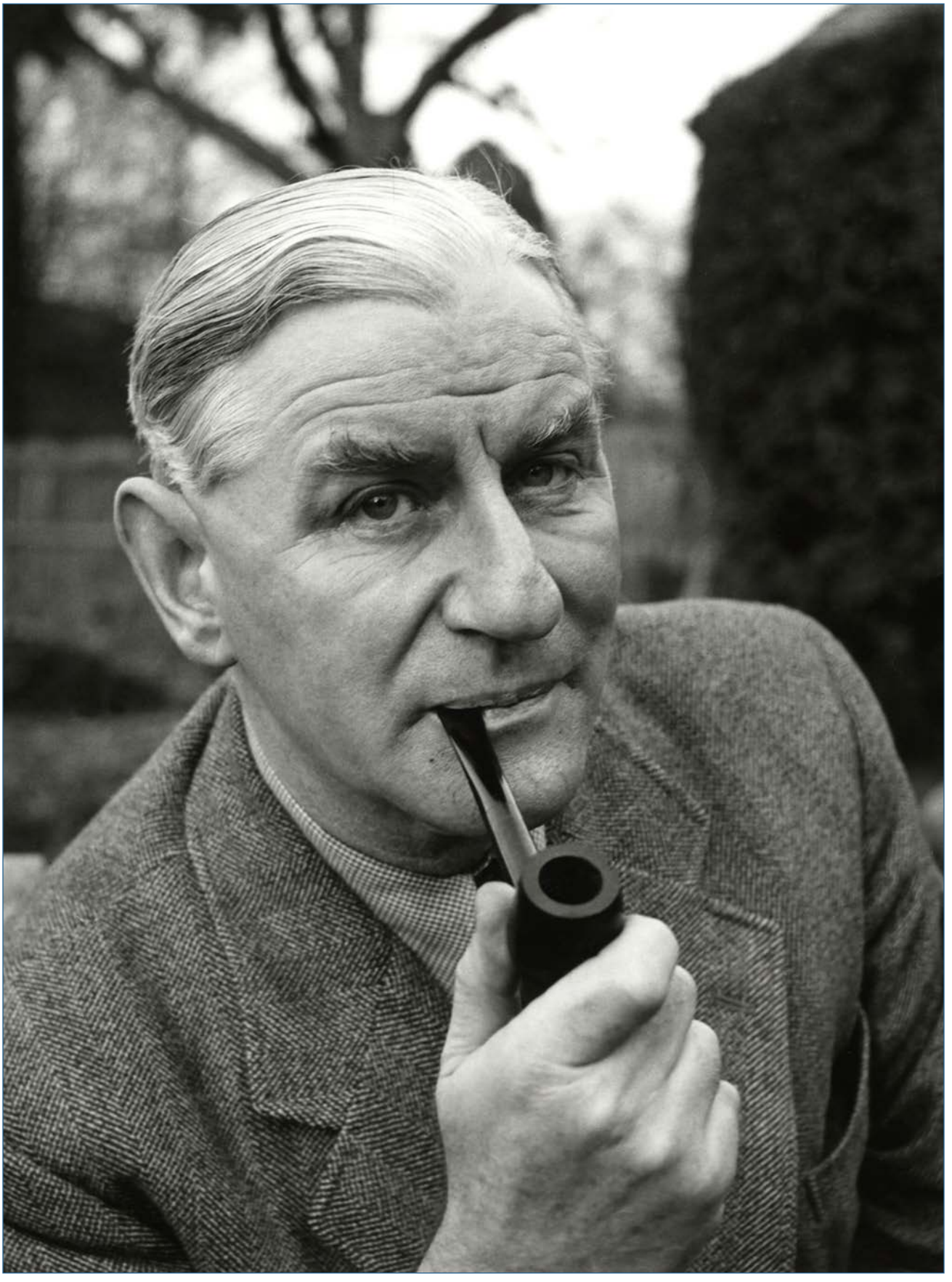
Agent M
The Lives and Spies of MI5's Maxwell Knight
by Henry Hemming
PublicAffairs, 384 pp., $28

Born in 1900, Knight grew up with a father whose financial failure left him dependent on a wealthy uncle. Obsessed with animals, he spent long stretches observing them in the wild, rescuing injured ones, and training them. He enjoyed getting to know the personality of each animal, having a seemingly magical gift for earning their trust and affection. Following his father's death, his uncle apprenticed him at the age of 14 to a naval training vessel. He served in the Royal Naval Reserve during World War I; never attended a university; became caught up in the jazz scene at the end of the war; housed a menagerie of animals in his apartment, including a bear named Bessie that he regularly walked through the streets; and lost a minor civil service job before, likely because of his irresponsibility, his uncle cut him off financially. Knight was adrift, working as a school games instructor, when in 1923 he was recruited by Sir George Makgill, a wealthy industrialist who had set up an intelligence organization to provide to businessmen information about Communist-inspired strikes.

Knight's first assignment, however, was to infiltrate the British Fascisti (BF), a small, right-wing outfit, in part to identify potential recruits for Makgill's own group. Knight was so successful that within a few months he was BF's director of intelligence, sending operatives into the Communist party, running fascist cells in other groups, and setting up the K Society, a paramilitary wing of the BF that specialized in street fighting with Communists, kidnapping Communist leaders to prevent them from making speaking engagements, and vandalizing Communist offices.

Hemming notes that Knight shared BF's disdain for democracy but claims he was driven more by the group's camaraderie, hostility to communism, and British patriotism than by ideology. His loyalty to his friends from this period remained intense. Many of his old BF comrades would later work for him in MI5, infiltrating both the Communist party and the 1930s iteration of British fascism. Knight's closest friend in BF was William Joyce, an American-born provocateur who eventually wound up in Berlin during World War II, broadcasting Nazi propaganda as Lord Haw-Haw (he was hanged as a traitor in 1946). Significantly, Joyce escaped England two days before he was to be incarcerated in 1939, following a telephoned warning from Knight.

Harvey Klehr is the Andrew W. Mellon professor emeritus of politics and history at Emory.



COURTESY OF PUBLICAFFAIRS / NATIONAL ARCHIVES, KEW

Knight was a highly successful agent runner. His work with animals had taught him how to gain the trust of naturally suspicious creatures. He knew that patiently allowing animals to make the first moves toward humans was a better tactic than approaching them. He treated all his agents like "fascinating pets," Hemming says, making each one feel special. In Knight's later naturalist writings his descriptions of gaining the trust of animals read like a primer on running intelligence agents—he talks about rearing "deserted or stray young birds" and "fledglings fallen from their homes, or found slightly injured." His speaking voice—which Hemming describes as having a "gentle, firm, and reassuring tone" that "could put almost any creature at ease"—helped him nurture animals and win the loyalty of a host of spies.

Knight began working informally for British intelligence in 1929 and became a full-time employee in 1931, just as the Invergordon Mutiny in the Royal Navy—in which a thousand sailors went on strike—convinced the intelligence community that it needed his sources in the Communist party of Great Britain. His employment was not without controversy. The Home Office had qualms about employing a member of a fascist organization and considerable negotiation was required before Knight was made the head of a section of MI5 charged with obtaining intelligence about the internal Communist threat.

His section remained physically detached from the larger organization, for many years operating out of his cramped apartment (along with his assortment of pets). And Knight's autonomy extended to his selection of recruits. Over the opposition of his superiors, Knight used a number of women, encouraging them to take secretarial and other lowly jobs in target organizations, remain inconspicuous, and, rather than push for promotion, wait to be asked to take on more important tasks. By such tactics, they slowly moved into positions of greater responsibility. The downside was that it sometimes took years for his agents to gain access to significant information—but Knight was a patient man.

That patience finally paid off in 1937 when Olga Gray, who had volunteered to work in a Communist front and slowly worked her way up, was asked by Percy Glading, a Moscow-trained liaison to Soviet intelligence, to set up a safe house in which top-secret weapons blueprints stolen from Woolwich Arsenal could be photographed. The ensuing arrests cemented Knight's reputation in MI5. Gray's sensational testimony at Glading's trial led the Communists to search frantically for other government moles in their midst—a search that was itself carefully monitored by another of M's agents who worked as a lead secretary at party headquarters.

The other great achievement of Knight's crew was the destruction of the British fascist movement. It had morphed from the ultraconservative BF dedicated to traditional British values into a violently anti-Semitic ally of Britain's wartime enemies, but Knight still had personal ties to some of its adherents, used them as informants, and for most of the 1930s did not regard fascism as a threat. By late 1939, however, three of his female agents had infiltrated the Right Club, a small fascist group led by Archibald "Jock" Ramsay, a Conservative member of Parliament and fanatical anti-Semite. One member of the Right Club, Anna Wolkoff, daughter of a czarist officer, was in contact with William Joyce—and, more alarmingly, with Tyler Kent, a code clerk at the American embassy, who had purloined or copied more than 1,000 confidential documents, including correspondence between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt showing FDR's interest in aiding Britain's war efforts. Their release could embolden American isolationists and embarrass both men. Knight arranged for the withdrawal of Kent's diplomatic immunity; the clerk was arrested, tried, and sentenced to seven years in prison. Wolkoff got a 10-year sentence. A thousand British fascists, including Ramsay and Sir Oswald Mosley, were interned.

As Hemming notes, Knight cut a number of legal corners: An agent provocateur solicited Wolkoff to communicate with Joyce in Berlin, and Knight himself secretly broke into Kent's apartment before his arrest to make sure the incriminating documents were actually there. When faced with a conflict between his country and some of his old friends, Knight had not hesitated.

Sometimes the intelligence gathered by Knight's agents fell through bureaucratic cracks or was ignored by his superiors. Reports that Melita Norwood, a Communist secretary, was connected to one of the Woolwich Arsenal spies were overlooked. She went on to work for Britain's atomic-bomb project and became the longest-serving Soviet spy in the country, not being exposed until the 1990s.

When one of his agents, Tom Driberg, a flamboyant gay writer and future MP, was identified, Knight came to suspect that the leak had originated with Anthony Blunt; but again, the MI5 hierarchy dismissed his suspicions, for which he had no evidence. Still, he was prescient about Soviet espionage tactics; they had no doubt recruited spies at Oxford and Cambridge, telling them to disown communism and remain "on ice" for years. After the war, Knight warned in a report that the "Comintern is not Dead." But within MI5 his belief that Soviet spies had penetrated the British government was ignored, and he was regarded as obsessed with communism.

Driberg also played a role in another Knight operation. When Guy Burgess surfaced in Moscow in 1956, Knight encouraged Driberg to seek an interview with him. Burgess, it was rumored, wanted to return to England and a panicked government, concluding that there was not enough legal evidence to prosecute him as a Soviet spy, feared a public-relations disaster. During the Driberg interview, Burgess gave details of some of the things he had learned while working for the British government, an offense under the Official Secrets Act. MI5 soon leaked the information to journalist Chapman Pincher, whose subsequent story, headlined "Burgess Burns His Boats. Now—and Only Now—They've Got Him," ended that possibility.

Knight's personal life was even stranger than his politics. His first love left him to marry William Joyce. His wealthy first wife, whom he met in the fascist movement, persuaded him to leave London in 1927 to run a pub in rural England; perhaps she was goaded on by having to live in an apartment with his parrot, toads, snakes, bulldog, and mongoose. The marriage was never consummated. After they lived apart for years, she committed suicide in 1936, leading her family to charge in the press that he had driven her to it. His second wife had their marriage annulled on the grounds that they had never had sex. His third wife, a member of MI5, remained married to him despite their lack of a sex life. Hemming dismisses the claim made by some writers that Knight was gay and attributes his sexual problems to a medical issue.

Astonishingly, for an intelligence operative Knight was a well-known figure in Great Britain, although not as a spymaster. During the 1950s he appeared on more than 300 BBC radio broadcasts and 40 TV shows. He wrote more than 20 books and lectured frequently on natural history. Beloved by children for his stories about the animals he had cared for, he came across "as warm-hearted, sensible, and sturdy, if at times a little stern." He often named the animals after the agents he had run. This enigmatic man retired from MI5 in 1961 and died seven years later.

Knight's success as a spymaster and agent runner no doubt owed a great deal to his own upbringing. He was rooted in traditional British values and mores, and was unimpressed by ideologies and abstract ideas. Even his fascist allegiances were a consequence of personal loyalty rather than ideas. Perhaps because he was so comfortable in his own skin, he was able to find and direct people who had to assume other identities and care for them for years as they played assumed parts. His agents—like the Cambridge spies—had to betray and lie to people with whom they associated. His avuncular concern no doubt made their feats of deception more tolerable. The man who loved animals but could not make love to women had a remarkable understanding of human beings. ♦

B&A

Fantasy Flashback

Revisiting a novel that inspired J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and George R.R. Martin. BY MICHAEL DIRDA

Now that the latest season of *Game of Thrones* has ended, fans of the show may be wondering: What now? How do I fill the void? One could, of course, reread George R.R. Martin's books, or check out Maurice Druon's *The Accursed Kings*, a series of seven historical novels that partly inspired Martin. It might even be time to return to those familiar tattered paperbacks of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, and Ursula K. Le Guin's tales of Earthsea. All perfectly reasonable ideas.

Or, instead, you could look for a copy of E.R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*, crisply summed up by E.F. Bleiler, the leading mid-20th-century scholar of supernatural fiction, as "still the finest heroic fantasy." Published in 1922, the same year as so many modernist masterpieces, *The Worm Ouroboros* combines elements of Homeric epic, Norse saga, and Jacobean drama, while its opulent style borrows the vocabulary and verve of Elizabethan English.

That style, in particular, may put off readers who expect sentences to be essentially journalistic, little more than a means of conveying information rather than things of beauty in themselves. Yet, as Le Guin once wrote of Eddison, "if you love language for its own sake, he is irresistible." His elevated diction adds real grandeur to his novel's heroes and their actions. By fusing what Lewis called "renaissance luxury and northern hardness," Eddison may have even created a "new climate of the imagination." For Tolkien, who denied any influence, he was simply "the greatest and most convincing writer of 'invented worlds' that I have read."

The Worm Ouroboros—the title refers to the serpent or dragon that eats its own tail—begins on Earth when a man named Lessingham is transported through magical means to the planet Mercury. He is set down, invisible, at the 30th-birthday celebration of Lord Juss, who is, with his brothers Spitfire and Goldry Bluszco and their cousin Lord Brandoch Daha, one of the four great champions of Demonland. In a recent war they have defeated the iniquitous Ghouls, but now find themselves embroiled in a new conflict with power-hungry Witchland. Other regions of this very Earth-like Mercury include Impland, Goblinland, and Pixyland.

Let us pause here. Eddison's names, it must be admitted, tend to sound clunky, while nearly all his characters are essentially human beings rather than what we normally think of as demons, witches, imps, or goblins. In the middle of the second chapter, moreover, Lessingham simply drops out of the action. By that point, however, the reader will have begun to adjust to the novel's various kinds of strangeness—in nomenclature, in diction—and, more importantly, the story will have started to cast its spell.

Eddison's particular "enchanter-quality"—to borrow a term from Nabokov—initially reveals itself in his descriptive passages. Here, for instance, an embassy from Witchland returns home from the court of the Demons:

Michael Dirda is the author, most recently, of Browsings: A Year of Reading, Collecting, and Living with Books.

> Still sailed they two days and two nights, and on the third day there was land ahead, and morning rose abated by mist and cloud, and the sun was as a ball of red fire over Witchland in the east. So they hung awhile off Tenemos waiting for the tide, and at high water sailed over the bar and up the Druima past the dunes and mud-flats and the Ergaspian mere, till they reached the bend of the river before Carcë. Solitary marsh-land stretched on either side as far as the eye might reach, with clumps of willow and rare homesteads showing above the flats. Northward above the bend a bluff of land fell sharply to the elbow of the river, and on the other side sloped gently away for a few miles till it lost itself in the dead level of the marshes. On the southern face of the bluff, monstrous as a mountain in those low sedge-lands, hung square and black the fortress of Carcë.

At this point, Eddison pulls out all the stops:

> It was built of black marble, rough-hewn and unpolished, the outworks enclosing many acres. An inner wall with a tower at each corner formed the main stronghold, in the south-west corner of which was the palace, overhanging the river. . . . Dismal and fearsome to view was this strong place of Carcë, most like to the embodied soul of dreadful night brooding on the waters of that sluggish river: by day a shadow in broad sunshine, the likeness of pitiless violence sitting in the place of power, darkening the desolation of the mournful fen; by night, a blackness more black than night herself.

Gorice XII, the new ruler of Witchland, isn't merely a king, he is also a necromancer; in fact, there is—in some occult way—only one Gorice, constantly reincarnated. To defeat the hated Demons the latest Gorice ascends the Iron Tower at Carcë and there, assisted by his adviser Lord Gro, summons a hellish "worm of the pit," which he sends forth against Juss and his companions. This "sending" results in the disappearance of Goldry Bluszco, though the Demons soon learn that their burly Hercules isn't dead, only imprisoned somewhere out of time and space. While attempting to undo this foul sorcery, Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha are themselves captured, chained to a wall in Carcë, and left to die of starvation.

Needless to say, they don't, but I shouldn't give too many more details about the novel's action, except to add that to rescue Goldry the Demons must eventually fight their way across the dread marchlands of the Moruna, leaving behind their familiar world for one suffused with desolation and an oppressive atmosphere of the uncanny:

> The fifth day, and the sixth and the seventh, they journeyed by the southern margin of a gravelly sea, made all of sand and gravel and no drop of water, yet ebbing and flowing always with great waves as another sea doth, never standing still and never at rest. And alway by day and night as they came through the desert was a great noise very hideous and a sound as it were of tambourines and trumpets; yet was the place solitary to the eye, and no living thing afoot there save their company faring to the east.

On their quest, Lord Juss and his companions encounter spectral beauties and ravenous mantichores, scale peaks to rival Mount Everest, learn the history of the ageless Queen Sophonisba, and discover that Goldry can only be freed if they locate the world's last remaining hippogriff egg. Many additional adventures test their strength and courage. But then the glory earned in fierce combat—*kleos* was the Greek word for this kind of renown—is what the Demons live and die for. As Daha says, "Are not all lands, all airs, one country unto us, so there be great doings afoot to keep bright our swords?" Even their metaphors are martial: Trying to identify an unknown army's commander, Juss asks, "Was he little and dark . . . like a keen dagger suddenly unsheathed at midnight?"

While these Demon princes journey through a haunted landscape, the court of Gorice XII bristles with intrigue: Who will lead the king's troops in the conquest of Demonland, now weakened by the absence of its greatest warriors? Will it be the scheming Corsus, the proud and lascivious Corinius, or the noble Corund? Perhaps Gorice, for all his austere, inhuman majesty, could even be influenced in his choice by feminine charms and wiles? Alone with the king, one court beauty tries to find out:

> Slowly she opened her arms upwards right and left, putting back her velvet cloak from her shoulders, until the dark cloak hanging in folds from either uplifted hand was like the wings of a bird lifted up for flight. Dazzling fair shone her bare shoulders and bare arms and throat and bosom. One great hyacinth stone, hanging by a gold chain about her neck, rested above the hollow of her breasts. It flashed and slept with her breathing's alternate fall and swell.

An armful of warm girl is not to be despised, yet, as it turns out, Corund's Pixyland wife more deeply grasps the mysteries of love and sex. Lady Prezmyra explains that she would never have taken a husband without knowing that she could "give him every time I would a new heaven and a new earth, and never the same thing twice."

In these chapters focused on the Witches, we learn more about the king's adviser, Lord Gro, who has been a traitor to Goblinland and a traveler to the distant places of the world. "Subtle of mind he is, and dearly loveth plotting and scheming," we are told, yet paradoxically Gro also "perversely affecteth ever the losing side if he be brought into any quarrel." Not least, this Goblin—the most complex character in the book—is a lover of goodness and beauty, a devoted friend to Lady Prezmyra, and, in dire circumstances, the protector of Lord Brandoch Daha's sister, Lady Mevrian.

Great battles feature prominently in the later chapters of *The Worm Ouroboros*, but each is slightly different in character. Some we follow as they happen; others are told to us after the fact, as when a common soldier recalls his part in an ambush: "We came down on to Krothering Side like a rock-fall." As in *Game of Thrones*, people we have come to admire are unexpectedly killed. Readers consequently shouldn't think of the great war between the Demons and the Witches as one of Good versus Evil. Eddison isn't writing a Christian fantasy à la Lewis. Lord

Juss and his inner circle may be the heroes, yet many of the Witches show themselves to be men and women of worth. When Corund, against overwhelming odds, defends the entrance to Carcë, Lord Juss himself is awestruck, calling it "the greatest deed of arms that ever I in the days of my life did see."

Such generous sentiments partly reflect the novel's pagan character: Conducting oneself honorably and dying well are all that truly matter. Yet when Lady Mevrian praises the splendor of the armies of Demonland, Lord Gro—like Xerxes surveying the Persian host—instead reflects on life's brevity:

> "Madam," said Lord Gro, "to the ear of one that useth, as I use, to consider the vanity of all high earthly pomps, the music of these powers and glories hath a deep under-drone of sadness. Kings and governors that do exult in strength and beauty and lustihood and rich apparel, showing themselves for awhile upon the stage of the world and open dominion of high heaven, what are they but the gilded summer fly that decayeth with the dying day?"

Whether a gentle wistfulness, despair over the apparent meaninglessness of life, or unavoidable ennui resulting from the tedium of peacetime existence, instances of melancholy regularly surface in the quieter sections of *The Worm Ouroboros*. Away from the clangor of arms, Eddison can even evoke a tranquil, ethereal loveliness that seems almost Japanese:

> Lulled with light-stirring airs too gentle-soft to ruffle her glassy surface, warm incense-laden airs sweet with the perfume of immortal flowers, the charmed Lake of Ravary dreamed under the moon. It was the last hour before the dawn. Enchanted boats, that seemed builded of the glow-worm's light, drifted on the starry bosom of the lake. Over the sloping woods the limbs of the mountains lowered, unmeasured, vast, mysterious in the moon's glamour.

Eric Rücker Eddison (1882-1945) spent most of his life as a civil servant working for Britain's Board of Trade. But he loved the Icelandic sagas and wrote one novel—*Styrbiorn the Strong*—in their style and later translated my own longtime favorite, *Egil's Saga*. Starting in the 1930s, Eddison resurrected Lessingham to reveal the complexity of the character's origins in three linked fantasy novels, usually called the Zimiamvia trilogy: *Mistress of Mistresses*, *A Fish Dinner in Memison*, and *The Mezentian Gate*. These track a pavane of complex love stories, in which major characters are actually emanations or avatars of the gods and our whole Earth but a bubble, easily pricked. While James Stephens—author of the Irish fantasy classic *The Crock of Gold*—unhesitatingly called *The Worm Ouroboros* "a masterpiece of English literature," he also described *A Fish Dinner in Memison* as "the largest, the most abundant, the most magnificent book of our time." (Such praise for Eddison gains added weight when you remember that James Joyce once said that if he were unable to complete *Finnegans Wake*, he hoped that James Stephens would finish it.)

One of the three individuals to whom Eddison dedicated The Worm Ouroboros *was the Scottish artist Keith Henderson, who illustrated the book. Here Henderson depicts "The Last Conjuring in Carcë."*

In its inventiveness and imaginative daring, *The Worm Ouroboros* is one of the foundational works of modern fantasy. Nonetheless, the book's archaisms, as I've said, may prove daunting to some 21st-century readers (though a 1991 Dell trade paperback edition, annotated by Paul Edmund Thomas, can be recommended for its excellent introduction and useful linguistic notes). Still, any ambitious work of art makes demands, though these, ultimately, only increase our aesthetic delight. We accept the stylistic challenges of Joyce, Gertrude Stein, or Djuna Barnes, so why not those of Eddison, their contemporary? Besides, once you've finished *The Worm Ouroboros*, you can go on more confidently to the other magnificently eccentric masterpieces of early-20th-century fantasy, such as William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land*, Hope Mirrlees's *Lud-in-the-Mist*, and David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*. ◆

B&A

Southern Man

Chronicling Dixie in the Depression.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

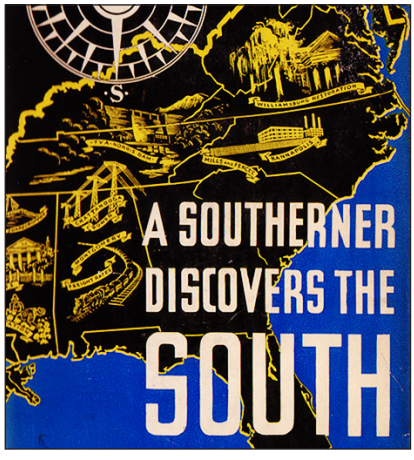
In 1954, when I was a sophomore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I paid tribute in an editorial for the *Daily Tar Heel* to a distinguished predecessor at that illustrious student paper, William T. Polk, who had died unexpectedly. Jonathan W. Daniels, the journalist and editor who had been Polk's friend and contemporary, mailed a note commenting on my piece and inviting me to visit him at his newspaper office in Raleigh. I soon did so—beginning a friendship that continued until his death in 1981. So, having known Daniels rather well as one of my journalistic elders, I am pleasantly surprised by the perceptiveness with which Jennifer Ritterhouse writes of his era and outlook. Her subject is *A Southerner Discovers the South*, a Daniels bestseller of 1938, one of a cluster of remarkable contemporaneous works—W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*; C. Vann Woodward's biography of the chameleon Georgia journalist-politician Tom Watson; and William Alexander Percy's elegiac *Lanterns on the Levee*—that announced the South's awakening from dogmatic slumbers.

The personalities and problems Daniels chronicled following a tour of 10 ex-Confederate states have faded from public consciousness. But that hardly matters, since their stories foreshadowed enduring perplexities. As a liberal journalist, Daniels's preeminent concern was the case of the "Scottsboro Boys," nine young black men who hopped a freight train in 1931 and were arrested in Alabama after two mendacious prostitutes accused them of rape. The case epitomized Jim Crow—including corrupt juries that ignored, among other salient facts, one accuser's repudiation of her testimony. Not even a U.S. Supreme Court decision quashing the original verdict sufficed to end the boys' decade-long ordeal. The case attracted national and international attention. It had few heroes, save for a bold Alabama judge who set aside one of several jury verdicts, but it had racist villains galore. Daniels, to his credit, editorialized vigorously against these injustices, both in his book and in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the newspaper his family owned.

In his book, Daniels also describes visiting the new Tennessee Valley Authority and its director David Lilienthal (later chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission). The TVA was a symbolic New Deal project, bringing electricity to an underdeveloped region and facing down private power interests.

In fact, the depressed Southern economy was a major Daniels topic. The South was caught up in a forced devolution from plantations to small farms. Subdivided land holdings lacked sufficient capital and labor to prosper. Exploitative tenant farming greatly increased. The '30s was an era of soil erosion, the overproduction of staple crops, drought, and the Dust Bowl. The New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Administration sought, with limited success, to cope with chronic crop surpluses. But the fractionating of land entailed poverty, black and white, that justified FDR's calling the South "the nation's No. 1 economic problem." There had been no Southern Marshall Plan after Appomattox.

Discovering the South
One Man's Travels Through a Changing America in the 1930s
by Jennifer Ritterhouse
North Carolina, 363 pp., $34.95



Daniels had taken over the editorship of the *News and Observer* from his father, Josephus, Woodrow Wilson's secretary of the Navy, a bone-dry Methodist who earned the enmity of naval officers by drying up their wardrooms. Josephus Daniels, incidentally, was no "populist," as Ritterhouse suggests: He was a bitter enemy of an authentic populism that "fused" with Republicans to capture North Carolina for progressive policies in the 1890s. His attitudes were crudely racist—he sought to drive from the state a distinguished historian, John Spencer Bassett, who dared extol Booker T. Washington as "the greatest man, save General Lee, born in the South in a hundred years." Jonathan admired his father but was a man of improved attitudes. He faced a revolutionary challenge at the helm of a stodgy family paper, but rose to it.

The younger Daniels's usual reportorial technique in his brief 1937 Southern hegira was the interview with key players, spiced with irreverence and reinforced by wide reading. Ritterhouse, following his trail after 80 years, has taken pains, as Daniels himself did, to expose the human and cultural variety that lurks behind sweeping designations of the South as a single entity.

Daniels wrote perceptively about the tensions between the "regionalists" of Chapel Hill and the "Agrarians" of Nashville. The former were scholars of a sociological bent, inspired by Howard W. Odum's influential treatise *Southern Regions of the United States*. They

Edwin M. Yoder Jr. is a Pulitzer Prize-winning former editor and columnist in Washington.

sought a future free from what they identified as "Lost Cause nostalgia." By contrast, the Agrarian writers and poets, including such distinguished figures as John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, extolled the best values of the Old South and resisted the siren song of "progress." The spirits of both schools linger still. At today's remove it is clear that this argument was more methodological than thematic. The regionalists were analytical, with sociologists like Odum and his protégé Rupert Vance in the vanguard, impatient with quaint appeals to rural leisure. But Odum and Vance were farm boys, acquainted firsthand with the soil. The Agrarians were sheltered, scholarly men of letters, valuing folk memory, some of it imaginary. Scorned by many progressives, they enjoyed a last laugh when "New South" prosperity yielded ill-distributed wealth and urban blight. Jonathan Daniels was not an impartial arbiter, but he made a game effort to give the romantics their due.

The most interesting pages of Ritterhouse's book recount Daniels's visit to Atlanta and its star personality, Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone With the Wind*. When Mitchell, a newspaper gossip writer, turned her formidable talent to Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler she struck gold. Daniels treated her and her bestseller, though not her booming city, with sympathetic detachment and intelligence.

Ritterhouse, a professor of history at George Mason University, has offered an uncommonly well-informed reexamination of the Dixie of the latter Depression, abstaining from the moralism that often flaws the historical writing of her generation. That she views the South of the 1930s (and after) through an elder's eye is a strength, not a weakness. In the period just before publishing his book, Jonathan Daniels had come to terms with his limited gift for fiction and turned, in his "discovery" of the South, to higher reportage. What he didn't know, he took pains to learn; the same may be said of the historian who now follows his tracks. The resulting blend of generational perspectives deserves a place on the small shelf of enduring Southern studies. ♦

B&A

Married, Bored, and Confused

An all-too-modern look at monogamy.

BY NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

Even if you hold no religious beliefs, you might want to consider adopting some simply for the sake of your wedding. That's the conclusion I reached after attending several secular nuptial ceremonies in the years after college. There was little worse than listening to vows that had been made up by the bride and groom. Even the ones that are written by professionals are pretty bad—like this one I came across while researching a book on interfaith marriage:

> I, [Groom], take you, [Bride], with all my heart and soul, to be my wife, my friend, my love, and my lifelong companion. I promise to respect that our ideas and opinions may differ, and to remember that yours hold as much truth and value for you as mine do for me. I promise to support you in times of trouble, and celebrate with you in times of happiness; to care more about your feelings than about being right, and to always listen without judging.

Listen without judging? Who are these people kidding?

In her new book, *Wedding Toasts I'll Never Give*, essayist Ada Calhoun calls this gilding the lily. She instead advises an engaged friend: "Saying you're going to stay together is plenty. . . . 'I do' covers it."

Calhoun, whose book weaves together a number of essays she wrote for the *New York Times* "Modern Love" column, has learned a few things about marriage over the past dozen or so years since she herself tied the knot. She tends to roll her eyes at the couples who "talk about how they will gracefully succeed where nearly everyone in human history has floundered."

But she has learned to keep her mouth shut and says, "I only wish I could tell them that in this marriage, occasionally they will suffer—and that not only will they likely endure sitcom-grade squabbles, but possibly even dark-night-of-the-soul despair." She adds, comfortingly, "That doesn't mean they are condemned to divorce, just that it's unlikely that they will be each other's best friend every single minute forever."

But these expectations are not surprising. In the past few decades, marriage has become what sociologists refer to as a "capstone" event. That is, couples wait longer and longer to get married—if they decide to do so at all. Both husband and wife want to ensure that they have completed their educations, are financially stable, own a house, and perhaps even have had children before they decide marriage is for them. If they expect marriage to be perfect, it is only because they have spent so long preparing for it.

Calhoun, on the other hand, got married younger than most of her

Wedding Toasts I'll Never Give
by Ada Calhoun
W.W. Norton, 192 pp., $24.95

Naomi Schaefer Riley, a senior fellow at the Independent Women's Forum, is the author of The New Trail of Tears: How Washington Is Destroying American Indians.

friends and she seemed rather unprepared for grown-up life. She thought she would never be bored with her husband Neal because he was a cool musician who had a childhood so different from her own. He was raised going to church three times a week and lived down the street from David Koresh. He was almost shot by police and at the age of 18 had a child.

So Calhoun was surprised by what she calls the "boring parts" of marriage. "There is the boredom of responsibility: crafting a budget, planning meals, arranging child care, cleaning." Fortunately for the reader, Calhoun finds witty ways to describe the boring parts. When Neal finds her on the floor sorting Lego pieces from Playmobil ones and asks what she's doing, Calhoun replies, "A dramatization . . . of why there are no Great American Novels by women."

Calhoun's boredom periodically—or constantly; it's hard to tell from the book—makes her wonder about other men. When arguing about broken sink faucets or changing the radio in the car, Calhoun writes, "*Other men*, I think at such moments, *wouldn't care if I broke a faucet*. And if they did, I could find someone else, leapfrogging from one lily pad of tolerance to the next. Or I could be alone, in which case I could break all my faucets and no one would say a thing."

At the beginning of her marriage, Calhoun and her husband seem to have had a fairly fuzzy agreement about fidelity. And that leads at one point to her making out with a guy she meets on a book tour. It also leads Neal to flirt with another woman while Calhoun is away. The ensuing guilt and arguments and "processing" are endless and difficult for both husband and wife to bear. Calhoun's astonishing conclusion—"Infidelity: not the best idea. Stop the presses."

SSPL / GETTY

The fact that Calhoun needed to figure this out on her own is telling. It's not that we are experiencing an epidemic of infidelity. In fact, recent statistics suggest that younger married couples cheat less than older ones. It's that we've left young people stumbling when it comes to how to behave in a marriage. And it's also that despite the generally stable marriages of our cultural elites, they enjoy writing and talking about how alternative arrangements might be just as good. Two big articles published in recent months—"Is an Open Marriage a Happier Marriage?" in the *New York Times Magazine* and "How Researching the Science of Boredom Prepared Me for Marriage" in *New York* magazine—are exercises in wishful thinking by reporters with conventional romantic lives who fantasize about what their relationships would be like without all of the constraints of conventional romance.

When the man she once nearly cheated with comes later to visit her town, Calhoun, with the help of a few friends, has figured out what to do: "I made sure I was away. . . . No good could come of it." Or, as one friend says, "If you hang out in barbershops, eventually you'll get a haircut."

While it's nice—maybe even admirable—that Calhoun has been able over time to understand the benefits of monogamy, it is worth noting that these would hardly be newsflashes to women of a few decades ago. So what's changed? For one thing, the opportunities for cheating have probably expanded. Even once you are off the market there is a whole world of single men and women (including on dating apps) who seem like potential alternatives. Picking a spouse can be like choosing shampoo on Amazon: It takes forever to make a decision and as soon as you come to one, you immediately start wondering whether you should have chosen something else.

Calhoun interviews older married couples and finds that they have experienced plenty of pain and boredom in their relationships—but they stayed married simply by not getting divorced. Maybe this sounds too simplistic. But the research bears out such a strategy. A recent paper released by a British pro-marriage organization finds that couples with newborns who were unhappy in their marriages but who stayed together were actually likely to be happy a few years later. The authors write that of the unhappiest parents—"those scoring 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale—only 7 percent of these said they were still unhappy 10 years later, regardless of whether they stayed together or split up. Two thirds said they were happy or very happy, scoring 6 or 7."

Of course, we don't really need social scientists to tell us such things. We just need to look with clear eyes at human nature and the possibilities real life affords us. Calhoun eventually recognizes this herself. "At forty," she writes, "I'm slowly coming to terms with the elementary notion that being in this world means giving up on other worlds." ♦

B&A

It Takes All Kinds

Stephen King's creepy clown Pennywise is pound wise, too. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

It
Directed by Andy Muschietti

Stephen King's *It* was the best-selling book of 1986 and the source material for an enormously successful two-part miniseries on ABC in 1990 that has been shown regularly on cable TV ever since. The ridiculously overlong novel reads like King is parodying himself; the miniseries is obvious and indifferently acted in the manner of most of the television of the time. But the central conceit of *It*—a grim-faced clown named Pennywise who turns out to be an ancient extraterrestrial demon literally feeding off the fear of the residents in a small Maine town—remains a stroke of genius. And a staggeringly effective Tim Curry gave King's creation enduring life on the small screen.

Bill Skarsgård as Pennywise

It turns out that *It*'s presence in the national memory bank quietly generated decades of unexpected compound interest that paid off last weekend. A new movie version, preceded by a potent trailer and a good poster, broke records at the box office with $123 million. That bests the opening weekend of any other horror movie ever made by $70 million and more than doubles the best first-weekend take between September and Thanksgiving. *It* will be the most successful of the staggering 100 or so adaptations of King's work on the big and small screens. And since the movie only covers half of the novel's story, the inevitable sequel may well outstrip this one when it is released in 2019. A 31-year-old piece of intellectual property is on track to gross $1 billion at the box office. Those are superhero numbers.

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

Indeed, at present, the only commercially reliable releases come in two genres: the superhero movie and the horror movie. The superhero movies are inescapable, even for us coots. Not so the horror movies, which tend to fly under the radar in American Grown-Up Land. You might not even have heard of one of the summer's few box-office triumphs, *Annabelle: Creation*. It's the fourth film in a series known as the *Conjuring* franchise—a mash-up of *The Exorcist* and classic scary stories about possessed dolls. This picture has grossed $100 million domestically ($280 million worldwide) on a $15 million budget, while *Wonder Woman* has earned $410 million domestically ($820 million worldwide) on a $150 million budget. *Wonder Woman* has made far more money, but in relation to cost, *Annabelle: Creation* was the summer champion.

What these genres have in common is that they promise to deliver experiences that cannot really be duplicated at home. Just as you need a theater with a gigantic screen and great sound to get the full impact of a superhero picture, a horror movie sells itself to its viewers on the grounds that you need to be away from home in a dark and somewhat unfamiliar space to have it work its dark magic on you. Creating and sustaining a mood of unsettled surprise is nearly impossible if you can stop and start a horror movie at will, and if your mother or little brother or girlfriend can walk through the room while you're watching it.

It does a creditable job making that case for itself and offers a few impressive scares along the way. That's what its trailer promised and why people came out in droves. But in the end, *It* works because it does what any good movie does. Its director, Andy Muschietti, and its three screenwriters establish strong characters in a vivid setting and get actors who make you care about what happens to the people they're playing. Muschietti found seven terrific kid performers who do a beautiful job of playing the experience of being menaced—not only by the evil clown but also by the moral corruption in their small town that the clown's centuries-long existence (literally beneath the surface) seems to have generated there. One of them, the authoritative Sophia Lillis, is likely to be a star for the rest of her life.

The movie's weaknesses are the weaknesses built into King's original story. The nature of the clown's supernatural abilities is never made clear. A villain's supernatural powers have to be limited in some way or there's no story. But we're never told what Pennywise's limits are, really; he seems at some moments able to kill and at other times unable. And is Pennywise only picking on our heroes, or is every kid in the town being haunted by him? The lack of clarity here keeps *It* from being more than pretty good. But given the other fare on offer at the multiplex these sorry days, just being pretty good can be accounted a triumph of a sort. ♦

BROOKE PALMER / WARNER BROS ENTERTAINMENT INC

"An earlier version of this article misstated the party affiliation of [Rep. Bob] Menendez. He is a Democrat, not a Republican."

"In a story about Mayor Rahm Emanuel telling Chicago students they 'have nothing to worry about' as President Donald Trump's administration winds down a program protecting young immigrants from deportation, the Associated Press incorrectly described the students who could be affected. They are living in the country illegally, not undocumented citizens."
—CORRECTIONS

AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

CORRECTION:

An August 29 Associated Press story about the lack of food and medical supplies in Venezuela provided the wrong description of the government's economic policies. They are socialist, not Thatcherite.

CORRECTION:

NOTE TO EDITORS: The AP is updating the story BC-US-POLITICS-1ST-LD-DEVOSSUCKS to correct a quotation from federal Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. In a speech to the Federalist Society about changes in campus sexual-assault policies, DeVos said, "Campus sexual misconduct must continue to be confronted head-on. Never again will these acts only be whispered about in closed-off counseling rooms or swept under the rug. Not one more survivor will be silenced. We will not abandon anyone. We will amplify the voices of survivors who too often feel voiceless." She did not say, "Dudes, rape is awesome."

CORRECTION:

An AP story provided inaccurate information about the cause of a fire in the Whispering Pines apartment tower in Enid, Oklahoma. The fire was started by an electrical short in an extension cord, not by climate change.

CORRECTION:

A September 10 story about offshore drilling gave the wrong cause of death for President Abraham Lincoln. He was killed by the assassin John Wilkes Booth, not by the brutal social Darwinism of Reagan-era tax cuts.

CORRECTION:

Editor's note: "Lock up your daughter, lock up your wife, lock up your back door, and run for your life—the man is back in town, don't you mess me around" are lyrics in the AC/DC song "TNT." They were not part of remarks delivered by President Donald Trump in a Rose Garden ceremony honoring National Honor Society scholars from underprivileged backgrounds.

CORRECTION:

Clarification: An August 22 sidebar about the solar eclipse fact-checking House speaker Paul Ryan's statements on solar phenomena rated his assertion that "the sun rises in the east" as Pants-on-Fire. After hearing from Ryan's office, the AP consulted four astrophysicists at four different universities. Each affirmed that owing to the rotation of the Earth around its axis, the sun does first appear to "rise" in the east before traversing across the sky until it appears to "set" in the west. Accordingly, we are revising our rating of Ryan's statement to Half-True.