

**A REAL DEBATE  
ABOUT GUNS**  
THE EDITORS

the weekly

# Standard

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**THE  
MURKY FUTURE  
OF THE IRAN  
DEAL**

**STEPHEN F. HAYES & MICHAEL WARREN  
REUEL MARC GERECHT  
THE EDITORS**

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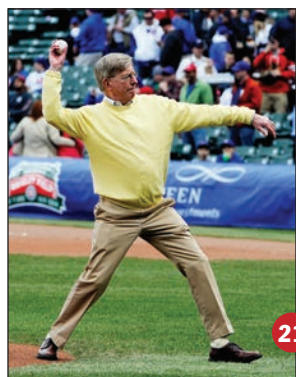
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# They Don't Know When They're Licked

In 1894 San Francisco dedicated an elaborate monument to the history of California, a vast pile of granite and bronze paid for by the estate of philanthropist James Lick. Last week San Francisco took a step toward getting rid of it.

Activists had tried before to have the monument removed, but that was before the modern frenzy for stuffing statues down the memory hole. The problem is a grouping of three bronze men—a cowboy, an Indian, and a cleric—off on one side of the monument. Right thinkers have long complained about how the Indian is portrayed.

This is how the San Francisco Board of Supervisors—in a breathless 1894 municipal report touting Lick's grand gesture—described the statuary now in question: “The group of three figures fronting the City Hall consists of a native Indian reclining” (you see, the Indian was just relaxing), “over whom bends a Catholic priest, endeavoring to convey to the Indian some religious knowledge.” And then this about the Indian: “On his face you may see the struggle of dawning intelligence.”

Were all one knew about the statue the description offered by the city fathers, one might be inclined to think that the complainants have a point.

But let's imagine that the Indian



*This week's statue-that-must-be-removed*

figure had been heroically posed: Would that have been an honest portrayal of the Native Americans' plight? Say what you will about the mix of grief and exhaustion and defeat on the Indian's face: It isn't phony. You can agree with the

American Indian Movement Confederation that, back in the 1990s, argued the statue symbolized “the humiliation, degradation, genocide, and sorrow inflicted upon this country's indigenous people,” and at the same time disagree that it should be removed. The activists, in the name of modern political hygiene, would put out of sight a statue that could have been designed to make their argument.

Old man Lick, by the way, was quite the benefactor. In addition to the Pioneer Monument, Lick's estate provided the funding for any number of San Francisco amenities. There were the free public James Lick baths; there were schools and orphanages; there was an observatory; there was the Old Ladies' Home that bore his name.

Oh, and yes, Lick money paid for a monument in Golden Gate Park honoring Francis Scott Key. THE SCRAPBOOK wonders how long it will be before that statue is deemed problematic too: Key, you see, penned the words to a militaristic ditty that some football players now seem to find objectionable. ♦

## Ne Retouche Pas

Eating disorders are not unknown in the land of foie gras (and we're not talking about the force-feeding of geese), and authorities there blame the fashion industry's unhealthy fondness for starvation-chic. Thus the French law that recently went into effect decreeing that fashion photos be honest about their falsity.

If a commercial image has been altered, or “Photoshopped,” to make a model appear more svelte or zaftig (though the latter doesn't seem to be much of an issue), the photo must now come with a warning label giving the



*Photographie retouchée*

consumer the skinny. Without the disclaimer “*photographie retouchée*,” nipping and tucking a few pixels will be punished with a big, fat fine.

Of course, body-image anxiety is a

terrible thing, and no doubt glossy, stiletto-thin magazine mannequins play some role in distorting notions of what is natural and normal. But what of the poor fashion models? Without the magic of Photoshop, won't they be pressed to slim themselves down even further? Won't models turn toward extreme dieting or extensive plastic surgery to achieve the results now attained digitally?

Well, it turns out there's a government intervention for that, too: In May, French authorities ordered that models present a doctor's note certifying they are healthy enough to strut the catwalk. But that license only

STATUE: BEYOND MY KEN

needs to be acquired every two years and relies on body mass index, a notoriously unreliable health metric. One can imagine models as the reverse of wrestlers—briefly bulking up to make regulation weight and then purging to get back in fighting trim.

Critics have long argued Photoshop-disclosure labels are unnecessary. “Our readers are not idiots,” the editor of French *Marie Claire* told the *New York Times* way back when the French law was first proposed in 2009, “especially when they see those celebrities who are 50 and look 23.” Doesn’t the lens always lie? Camera angles, filters, and lighting are all ways of manipulating appearance—artifice as much as art.

THE SCRAPBOOK also wonders if France isn’t undermining products that have been cornerstones of its culture. What is lingerie but a way to shape-shift? What is makeup but make-believe? What is perfume but misrepre-scent-ation? ♦

## Caisson Communism

We take a backseat to no one in deploring the effects that social media have on our culture. However, sometimes they provide people platforms to announce to the world that they possess dangerous and/or idiotic beliefs. This can be useful.

Such was the case of Second Lieutenant Spenser Rapone. It seems that Rapone thought that Twitter was the appropriate venue to send out photos of himself at his West Point graduation last year showing that he was wearing a Che Guevara T-shirt under his uniform and had the message “COMMUNISM WILL WIN” written under his cap. The Army has launched an investigation into Rapone.

It turns out Rapone was a combat veteran in Afghanistan with an Army Ranger unit. However, Rapone was “released for standards” from the Rangers, which, as ConnectingVets.com reports, means he was booted from the battalion for failing to meet “all standards as outlined in the Ranger Standards ‘Blue Book.’” And yet he was then accepted to West Point.

VIA TWITTER



Not-so-super, man

Getting through West Point is an extraordinarily challenging ordeal. Graduating is an impressive accomplishment—one that Rapone has thrown away with a few clicks. Even if the Army could manage to tolerate Communist proselytization in uniform, Rapone’s career is effectively over. Who would want to serve with someone who venerates an America-hating killer such as Guevara?

One might also ask how a committed Communist managed to infiltrate the U.S. Military Academy without West Point commanders being any the wiser.

Rapone’s once-proud family is devastated. In a pained Facebook

message, Rapone's father, a county treasurer in Pennsylvania, denounced his own son's "politics, his actions or behavior." Rapone's father also suggested that his son returned from Afghanistan a profoundly altered person.

If Rapone needs help with PTSD or some other condition affecting his judgment, we hope he gets it. But in the meantime, he should be discharged sooner rather than later. It's in the best interests of both the Army and Rapone: the Army, because who needs the hassle of policing the actions and agitprop of an anti-American soldier; Rapone, because he's clearly got all the credentials needed to move on to a fellowship at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. ♦

## Modifiers and the Met

THE SCRAPBOOK enjoys opera. We admit it. And although we believe the Metropolitan Opera in New York to be grossly overpriced, it's still the best opera house in the world, and so we make our way there at least once a year.

We were therefore interested to read the *New York Times's* assessment last week of some of this season's most anticipated singers. We read there of soprano Sondra Radvanovsky's "pungent, chicory-flecked voice" and Joseph Calleja's "plangent, slightly nasal tenor." Chicory-flecked? Well, okay. But then we learned that mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato's voice "may push and grow edgy" in the higher registers and that soprano Erin Morley poised "herself between silky sensuality and the stratosphere." Huh? By the time we read bass-baritone Laurent Naouri "sounded wry and roomy," that soprano Golda Schultz sounded "buoyant yet substantial, creamy but never heavy," that Carlo Rizzi's conducting was "vibrant yet unpressured," and that James Levine's conducting was "forward-moving but sensitive," we were thoroughly confused.

Wry, roomy, creamy, chicory-flecked—it reminds us of some of the stranger descriptions in wine-

tasting magazines. (Recall the scene in *Brideshead Revisited* when Charles and Sebastian, drunk from too much wine, fancy themselves sommeliers: "It is a little, shy wine like a gazelle." "Like a leprechaun." "Dappled, in a tapestry meadow.")

It occurs to THE SCRAPBOOK that some of our readers may enjoy opera but find opera criticism—the sort of modifier-heavy stuff you read in the *Times*—arcane and rather tiresome. If so, we wish to draw your attention to Nicholas Gallagher's review of the Met's production of *Norma* elsewhere in these pages. You may find his writing to be buoyant yet substantial, vibrant yet unpressured, but we promise there's not a chicory-fleck to be found. ♦

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## Bay Urea

I was recently in San Francisco on business. I was there on business because, well, I would never go there for pleasure.

That's right, I don't like San Francisco. When talking to avid travelers, I've found that voicing this opinion is equivalent to announcing that you find baby animals repellent or think Michael Jordan is an overrated athlete. Yes, I grant that the setting, with its hills, bay, and bridges, is geographically spectacular. And the city doesn't lack for fascinating history or interesting local color.

In fact, the problem with San Francisco may be that it's a little too colorful. While I was there, I was walking back from a movie around 11 P.M. This wasn't a bad neighborhood. I was right near Union Square, and the boutique hotel I booked to be in walking distance of the American Political Science Association annual meeting was across the street from luxury shops.

Nonetheless, as I neared the lobby of my hotel, I had to rebuff a streetwalker, who proceeded to grab my arm as I tried to walk past her. I was even more startled by this than you might imagine—because I was already distracted by the filthy shirtless man holding forth beneath the glowing Swarovski sign across the street. In between hacking coughs, he was shouting “Get used to it!” over and over again into an empty shoebox. For a moment, I pondered the (presumably) astronomical odds of contracting VD and TB in the same instant. But what really perfected this uniquely San Franciscan tableau was the saxophonist on the street corner ahead playing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

This was my second night in town. The first night, walking to dinner, I was approached by a police officer who wanted to know if I had seen anyone

engaged in a street fight. Fortunately, I had not. But I'm confident this is not the kind of interaction the board of tourism is hoping for an hour after you check into your hotel.

As for the meal itself, well, I admit I knew better than to pick a restaurant in the DMZ between Union Square and the notoriously shady Tenderloin district. But I like Mexican food, and



burritos are a San Francisco specialty. The Internet informed me this restaurant nearby was a favorite local haunt. Maybe the homeless person who wandered into the restaurant and lunged for my food read the same reviews. Normally, if someone is that desperate for food I would be inclined to give it to him. But the frantic motions and disturbing guttural noises suggested that, like a lot of the city's homeless, this person was stabby. I corralled my food with one arm, stiff-armed the hobo with the other, and waited for one of the cooks to hop the counter and shoo him back out onto the sidewalk.

And did I mention downtown San Francisco smells really bad? It's a very precise and inescapable funk—maybe

50 percent marijuana, 50 percent urine. Now drugs and San Francisco are the chocolate and peanut butter of American urban culture. But saying the place reeks of urine is not hyperbole. In August 2015, a three-story lamp post fell over and landed on a car, narrowly missing the driver. It was later determined the post had corroded from so many people micturating on it.

I realize I'm sounding like a heartless curmudgeon. San Franciscans could doubtless not care less what I think of how they run their local affairs. But without resorting to predictable complaints about San Francisco liberals, it does strike me as odd that a city that has probably generated more wealth than any other in human history over the past couple of decades has decided to enable widespread human tragedy with its approach to the homeless. And it did this as New York and other cities made incredible strides cleaning up the streets and taking care of people.

It wasn't all bad, of course. The third and final night I was there, I took a cab to the legendary Amoeba Music and discovered Haight-Ashbury is pleasant and gentrified just enough. Later that night, I walked across

Union Square and up through Chinatown, which was eerily calm for a Friday. I peered through storefront windows at exotic Asian goods. And I paused to imagine the thrill of careening downhill on San Francisco's stairstep roads in a Mustang fastback, toward the beautifully lit-up Bay Bridge in the distance. I ended up at Vesuvio's, the bar next to the famous City Lights bookstore. I hadn't been there in over 20 years. My older sister slung drinks there for a time after she dropped out of college. It brought back fond memories.

But the next morning, I got up and left San Francisco—and my heart was sprinting right behind me.

MARK HEMINGWAY

# Let's Have a Real Gun Debate

‘Over the years,” wrote the editors of the *New York Times*, “the gun lobby, claiming to defend the convenience of hunters and other gun owners, has so bullied Washington that . . . sensible proposals seem beyond reach. But as gun mayhem continues to mount, the political roadblock looks less and less rational, more and more deadly.”

These words appeared in 1993.

The fact that they could have appeared in the *Times* at any time in the last 30 years—indeed they sound a lot like the editorial that ran in the paper in the aftermath of the October 1 Las Vegas massacre—gives you a sense of just how stale and predictable the debate over guns in America has become. The pattern is depressingly familiar: Someone uses a gun in an act of mayhem and murder. Progressive and center-left politicians demand “action” in the form of gun-control legislation. Congress toys with the idea but doesn’t pass much of anything. The *Times* and other liberal publications and commentators denounce the “gun lobby” to which they attribute vast powers of coercion.

So it happened in the days after Stephen Paddock, firing weapons from a Las Vegas hotel room into a crowd of thousands, murdered 58 people and injured hundreds more. Investigators can find no motive. Mainly what they’ve found are guns—something close to two dozen of them in Paddock’s room, ranging from handguns to semi-automatic rifles, 12 of them effectively converted to fully automatic, what we commonly call machine guns. That led the usual coalition of celebrities and Democratic politicians to blame the carnage on guns—more particularly on the “gun lobby”—and demand that Congress “do something.”

But what can we do about a man with no criminal record who, for reasons known only to God, decides to turn a hotel room into an armory, smash the windows, and murder as many people as he can before turning a gun on himself? What can we do about a young man who determines to murder schoolchildren in their classrooms or about another young man who sits with humble Christians in Bible study before killing them with a handgun? For

all the easy sermonizing from gun-control advocates, the question of what laws or regulations might have prevented such manifestations of depravity is not easily answered. There are piecemeal alterations to the law, to be sure, and we have passed many of them over the last five decades.

What about the Las Vegas massacre? The sale of automatic weapons is already tightly regulated by federal law, to the point at which an ordinary person can only get one with dogged determination. Paddock used “bump stocks” to fire his semi-automatic rifles with machine-gun-like rapidity,

and Congress should outlaw these devices. But the next shooting will happen regardless of such a ban, for there is no way to ban the rage that will give rise to it. Indeed, as the *Washington Post*’s Glenn Kessler reluctantly conceded after a thorough analysis in 2015, none of the mass shootings perpetrated between 2012 and 2015 would have been prevented by any actual gun-control proposal.

The case for increased gun regulation isn’t helped, either, by the fact that what laws have been passed and rigorously enforced all over the nation have had little or

no measurable result. A comprehensive study published in 2013 by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council could find no clear correlation between the implementation of gun-control laws and reductions in gun-related violence.

But what makes the gun debate so unbearably stale isn’t any disagreement over the interpretation of data. Nor is it a dispute over the value of firearms in a free society. If only it were about these questions. What makes the debate so stale, rather, is the disingenuousness of those who claim to want “sensible” and “reasonable” gun regulations but who in fact want an outright ban.

Supporters of stricter gun laws are not stupid. Some are rather prone to moral exhibitionism, for sure—we think of Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), who didn’t wait for the blood to dry in Las Vegas before commencing a self-righteous tirade about the “cowardice” of his colleagues on the Hill who disagree with him on gun policy. But Murphy, Hillary Clinton, Piers Morgan—these people are not stu-



*It's not a lobby; it's the people.*

pid. They do not actually think that reducing the capacity of magazines on semi-automatic rifles will somehow make it more difficult for deranged men to shoot schoolchildren. They don't actually believe that closing the "gun show loophole" (the provision in the Brady law of 1998 by which gun purchasers may avoid background checks) will make Americans safer.

Yet gun-control proponents persist in this charade. Why? Because their real aim—an outright ban on all civilian use of handguns and most rifles—would require a repeal of the Second Amendment. They can't or won't call for such a repeal because, for all their brandishing of opinion polls and claims to speak for the majority, they stand no chance of accomplishing it. It's not impossible to repeal an amendment. The Eighteenth Amendment, establishing Prohibition, was repealed by the Twenty-First in 1933. But it's impossible to repeal a *popular* amendment, and Americans like guns and value the Second Amendment far too much to consider excising it from the Constitution.

Since they can't name their desire, anti-gun activists, in a kind of Freudian displacement maneuver, spend their energy fulminating against the "gun lobby." Hence all those *Times* editorials about the NRA "bullying" Washington and holding congressional Republicans in thrall. Hence all those talking-head diatribes and crime-show episodes portraying the "gun lobby" as some dark super-mafia, the mere mention of which turns otherwise cocksure politicians into whimpering fools. But do the NRA and related groups really have such great power? You wouldn't know it from their lobbying expenses. Last year, gun-rights groups spent \$10.5 million on lobbying. Environmental-advocacy groups spent \$13 million. Labor unions spent \$47.2 million. The agricultural services and products sector: \$32.7 million.

If the gun lobby seems to have sway in Washington, it is because a lot of ordinary American voters feel strongly about the issue. Sufficiently strongly to vote against a lawmaker who supports what they deem—rightly or wrongly—to be a restriction on gun ownership.

The main obstacle for gun-control advocates is not some mendacious lobby but Americans themselves. We like guns. We like shooting them. We use them to protect our families and our businesses from criminals. We collect guns—as an antiquarian hobby, as preparation for the apocalypse, and just for fun. We like watching movies in which people use them to deadly effect. Europeans and their domestic imitators may not understand our affection for firearms (though they seem to enjoy the gun violence in American movies all the same). But it is a cultural and sociological fact that will not be overcome by incremental restrictions and sanctimonious jeremiads against gun manufacturers and denunciations of the allegedly omnipotent gun lobby.

If progressives insist on engaging in the joyless ritual of arguing about guns after every inscrutable act of mass murder, we would prefer that they drop the pretense and

advocate the repeal of the Second Amendment and the confiscation of our guns. We disagree with that view, but we would rather have an honest debate about the Constitution than go on trampling the sensibilities of mourners by treating their grief as an occasion to quarrel about statutory adjustments nobody really believes in.

—The Editors

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# Trump's Right About Iran

Presidential candidate Donald Trump disparaged the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran in characteristically superlative terms: "My number-one priority," he said to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in March 2016, "is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran. I have been in business a long time. I know deal-making, and let me tell you, this deal is catastrophic—for America, for Israel, and for the whole Middle East. . . . We have rewarded the world's leading state sponsor of terror with \$150 billion, and we received absolutely nothing in return."

We didn't disagree with Trump's reasoning then, and we don't now. This magazine has been sharply critical of much the president has done, but on two vital questions—Iran and North Korea—we believe his instincts are sound. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, negotiated by the Obama administration and signed in 2015, took pressure off one of the world's most aggressive sponsors of terrorism in exchange for empty promises not to pursue its aim of building a nuclear weapon. The deal was, indeed, catastrophic.

Congress never ratified it, but lawmakers did codify some oversight. The 2015 Corker-Cardin act requires the president to "certify" Iran's compliance with the terms of the deal every 90 days. When certifying the deal, the president must avow four points: that Iran is "transparently, verifiably, and fully" implementing the agreement; that Iran "has not committed a material breach with respect to the agreement"; that it's taken no action, "including covert activities, that could significantly advance its nuclear weapons program"; and that continuing to suspend sanctions is in the U.S. national interest.

It is unassailably obvious that the Iranian regime has not complied with the agreement. The Iranians have not given international inspectors unfettered access to nuclear and military facilities, as the agreement requires. They have attempted to acquire banned nuclear and missile technology. They have exceeded the agreement's limits on advanced

centrifuges and heavy-water production. They continue, moreover, to sponsor terrorism around the world and abet the brutalities of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria.

Trump made the decision to certify Iran's compliance in July, by all accounts against his instincts, having been talked into it by some of his closest advisers, as Stephen F. Hayes and Michael Warren show elsewhere in these pages. Three months ago the administration squared the circle by declaring the Iranians to be in "technical compliance" with the agreement but "in default of the spirit"—a reasonable ploy to buy time while the administration figured out what to do next.

How the months flew by! The problem is here again—the deadline is October 15—and the president by all reports is leaning toward refusing to certify compliance.

That will bring its own set of problems, to be sure. Congress would have 60 days to decide whether to reimpose the sanctions lifted when the JCPOA came into force. Trump's national security advisers appear to have no illusions about Iran and reject Obama's woefully misguided notion of a U.S.-Iran partnership for Middle

East security. They also know that the Iran deal is a fact. The danger of walking away from the agreement is not that Iran will feel emboldened to continue pursuing its nuclear program and exporting terror—it's already doing

both. The danger, as Reuel Marc Gerecht explains elsewhere in these pages, is that Iran will more aggressively undermine American interests in the region at a time when the United States is already in retreat from it. President Trump hasn't given any indication of having a strategic vision for the Middle East. That, we assume, is why Secretary of Defense James Mattis told a Senate committee on October 3 that he thought preserving the agreement was in America's interest.

Maybe. But the administration's credibility is at stake. The president has said, repeatedly and in strident terms, that the JCPOA is a bad deal for the United States. If Trump once again gives his blessing to an agreement he believes to be "disastrous" and "catastrophic," the Iranians will draw the wholly valid conclusion that the 45th president is as weak and naïve as the 44th. So will rogue regimes and terrorist organizations around the world.



Secretary of State Rex Tillerson

SPENCER PLATT / GETTY IMAGES

## Slow Confirmations Are Thwarting Progress

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Nine months into the Trump administration, an unusually high number of senior positions remain vacant. As of September 28, only 170 of President Trump's nominees for key federal appointments had been approved, compared with 342 at this point in the Obama administration and 370 in the George W. Bush administration. This is leaving holes in our nation's leadership that hamper operations and, in some cases, could stall economic growth.

Why is this happening? It's true that the Trump administration has had a slow start to the nomination process, but this isn't the full story. In fact, the president has already nominated approximately 280 individuals who are languishing in procedural limbo. Some in the Senate are forcing nominees to go through a time-consuming process designed to slow down confirmations.

Rather than confirming noncontroversial nominees by voice vote—as the Senate has done in prior administrations—the Senate minority is forcing some confirmations to go through what is called the cloture process, which takes longer to complete. By one estimate, at the current pace it will take 11 years to confirm all the president's nominees.

The impact of these delays is real. Workers are sidelined as projects await permits and approvals from agencies that lack the quorum necessary to issue them. Businesses are left waiting for important administrative decisions that simply cannot be made in the absence of Senate-confirmed officials. And numerous agencies and independent commissions lack the personnel to carry out the pro-growth and regulatory relief agenda the president wants to enact.

For example, due to stalling tactics by certain committee members, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions postponed a vote on the nominations of Patrick Pizzella to be deputy secretary of Labor

and Janet Dhillon and Daniel Gade to be commissioners on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. These highly qualified nominees deserve the same speedy consideration that has been afforded to previous holders of these positions. Those standing in their way are also standing in the way of the important work of the Labor Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to foster an economy that benefits all American workers and families.

The breakdown of the confirmation process results in a breakdown in the functioning of government—and ultimately a drag on the economy. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce urges all parties to do their part in filling these critical positions. By appointing and confirming qualified nominees quickly, we can ensure a process that delivers what every American deserves: a working and efficient federal government.



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

Some reports suggest that Trump may refuse to certify the deal, as we urge him to do. But that's more than a matter of not signing a document. It will take resolve. It will require imposing a new program of executive-branch sanctions on the regime and particularly on its Revolutionary Guard Corps, and it will require a substantially increased level of commitment and vigilance on the part of the U.S. military.

Iran's ruling elite are increasingly restive because the 2015 nuclear deal, though it eased some sanctions in return for minimal alterations in the regime's behavior, has not resulted in the high levels of foreign investment they hoped for. They need money. The credible threat of new and tough sanctions, together with more deliberate engagement in Syria and Iraq, may bring the country's clerical rulers to a more compliant state of mind.

Trump has the right instincts on Iran. We hope he also has resolve.

—The Editors

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# A Republican Crackup?

**O**n October 3, Vice President Mike Pence's chief of staff, Nick Ayers, spoke to a group of Republican donors at the St. Regis Hotel in Washington. Unbeknownst to Ayers, his remarks were recorded, and the audio was subsequently obtained by *Politico*.

Combining the arrogance of D.C. operatives with the bluster of the Trump White House, the young staffer urged the donors to punish elected Republican senators and congressmen who dared call into question parts of Donald Trump's agenda: "Just imagine the possibilities of what can happen if our entire party unifies behind him? If—and this sounds crass—we can purge the handful of people who continue to work to defeat him."

Later in the session, Ayers elaborated on how this purge might take place: "If I were you, I would not only stop donating, I would form a coalition of all the other major donors, and just say two things. We're definitely not giving to you, No. 1. And No. 2, if you don't have this done by December 31, we're going out, we're recruiting opponents, we're maxing out to their campaigns, and we're funding super-PACs to defeat all of you."

It doesn't seem to have occurred to Ayers that members of Congress owe their constituents their best judgment. Nor does it seem to matter that Republican lawmakers have, in fact, voted over 90 percent of the time with the president, often giving the leader

of their party more than a little benefit of the doubt.

No. In today's Washington, it seems normal to assume that party loyalty—understood as loyalty to the president of one's party—comes first.

It doesn't. It shouldn't. Political parties are fine things. Edmund Burke did a service to representative government when he more or less made parties respectable for the first time, in 1770. But four years later, in his "Speech to the Electors of Bristol," Burke famously explained that representatives should not blindly follow the wishes of their constituents. The same argument holds with respect to party:

"Government and legislation are matters of reason and judgment, and not of inclination; and what sort of reason is that, in which the determination precedes the discussion; in which one set of men deliberate, and another decide?" Each representative, each member of Congress, is supposed to deliberate and decide, not simply to follow his party's leadership in Congress or in the White House.

The Constitution envisions equal branches of government. The Federalist Papers expect some degree of moral and intellectual virtue on the part of members of Congress. Neither the Constitution nor the Federalist Papers envision parties. Parties have come to have their place, but that place is limited. Parties have their claims. But party loyalty ought not mean a click of the heels and salute to whatever the president wants.

Which raises the broader question of the future of the president's party in particular. The GOP is now torn between demagogues who appeal to the lowest-common-denominator concerns of voters and establishment types who roam like zombies on a terrain they can no longer navigate, among citizens for whom they have little in the way of answers.

So what is the future of the Republican party? Who knows? Parties aren't forever. It would be foolish to assume that citizens who believe in limited and constitutional government, in free markets and in American world leadership, will necessarily find their homes in the GOP. Those citizens may have to look beyond the party they've become accustomed to support.

We know that great statesmen have always seen beyond party. Lincoln helped found a new one. Churchill switched parties twice and more than once lamented the absence of a vigorous centrist party distinct from overbearing progressives and unimpressive conservatives. Serious citizens as well have a perspective higher than that of mere party.

This is an unusual moment, as everyone senses. It would be foolish to dismiss the case for independent candidacies or new parties. We are, after all, citizens first, not partisans. John McCain's 2008 slogan, "Country First," didn't prevail in that era's polarized partisan environment. But McCain would not be the first prophet, denied honor, who turned out to be ahead of his time.

—William Kristol

# No Easy Way Out

If he decertifies the Iran deal, what will Trump do next? **BY REUEL MARC GERECHT**

**B**y October 15, Donald Trump must decide what to do with his predecessor's nuclear agreement with Iran. He has felt obliged, against his instincts, to recertify the deal every 90 days, per the requirements of the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, Congress's attempt to supervise Barack Obama's nuclear diplomacy. The president's senior advisers reportedly gave him no other choice. Since July, the second time he recertified the deal, the National Security Council has been working arduously to give him options. There are only three.

First, the president can do what he has reluctantly done before: certify Iran's compliance and affirm the accord remains in the interest of the United States. According to the nuclear review act, also called Corker-Cardin after its sponsors, Tehran could be abiding by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action but the president could still find the accord, with its many deficiencies, detrimental to America's security and thus uncertain. The secretaries of defense and state, the chairman of the joint chiefs, and most congressional Democrats want to maintain the status quo. It's difficult to suss out the truth about where congressional Republicans stand, but it's a decent guess that in the Senate a majority of Republicans would rather see the JCPOA continue than share the responsibility of downing the agreement and dealing with the fallout. According to the review act, if the president decertifies, Congress has 60 days to restore the sanctions suspended by the nuclear deal by

a simple majority vote in both houses. After 60 days, the Senate would need 60 votes to overcome a probable Democratic filibuster to restore the sanctions. The solid wall of GOP opposition to Barack Obama's accord in 2015 appears to have cracked even though Republicans haven't found Obama's outreach to the Iranian



*Emmanuel Macron, Trump, and Theresa May: Will the president pick door number two—and disregard his allies?*

regime astute, rarely hesitate to highlight baleful Iranian actions, and often dismiss the nuclear accord as a Trojan horse. If Trump certifies the agreement for a third time, after decrying its fatal flaws, the odds are high that he will keep on certifying. Certainly others, chiefly the Europeans, Russians, and Iranians, whom Trump has spooked with his fierce opposition to the deal, will no longer take Trump's remonstrations seriously.

Door number two: The president decertifies the deal and quits waiving the statutory sanctions lifted under the JCPOA, effectively killing the agreement. The most punishing of fiscal sanctions, which basically stopped the world's big banks from handling Iranian commerce and investment, would snap back, derailing President Hassan Rouhani's dreams of using

European investment, technology, and heavy industry to fuel the Islamic Republic's economic expansion. This option would oblige the president and Congress to prepare immediately for blowback from the Europeans, who really want to put the nuclear issue behind them and get on with trading with Iran. President Trump is hardly enthralled by the Western alliance, and European investment in Iran is trivial compared with European investment in the United States. But the Europeans don't like being manhandled by Washington, especially by Trump, who is loathed by the Western European political class. Although neither the French nor the British

were enamored of the way the Obama administration negotiated with the clerical regime, and the French in particular thought some of Obama's concessions profoundly unwise, the "EU3" nuclear diplomacy that bound France, Britain, and Germany together against Tehran remains the most momentous diplomatic effort undertaken by the European Union. In European eyes, Trump wouldn't just be trashing Obama's legacy by leaving the JCPOA; he'd be trashing their efforts, which started in 2003.

Even in the age of diminishing transatlantic fraternity, Washington instinctively would prefer not to quarrel with its oldest allies. Even the Trump White House would prefer to take a path by which it doesn't have to listen to the Europeans whine loudly.

Far more important, however, would be the blowback from Iran. The White House and the Pentagon would have to be ready for Iran's possible "asymmetrical" actions—to use the American term that the Iranians like to throw at us—against U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria. Washington isn't prepared to handle attacking Shiite militias. The war against the Islamic State remains the guiding light of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and the White House—at least the national security adviser, Lt. General H.R. McMaster, and his

*Reuel Marc Gerecht, a contributing editor, is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.*

staff—have been seriously ruminating on how they can convert a counterterrorism-focused mission into an anti-Iran grand strategy.

It is unclear that they could do so given the confines in which they operate—chiefly, the refusal of President Trump to commit significant U.S. forces long-term in Iraq and Syria with the explicit mission of containing and rolling back the clerical regime. This contradiction in President Trump's approach to the Islamic Republic—fierce hostility to the nuclear deal but no large, lasting commitment, which must include more U.S. boots on the ground, in Syria and Iraq—is surely in part why Mattis supports the JCPOA even though he is aware that it is deeply flawed. If you accept that American downsizing in the region will continue, if you are scarred from a recent war, fearful that the United States just doesn't have the staying power for the Arab world, then the JCPOA is an acceptable alternative. Mattis probably believes that President Obama's new-age hopes about Iran and America and about the need for a smaller U.S. footprint in the Muslim world are twaddle, belied by the return of U.S. forces to Iraq. But he may nevertheless accept, however reluctantly, the idea of American decline and retrenchment. Trump obviously has ingested a big slice of this twilight world-view. Walking away from the deal on October 15 just seems too ballsy for Mattis and Trump, though probably not McMaster.

Hence the appeal of door number three: The president decertifies the deal but continues to waive sanctions as required by the JCPOA, which would allow, at least in theory, the president and the Republican Congress to "fix" the deal through further diplomacy, backed up by the threat of renewed sanctions and military force. If the president chooses this option, which now seems likely, it indicates he prefers not to walk away from the accord, at least not immediately, and might want to explore the possibility of the Europeans, voluntarily or under duress, joining us in an effort to remove the debilitating deficiencies of

the nuclear agreement (sunset clauses, permission to do advanced-centrifuge research, continuing long-range ballistic missile development, and a verification regime that doesn't allow access to military sites and key scientific personnel and paperwork).

Decertification does not necessarily mean that a new round of escalating sanctions is coming. It could well mean, at least in the eyes of the Islamic Republic's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and the head of its Atomic Energy Organization, MIT-trained nuclear engineer Ali Salehi, that Washington isn't going to do much of anything at all.

Zarif and Salehi have repeatedly shown that when it comes to handling Americans and Europeans, they have clout with the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, whose deep anti-American emotions could get the better of him. Zarif and Salehi have surely already advised Khamenei to ignore all but the most serious of sanctions while waiting to see how Trump's decision plays out in Washington and Europe. The president could decertify, and keep decertifying, while waiving the most painful sanctions. Treasury and Congress could shower Iran with pinprick designations, giving a certain spiritual satisfaction while not challenging anything fundamental and certainly not setting the stage for a military clash.

The best-case scenario: The president decertifies the nuclear deal and the administration tests the idea that major new executive-branch sanctions aimed at the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has a commanding position in all the strategic sectors of the country's economy, can freeze further Western investment in the Islamic Republic, especially in oil and gas. European investment in Iran has so far been more aspirational than real; European banks remain leery of significant transactions with the Islamic Republic. Deflating European commercial appetites will not be hard for the White House. Rouhani and Zarif will surely try to play the Europeans off the Americans, but the Europeans are stuck: American-European ties

are continental and a trade war over the unappealing Islamic Republic isn't going to happen. European Union rules require consensus. Eastern Europe, which still needs the United States as a protector against Russia, will definitely not consent. This is true even if President Trump takes down the \$12.5 billion Airbus deals with Iran, which would inevitably happen if he decides to kill the \$17 billion Boeing sale to Tehran, because of American parts in Airbus planes. The president would, however, continue to waive sanctions as under the JCPOA, stating clearly that this is a temporary endeavor, that he will allow the full force of American sanctions to return within a year if Tehran does not agree to rectify the omissions in Obama's nuclear agreement. The president would also make clear that he is fully prepared to use military force to destroy the clerical regime's nuclear infrastructure.

Republican senator Tom Cotton's recent speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington in support of decertifying the deal was important precisely because he didn't run away from the military option. Most Republicans do. If economic coercion is going to work, if it is possible to oblige the Iranians peacefully to give up what Obama allowed them, it will require a credible military threat. Sanctions, for all their utility in a globalized world run with U.S. dollars, cannot guarantee that the Islamic Republic's economy will crash so as to enfeeble nuclear progress permanently. If Trump isn't prepared to back up economic coercion and diplomacy with a promise to use the military against Tehran should the supreme leader attempt to accelerate the atomic program, then Washington will be right back where Obama was and abandoning the JCPOA will have made no sense. The odds of Khamenei and the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards buckling aren't brilliant, but the clerical regime remains fundamentally fragile, as was most recently demonstrated in 2009-2010, when the pro-democracy Green Movement nearly cracked the theocracy through massive street demonstrations. Getting

Tehran to forsake its atomic ambitions, which have been at the center of Iranian defense policy since the 1990s, will require the Trump administration and Congress to convince the mullahs and senior guardsmen that a dark future awaits. Threatening our foes with military responses was the bread and butter of America's Cold War containment strategy. That the Cold War approach seems outdated if not wrong for so many in the political and foreign-policy elite only shows how far America has traveled since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan became long and difficult.

The worst-case scenario with door number 3: The president decertifies but waives sanctions as under the JCPOA, Congress doesn't force any tougher response, the White House hits Iran with relatively minor sanctions, which Zarif and Salehi persuade Khamenei to ignore, and Trump allows Obama's license for the Boeing sale to stand, thus also allowing the Airbus deal, too. For the third option to be dissimilar from what Trump has done before—certifying the agreement—he must be prepared to walk away from the deal, which he wasn't in April and July. Door number three is only fundamentally different from door number one if Trump is primed to pull the trigger, economically and if need be militarily, after a clearly specified period of time. Otherwise, this choice is an invitation to endless negotiations with Iran and the Europeans—and the Iranians, fearful that Trump might bomb them, will probably be willing to engage the United States on supplementing the JCPOA so long as no timeline is given and sanctions aren't ramped up. Zarif and Salehi aren't fools: They know the peaceful promise of diplomacy can tie up Westerners endlessly. Needless to say, there would be a large chorus in Europe and in the United States, even perhaps inside the president's cabinet, thrilled to see Trump's rebellious option become just a variation of continuous certification.

We will know that Trump is moving in this direction if we see him approve the Boeing deal and ask

Republicans in Congress to rewrite the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act so he doesn't have to certify the agreement at all or only infrequently. Needless to say, Republicans should refuse. Foreign affairs isn't an easy bailiwick for Congress to work its will. Annoying the executive branch, however,

has a long and distinguished bipartisan pedigree. Republicans in Congress have to work up the will to break with Obama's foreign policy. Trump is right about Iran and the nuclear deal. For him and all those who so strenuously opposed Obama's nuclear diplomacy, being right, though, isn't enough. ♦

## Benghazi at the Bar

Trying terrorism before a U.S. civilian court.

BY JENNA LIFHITS

"I want them to hate him," a federal prosecutor said quietly on the evening of October 2 as his colleagues packed up. It had been a long first day in the trial of Ahmed Abu Khatallah, the man charged with instigating the tragic 2012 attacks in Benghazi, Libya.

Khatallah, a middle-aged man with a long gray and yellow beard, sat quietly for over five hours in one of the wood-paneled courtrooms of the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse—barely fidgeting, not looking at the benches to his left, which were filled with government officials, reporters, and spectators all looking at him.

His six-week trial is going to revive the controversy over Benghazi. The violent attacks that occurred at the U.S. mission and a nearby CIA annex on the night of September 11, 2012, left four Americans dead, including Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens. They also triggered hyperbolic remarks and partisan rancor. The contradictory statements and foggy accounts of the night's events from Obama administration officials led to intense efforts by Congress to pin

down exactly what happened. Lawmakers held hearings and produced lengthy reports. But many questions were left unanswered. Monday marked the first day of a trial that should set the story straight.

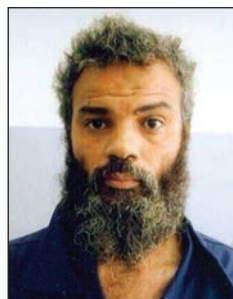
Khatallah is facing 18 counts, including murder and providing material support for terrorists. He has pleaded not guilty on all charges. He wore a blank expression as a top federal prosecutor laid out what to expect in the weeks ahead.

Jurors, he promised, would hear from a man named "Ali" who, at the behest of the U.S. gov-

ernment and in exchange for \$7 million, grew close to Khatallah in Libya and lured him to his capture in 2014. "I would have killed all the Americans that night," Khatallah allegedly told Ali of the Benghazi attacks, "if others had not gotten involved and stopped me."

They'll hear emotional retellings from people at the U.S. mission and CIA annex the night of the attacks, as well as testimony from arson and weapons experts. All of it, assistant U.S. attorney John Crabb argued, will prove one thing: that Abu Khatallah is responsible for the deaths of four Americans.

"Those four Americans were killed



Ahmed Abu Khatallah

Jenna Liphits is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

because the defendant hates America with a vengeance,” he told jurors. “He didn’t light the fires, and he didn’t fire the mortars,” but Khatallah planned the attacks, incited the fighters, and ensured that no one interfered with the assault or helped the besieged Americans, Crabb said. “He got others to do his dirty work.”

About a week before the attacks, Khatallah and a few of his associates stocked up on weapons at a militia camp, Crabb reported. Aided by an elaborate model of the compound and annex as well as video footage, Crabb then walked the jury through the events of the night. He referred to the participants in the attacks as Khatallah’s “associates.”

Crabb barely touched on Khatallah’s terror affiliations or those of the other attackers. He mentioned Ubaydah bin Jarrah (UBJ), a militia led by Khatallah, which sought to establish *sharia* in Libya, and he referenced Ansar al Sharia (AAS), which merged with UBJ around 2011.

AAS has well-established connections to al Qaeda. A government report published not long before the Benghazi attacks noted that AAS “has increasingly embodied al Qaeda’s presence in Libya.” Some analysts initially thought that AAS was merely a local extremist group that operated independently. But AAS abandoned any pretense in the months following Benghazi and broadcast lectures by Osama bin Laden to its followers. The U.N. has formally recognized the links between al Qaeda and AAS.

Terrorists with broader ties to al Qaeda also participated in the attacks. There were fighters in Benghazi with links to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and Al Qaeda in Iraq, as well as to the Egypt-based Muhammad Jamal network, according to the 2014 Senate Intelligence Committee report on the attacks. The State Department terror designation for the Jamal network explicitly links it to al Qaeda as far back as the 1980s.

Crabb showed surveillance footage of armed men streaming through the mission gate in Benghazi at about 9:45

on the night of September 11. Some of them then stormed the building where Stevens was holed up and set it on fire, resulting in the ambassador’s death as well as that of Sean Patrick Smith, a State Department information officer.

Two of the first witnesses called to the stand, diplomatic security agents Scott Wickland and David Ubben, added tragic detail to Crabb’s brief retelling.

“My face was covered in soot, my eyeballs were black, my teeth were black, my feet were in pretty bad shape,” said Wickland, who was in the burning building with Smith and Stevens.

Ubben testified that he repeatedly went into the burning building to find the ambassador and Smith. The smoke made his eyes, nose, and throat feel like they were on fire. “Extremely thick, very acrid, very toxic,” he remembered. “The smoke is so thick you’re gulping for air.”

Crawling on his hands and knees due to smoke, Ubben ran into a body, which he recognized as Smith’s. “Stumbling upon him the way that I did, I could tell very quickly from his body type,” he said evenly. “I knew it was Sean.” Ubben dragged the corpse outside and reentered the villa to find Stevens.

All the while, Crabb said in his opening statement, Khatallah was “on the perimeter” ensuring that no one could help the trapped Americans.

Khatallah’s lawyer Jeffrey Robinson agreed the defendant had been present that night but insisted he did not orchestrate or even participate in the attacks. He had not been setting up roadblocks or warding off emergency responders but was, Robinson said, simply warning people to stay away because of the dangerous gunfire.

“He didn’t shoot anyone,” he said. “He didn’t set any fires.” Robinson said Khatallah had heard about a “protest” and wanted to see what was happening. By the time he entered the mission, the Americans had left and the building was already blazing, according to Robinson.

Crabb showed surveillance footage of Khatallah entering the mission

with an AK-47 around midnight. He went into the building that contained an office with secret documents, from which attackers were filmed emerging with maps and other items. Ali told the government that Khatallah possessed books, computers, maps, charts, and weapons from the compound, Crabb reported.

Robinson disputed this. Khatallah, he said, walked into the building and walked right out. He went home and didn’t go anywhere near the CIA annex. “You don’t go home if you are planning and leading an attack on a CIA annex,” he said. “That doesn’t make sense.”

The attack on the nearby CIA annex began after midnight, and two former Navy SEALs, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty, were killed on the roof of the building by precision mortar fire. The attack left Ubben badly injured, Wickland testified. “It’s hard to see your friend like that,” he said. “I didn’t think Dave was going to live.”

The six-foot-four Ubben—walking without assistance and moving his arms freely after over 40 surgeries—showed jurors the scars on his arm, leg, and head. “I could see my leg. It was a mess. It was just hanging on by a little bit of flesh,” he said of the battle at the CIA annex. “But I was committed to surviving. I was going to get out of there. I had made that decision already.”

Ubben’s responsibilities at the mission included the room containing sensitive government information, and prosecutors asked him about the maps and other items stolen by the attackers. Some of the documents in the office contained coded coordinates and labels representing the nearby CIA annex, he said.

The prosecution also asked Ubben about the mortars that badly injured him. He said that mortar fire is a skill that must be “learned,” and that one can hit a target directly with coordinates or familiarity. Crabb said in his opening that there was evidence that Khatallah was well-versed in how to use mortars and had trained others.

But the defense rejected any attempt to tie Khatallah to the attacks

via the maps or mortars. Robinson insisted Khatallah was simply a “soft target” for the government—someone they decided they could blame for the attacks. For one thing, he said, he was easy to find. The *New York Times* interviewed Khatallah a month after the attacks at a luxury hotel in Benghazi, where the terror suspect was “sipping a strawberry frappe.” Robinson alleged that other individuals, not Khatallah, had masterminded the attacks—but that this information was kept classified by the government.

He also warned jurors to be skeptical about believing the government’s witnesses, especially the Libyans set to testify. “When you hear them, you’re not going to believe them,” he said. He pointed especially to Ali, who he said was doing whatever it took “to collect” the \$7 million offered to him and go along with the government script.

The early days of the trial were focused on a play-by-play of the night in Benghazi. The prosecution promises to piece together Khatallah’s involvement in the coming weeks and to look closely at his activities before and after the attacks.

By 2014, the intelligence community had identified around 80 individuals with “some level of participation” in the attacks, according to a congressional report. To this day, Khatallah is the only one charged publicly—and he is being tried in civilian court.

The trial’s setting also revives yet another debate—over whether terrorists should be tried in military or civilian tribunals. And Khatallah’s military capture in the run-up to the trial adds an especially unusual twist. He was kidnapped by Delta Force operators and hauled aboard the *USS New York* for a 13-day journey to the United States during which he was interrogated by intelligence officials for information on active threats. Days later, he was read his Miranda rights and re-interrogated by FBI agents who began to make the case against him for the Benghazi attacks. Abu Khatallah is thus the first terrorist captured in a military raid to be tried before an American jury.

On Monday morning, Khatallah

walked casually and freely into a D.C. courtroom. He sipped some water and swiveled in his chair slightly. But Crabb made clear that despite the

setting of the trial, he would not let lines be blurred.

“This is a terrorism case,” he said. “Plain and simple.” ♦

# Catalanguish

## Will Spain come apart?

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

**T**he Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos, who in the 1970s won the Panama Canal back for his country, used to tell less successful Latin American leaders that the United States is like a monkey on a chain. You can play with the chain all you like—but if you play with the monkey, you’ll get badly hurt. The great and ancient European nation of Catalonia—with its beautiful language that resembles medieval French, its

until the 18th century. If it were a member-state of the European Union it would be of average size (16th of 29). But for hundreds of years now, Catalonia has been a mere province of a Spanish state that is primitive, pious, and poor by comparison. Not only is their culture being disrespected, the Catalans complain, their money is being stolen. The region’s 7.5 million people pay about \$18 billion more in taxes than they get back in services, say advocates of independence.

In a 1979 “statute of autonomy,” Madrid agreed to, and Catalan voters approved, significant areas of autonomy in policing and local government. These grew over the decades, but non-Catalans are not interested in seeing them grow further. In 2010 Spain’s constitutional tribunal rejected a plan for broader autonomy. It blocked a referendum on independence in 2014.

Catalan president Artur Mas rebranded the vote as a “consultation” and held it anyway. This spring he was banned from politics for having done so. In early September, two pro-independence parties in Catalonia’s assembly used a parliamentary trick to schedule another referendum. The Spanish court blocked it. The Catalan politicians announced they would hold it anyway, and declare independence within 48 hours if they got a Yes.

When the vote took place on



*Spanish police drag a man outside a Catalan polling station, October 1.*

epic poets, its classical composers, its exemplary architects, and above all its shrewd businessmen—has long been in the same position with Spain. Lately Catalonia’s president, Carles Puigdemont, has begun harassing the monkey.

Catalonia is a serious country. As part of what used to be Aragon, it shaped Spain from before Columbus

*Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

October 1, there were no election rolls, and the results were not independently verifiable. Given that Spanish authorities had declared the vote not just illegitimate but criminal, those who agreed with the authorities tended not to vote at all. The pro-independence side got 90 percent of the vote on very low turnout. As an exercise in democracy it would have been unimpressive even in an emerging colony.

But as an exercise in national will, it was extraordinary. Most of the irregularities were the result of Spain's attempts to stop the referendum. And Spain failed. Conservative prime minister Mariano Rajoy ordered the semi-autonomous Catalan police to block the vote. They showed no inclination to do so. Thousands of members of the national police were brought into Catalonia's harbors on cruise ships. The head of the Catalan police, Josep Lluís Trapero, is being investigated for sedition. The charge involves an incident in September when Trapero's men allegedly failed to come to the aid

of national police who were trapped in a Barcelona building by a mob of Catalan nationalists. Does that make Trapero a hero or a scoundrel? Well, it depends who wins.

When truncheon-wielding national police clashed with voters at several polling places, Rajoy was accused of poor judgment and heavy-handedness. Hadn't he provided the separatists with images that made the Spanish state look repressive? Maybe. On the other hand, it is hard to see how Madrid would have benefited from images that made the referendum look normal. Had Spain showed any sign of regarding the vote as an ordinary democratic exercise, had the majority of Catalans voted, had the result been some banal-looking tally like 53-46, then calls for independence might have risen.

Puigdemont was like the dog who caught the bus. Here was his result—a 9-to-1 majority—and a lot of sympathetic international press coverage. Yet he stalled for time. Instead of declaring independence, he said Catalonia

had won the "right" to declare it. He kept calling on the European Union for help in "mediating" and alluding to the Spanish state's violation of "civil rights." But what is there to mediate? If Spain does not have rightful sovereignty over Catalans, how can it give them civil rights? If Catalonia *does* have sovereignty over Catalans, why should it surrender their fate to the say-so of some foreign arbitrator or mediator?

Puigdemont saw clearly the logic of the European Union. It aims at destroying the authority of the old European nation-states. He must have assumed it would be happy to lend Catalonians a hand in destroying the authority of one state in particular. Certain politicians agreed, but they were fringe ones. The leftist opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn in Britain. Belgian prime minister Charles Michel. And the Green member of the EU parliament Philippe Lamberts. "Absolutely nothing can justify the violent repression we saw," said Lamberts after the vote. "Yes, it is an internal affair, but an internal affair of the European Union."

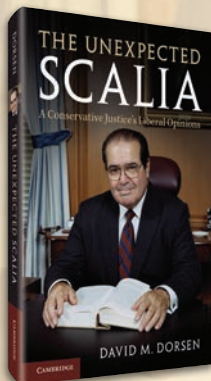
But Puigdemont failed to see that this destruction of nation-states is only the *inner* logic of the EU. The politicians pursuing the project draw all their real authority from those very nation-states, so they must avoid all expressions of disrespect. Emmanuel Macron, the reforming president of France, reportedly even assured Rajoy of his backing in a phone call. The European Commission called the vote illegal.

Businessmen followed suit. A "day of protest" on October 3—with widespread reports of shopkeepers intimidated into closing their stores—made the whole independence drive look like something a bit more Bolshevik than it perhaps was. The *Financial Times*, describing those who *don't* want independence as "Catalonia's silent majority," warned that companies were "drawing up plans to leave the region." This turned out to be true. Catalan bank stocks fell by 5 percent, and on October 5, Banco Sabadell, Barcelona's second-largest bank, announced it was moving its headquarters to Alicante.

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King Felipe VI intervened to scold Catalan authorities for their “unacceptable disloyalty to the powers of the state.” It was easy to mock a king lecturing his people on democracy. Alberto Garzón of the United Left party declared that the speech of “Citizen Felipe Borbón” had been shameful. But the king’s logic was correct: He argued that Catalan leaders had “placed themselves outside of law and democracy.” It was *holding* the referendum that was the trespass against the Spanish state. The old conservative Popular party, the new conservative Citizens party and the Socialists rallied to the king’s way of looking at things, particularly after Puigdemont accused him of partisanship in a national address. The new left party Podemos has tended to be objectively pro-independence. Its interest in disrupting Spain’s institutions is like that of Americans for Tax Reform in tax-cutting. They favor it in all contexts and at all times, and don’t really need to know the details.

But the king’s logic holds for the Catalan side, too. If it was *holding* the referendum that was the trespass, then independence has already been declared. In the days after the vote, the Catalan parliament announced a special plenary session to discuss independence. Spain’s constitutional tribunal declared it unconstitutional. There was an increasing likelihood that should the parliament meet anyway, the government would activate Article 155 of the constitution, suspending Catalonia’s autonomy and likely nationalizing its police force.

Viewed through the eyes of a Spanish constitutionalist, the Catalan referendum was a high crime—a crime against democracy in a country that has a tradition of, let us say, forcefully quashing domestic dissent. As Tony Blair’s longtime adviser Jonathan Powell put it, “The objective must be to avoid Catalonia settling into a protracted armed conflict of the sort we saw in Northern Ireland.” Viewed through the eyes of a Catalan nationalist, Spain’s objections to Catalan independence are not just an interference, they are an aggression. The national

policemen swinging truncheons on October 1, who felt they were upholding the law in their own country, were actually invading someone else’s.

When we talk about self-determination and sovereignty, we hit an element of politics that is irreducible. As

Van Morrison once sang: “It ain’t why why why, it just is.” There is nothing to talk about, nothing to be explained, and nothing to be negotiated. No one is right and no one is wrong. We are looking at the abyss that ever threatens to open up under a multi-ethnic state. ♦

## Killer Celebrities

The sociopaths championed by credulous literati.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN



William F. Buckley Jr., left, with Edgar Smith on *Firing Line*

Before Jack Henry Abbott, there was Edgar Smith.

Abbott was a Utah forger, bank robber, and killer whose series of essay-letters to Norman Mailer about prison life were published by Random House in 1981, in a volume entitled *In the Belly of the Beast*. Abbott had come to Mailer’s attention a few years earlier when he learned that the novelist intended to write about Gary Gilmore, another self-publicizing Utah convict who had chosen to be executed rather than appeal his conviction for two murders.

It was a sensational case at the time: No American had been put to death judicially in the previous decade, and a 1972 Supreme Court ruling had found

most state death-penalty statutes to be unconstitutional. Gilmore’s combination of bad-boy good looks, tough-guy bravado—when asked for his last words, he declared, “Let’s do it”—and choice of firing squad instead of hanging brought him renown and sacks of fan mail. It’s not difficult to see Norman Mailer’s attraction.

Abbott, however, informed Mailer that he thought Gilmore was something of a poseur and that Gilmore’s accounts of Utah prison life were largely imaginative. This seems to have had little effect on Mailer’s attitude toward Gilmore—which, in *The Executioner’s Song* (1979), earned him the inevitable Pulitzer Prize—but it did prompt Mailer to encourage Abbott to keep on writing, to raise interest among New York editors and publishers, and to lobby for

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Abbott's parole, which was granted.

The second act of this particular drama has not been forgotten. On the night before the *New York Times* review of Abbott's book appeared (in the rapturous words of Terrence Des Pres, *In the Belly of the Beast* was "awesome, brilliant, perversely ingenuous"), he and two women repaired to a Manhattan café where Abbott got into an argument with a 22-year-old actor-waiter named Richard Adan. Abbott ended the argument by stabbing Adan to death. At his trial, in the winter of 1982, Abbott was found guilty of Adan's murder. He published yet another prison memoir five years later (*My Return*) and always failed to gain parole since he expressed no remorse for his crime and consistently blamed the prison system for his conduct. He finally murdered himself while still imprisoned, in 2002.

Abbott may have had a point about the long-term effects of incarceration, but what sticks in my memory is not the primordial nature of Jack Henry Abbott but the conduct of Norman Mailer. He and his wife Norris Church were regular attendants at Abbott's Manhattan trial along with other celebrity supporter-admirers such as Jerzy Kosinski and Susan Sarandon. (For what it's worth, some years later Sarandon named a son, fathered by actor Tim Robbins, Jack Henry.) You can admire Mailer for sticking by a protégé, in good times and bad, or regard his strikingly cold-blooded attitude toward the death of Richard Adan with a certain horror. Mailer did subsequently express misgivings about his interlude with Jack Henry Abbott, but characteristically they reflected entirely on his own predicament. It was, he told a reporter, "another episode in my life in which I can find nothing to cheer about or nothing to take pride in."

What prompts these recollections of the Mailer-Abbott connection was last week's long-delayed obituary of Edgar Smith, who died in a California prison hospital in March, age 83. Smith, like Abbott, was a talented psychopath and murderer; in contrast, however, he earned the allegiance not of a well-known left-wing writer like Norman Mailer but the godfather of modern

conservatism, William F. Buckley Jr.—proving, I suppose, that gullibility knows no partisan boundaries.

Smith had been convicted of the grisly 1957 murder of a 15-year-old New Jersey high school student named Victoria Zielinski and sentenced to death. Like Abbott, Smith was a skilled jailhouse lawyer and indefatigable correspondent on his own behalf. And among the people he approached was Buckley, founding editor of *National Review* and not one, I should guess, predisposed to take up such causes. But Smith's case—like many crimes, arrests, and convictions—featured its share of loose ends, imperfect policing, fallible memories, and reasonable doubt. Enough, indeed, that Buckley became persuaded of Smith's innocence and asked, in a 1965 *Esquire* piece, "Doesn't it strain the bounds of credibility that an essentially phlegmatic young man, of nonviolent habits, would so far lose control of himself, in the space of a minute or two, as to murder under such circumstances a 15-year-old girl he hardly knew?"

A less generous person than Buckley, such as myself, might respond, "Not at all. It happens quite frequently." But Smith, like Abbott, was a capable writer—and shrewd enough to impart to Buckley, along with his detailed legal arguments, suggestions that he shared Buckley's politics. In due course, Knopf published Smith's account of his judicial ordeal—*Brief Against Death* (1968), with an introduction by Buckley—and three years later, after he produced a second volume (*A Reasonable Doubt*), New Jersey granted him the choice of a new trial or a guilty plea to second-degree murder and immediate release. He took the plea.

I was an undergraduate at the time and neither a regular reader of Buckley nor a viewer of his celebrated PBS interview program *Firing Line*. But the case was lavishly covered in the press, and I tracked down a television set in my dormitory—those were the days!—on the evening in December 1971 when Smith, very nearly fresh from prison, appeared on *Firing Line*.

Nearly a half-century later, I would like to say that I was immediately

suspicious of Smith, whose manner and appearance did strike me as slightly unappetizing and whose answers—especially about the guilty plea—were at best elliptical. But so what? Buckley had not argued that his guest was an angel, and years on death row had no doubt instilled a certain guardedness and guile. I accepted the notion that Edgar Smith might well have been wrongfully convicted and imbibed the useful lesson in life that people are not always as they seem.

The following chapter of the story may be predicted. In the next year Smith published a third volume (*Getting Out*) and became a frequent guest on radio and television shows and a popular campus speaker, lecturing from experience on penal reform. But celebrity is a two-edged sword: No doubt, Smith enjoyed his temporary status but was dangerously ill-prepared when the novelty wore off. He drifted to San Diego, drank heavily, worked sporadically—and one evening in 1976 kidnapped at gunpoint and stabbed a woman who managed to escape from his car. While still at large in Las Vegas, Smith got in touch with Buckley, who in turn contacted the FBI.

After his trial and conviction in California, Smith sought to ameliorate his sentence by presenting himself as a compulsive sex offender—and confessed to the 1957 murder in New Jersey. For his part, William F. Buckley Jr. was considerably more honest, and surely more straightforward, than Norman Mailer: He admitted that he had been deceived by Smith and regretted his role in the tragic aftermath.

Which, in retrospect, has ramifications beyond two squalid confidence men. Prisoners, especially prisoners who are innocent, have a rational impulse to plead for justice. And famous writers, whose charitable words can be persuasive, are natural objects of attention. Yet vanity is sometimes mixed with understanding, and writerly perception has its limits. For every Emile Zola who crusades for Alfred Dreyfus, there are Mailer and Abbott and Buckley and Smith, making cynics of us all. ♦

# The Man Who Would Be Kempton

The undiminished quality of George Will's stuff.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

When George Will was being packed off to graduate school, his father, a professor of philosophy at the University of Illinois, asked him what, or who, he wanted to be in life: Ted Sorensen, Isaiah Berlin, or Murray Kempton? All three men were closely identified with a public trade. Sorensen, as President Kennedy's speechwriter, was the ultimate political operative and staffer. Berlin was one of the century's leading political philosophers. Kempton was the most revered newspaper columnist of his time, writing copiously about everything from politics to poetry in an elevated style unlike that of any other newspaperman.

Will studied at Oxford and got a Ph.D. in political philosophy from Princeton, on the assumption that he would pursue the calling of Berlin. It didn't take. He moved to Washington to be an aide, Sorensen-like, to a conservative Republican senator. After two years, he had had enough of the hill-rat race. That left Kempton and the scribbling life. "I phoned Bill Buckley at *National Review*," he recalled the other day. "I said, 'You need a Washington editor.' He said, 'Yeah, I do, and you're it.'" A few months later, in January 1973, the editorial page editor of the *Washington Post* offered him a three-times-a-week column, to be syndicated nationally. At the age of 32, Will had arrived at the summit of political punditry.

And here he is still, an astonishing 44 years later, in the second-floor office

of a townhouse he owns in Georgetown. He's 76 but looks 55; for that matter, when he was 36 he looked 55. Owing to his trademarked dour appearance and sometimes crotchety manner on TV, it is always a surprise to note that the primary impression



George Will tosses out the first pitch before a Cubs game at Chicago's Wrigley Field, April 6, 2014.

George Will makes in person is one of perpetual sunniness. Maybe happiness is a better word—happiness understood in its old sense of aptness. He has the good cheer and supreme self-confidence of a man perfectly situated in life, doing precisely what he was made to do. The man and the vocation are essentially identical. He is a columnist born to write columns, a miniaturist who writes exquisite mini-essays of 750 words and not a word longer.

"I'd do it for free," he says, "but they pay me anyway. It's a failure of the price system."

George Will is part of the furniture of Washington life and as close to a national celebrity as punditry will allow. He has been famous for so long—he's figured in episodes of *Seinfeld* and *The Simpsons* ("The George Will?" says an awed friend of Lisa's) and has been the subject of a sketch on *Saturday Night Live* and made a character in *Dooniesbury*, back when both were sort of funny—it's sometimes easy to forget he's here. But you don't forget for long.

For instance: His column this May asserting that President Trump suffered from a mental "disability" was one of the most republished columns of his career, propelled by the combined accelerant of Twitter, Facebook, and vast clouds of anti-Trump animus. His columns are routinely among the top five "most read" stories on the *Washington Post* website the day they appear. When, last year, he offhandedly told a meeting of the Federalist Society that he had dropped his Republican party registration, political outlets from the *Post* to *Politico* wrote it up as news. Under contract to Fox News, he engaged in a televised argument with Bill O'Reilly, then the network's premier star, that became, as the kids don't say but should, a YouTube sensation.

It also got him fired. Will called O'Reilly a *liar* and O'Reilly saw his *liar* and raised him a *hack*, and the spectacle of two of his stars squabbling so unnerved Roger Ailes, the overlord of Fox News, that he phoned Will and instructed him to declare a truce. Recall President Muffley's famous reproach in *Dr. Strangelove*. "Gentleman, you can't fight in here! This is the War Room!"

"I think he didn't think I was a good team player," Will says, "and he was right. I'm not a good team player." Will left Fox and joined the other team, MSNBC, where he can unfurl his anti-Trump colors to cheers instead of dirty looks.

"The usual trope about Fox is that it's been bad for journalism but good for conservatism, and that's exactly wrong," he says. "They've got some

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

DAVID BANKS / GETTY

really first-class journalists over there. But it's been calamitous for conservatism. When Sean Hannity is the face of conservatism you're in deep trouble."

At this particular moment in his long career, Will is best known as a ferocious critic of President Trump. He comes at him from the right. Will's revulsion isn't really about ideology, since the president has none. It is aesthetic, and aesthetics, Will says, have a place in politics. "Manners matter," he says. "Appearances matter. Many people, including him, seem not to understand this. It simply won't do to say, 'Well, we like his program but not his persona.' The two are now inextricable."

The president's vulgarity to one side, Will puts his finger on something more crucial about Trump's rise. Virtually alone among Trump critics, he recognizes that the president is a bastard child not so much of the right as of the left—of the dominant "mainstream" culture and its obsession with individual autonomy: its sexual libertinism and moral relativism, its disdain for traditional propriety and distrust of the very idea of objective truth. "The Trump people talk of 'alternative facts,'" he says. "If the Nietzscheans at the Modern Language Association were paying attention, they'd say, 'Ah, yes, Nietzsche told us about this; there are no facts, only interpretations.' They would have given Trump tenure, for Pete's sake."

Still, Will knows that his own contempt for the president could quickly become a snooze for readers, as several of his fellow columnists have already proved. He rations his columns on Trump—indeed, he says, in the first half of the year there were only two. "I don't think the country's readers of editorial pages feel an aching insufficiency of commentary on Donald Trump," he says. "If you open up the *Post* editorial page it's 'Trump, Trump, Trump.'" He waves a limp hand. "I mean, give it a rest."

Fortunately, he has other things to write about. Range of subject is Will's greatest strength as a columnist. His inexhaustible curiosity is a key to his longevity, like a bubble fountain

keeping the pond water fresh. He is chiefly a political columnist, but also a columnist about any subject that suits his fancy.

"A columnist ought to write at least 20 percent of his or her columns on subjects that aren't even in the newspaper that day," he says. "It was said of Napoleon that he could not look at a landscape without seeing a battlefield. Someone who has an aptitude for columnizing just looks at the social landscape and sees columns everywhere."

Will is one of the few remaining newspaper columnists whose pieces are collected into books and deserve to be. By my count, there are eight collections, covering the span of his career. He writes about sports, education, diplomacy, popular entertainment, new works of fiction and nonfiction, and of course politics, foreign and domestic—anything that would catch the attention of an alert and well-stocked mind. Taken together they make for a comprehensive intellectual history of the last half-century. A reader who returns to them after many years will find them irresistible for dipping into, for laughs, historical observations, aphorisms, obscure facts, and other forms of mental enrichment.

All the Willian trademarks are there. He is a magpie and famously allusive. In one collection, *The Woven Figure*, Will begins the first page of his introduction by telling of the discovery of a new Middle English word by linguistic researchers in Michigan; he ends the page with a reference to Erik the Red. Then we're off to the races: Here come quotes from Daniel Patrick Moynihan and James Q. Wilson and Lionel Trilling, followed by a potted history of the first 12 amendments to the Constitution, a funny bumper sticker glimpsed on a New York taxicab, an anecdote about William McKinley and a cigar (this is before Monica Lewinsky) told by William Allen White, a recent judicial opinion from the Massachusetts supreme court, Burke, Tocqueville, Mr. Jarndyce from *Bleak House*, Shelley, and Samuel Beckett (these last three in a single paragraph), before he wraps up the introduction with a perfectly

chosen quotation from . . . Lily Tomlin.

Sometimes, it's true, he pushes his luck, or his erudition, and he becomes quotatious. Nobody's perfect. But usually the allusions are more enlightening than obtrusive. As someone once said of Will's hero Kempton, "The man knew how to write, even when he was quoting somebody else." Yet liberals have chosen this quality to try to make Will a figure of fun over the years—for them it's even more risible than the bow ties he used to wear on TV! A piece of writing by Will, said one liberal magazine years ago, reads like "Monty Python's shooting script for Bartlett's."

Among the many sins a columnist can commit, erudition is the most refreshing. And the rarest. Will never condescends to his readers. He assumes that they are as smart as he is. The assumption is wrong, of course, but he's not wrong to assume it: A column couldn't last 44 years if the columnist was always pausing to wonder if he's being too intelligent. The 750-word limit doesn't allow for dilation. "You have to be concise—though concise isn't the right word," he says. "You have to do a lot with intimation. You have to be able to assume a lot about your readers—that they have a certain pantry full of knowledge."

Which leads to one other thing about Will, worth mentioning along with his durability and the undiminished quality of his stuff. I mean his personal and professional generosity. As the dean of conservative journalists—he would hate the title, if only because it discounts his many ideological heresies—he makes it a point to seek out the company of younger scribblers. He is quick to drop them a line of praise, take them to lunch, publicize their work in his column, or clear the way toward one job or another. There are now at least three generations of these lucky people sawing away in the journalism business. You can easily imagine the revivifying effects of gestures like these on a writer, young or old, when they come from a man of such stature, integrity, and accomplishment. Plus, he always picks up the check. ♦

# Sense and License

## Protecting consumers or just the competition?

BY STEVEN E. RHOADS

In the 1970s, about 10 percent of American workers required licenses to perform their jobs legally. By 2015, that proportion had more than doubled to 22 percent. There is widespread agreement among economists and an increasing awareness among politicians that there is no public-interest justification for many restrictions of the freedom to work. Indeed, both the Obama and Trump administrations have encouraged states to scale back onerous licensing regulations.

Almost all the policy discussion focuses on the unreasonable burdens regulations place on workers, who in many cases should be able to offer their services without getting anyone else's permission. I now have personal reasons to believe that the debate over credentialism should pay more attention to the costs incurred by consumers.

I have had two major back operations and have substantial osteoarthritis elsewhere. Over time, I have been treated for these problems by a wide range of health professionals. A few years ago I was only 70 percent recovered from an operation for a new knee. My surgeon had discharged me, and work with a good physical therapist still left me unable to get the aerobic exercise that my cardiologist said I needed.

With low expectations, I turned to a personal trainer at the Boar's Head Sports Club in Charlottesville. I had noticed that in addition to giving advice about the fitness machines, one trainer—let's call her Joy—was doing hands-on work with many of her clients.

*Recently retired, Steven E. Rhoads taught public policy at the University of Virginia for over 40 years.*

After a few sessions with Joy, my knee function dramatically improved, and I could exercise comfortably. Then Joy turned to problems with my lower back, and later to my wife's hip and shoulder problems. We both experienced a dramatic reduction in pain in every case.



*Pardon me, ma'am, but do you have a license for that elbow?*

But Joy has recently been told that she can no longer work hands-on with her clients. A physical therapist and a massage therapist had complained to management that her practice lacked the appropriate license. Joy had never had a client complain, and she was willing to serve only those who signed waivers; but the lawyers were consulted, and unduly frightened managers at the sports club determined that, stretching aside, Joy would do no more touching.

Here's why that doesn't make sense. In her two decades of work, Joy has developed expertise in myofascial release—a deep-tissue massage technique in which the practitioner applies firm pressure to the client's body with hands and even elbows to reach deeper layers of muscles and fascia. According to a large *Consumer Reports* survey, deep-tissue massage is

more helpful to those suffering osteoarthritis pain than chiropractic treatments, acupuncture, over-the-counter medication, and several kinds of supplements and is nearly as helpful as prescription medication.

Massage therapy is the closest thing to an official home for myofascial-release therapy. If Joy wants to pay \$12,000 and take 750 hours of instruction at a massage-therapy school, she can become a certified massage practitioner. But myofascial-release therapy is not a prominent practice among massage therapists. At the local massage school, only the last 12 hours of the 750 are devoted to myofascial release.

So massage-therapy school would be of little use to Joy, who already has a master's degree in exercise physiology. In earning that degree, she took semester-length courses on anatomy and physiology at the University of Virginia medical complex. Most massage instructors, much less graduates of massage schools, cannot match this learning base.

In fact, massage therapy does not have an established learning base, and no single school could teach the various modalities. A glossary lists 22 kinds of massage that begin with the letter A and 30 that begin with the letter B! I haven't counted how many begin with the other 24 letters, but it is clear that possession of a massage-therapy license does not tell a potential client much of anything.

An enormous number of people in manifold occupations seek to improve human health and well-being without medication, injections, or surgical incisions. It's mad to stop them from doing so. Let licensed massage therapists brag about their credentials on their office walls and on the Web, but let the unlicensed also practice bodywork—as couples have done for millennia.

We consumers can tell who makes the pain go away. And through word of mouth, those practitioners who make the pain go away will eventually prosper.

Joy can make my pain go away. The government won't let her do it. ♦

GORDON CHIBROSK / PORTLAND PRESS HERALD / GETTY

# Getting to No

*The art of decertifying the Iran deal*

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES  
& MICHAEL WARREN

**D**onald Trump was frustrated. Five days earlier, on July 12, 2017, the president had decided for the second time in his young administration that he would certify to Congress Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal he'd promised as a candidate to dismantle. He wasn't happy with the decision he'd made, and he was angry about the process that led to it. His top national security aides had presented him with a narrow range of options that did not include leaving the deal—or even simply “decertifying” it. On July 13, *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* was the first to report Trump's reluctant decision.

On the morning of July 17, the day the White House was to transmit its decision to Congress, chief strategist Steve Bannon handed Trump an article with the headline “Trump Must Withdraw from the Iran Nuclear Deal—Now.” The op-ed, written by former United Nations ambassador John Bolton and published the day before in the *Hill*, made the argument Trump had wanted to make: Iran wasn't complying with the terms of the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; the mullahs were advancing their nuclear program, ostensibly with America's blessing; and the deal certainly wasn't in the national security interests of the United States.

“President Trump has repeatedly made clear his view that the Iran deal was a diplomatic debacle,” Bolton wrote. “It is not renegotiable, as some argue, because there is no chance that Iran, designated by Ronald Reagan as a state sponsor of terrorism in January 1984, will agree to any serious changes. Why should it? President Obama gave them unimaginably favorable terms, and there is no reason to think China and Russia will do us any favors revising them. Accordingly, withdrawing from the JCPOA as soon as possible should be the highest priority. The administration should stop reviewing and start deciding.”

So right then, Trump changed his mind. The United States would not recertify the Iran deal, as he'd decided on July 12. It was time to move on.

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*Stephen F. Hayes is editor in chief and Michael Warren is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

The abrupt reversal began making its way to Trump's top advisers late that morning, upending nearly a week of White House preparation. Indeed, a rollout of the previous decision had already begun. For nearly eight hours, Trump's national security team would scramble to make their public relations effort consistent with the president's new position.

Shortly after 8 A.M., Kelly Sadler, a White House communications official, had sent an email to the White House surrogates' list—friendly policy wonks and journalists who might be called upon to explain and defend the recertification. The advisory notified the surrogates of a background call, scheduled for noon, with Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster to discuss the Iran deal. A similar email notification had gone out to the White House press corps, advising them of a background briefing on Iran at 1 P.M. At 11:28 A.M., about a half-hour before the surrogate call, the White House had sent surrogates its “talking points” on recertification. The guidance made clear that the recertification was grudging but defended the president's decision. One anticipated question got to the heart of the administration's awkward position: “If, as you say, the JCPOA is so bad and Iran is in ‘default’ of its ‘spirit,’ then why did the administration—for the second time—recertify Iran's compliance?”

The White House had provided surrogates an answer:

- As the Secretary of State's letter makes clear, “the JCPOA is a one-sided agreement that gives Iran every incentive to be in tactical compliance, while repeatedly testing the boundaries of the agreement.”
- This recertification in no way implies that the Trump Administration has changed its mind about the threats from Iran or the shortcomings of the JCPOA.
- We will continue to work with our allies and partners to address those threats and to address the JCPOA's considerable flaws.

Now these talking points were suddenly irrelevant. They defended a position the president had just abandoned. White House officials scrambled to draft new talking points and a new letter to Congress explaining the president's decision to decertify the Iran deal.

The surrogate briefing went ahead as scheduled. But at 12:34, the White House press office sent an email to the press corps. “UPDATE: The originally scheduled

background briefing will be postponed. We will provide an update when we have a new time.”

At 1:30 that afternoon, Trump held a previously scheduled meeting with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and several other top national security and foreign policy advisers. According to seven sources directly involved in the decision-making on Iran policy, the president made clear his frustration with his lack of options on Iran and wondered aloud why his team had not given him a broader set of alternatives to recertification.

Having failed to receive the decertification option from his own team, Trump called Senator Tom Cotton and put him on speakerphone. The president asked Cotton to make the case for decertifying the Iran deal. Cotton took five minutes and walked Trump and his team through the case, emphasizing one point in particular: recertifying the deal would be declaring that it was in the national security interest of the United States, something Cotton understood that Trump didn't believe. Bannon provided the political complement to Cotton's policy argument: *Mr. President, you campaigned on tearing up the deal and now you're recertifying it—for the second time?*

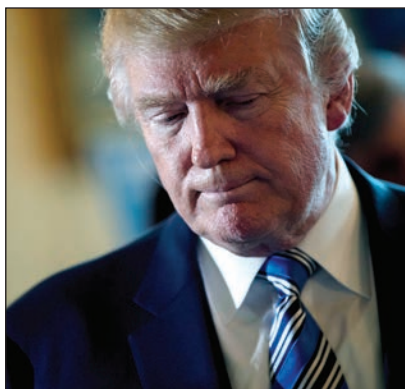
Trump left the phone call, and the meeting, even more convinced that his decision that morning—to decertify—was the right one. When he had reluctantly recertified in April, he had made clear that he didn't want to do it again and had instructed his team to provide him with a wide range of options. They didn't.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer had a briefing scheduled for 2 P.M. It started late, at 2:32, and reporters were curious about the recertification decision. Spicer punted. “The secretary of state will have an announcement very shortly on that deal,” he said. Moments later, he went further, suggesting a reversal of the president's April decision was imminent. “I think the president—from throughout the campaign until now—has made very clear that he thinks it's a bad deal. And initially he recertified it because he had the luxury of having an entire team here, both from State, DoD, NSC to review it. That time is up, and State will make its announcement very shortly. But I think he's been very consistent with the fact that he thought it was a bad deal.”

At 4:15, Trump met with key members of his national security team—Tillerson, McMaster, Defense Secretary James Mattis, and others—to review the new policy. If the president thought he'd find support for decertifying, he was mistaken. Mattis and Tillerson urged the president to

recertify the deal, arguing that an abrupt reversal would frustrate and anger our European allies. McMaster, who wasn't a defender of the deal on the merits, argued for recertification on the grounds that the National Security Council hadn't yet completed its comprehensive review of Iran policy.

Trump was irritated but eventually gave in. Shortly before 7 P.M., NSC officials transmitted the letter to Congress notifying it of the president's decision to recertify the deal. At 7 P.M., the long-delayed press briefing took place, and White House officials relied once again on the talking points that had been discarded at noon, only to be restored late in the day.



Trump at the White House, July 17

From nearly the moment Trump grudgingly agreed to recertification, he began preparing to decertify at the next deadline. On July 25, in a candid interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, he made clear that he'd felt panned in by his national security team. “Personally, I have great respect for my people, but if it was up to me, I would have had [Iran] noncompliant 180 days ago,” he said, adding that he'd “be surprised” if Iran would still be considered compliant 90 days later.

On September 5, the administration released what officials have said was a “trial balloon” for decertification. In a speech at the American Enterprise Institute, U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley made a strong case for why President Trump would be justified in decertifying the deal in October.

“If the president chooses not to certify Iranian compliance, that does not mean the United States is withdrawing from the JCPOA,” Haley said. “If the president finds that he cannot certify Iranian compliance, it would be a message to Congress that the administration believes either that Iran is in violation of the deal, or that the lifting of sanctions against Iran is not appropriate and proportional to the regime's behavior, or that the lifting of sanctions is not in the U.S. national security interest, or any combination of the three.” Haley was careful not to confirm Trump's intentions. “I'm not making the case for decertifying,” she said. “What I am saying is should he decide to decertify, he has ground to stand on.”

There were more hints in President Trump's September 19 speech to the U.N. General Assembly. “We cannot let a murderous regime continue these destabilizing activities while building dangerous missiles, and we cannot abide by an agreement if it provides cover for the eventual construction of a nuclear program,” he said. “The Iran deal was one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United

States has ever entered into. Frankly, that deal is an embarrassment to the United States, and I don't think you've heard the last of it. Believe me."

What, exactly, would decertification mean? The requirement that the president certify Iran's compliance with the deal every 90 days isn't a provision of the JCPOA—it's part of U.S. law. It's contained in the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, known as Corker-Cardin after the two senators who authored it. When the Obama administration denied the Senate the opportunity to ratify or reject the Iran deal as a treaty, Congress passed Corker-Cardin as part of its assent to the sanctions relief called for in the deal.

Decertifying it, as administration officials point out, does not kill the deal. But it does place the onus on Congress to determine a legislative path—to impose new non-nuclear sanctions, to amend the Corker-Cardin law, or to pass a new bill—that would guide how the U.S. government will proceed on the deal.

Under the terms of Corker-Cardin, the president must certify four things to Congress every 90 days: that Iran is complying with the JCPOA's terms, that Iran is not in "material breach" of the agreement, that Iran is not materially advancing its nuclear program, and that the sanctions relief provided for in the deal remains in the national security interest of the United States.

It is this final benchmark the administration is expected to cite if it decertifies. In an October 3 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, Tom Cotton emphasized this point, just as he had on his phone call with Trump and his advisers on July 17. "Even if they were complying with it, even if . . . it was fully verifiable they were complying with it, which it's not and which they aren't, it is still not in our vital national-security interests because it does not block Iran's path to a bomb," Cotton said. "It puts them on the path to a bomb, now in barely a decade. So there's no need to quibble over Iran's technical compliance with the deal."

**W**hat happens after decertification is a precarious balancing act if the president hopes to succeed in renegotiating a better deal that achieves the U.S. goal of preventing a nuclear Iran. There are a lot of things Trump and his administration could do to try to improve the deal before deciding whether to scrap it altogether. As Mark Dubowitz and David Albright put it in a recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, these include: designating the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization, slapping Iranian companies and organizations with new non-nuclear sanctions allowed under the JCPOA,

insisting on making permanent the "sunset clauses" that only temporarily restrict Iran's nuclear program and testing, and demanding thorough and complete inspections of Iranian facilities to ensure compliance. In his Council on Foreign Relations speech, Tom Cotton echoed these ideas.

Success on this post-decertification route will require working closely with Congress, negotiating with European allies who have economic interests in Iran and want to expand them, and follow-through and commitment on the part of the administration. John Bolton tells *TWS* he's highly skeptical of the news reports of this plan. "What's been described is an incoherent policy mishmash," says

Bolton, who was candid in his criticism of Tillerson, Mattis, and McMaster's guidance of the president toward recertification back in July. "If they failed to present the president with the full range of policy options, it is—and I say this wittingly—a dereliction of duty." If Trump begins to feel this way again, he could upend the difficult path forward for improving the deal.

And that's the worrisome X-factor for Iran hawks hopeful that this renegotiation-first plan might be pulled off: President Trump himself. He has had no major legislative achievements on Capitol Hill, having alienated nearly every Democrat in Congress and the Republican leadership, too. Administration officials insist that their counterparts in Europe are privately talking about the

need to fix the flaws in the JCPOA, but for the European heads of state, Trump remains difficult to partner with.

And while the NSC-led interagency review of Iran policy is complete and offers a path forward, there is concern that Trump and his administration could lose focus on Iran. The Treasury Department, which enforces sanctions, has its attention on North Korea. The State Department is understaffed, run by careerists generally supportive of the existing Iran deal and led by a secretary who has been crosswise with Trump on the issue from the get-go. Asked if he was worried the president might not follow through on the additional work needed after decertification, Tom Cotton responded with one word: "No."

Cotton is perhaps Trump's most trusted outside adviser on Iran—it was the subject of their first conversation back in 2015. But the Arkansas Republican's confidence in the president's perseverance is not widely shared. As administration officials say about Trump all the time, as was borne out in his quicksilver changes of position on the Iran deal on July 17: With this president, you never know. ♦

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**Decertifying it, as administration officials point out, does not kill the deal. But it does place the onus on Congress to determine a legislative path that would guide how the U.S. government will proceed.**



An abandoned house in Waterbury, Connecticut, once a thriving industrial city

# Can This State Be Saved?

*Connecticut has dug itself into a deep economic hole; David Walker senses political opportunity for an accountant.*

BY ALICE B. LLOYD

*Sherman, Conn.*

**T**he annual Reagan dinner is the New Milford Republican Town Committee's marquee event. Members plan their year around it. Connecticut's candidates, young and old, local and statewide, meet, greet, and mingle in the ballroom of the River Oaks golf club till their cheeks hurt from smiling. But all anybody can talk about tonight is the news from Hartford.

A Republican budget plan has just passed the state senate—a chamber controlled by Democrats. It's expected to pass the similarly Democratic house of representatives tomorrow. Is true-blue Connecticut—a state whose speaker of the house works full-time for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees—changing course?

It's a good night to be at a Republican gala in a town named for the state's most famous Founding Father, Roger Sherman. Republican national committeewoman Leora

Levy—who's come from Greenwich to cheer on the candidates and carries an elephant-shaped enamel handbag—agrees. "Tonight is an earthquake in Connecticut," she says. "The only reason those three Democrats switched their votes? They felt pressure from their constituents, who've had enough."

David M. Walker, who sits to Levy's right, is less sanguine. The former comptroller general of the United States is running for governor. He sees little to celebrate in three crossover votes for a budget that Democratic incumbent Dannel P. Malloy is never going to sign—especially one not radical enough even to begin to correct the state's downward slide. And sure enough, Malloy vetoed the bipartisan bill two weeks later, making Connecticut the last state in the union without a budget.

These are dark days in the Nutmeg State. Morale is almost as low as real-estate values, which never fully rebounded from the 2008 recession. The state's economy is contracting, and unfunded public employee pension liabilities have ballooned. Connecticut governors have so far preferred budgetary band-aids to dealing with a deep demographic and commercial hollowing. Historic tax hikes under Malloy spooked many. As the wealthiest

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SPENCER PLATT / GETTY IMAGES

residents and biggest corporations flee, the state depends on a smaller cohort of high-income taxpayers every year. The budget battles in Hartford are the beginning of a triage-themed electoral cycle.

Malloy is the nation's least-popular Democratic governor. (Chris Christie is, unsurprisingly, the least popular of all.) In April, he announced he would not seek reelection. "He could have chosen to run for another term," says Jon Thompson, spokesman for the Republican Governors Association—for which Connecticut is now a top target. "He chose not to, because his policies were so toxic." A "red wave" has swept state governments from Maine to Massachusetts since the recession: In all of New England, Democrats govern only Connecticut and Rhode Island, where no-nonsense former treasurer Gina Raimondo has enacted a conservative pension reform.

### THE NATION'S WATCHDOG

With his round glasses, ring of white hair, and stolid disinterest in partisan gamesmanship, David Walker, 66, seems a lot like the accountant he is in civilian life.

"We're bottom five in competitiveness, and one of only eight states that have a declining population," his Connecticut crowds hear in these pre-primary fundraising days. "The people who are leaving are disproportionately wealthy, disproportionately contributors to philanthropic organizations and to economic growth. The people who are coming are disproportionately interested in our welfare system and our sanctuary cities."

When he's not campaigning, Walker works as an adviser for PricewaterhouseCoopers, the big-four accounting firm that gave him his start straight out of college in 1973. At a meet-the-candidate lunch at the Rotary Club of New Canaan, Walker relies on PwC data from a study he coauthored on states' relative financial ranking: Listeners fall into silence when they learn Connecticut ranks 47th in economic outlook. Ever the auditor, when he spots the Kentucky plates on my rented Kia, he sighs, "Ah, number 49."

We meet on a sunny Thursday in September. Walker's traversing Fairfield County in a white Audi sedan with unopened boxes of campaign stationery piled high in the backseat. A handwritten note to a donor can't hurt, but it's Connecticut's fiscal breakdown and his timely credentials that do most of the work for him.

In 1987, Walker went to work for the Reagan administration as assistant secretary of labor for pension and welfare benefit programs. In 1998, he was chosen by Bill Clinton to head the Government Accountability Office, which he restructured and renamed: Before Walker, the "A" was for "accounting." In the early George W. Bush years, he won favor with Democrats and the press by suing Vice President Dick Cheney—amid popular suspicion of

unseemly corporate entanglements—for the minutes of the White House Energy Policy Development Group's private meetings. Walker likens the suit to a productivity-based pay scale he introduced at GAO to scare career bureaucrats back to work. "If I hadn't [sued Cheney], believe me, we would have been undercut in our ability to ensure accountability and transparency."

Walker served as the nation's top watchdog for 10 years, cutting short the standard 15-year term to become the inaugural head of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation. He left his strictly apolitical post in federal government on a mission he couldn't accomplish from an auditor's perch: "To get Congress and the president to make a meaningful downpayment on growing structural deficits." He helped produce the doom-and-gloomy deficit documentary *I.O.U.S.A.*—an indie hit in 2008—and wandered the country Cassandra-like, warning citizens about out-of-control spending and our runaway deficit.

"When I was comptroller general, I came with a charge to transform the agency, to turn it around and lead by example," Walker tells me. "And I did that." GAO's sprawl was smaller by a third when he left. Superfluous personnel had been removed or reassigned according to their actual service to the client, namely the Congress of the people of the United States. And with every move he's made since leaving the agency, Walker's hoped to persuade elected leaders to be equally responsible.

In 2010, he wrote *Comeback America*, asking Americans to tell their representatives to give up the debilitating addiction to big government. "It's still very relevant today," he tells the Rotarians at lunch, "though the numbers are much worse." With a tie-in Comeback America Initiative, backed by the likes of Pete Peterson, Ross Perot, and former Wyoming senator Alan Simpson, he toured the nation by bus calling for a new type of thrifty, accountable governance.

He may have traded the bus for an Audi and a seaside house in decaying Bridgeport. But in running for governor of Connecticut, the mission's the same. "In almost 30 years, Connecticut hasn't had a CEO that got it right," he says.

### TAX HIKES AND CORPORATE FLIGHT

Connecticut's traveled a rocky road with Republican governors. Lowell Weicker, a three-term Republican senator, gave Connecticut its first personal income tax with his 1991 post-recession budget. (To be fair, Weicker—who'd lost his Senate reelection bid in 1988—won the governorship as an independent.) And it was a Republican governor, John Rowland (1995-2004), who struck a long-term contract with public sector unions as a quick fix to balance a broken budget. In 1997, Rowland guaranteed unionized state employees' retirement and health care for 20 years in order to reallocate the hundreds of millions that would

have funded their benefits. Weicker and Rowland's 15 years in the Hartford governor's mansion dominate any diagnostic analysis of Connecticut's fall from fiscal grace.

Underfunded state employee pensions are hardly Connecticut's unique problem, points out Steve Eide, a Manhattan Institute fellow who's made a case study of Connecticut. The state's Republicans have not, historically, been "models of fiscal conservatism," he notes. But when the market crash punctured pension funds for states like Massachusetts and Rhode Island, they enacted structural reforms. Connecticut "resorted to tax increases in the wake of the Great Recession"—becoming so dependent on income-tax revenue that "to lose just a few hundred people, high earners, makes a noticeable difference." The Rowland contract—extended by Malloy—certainly hasn't helped, explains University of Connecticut economist Fred Carstensen: "It's meant union don't have to negotiate. They have their contract."

"It was irresponsible," Walker says of the contract, "and frankly mortgages the future of the state, as well as our young people." A shrinking demographic as it is: In the last 10 years, the median age in Connecticut has risen, while the population—particularly of those of childbearing age—has decreased.

In 1974, General Electric moved its headquarters from "Drop Dead"-era New York City to Connecticut, joining dozens of Fortune 500 campuses already nestled in clubby coastal Fairfield County, enjoying its low tax burden and top-notch public schools. GE would for decades be the town of Fairfield's single-largest taxpayer—but the county's wealth concentrates in Greenwich, commonly called the "Hedge Fund Capital of the World." In the 1990s, financial-management firms established sizable satellites in Fairfield County towns like Westport and New Canaan, drawing bankers away from Manhattan with lower taxes and a relaxed suburban life within reach of the city.

The expensive exurbs of the Northeast are out of fashion with millennials, who tend to have children later and, when they do settle for the picket fence, favor the metro areas of the warmer—and cheaper—Sun Belt. The highly educated millennials big banks compete to employ, moreover, prefer city living. But the modern distaste for the overpriced bucolic doesn't account for Fairfield County's decline: It is the predictable outcome of public-pension mismanagement, unsustainable income-tax hikes, and flagging infrastructure. In other words, it's Connecticut's turn to drop dead.

"In 2011, a lot of governors went the conservative route, Republicans and Democrats," recalls Suzanne Bates, policy director at Hartford's Yankee Institute for Public Policy.

"Revenues were down across the nation, but Dan Malloy said, 'I'm going to put out a progressive budget. I'm going to spend our way out of this recession.'" She blames "the greatest tax increases in state history" for Connecticut's bleak prospects: a \$2.5 billion tax increase in 2011, followed by a \$1.3 billion hike four years later. "We've only gained back 78 percent of the jobs we lost in the 2008 recession," and they're not the high-income ones that fed the growing state government in the early years of the Weicker income tax.

Ahead of the 2015 tax increase, which hit corporate income hard, Connecticut CEOs warned that they'd have no choice but to pack up and leave the former tax haven.

GE decamped for Boston in 2016. And in June, the 164-year-old Hartford-based health-insurance giant Aetna made known its plans to relocate, despite Malloy's pleas, to New York.

Walker recalls to the rapt crowd of New Canaanites his meeting with Aetna CEO Mark Bertolini early this year. "The first thing he said to me was, 'I cannot afford to die in this state.'" If you die within five years of having lived in Connecticut, he adds, the state government claims a chunk of your estate. "And only God knows when you're going to die." The pharmaceutical company

Alexion announced just after Labor Day that it would be moving its headquarters from New Haven to Boston.

"There's a sense of entitlement," explains Suzanne Bates, voicing a common criticism against a state that refuses to trim its excesses. "For a long time Fairfield County has been the gravy train for Connecticut. When the recession hit, that train stopped." And yet, just this spring, progressive Democrats in the legislature held a hearing on a bill to tax hedge funds' carried interest at 19 percent—not a vote, just a gesture of "good riddance" to the gravy train, as Bates puts it.

In early summer, Florida governor Rick Scott made a presentation to Connecticut's bankers, hedgies, and CEOs. Sunny, no-income-tax South Florida has a growing business sector for good reason. Connecticut attorney general George Jepsen explained in a midsummer opinion what Connecticut might have to do to turn back from the brink: unilaterally renege on contractually promised health care, pensions, and state employee pay. "If you want to fix Connecticut," Bates explains, "you're going to have to take on the unions in a way that's scary."

Jepsen is one of several Connecticut Democrats who've dodged what he calls the "misery" of running to succeed Malloy. So far the mayor of Middletown, Dan Drew, lately pegged with an ethics violation, and Bridgeport mayor Joseph Ganim—recently elected to his sixth term after



David M. Walker

a 10-year sabbatical, most of which was spent in a federal prison—lead a meager half-dozen serious candidates.

On the Republican side, Walker faces his toughest challenge from two mayors who've shot for statewide office before: the boyish Tim Herbst of Trumbull, whose voice quivers pubescently when we meet at the Reagan dinner, and Danbury's Mark Boughton, who believes he can lure Amazon's new headquarters to Connecticut. Walker, ever the grownup, talks up tax reform to keep job-makers in the state and tells voters dreary things like "the future is not manufacturing." Asked whether he would pitch Jeff Bezos,



*Waiting in line for groceries  
at the Greater Waterbury Interfaith Ministries*

he scoffed, "You cannot sell Connecticut with a straight face, not unless you do some of the things I'm talking about."

### **THE NERD CONNECTICUT NEEDS?**

"It's worse than you think it is," Walker tells the New Canaan audience—and rattles off numbers to back up what they already know: how far Connecticut has fallen. He's more interested in making this case than panning the opposition, he explains to Amy Wilkinson, who, after a lively question and answer session, sidles up and advises him to attack other candidates' shortcomings in his speeches. "There are plenty of people running for governor who are good people, and if the state were in good shape, they'd be fine, but the state's sinking."

A local financial planner, Bert Bowler, leans over to tell me none of this is news to him. He advises clients to steer clear of Connecticut. "As a practitioner, I cannot in good conscience tell anybody, 'You should move to Connecticut.' No way."

Fairfield-based real-estate mogul William Raveis agrees. He didn't touch state politics until he met Walker: "Mismanagement from Rowland to Malloy screwed up a great state. Now you can't not get involved." Raveis and another local real-estate executive, Bob Scinto, talked Walker into running for governor. Scinto sees his wealthy clients fleeing to Florida and a stagnant market in which,

simply, "No one is looking for space." There were those, even two or three years ago, who dismissed a depressed real-estate market and steepening tax rate as a survivable blip—but no more. "Everyone gets it now," Scinto says.

Never much of a partisan, Walker was a founding member of the advocacy group No Labels—"Results Over Rhetoric, Ideas Before Ideology" he riffs on their high-minded alliterative taglines—along with former Connecticut senator Joe Lieberman, whom he called for counsel when considering whether to run for Malloy's job. First, though, he called the former governor of Indiana, Mitch Daniels, who led the Office of Management and Budget while Walker was at GAO. Both voted yea. "Connecticut obviously needs a new one, and he'd be a huge improvement on the status quo," Daniels says when I ask him whether Walker would be a good governor. "He has all the right instincts and knowledge. We need more people like him running."

At an evening fundraiser just uphill from his Bridgeport home, Walker stands on a piano bench on the terrace and barnstorms. He's got a three-point plan to turn around their ship of state: "To restore our cities, we need to be business-friendly, not business-adversarial. That's day one. But we've also got to restore integrity—a word you don't hear enough from politicians in the state and local governments. We need to toughen conflict of interest laws, and we need to kick convicted felons out of public office." (Both John Rowland, the former governor, and Bridgeport mayor Joe Ganim have done jail time for corruption.) "They shouldn't be able to run again!" Walker insists, and the crowd goes wild.

But they haven't even heard the best part: step three, balance the budget. "Connecticut ratified a constitutional spending cap back in 1992 in order to constrain spending in the face of the new income tax, which provided a new stream of revenue," Walker says. "But it's never been operationalized." With cities Bridgeport, Hartford, and Waterbury lurching toward bankruptcy, he notes: "We've got to force these municipalities to restructure their finances."

Tonight's hostess is Ashley Sikora, a communications consultant. She restored the 15,000-square-foot Georgian mansion where we're gathered after it had lain derelict for nearly a decade. "When we moved here, the floors were buckling and there were animals living in the chimneys," but, even with her husband and his brother and parents sharing the burden, raising three children in a high-tax city in a high-tax state is "really hard."

She needs Connecticut restored if they're going to stay. "It's very difficult to have a passion for a house and have a passion for a city and have a passion for a state, but not know that you can be there securely." Sikora's no Republican stalwart but an issue voter, and few of her guests tonight have come purely for party politics. Walker has won their support as an honest accountant in a field of professional

SPENCER PLATT / GETTY IMAGES

politicians and perennial candidates. “We met him down at the local market,” remembers Sikora, “and said, ‘We love your background. What can we do to help?’”

### A CARPETBAGGER’S UPHILL CLIMB

Walker has one particularly difficult fight ahead of him. The state that gave us the cotton gin, the submarine, and the Colt .45 did not produce David M. Walker. He was born in Alabama, educated in Florida, and only moved to Bridgeport in 2010. From the crumbling city he calls home and the metropolitan suburbs that fund his campaign’s early steps to the land east of the Connecticut River, where gun rights decide Republican primaries—it’s 169 towns, no county seats, and countless states of mind, united in little more than anxiety about a plummeting economic outlook. But they are all Connecticut.

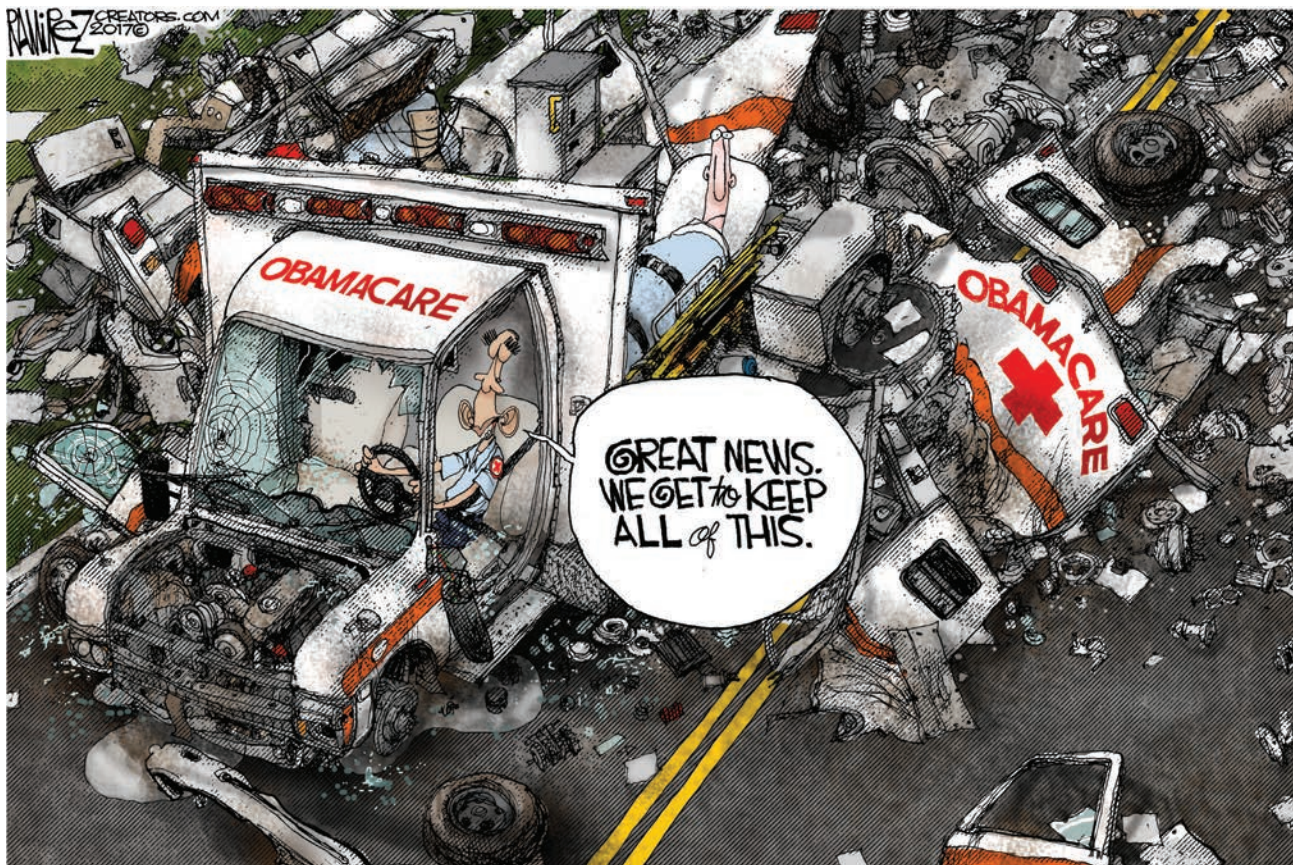
“My wife and I, we’re not from here,” he admits, as though his Southern accent hadn’t given it away. He and Mary met as college students in Jacksonville and have mostly lived in the suburbs of Washington. “We chose Connecticut, but not having family here, unless things change, it doesn’t make sense for us to stay here. We’ve decided to fight rather than flee.”

Veteran *Hartford Courant* columnist Kevin Rennie, a

conservative who’s covered Connecticut politics for 15 years, isn’t convinced the state needs carpetbagging candidates. He further scoffs at a non-politician’s chances in a very political race. “What’s that got to do with Connecticut?” he asks when I describe Walker’s national deficit hawkery. Every other candidate has a story that ties him to the sinking state.

After the Reagan dinner, driving downcountry through the dark—“It’s beautiful in the daytime, but you can’t see shinola during the night,” Walker says of the winding, wooded highways—we weigh his chances as a Southerner new to electoral politics. “Some of the best governors we’ve ever had,” he says, “some of whom turned out to be presidents, the first job they ever got elected to was governor, and they weren’t born in the state they got elected in.” Look who was honored here tonight!” he adds, exuberantly remembering that son of Illinois who called him to Washington—the two-term reform governor of California who became our 40th president.

The Walkers become more Connecticut every year they see their taxes climb and their house depreciate and balk at the cost of staying—inconceivable, unless a real reformer takes the state’s reins. He’s honest enough to admit it doesn’t have to be him. In 2018, the reach to justify not leaving Connecticut may just define a native. ♦



# After Netanyahu

*He won't be Israel's prime minister forever*

BY NEIL ROGACHEVSKY

With police intensifying their long-running corruption probes, Israel is awash with speculation that Benjamin Netanyahu's days as prime minister may be numbered. Opponents—both within the Likud party and without—have been organizing. Sensing the danger, Netanyahu and his allies have fought back, organizing pro-Netanyahu rallies and events. Gleeful critics have taken to gaming the possibilities for a successor if the man known simply as Bibi is forced from office.

Could scandal really take down Netanyahu? The outcome is impossible to predict. There are multiple police investigations. One centers on a recorded conversation in which Netanyahu is alleged to have asked a prominent newspaper publisher for favorable coverage. Perhaps the recent American experience should have taught him it would be better to simply do this every day on Twitter. Another focuses on alleged “gifts” received, such as cigars and free services performed for his private residence, allegedly at his wife's behest. More remote but possibly more dangerous is an investigation involving the state purchase of German submarines.

At this stage, it is worth bearing in mind that Netanyahu has been considered finished very often over the years: in 1999, ousted after a difficult first term at the hands of a Labor party led by Ehud Barak; in 2006, as the Likud party nearly crumbled after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon left it to form Kadima; most recently, in the days before the 2015 elections when his party badly trailed the center-left coalition Zionist Union. Time and again, Netanyahu has bounced back and more, managing to gain the upper hand in the brutal trials of Israeli politics, said to have been compared by George W. Bush to a “den of sharks.” Even if he does not achieve the feat of being the longest-serving Israeli prime minister—he is currently second on the list—Netanyahu already holds a pile of electoral records. He is the only prime minister to have led his party to four election victories (1996, 2009, 2013, and 2015) and to three in a row. In his ability to remain on top, Netanyahu most closely resembles

Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, who led the pre-state Yishuv and then Israel proper through its foundation in 1948 until 1963, with only a short interregnum.

At home and abroad, Netanyahu inspires no small amount of strong passions. To his critics, he is an obstructionist cynic, a roadblock to peace and progress. To his greatest supporters, he has been seen as Israel's first American-style conservative leader, a proponent of free markets and a strong national defense. After so many years, there is a sense that Israelis simply tolerate him as the safest and most acceptable choice among the plausible alternatives. Whatever one thinks of him, however, Netanyahu's premiership has been one of the most consequential in Israeli history—and for a reason one might not expect. Compared with the tenures of almost of all his predecessors, Netanyahu's premiership has seemed remarkably *uneventful*. The hallmarks of Israel under Netanyahu have been strength and stability. A poorly made film about the history of Israel that tormented Jewish day-school students throughout the 1990s was called *Never a Dull Moment*. Netanyahu's premiership since the late 2000s has, uniquely in Israeli history, featured some dull moments.

Quietude in Israel cannot be measured by the standards of, say, Switzerland. There have been plenty of bumps: bursts of violent conflict with the Palestinians, tensions stemming from unresolved issues of religion and state such as the one currently bubbling about prayer at the Western Wall, difficult strategic questions about an expansionist Iran, and differing challenges with the United States, Europe, Russia, Turkey, and the Arab countries. Yet some historical perspective is in order. The biggest military engagement of Netanyahu's time—the 2014 Gaza war—was small compared with previous wars and battles, including with Gaza. The reason it was small was that Netanyahu and the defense minister at the time, Moshe Ya'alon, did everything in their power to limit the war by setting modest strategic objectives. The still-ongoing spate of knife and car-ramming attacks—sometimes referred to as the “social media” Intifada—cannot compare in intensity or scale to the Second Intifada (2000-2005), in which over 1,100 Israelis were killed and more than 8,000 wounded.

Meanwhile, over the course of Netanyahu's rule, the country has enjoyed either very strong or better than average economic growth. When other Western countries

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sputtered in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, Israel grew at 4 to 5 percent a year. A left-wing economic populist movement in the summer of 2011, motivated by high housing and food costs, has if not been diffused at least been limited.

In the realm of diplomacy, Israel seems to have weathered a particularly rough period in its relations with Washington. The Europe-Israel relationship continues to decline, though most Israelis have concluded there's little that might be done on that front and that relations with the East are more significant. And Netanyahu's "pivot to Asia" has been extremely well executed, the most recent sign of which was the visit of Narendra Modi to Israel this past July, the first by an Indian prime minister.

Netanyahu's mastery of the political scene has made it difficult for friends—and detractors—to think concretely about a post-Bibi Israel. "It's very hard to imagine Israel after Netanyahu," a pro-Netanyahu state prosecutor recently told me. "He sees three steps ahead, and others don't." At 67, Netanyahu is still a spring chicken by Israeli political standards. The parliamentary system has no built-in term limits. If he beats the current corruption charges, it's not impossible he could win a fourth straight term when the next election comes. Yet there are signs everywhere that he will be fighting an uphill battle. After electing the purported centrist Avi Gabbay in its July primaries, the long-moribund Labor party appears to have picked up some steam, and recent polls that include a Gabbay-led Labor imply that any election would be close. Meanwhile, there are rumors that some prominent figures in Likud have concluded that it's time for Netanyahu to step aside.

More serious, perhaps, than the scandals is what might be called administration fatigue. The legacy of an extended run is not all happy. Having been in power for so long, Netanyahu has built up a list of "ex-friends" long enough to impress even Norman Podhoretz. Having run through many of the most competent ministers and administrators in his previous terms, Netanyahu increasingly has had to rely either on untested neophytes or apparatchiks who have weathered long years of power without distinguishing themselves. Case in point: Netanyahu has been unable to find a trustworthy defense minister since the resignation

of the very sound Moshe Ya'alon in May 2016. And he has, again in the manner of David Ben-Gurion, had to hold multiple portfolios himself.

As Niall Ferguson shows in his recent biography of Henry Kissinger, exercising political power burns and consumes intellectual capital without replenishing it. Over time, the principles that initially serve a leader well can morph into implacability and political blindness. Netanyahu has not yet exhibited symptoms of these maladies—this is a great credit to him. But the disease has felled many statesmen. A worrying parallel for Netanyahu might be Margaret Thatcher's final years in office. Having been so adroit previously, she became rigid and distant. And her ability to manage her cabinet and move her voters was seriously hampered. Having vanquished so many political foes over the years, Netanyahu might rightly believe that he does not currently face a challenge from an adequately competent or charismatic rival. But of course John Major was neither of these things himself—and yet the British Conservative party went with him (and went down with him) anyway.

While it's far too soon to close the book on Netanyahu, we are now in a position to offer some preliminary reflections on his time in office and what might be coming next. Doing so, I believe, points to the unique character of Netanyahu's approach to politics, his strong record, and the difficulty of predicting what might follow.

It is hard to think of Netanyahu as anything but a man of the Likud party. Indeed, the Revisionist Zionism that once stood as the basis of the Likud party was in a way the birthright of Netanyahu. His father Benzion, who died in 2012 at 102, had been for a time the secretary of the Revisionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Benzion Netanyahu was not just an ordinary Revisionist (if such a thing could exist): He was one of the deepest and most interesting theorists of Revisionist Zionist thought, penning important books on Jewish history and underappreciated essays on Zionist intellectual history, which should themselves be viewed as important texts in the history of Zionism. This was the faith in which the Netanyahu children were all raised. Yet there are major differences between these ideas, Netanyahu's politics and ideas, and the typical Likud politics today.



*At a Memorial Day ceremony in 2013*

The principles of what one might call Netanyahuism are as follows: a strong, though cautious; policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians and foreign policy more generally; economic neoliberalism where possible and practicable; and the middle ground and compromises on social questions, particularly religion and state. They are a politics of moderation that fit well with what Jabotinsky called *hadar* (literally “magisterialism”), a kind of enlightened or princely statesmanship.

To wit, to the extent that they have recognized Netanyahu’s approach, his sharpest (and it must be admitted most perceptive) critics have often deemed it to be overly cautious and lacking in Israelichutzpah. The most ardent free marketers complain that his reforms have been too slow and too few and that his economic reform agenda lost steam following 2011. National security hawks can complain that his words have been much louder than his actions, especially toward Iran. These claims are not without merit. But an honest assessment of Netanyahu’s record would have to admit that his caution bespeaks a kind of common sense and moderation sorely lacking in many countries these days and often absent from Israeli history.

This combination of moderation and common sense has run through most of Netanyahu’s major decisions. In military affairs, Netanyahu has been willing to act decisively but has always set limited, concrete objectives. In the 2014 Gaza war, he resisted calls from hawkish members of his coalition to continue fighting until Israel had completely eviscerated Gaza’s tunnel network and replaced its government, as if Israel would have had a plan for what to do next. As Syria began to collapse in 2011, Netanyahu articulated a clear policy: reserving the right to intervene when Israel’s vital interests are threatened by weapons transfers or otherwise but avoiding direct political involvement. He has stuck with this policy throughout. On the Palestinian front, while paying mandatory attention to international efforts towards the creation of a Palestinian state, he has mostly opted to build up the Palestinian economy, ease tensions where possible, and avoid the birth of a second state that would be dominated by Israel’s enemies as Gaza is today. Iranian aggression has prompted tough rhetoric. Indeed, Netanyahu vociferously lobbied against the Iran deal, not so much because he thought he could stop it as in the belief that when the deal inevitably fails, Israel will have maintained credibility by having opposed it from the start. Still, to this point, Netanyahu has largely opted for diplomatic and clandestine efforts against the Iranian regime.

Netanyahuism has often sat uneasily with Likud voters—to say nothing of other right-leaning voters who are generally within the party’s orbit but support smaller parties like the national-religious Bayit Yehudi or Jewish-nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu. On military matters, many

Likudniks are inclined to favor a scorched-earth doctrine. This was most flagrantly and dangerously touted by the onetime Netanyahu ally Naftali Bennett in the 2014 Gaza war, during which he pushed for greater tactical action without a seeming strategic objective. There is an echo of this in the defense establishment’s view that Netanyahu needed either to accept the Obama administration’s Iran deal—or stage a massively risky strike against Iran, venturing as much as half of the air force and most of Israel’s modern aircraft in the process.

Similarly, many Likud members have sought to decide questions of foreign policy and alliance solely on the basis of national pride, even if doing so would be to Israel’s disadvantage. This has included calls from the right to refuse to renew relations with Turkey in 2016 even as Turkey changed its policy and found itself in need of better relations with Israel (and open to importing Israeli natural gas). Similarly, it has included a desire to poison a potential opening with the Gulf states by voicing criticisms of their religious customs and rules. Netanyahu has largely kept these tendencies bottled up.

Finally, many Likud coalition members have spent their time attempting to ignite various culture wars on religious and social questions. There have been efforts to censor the theater, regulate the news industry, and ever-present initiatives to inflame secular-religious tensions over education subsidies. Whatever the merits of such cultural battles, this is bait that Netanyahu has studiously avoided taking.

On economic issues, Netanyahu has been the country’s foremost advocate for liberalization, undoing socialist-era regulations that stifle growth and innovation. He has scored some successes in this domain, though admittedly most came when he was finance minister under Ariel Sharon from 2003 to 2005. This liberalization has not been libertarian, though. Israel depends on massive state subsidies and state-brokered R&D in many sectors, and Netanyahu has only cautiously dialed these back, if at all. Moreover, he has often pointed out that he can push liberalization only so far because the core constituencies of Likud and the Israeli right are by no means partisans of free markets. For instance, current finance minister Moshe Kahlon spun out of Likud a party called Kulanu that promises lower consumer prices via increased state regulation of banking, housing, and supermarkets. As with all other political parties in Israel, regulation remains the reflexive impulse on the right. Often seen in the West as a kind of Orthodox neoconservative, Naftali Bennett fits the statist mold as well and has supported a high minimum wage and what would amount to byzantine price controls.

A common charge against Netanyahu is that he lacks the courage to act decisively and then claims afterwards that there was no alternative. In yielding to the

ultra-Orthodox religious authorities' desire that there be no non-Orthodox prayer space near the Western Wall, he claimed he either had to accede to the ultra-Orthodox position or see his government, which relies on ultra-Orthodox coalition partners, tumble. If this was an excuse, it happens to be a true one. It is no different from his concessions to Kahlon's Kulanu party on any number of their misguided economic schemes. Or his willingness to continue to pay into the education systems managed by the ultra-Orthodox parties. Or his acceptance of the populist Yesh Atid party's demand to enforce the conscription of Orthodox men in 2014—and his reversal on this issue in 2015 as coalition dynamics changed.

Is this conciliatory tendency a flaw? In general, one can say that Netanyahu has managed the difficult feat of avoiding and defusing the extremes that always threaten to tear democracies apart. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, was, or at least claimed to be, a great reader of Thucydides. I do not know if Netanyahu has read him. What that great depicter of democracy shows is that popular governments wildly vacillate between the desire to turn inward and abandon all responsibilities or else conduct various holy wars at home and abroad. From these dual temptations, Israel, as close to a pure democracy as there is anywhere in the world, has been far from immune. Netanyahu has managed to temper fanaticism of all kinds, secular, religious, and military. This can be seen by the fact that his main rivals are not from the center or left but from the far right: populists in the Likud party and the splinter parties whose bases they seek to capture.

At the same time, Israel has quietly prospered. Anyone who visits today will find the average Israeli—Jewish and non-Jewish—richer, more cultivated, worldly, and religiously literate than he or she was a generation ago. The country is still a long way from becoming the truly liberal polity envisioned by the elder Netanyahu's mentor, Jabotinsky. In a subtle but clear way, Netanyahu has helped push the country in this direction.

Will Netanyahuism survive beyond the man's tenure in office? This question is murky as he has few if any real disciples. Reagan had Reaganites; Thatcher had Thatcherites; even Tony Blair had Blairites. It's hard to conceive that Netanyahu will have such followers. This, however, is not necessarily a bad thing, as the question of the merits

of disciples is as vexed in politics as in the world of ideas. Do not disciples corrupt as much as carry the flame? Disciples can sustain the example of a character worthy of emulation, yet they can also lack the ability to adapt to new circumstances. As in so many other things, the example of Abraham Lincoln is perhaps the happiest one. He did not produce political disciples who carried his platform forward after his death, but his example inspired the wisest stewards of American government for decades.

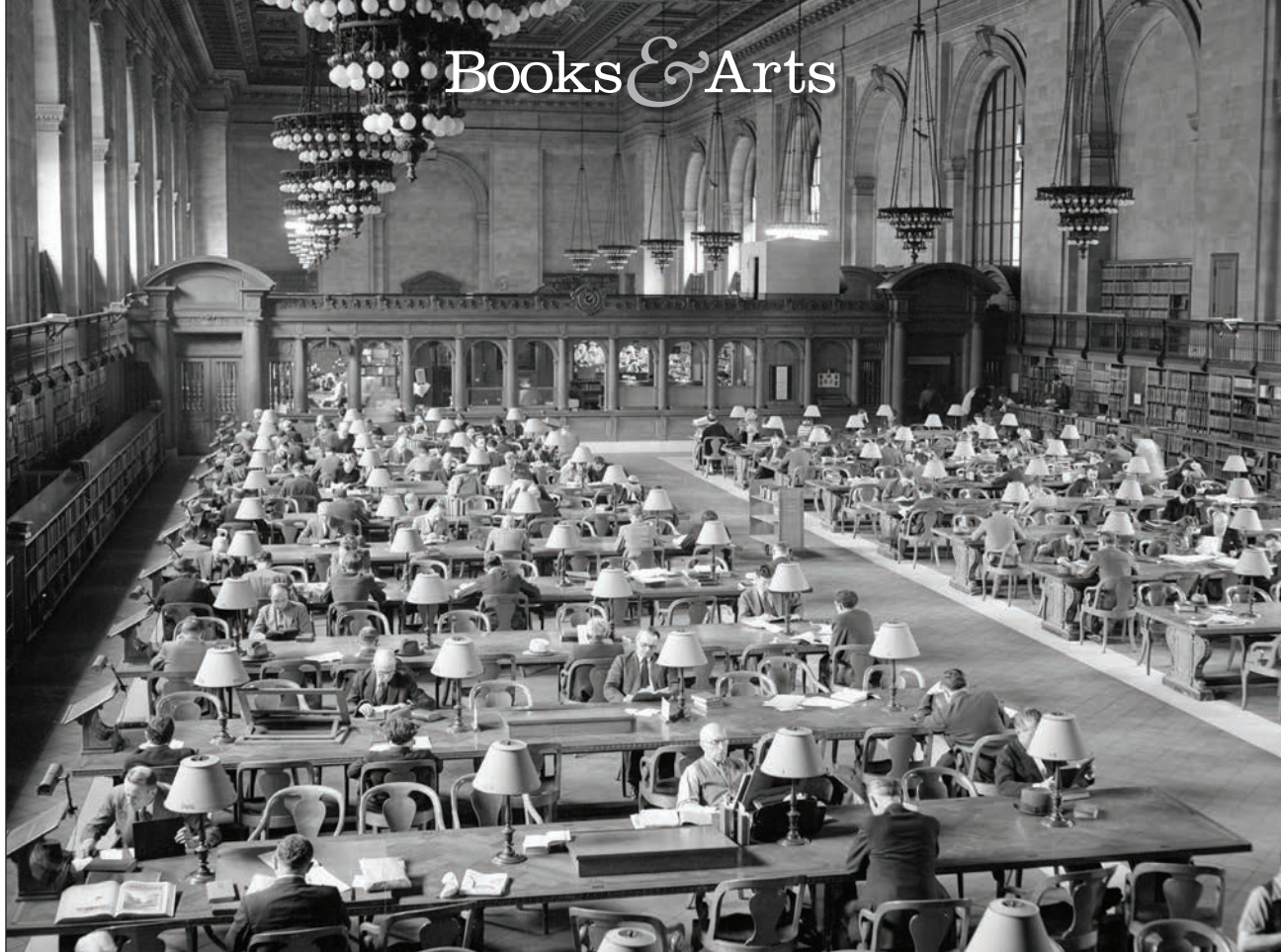
There are people with potential political futures in Israel who embody something of Netanyahu's moderation. Though he recently fell out with Netanyahu himself, Moshe Ya'alon has consistently shown excellent judgment in matters of war and peace. Yet his competence in other areas is in doubt and his rhetoric since his split from Netanyahu has been extremely grave—perhaps too much so to garner meaningful popular support. In Likud circles, Gideon Sa'ar is frequently invoked as a possible successor to Netanyahu. While projecting an air of strength, however, he has not exhibited the breadth of diplomatic and policy substance that Netanyahu exhibited prior to his ascent. Yisrael Katz, the Knesset member who most closely resembles an American “machine politician,” might actually present an attractive option given the alternatives.

As for the current opposition, both the “Macron-like” businessman Avi Gabbay and the former television host Yair Lapid have some virtues. Neither inspires much confidence as a potential prime minister. The Likud party has some other colorful figures, but many are more reminiscent of ideologically committed party activists than of statesmen in waiting. As a scholar of Israeli history and sometime resident, I find little comfort in thinking about the figures that may be waiting in the wings.

The true record of Netanyahu's tenure is beginning to come into view. It is one of economic growth, diplomatic moderation, and relative social cohesion amidst a fanatical age, both in the Middle East but also elsewhere in the world. Netanyahu will likely leave behind the strongest and most firmly rooted Jewish state ever to appear in the world. This would give him a claim, however improbable it may sound, to be counted along with Ben-Gurion as one of Israel's great statesmen. But historical reputation also depends on what comes after. And no one can yet say whether he will one day look back on his political career and have to conclude, *Après moi, le déluge*. ♦



Netanyahu with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2002



The room now known as the Rose Main Reading Room in the New York Public Library's main branch, circa 1950

# What Are Libraries For?

*Balancing the needs of scholars and the public inside a storied New York institution.* BY TIM MARKATOS

As I was leaving the theater after a screening of Frederick Wiseman's *Ex Libris: The New York Public Library*, the friend I watched it with turned to me and observed, "For a documentary about a library, that movie didn't have a whole lot to say about books."

It's true that an institution as large and storied as the NYPL could furnish a half-dozen documentaries about everything from its identity as a vanguard public-private partnership to the architecture of its buildings before even reaching the topic of its holdings—

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some 8.7 million items in circulation, if you count ebooks, music, and movies along with physical tomes. This particular movie's relative booklessness is noteworthy precisely because, at three-and-a-quarter hours, *Ex Libris* practically runs as long as a half-dozen shorter documentaries. If a movie of such great length isn't asking us to think so much about the holdings of the library, then what *is* the point it's trying to make? Par for the course with Fred Wiseman.

For 50 years, Wiseman has been making documentaries on shoestring budgets with small crews, focusing on institutions—everything from a Massachusetts insane asylum, in the famously

censored *Titicut Follies*, to, more recently, New York City's Jackson Heights neighborhood and Britain's National Gallery. His movies range in duration from an hour long to six, with the majority falling somewhere around the three-and-a-half-hour mark. Whatever any of his movies might promise in trailers or synopses is usually a far cry from what Wiseman is actually invested in exploring. "What is this place and what happens here?" is only answered indirectly by the movies he sculpts around the questions that really guide his enterprise: What are the mechanics of this institution? Who uses it? To whose benefit? How is it changing? Who wants it to change? Who here thinks

BETTMANN / GETTY

they have power? Who actually does?

The answers to these questions, as Wiseman's movies universally demonstrate, are complicated and unpredictable, so it's especially ironic that *Ex Libris* opens on Richard Dawkins of all people. Dawkins is giving a talk in the lobby of the NYPL's iconic Beaux-Arts Stephen A. Schwarzman Building on 42nd Street, or rather he's giving his usual spiel on science and religion to an audience that fills the foyer. He insists that the real problem with religion isn't stupidity (though plenty of religious people, he assures his listeners, are stupid without a doubt) but ignorance. Education is the road out of ignorance toward truth, to which Dawkins pledges his fealty ("I think I'd call myself a lover of truth"). The woman moderating this talk presses Dawkins to define what truth means to him; the bromide he offers in breathless and confident reply is swallowed up by the three hours of filmmaking that follow.

Not a moment is wasted in *Ex Libris*: Every scene is in conversation with every other scene. From that Dawkinsian preamble, Wiseman cuts around to a dozen or so of the NYPL's 88 libraries and 4 research centers, with recurring visits to the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center at Lincoln Center and the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library; he features speakers both known (Elvis Costello, Ta-Nehisi Coates) and unknown (a dyspeptic young man presenting his research on the delicatessen as the hub of Jewish life in old New York, an audiobook recorder whose voice was obviously made for his profession); he peers in on roundtable discussions both public and private. In that last is a series of eight or so conversations between NYPL board members and librarians about digitization and funding for the library, paced gradually throughout the film and culminating in an end-of-fiscal-year meeting to denote the passage of time in the labyrinth into which Wiseman lures us.

At one turn in the maze we're watching behind-the-scenes footage of archivists at the Library Services Cen-

ter as they photograph old manuscripts for the digital collections. At another we're joining in a dance class for senior citizens. Wherever Wiseman takes us, we see the ideas that motivate him—the relationship between language and politics and technology, the limits of education and what does and doesn't further its reach, the need for innovation and imagination to repackage old stories and truths for new audiences—and we're gently invited to play along. If all of this sounds grueling or overbearingly moralistic, you would need to be familiar with Wiseman's homebrew of magic to understand why *Ex Libris* is anything but.



A girl builds a Lego robot in the NYPL's Westchester Square branch.

My first exposure to Wiseman's work came only a few years ago when I caught his 2013 documentary *At Berkeley* on television. Because Wiseman finances his documentaries largely independently and distributes them through his own company, Zipporah Films, viewing any of his 40-odd projects can be difficult. (Individuals can purchase DVDs of any of his films through the Zipporah website, though that assumes a level of trust in what you're plunking down \$20 for.) Occasionally one of them will show up on PBS's *Independent Lens* (PBS has provided funding for many of Wiseman's films).

Clocking in at four hours and four minutes, *At Berkeley* has a runtime that in other contexts could fairly be described as punishing. A certain kind of viewer will know almost

immediately—from the long takes of philosophy instructors leading class discussions that jump-cut to exterior shots of janitors cleaning pedestrian walkways—if he has the mettle for this kind of stuff. Give Wiseman even 15 minutes of your attention, though, and you can quickly find yourself giving him hours. So it went with me as I sat, transfixed, through *At Berkeley* for two-and-a-half hours before noticing where the time had gone, and so it was with the couple seated next to me for *Ex Libris*. They came on a whim to see *At Berkeley* when its tour brought it to D.C. four years ago; planning on staying for only half of the film, they found themselves sitting rapt through the end and came back this year to reprise the experience with Wiseman's latest.

A Wiseman film works on you slowly and imperceptibly. He never stages interviews, interposes B-roll that he hasn't filmed himself, or identifies speakers with onscreen titles. Music is used sparingly and almost exclusively diegetically. Sometimes he edits scenes as though they were narrative material and not living documents, cutting up and splicing speech to achieve rhythmic interest or to draw out the most salient points of a conversation. At other times, he lets a scene run for five full minutes (or longer) without any edits at all, directing us to find interest in what we're watching simply because Wiseman's camera has bothered recording it. He films speakers from the same focal length, with the same audio quality, with the same kinds of camera angles. In a Wiseman film, it doesn't matter if you're Richard Dawkins or a circulation-desk librarian in the Bronx: Everyone is on an equal footing, as deserving of our attention as anyone else.

*Ex Libris* uses a poetic structure similar to that Wiseman employs in both *At Berkeley* and 2015's *In Jackson Heights*. The repeating pattern—(1) exterior establishing shot of a new branch of the library, (2) interior establishing shot, (3) speaker, and (4) cutaway to interlocutor or related inanimate object—helps to structure the film and to hold our attention the way that a dexterous rhyme scheme

does. In *Ex Libris*, Wiseman returns most frequently to the Schwarzman Building in mid-Manhattan and uses his footage of the staff and board meetings that happen there as refrains to mark the passage of seasons. For punctuation, Wiseman intersperses musical performances, still shots of the library's holdings—mostly art and periodicals, though the Gutenberg Bible's appearance some two hours into the movie is prominent as one of the only times a physical book is the subject of a scene—and interludes of library technicians and staff performing the roles that make the whole system run.

The formula doesn't grow stale because it leaves plenty of room for surprise, both in terms of what Wiseman might cut to at any given moment (a Day of the Dead parade, a hands-on lesson in how to read Braille) or what personalities might wander on camera. The surge of recognition we have whenever someone famous turns up (hello, Patti Smith!) is second to the lightning that strikes when we meet the anonymous characters who are more central to the day-to-day life of the library. A job fair at one of the NYPL's Bronx branches gives a momentary soapbox to an enthusiastic career coach whose power of rhetoric rivals any of the more celebrated public speakers who show up onscreen; the patrons who participate in a town hall at the Macomb's Bridge branch in Harlem are as passionate and articulate in explaining the obstacles to improving education in an underprivileged minority community as any of the scholars lecturing about educational disparities and systemic racism to better-off patrons in mid-Manhattan.

A documentary filmmaker doesn't just fall upon all these gems without putting real effort into finding them. Wiseman and his cameraman film on location for 8 to 12 weeks, capturing several hundred hours of footage, which Wiseman then spends the ensuing months editing by himself down to a three- or four-hour-long movie. The editing room is where Wiseman finds the movie—or rather where the movie finds itself. Amusingly, Wiseman describes his process as “highly

rational and perhaps nonrational. Part of it is deductive, part of it is associative, and part of it is mysterious. I don't know that I'm aware of all aspects of it, and I'm not sure I want to be aware of all aspects of it.”

**A**n existential question underlies *Ex Libris*: What are libraries for? Librarians and library patrons alike have been asking this at least since the rise of the Internet and the promise (and peril) it brings of digitization and rapid access to all the world's knowledge. An hour into the film, architect Francine Houben takes the floor at a master-planning forum for the Schwarzman Building and presents a pertinent thesis: “For me, libraries are not just about books. That's what a lot of people think, that it's a storage space for books. No, libraries are about people who want knowledge delivered to them.”

If we accept this definition, then we're left with a corollary question: Which people are most deserving of the knowledge a library has on offer? One philosophy might hold that a library's principal duty is to serve the work of serious scholars. In this view, the library's resources ought to be allocated toward building up the institution as a physical repository of civilizational wisdom, a hub for transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. A competing camp will maintain that the library's primary function is decidedly more democratic. Libraries exist to further the enlightenment and well-being of the public; it's less important that a library's stacks be comprehensive than that its spaces extend equality of access to everyone, regardless of class or profession. For many libraries, this problem resolves itself. The Library of Congress and many university libraries fit almost purely into the first category; most local public libraries are comfortable fitting into the second.

The NYPL is in a much more difficult situation, and its attempts to reconcile the differing needs of its users—from researchers working with the special collections at its Bryant Park branch to families with young children in the Bronx—have some-

times been controversial. The Central Library Plan, a 2012 proposal that would have, among other things, closed two branches and relocated millions of books from the NYPL's flagship Manhattan edifice to a storage facility in New Jersey was met with such vehement opposition, especially from scholars, that the plan was abandoned in 2014. These days, as we learn from the board meetings throughout *Ex Libris*, the NYPL administration has turned its attention to expanding the library's digital collections and capabilities to better serve its patrons and address larger problems of access to technology while leaving its physical stacks more or less unchanged.

A still more urgent question emerges from the scenes that Wiseman fills in around these administrative meetings. Insofar as a library is a repository of knowledge, whether it exists in a physical book or in the cloud, it's also an arbiter of knowledge—and, for that matter, truth. Context is especially important for determining whether a library is fulfilling its duties responsibly. A research library with the complete works of Marx in circulation isn't doing as great a service to truth-seekers as it might think it is if it doesn't also carry volumes of homilies by the early church fathers on wealth and poverty. Likewise, a seminary library stocked with all of the latest New Atheist literature but not a single book by Nietzsche is poorly equipped to teach anyone about belief and unbelief.

For the NYPL, context is often a question of socioeconomic status and racial inequality. The frequent trips *Ex Libris* takes to NYPL branches in Harlem and the Bronx show us how librarians and volunteers there micro-manage and advocate on behalf of their neighborhoods, to ensure that even the most underprivileged New Yorkers have as much access to truth- and soul-affirming resources as any of the wealthier patrons we see in the lower Manhattan libraries. The truth, as former Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture director Khalil Gibran Muhammad offhandedly tells an audience at the Macomb's Bridge branch, is complicated. They don't need to be

reminded, but perhaps some of Wiseman's viewers do.

The problem with many documentaries these days is that filmmaker and viewer alike treat them like vaccinations. You watch the new movie about the injustice *du jour* (police brutality, animal cruelty, inequality of opportunity in education) and you're effectively inoculated against having to think any more about the subject or do anything about it. You saw the movie so now you're educated, end of story. The results-oriented moviemaker, meanwhile, tosses in a URL at the end of the film or flashes a hashtag to help spread the word on social media and counts himself blessed if even 5 percent of all viewers follow through on the call to activism.

This is never the case with Wiseman's films. If their absurd-seeming runtimes are good for one thing in particular, it's for instilling humility in the face of the inherent complexity of human beings and their institutions. Three hours with the NYPL is barely enough to scratch the surface of all that goes on in and around its stacks, meeting rooms, lecture halls, phone centers, and trash rooms. One might fear that this kind of filmmaking would produce a depressing epistemological pessimism, paralyzing us in the face of more knowledge and context than we could ever hope fully to understand. Instead, we are galvanized by the joy of discovery, of truths previously unknown to us and of our own limitations—which, it turns out, might not be so bad after all.

A more didactic documentary could not provide the effective education a Wiseman movie offers. He surprises us by showing us things we never knew we didn't know, whether as perceptible as the day-to-day interactions of people from different socioeconomic backgrounds with their libraries or as secretive as the system of conveyor belts that returns library books to circulation. By inviting us to spend so much time with a single subject, he helps us see the larger picture of the systems we normally experience unthinkingly.

In the final scene of *Ex Libris*, porcelain artist Edmund de Waal refer-

ences a line of Primo Levi's that's germane to the movie as a whole. In de Waal's paraphrase: "The manner of what we make defines us." In the case of the NYPL, the technologies and habits the institution has embraced speak to a mission of offering access to human knowledge across neighborhoods and generations. Whether the system *works* as best as it could

isn't for Wiseman to say. Wiseman observes, he curates, and he juxtaposes, but he never forces a conclusion on his viewer. Applying Levi's words to Wiseman himself, the curiosity, humanism, and democratizing spirit he brings to his films mark him as not just a great filmmaker, of which we have plenty, but a much rarer and more valuable thing: a great teacher. ♦

BCA

## Norma-tivity

*The Met's season opener raises questions about civilization and relativism.* BY NICHOLAS M. GALLAGHER



Joyce DiDonato as Adalgisa and Sondra Radvanovsky in the title role of *Norma*

What does it do to casually assumed theories of cultural equality if a civilization is founded on the idea that the gods require the ritualized butchering of human beings? When Mel Gibson released his twilight-of-the-Maya epic *Apocalypto* in 2006, some scholars of Mayan culture felt that the film's gory depictions of human sacrifice implied the Maya were so "crazed and blood-thirsty" that they belonged "to a civilization that deserves to die." Can it be that, because of their bloody ways, some civilizations were—

are?—not only worthy of condemnation but also fundamentally incompatible with modernity? Do they therefore "deserve to die"?

This uncomfortable question hovers just in the background of Vincenzo Bellini's 1831 opera *Norma*, a new production of which, by Sir David McVicar, just opened the 133rd season of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Set in Gaul at the end of the Gallic Wars, *Norma* tells the story of two druid priestesses, the eponymous Norma (Sondra Radvanovsky) and Adalgisa (Joyce DiDonato). Pollione (Joseph Calleja) is a Roman proconsul who's got all the moves, and he's used them to woo not one but two of the

Nicholas M. Gallagher writes on opera, culture, and politics from New York.

powerful, virginal priestesses. When it comes time for Pollione to return to Rome, and he has to choose whom to take with him, his double-act falls apart. When he asks the younger, Adalgisa, to come with him, both women discover his secret. But Adalgisa abandons her lover to stick by her friend. Norma is so demented with grief that she tries to bring herself to kill first her children with Pollione, then Pollione, then Adalgisa.

Meanwhile, tensions have been mounting for one of the last spasms of Gallic revolt against the Roman yoke. Though hints about “your bloody god” have been percolating from the beginning, it’s at this point that you realize that the Druids are going to need a human sacrifice for the war god. Indeed, sensitive, motherly Norma has chosen the victim for the slaughter dozens of times before: “*Non mai l’altar tremendo / Di vittime mancò*”—“The awful altar has never lacked victims.”

But this time, Norma nominates “a perjured priestess [who] has broken her holy vows”—herself. The Gauls are beside themselves with grief—but only because of the betrayal and because it’s their chieftain’s daughter and their beloved prophetess who must die. For the audience, this creates an alienation that heightens the pathos and terror, as the flames grow higher at the back of the stage, as some of the finest music in the Western canon swells to a climax, and as Norma, joined at last by a repentant Pollione, walks onto the pyre.

Bellini and his librettist Felice Romani, drawing on a line of Western thought that goes back to at least Tacitus, heighten the problem by making it clear that in almost all normal ways, the Gauls are the nobler, more honest, less corrupted civilization. Pollione, the only Roman (besides one of his centurions) that we see, is a contemptible character. He’s a self-pitying, shameless, two-timing cad. His willingness to say or do anything to get what he wants clearly reflects the imperial greed of his society, while Adalgisa and Norma shine with a spirit of nobility, independence, and (terrible, literal) self-sacrifice. McVicar redoubles this jarring effect by focusing on the normal

rather than exotic aspects of his characters: DiDonato and Radvanovsky come across as dignified figures rather than strange, dangerous witches.

But that intensifies rather than diminishes the horror during the second act—as you realize the heroine’s complicity in past outrages; as you see that none of her noble, sympathetic countrymen would find the sacrifice particularly noteworthy if the victim were a slave, captive, or not a member of the community; as you learn the chieftain Oroveso (Matthew Rose most nights; Vazgen Gazaryan on the night I attended) is her father and yet is ultimately willing to stand by as his daughter is burnt alive to appease the gods.

How do you approach a society where a bloody altar lurks always in the background? Where the gods themselves constantly hunger for the sacrifice of innocents? You cannot simply brush this aside with the (true) point that Rome also did really bad things. There is a difference between bad acts and bad foundations, as well as between degrees of bad foundations.

This principle should be widely agreed upon—to the point where remarking on it should be obvious and banal. But it isn’t. Although moral relativism may have fallen out of favor with left-wing academic philosophers in recent years, it has sunk deep into the upper strata of our society. The results on the hard left are student groups that think condemning ISIS would be “Islamophobic,” and pundits and scholars who straight-facedly say that Kim Jung-un is no worse (or even a better, cooler-headed leader) than Donald Trump. The president, meanwhile, infamously said on the campaign trail that the United States was no better than Russia because we, too, “have a lot of killers.” And in the mushy, *bien pensant* middle, the results are a debilitating lack of confidence that our own civilization, despite its often-weighty sins, has wrought change for good in the world.

Of course, you can agree with the principle that certain foundational beliefs can be outside the pale but still insist that the principle be narrowly

and carefully applied. There’s a need for caution and prudence: Roman writers and later scholars were aware that the Caesars played up enemy practices like human sacrifice for imperialist propaganda. You can worry about the slippery slope: Human sacrifice—or genocide or slavery—may be condemnable, but is some other practice really as bad as human sacrifice? And the legacy of imperial conquest and racism should make us warier of certain types of conflict than others.

As “clash of civilization” conflicts grow more common—or, more precisely, when internal clashes about what a civilization ought to be, such as that between radical versus moderate Muslims, have immense spillover effects—these worries intensify. But for that exact same reason, it can’t remain fashionable to think that all conceptions of what God wants, or of how a society should be organized, no matter how twisted, are equally valid, or that no one can judge between them.

If we lose track of that, we lose track of what puts us and moderate Syrians, Kurds, etc. on one side of a line and ISIS on the other. In 1831, I’m fairly certain Bellini’s audience would have taken the horrors of paganism for granted and been more struck by the nobility of the Gauls. In 2017, the horror is the more jarring presence in the opera.

The Met’s *Norma* is superb. Not only does it have some of the best singers on the planet, plus the invariably excellent Met Orchestra led crisply by Carlo Rizzi, but it’s immensely stylish. The set (Robert Jones), costumes (Moritz Junge), and lighting (Paule Constable) will clearly be identifiable as circa 2017 to viewers in future decades—blue and orange tints predominate in the sky, gray tones in the otherwise traditional armor and cloaks. But it’s a visual spectacle that stands an excellent chance to be around for future decades.

Part of the fun, too, is that it guiltlessly goes full *Last of the Mohicans*—natives smearing themselves with blood and dancing with swords in forest glens. But it’s Not Problematic, because they’re French. ♦

# The Agony of Writing

*Master stylist John McPhee on his craft.*

BY DANNY HEITMAN

In recent years, John McPhee's writing has become more retrospective, a natural sensibility for a man now 86 years old. A case in point was his 2010 book *Silk Parachute*, a collection of essays and reportage that also stood out for its uncharacteristically personal tone. From the title essay, a remembrance of his mother, to reflections on his high school years and his challenges as a traveling journalist, McPhee, a longtime *New Yorker* writer, offered readers a view of himself rarely seen in print. An equally intimate perspective informs *Draft No. 4*, his new assortment of pieces on the craft of writing. It also has the valedictory air that's defined McPhee's prose for the past decade.

Although McPhee has never been a stranger to the first-person singular, his writing is best known for its sublimation, its sly gift for approximating authorial anonymity. McPhee tends to blend into the background of his subjects, which are typically expansive enough to comfortably hide him within their shadows. In "Progression," the opening essay of *Draft No. 4*, McPhee calls himself "shy to the point of dread," a description often echoed by those who've met him.

"McPhee has sharp blue eyes, thinning gray hair, and the full beard of a shy man," the *Paris Review* noted in 2010. "He seldom grants interviews, and his photograph has never appeared on a book jacket."

If it's true that many shy people become actors as a form of compensation, it's perhaps equally true that a lot

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**Draft No. 4**  
*On the Writing Process*  
by John McPhee  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 192 pp., \$25



*John McPhee in 1986*

of the world's wallflowers become journalists and teachers, two professions that also allow reticent souls to project themselves beyond their insecurities. In addition to his work at the *New Yorker*, McPhee has taught writing for many years at Princeton.

He's probably most famous for *Oranges*, his 1967 book that grew from an epically long *New Yorker* article about the cultivation and processing of the world's best-known citrus fruit. Excerpts of *Oranges* have appeared in college writing textbooks to illustrate the principle that there are no boring subjects, only boring writers. McPhee is widely revered among professors and practitioners of what's known as "creative nonfiction" for his elaborately conceived and scrupulously reported books on ostensibly prosaic

topics such as geology, fisheries, and freight transportation.

*Annals of the Former World*, McPhee's Pulitzer Prize-winning geological survey of the North American continent, is almost 700 pages. Nonfiction writers aggrieved by their genre's second-class status behind the novel point to McPhee as proof that a strictly factual writer can be a literary giant, too.

Not everyone is a fan. Essayist Philip Lopate, a nonfiction guru himself, has lamented McPhee's "scrupulously fair, sporting, impersonal, fact-gathering style," grouching that it reminds him "of nothing so much as a colony of industrious termites capable of patiently reducing any subject matter to a sawdust of detail."

Lopate belongs to the confessional wing of creative nonfiction, a literary school that includes figures such as Edward Hoagland and Joan Didion for whom personal disclosure is a primary technique. McPhee's writerly reticence continues to stand as a kind of corrective against his more exhibitionist contemporaries.

Yet one sometimes wonders if McPhee's protracted accounts of such subjects as the Brown Seven Hundred industrial juicing machine are their own form of conceit. Whatever McPhee's virtues as a storyteller, not all or even most readers who turn the pages of *Oranges* will be riveted by passages such as this one on the mega-juicer's production: "Seven hundred oranges a minute go into it and are split and reamed on the same kind of rosettes that are in the centers of ordinary kitchen reamers. The rinds that come pelting out the bottom are integral halves, just like the rinds of oranges squeezed in a kitchen."

In a recent defense of *Oranges* in the *Oxford American*, writer Wyatt Williams put his finger on part of McPhee's appeal: "He is sometimes accused of being a boring writer or one who writes about boring subjects . . . but the accusations miss the point. Maybe you get bored, but John McPhee does not. The unifying subject of McPhee's work is his sometimes overwhelmed, occasionally zig-zagging, but always endless desire for knowledge of the world."

There is, in fact, much to like in the earnestness of McPhee's curiosity, a quality that seems to endear him to readers and interview subjects alike. Some of his readers, we learn in *Draft No. 4*, suggest *themselves* as subjects, apparently assured, after seeing his work, that he'll write about them without irony or condescension. It's how he ended up writing *Looking for a Ship*, a book on the Merchant Marine, then *Uncommon Carriers*, which chronicled, among other things, the operators of big trucks, towboats, and coal trains.

McPhee essentially grew up on the campus of Princeton, the son of a physician who often treated the university's athletes. His father also worked summers as resident physician at a Vermont boys' camp, and McPhee tagged along. His childhood inculcated a deep love of the outdoors, as well as science.

McPhee often writes about science, and he seems to think like a scientist, too, driven by the impulse to reduce the mechanics of writing to universal principles. It's not surprising that the subtitle of *Draft No. 4* refers not merely to writing, but "the writing process," suggesting that McPhee regards the production of prose as an enterprise that might be calibrated as efficiently as the production of orange juice.

In "Structure," the driest chapter of the book, McPhee includes elaborate diagrams, with circles, arrows, and loop-the-loops, that show how some of his articles and books were constructed. "Readers are not supposed to notice the structure," he concedes after introducing a series of schematics that look lifted from a VCR manual. He also acknowledges that his literary designs might work for his projects, though not for other writers. McPhee's best advice after this Talmudic deconstruction is also the simplest—when he cites Aristotle's dictum that all stories should have a beginning, middle, and end.

Reading McPhee's point-by-point analysis of the act of composition recalls what another *New Yorker* writer, E. B. White, once observed about the study of humor. It "can be dissected, as a frog can," he wrote, "but the thing dies in the process and the innards are

discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind."

As a principal voice of *The Elements of Style*, White popularized basic writing advice that a broad mass of aspiring scribes, from students to executives to novelists, have taken to heart. McPhee's counsel, on the other hand, sometimes seems to defy general application. He notes with satisfaction that he once wrote of a man who had a "sincere mustache," which mystified a *New Yorker* editor who nevertheless allowed the description to be published. "Writing has to be fun at least once in a pale blue moon," McPhee offers by way of weak defense. The story recalls an equally head-scratching phrase—one not mentioned in *Draft No. 4* but that appeared in *Annals of the Former World*—in which McPhee writes of a waterway as a "vitaly ignorant river."

Such runic references remind one that shy souls such as McPhee sometimes lapse into interior monologue more than most, speaking a language only they can understand.

The indulgence of eccentricities like McPhee's has a long tradition at the *New Yorker*, as other reminiscences in *Draft No. 4* make clear. McPhee mentions matter-of-factly the magazine's lack of absolute deadlines and notes approvingly longtime editor William Shawn's defense of the glacial pace of his editing: "It takes as long as it takes."

McPhee celebrates Shawn's pseudo-Confucian pronouncement as useful advice for writers, too, although it's not likely that "It takes as long as it takes" will resonate much among the mere mortals charged with bringing other magazines to press.

How encouraging, though, that McPhee manages to mention fun and writing in the same breath. As the title of *Draft No. 4* suggests, McPhee is more prone to stress the agony of composition, frequently highlighting the demands of revision, the struggle for just the right word. That writing can be hard work will be evident to anyone who's consistently tried to do it well. But in generally downplaying the pleasures of his craft, McPhee can make the writing of his books—and,

for us, the reading of them—seem like an exercise in duty rather than delight.

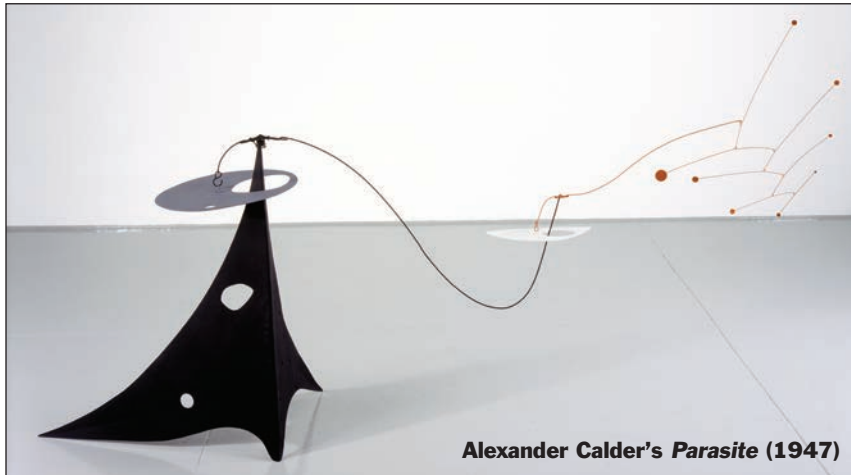
What can't be denied, though it's frequently overlooked, is McPhee's gift as a prose stylist. He's written so much—more than 30 books in all—that admirers tend to focus on the quantity of his work rather than its quality.

What he does best—which is surprising given the typically large canvas of his narratives—is distill a character or scene into a compact and compelling passage. Despite his occasional lapses into metaphorical overreach, he often writes beautifully and concisely about people and places. McPhee started his magazine career at *Time*, where he endured an entry-level job writing small news bits for a column called "Miscellany." Although he mentions his "Miscellany" phase glancingly, one wonders if it helped him hone his economy of expression. Here, in the opening chapter of *Annals*, he neatly limns a principal character, a scientist who takes samples along the highway:

Her face is Nordic, her eyes dark brown and Latin—the bequests of grandparents from the extremes of Europe. She wears mountain boots, blue jeans. She carries a single-jack sledgehammer. What the truckers seem to notice, though, is her youth, her long bright Norwegian hair; and they flirt by air horn, driving needles into her ears. She is a geologist ... and there is little doubt in her mind that she and the road and the rock before her, and the big bridge and its awesome city—in fact, nearly the whole of the continental United States and Canada and Mexico to boot—are in stately manner moving in the direction of the trucks.

"The last thing I would ever suggest to young writers," McPhee writes in *Draft No. 4*, "is that they consciously try to write for the ages. Oh, yik, disgusting. Nobody should ever be trying that. We should just be hoping that our pieces aren't obsolete before the editor sees them."

In an age of Twitter and widespread indifference to the demands of the truth, whether John McPhee's long-form journalism and its fidelity to fact will last beyond his career is anybody's guess. But it should. ♦



Alexander Calder's *Parasite* (1947)

BCA

# Getting Things Moving

*The childlike joy of Alexander Calder.*

BY JAMES GARDNER

In the past 100 years, no visual artist has contributed more to the sum total of human happiness than Alexander Calder. If you think about it, this generating of happiness, to the extent to which it retains any cultural prestige these days, is seen as the domain of musicians and writers far more than of painters and sculptors; rather, since the rise of modernism, vexing the public has been the more likely mission of visual art. But if the works on view in the Whitney's current *Calder: Hypermobility* exhibition, devoted to his kinetic sculptures, are among the most revolutionary of the past century, they present themselves with such grace and modesty and charm that even small children, knowing nothing of vanguardist aesthetics, respond with all the delight that Calder clearly wanted them, and us, to feel.

Calder's ability to communicate with children was, in part, a consequence of his own famously childlike nature.

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

**Calder: Hypermobility**  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
through October 23

**Calder: The Conquest of Time**  
*The Early Years: 1898-1940*  
by Jed Perl  
Knopf, 704 pp., \$55

At his birth, in 1898, he weighed in at 11 pounds, and for the next 78 years, his large and usually overweight frame did nothing to dispel the impression of a big baby. "Powerful but not agile, fat but not tubby," is how a friend describes him in the first installment of Jed Perl's new biography, *Calder: The Conquest of Time*, which seems well on its way to being the definitive work on the man. But it was Calder's demeanor, even more than his corpulence, that suggested the overgrown man-child. His affinity for play was not unique among modernists—Jean Dubuffet and Joaquín Torres-García, to name only two, mined similar terrain—but Calder's thorough absorption in it, his appearing to find nothing

adorable or noteworthy about it, distinguishes him from all his contemporaries.

Calder was still in his twenties when he conquered Paris with *Cirque Calder*, now in the possession of the Whitney. This was an elaborate contraption, roughly the size of a tabletop, in which metal wires were twisted to resemble contortionists and sword swallowers, musclemen and barking seals. To judge from the surviving footage of his improvised performances, he led these figures through their elaborate paces as freely as a boy fighting the Battle of Blenheim with armies of toy soldiers.

"I seem to have always liked + had toys," Calder once wrote, and this ludic impulse, sustained from earliest childhood well into his seventies, is clearly the key to his career. Both formally and thematically, many of the works in the Whitney exhibition have their genesis in children's toys. Their open-form structure is certainly radical in the context of the early 20th century, but if it is an innovation that Calder greatly developed, it is not one that he can claim to have invented: It originated with Picasso and Julio González. What is truly revolutionary about Calder's art is the introduction of movement into sculpture. This movement takes two forms: Either it is motorized, especially early on, or it exploits the simplest laws of gravity. This latter option is especially evident in Calder's mobiles, those pendent acts of virtuosic equilibrium that reinvent themselves in accordance with the ficklest whims of the air. Usually, in museums and galleries, Calder's kinetic sculptures are displayed in a state of distorted stillness. It is one of the draws of the present show that the museum staff drops by several times a day to set the art in motion.

The objects on view at the Whitney emerge out of a surrealist aesthetic that throughout the 1920s and '30s permeated the Parisian art scene of which Calder was such a prominent part. Through them one senses in Calder a sort of divided artistic self: He is always at play and he is always serious. If there is an element of play in even his purest and most Apollonian works, there is something of high seriousness even in such sportive pranks as the

CALDER FOUNDATION, NEW YORK / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY, NEW YORK

*Cirque Calder*. But if the motivations are equivalent in these two halves of his output, the results are not. Some of the buzzing, cranking, spinning efforts of his early years are surely fun, but, like the *Cirque Calder*, they fall short of the real greatness that is evident in the mobiles that he began to make in the mid-thirties. As the spectrally floating metal discs of *Hanging Spider* (1940) fan out on steel wires, it asserts its distinct personality as surely as anything that ever truly lived. Multicolored or monochrome, Calder's mobiles are majestic and serene, alien and yet as consolingly familiar as those crib-adornments that first suggested them to the artist's mind. Simply put, they are among the finest objects of the 20th century.

The Whitney exhibition, however, does not quite rise to the eminence of its subject. In part, this is due to some lackluster works exhibited among the masterpieces; there is nothing at all wrong with them, but one often feels that better examples could have been found. In larger part, however, this sense of insufficiency is a consequence of the display. It is now over two years since the new Whitney Museum, designed by Renzo Piano, opened in lower Manhattan, and several things are becoming clear. The vastness of its canyon-like spaces and the almost promiscuous modernist flow of one zone into the next may (or may not) serve the interests of those large-scale installations that contemporary artists favor, but the design is lethal to most earlier modernist works, which, like Calder's, were usually conceived on a far smaller scale. To make matters worse, the entire eastern side of the exhibition is mounted in such a way that there rises, just beyond a low partition, the supremely visible distraction of the museum's eighth-floor restaurant, from which the aroma of espressos and double lattes mingles with and nearly overpowers the art itself.

And yet, notwithstanding those distractions and the relatively pallid selection of objects, Calder's genius shines through. The press material for Jed Perl's book acclaims its subject as "America's greatest sculptor." There is something new and polemical in that claim, but it sounds about right. ♦

BCA

# Whole New Ballgame

*The drama and fun of America's pastime in the post-steroid era.* BY TOM PERROTTA

**T**his summer, the Cleveland Indians won 22 consecutive baseball games—a seemingly impossible streak that elated fans of the team and captivated non-fans. The Indians won large and they won small. They won the 22nd game in a comeback, getting a hit with two outs and two strikes in the bottom of the ninth inning, when trailing 2-1. After the Indians scored the winning run in the tenth inning, all was bedlam: The crowd screamed and swung signs around. The players pumped their arms and leapt and hugged. Fireworks popped off outside, a large, bright collection that loaded Progressive Field with smoke.

If this excitement sounds like the joy you'd expect following a miraculous World Series win, you're on the mark. That has been baseball this year: fresh, full, and dramatic. Remember the years when steroids dogged baseball and left fans disgruntled? The game is different now, and the way it has changed in recent years has made it more likable than it has been in years. One indication of the change: Giancarlo Stanton, the 27-year-old Miami Marlins star, belted 59 home runs, the most in-season homers since 2001. This makes Stanton the first post-steroid-era hitter to make a serious run at the record. And yet his attempt was just one tale among many in this exciting season. And there is more still to come in playoffs that have the potential for stirring contests—and perhaps a World Series as dramatic as last year's, when the Chicago Cubs beat the Cleveland Indians 8-7 in the tenth inning of the seventh game to win the title.

*Tom Perrotta writes about sports for the Wall Street Journal, FiveThirtyEight, and other publications.*

Any of the teams has enough weapons to win, no matter the score in their series as you read this—it's just that someone has to prevail, and luck, as always, is sure to play a big part. That's the style today. The most charming and talented team this year—though not by much—is the Indians, back better than last year after that crushing World Series loss. Look at the Indians and behold a flawless team with 102 victories this season. The team is fast and excellent at defense, with well-rounded hitters and pitchers. Corey Kluber, the 31-year-old starter, went 18-4 during the season with a 2.25 earned run average (the best major-league ERA for a starting pitcher this season) and 265 strikeouts. Carlos Carrasco, age 30 and from Venezuela, also won 18 games this season. Trevor Bauer, a 26-year-old, won 17.

The Indians' bullpen is even stronger than their collection of starters. Leading the way: 32-year-old southpaw Andrew Miller, whose height—he's 6-foot-7—gives him an angle for one of the fiercest pitches in the sport. For the year, he struck out 95 batters in 62.2 innings and kept his ERA at a remarkable 1.44. When Miller winds up and throws, he releases the ball so far from the side that against lefties, it looks like he intends to hit the batter with a fastball, and then it zips in for a strike at the corner. It's a pitch lefties find nearly impossible to hit.

**A**ll the top teams in the playoffs are different, but there is one entertaining similarity: a modern shortstop. Once the home of small, quick players, the shortstop position now has size and hitting to go along with excellent defense. Big-hitting shortstops could be the key for four teams: Cleveland, Boston, Houston, and Los Angeles.

For the Indians, Francisco Lindor leads. He's the small one of the group, though still tall for a shortstop: 5-foot-11. His power impresses. Lindor, age 23, hit 33 home runs this season, including a grand slam in April against the Texas Rangers in the ninth inning while trailing by a run.

For the Dodgers, who with 104 wins had the best record in baseball this season, 23-year-old Corey Seager is the shortstop phenom. He's tall—6-foot-4 and 220 pounds—and quick, and hit .295 with 22 home runs. The Dodgers looked to be the best at everything earlier this year. But a spate of losses—including an 11-game skid—has recently worried fans. The team's decline makes the playoffs seem much more open than back when the Dodgers looked like they could break the single-season wins record. Manager Dave Roberts believes the team is now on its way back: "I think the troubles are over," he said. "The quality of baseball is better and the best is yet to come. The guys are healthy. The right guys are trending in the right direction."

Another star shortstop plays for the Houston Astros. Like Seager, Carlos Correa is 6-foot-4 and 23 years old. This season he hit .315 with 24 home runs and 84 runs batted in, a fine year for an outfielder, never mind a shortstop. And in the field he's electric. Correa has made dazzling plays and catches, especially with high popups hit behind him. His glove arm looks like it stretches several inches when he races into the outfield, his balance just enough to keep him from falling as he tracks down the ball.

Houston won 101 games this year, joining the Indians and the Dodgers as the only teams to reach triple digits. The team has young talent, great offense, and Carlos Beltrán, the 40-year-old pro from Puerto Rico, which is suffering in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. "I try to come to the ballpark with a positive mentality, but my heart and my mind is not here," Beltrán said. In his 19 years in baseball, Beltrán has reached just one World Series. That was in 2013, when he and the St. Louis Cardinals lost to the Red Sox.

The Red Sox that year were one of the most resilient teams in memory.



*The Cleveland Indians celebrating their 22-win streak*

No matter the score or the pitching on the opposing team, the 2013 Sox, led by David Ortiz, came through. The 2017 season is their second straight season in the playoffs; last year the Indians beat them out. This year won't be any easier. Boston's postseason starts against the Astros. The two keys to success could be pitcher David Price, who is back from an injury, and Xander Bogaerts, the 25-year-old, 6-foot-1 shortstop who hit better in the late part of the year.

Price is fascinating to watch. He's left-handed and throws hard, with nice movement on his pitches. After an injury this year he has returned to the bullpen rather than starting, a move that could strengthen the Sox on the mound. Bogaerts and third-baseman Rafael Devers, a 20-year-old sensation, are keys to the team's success. Bogaerts is a fine defensive shortstop, one of the best in baseball, and dangerous on offense when he's hot. Devers is more of a wildcard. Of all he can do—he slugs the ball—fielding is not a strength. Whenever he's in the field, an error may not be very far away.

Just shy of the Red Sox were the New York Yankees, with a mere two fewer regular-season victories. The team has surprised with its pitching and even more with its absurdly powerful rookie, Aaron Judge. The 25-year-old Judge is huge: 6-foot-7 and 282 pounds, with no fat to be found—his muscles look like chiseled stone. Judge hit 52 home runs this season but when he misses,

he misses big: He struck out 208 times. He's one of those dramatic players like David Ortiz who could win a series with his own hitting, like when he clubbed a homer against the Minnesota Twins in the October 3 wild card game. It's just a matter of how confident Judge will be.

Ever since the Chicago Cubs broke their fabled 108-year World Series failure streak last year, the Indians have held that unhappy record. The team hasn't won the series since 1948, when they dumped the Boston Braves in six games. As much celebration and joy as there was after their 22-game winning streak, the Indians want more, and manager Terry Francona knows how to get there, guiding the team with his understanding and his friendly demeanor. In 2004, he coached the Red Sox to their first World Series title since 1918. The Sox had trailed the Yankees three games to none in their meeting, then won four straight games. No team in baseball, and arguably sports in general, has ever made such an unlikely comeback in a series.

Last year's loss by the Indians was almost as brutal as that of the Yankees. The Indians led three games to one, needing just one more win for a title. But the Cubs came back and won three straight games to clinch the series. This year, the Indians want nothing less than a World Series victory. For the team—and everyone else—this is about the ultimate win in American sports. Let's enjoy the show. ♦



Ryan Gosling as K in *Blade Runner 2049*

# Replicants' Return

*Why Blade Runner lasted—and its sequel won't.* BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**C**an there be such a thing as a great movie that is also unsatisfying? It would seem like a contradiction in terms. After all, how can something work when it doesn't work? And yet it does happen. The early Marx Brothers and Woody Allen pictures are disastrous pieces of storytelling, but who cares when you're exploding into laughter every two minutes? It's far more rare for a drama to pull this off, since a drama is almost nothing but a story told. Still, the unsatisfying aspects of a piece of popular dramatic art can fade over time as more memorable qualities take up permanent residence in the collective unconscious.

That's what happened with *Blade Runner*.

When the science fiction film starring Harrison Ford premiered in 1982, almost everyone thought it just didn't

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

**Blade Runner 2049**  
Directed by Denis Villeneuve



deliver the goods. *Blade Runner* was slow and oddly paced; its ghastly narration from Ford sounded as though someone had put a gun to his head and made him read it; and its ending was forced and false. It received indifferent reviews and was a box-office disappointment—for good reason.

Then something happened. Over the subsequent 35 years, director Ridley Scott released no fewer than four re-edits on videotape and DVD. He removed the horrible narration, eliminated the absurd ending, and undid some clumsy studio-ordered deletions. These revisions certainly enhanced the movie's reputation. But far more important was the simple fact that no one who saw it at the time or who has seen it since, even

those who had negative feelings about it during its initial run, has ever been able to forget *Blade Runner*. And its reintroduction into the marketplace every few years had a cumulative positive effect on its reputation. This nightmare vision of Los Angeles in 2019 is now universally recognized as a masterpiece—even though it's just as true today that *Blade Runner* is messy and confused.

It's also true that the movie's speculative depiction of 2019 has proved wrong in every particular. The world is not awash in acid rain (an environmentalist fad subject of the early 1980s). The sun still shines. We still have living animals. America has not become a cultural colony of Japan. Our cars do not fly. Los Angeles isn't ferociously overpopulated, with its residents living in endless billion-story skyscraper complexes. We aren't mining in outer space, and we don't have robots with four-year lifespans that are all but indistinguishable from humans performing slave labor.

ALCON ENTERTAINMENT

So why has *Blade Runner* not only stood the test of time but risen to the summit among American films? Because it is so fantastically imaginative and detailed in its rendering of its false 2019 that one doesn't mind how badly it has dated. Because it's just eye-poppingly beautiful even as it seeks to portray a city mired in ugliness. And because screenwriters Hampton Fancher and David Peoples took the skeleton of a Philip K. Dick novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, and turned it into a 1940s-style detective picture, so that it exists in a glamorized past and a dystopian future.

An ex-cop named Deckard (Ford) has taken a job tracking down runaway "replicants." He wanders into a giant conspiracy—and as he tries to unravel it, Deckard begins to understand that these artificial people can suffer and hate and love. At the climax, he comes face to face with Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), the replicant who has come to Earth to take revenge on the corporation that brought him to life as a worker-bee slave and programmed his death four years from the moment of his inception.

"I've seen things you people wouldn't believe," Batty says. "Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die." Batty does not try to kill Deckard, as we expect and as it is in his power to do; rather, he shuts down. It is a scene of surpassing beauty. It may sound pretentious to say so, but *Blade Runner* has proved itself, over time, one of cinema's deepest examinations of what it means to be human.

Now we have *Blade Runner 2049*, cowritten by the original's co-scenarist, Hampton Fancher, and directed by Denis Villeneuve. He made last year's *Arrival*, a wonderfully creative and emotionally wrenching work of science fiction, and with this new picture, Villeneuve aims for the fences. *Blade Runner 2049* runs 45 minutes longer than the original and cost a staggering \$185 million, more than twice the budget of the 1982 film in constant dollars.

The scale is monumental. Where *Blade Runner* was set entirely in Los Angeles, the sequel shows us a ravaged Western United States in which San Diego has been reduced to a gigantic waste dump and Las Vegas has all but crumbled into nothingness. You must see it, just to goggle at it; Villeneuve and his collaborators, chiefly master cinematographer Roger Deakins, really do succeed in transporting the audience to another place and time. Where Scott's world was lush and lavish and overstuffed, Villeneuve's is so bleak and denuded that your eyes have difficulty adjusting when flashes of bright color appear.

Villeneuve is a far more controlled filmmaker than Scott, and he manages the extraordinarily complex plot of *Blade Runner 2049* with masterly skill (a feat that made me wonder anew at his ingenious storytelling in *Arrival*). The new replicant-catcher is himself a replicant named K, played by Ryan Gosling. K is hunting and "retiring" old versions without fixed lifespans that have hidden themselves in the blasted Western landscape. He makes an inadvertent discovery beneath a ruined tree—a box with bones in it that suggests a long-dead female replicant once actually gave birth. The possibilities raised by this robotic evolution are so terrifying that K is ordered by his superior (an enigmatic cop known only as "Madame" and played chillingly by Robin Wright) to hunt down the child and kill it.

The film moves slowly, almost hypnotically, for its first hour, and it is just about to overstay its stately welcome when Gosling comes upon an aged Deckard. Then, just as he did when he took the screen 45 minutes into *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, Harrison Ford gives the movie a powerful new jolt of energy. This is a fascinating development. Aside from the fact that Ford spent the decade before returning so delightfully as Han Solo somnambulating his way through a series of really terrible performances, he is the key reason the original *Blade Runner* doesn't quite work. Ford stumbles through that picture with a quizzical and confused expression indicating he doesn't understand what the hell

is going on and doesn't really care.

One weird consequence of his lousy acting in *Blade Runner* was the ludicrous theory that Deckard was also secretly a replicant—an idea Ridley Scott even championed 20 years later in a nakedly transparent ploy to seduce fanboys into buying a new DVD version of the movie that supposedly offered more hints that this is the case. It's preposterous balderdash.

The moral complications of the original movie (like the Philip K. Dick novel that served as its source material) arise from its portrait of a human race slowly losing its humanity even as its synthetic creations are gaining a measure of their own. Deckard is desiccating; Roy Batty is more of a human being. That is the fact that gives *Blade Runner* its unique and haunting power. Turn Deckard into a replicant and all of that is lost.

Ford brings to *Blade Runner 2049* all the grief and anger and pain he failed to bring to *Blade Runner*, and he becomes the new movie's beating heart. He also has the one great line of dialogue that, in context, is as powerful as Batty's death speech: "Her eyes were green."

*Blade Runner 2049* is a very impressive picture and, despite its excessive length, better than the original in almost every way—except the one that really matters. It's not going to stick. Unlike Ridley Scott's maddeningly imperfect film, *Blade Runner 2049* isn't an original. It renovates elements not only of its predecessor but also of Steven Spielberg's *A.I.*, Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*, and even Pixar's *Wall-E*. It builds on those and even improves on them to some degree, but it doesn't show you anything genuinely new. And the perfunctory questions it raises about the souls of artificial beings are by definition not as interesting as ones about the human condition.

*Blade Runner 2049* may be more satisfying at first glance, but I don't think it's likely to reward a second, whereas *Blade Runner* rewards a fifth, a sixth, a seventh. "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe," Roy Batty says—and that, in the end, is exactly why *Blade Runner* is great and *Blade Runner 2049* is not. ♦

**“Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson insisted on Wednesday that he has never considered resigning, despite what associates have described as deep frustration. But he did not deny a report that he has grown so disenchanting with President Trump that he once referred to him as a ‘moron.’”**

**PARODY**

—New York Times, October 4, 2017

right. So doesn't that make you happy?

OCTOBER 10, 2017

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# TILLERSON STATEMENT SEEKS TO CLARIFY CLARIFICATION

*‘I meant “moron” in the nicest way’*

By ELIZABETH MCCORD

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson convened a press conference Monday to clarify statements he made during last week’s press conference. “There are things I need to straighten out because you folks in the media can’t seem to get things right,” the secretary said. “The first is the erroneous reporting on my threat to resign. What I told Vice President Pence was, ‘I have resigned myself to working for this moron.’”

“Which brings me to my second point: I meant ‘moron’ in the nicest way,” Tillerson was quick to add. “Like, ‘Here’s looking at you, moron’ or ‘You had me at moron’ or ‘Nobody puts moron in the corner!’ See what I mean?” Tillerson said. “The problem is you morons are probably going to screw up this story, too.”

The secretary continued to refer to these recent allegations as “petty.” “Where I come from, we don’t deal with that kind of petty nonsense. I was in the oil and gas business, you see. Where I come from, my straw reaches across the room and drinks your milkshake. I drink your milkshake!” Tillerson then ended the press conference, inviting members of the media to join him in the White House bowling alley.

State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert followed this clarification



Rex W. Tillerson speaks to reporters at the White House Monday.

to the earlier clarification by clarifying that Secretary Tillerson also never referred to the president as “‘a [expletive] moron,’ ‘a [expletive] [expletive] moron,’ or ‘a [expletive] [expletive] [expletive] moron,’ as some in the media claim.” She also noted that the secretary at no time referred to

the president as “Little Finger.” “But even if he did,” said Nauert, “the secretary would have meant it in the nicest way. Little Finger, as you all know, is one of the most beloved characters in *Game of Thrones*.”

*Continued on Page A7*

## Menendez Corruption Trial Probes Deeper

*‘I thought that was part of the massage’*

the weekly  
**Standard**

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