

**TRUMP AND  
THE MUELLER  
INDICTMENTS**  
MARK HEMINGWAY • MICHAEL WARREN

the weekly

# Standard

NOVEMBER 13, 2017

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## THE BIG REVEAL



**The CIA  
has finally  
released the files  
recovered from  
Osama bin Laden's  
compound. It's no secret  
why the Obama administration  
wanted them locked away.**

**STEPHEN F. HAYES  
THOMAS JOSCELYN  
THE EDITORS**

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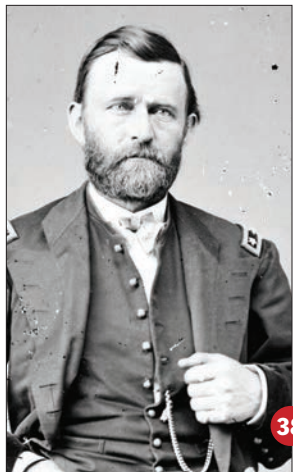


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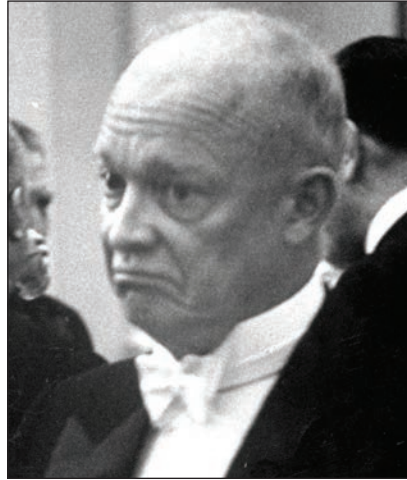
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# A Heartbreaking Groundbreaking

Leave to one side for a moment the debate over whether Confederate memorials, many of them more than a century old, should be pulled down as an act of civic and moral hygiene. Nearly everyone can agree that the memorials themselves are artistically accomplished. Some of them are overwrought, some of them are mawkish, some of them could rightly be considered beautiful. But in the eyes of the audience they were addressing, at least, the artists and designers did what they set out to do, calling out feelings of gratitude and reverence for the men who fought for a cause. Indeed, it is this very competence that enables the memorials to provoke outrage rather than indifference in a modern audience.

After 18 years of hesitation, congressional dithering, bureaucratic ennui, and aesthetic controversy, ground was broken this week near the National Mall for a memorial to Dwight Eisenhower. It was de-



*Ike wouldn't like.*

signed, as readers likely know, by the famous architect Frank Gehry, and it is done up with every ounce of eccentricity and pointless elaboration that he could muster. Its elements—large stone blocks, a few statues, a frieze, bare platforms, and a giant mesh screen hung like

a scrim from flanking pillars—are scattered over a four-acre urban square. None of the elements bears much relation to the others. Even now, as the earthmovers do their work, it's unclear how the statues will be posed or what image will be shown from the scrim.

Which is perfectly appropriate, for the informational content of Gehry's design was always secondary to its primary purpose: to showcase Frank Gehry and his artistic caprice, along with the supposed aesthetic sophistication of the arts bureaucrats who approved it. The design says much less about Dwight Eisenhower, whose distaste for modernism was well-known, than it says about us. We can only wonder what future generations will think when they come upon the ugly and meaningless memorial that this generation chose to build to honor a great man. By "great man," we mean Ike, not Gehry, although decades from now no one will be sure. ♦

## Anticipatory Journalism

The day after an immigrant from Uzbekistan murdered cyclists and pedestrians in New York, running them over with a rented pickup truck, NPR did an interview to highlight how such events make life uncomfortable for Muslims. They spoke with Hussein Rashid, a professor of religion at Columbia University who had distinguished himself by his response to the terror attack. He had tweeted: "I am a New Yorker and a Muslim. Stand tall. Stand proud. That's our city. #ManhattanAttack and also, f— all y'all who want to mess with us." Expletive not deleted in the original.

Rashid, with a little prompting from the NPR host, allowed that the "all y'all" he had in mind included "anybody who wants to mess with our city" (hear, hear), but was particularly



*Can we wait to clear the wreckage before joking?*

aimed at "the backlash against Muslims that are going to come after this."

We're told repeatedly that it is crucial not to leap to the assumption that some or another attack is an act of terrorism—we need to wait for the facts to come in. But it's never too early to report on the terrible backlash against Muslims, even before any such backlash has happened.

As you might expect from a religion professor who responds to a mass killing by tweeting "f— all y'all," Rashid is a guy who can be counted on to keep

it classy. Which he did with another tweet while the wreckage was still being removed. Riffing on the fact that the killer's birthplace was once a part of the Soviet Union, Professor Rashid had a few yuks tweeting, "With the Russia connection, the Manhattan Attacker has more in common with @realDonaldTrump than he does with NY Muslims."

Say this for Rashid: He knows how to get on National Public Radio. ♦

## Please Don't Bug Me

As a dutiful reader of the *New York Times*, THE SCRAPBOOK has for several years been aware of a new trend in the culinary arts. The trend: the preparation and consumption of insects.

Three years ago we read about a startup, Bitty Foods, "a company that mills crickets and blends them with cassava and coconut." The basic

EISENHOWER: LEONARD MCCOMBE / THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION / GETTY; JEWEL SAMAD / AFP / GETTY

insight seems to be this: If you're a vegan or a vegetarian, your sources of protein are limited—you can only eat so many nuts. “My vision,” the Bitty Foods founder explained, “is that we're going to boost the protein content of all the staple foods that we eat. And we're going to need a really sustainable and plentiful protein source to do that with.”

Yeah, and what could be more sustainable and plentiful than bugs?

Now we read in the *Times* of an “entertaining and eye-opening documentary” called *Bugs*. The film chronicles a chef, Ben Reade, and a researcher, Josh Evans, “as they travel the world to visit cultures where insects are prepared as food.” We learn from the documentary, among other things, that “the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has reported that the use of insects as food may have long-term benefits for the global food supply.” The film “also offers cooks new possibilities for tastes and textures.”

With the animal rights movement growing in popularity, our days of eating bacon and steak may be drawing to a close. If pigs and cows have the right not to be eaten, we'll just have to get our protein from the next link down on the food chain.

But this led us to ask a question: If pigs and cows are not to be gnawed, what about crickets and worms? (Does it matter that, as

Shakespeare noted, worms eat

of commoners and kings—his gloomy Dane observes, “Your worm is your only emperor for diet”?) So we searched online for the term “insect rights.” We won't bother cataloguing what we found. Suffice it to say: In a few years, we'll have

to move another link down the food chain to source our edibles. At which point the question will be whether plants have rights, too. Gosh, we hope not.

But if that is where fashionable ethics take us, we can at least count on the *Times* to tell us about the hip and



BUG: BIGSTOCK



happening new chefs doing exciting things with dirt. ♦

## Screen Time

The Berkshire Museum, a venerable, century-old museum of art and history in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, is making enormous changes to its dowdy displays. Two years of planning, 22 focus groups (uh-oh), and two multimillion-dollar fundraising drives have yielded a “New Vision,” described as a bold, creative approach to save a struggling cultural institution. The Board of Trustees proudly announced the creation of an exciting new interdisciplinary Museum. . . . Treasured

objects from the collection will be integrated with cutting-edge technology, new interpretive techniques, and a fresh perspective that aims to extract contemporary relevance from historical artifacts.

That's a lot of buzzwords, most of them lamentable. (You can tell a curator has a certain contempt for the “historical artifacts” in her charge when she insists upon extracting “contemporary relevance” from them.) But what those buzzwords—especially the tired and hidebound expression “cutting-edge technology”—mean in practice is clear: screens. The Berkshire, like many other desperate museums, seeks to leap into the digital age

by transforming itself into a glowing, interactive, multimedia experience. The people who run museums seem to be convinced that kids, liking video games as they do, will tolerate museums if only they are dressed up like video games. We suspect the whippersnappers know the difference.

To pay for all those screens the museum has handed over some 40 works of art to Sotheby's to sell at auction. The cache includes two Norman Rockwell paintings—works donated to the Berkshire decades ago by no less than Rockwell himself. The museum hopes that one of the paintings, *Shuffleton's Barbershop*, will fetch \$20-\$30 million. Rockwell's three sons are suing to stop the sale. If there were a Massachusetts statute against tacky ingratitude they'd have an open-and-shut case.



The locals share the Rockwell brothers' dismay. But protests, petitions, and canceled memberships have failed to persuade the museum's poohbahs to relent. In a recent press release, the museum explained that the canvases being put up for sale are “not essential to the Museum's refreshed mission and do not directly contribute to its new interdisciplinary interpretive plan with its heightened emphasis on science and history.”

Not essential? In *THE SCRAPBOOK'S* view, the Berkshire is trading unique objects for ubiquitous technology. The community is right to be irate as it knows it's getting a birthright-for-pottage deal, exchanging original works of art for interactive touchscreens.

Screens are banal. You can get them at Best Buy.

The museum's website has the pleading tone of an organization under siege, but the “Frequently Asked Questions” tab is most revealing. Loyal patrons of the Berkshire are wondering many things, but most tellingly, “What is interdisciplinary interpretation?” The answer, if the FAQs section were being perfectly honest, would be, “A pseudo-intellectual fad of dubious provenance.” ♦

## Manafort Shares

Washington is nothing if not opportunistic. Take the activist group American Family Voices (please!). It is a classic D.C. sort of organization, what's known in the trade as “astroturf,” which is to say, phony grassroots. It was among the political players this week trying to make the most of the indictment of former Trump campaign honcho Paul Manafort.

American Family Voices does issue-advocacy for a variety of left-wing causes, and among its recent targets has been the wildly successful home-sharing app Airbnb. It isn't clear who's paying for the attacks, but the organization has crafted a slick impersonation of a good-government watchdog called “AirbnbWATCH.” It sends out press releases detailing the many supposed iniquities of the service (a platform that has done for the hotel biz what Uber has done for taxis).

It turns out that among the properties Paul Manafort is accused of buying with laundered Ukrainian cash were a few apartments in New York that have been used as Airbnb rentals. “Manafort's indictment blows holes in Airbnb's claims of being a mom and pop home sharing site,” the astroturfers thundered in a press release. “It is a multi-billion-dollar corporation profiting from the illegal use of its platform for commercial interests.”

You'd think that special counsel Robert Mueller was investigating Airbnb. Then again, given the expansiveness of his enterprise, don't give him any ideas. ♦

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## Rough Draft

I recently saw a sportswriter on social media paying tribute to a deceased editor he'd had the pleasure of working with. "The best editors are a psychologist, a friend, an idea person, a life vest," he wrote. "Every story written is a trust fall into an editor's arms." I don't doubt this sentiment is well-intended or that this particular editor, God rest his soul, was a real prince. But in nearly two decades of writing, and occasional editing, I've never thought of exploiting my professional relationships to sort out personal problems, much less save my life.

Still, after reading this I thought maybe I'd been missing out on a significant perk by not being more demanding. Writing about the current state of American politics and culture is a dreary affair, so I pinged a very talented young editor I've worked with and told him I was feeling a bit morose. He suggested that watching an amusing video clip on the Internet entitled "Ow, my balls" would lift my spirits. I can't say it was an effective remedy for my lingering malaise, but I will say this editor gave me a good writerly lesson in getting your point across succinctly.

I must admit I do have one intimate relationship with an editor who often acts as my amateur psychologist and life saver. In fairness, I explicitly asked her to sign on to this aspect of the job, and in response, she said, "I do." Being married to another writer who can blithely offer withering evaluations of your professional output is pretty humbling. Well, it would be humbling, but my wife tends to read my work with an eye toward grammar. My grasp of the subject is largely

intuitive, and she often corrects me using big, made-up words like "subjunctive" and "participial." Nonetheless, I really should refrain from doubting her. Husbands who obnoxiously insist on arguing with their wives in spite of their better judgment have a saying: "Ow, my balls."

I suppose I should also take this opportunity to thank the editors in my life—even those I'm not married



to—for their dedication and forbearance. Their jobs can't be very easy. My rough drafts are often just that. And I don't mean "diamond in the"-style rough but manhandled-by-Hells-Angels-in-the-front-row-at-Altamont rough. I hope it counts for something that I'm constantly striving to improve. But I worry that as I grow older my tics as a writer are becoming even more pronounced.

For instance, I drop words when I write, often important ones. Sometimes the imputed meaning is obvious,

e.g., "This sentence no verb." However, I've found that if you omit a simple pronoun, your editor can be forced to play a rather frustrating game of Clue. The suspected antecedent could be any of the six proper nouns mentioned in the preceding three paragraphs, and it generally requires sending me a passive-aggressive email right before a looming deadline to crack the case.

Dropping words is, at least, an affliction shared by a number of other writers I know. Other of my faults are uniquely my own. A rather accomplished friend of mine, who used to work in the White House and now writes speeches for the CEO of one of America's more august corporations, asked me once with some degree of earnestness whether I spoke English as a second language. It seems that being a native German speaker was the only logical explanation for my otherwise inexplicable habit of randomly capitalizing Nouns. I had to inform the former presidential speechwriter, *Ich bin nein Berliner*.

So, after all these years of professional experience, why can't I write good? Well, when I'm in the process of thinking my Big Important Thoughts, can I really be expected to pay attention to the minutiae of communicating them? The value of my insights is undeniable. The rest is just lexicographic niceties.

Okay, this is a sorry and egotistical justification for being careless and otherwise not taking my craft seriously. I guess it's pretty obvious at this point that I've mastered fewer of the fine points of my profession than is wise for me to admit. And if I had a point to make when I sat down to write this, I feel like I'm now hopelessly adrift in choppy waters. But I'm going to turn this in anyway. I hear that editors can be a life vest.

MARK HEMINGWAY

# The New Cold War

Henry Kissinger aptly characterized two centuries of Russian foreign policy in his 2001 book *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?* “Throughout its history, with all its ups and downs,” he wrote, “Russia has conducted a persistent, patient, and skillful diplomacy: with Prussia and Austria against the specter of French domination; with France against Imperial Germany; with England, France, and Hitler’s Germany to avoid isolation; with the United States and Britain to avoid disaster during World War II; and, during the Cold War, by trying to split Europe from the United States through a combination of nuclear blackmail and the support of movements that portrayed the United States as the greater threat to nuclear peace.”

These observations were made not long after the turbulent presidency of Boris Yeltsin had come to an end. Nearly 18 years now into the less turbulent but far more ominous era of Vladimir Putin, Russia’s latest approach to the United States has become clear. The present moment of political chaos in America—the Mueller investigation, the “Trump dossier,” Russia-linked “bots” on social media—tells us a great deal about Russia’s strategic disposition in the early 21st century.

Russia spans 11 time zones. It shouldn’t feel the need to expand. But it does. Russian military exercises near the borders of Finland and the Baltic states are a constant threat to our NATO allies, and Russia’s shadow war in eastern Ukraine and brutal annexation of Crimea are expressions of its expansionist aims. It has begun again to establish proxy states—think of Syria—to extend itself into spheres of American influence and make trouble for its chief geopolitical adversary.

Of course, Russia cannot match America’s capacity for conventional warfare, but it compensates for that imbalance by emphasizing facets of what military observers call “hybrid warfare”: attacks on the enemy’s communication systems, cyberwarfare, and the aggressive use of fabricated media reports and other forms of disinformation. What Russia’s most forward-thinking military minds have grasped is that part of what gives modern Western militaries their conventional superiority—their technologies, especially their communications technology—can be turned against them with a little creativity.

That approach has manifested itself in America’s domestic sphere, too. The Russians are aware of how divisive our

politics have become and seem to have concluded that with modest efforts they can turn American eyes inward.

In the summer of 2016, the Democratic National Committee’s email server was hacked and its contents given to WikiLeaks. The uproar, though less damaging to the Democrats than they would come to pretend after their 2016 loss, was an embarrassment to the party’s presidential nominee and her staff. American intelligence officials are convinced Russian actors carried out the hacking. Reports from the FBI, CIA, and NSA have further concluded that Russia attempted to influence the presidential election, probably in

favor of Donald Trump, by the use of social media “trolls” and other forms of cyberwarfare.

Then there were Hillary Clinton’s emails. As secretary of state, she made highly improper use of a private email server, which led to a legitimate fear it had been hacked. This allowed Russian operatives to tantalize her enemies with the prospect of getting their hands on thousands of those emails. In

at least two cases, shady characters purporting to have close ties to the Kremlin suggested they could make these emails available to Clinton’s political enemies: first, to a Trump foreign-policy adviser named George Papadopoulos, whose lies to FBI investigators about the encounters earned him a federal indictment; second, to Donald Trump Jr. in a meeting also attended by Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner.

When Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election, Democratic pundits and politicians suddenly became concerned about Russian meddling in our elections. Theretofore they had been as blithely willing to solicit the Russians for opposition research as Don Jr. And in at least one case, the Russians obliged. When the DNC and the Clinton campaign commissioned an opposition research outfit called Fusion GPS to find unflattering information about Trump—carefully paying Fusion through a law firm so as to keep it off the campaign’s disclosure form—what they got in return was at least partly a collection of wild rumors and outright lies, courtesy of Russian disinformation artists.

On November 1, attorneys for Facebook, Twitter, and Google testified at a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing about Russia-linked accounts purchasing ads and spreading content on their platforms. Facebook estimates that accounts linked to Russian sources reached as many as 126 million



*‘I see the Americans fighting amongst themselves.’*

users during the run-up to the 2016 election. Some of these accounts posted content and ran ads maligning Hillary Clinton, but the ads sought to manipulate both right and left. Some encouraged violence against police officers; others incited violence against Black Lives Matter activists. Some called for rallies defending gun rights; others called for anti-Trump protests. In one instance, separate Russian-linked ads called for dueling protests at an Islamic center in Houston. According to the *Texas Tribune*, people showed up on both sides and traded insults.

Most Democrats, predictably, see only one lesson here: Russia threw the election to Donald Trump. The fact that Hillary Clinton was a terrible candidate who ran a poor campaign seems lost on them. But let's leave aside the election's outcome. Let's also leave aside the questions of whether anyone on Trump's campaign cut a deal with Russian government actors to tilt the election and whether bogus social media ads actually persuaded people in Michigan and Wisconsin to change their votes.

Let's forget the politics of it.

The far more relevant point is that Russia actively engaged in these activities and in doing so threw our political culture into a state of acrimonious distraction. Russian activities have hamstrung a presidency in its first year and nearly maddened a new president's opponents. This week's indictment of Manafort on charges of evading taxes and laundering money paid to him by Russia-linked entities only deepens the morass in which the Trump administration finds itself as a result of Russian interference.

The new Cold War is subtler and more cryptic than its predecessor. So far it involves hacked websites and email servers rather than proxy wars in Asia or Africa; "fake news" rather than diplomatic summits; inflammatory social media ads rather than the threat of thermonuclear annihilation. What makes America especially vulnerable is not a loss of military superiority but our fracturing democracy and our technological connectedness. But it is war, and the Russians are fighting it with persistence, patience, and skill. We had better learn to fight it, too—perhaps first by learning not to fight ourselves. ♦

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## Transparent Lies

We don't use the word "lie" with abandon in these pages. It's used far too often in public life, to the point at which nearly every statement someone disagrees with is characterized as a "lie." The L-word is tightly regulated in parliamentary bodies—in Congress, for example—and rightly so. Once you call someone a liar, the good faith that allows for healthy debate is no longer possible.

On the subject of the Osama bin Laden documents,

though, as Stephen F. Hayes and Thomas Joscelyn report in this issue, the administration of Barack Obama lied repeatedly and lied flagrantly. The documents were retrieved in the May 2011 raid on bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Obama rightly hailed the mission as a success, not only because U.S. forces killed the man responsible for the deaths of nearly 3,000 Americans on 9/11 without suffering a casualty, but also because they carried away an enormous trove of information about bin Laden's global terrorist network. A senior intelligence official who briefed reporters at the Pentagon said: "As a result of the raid, we've acquired the single largest collection of senior terrorist materials ever."

In a war against a stateless enemy whose soldiers move furtively among civilians, this was a triumph. The only problem? The president and his administration didn't believe we were at war. They believed it *had been* a war but had moved on to the mopping-up phase—akin to Allied troops occupying Berlin in 1945.

If this were true, the Abbottabad trove should have borne it out. The Obama administration pledged to "share as much information with the American people" as possible, an aim consistent with the president's boast that his was the "most transparent administration in history." But it only declassified a handful of documents. Out of the hundreds of thousands captured in the Abbottabad raid, the Obama White House released only a few hundred and falsely characterized these as the entire trove. An outrageous lie.

Why such secrecy? There were no national security concerns for the vast bulk of the collection. The raid wasn't secret—al Qaeda knew we had whatever documents had been held in bin Laden's lair and would adjust accordingly. Why keep them locked up?

The answer is now clear. First, bin Laden's terrorist network wasn't the beaten and fugitive force Obama—then seeking reelection—claimed. Second, the documents proved beyond any reasonable doubt that al Qaeda had an uneasy but mutually beneficial relationship with Iran, and Obama spent much of his second term laboring to convince Americans that the Iranian regime could be trusted.

Almost the full collection of documents has now been made available—something this magazine has been calling for since 2013. President Trump and his administration, in particular CIA director Mike Pompeo, deserve credit for making good on their predecessors' pledges—and prevailing over the bureaucratic inertia that would have kept the vast majority of these documents secret forever.

Much of the information contained in this trove is dated. But it will yield valuable insights to scholars and journalists on the workings of a global terror network. And it will tell us much about the Obama administration's handling of the terror war from 2009 to 2011. From what we've seen already, the bin Laden documents won't do much to flatter "the most transparent administration in history." ♦

# Documenting al Qaeda's Durability

Lessons from the long-hidden bin Laden files.

BY THOMAS JOSCELYN



Abbottabad boys play cricket as the compound where Osama bin Laden was slain is demolished.

More than 16 years after the September 11, 2001, hijackings, America remains at war with jihadist groups around the globe. From South Asia through the heart of the Middle East and into West Africa, American forces are battling terrorist organizations that seek to control territory while threatening the West. How did we arrive at this point?

A complete history of the 9/11 wars won't be written for decades. They haven't been won or lost yet, so we don't know how this story ends. But this past week, the CIA released an invaluable trove of information for understanding our enemies: a large tranche of Osama bin Laden's files, retrieved during the May 2011 raid

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on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. There is perhaps no better source for understanding al Qaeda's history and intentions than the formerly secret memos and musings of the master terrorist who launched the jihadists' revolution.

In a newly released, 228-page handwritten journal, bin Laden reflected on his longstanding anti-Americanism. "When was your first dealing with the West? Meeting or statement?" the al Qaeda founder privately asked himself. Bin Laden answered his own question, saying that he remembered "giving a lecture in Jeddah," Saudi Arabia, in 1986 or 1987 titled "Pains and Hopes." "I talked about Palestine, Jews, and that we must/should hit America on its head and boycott even American apples," bin Laden wrote.

The al Qaeda founder would later

cite the U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia during and after the first Gulf war as a justification for his terrorism. But privately, in his yellow-bound diary, bin Laden explained that he had wanted to strike America all along, well before the United States intervened to stop Saddam Hussein's aggression in the region.

Bin Laden did not anticipate the ferocity of America's response to the 9/11 attacks. His men were left to scramble for new redoubts as U.S. forces and operatives hunted them down. After the Taliban's emirate crumbled in late 2001, the al Qaeda founder had to defend his decision to wake a sleeping giant. In one handwritten letter, presumably written by bin Laden, the author claims that Afghanistan would have been "targeted" and the Taliban "inevitably" overthrown even "without hitting the head of the infidel." This is a dubious assertion, to say the least, as no one was talking about invading Afghanistan on September 10, 2001.

The al Qaeda leader went on to argue that the Afghan war was important for "dragging the adversary" into a conflict that would "drain it economically and break the fear of confronting the lady of the new world order," meaning America. This contradicts bin Laden's previous assertions about America's alleged weakness. Bin Laden had cited the unceremonious U.S. withdrawals from Lebanon in the early 1980s and Somalia in the 1990s as evidence of the superpower's supposed cowardice. But the al Qaeda master had a point—the U.S. government's inconsistent approach to the Afghan conflict, which has cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars, means we are no closer to victory.

Yet the Abbottabad repository also demonstrates why it is still necessary to fight in Afghanistan, as the files document al Qaeda's durable presence there. Bin Laden himself never lost focus on the war. One of his subordinates even translated portions of Bob Woodward's 2010 book *Obama's Wars* into Arabic so that he could understand the Obama administration's thinking on the conflict. Regular

AAMIR QURESHI / AFP / GETTY

status reports submitted up the chain of command highlight the scope of al Qaeda's operations and enduring relationship with the Taliban.

Al Qaeda quickly exploited the 2003 war in Iraq as well. Bin Laden received numerous updates on the fighting, including audio reports from his loyalists.

In one such audio file, a jihadist known as Abu Muhammad offers a biography for Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist who publicly swore allegiance to bin Laden in 2004. Zarqawi fled Afghanistan through Iran and into Iraq. He arrived in Baghdad well before the war, according to Abu Muhammad's summary, and from there built a network that extended into Jordan and Syria. As the Americans approached in March 2003, Zarqawi feared for his safety, so he left Iraq for Iran. The Iranians detained Zarqawi, but only temporarily. Iran told Zarqawi that he could choose from several destinations, including Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey. Abu Muhammad elaborated: "Brother Abu Musab [al Zarqawi] refused these [countries] and asked them to send him to Iraq." This supposedly "surprised the Iranians," who wondered why Zarqawi wanted to enter the fray. But Zarqawi insisted on Iraq, and the Iranians let him have his way, according to Abu Muhammad's telling. The rest is history.

Abu Musab al Zarqawi, who was killed in June 2006, built Al Qaeda in Iraq—the predecessor to the Islamic State, or ISIS. The newly available files are crucial for understanding the history of this group. In one audio report, for instance, an al Qaeda operative discusses the Saudi sheikhs who support the jihadists' cause. While older Saudi clerics were less than helpful, others from the younger generation proved to be more amenable to al Qaeda's cause. One such ideologue named in bin Laden's files, Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Tarefe, is widely praised by the jihadists to this day.

Bin Laden remained an active manager of his far-flung network

until his dying day, receiving updates from loyalists around the globe. Groups such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al Shabaab in Somalia all sought and received his guidance. Bin Laden wanted these regional branches of al Qaeda to establish strong local support while also devoting resources to targeting Western forces. Each of those three al Qaeda groups continues to pose problems for American policymakers. The Trump administration has found it necessary to step up U.S. involvement in the countries they inhabit. Since the beginning of the year, President Trump has ramped up the air campaign in Yemen (where

**The Abbottabad repository demonstrates why it is still necessary to fight in Afghanistan, as the files document al Qaeda's durable presence there. Bin Laden himself never lost focus on the war.**

AQAP is headquartered), granted broader authority to U.S. forces in Somalia (where al Shabaab challenges the Western-backed government), and continued special forces operations in West Africa (where AQIM continues to thrive).

All of this is evidence that bin Laden's anti-American jihad lives on today. It has evolved in ways he could not have anticipated, especially with the rise of ISIS, which was disowned by al Qaeda in early 2014. But there are still thousands of men willing to carry bin Laden's torch.

The Abbottabad cache shows that al Qaeda groomed a "new generation" of leaders to replace those lost in the U.S. drone campaign. One of them is Osama's genetic and ideological heir: Hamza bin Laden.

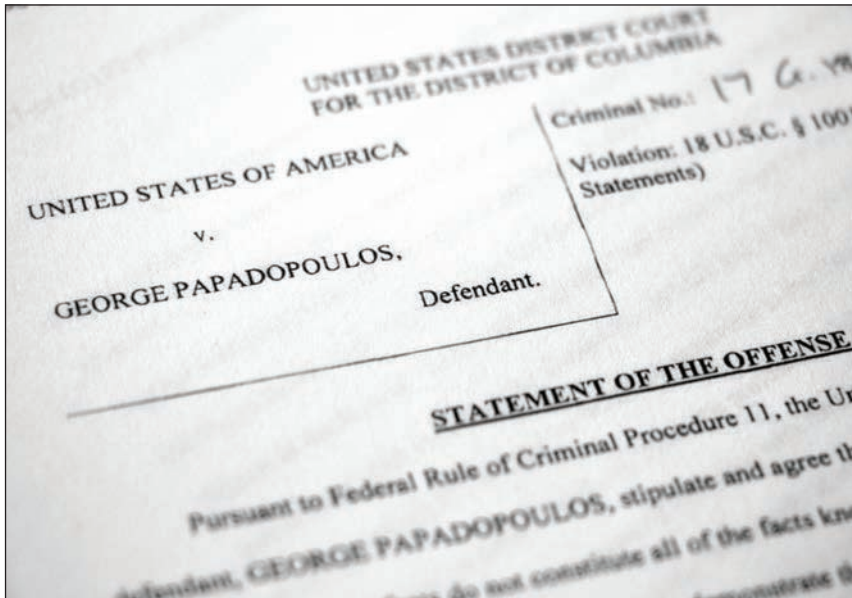
Since August 2015, al Qaeda has released a series of audio messages from Hamza. The group's

propagandists have been careful not to show the adult face of Osama's son, likely fearing that it would increase the threats to his security. For instance, al Qaeda celebrated the most recent anniversary of the 9/11 attacks by superimposing a childhood photo of Hamza on one of the Twin Towers.

Thanks to one video released this week, however, we can finally see Hamza as a young adult. The video was recorded during his wedding in Iran approximately a decade ago, so it is not current. But it is much more recent than the images al Qaeda uses. Like other bin Laden family members, Hamza absconded for Iranian soil in late 2001. One 19-page file released this week notes that a senior al Qaeda ideologue known as Abu Hafs al-Mauritani negotiated with Iran to secure this post-9/11 safe haven. That same memo, likely written in 2007, indicates that Iran offered "Saudi brothers" in al Qaeda "everything they needed," including "money, arms," and "training in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, in exchange for striking American interests in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf." Iran and al Qaeda had their differences, the author wrote, but their "interests intersect" when it comes to being an "enemy of America." In a previously released memo, bin Laden had described Iran as al Qaeda's "main artery for funds, personnel, and communication."

Along with other bin Laden family members, Hamza was detained inside Iran at some point. The detentions became a major bone of contention between the two sides, and al Qaeda kidnapped an Iranian diplomat to force their release. There is no question that the two have been at odds at times. As additional files are translated and analyzed, we will likely learn more about Iran's complex dealings with bin Laden's subordinates.

Osama bin Laden has been dead for more than six years. But the jihadist revolution he launched continues. And bin Laden's secrets—many of them now available to the public for the first time—go a long way toward explaining why. ♦



# Not Quite the Best or the Brightest

Team Trump's 'island of misfit toys.'

BY MICHAEL WARREN

George Papadopoulos was ambitious and underqualified, the kind of wannabe who fills the lower rungs of many a political campaign. This foreign policy adviser to the Donald Trump campaign would not have been even a footnote in the history of the 2016 election before he pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his attempt to connect campaign officials with Russian officials. Now, as with so many others, a marginal supporting actor in Trump's ongoing drama takes center stage.

Early in the 2016 cycle, Papadopoulos, then 29, briefly advised Ben Carson's presidential campaign. Interested in national security and politics but without much in the way of credentials or experience, Papadopoulos

cast himself as an international energy consultant based in London. He had previously worked as an unpaid intern and contract researcher for the conservative Hudson Institute. It was a middling résumé for an aspiring policy aide, and he joined Team Trump in what most campaigns would consider an entry-level advisory role.

Take it from the president himself, who, shortly after the guilty plea was released on October 30, dismissed Papadopoulos as a "low-level volunteer." White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Papadopoulos was merely a "member of a volunteer advisory council that met one time over the course of a year." According to Michael Caputo, who served as senior communications adviser for the Trump campaign, Papadopoulos was a "coffee boy."

Yet this coffee boy and low-level

volunteer seemed to have the ear of some important people in the campaign. Throughout the spring of 2016, he emailed with key Trump aides—most frequently with his immediate supervisor, Sam Clovis, but also with campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, campaign chairman Paul Manafort, and a still-unknown "senior policy advisor." His attempts to broker a meeting between the campaign and the Russians never bore fruit, despite Papadopoulos's persistence and the willingness of these more senior aides to entertain the idea.

For a brief moment, Papadopoulos's exposure even went all the way to the top. According to his plea statement, on March 31, just a few weeks after coming on board the campaign, he attended a "national security meeting" in Washington. In attendance were Trump, then-Alabama senator Jeff Sessions, and 10 other members of what the candidate called his "national security team." Ten days earlier, in a meeting with the editorial board of the *Washington Post*, Trump read off a list of his national security advisers and included Papadopoulos. "He's an energy and oil consultant," Trump said. "Excellent guy."

Hangers-on, self-promoters, and fortune-seekers surround every political campaign, from dog catcher to president. They are like bacteria—inevitable, inescapable, sometimes harmless, often dangerous. A typical campaign has an immune system to protect itself and the candidate from these invaders, well-meaning and parasitic alike.

"In every presidential campaign, you have people with thin résumés," says Karl Rove, the chief political strategist for George W. Bush. "In a serious policy shop you'd have a process that sort of weeds those people out."

Donald Trump's campaign, needless to say, was atypical. For one, Trump consciously and credibly adopted the outsider mantle, a signal to established political professionals to stay away. His deviations from GOP orthodoxy on policy were a similar red flag. There was also the enduring belief among the so-called

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experts that Trump had no chance of winning the nomination. Who wants to hitch their wagon to a campaign going nowhere?

Steve Bannon would call the C-team politicians who made up the Trump campaign the “island of misfit toys.” Rove calls them “walking disasters.”

Papadopoulos wasn't the only such disaster to strike the campaign. His supervisor, Sam Clovis, was an Iowa talk-radio host whose political experience reached its peak in 2014, when he first failed to win the GOP nomination for U.S. Senate and then was defeated in the race for state treasurer. Clovis advised Rick Perry's presidential campaign before jumping to Trump in August 2015. He showed little pull even within his home state—it was Ted Cruz, not Donald Trump, who won Iowa—but Clovis nevertheless became a national co-chairman of the campaign and a top cable-news surrogate for the candidate. His most consequential role may end up being his frequent conversations with Papadopoulos, in which, as outlined in the guilty plea, they discussed the possibility of an “off the record” meeting between the campaign and Russian officials. Clovis emailed Papadopoulos in mid-August 2016: “I would encourage you . . . to make the trip [to Russia] if it is feasible.” According to recent news reports, Clovis has testified before Robert Mueller's grand jury.

“Every campaign attracts its fair share of strange characters,” notes Alex Conant, who was Marco Rubio's communications director during the Florida senator's bid for the GOP nomination. “Campaigns are about addition, so you generally try to find something to do for everyone who wants to help. But obviously most people who walk in off the street don't end up as senior advisers to the candidate.”

Trump World's “strange characters” didn't always come off the street. It's worth remembering that Paul Manafort was brought into the Trump campaign in May 2016 to “professionalize” the

operation. Manafort had been a Republican consultant for decades, but by 2016 he had mostly abandoned domestic politics for the lucrative foreign market. As his recent indictment outlines, there was plenty of evidence of shady dealings and questionable associations that would have warned off most candidates.

There were also the personal connections—figures such as Boris Epshteyn, a friend of Eric Trump's from their days at Georgetown University who began popping up on TV and at campaign events as an imperious surrogate. Epshteyn served a short stint in the White House communications shop before leaving in March, amid reports he

adviser before being forced out for misrepresenting his conversations with the Russian ambassador. Flynn is one of the central figures in the Mueller probe. Sebastian Gorka, the British-born counterterrorism analyst, was brought into the White House as an aide primarily on the basis of his position as the national security editor at *Breitbart*. He spent most of his time gabbing on cable news before exiting the administration a week after Steve Bannon did. And who can forget the whirlwind 11 days when Anthony Scaramucci served as the White House communications director? Scaramucci's chief qualification seemed to be his willingness to defend Trump in the most bombastic way



A photograph candidate Donald Trump posted on Instagram in March 2016—“Meeting with my national security team in #WashingtonDC”—showing George Papadopoulos third from left

had been combative with networks.

Then there was Michael G. Flynn, the son of Trump campaign adviser and former defense intelligence chief Michael T. Flynn. Flynn *files* was a part of the Trump transition in late 2016, and even applied for a security clearance, before he was kicked out for spreading conspiracy theories on his Twitter account.

Trump's tolerance for these types has extended well past the campaign and into his presidency. The elder Michael Flynn served for a short time as the White House national security

imaginable. His over-the-top, vulgar interview with the *New Yorker's* Ryan Lizza during his first week on the job sealed his fate.

So is it any wonder that George Papadopoulos, who listed among the credentials on his LinkedIn page his participation in the 2012 International Model United Nations, would have been in a position to regularly communicate with top Trump campaign staffers?

“It's a sign of the thinness of the campaign,” Rove says. “Where's the adult?” ♦

# The Courage of Their Convictions

If Sen. Menendez is found guilty, will he resign?

BY FRED BARNES

The verdict in the corruption trial of Democratic senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey may come as early as this week. If Menendez is convicted of a felony, Democrats face big trouble.

The switch of one vote from Democrat to Republican, even temporarily, would improve the GOP's prospects for achieving its most cherished goal, tax reform. In the narrowly divided Senate, a single vote defeated the repeal and replacement of Obamacare, and a single vote could clear the way not only for the tax bill but also for confirmation of Trump administration officials and judicial nominees.

This assumes Menendez would leave the Senate if convicted. But should he win acquittal, Republicans would gain nothing. And even if he's convicted, it won't revive the failed efforts to kill Obamacare. That must await a new budget in 2018 with special "reconciliation" rules that authorize passage by a simple majority vote, according to Senate officials.

If the jury finds Menendez guilty, he would be under extreme pressure to resign immediately. New Jersey voters favor that. In a Fox News poll in mid-October, 73 percent said he should step down if found guilty of "corruption charges." In late September, a Suffolk University poll found that 84 percent—including 77 percent of registered Democrats—think he should resign if convicted of bribery.

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Senate Republicans are prepared to demand he quit instantly. In that case, Republican governor Chris Christie would appoint a Republican to the seat. Democrats might prefer to keep Menendez in office until January 17, when a newly elected governor, probably a Democrat, takes over. But the



*Menendez, left, and Christie*

new governor couldn't substitute his pick for Christie's. He could only schedule a special election for the Senate seat in a few months. So all in all, there would be an additional Republican senator for four or five months. Or longer if a Republican won the special election.

In the meantime, Senate Democrats have no good options for dealing with a Menendez conviction. Should they stand aside while he remains in office, they'll be accused of poisoning the Senate or at least of hypocrisy.

When a jury convicted Republican senator Ted Stevens of Alaska on corruption charges in 2008, then-majority leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, said: "The reality is that a convicted felon is not going to be able to serve in the United States Senate." If Stevens balks at resigning, he "will face

an ethics committee investigation and expulsion." Barack Obama, still a senator, said Stevens "should step down." Stevens did, though his conviction was later vacated.

Mitch McConnell, then Senate minority leader, insisted Stevens would be expelled if he didn't leave on his own. "There is a 100 percent certainty that he would be expelled. . . . The Senate would have zero tolerance for the continued service of a convicted felon," McConnell said.

An aide says McConnell is "righteous" on matters of wrongdoing by senators. He was instrumental in easing Republican senators Bob Packwood of Oregon and John Ensign of Nevada out of the Senate when they were morally compromised. He did the same with Larry Craig of Idaho.

With Menendez, Republicans have many options. The most difficult would be quick expulsion by the Senate in the event Menendez is convicted but refuses to resign. That requires a two-thirds vote—all 52 GOP senators plus 15 Democrats.

The hard part would be getting a handful of Democrats, much less 15. But the Republican National Committee is geared up to target the 10 Democratic senators from states won by President Trump. And special attention would be paid to Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer. Since a vote against expulsion wouldn't sit well with voters, Republicans are ready to make the most of that issue.

A second option involves taking the Menendez matter to the Senate ethics committee. With the committee's stamp of approval, a majority vote would suffice to toss Menendez out of the Senate. But the committee is bipartisan, with three Republicans and three Democrats. This probably means a tie vote and no action by the panel. But it's not clear McConnell would go the ethics route anyway.

Still another option is a resolution saying felons don't belong in the Senate. This would have minimal impact,

LEFT: EDUARDO MUNOZ ALVAREZ / GETTY; RIGHT: DREW ANGERER / GETTY

“but it would put Democrats on the record,” a Senate aide says.

As you might expect, Democratic senators aren’t talkative when reporters ask about Menendez. Kamala Harris of California was asked if a convicted felon should stay in the Senate. She wouldn’t say. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts was asked if she had a plan in case Democrats lose a vote—Menendez’s—in the Senate. “I didn’t know about this,” she replied.

When a reporter queried Schumer about standing by Menendez if he’s convicted, the senator’s answer wasn’t responsive. He said this: “Senator Menendez is issuing a spirited defense. We all believe in the presumption of innocence in this country. And Senator Menendez is fighting very hard and we respect that greatly. Next question.” Schumer, by the way, was cagey back in 2008 when asked if Stevens should resign. He said he wasn’t commenting on that situation. “I would say that the fact John McCain and Sarah Palin and Mitch McConnell say he should step down is something Alaska voters will pay attention to.” CBS News said he didn’t want to pile on and cause a backlash that might Stevens get reelected.

Dick Durbin of Illinois, the Senate minority whip, said Menendez “has given us assurance that there is no substance to these charges.” Federal judge William H. Walls doesn’t appear to agree. He has turned down a motion to dismiss the case and another to declare a mistrial.

Menendez, 63, is accused in an 18-count indictment of taking bribes to use his Senate office to benefit the business of Dr. Salomon Melgen, a close friend. Prosecutors alleged the bribes consisted of gifts and campaign contributions.

Even based on the indictment and before the nine-week trial began, the *New York Times* and the *New Jersey Star-Ledger* urged Menendez to step down. That would spare everyone the drama of a trial, the *Star-Ledger* said. Whatever drama the trial created, it attracted minimal coverage by the national media. ♦

# Distaff Meeting

When sisterhood flowered in Detroit.

BY ALICE B. LLOYD

*Detroit*

The pink knit cap made famous by last winter’s Women’s March on Washington is already an anachronism. Not more than a couple dozen or so of the eye-catching toppers bobbed among the



*‘They are the same and they must die,’ says actress Rose McGowan.*

4,000 or so activists attending “Women’s March Presents: The Inaugural Women’s Convention.” And those few “pussy hats” stuck out like embarrassing artifacts, reminders of the high hopes many on the left held for an anti-Trump feminist revival just 10 months ago.

These three days at Detroit’s Cobo Center are billed as a chance to “Reclaim Our Time” and “March On” in the momentous spirit of the post-inaugural protests. But the urgency of liberal strategizing for the 2018 midterms comes in a distant second to

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collective soul-searching. Intersectionality, the central tenet of today’s women’s movement, asks white women to cede their social power to minorities. With its emphasis on exposing “micro-aggressions,” intersectional feminism undercuts political unity.

The rift between the feminist left and the Sandernista further-left reopened on October 12 when the Women’s March’s official Instagram account announced Bernie Sanders as the convention’s headliner. The backlash was instant: The socialist senator is a man—and not just any man, but a man who hasn’t consistently stood with Planned Parenthood (one of the chief sponsors of the Women’s March). Worse yet, he stood in the way of the First Woman President for five stubborn months. An online petition to remove Sanders won more than 1,300 signatures and a formal statement of apology was quickly issued. He rerouted his activism to Puerto Rico, and Rose McGowan, the shero of the moment, took his place at the top of the program. It would be her first public engagement since outing herself on Twitter as an unnamed accuser who’d settled with Harvey Weinstein.

In her opening address, Women’s March co-president Tamika D. Mallory tries to push past a year of controversies. “If your feminism is the difference between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, it does not represent me!” she thunders. “Your feminism does not represent me if it is only about our right to get an abortion!” Back in January, the march dropped a pro-life group, the Dallas-based New Wave Feminists, from its list of sponsored organizations when too many pro-choice women complained on social media.

California congresswoman Maxine Waters gave the convention its slogan back in July when she invoked

ALL IMAGES: THE WEEKLY STANDARD / HANNAH YOEST

parliamentary procedure to regain the House floor from Steve Mnuchin with three words that launched a thousand tweets, “reclaiming my time.” On stage in the Cobo Center’s gaping main hall, she reminds the sisterhood why we’re all here, leading the chant: “Impeach 45! Impeach 45! Impeach 45!”

It is Rose McGowan, though, who steals the show. With an otherworldly cadence and a militant message, the reformed Hollywood vamp commands her troops: “We are planet women, and you will hear us roar!” She raises a culturally appropriative fist. “From one monster we look away to another, the head monster of all right now. And they are the same and they must die,” she says, referring presumably to Weinstein and Trump, but surely with the whole patriarchy in mind. She presents #rosearmy, a Twitter shorthand for signaling solidarity with women cowed into silence about their abuse at the hands of monstrous men: “We’re free, we’re strong,” she tells us. “Rose Army is about all of us being roses in our own life. Not me, the actual flower—because we have thorns and our thorns carry justice.” In Rose Army, we may all be victims, but we’re marching toward revenge.

One woman not here to enlist in Rose Army is Destiny Herndon-De La Rosa, founder of the disinvited New Wave Feminists. She’s come to the convention at her donors’ urging—in peace not protest, to represent a nuanced pro-life perspective. The intuitive premise of her advocacy sits as uneasily beside the stridency of McGowan as it does besides Planned Parenthood’s big-moneyed claim on liberal feminism as a pro-choice movement.

“No one *wants* to get an abortion,” Herndon-De La Rosa says aloud, while watching a religious pro-life demonstration on the other side of the Cobo Center’s high glass windows. Another woman, who doesn’t know her background, agrees, “I know, right?” Later, at a Planned Parenthood panel on “Abortion Stories,” Herndon-De La Rosa stands and asks whether women with mixed feelings about their abortions should join storytelling campaigns. “I know so many post-abortive



Above, congresswomen Brenda Lawrence, Maxine Waters, and Debbie Dingell ask attendees to target the 2018 midterms; below, a marble atrium overlooking the St. Clair River hosts ‘intersectional artwork’ by ‘U.S.-based, femme-identifying artists.’



women, some who are okay with, but some who aren’t,” she says. If their stories are at all troubling, should they stay quiet? The moderator, defensive and confused, deflects. Another woman in the audience paraphrases Herndon-De La Rosa’s question: Does a woman who regrets her abortion belong in this room? The moderator concedes, “Every experience is different.”

While we have coffee in the convention center lobby, a grateful witness introduces herself. Coco, who chairs Planned Parenthood Southeast’s young professionals group, wants to

thank Herndon-De La Rosa for daring to broach a subject with which Southern women disproportionately struggle. “It becomes propaganda when we only allow women to tell positive stories about abortion,” Herndon-De La Rosa says, and Coco nods knowingly.

Jamecia Gray, a 25-year-old from Miami, isn’t interested in pro-life feminism and tends to side with Planned Parenthood. “They probably paid for my scholarship, so I’m thankful,” she says, referring to the fact that she and almost 1,000 other applicants were invited to the convention free



*Destiny Herndon-De La Rosa believes 'no woman wants to have an abortion'; at the Women's March's Inaugural Women's Convention, it's a radical idea.*

of charge. But, she adds, “When most people hear reproductive justice, they think of white women and Planned Parenthood.” The same goes for the Women’s March, too: “The Women’s March has a lot of resources. And it’s filled with a lot of white faces. These are privileged folks who have the means to get here,” Gray observes. If she had paid to attend the convention, she would be disappointed by the lack of diversity.

The breakout session “Confronting White Womanhood” was so popular that a second session is convened. It is an examination of the various evils white women have inflicted throughout history, many of them—it seems—by a miscarriage of good intentions. “Outside, the white women were really upset,” recalls Gray, who’d been standing nearby when the first session filled up. “They were *white women-ing*, they were complaining that they’d paid this money, and they couldn’t get in.”

Sophie Ellman-Golan, who leads the two sessions, begins with a confusing story about telling off a deliriously drunk black man for manspreading—i.e., having his legs wide enough apart to take up multiple seats on public transportation. The man proceeded to expose himself in retaliation against her scold, and the rest of the passengers on the subway car rushed to shield

her from his lurching half-nakedness. The lesson, she says, was that she should have left him alone because, “If he’d been arrested, that would’ve been on me.”

Following Ellman-Golan’s lead, we break off into little groups and confess our own microaggressions. A local husband and wife tell my circle they regret not befriending a black woman who’d recently moved out of their building—although, to be fair, the husband adds, they’ve never been more than cordial with any of their neighbors. A young woman from Indiana owns up to having traveled with a church group to Central America, where, as a typical white girl *voluntourist*, she played with orphans during the day and retired to a comfortable hotel every evening. Deciding silence would be more conspicuous, I volunteer that in my interviews so far this weekend I’d asked minorities, more often than not, to spell their names a second time.

The old unsettled problem of what, other than skin color, makes a minority in America rises at the end of another session—this one “Confronting Anti-Semitism and White Supremacy.” This is a lengthy discussion of Bannonic bigotry, but little else. A disappointed Elyssa Schmier gets up to prod the fat flank of the “elephant in the room.”

“I’m an intersectional feminist, and I am Jewish. I’m not going to leave my Judaism at the door,” she announces to raucous applause. “The anti-Israel movement on the left is huge. Some of those people are anti-Israel, but some of those people are anti-Jewish,” Schmier tells me later on, recalling the offenses of the “Bernie bros” on social media. Schmier’s challenge, like Herndon-De La Rosa’s, won more welcome from activists in the audience than from the panel moderators. Several women afterward thanked her for her intervention. “If it doesn’t change, Jewish Democrats are going to leave the party!” Schmier says to a new friend.

It is, after all, the future of the Democratic party that was meant to be on our minds all weekend. But the grassroots left and the Democratic establishment don’t look toward a common future. If we’re to judge by panel attendance, the average conventioner worries more about what we can do to be less microaggressively white in our daily lives than about getting out the vote in the Trump-friendly Rust Belt.

Emily Kaufman, a senior majoring in women’s studies at the University of Michigan, made the trip from Ann Arbor in large part to attend a session organized by the women-focused political fundraising group EMILY’s List. Kaufman, who is transgender, noticed the weekend’s dearth of trans-specific offerings: There was just one event, “Not All Pussies Are Pink, And Not All Women Have Pussies,” which she would not attend, noting how its playful title made light of the profound. “It’s like it’s just a hat, but it’s not,” she says.

And, besides, Kaufman, who hopes to run for office in the not-too-distant future, ought to be thinking about what she can say to the women of EMILY’s List to secure herself a spot on their radar. The night before, she tells me, revelers complimented her convincing costume, having mistaken her for a man dressed in a skirt and heels for Halloween. That’s perfect, I tell her: When you want to close with this crowd, nothing works quite like a microaggression. ♦

# Putin on the Ad Blitz

Did 100 grand in social media ads swing the election? BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

Toothpaste, a 7,000-year-old product, is rarely a leading indicator. But the world's top purveyor of the stuff—along with laundry detergent, dish soap, diapers, and other sundries—made a decision earlier this year that could portend a big shift in the advertising industry.

Procter & Gamble, the sprawling 180-year-old consumer goods conglomerate, had, like most of corporate America, readily embraced digital advertising. YouTube pre-roll videos and targeted Facebook ads—whereby advertisers select narrow categories of people to whom they wish to pitch their products—were the name of the game.

Until, that is, they weren't. In the second quarter of 2017, as part of general cost-cutting measures, Procter & Gamble slashed digital ad spending by more than \$100 million. The Ohio company also announced it was moving away from targeted advertising. (On Facebook, "I can literally target 50-year-old women in Peoria, Illinois, who like cats and whisky," explains Champlain College digital marketing professor Elaine Young.) And what price did P&G pay for this pull-back? None: They reported 2 percent sales *growth*—results that surprised even industry analysts.

Which brings us to the \$64,000 question. Or more precisely, the \$100,000 question of the day: Did the roughly hundred grand that Kremlin-linked groups spent on social media ads in 2016 have an effect on the presidential election? (By way of comparison, Hillary Clinton's campaign spent

around \$450 million in total, including about \$150 millions on television ads.) Targeted social media ads are apparently not that effective at selling dental floss, as the Procter & Gamble example suggests. But were they enough to install Donald Trump in the White House?



*Wait, they think THAT will influence me?*

To hear the media—and the social media companies themselves—tell it, the answer is obvious. Russian-sponsored Facebook ads and Twitter bots join uber-villains James Comey and Julian Assange to constitute the parade of horrors that put the underqualified real estate tycoon in the Oval Office. In a more-in-sorrow-than-anger performance before Senate and House committees last week, a Facebook honcho humble-bragged that some 126 million Americans saw Russian-sponsored ads in the run-up to the election last year. Left unsaid was that Facebook, an advertising business, has a vested interest in talking up the reach—and the efficacy—of the ads it hosts.

While 126 million impressions may sound like a lot, the figure pales in comparison to many social media ad campaigns. (An "impression" is every time

an ad is seen, whether or not it is clicked on.) In 2013, Frito-Lay ran a contest in which people voted on new flavors of potato chips to offer. More than 1 billion Facebook impressions were generated by the gimmick. Even niche products can draw a huge audience: More than 124 million people have viewed a Facebook ad for the Squatty Potty, a stool that sits underneath a traditional toilet. Twitter, for its part, hasn't been left out of the party. Earlier this year, a Twitter user asked Wendy's how many retweets he would need to garner to win free nuggets for life. Wendy's responded: 18 million. The rejoinder went viral, reportedly generating some 330 million impressions.

So it's probably not surprising that Mark Zuckerberg initially claimed it was "crazy" that Facebook may have affected the outcome of the election. Now he says the company he founded may indeed have swayed things. That would be bad for democracy, of course. But it's not good for business to scoff at the advertising power of one's platform.

The truth is it's a complicated process to assess whether social media ads work that well. "First and foremost, if one wants to assess the effectiveness of advertising, and truly know the answer, one has to run randomized experiments," explains Eric T. Bradlow, the chair of the marketing department at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. "The simplest form, as they are known, are called A/B tests. In this case, the experimenter needs to randomize who gets exposed to ads and who doesn't. Then, one can simply look at the difference in, say, voting pattern, buying habits, click-through rates, etc., of the treated group versus the control group."

At this point, we simply don't have these data, so we can't assess in this way whether those who saw Russian-sponsored ads were ultimately more inclined to pull the lever for Trump than those who didn't. Further complicating the narrative is that some Russian-bought ads were not, on their face, pro-Trump at all. It's recently emerged, for example, that the Internet Research Agency, a

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supposedly Kremlin-linked troll farm, bought ads in support of Black Lives Matter. The BLM ads were even targeted to communities where they would have had particular resonance, like Ferguson, Missouri, the birthplace of the movement.

This suggests a few possibilities: Russian efforts may have been geared more towards sowing general societal discord than helping the Trump campaign. (The chaos-as-an-objective strategy is indeed one we've seen in Eastern European countries in recent years.) Or perhaps it was a brilliant jujitsu move, and the Kremlin had the insight that Black Lives Matter is unpopular enough that increasing its visibility would help the Trump campaign. On the other hand, it's always possible that the move was in earnest, and that a particularly woke devotee of Ta-Nehisi Coates is currently strolling the streets of St. Petersburg.

Social media ads do offer the same value proposition to political campaigns they do to consumer goods companies—the ability to target with incredible precision. “Around 2004, when the Bush-Cheney reelection campaign led the way in micro-targeting, it had gotten down to targeting households,” notes Dennis J. Lennox, the former executive director of the Michigan Republican party. “Now, several years later, campaigns are using big data to target the same household as 2004, but with the different messages for each household member.”

Nonetheless, those who've worked in campaigns firsthand express doubts about the efficacy of social media advertising. An ad is “only as good as what it's next to,” observes one political consultant who has managed congressional campaigns. A pricey TV spot running on a prestigious cable drama, a Cartier watch ad in an upmarket print publication—these can work.

But social media ads, crammed into an endless stream of cat videos, incoherent political rants, and inane customer service complaints don't have that pull. Viewers “don't respect the content, so they don't respect the ad,” he says. They're also easy to ignore; years of web surfing have conditioned

Internet users simply to tune out online ads. Indeed, an experiment run by *PC World* in 2013 found that Facebook ads have abysmal click-through rates—that is, the percentage of people who tangibly respond to an ad they see. That suggests they're easily ignored.

The consultant adds that the best political ads persuade voters—that's the purpose of negative ads, for example. His experience in campaigns suggests that social media ads are horrible

at persuasion: “Someone would have to be an idiot to be swayed by them,” he avers. TV ads are where the real persuasion occurs.

“Facebook ads are hardly a substitute for a good candidate with a compelling message,” concludes Dennis Lennox, the Michigan chairman. And in 2016, “build the wall” trumped “you're all irredeemable”—probably regardless of what the Russkies posted on Facebook. ♦

## The Convergence of the Scandals

Russian meddling and Russian muddling.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

On October 30, special prosecutor Robert Mueller indicted President Donald Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort and deputy chairman Rick Gates on 12 charges, including money laundering, false statements, and conspiracy against the

Russians, which included discussing the possibility of the Trump campaign obtaining thousands of hacked emails with “dirt” on rival Hillary Clinton.

Those headlines alone could mark the start of a sweeping scandal of the sort Washington hasn't seen in years. But they are just two of a handful of shady stories, all involving Russia, that raise serious concerns about the vulnerability of America's political institutions to meddling from the Kremlin.

The week before the Mueller indictments, news broke—after months of speculation and the threat of congressional subpoenas—that Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and the Democratic National Committee funded the infamous “dossier” of unverified intelligence about Trump's Russian connections that was privately circulated in Washington prior to last year's election and published after it by *BuzzFeed*. Marc Elias, the general counsel of the Clinton campaign, used his law firm Perkins Coie as an intermediary to hire opposition research firm Fusion GPS to collect damaging information about Trump. Former DNC head



Gates, left, and Manafort

United States, related to their work with Ukrainian political entities. That same day, Mueller's team revealed that George Papadopoulos, a foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign, had pleaded guilty to lying to investigators about his contacts with

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Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta both told the Senate Intelligence Committee behind closed doors (the former in October, the latter in September) that they knew nothing of the Democrats' funding of Fusion GPS. Sitting next to Podesta during his testimony was his personal lawyer—Marc Elias. As the *New York Times's* Maggie Haberman tweeted, "Folks involved in funding this lied about it, and with sanctimony, for a year." *Times* reporter Kenneth Vogel was even more specific: "When I tried to report this story, Clinton campaign lawyer @marcelias pushed back vigorously, saying, 'You (or your sources) are wrong.'"

Another scandal is an old one made new. In 2015, former Republican speechwriter Peter Schweizer charged in his book *Clinton Cash* that a Russian state-owned corporation received U.S. approval to buy a majority share in Uranium One, which held 20 percent of America's strategically vital uranium production capacity, after money from the company's investors flowed into the Clinton Foundation. Schweizer's allegations were largely corroborated by independent reporting by the *New York Times*. All told, tens of millions of dollars from Uranium One investors went to the Clinton Foundation.

An October 17 report in the *Hill* revealed significant new information. Even as the Obama administration was approving the deal, with direct involvement from the Clinton State Department, the FBI was investigating Russian extortion and bribery efforts to gain control of American energy interests. The Trump administration recently took the unusual move of removing the gag order on an FBI informant in the case, which will allow him to testify before an interested Republican-led Congress about the matter.

These scandals are complicated matters whose details can be hard to follow. Press coverage of each is heavily colored by partisan and personal interests that sometimes overlap. The Mueller indictments have sparked

a media feeding frenzy; what's less obvious is that they suggest a wider and more alarming story.

Almost nothing is surprising about the charges Manafort and Gates hid \$75 million they received for their work for the pro-Russian government and political parties in Ukraine. Manafort was long fingered as a frontman for Russian interests; it was widely reported when he left the Trump campaign last fall under a cloud of scandal surrounding his consulting work. "It's important to note that these investigations predate Manafort's time as head of the Trump campaign," concedes the *Washington Post*. The FBI was investigating Manafort as early as 2014.



John Podesta

But Manafort and Gates's suspect lobbying activities might have been a bipartisan affair. Mueller's indictment notes that the pair farmed out some of their Ukraine work to two unnamed organizations; the press has identified them as the Podesta Group and Mercury Public Affairs. The Podesta Group, one of Washington's most lucrative lobbying concerns, was founded by brothers and Democratic fundraisers Tony and John Podesta (the latter left the shop years ago). The Podesta Group worked with Manafort on behalf of an organization known as the European Centre for a Modern Ukraine, a front for former Ukraine president Viktor Yanukovich's pro-Russian government. Both organizations claim they didn't know the center was a front for foreign interests; Mueller's team is investigating. But already, Tony Podesta has resigned from his eponymous firm—the same day the Mueller indictments

came down. The real scandal may end up being not just the Trump campaign's ties to Russia but the extent to which Washington's influence-peddling industry was already in cahoots with pro-Putin interests.

The charges against Trump foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos speak more directly to the issue of collusion. Papadopoulos lied to investigators about the timeline of his contacts with people claiming connections to the Kremlin, falsely stating he'd met them before he joined the campaign. He actively pursued the prospect of obtaining stolen emails from the Russians, possibly with approval from other campaign officials. According to court documents, Sam Clovis, Papadopoulos's supervisor on the Trump campaign, told him "I would encourage you" and another foreign policy adviser to "make the trip, if it is feasible," to Russia for a planned off-the-record meeting. Clovis denies any wrongdoing and is said to be cooperating with Mueller's probe, but on November 2 he withdrew his nomination for a high-level job in the administration.

Ultimately, Papadopoulos didn't come close to securing any stolen emails. And in fact, Russia might have been manipulating both campaigns. One telling detail, courtesy of the *Washington Post*: "Sergei Millian, who was a key source of information contained in a dossier of information about Trump's ties to Russia, told people around him that he was in contact with Papadopoulos during the campaign."

While much of Washington is focused on the domestic political ramifications of these scandals and the possibility of overt collusion with Russia, it could turn out that Moscow didn't actually have a rooting interest in the 2016 election. Russia's real purpose may simply have been to exploit corruption and partisan divides to weaken our institutions, undermine American confidence, and soften opposition to its global agenda. If that's the case, since Washington is now buried in Russia-related scandals, it's hard not to conclude that the Kremlin has had remarkable success. ♦

KRISTOFFER TRIPPLAAR / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY

# Podcasting to the People

Who gets to talk to the public: priests or politicians?

BY PHILIP TERZIAN



Franklin Roosevelt broadcasting from his Hyde Park home, November 4, 1938

Amanda Hess, a David Carr Fellow at the *New York Times*, who “writes about Internet culture for the [*Times*] Arts section,” recently took to its pages to tell us what she thinks of politicians who podcast. Executive summary: She doesn’t approve of them (“Politicians Are Bad at Podcasting,” Oct. 27).

Podcasting is a relatively recent phenomenon in the world of Internet culture, and as it happens, most (but not all) podcasting pols are Democrats. Bernie Sanders has his own podcast, as does his Senate colleague Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio). So do Hillary Clinton and Mayor Rahm Emanuel of Chicago. There are a handful of GOP podcasters—Congressman Sean Duffy of Wisconsin, for example—but Hess mentions Duffy largely for laughs: His podcast is entitled

“‘Plaidcast,’ [which] references his rugged status as a lumberjack games champion and sets out to ‘humanize’ his colleagues by interviewing ‘neat, cool members of Congress.’”

You can easily imagine the rolling eyes in the *Times* newsroom.

To be fair, Hess is almost equally contemptuous of progressive podcasters. Listening to Rahm Emanuel’s “Chicago Stories,” she describes the “combative mayor [recasting] himself as a kinder, gentler interlocutor of anodyne local figures, like brewery owners and spoken-word poets”—as if that were a bad thing. I confess to harboring mixed feelings about Emanuel, Barack Obama’s foul-mouthed chief of staff; but a conversation with a Chicago brewery owner—imagine the accent!—might induce me to tune in.

For that matter, you would think that a writer for the *Times* Arts section might appreciate a combative mayor who seeks out, and talks to,

spoken-word poets. But you would be mistaken. Not only does Hess fail to be amused—“the podcasts are . . . boring”—but she is indignant as well. Here she dons her hat as a David Carr Fellow: “The lawmaker podcast boom,” she explains in earnest tones, “is another way that our political news is becoming less accountable to the public and more personality driven.”

I don’t mean to suggest that a contributor to the *Times* Arts section has no standing to discuss such topics, but in her angry observations disguised as bemused contempt, Amanda Hess manages to express nearly everything that the public distrusts about political journalism. For her argument is not about aesthetics but power. When she talks about elected officials being “accountable to the public,” is she speaking on behalf of the electorate or the *Times*?

A. J. Liebling once observed that freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one. Hess seems to believe that ownership also confers something like monopoly status. “On TV interview shows or at news conferences,” she points out, “reporters challenge the politician’s narrative.” But on podcasts—or, say, in social media—those same politicians enjoy “a hermetically sealed branding platform. . . . There are no actual journalists around to ask any pesky questions.” Worst of all: “None of these shows are the optimal conduit for understanding the political issues of the day.”

This is a near-classic expression of the press as the Fourth Estate, exerting influence on politics and public affairs while retaining an unofficial status within the political system. It’s an interesting and intuitive concept; but clearly of greater appeal to the press than to politicians—or to the public, for that matter. Rather like the doctrine of priests as interlocutors between God and man, the press tends to see itself as the essential, even exclusive, filter through which politicians and their policies must pass. A politician who somehow contrives to speak directly to constituents is not just avoiding those

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“pesky questions” but insulting the “optimal conduit” by which the public is supposed to gain wisdom.

As I say, it’s a nice conceit and may even, in certain cases, be approximately true. But who elevated journalists to this priestly status? Until very recently, the public has been almost entirely dependent on the media for information about politics and civic affairs, and the press has been mindful to preserve, and expand, its prerogatives. That is why, for example, campaign debates are not debates, in the usual sense of the term, but closely choreographed press conferences where the rules are laid down, and enforced, by a panel of journalists. It is also why the invention of such institutions as C-SPAN—or the cable/Internet universe, of which podcasts are a burgeoning component—has been seen by the press, and not without reason, as threatening to its gatekeeping powers.

This is not to say that politicians should never be held accountable or that reporters should fail to ask pesky questions. Of course they can and should, and a vigilant press is an integral gear of democracy. But just as journalists are free to report and interpret as they like, politicians are equally free to circumvent such influence and explain themselves as they wish. And the public can embrace or ignore both as it sees fit.

Nearly a century ago, Franklin Roosevelt used radio to speak “directly” to his listening audience, and in our time, Donald Trump has adapted Twitter to his own particular needs. In Roosevelt’s day, the press regarded this tactic as demagoguery; now it argues that citizens are incapable of knowing their own minds—susceptible to spin, or Russian influence, or “personality-driven” politics—and need compulsory guidance.

Well, not necessarily. Podcasts “are an attempt to signal that [politicians] are listening to us,” writes Amanda Hess. “But that doesn’t mean that we should listen to them.” Maybe not—who elected the *Times* to instruct us otherwise? With politicians, as with the press, the watchword remains the same: Let the buyer beware. ♦



Israeli artillery in the Golan Heights, January 20, 2015

# Israel’s Coming War with Hezbollah

Fraught with peril—and opportunity.

BY THOMAS DONNELLY

Donald Trump’s feud with North Korea’s “Little Rocket Man” notwithstanding, the most likely major war on the horizon is one between Israel and Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militia that, thanks to years of experience and an increasingly lethal arsenal, has become part of the vanguard in Iran’s drive for hegemony in the Near East. Indeed, such a war would be a huge next step for Iran after its rescue of the Assad regime in Syria and its increasingly powerful posture in post-ISIS Iraq. For just such reasons, this war would be a potential tipping point in the Middle East balance of power, a frightfully violent prospect that is equally ripe with strategic opportunity for the United States.

As Willy Stern chronicled in these pages last year (“Missiles Everywhere,” June 20, 2016), an Israel-Hezbollah conflict would be nasty and brutish

but not short. Ever since its 2006 clash with Israel, Hezbollah has been stockpiling hundreds of thousands of rockets, missiles, and mortars capable of reaching not just border areas but deep into Israel. This arsenal includes hundreds of ballistic missiles capable of carrying chemical warheads—some of Assad’s chemical weaponry no doubt made its way to Hezbollah—as well as substantial conventional explosives. More important is their improved accuracy; Hezbollah might actually hit something for a change, and not just large cities like Jerusalem and Tel Aviv but military bases and airports. Despite Israel’s successful development of missile defenses like the “Iron Dome,” “Arrow,” and “David’s Sling,” it’s unlikely that an all-out or sustained series of attacks could be fully blunted.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has been making increasingly warlike comments in recent months and claimed in June that his men would be reinforced in battle by “tens . . . or even hundreds of thousands” of Shiite fighters from Iraq, Iran, Yemen,

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JALAA MAREY / AFP / GETTY

Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Nasrallah may be boasting, but Israeli intelligence assessments put the likely strength of such forces at about 40,000. In addition to expanding the number of Hezbollah-like militias it commands, Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the IRGC, has improved its ability to shuttle forces to decisive points. In the fight to evict ISIS from western Iraq, the Iranian proxy Popular Mobilization Units have played as critical a role as U.S. or Iraqi regular forces, not least in the recent clashes that drove Kurdish militias out of Kirkuk.

Jeffrey White of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has long argued that the next Israel-Hezbollah conflict would be quite unlike the 2006 edition of this “forever” war or any of the recent Israeli campaigns against Hamas. The numbers of missiles, including anti-ship cruise missiles, would dwarf previous Hezbollah salvos and, including upgraded versions of the ubiquitous Scud, could be launched from deep within Lebanon at targets deep within Israel. And the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) could well confront its nightmare scenario—a two-front war in the form of simultaneous attacks launched from the Syrian part of the Golan Heights. As White and his colleague Michael Eisenstadt recently noted, an IRGC general was killed in a January 2015 IDF airstrike while he was touring the Syrian Golan with Hezbollah hosts.

Israel has not faced such a powerful threat since the 1973 war, and confronting the Iran-Hezbollah-Assad coalition will tax the IDF heavily. To begin with, even if its missile defenses live up to their advertising, they cannot obviate the need to conduct counterstrikes into Lebanon and Syria. While the Israeli air force has long ruled the local skies, the proliferation of advanced Russian-made air defenses calls into question how rapidly—and at what cost—the IDF can establish or sustain the kind of air supremacy it will need. The best way to remove the Hezbollah missile threat is to seek and destroy the launchers or to deny use of customary launch sites. The Israelis have worked very hard to improve



*Above, Israeli military vehicles burn along the Israeli-Lebanese border, January 28, 2015, following a Hezbollah missile attack; below, an Iron Dome defense system for intercepting incoming short-range rockets and shells, in the Golan Heights.*



their mobile-missile-hunting abilities, but this would be a risky mission.

Moreover, the best missile defense is a large-scale ground assault. Both sides know this, and Israel's enemies have made strenuous preparations for the IDF counterattacks—again, simultaneously into Lebanon and Syria—that must come. The IDF has worked to improve the survivability of its mechanized infantry and armored forces and the responsiveness, lethality, and accuracy of its artillery. For its part, Hezbollah, which showed considerable tactical skill in defending southern Lebanon in 2006, has added advanced anti-armor weaponry and new layers of defenses. The terrain in southern Lebanon and on the Golan is well suited for such purposes; the IDF will have to pick its way forward cautiously,

through ambush after ambush, and ultimately it may have to go farther north and east than in 2006.

These daunting tactical challenges also, as in the past, generate strategic and geopolitical problems. The perception of victory often counts more than the battlefield result, both in the region and in the larger international contest. Nasrallah excels at spinning defeat into victory. The 2006 war began when Hezbollah captured two IDF soldiers. In an unguarded moment shortly after the cessation of hostilities, he admitted that he did not anticipate, “even by 1 percent,” that the snatch “would result in such a wide-scale war, as such a war did not take place in the history of wars. Had we known” what would result, “we would not have carried it out at all.” But in short order, survival

TOP: MARUF KHATIB / AFP / GETTY; BOTTOM: JACK GUEZ / AFP / GETTY

became triumph, a bit of propaganda that caught on in outlets such as the *Economist*, which declared, “Nasrallah wins the war.” By now even many Israelis, especially on the political left, concur; in an otherwise thoughtful analysis of the current situation, *Ha’aretz* concluded that the 2006 campaign “remains a resounding failure.” The standard of victory for Israel remains almost impossibly high.

Despite the gloomy view of the past and the foreboding about the future, it is also the case that since 2006 Israel’s northern border has been remarkably quiet. That’s even more remarkable considering the chaos that’s ripped Iraq and Syria apart and catapulted Iran to the fore. This is a ceasefire worth preserving.

It particularly behooves the United States to try to do so, although Donald Trump finds himself in a far worse position than was George W. Bush in 2006; the ebbing of American power and influence across the Middle East

since the withdrawal from Iraq has had incalculable consequences. At the same time, the looming war presents an important opportunity.

To begin with, this is a case where Trump’s bluster and bellicosity may be an asset. It’s a chilling thought, but if deterrence depends on creating an effect in the mind of an adversary, the president’s loose lips or slippery Twitter fingers—even his apparently serious bromance with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu—might give Iran some pause. Many Iran-watchers have noted Tehran’s relative caution in regard to Israel. Further, Iran strategy is perhaps the one issue on which Trump and his senior advisers see eye-to-eye, especially in the case of Secretary of Defense James Mattis, who got himself fired by President Obama for being too focused on Iran. For once, the administration might enjoy credibility.

Should deterrence fail and conflict resume, it will be important for the United States to clearly and forcefully

back the Israelis. The 1973 Yom Kippur war is worth recalling in this context. The Israelis were badly surprised when the Egyptian army crossed the Sinai and Syria attacked the Golan Heights. The IDF soon found itself in logistical as well as tactical trouble, and President Richard Nixon, against strong international pressure, ordered Operation Nickel Grass to help restore IDF losses. Beyond the material support, the gesture of political support was critical. While the Israelis have been planning and preparing for Hezbollah for years, their ability to sustain operations could well be stretched, and the international environment is every bit as hostile as in 1973.

Iran’s caution on Israel may owe something to a danger it senses, the flip side of which is an opportunity Washington may underestimate. A decisive Israeli victory against the Tehran-backed Hezbollah forces would be an unparalleled opportunity to stem the regional Iranian tide, thereby serving a prime U.S. national security



interest. Such a victory would both reassure and relax America's Arab allies, particularly in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Egypt—those most nervous about a flagging U.S. commitment in the Middle East. It would also remind the world that, despite Vladimir Putin's meddling, the United States remains the most powerful external force in the region.

A renewal of war across Israel's northern and eastern borders would be a savage thing, one that might escalate in unpredictable ways; if its proxies in Lebanon and Syria are in danger, one can expect Iran to react elsewhere, a mortal danger to U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Just as Israelis have begun to prepare themselves for this prospect, so should we. ♦

# Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

Sex scandals imperil Britain's quest to quit the EU.

BY DOMINIC GREEN

*London*  
All politics aspires to the condition of entertainment. At least it does so these days, whether in London or in Washington. The British derive enjoyment from their national dramas, even when things go wrong—*Dunkirk* was the film of the summer. But that multi-series extravaganza known as *Brexit* makes increasingly uncomfortable viewing. If the Brexiteers ever had a script, the government of Theresa May has long since wandered off it.

For those who missed October's first episode, a short recap. The Conservative party conference was a disaster. Theresa May, the leading lady, was upstaged by Boris Johnson, her foreign secretary, who announced his terms for Brexit just before the party convened. May kept dancing like the plucky hooper she is, but she ended up on her backside during her conference speech. First, a professional comedian commandeered the stage and purported to hand her her unemployment notice on Johnson's behalf. Then her big number was ruined by a

most unprofessional attack of coughing and wheezing.

Early in her short and disastrous tenure in Downing Street, May sported a theatrical pair of leopard-print shoes. These days, *The Red Shoes* seem more appropriate. Determined to dance until she drops, she keeps the footwork going, and all the time

**May's cabinet seethes with rivalry. Some ministers are pulling for Brexit and others for Remain. Many on both sides are whispering noises off to the press. 'One more crisis, and she's gone,' a pro-Brexit observer predicted last week.**

she spins faster and faster towards the edge. She leads a minority government. Her cabinet seethes with rivalry. Some ministers are pulling for Brexit and others for Remain. Many on both sides are whispering noises off to the press. The House of Commons has attached some 300 objections, queries, and bear traps to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, to

be resolved in committee. No date has been set for the committee to meet.

"One more crisis, and she's gone," a pro-Brexit observer told me last week. "We don't know what it'll be, but it can't be long."

The European Union's negotiators have done their best to weaken May further. The first stage of Brexit negotiations has been unproductive and sour. In September, Jean-Claude Juncker, the head of the EU Commission, questioned the "stability and accountability" of May's Brexit negotiator, David Davis. When May laid out some negotiating positions in a speech in Florence, an anonymous EU official complained about her "wordy and unclear" terms. So no one saw the double plot twist coming on October 21.

May went to Brussels for what was expected to be another fruitless summit of the EU Council. A photographer caught her sitting alone and pensive at the negotiating table, seemingly out in the Euro-cold. Instead, the EU broke the deadlock and began a slow move to the second stage of Brexit negotiations, by offering to start internal discussions on trade terms, perhaps even as a prelude to negotiations with Britain in December.

"EU leaders throw Theresa May a lifeline on Brexit trade," said the papers. Unfortunately for her, Jean-Claude Juncker was holding the other end. The next day, the German broadsheet *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) carried an extensive leak from Juncker's team, allegedly describing Juncker's dinner with May earlier that week.

"May did not give up. She begged for help," the source claimed. She reminded Juncker of her recent offer of flexibility over the financial settlement with the EU, and a two-year "transitional period" after 2019, to avoid the "hard Brexit" that she was once prepared to risk. "And she let them know that her friend and her enemy"—chancellor Philip Hammond and foreign secretary Boris Johnson—"are sitting at the back of her neck. She said she had no room for maneuver."

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On her own? Theresa May awaits her EU counterparts for Brexit talks in Brussels, October 20, 2017.

This might be May making the best of her domestic position, as head of a weak government that no one wants to topple—at least not just yet. But the *FAZ* leak implied she was physically and mentally weak. She seemed “anxious” to Juncker, “despondent and dismayed,” “tormented,” and “drawn from the struggle with her own party.” She has “deep rings under her eyes,” and “looks like someone who doesn’t sleep through the night.” Once, the “laughter literally poured out of her.” Now, she uses all her strength “to avoid losing her temper.”

Juncker made May sound like Vanessa Redgrave in *Agatha*, in which she played Agatha Christie having a nervous breakdown. Juncker’s own performance is closer to that of the abusive husband in *Gaslight*. Confident that she cannot bring herself to leave Downing Street, Juncker is trying to weaken May, to humiliate her into total dependency. It is an ugly, bullying spectacle—a reminder, in fact, that the arrogance of the EU leadership was one of the reasons the British voted to leave the union.

Juncker could not have seen a further twist of the plot. Connoisseurs of the afternoon soap opera will be familiar with the character of the uncle or cousin who emigrated years ago and is heard from occasionally, in

case the script writers need to “work the story round,” as Dickens used to say. The fall of Harvey Weinstein has rippled from the hotels of Hollywood to the Palace of Westminster. This is not as long a distance as it sounds; as the saying goes, politics is show business for ugly people. Then again, the Weinstein affair reveals how show business is also show business for ugly people.

By the afternoon of October 30, Conservative party staff had compiled a list of 36 Conservative MPs alleged to have behaved inappropriately towards their female staff. Mark Garnier, the minister for international trade, is said to have called his secretary “sugar tits” and to have sent her shopping for sex toys. The former cabinet minister Stephen Crabb, who is 44, married, and a vocal Christian, has admitted to sending “explicit” text messages to a 19-year-old woman after turning down her application to work in his office. The *Times* of London has reported that the names of other cabinet ministers appear on the list.

Theresa May has written to John Bercow, the speaker of the House, saying that sexual harassment in Parliament “cannot be tolerated any longer.” This is an infelicitous wording, for it implies that she, like every

other member of Parliament, has tolerated it previously. Her aides are insisting that she will fire any cabinet minister against whom accusations are substantiated. The chances are, however, that most of the substantiations will be made in the press, not the courts. If the scandal grows, the press will have the government on the run—and the Labour party, too, for similar allegations are swirling around the followers of Jeremy Corbyn.

And grow the scandal surely will. Labour or Conservative, British politics is a boys’ club. Walk around Westminster in the evenings, and you will see male MPs tottering drunkenly in the streets, often in the company of younger women. The only surprise in the allegations so far is that only two Conservative MPs are named as users of prostitutes. Miraculously, only one MP has thus far been described as a habitual drunk with wandering hands.

In 2009, when it emerged that many MPs were systematically fiddling their expenses, there were firings, disciplinary proceedings, and the refund of government monies that had been diverted to urgent necessities like garden ponds and kitchen makeovers. The British public tend not to pay much attention to politics, but they are highly vindictive when they do. In February, a YouGov poll found that while pro-Remain and pro-Brexit voters may divide over the country’s future, they are united in the conviction that their elected representatives are scoundrels. Politicians are the least-trusted professionals in Britain. Even the word of a weather forecaster is considered more reliable.

If the allegations of endemic sexual misconduct are true, Theresa May will not be able to appeal to the public. And if Jean-Claude Juncker is to be believed, she cannot appeal to her cabinet either. She leads a minority government and governs only with the support of the social conservatives of the Democratic Unionist party. The names of 1 in 10 of her MPs are on the list of alleged offenders. The fate of Brexit, the most important episode in Britain’s postwar history, may turn on a tabloid drama. ♦

GEERT VANDEN WUNGAERT / AFP / GETTY

# The Big Reveal

*The CIA has finally released 470,000 files recovered from the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound. Here's why it took so long.*

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

**O**n the penultimate day of the Obama administration, less than 24 hours before the president would vacate the White House, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper issued a press release meant to put to rest what had been a pesky issue for his office. “Closing the Book on Bin Laden: Intelligence Community Releases Final Abbottabad Documents,” the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) announced. “Today marks the end of a two-and-a-half-year effort to declassify several hundred documents recovered in the raid on Osama bin Laden’s Abbottabad, Pakistan, compound in May 2011.” Accompanying the press release were 49 documents captured during the raid, bringing the total number of documents made public to 571.

For anyone who had paid even casual attention to the long-running debate over the Abbottabad documents—a group that doesn’t include many journalists—the ODNI announcement was cause for a chuckle. Closing the book on Osama bin Laden? The final Abbottabad documents?

In the heady days immediately after the May 2 Abbottabad raid, President Obama’s national security adviser, Tom Donilon, had described the intelligence haul brought back from Pakistan by the Navy SEALs and CIA operatives as extensive enough to fill a “small college library.” A senior military intelligence official who briefed reporters at the Pentagon on May 7, 2011, said: “As a result of the raid, we’ve acquired the single largest collection of senior terrorist materials ever.”

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Why would ODNI think it could get away with such an aggressive lie? Why would officials there believe that they wouldn’t be asked to reconcile the fact that they were releasing just 571 documents with the repeated pronouncements that the Abbottabad collection was the largest haul of terrorist intelligence ever?

The answer: The self-proclaimed “most transparent administration in history” had spent more than five years

misleading the American people about the threat from al Qaeda and its offshoots and had paid very little price for having done so. Republicans volubly disputed the president’s more laughable claims—the attack on the Benghazi compound was just a protest gone bad, al Qaeda was on the run, ISIS was the terrorist junior varsity—but the establishment media, certain that Obama’s predecessor had consistently exaggerated the threat, showed little interest in challenging Obama or the intelligence agencies that often supported his spurious case.

In this context, ODNI’s bet wasn’t a crazy one. No one outside of a small group of terrorism researchers and intelligence pro-

professionals had paid much attention to the fate of the bin Laden documents. The likelihood that these ODNI claims would get much scrutiny in the middle of the frenzy that accompanies a presidential transition was low. ODNI dismissively swatted away questions about the absurd claims in the release with absurd claims about the document collection itself: The unreleased documents weren’t interesting or important, just terrorist trash of little interest to anyone. The documents being withheld would do little to enhance our understanding of al Qaeda or the jihadist threat more generally, they said.

This is what the politicization of intelligence looks like.



In the spring of 2012, with the Republican presidential primaries nearing an end and shortly before the first anniversary of the successful raid on bin Laden's compound, Obama's National Security Council hand-picked 17 documents to be provided to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point for analysis. (Obama's NSC would later hold back two of those documents. One of them, laying out the deep ties between the Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda leadership, would complicate Obama administration efforts to launch negotiations with the Taliban, according to an explanation the NSC's Doug Lute offered to West Point.) The West Point documents were shared with Obama-friendly journalists. Their conclusion was the only one possible, given the documents they were provided: At the time of his death, Osama bin Laden was frustrated and isolated, a relatively powerless leader of a dying organization. In the summer and fall of 2012, Obama would use this theme as the main national security rationale for his reelection: Al Qaeda was alternately "on the run" or "decimated" or "on the path to defeat."

"Thanks to the service and sacrifice of our brave men and women in uniform, the war in Iraq is over. The war in Afghanistan is winding down. Al Qaeda has been decimated. Osama bin Laden is dead," Obama said in Green Bay, Wis., on November 1, five days before his reelection.

Even the deadly attack two months earlier in Benghazi, conducted by jihadist groups with extensive ties to al Qaeda, didn't cause Obama to recalibrate his narrative. The president would tout the imminent demise of al Qaeda more than two dozen times between those attacks and Election Day.

In the weeks following the bin Laden raid, the documents went through an immediate interagency triage for actionable intelligence. That initial scrub yielded valuable information that led to the capture and killing of key al Qaeda associates. But then the documents sat, largely untouched, for months at a time. From that point on, the Obama administration's interest in the Abbottabad documents didn't extend much beyond their public relations implications. Simply put, a fuller release of the cache would have fatally undermined the message that al Qaeda had been decimated and that the war on terror was being reduced to a few mopping-up exercises.

As a result, some of the documents were never translated. Relevant intelligence agencies engaged in a protracted fight about who could have access to the information. The Defense Intelligence Agency was repeatedly denied full

access by the CIA, which had "executive authority" over the collection and which was run throughout much of the bureaucratic infighting by John Brennan, an Obama crony who had predicted in April 2012 that al Qaeda would meet its demise by the end of the decade.

The U.S. intelligence community never conducted a full-scale review of its own intelligence collection on al Qaeda using the Abbottabad documents. "There was never any kind of evaluation of our work on al Qaeda based on the documents," says one senior U.S. intelligence official involved with the documents. Obtaining the documents presented an opportunity to check what the intelligence community thought it knew about al Qaeda and its leaders against what actually happened. Who were our good sources? Who was providing misinformation? Was there a source who had better visibility into leadership decisionmaking than we'd assessed? Someone we relied on who wasn't as important as we'd thought? In some important respects, the bin Laden documents were like the answer key to a test you'd taken. It's telling that many in the intelligence community didn't want to review their work or revisit their conclusions.

After Obama's reelection, the administration repeatedly shut down requests from Republican lawmakers, led by Rep. Devin Nunes, for access to the documents. Then the 2014 Intelligence Authorization Act turned those requests into a demand backed by law. That's the only reason the 571 documents were released. And that's where matters stood through the early months of the Trump administration.

No more. On Wednesday, November 1, CIA director Mike Pompeo announced the release of "nearly 470,000 additional files" from the Abbottabad raid. From 571 to 470,000: The "most transparent administration in history," you might say, has just been trumped, by nearly three orders of magnitude.

At the time of the valedictory press release in January, I asked Timothy Barrett, chief of media relations at ODNI, to reconcile the claim that the final document dump of the Obama era amounted to "closing the book" on the bin Laden files, even as a vast collection had not yet been made public. He allowed, in an email, that there were in fact "a lot more than a few hundred" documents but claimed that the discrepancy could be explained by duplicates and over-counting. The front page of a

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**The self-proclaimed 'most transparent administration in history' spent more than five years misleading the American people about the threat from al Qaeda and its offshoots and paid very little price for having done so.**

newspaper would count as one file, the inside cover as a second page, and so forth, he said.

“We have released the majority of the pertinent files,” Barrett claimed of the 571 documents made public by ODNI. This, too, was false. (Barrett asked *TWS* at the time to attribute this statement to a “US Intelligence Official.” While we understand his desire not to be associated with statements that are demonstrably misleading, we didn’t agree to this attribution.)

ODNI duplicity on the Abbottabad documents didn’t end with that January announcement. On June 28, a meeting between NSC officials and representatives of the intelligence community featured a discussion on the proposed release of more documents from the Abbottabad collection, according to two sources familiar with the session. ODNI officials explained that they couldn’t declassify and release more of the files because they lacked the resources to undertake a job so challenging.

So, in public, ODNI says: The job is done. Move along. In private, ODNI says: Finishing this monumental job would overwhelm our bureaucracy.

When I asked Barrett about the meeting and to explain the contradiction, he emailed: “We have nothing further for you on this issue at this time.”

But with new political leadership come new marching orders. It will take time for interested reporters and analysts to digest the full scope of the documents the CIA has just disgorged. Many of them are no doubt worthless, but there are thousands of newly available files of importance, and this much is already clear: They are not just duplicates, they are not lacking in pertinence, they are not merely the personal detritus of an isolated and powerless has-been terrorist. As Thomas Joscelyn details elsewhere in these pages, among them can be found documents describing al Qaeda’s relationship with the Afghan Taliban; videos and photographs of senior al Qaeda operatives, including those running the terror network and its affiliates today; letters with new information on al Qaeda’s web of relationships inside Pakistan; documents explaining the ways in which al Qaeda was adapting to U.S. targeting of its leaders; and the 228-page handwritten journal of the jihad kept by Osama bin Laden himself.

**T**he new materials make clear that ODNI sought to mislead the country not only about the size of the collection but about its contents, too. The January ODNI press statement claimed that the batch

of 49 documents it was then making public “mirrors the themes in previous releases,” chief among them Osama bin Laden’s “hatred, suspicion of Iran.” It was true that this was what previous ODNI releases claimed. But it is misleading in the extreme to pretend that the story of Iran and al Qaeda told through the captured bin Laden documents is solely one of hostility.

Bin Laden had described Iran as the “main artery” for al Qaeda in one of the previously released letters recovered in Abbottabad. The details on Iran’s support for al Qaeda, some of them buried until now, led to terrorist designations by the Treasury Department and even caused some intelligence analysts to revisit the assumption that the Shiite radicals in Iran wouldn’t back the Sunni al Qaeda.

In a 2011 interview, David S. Cohen, a senior Treasury Department official who went on to become deputy director of the CIA, described the intelligence, which detailed a network of financial support for al Qaeda that operated out of Iran: “There is an agreement between the Iranian government and al Qaeda to allow this network to operate,” Cohen said. “There’s no dispute in the intelligence community on this.” Iran was providing a “core pipeline” of support that included safe haven for al Qaeda members and the facilitation of travel and the flow of money and weapons.

Al Qaeda accepted this help warily, it is true, and the al Qaeda-

Iran relationship is based on mutual interest rather than ideological or doctrinal affinity. But to ignore the secret agreement altogether—to set aside the years of collaboration and to elide bin Laden’s own description of Iran as the “main artery” for al Qaeda, all in order to downplay the threat such an alliance presents—is a textbook case of cherry-picking.

Asked about ODNI’s misleading characterization of the relationship between Iran and al Qaeda, Barrett wrote: “[Osama bin Laden] had a delicate dance with Iran. He maintained a fierce, private hatred of Shia Muslims. But he didn’t publicly criticize Iran since he had family members in hiding there.”

In a follow-up email, I made the rather obvious point that the willingness of Iran to allow bin Laden family members to hide in Iran contradicted ODNI claims of a deep antipathy between Iran and al Qaeda. Moreover, why would ODNI cite the documents as evidence of bin Laden’s hatred of Iran when the man himself acknowledged Iran’s crucial role in sustaining and strengthening



al Qaeda? Didn't this suggest a relationship that was mutually beneficial and, at times, even friendly?

Barrett responded: "I was wrong about the 'in hiding.' Instead, I should have said, there were many senior [al Qaeda] members, and at least one [Osama bin Laden] family member, under house arrest there. The passageway you cite is not the same thing as collusion with the Iranian government. That is, [al Qaeda] had the ability to transit the country; but it wasn't done in any sort of partnership with the Iranian government."

It was an extraordinary claim, and newly released documents make clear that the Iranian regime actively facilitated this travel. Beyond that, it was clear that there was, in fact, precisely the kind of "partnership" between Iran and al Qaeda that ODNI was disclaiming. The Treasury Department had designated terrorists specifically citing the "secret deal" between Iran and al Qaeda.

After a few more mostly unproductive exchanges, TWS sent Barrett language from Treasury designations and the Iran section of the State Department's list of state sponsors of terror. Among them: the designation of Ezedin Abdel Aziz Khalil, which noted that he was "an Iran-based senior al-Qaeda facilitator currently living and operating in Iran under an agreement between al-Qaeda and the Iranian government. Iranian authorities maintain a relationship with Khalil and have permitted him to operate within Iran's borders since 2005"; the designation of Atyah Abd al-Rahman, bin Laden's handpicked emissary to Iran, "a position which allowed him to travel in and out of Iran with the permission of Iranian officials"; a Treasury statement that read, "by exposing Iran's secret deal with al-Qaeda allowing it to funnel funds and operatives through its territory, we are illuminating yet another aspect of Iran's unmatched support for terrorism"; a Treasury designation of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), which "has facilitated the movement of al Qaeda operatives in Iran and provided them with documents, identification cards, and passports."

We included several other examples. Barrett tapped out: "I'm not an Iran expert so I have to consult people and follow up with you Monday, I'm afraid." We heard nothing more on Iran.

Barrett and I had one final exchange on November 2, after the new trove of documents was released. Offered an opportunity to revise his now plainly misleading statements from January, he emailed: "ODNI supports CIA

Director Pompeo's decision to release additional Abbotabad materials. While the files provide additional insights, they do not change the assessments of the interagency document exploitation task force."

**T**he overriding foreign policy message of Obama's first term was that the war on terror had been badly botched by his predecessor but was now in his capable hands and therefore being swiftly brought to a favorable close. The overriding imperative of his second term was to make a deal with the Iranian government. In a manner of speaking, Barack Obama wanted what al Qaeda already had: a mutually beneficial partnership with Tehran. Revealing to the American people the truth about Osama bin Laden's cozy working relationship with

the Iranian government might have fatally undermined that diplomatic quest, just as the ongoing vitality of al Qaeda, amply testified to in the bin Laden documents, would have contradicted Obama's proud claims in 2012 that al Qaeda was "on the run." So Obama, with the eager cooperation of some in the intelligence community, bottled up the bin Laden documents and ran out the clock.

The CIA release of the additional 470,000 documents includes a 19-page report on al Qaeda's relationship with Iran authored by an unidentified al Qaeda operative.

The author lays out some tensions between al Qaeda and Iran but makes clear those differences don't preclude cooperation. The document reports that the Iranian regime was giving its "Saudi brothers" in al Qaeda "everything they needed." This included safe haven in Iran, the facilitation of travel for senior al Qaeda operatives, and "money, arms," and "training in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, in exchange for striking American interests in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf."

The newly released documents also include a video from the wedding of Hamza bin Laden, Osama's son and a prominent al Qaeda voice today. The video shows Hamza bin Laden and several other notable senior al Qaeda figures celebrating his marriage at an unidentified mosque. With the shouting of a child in the background echoing off marble walls, the shaky video shows the younger bin Laden, dressed in a gold robe and a black and white keffiyeh, reciting his wedding vows in a quiet, serious tone. The video was shot in Iran. ♦

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# The Tzaddik of the Intellectuals

*The arc of Leon Wieseltier bends toward justice*

By JOSEPH EPSTEIN

**M**y first contact with Leon Wieseltier was by letter. The year was 1977. Written on Balliol College, Oxford, letterhead stationery, the letter informed me that I was a force for superior culture in America, one of the few contemporary intellectuals worthy of respect, and through my writing the all but single-handed savior of *Commentary* magazine. The author of the letter, he went on to report, was 25, had gone to Columbia, thence on a fellowship to Oxford, and would be spending the next few years as a member of the Society of Fellows at Harvard. He ended by wondering if, were he to shore up one day in Chicago, we might meet for lunch.

As a scribbler for small-circulation magazines, my threshold for praise may be a touch or two higher than most people's, but even I did not believe the extravagant praise in young Leon Wieseltier's letter. Still, as one grows older, and I was then 40, one is pleased to have the praise of the young. Such praise leads to the doubtless delusionary hope that one's own work will live on after one has departed the planet. I wrote to Leon Wieseltier, thanking him for his generous words and telling him that, yes, sure, should he ever find himself in Chicago, he was to let me know, so that we might meet.

Six or so months later, I received another letter from Wieseltier informing me that he planned to be in Chicago in six days and wondered if we might have that lunch. The letterhead was now that of the Harvard Society of Fellows. I wrote back to say yes, of course, and gave him the address of a Chinese restaurant where I thought we might meet. When he entered the restaurant, he turned out to be tall, slender, with close-cropped dark hair. Conversation flowed easily enough. He told me that, like me, he wished to write for the intellectual magazines. He filled me in on

his own background. His parents were immigrants, survivors of the Holocaust. His early education was at the Flatbush Yeshiva, where Talmud study had made all subsequent classroom learning seem a pushover. We told each other Jewish jokes. We searched for the French word for "a light," as in to light a cigarette (*allumer*). I was editing a magazine myself in those days, and he said he would like, if I didn't mind, to send me an essay he was thinking of writing about his Oxford days.

Toward the close of the meal, he took out a scrap of paper and read out an address on Sheridan Road in Chicago and asked how far it was from the hotel in the Loop where he was staying.

"It's roughly a 20-dollar cab ride," I told him. "Who lives on Sheridan Road?"

"Oh," he said, "Saul Bellow. I'm having dinner tonight with him and his wife."

Just then I wondered how many letters of the kind he had written to me, with appropriate variations, he had written to others. I also thought, this kid is doing intellectual tourism, and I am merely Siena.

Three or so months later, he sent me his essay, which was passable but no great shakes. Still, wanting to encourage the young, I agreed to publish it, which, with a bit of editing, I did. Meanwhile, I noticed his name beginning to turn up over reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Review of Books*. These reviews were of books on serious subjects—I remember a Gershom Scholem book at the center of one—and were not especially notable, not for distinction of style or for penetrating ideas, but good imitations of the kind of reviews that appeared in both places. His essay on Oxford that I published attracted no comment but for a letter from a reader pointing out that its author had made a factual mistake. I wrote to tell him, Leon, all that was required was his acknowledging his error and apologizing for it. He replied by asking if it were possible that I could attribute the mistake to "a printer's error." I replied absolutely not and printed the letter without a response. This was the second time in my brief acquaintance with him that I sensed Leon Wieseltier was

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a young man worth watching. And so I did, and continued to do. I never saw him again, but I found myself following his career with fascination and much amusement. Quite a career, close to fabled you might say, it turned out to be.

Around this time, while in New York, I had a meeting with the literary critic Irving Howe. He had been generous to me, running some of my early writing in his magazine *Dissent* and going out of his way to get me, a man with no advanced degrees, a job teaching in the English department in nearby (to me) Northwestern University. We met in Irving's office. He sat behind his desk, upon which sat an ample manuscript. He told me it was for his book to be called *World of Our Fathers* and that its publisher thought it had a chance for a large sale.

"Must be nice to hear," I said.

"I suppose so," Irving answered, "but you know such accomplishments as I've recorded have always been dampened for me by a remark of Elizabeth Hardwick some years ago that got back to me."

"What was it?"

"'Irving Howe,'" she said, "'another Jew-boy in a hurry.'"

I thought, of course, of Leon Wieseltier.

After his years at Harvard, a school useful above all for making connections, Leon had acquired a job at the *New Republic*, a liberal weekly that had not long before been bought by a man named Martin Peretz, a wealthy, part-time instructor at Harvard. During his early days on the magazine, Leon published a longish piece there on, of all things, nuclear war. Nothing very distinguished about it, either, the thought of taking him seriously on such a large subject was in fact slightly gigglesome, but it suggested to me that young Leon, with all the possibilities open to him, the good student with superior *tuchus-lecking* skills, was considering that of becoming our next Henry Kissinger. I subsequently learned he was aiming higher.

Before long Leon was given control over the back of the book, the literary and cultural sections of the *New Republic*. His byline would appear mostly over something like a column, not every week but fairly often, on the last page of the magazine. These columns increasingly became moral diatribes. Whatever the subject, one thing they all had in common was that he, Leon Wieseltier, not only had a clearer vision of the world and what was important in it than anyone he was writing about, but also a deeper moral imagination. Along the way, he had developed a style which entailed short-sentences that suggested the aphorism. This style worked nicely to elevate himself while dismissing anyone who happened to

disagree as a moral idiot, scum really, who if he understood how wretched he was would go instanter into the intellectual equivalent of a witness protection program.

In this new style, on his single page containing 800 or so words, Leon took on the role of moral conscience of the intellectuals, the Jews, the nation at large. His self-emplacement as spokesman for the Jews especially caused me to wince and shiver. Still a fairly young man, Leon Wieseltier was setting up shop as one of the leading moralists of our day, and with absolutely no legitimate claims to it that I could see, and a few, from personal experience, that I knew disqualified him. Yes, his was a career worth watching.



Leon Wieseltier, left, with Patricia Duff and Ron Silver at the 2008 White House Correspondents' dinner in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, the name Leon Wieseltier, sometimes accompanied by photographs, began to turn up in places like the *New York Observer* and those small photographs in the party pages at the front of *Vanity Fair*. His hair had turned prematurely white, he had put on weight, his complexion become pinker than I had remembered. Someone told me that on trips to Hollywood he had become not merely acquainted but friendly with those two queens of ditz, Barbra Streisand and Shirley MacLaine. In Washington, where the *New Republic* was located, he was often seen in the company of Al and Tipper Gore. He somehow managed to wangle a small part—two lines at a Jewish wedding—in an episode of *The Sopranos*.

He began turning up on television. I recall him pontificating about the Middle East and the fate of Israel on *Charlie Rose*. Charlie (if I may) asked him to explain the complexities of Middle Eastern politics; Leon obliged. Appearing on the occasional cable station panels, he could have been, if he so desired, among the punditi, but

his intellectual allusions elevated him at least two stages higher. Leon was one of America's leading experts in—in whatever you've got.

On television I noted that he put on weight, his hair-line greatly receded, his skin grew pinker and he, somehow, grosser. (If Orwell was correct when he said that at 50 one has the face one deserves, then Leon was going to need cosmetic surgery at 60.) When I searched him out on YouTube, which I began to do in recent years, he wore a standard outfit, trousers, jacket, T-shirt, outershirt, long *tallith*-like scarf worn indoors, cowboy boots, all of them black; he was a kind of ruffled reversal of Tom Wolfe in his white suits. An Internet photo has him wearing a cowboy hat above his jowly face. His dominant feature, though, was his hair, two great white tufts of it, growing out of both sides of his head, framing his coarsening features and causing Gore Vidal to remark of him that he had "important hair," with the clear if unspoken implication of "and nothing else."

In 1995 an article appeared in *Vanity Fair* written by a man named Lloyd Grove, commenting on Leon's social-climbing skills, his unbreakable connection with Martin Peretz and the power it gave him at the *New Republic*, his all-but-self-confessed cheating on his first wife (the Pakistani daughter of a man described in the article as a "merchant prince"). The article also remarked on how these various activities apparently got in the way of Leon, despite his rather extravagant intellectual pretensions, getting any serious intellectual work done: no books, few articles beyond those back-page moral diatribes. He was, he told Grove, contemplating a book on *sighing*, a fine Leon touch, in the realm of intellectual pretension. The unspoken charge was laziness.

Toward the close of the article what one might have thought a more serious matter arose: that of Leon's reputed cocaine habit, which caused him to load up his Honda with the review copies of books sent by publishers to the magazine and sell them to support his expensive drug habit. I looked at future issues of *Vanity Fair* to see if Leon had written in, in his best moralizing tone, refuting such a story, but no letter appeared.

One might have thought this last item—drugging and petty thieving—might have taken the highfalutinness out of Leon's moral tone, but, near as I could make out, not in the least. The heavy moralizing, the portentousness, the pomposity, all continued, business pretty much as usual. Evidently, he beat his cocaine habit.

Leon grew older, balder, fatter, his white locks longer (the Benjamin Franklin *de nos jours* someone called him). His speaking engagements, at *shuls*, universities, in Israel, if anything seemed to increase. The role and responsibility of the intellectual became one of his signature topics.

But he had many. Watching him on YouTube being interviewed by earnest young rabbis, professors, editors, on one occasion appearing with the female president of Harvard, I sensed that, on the basis of no concrete intellectual achievements, Leon Wieseltier had taken upon himself the role of a *tzaddik*, for the hasidim one of the world's righteous and all-wise leaders. He was a *tzaddik*, of course, without followers or even a belief in God, a freelance *tzaddik*, you might say, working for what I assume were substantial speaking fees.

On these various interviews, it was as if his interlocutors, looking over at him in his black get-up, slouching in his chair, thick fingers on his expansive pot belly, one cowboy-booted leg crossed over the other, were appealing, "Oh, *tzaddik*, give unto us your wisdom, what do you think of the Holocaust, the future of the university, the role of the humanities, the Netanyahu government, mobile phones, the role of technology in contemporary life . . ." With neither flinch nor stammer, Leon told them, prattled away, gave them crumbs from the great *tzaddik's* plate, and they seemed to slurp it all up. Did he believe all, or even any, of his moral pronouncements? Who knows? Even Leon may not have known. No one seemed to call him on them, or on his authority generally. He had a tight act.

I noted that in recent years Leon had added to his repertoire the notion that he was, as he put it, "the intellectual son" of distinguished men: of Lionel Trilling, Isaiah Berlin, Saul Bellow, and others. "I have many intellectual fathers," I heard him say in more than one of his interviews. Since all these men were dead, I thought, what a pity they couldn't, as all would doubtless have wished, deny paternity.

Still, Leon Wieseltier seemed to go from strength to strength. He turned setbacks into victories. When a young Internet millionaire, who had bought the *New Republic* two years earlier, announced plans in 2014 to transform the magazine for which he had worked for decades into a "digital media company," Leon resigned in his by now well-practiced high moral dudgeon, accompanied by much favorable publicity, claiming the owner knew nothing of the higher purposes of intellectual journalism.

Upon his quitting the *New Republic*, a famous think tank quickly took Leon on as its Isaiah Berlin Senior Fellow (Daddy would have been proud) and the *Atlantic* appointed him a contributing editor. The wealthy widow of Steve Jobs stepped up to fund a new magazine he planned to edit called *Idea*. In a well-known anecdote, the conductor Herbert von Karajan is said to have got into a cab, and when the driver asked him where he wished to go, von Karajan replied, "It doesn't matter. They want me everywhere." Leon Wieseltier seemed to be in the same condition.

And then—*Pow! Crash! Crunch!*—the roof fell in. Amid a clump of sexual harassment scandals, featuring movie moguls, right-wing television commentators and executives, big-money journalists, Leon Wieseltier's name turned up. For nearly his entire tenure at the *New Republic*, the unrefuted accusation was, he was a regular offender, kissing young women full on the mouth against their wishes, describing their bodies to them, recounting his own sexual exploits, sputtering obscenities, bringing tears and shame to females under his power. Everyone on the *New Republic* apparently knew about it, but, owing to his close connection to the magazine's owner, no one on the staff, man or woman, had the courage to call him out on the awfulness of his behavior.

Leon's modest fame was just ample enough for a lengthy story about his atrocious behavior to appear in the *New York Times*. His villainous behavior was suddenly all over the Internet. Leon made his apology, thereby owning up to the truth of the accusations against him, but the apology, though it seemed little more than perfunctory, did include the nice Leonie moral touch near the end, where he assured everyone that he "will not waste this reckoning." At least he had the decency not to claim that he was going into therapy.

What made it all so rich, of course, was the Tartuffian quality of its perpetrator, Leon Wieseltier, the earnest young man who wrote to me from Oxford some 40 years ago. The great humanist turned out to be inhumane, the *tzaddik* wore no *tzitzit* but all these years was mentally undressing and offending his female co-workers. Untopple, such a story, as Molière recognized nearly four centuries ago.

Soon after the story of Leon Wieseltier's years of sexual harassing broke, the wealthy widow canceled his new magazine, the Brookings Institution stripped him of his fellowship, the *Atlantic* dropped him from its masthead, other journals on whose boards he sat found him, to put it gently, an embarrassment.

I, for one, shall miss Leon in, as he might say, the public square, or rather I shall miss his act, which over the years has been a source of high amusement for me, who viewed it as a one-man intellectual sitcom at the spectacle of which I may have been the only one laughing. In his middle sixties, now that he has been publicly shamed and self-confessed as a creep, the Leon Wieseltier Show would seem to be over. No comeback for its star, surely, is possible, or so one might think. But I wouldn't bet on it. ♦

## A Victory for Consumers—and for Justice

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

The historic rollback of harmful Obama-era regulations under the Trump administration continued last month with Congress' dismantling of a rule that would have blocked consumers from using arbitration to settle their disputes with financial firms. This anti-arbitration rule was an outrageous act of overreach by the unaccountable Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce applauds Congress for answering our long-standing calls to strike it down.

The rule amounted to an enormous gift to the trial bar at the expense of consumers and businesses alike. It effectively banned arbitration—a method of settling disputes out of court—in consumer contracts in favor of costly and time-consuming class action lawsuits. In issuing this rule, the CFPB ignored the views of many

members of Congress, the business community, as well as the findings of its own foundational study showing the problems associated with class action litigation.

According to the CFPB's study, the average payout for the few consumers who actually recover something from a class action lawsuit is about \$32, while the average plaintiff's lawyer pockets \$1 million. In arbitration, in contrast, consumers recover \$5,389 on average. The study also reports that the average time frame for arbitration is two to seven months, while the average class action suit takes one to two years to complete. Despite these clear findings in favor of arbitration, the CFPB went ahead with issuing its devastating rule.

Ever since the CFPB came up with this bad idea, the Chamber has been working to defeat it. For over six years, the Chamber's Center for Capital Markets Competitiveness and Institute for Legal Reform have worked together to fight this rule. They built a broad coalition of

support, filed numerous comment letters, ran advertising campaigns, engaged state and local chambers of commerce, and even filed a lawsuit.

Their efforts paid off last month when the Senate joined the House in passing legislation to not only repeal the rule but to bar the CFPB from ever issuing a similar regulation. This does not mean, however, that opponents of arbitration will give up. They will continue to threaten arbitration in other contexts with other tools. And the Chamber will continue to fight back.

Yet for now, the repeal of the anti-arbitration rule is a major step in the right direction. Consumers will again have the option of settling disputes without incurring staggering legal fees and wading through the overburdened court system. This outcome is a victory for consumers, businesses of all sizes, and justice itself.



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



**Ulysses S. Grant,**  
photographed by  
**Mathew Brady**  
during the war

# A New Grant

*The general-turned-president gets the Chernow treatment.* **BY CARL ROLLYSON**

**W**e can speak of “settled law.” Not so with biography. The verdict is always out on appeal, and the subject accountable to more litigation. Discovery yields new evidence, and additional litigants take up the case. This is especially so with Ulysses S. Grant.

Even at blockbuster length, Ron Chernow’s *Grant* is not definitive. So much, he suggests, is still questionable. How did this peacetime failure become

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## Grant

by Ron Chernow  
Penguin, 1,074 pp., \$40

a great general? Why has this great general been dismissed as a poor president? Even Grant’s military greatness has been called into question. Was he a butcher, as Mary Lincoln and many other detractors charged? Did he simply rely on the North’s superior size to overwhelm the outnumbered South? Did he succeed in spite of his alcoholism? Or has his drinking been exaggerated, a canard perpetuated by politically motivated critics?

Chernow addresses all these ques-

tions but also rectifies the very shape of Grant’s biography, performing at the same high level he attained in his acclaimed biographies of Washington and Hamilton (the latter of which famously became the basis for the Broadway musical). Earlier biographies of Grant tend, not surprisingly, to dwell on his finest hours, his victories in the Civil War, followed by shorter accounts of his anticlimactic presidency. How, then, to do justice to the complaint of Grant’s friend Mark Twain, fed up with press accounts of Grant as a gifted warrior but feckless president: “It makes me sick—that newspaper nonsense. Grant was no namby-pamby fool; he was a *man*—all over—rounded & complete.”

The biographer takes a two-track approach: closely following, in chronological fashion, the events of Grant's life, giving due proportion to each phase, but also pausing, at strategic points, to consider the nature of the man—his sensibility and physical presence. Grant did not make the same sort of impression on his contemporaries and biographers that most great men have made. Unlike Robert E. Lee, Grant did not look or behave like the common notion of a leader. He was not tall, did not look commanding (except on a horse), and, in fact, could be called nondescript. To add to this unprepossessing profile, the usually taciturn, shy, and modest Grant seemed, until the start of the Civil War, a man without ambition or prospects—in short, a loser who had been forced to leave military service because of his drinking and then made a botch of farming and business ventures, frequently falling prey to con men who cost him his investments. Grant's marriage to Julia Dent, the daughter of a proud slave owner, was delayed for years—in part because her haughty father thought this Northern ne'er-do-well beneath his notice and undeserving of his daughter's hand. Grant did not have a pedigree or the manner of a man in command of himself let alone of other men.

Even after Grant began to rise in the ranks of the Union Army, after rejoining at the start of the Civil War, he could appear to fellow soldiers as an unassuming, even retiring figure, unfit for leadership. In one incident, a bullying soldier shadowboxed with Grant, trying to bait the newly appointed colonel, but Grant walked on, refusing to involve himself in a petty fight. The incident is a perfect representation of the man who could not be sidetracked by minor skirmishes. He was no tactician, the word that might be applied to the agile Lee. Rather, Grant was a grand strategist, unswerving from his goal of unconditional surrender.

So how, in Chernow's telling, did Grant become a great general, a much better president than has been generally supposed, and a great man? It was partly a matter of events, partly of

character, and, perhaps most of all, the result of Grant growing into the roles—roles that were assigned to him but that he also sought, however quietly and circumspectly. When his moment in history arrived, Grant was ready to salute his destiny.

Chernow does not make the mistake committed by some biographers of backdating, so to speak, Grant's greatness—although subtle indications of Grant's singularity emerge early on even as most of his contemporaries take no notice. At West Point, it is true, he seemed no more than average. In fact, he had dreaded enrollment and actually hoped Congress would defund the institution, since Grant feared he would fail and disappoint his pushy father and his "emotionally arid" mother. Yet Grant had two outstanding skills: mathematics and horsemanship. All his life Grant loved to ride fast horses and to race them, and his ability to plot a campaign on a map, to measure the distance between and to victories was phenomenal. The engineering works of his campaigns—the astounding length of the pontoon bridges over which men and materiel flowed—made the transport of troops and equipment virtually miraculous. Even when Lee, with excellent intelligence reports, knew where Grant moved, the rapid deployment of many thousands of troops astounded the rebel general and energized President Lincoln.

Grant's early inability to distinguish himself was due, in part, to self-doubt compounded by drinking. He was not an aggressive drunk or a manly alcoholic; his drinking made him look silly and pathetic, so he lost the respect of his superior officers. His other weakness, a naive trust in his fellow man, led to several failures to make a living. At one point, a destitute Grant had to borrow money just to keep himself clothed.

The Civil War saved him—that much of Chernow's narrative is familiar. But here is also where this new biography begins to alter perceptions of Grant. Naïve though he might have been in some respects, Grant began to develop a political sensibility that outclassed his contemporaries. He was not stiff and uncompromising like the

arrogant Lee. Nor did he despise politics, like Sherman. Grant read his superiors, especially Lincoln, with acumen and understood the changing nature of the war—that it had become more and more about the end of slavery and the promotion of equality for all races. Whereas Sherman continued to disparage blacks and saw them merely as an encumbrance to his fast and fiery march through the South, Grant had the liberated slaves trained as soldiers.

What general does not want more troops? And yet Grant rarely requested more from Lincoln, who had been hectored almost to death by General George McClellan's constant calls for reinforcements. Grant made do with what he had, a grateful Lincoln noted. And Grant pressed on, always on, never retreating, although, Chernow admits, he sometimes made rash decisions that resulted in unnecessary deaths.

In Chernow's narrative, Grant has a sidekick, Major General John Aaron Rawlins, Grant's tubercular double who began as his adjutant and became his conscience, constantly monitoring his superior, chastising Grant when he gave way to drink, and becoming a supporting pillar of Grant's life. In this regard, Rawlins was second only to Grant's wife, Julia, who during the war was often at her husband's side, making certain he refrained from the liquor that diminished his power and authority. Chernow carefully assesses reports of Grant's drinking, rejecting some, provisionally accepting others. In the end, Grant's drinking does not seem to have been a problem during any major Civil War engagement. His relapses often occurred while his wife or Rawlins were not present and when the battle had already been decided.

As to the charge of butchery, Chernow finds his subject not guilty. It is true Grant had superior numbers and could count on replacements that were not available to Lee. But the main problem, as Chernow sees it, is that Grant fought an offensive war, whereas Lee often conserved his men by expertly maintaining well-dug-in defenses on his native Virginia soil. In fact, Chernow might have made more of this point by emphasizing how Lee botched

Gettysburg, the only time he tried a major offensive, when he had to withdraw with devastating losses.

As president, especially during his first term, Grant made the mistake of thinking that what worked in the Army—maintaining secrecy and his own counsel—would serve him well in the White House. He often blundered because he did not take advice or show his hand to trusted advisers. He would not even share his handwritten first inaugural address with his inquisitive wife before he delivered it. Gradually, Grant did learn to call on old political hands, especially his brilliant secretary of state Hamilton Fish. But Grant could not command the loyalty and probity of cabinet officials corrupted by political power and the desire for personal enrichment. Politicians did not behave like Sherman or Sheridan, executing orders with integrity, dispatch, and aplomb. The president was not personally corrupt, as Chernow, like earlier biographers, shows, but Grant really did not understand the problem of conflicts of interest. He saw nothing wrong with accepting gifts of houses and other generous offers, especially since he had only a modest income and thought of these perks as the kind of tributes that Wellington and other generals had traditionally accepted as their due.

In Chernow's account, Grant's tenure in office was nearly as heroic as his exploits during the war. President Grant remained true to the legacy of President Lincoln in enforcing the rights of liberated slaves and beginning the work of reconciliation and reconstruction in the South. Here is how Chernow sums up the first term:

Grant had chalked up significant triumphs in suppressing the Klan, reducing debt, trying to clean up Indian trading posts, experimenting with civil service reform. . . . He had appointed a prodigious number of blacks, Jews, Native Americans, and women and delivered on his promise to give the country peace and prosperity.

What happened next, in Chernow's

view—one that is supported by many historians—is that Northerners, and especially the Republican party, grew weary of policing the South, of ensuring that blacks were able to exercise the right to vote and to hold public office. To be sure, Republican governments in the South were corrupt, but at least they provided opportunities for black officeholders, many of whom acquitted themselves respectably. Overwhelming evidence reveals that thousands of African Americans were



Ron Chernow

murdered and otherwise intimidated in the postwar South. Grant, nearing the end of his second term, seemed to relinquish his leadership role in Reconstruction, signaling defeat.

But then—and what a gift to biographers!—Grant came up with a third act: the writing of his acclaimed memoirs, a literary classic. Although some critics have claimed that Grant's memoirs were ghostwritten by Mark Twain, the Library of Congress manuscript is in Grant's own hand. There is besides plenty of other evidence of his writerly gifts: He was a great reader of novels and wrote letters and orders and responses to Lincoln, for example, that are exemplary for their concision and terse wit. Twain deserves credit insofar as he instilled enthusiasm in Grant for leaving behind the legacy of his memoirs, which, Twain accurately predicted,

would sell 300,000 copies, netting Grant's wife Julia nearly half a million dollars. Grant had never supposed he would write a book, let alone some 300,000 words of meticulous prose. But as with his military career, he kept at it, spending the last year of his life triumphing over excruciatingly painful throat cancer, battling to restore his fortune—which had been once again robbed from him in a Ponzi scheme.

This is a biography written to be popular. Chernow is a Grant partisan, and we readers have a rooting interest, as we would with a Hollywood hero, in Grant's success. But Chernow does not blink at Grant's failings, which resulted, again and again, from his unwillingness to examine carefully the charges against his corrupt associates.

Chernow has one prominent shortcoming—common among biographers. He pretends to know more than is possible. So he resorts to that desperate dodge of “must have,” the locution favored by biographers who believe they know their subjects so well that the blanks can be filled in. A couple examples, out of 52 must haves, will suffice:

Colonel Dent intervened with a proposal so cruelly preposterous that Grant must have felt hurt. “Grant, I can arrange it all for you. You join your regiment and leave Julia with us. You can get a leave of absence once or twice a year and run on here and spend a week or two with us. I always knew [Julia] could not live in the army.”

And:

Whatever the cares of his presidency, Grant must have trembled at the specter of returning to private life, a world where he had stumbled so miserably.

Did Grant feel hurt? Angry? Disappointed? Did he tremble? Who knows? The urge to assign thoughts and emotions in order to make a good story, to turn a biography into a novel, really ought to be resisted when the biographer has such a good story to tell without fudging it. ♦

MICHAEL RUBENSTEIN / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY

# Keynes Unable

*Misunderstanding the clash between two titans of 20th-century economics.* BY HELEN ANDREWS

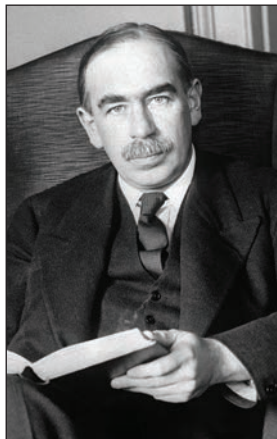
Robert Skidelsky, whose biography of John Maynard Keynes is unlikely ever to be surpassed, judged that his subject “never needed a Jehovah, because he had never experienced despair.” Skidelsky was speaking of religion and morals, a department where Keynes was a typical Bloomsbury hedonist. In economics, to find a system with no deity, it is necessary to consult not Keynes but his archrival, Friedrich Hayek. There most certainly was a Jehovah in Keynes’s economic system; he saw him every morning when he shaved.

Americans sometimes fail to grasp the full extent of Keynes’s egotism, which underlay all his theories of government by economic experts, because we assume that all aristocrats are like that. They are not. The Cambridge Apostles were notorious for their arrogance throughout Edwardian England, from Westminster Palace to the pages of *Punch*, and his fellow Apostles considered Keynes exceptionally arrogant even by their standards. Bertrand Russell, who may be considered an authority on the subject, marveled at Keynes’s self-regard.

This is the sort of historical and psychological context that might usefully be provided in yet another book on the Keynes-Hayek debate. Alas, this is not what is offered by Thomas Hoerber’s little book, which has the feel of a think-tank white paper stretched beyond its natural limits. Rather than bring the debate of yesterday to bear

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**Hayek vs. Keynes**  
*A Battle of Ideas*  
by Thomas Hoerber  
Reaktion, 192 pp., \$22.50



*Keynes, left, and Hayek*

on our own time, as the dust jacket promises, he merely retells yesterday’s debate in today’s clichés, in order to support his arguments for greater economic regulation by the state and, especially, the European Union.

Hoerber’s contention is that the fight between Hayek and Keynes has been mischaracterized as one between freedom and control, when really both sides were equally interested in freedom. Hayek’s mistake, he argues, was in failing to see that Keynes embraced economic planning precisely in order to preserve liberal democracy from the threat of revolution. This is an old tactic. Keynes used it himself in his popular journalism—heed my advice, or else capitalism will be discredited and who knows what will follow! Equating Hayek and Keynes on this basis makes as much sense as equating the NYPD and a Mafia protection racket: One offered a warning, the other a threat.

In reality, Keynes did not care a fig for freedom. He claimed to, but then so did the Soviets, on the logic that man under capitalism cannot be free if he is starving. Was Lenin therefore a devotee of freedom? Keynes’s contempt for the common people was boundless. In any conflict between their preferences and his own expert prescriptions, Keynes never hesitated to choose the latter. He predicted in the *General Theory* that the future would require—the understatement is justly famous—“a somewhat comprehensive socialisation of investment.” If he sometimes referred to this end state as a free market, the appeal was rhetorical.

Hoerber repeatedly uses the same maneuver to defend his own cherished ideal, the EU. Libertarians have no love for this institution, he has noticed, but this is only because, like Hayek, they do not take a sufficiently wide view of freedom. The EU “was founded from the outset on liberal market values,” he insists. “Freedom in political terms, embodied in democracy, became the unshakeable foundation of the EU, an ideal Hayek defended passionately in *The Road to Serfdom*.” (Mind the dangling modifier.) Libertarians fail to recognize the EU as the true guardian of freedom only because they are blinded by their Hayekian misapprehension that fishery licenses are the first step on a slippery slope to the gulag.

If this is his argument, Hoerber cannot have read *The Road to Serfdom* very closely. In fact, I am sure he hasn’t, because he commits the howling anachronism of claiming that the book warns against the “nanny state.” This is a phrase beloved by modern Hayekians but not by Hayek. It first came into use more than two decades after *The Road to Serfdom* was published, and as far as I know Hayek never used it. More importantly, the penny-ante regulations the term refers to—smoking bans, soda taxes—are categorically not what Hayek was warning against.

The regulations Hayek warned against were those that socialism cannot help but impose because it requires

them in order to function. The decision to fix prices or plan production does not *lead to* an unaccountable army of paid snoops and arbitrary bureaucrats, it *necessarily implies* them, because those are the only possible means of its enforcement. That is the whole thesis of the book: “Socialism can be put into practice only by methods of which most socialists disapprove.” Hoerber’s failure to grasp this point leads him into the strangest and weakest of his central arguments, that Hayek was “oversimplifying” to draw an equivalence among fascism, communism, and socialism.

“There can thus be no doubt as to the fundamental difference between communists and socialists in basic attitudes towards political values, such as democracy and economic policy,” Hoerber triumphantly concludes at the end of his chapter on Hayek’s theory of totalitarianism. The basis for this claim is that social democrats say nice things. But the best intentions will not prevent a Kautsky from becoming a commissar when the necessities of economic planning demand it—again, this is Hayek’s entire point. Hoerber thinks that you can tell the difference between nice and nasty socialists by their attitude to power: “If it becomes an end in itself, as for Lenin or Stalin, the danger of corruption is great.” And if not, not? This is startlingly naïve, even from a true believer in the European project.

Keynes was a man of surfaces. His knowledge, even of economics, was not deep, and he was not well read. His pamphlet “The End of Laissez-Faire,” which biographer Skidelsky calls his “most learned essay in political economy” and praises for “his range of references,” cites nothing Keynes would not have read as an undergraduate. When he won Cambridge’s Adam Smith Prize in 1909, he had, ironically, not even read *The Wealth of Nations*. He labored to cultivate his instincts, not his erudition, and Hayek was right when he reflected that Keynes’s “interests were very largely guided by aesthetic appeal.”

It is an unattractive quality in an intellectual, this substitution of instinct for learning, but at least Keynes’s instincts

were generally good. He had a real sense for beauty, a real quality of command, real charm. Hoerber, too, operates at the surface of things. He too tries to prevail on his readers by means of attitude more than argument. But instead of speaking in the manner of a self-confident English aristocrat, he talks like a professor at

a French school of management, which he is. He is guided not by instinct but by that far less reliable shortcut, cliché (“neoliberalism,” “sustainable growth,” “raptor capitalism”). Every currency in the world has suffered inflation since the days of Keynes and Hayek. Apparently the coin of expertise is no exception. ♦

BCA

## Gateway to the ‘Upside Down’

*The horror of Netflix’s Stranger Things begins with the abuse and abandonment of kids.* BY ALEXI SARGEANT

**T**he first season of the Netflix show *Stranger Things*, released last year, immediately plunged its protagonists into danger. In the first episode we see 12-year-old Will Byers, one of a quartet of Dungeons & Dragons-playing nerds, waylaid by a dark shape on his way home along the wooded back roads of Hawkins, Indiana. He abandons his precious bike and runs to his house. But the home, which should be a place of safety, offers no haven. His mother and brother are working extra shifts to keep the family afloat—his deadbeat father long ago abandoned them all—and so, alone, the sensitive child is easy prey for the monster. Will is snatched before the opening credits.

The show’s second season, available October 27 for binge-watching by obsessive fans, is a slower burn. A year after the events of the first season, not much seems amiss in Hawkins as Halloween 1984 rolls around, save that a newcomer has beaten the gang’s high scores at the local video-game arcade. But Will has brought back more than just trauma from his ordeal last year: He’s seeing apocalyptic visions and coughing up creepy slugs. The kids,

teens, and adults who in the first season teamed up to save the day have a new mystery to unravel—and consequences to reckon with from the mistakes and compromises they made along the way. Lies spread, you see, like strangling roots. The series has maintained the retro setting, pulse-pounding suspense, and charming cast that made it a hit, while deepening its thematic concern with the intergenerational wounds of abuse and neglect.

In a review of the show’s first season, Joshua Rothman described *Stranger Things* as something like “Lovecraft in suburbia.” The looming, multi-armed monster presented as a new archfoe in the latest season certainly suggests the showrunners—identical twins Matt and Ross Duffer—leaned toward the Lovecraftian. Yet there’s still something crucial missing in that description. H.P. Lovecraft’s particular brand of New England nihilism located horror in the unknown, uncaring vastness of the sea and outer space, from the depths of which emerge alien gods who prove humanity’s insignificance—not by their malice but by their indifference. What drives Lovecraft’s protagonists mad is the revelation that humans don’t matter to the universe. Thus his subgenre is commonly called “cosmic horror.”

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The philosophy of *Stranger Things* is more human-friendly, and the horror of *Stranger Things* is closer to home. The monsters come from another realm, but not from deep space: It's the so-called "Upside Down" right under the surface of our world. When characters get a glimpse of it, they see a rotting, cold, toxic duplicate of the town of Hawkins. The geography is the same, the buildings are the same, but everything is crumbling, fetid, overgrown with slithering vines and squelching tentacles. Season two forgoes any subtlety. The evil of the Upside Down twists its way into Hawkins, rooted in the soil itself.

The theme of absent and abusive fathers runs deep. The monster that took Will in the show's first season is the negative image of his absent father. It torments his mother Joyce, riddles the house's walls with holes, and drags Will to a dark and lonely place—literalizing the wounds Lonnie Byers inflicted on his family. Another father we see—Ted Wheeler, whose son and daughter both become entangled in the supernatural adventure—is a stand-in for obtuse and unconcerned parents everywhere; his highest domestic ambition is napping in his recliner.

And then there is the father figure at blame for the crisis. Our world was first exposed to the Upside Down by experiments Dr. Martin Brenner ran on the young girl known as Eleven in the Hawkins National Laboratory, a secretive subsidiary of the Department of Energy. Brenner styles himself a father figure, even having Eleven call him "Papa," but he's only interested in exploiting her psychic and telekinetic abilities for their military potential. He locks her in solitary confinement when she fails to give him what he wants.

In season one, Eleven escapes and gets her first taste of real friendship (and Eggo waffles) from Will's trio of friends, Mike, Dustin, and Lucas. Picking up where the first season ended, we learn in season two that she is now hiding from sinister government forces with help from Hawkins's redoubtable, irascible sheriff, Jim Hopper. Hopper and Eleven make a fractious but winning surrogate family; gruff Sheriff Hopper even has some great dance moves he



The D&D party—Dustin, Will, Lucas, and Mike—from Netflix's *Stranger Things*

puts to use as he and Eleven fix up their cabin hideout. Their dynamic recalls Wolverine and Laura from this year's *Logan*—a battered loner struggling to be a good father to a powerful, traumatized youngster. Hopper has his own secret grief, the loss of his daughter Sara years ago. His reluctance to share this with Eleven is understandable but adds to her growing feeling of isolation. Hopper's plan to hide Eleven from the world may keep her off the government's radar, but it does little to heal the wounds of her childhood spent being experimented upon in a laboratory, cut off from the world, from a sense of belonging, from her brokenhearted mother.

Speaking of mothers, in the second season Winona Ryder's Joyce Byers has leveled up in maternal ferocity, this time fighting to save not only her son's body but also his soul. The show follows the sequel tradition of *Alien* to *Aliens*—with the monster a more known quantity, some horror-movie beats are replaced by action-movie beats. Ryder, though, gets to have a classic horror arc: *Something* is wrong with her child, and she will fight the forces of hell for him.

Eleven's psychic wound is the gate that let all this supernatural evil into Hawkins. Season two makes this explicit. The fundamental question of the season is what to do with this gate, this wound: Cauterize it repeatedly? Or take the risks needed to heal it? The new battalion of scientists at the Hawkins lab have opted for containment. With the judicious, regular application of a flamethrower, they think they can keep the

gate to the Upside Down charred and inactive. This is paralleled by Hopper's approach to keeping Eleven safe: The strict isolation he imposes is meant to help but it frustrates Eleven and doesn't get to the root of the problem.

Eleven was never allowed to feel welcome and at home in the world. She was the child of Omelas, the one innocent made to suffer for the utopia enjoyed by everyone else—the utopia in this case being the United States in the 1980s, which the shadowy experiments on Eleven were intended to help protect from the Soviet menace.

Eleven is not the only child mistreated by irresponsible adults—and I don't just mean the other government test subject we meet. Several other child characters, such as the new addition to the kids' D&D party, spunky skater-girl Max, are scarred by the sundering and suturing of their parents' marriages. While the decision to set the show in the early 1980s sometimes seems to have been made to keep the characters from having cell phones—part of a wider trend of pre-cell-phone, '80s-set horror movies and shows—it also drops us right into the fallout of the baby boomers' divorce boom.

The most facile dismissal of *Stranger Things* is to call it nostalgic kitsch. Yes, it wears its influences on its sleeve—there are obvious nods to Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* and Stephen King's *It*. There's also more than a little of Twin Peaks behind Hawkins, the sleepy town full of dark secrets. But the stylized period detail (it's more an '80s fantasia than an exacting historical piece) is the backdrop

for a rip-roaring story. Like most scary stories worth telling, it's about children and childhood. It weaves together the fears of children exploring a world too big for them, the fears of teenagers leaving childhood behind, and the fears of parents worried for their vulnerable children. You could call that, respectively, the *Stand By Me*, *Halloween*, *Exorcist* trifecta. But it's also a structure that highlights the deep, dark things many of us face at each stage of life. It's not the abstract, existential fear of Lovecraft's stories but rather the more intimate, familiar, and universal fears of being a human, made vulnerable by one's love and connection to others.

The monsters of *Stranger Things* remain mysterious enough that we don't know what motivates them: animal hunger and instinct, or some rational (but alien) agenda we cannot grasp. But allegorically, the monsters have a clear role—they're orphan-eaters. Every supernatural evil on the show has its root in the abuse and abandonment of children. That trauma—no, that sin—festers and spreads to imperil everything wholesome. The ethics of the show are clearest on this point. Other patterns appear in its moral universe: Lies, however well-intentioned, always sow chaos; generosity, however foolhardy, always has its reward. But the deepest theme is that parental wrongs are never without ramifications.

A recurring image in both seasons is that of the child characters speeding around on their bicycles, gliding on dark wooded roads lit only by their bike headlights. This free-range childhood is both a throwback idyll and the source of danger and tension—we know what might be lurking in those woods. But it's not constant supervision that the kids need; helicopter parenting won't save Hawkins. Hopper tries something like that with Eleven and it proves stifling. What the children need are adults who see them as individuals learning to navigate a morally fraught world, and provide them care, attention, and good examples. Adults who build homes that are sanctuaries from darkness—and places where children can equip themselves to go out and confront the monsters. ♦

BCA

# Putting on a Show

*Curating museums—scholarship dipped in dazzle.*

BY AMY HENDERSON



Visitors stroll through the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History in July 2017.

In the unpredictable and often baffling way that hip, new meaning can glom onto even the stuffiest of words, “curating” has emerged in recent years as a ubiquitous cultural tag for fashion, groceries, Instagram posts, Pinterest accounts, and much else. Grammy winner Usher “curated” a July 4 fireworks and light show for Macy’s. On its website, a strip club in New York promised a few years ago to “curate a night of Curious burlesque.” Self-help gurus suggest that by self-curating—decluttering your life—you can find inner peace.

To understand how “curating” came to acquire such star power, let’s take a quick trip through the showy side of American museum history. In the 19th century, P.T. Barnum’s American Museum in New York offered visitors an experience that was literally spectacular. Barnum showcased “industrious fleas, automatons, jugglers, ventriloquists, living statuary,” and much more. His intention was to “make the Museum the town wonder,” and it worked because

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**Inside the Lost Museum**  
*Curating, Past and Present*  
 by Steven Lubar  
 Harvard, 416 pp., \$35

“my ‘puffing’ was more persistent, my advertising more audacious, my posters more glaring, my pictures more exaggerated, my flags more patriotic.”

For much of the next century, museums settled into a more sedate and refined existence; during this time, curating was for the most part an amateur calling. But then came J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art in the 1970s and ’80s. As historian Neil Harris argues in his book *Capital Culture*, Brown launched a “new age of museums.” He organized such blockbuster exhibitions as *The Treasures of Tutankhamun* and *Treasure Houses of Britain*; his combination of panache and showbiz smarts transformed the National Gallery into a place of wonder.

Brown’s orchestration of blockbuster exhibitions reinvented the contemporary museum experience—and profoundly transformed the workings of American museums. As museums

BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI / AFP / GETTY

stepped into a more prominent place on the public stage, the notion of “curation” took on a certain élan. “Museum studies” emerged in the academic world. Amateur putterers were left in the dust as curating came increasingly to be a matter for credentialed professionals.

In his new book *Inside the Lost Museum*, Steven Lubar traces curating’s transit to professionalism. Lubar began his career as a curator at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History; he later moved to Brown University, where he is a professor of American studies, spent a decade directing the Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage, and ran the university’s anthropology museum.

Lubar’s interest in writing this study grew out of his work at Brown and his research into the career of a sort of predecessor. In 1871, John Whipple Potter Jenks, a natural history professor, opened his own museum at the university. This was during the era in which academics launched a national mania for dinosaurs: Paleontologists led rival expeditions to discover fossils in the West, in a headline-grabbing competition known as the “Bone Wars.”

Jenks used his own vast collection of 50,000 taxidermied animals, ethnographic items, and “curiosities” to create his museum. But in the years after his 1894 death the university lost interest, and the museum was shuttered in 1915. Most of Jenks’s collections landed in the university dump in the 1940s.

Lubar was part of a group of museum-studies faculty members and students at Brown that became intrigued by Jenks’s work. They formed a “Jenks Society for Lost Museums” and curated an exhibition to examine what Jenks had accomplished. It had three parts. The first used a staged setting to depict how Jenks worked in his shop—tables were strewn with fossils and paperwork, and a taxidermy project was shown underway. The second part was an art installation in which 80 artists reimagined Jenks’s artifacts and “curiosities” and painted them a ghostly white. The final section was presented as a more traditional museum exhibit, with a display of about 100 objects that survived from the original Jenks museum.

“We used the story of one museum,” Lubar writes, “to consider the fundamental nature” of museums in general. Working on the project inspired Lubar to consider “how museums preserve objects, learn from them, and tell stories with them; and how visitors interact with and learn from exhibitions.” His book is organized in sections that reflect these themes, focusing on such essential curatorial tasks as gathering, preserving, and displaying collections. He concludes with an essay on “the usefulness of museums” today—how they help us understand past and present, and how they foster a sense of connection.

Exhaustive research frames Lubar’s entire study, and he broaches some of the most difficult issues facing museums today. One especially timely section deals with how collections are selected and how historical “significance” changes over time. The recent outcry over Confederate statuary exemplifies how historical interpretation and “purpose” change; over the last few decades, debates about diversity, representation, and “political correctness” have been a constant challenge for museums. As Lubar writes, “Quality, significance, and usefulness mean different things to different people, at different times.”

Lubar also offers illuminating chapters on key curatorial questions about museum life: Who decides what to collect? What are the stories objects tell? How do visitors encounter objects? What do objects “teach”? In some cases he hints at answers using tales from museum history, like the story of the Air and Space Museum’s controversial *Enola Gay* exhibit in the 1990s. Sometimes, though, he uses thought experiments and broad hypotheticals:

Consider a local historical society deciding on its next exhibit. First, they must decide who sits at the table: do they represent themselves, everyone who feels a connection to the historical society, or everyone in town? . . . Next, they must consider what will draw a crowd, what historians think is important about the town’s history, and what story will be interesting, or useful, to which groups in the town. They need to look at what their museum can do that other organizations can’t, what they have funding for, and whether the exhibit might bring new collections

to the museum. . . . Then there are the philosophical questions.

Lubar also discusses how attracting and engaging new audiences is a priority for museums today, as they devote much energy to “opening the fourth wall and allowing visitors into re-created spaces, to give them a more immersive experience”—sometimes using mockups and dummies, sometimes using imitated or refurbished items, sometimes using photographs and screens and digital trickery. And in addition to interactive media, performing arts have increasingly been introduced into the once-quiet halls of art museums. For example, the National Portrait Gallery, my former professional home, now has the Smithsonian’s first choreographer-in-residence. Dana Tai Soon Burgess’s troupe explores the American experience through dance; he says his choreography can “enliven” the gallery’s exhibitions.

Lubar’s highly accessible book sits comfortably on museum-studies shelves alongside such works as Stephen Weil’s *Making Museums Matter*, Nina Simon’s *The Participatory Museum*, and Adrian George’s *The Curator’s Handbook*. And although Lubar’s book stays firmly within the academic bounds of museum-studies concerns, it could be of practical interest to people who participate in any organization, large or small, devoted to preserving or displaying art or artifacts.

Unfortunately, Lubar’s imagination is not attracted by the magic of curating: the dazzling combination of scholarship, storytelling, and “eye” that elevates a curator to greatness. Nor does he offer a hint about why curating has taken on its quirky recent expanded meaning. More’s the pity. The broadened, democratic use of the word “curating” seems in part to reflect our growing need to impose order and organization on the busy, buzzing abundance that surrounds us. It also suggests the ways that we are increasingly using social media to put ourselves on display, making ourselves into spectacles. Perhaps some future author writing about this strange, new kind of curation—of our world and ourselves—will find practical and ethical wisdom in Lubar’s fine examination of what curating has been. ♦



Wild horses in the federally run Sand Wash Basin herd management area in Colorado

BCA

# Unbridled Affection

*The myth of the mustang and the plight of America's wild horses.* BY PIA CATTON

In 1971, when Congress passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the aim was to protect the animals from “capture, branding, harassment, or death.” The law hailed wild horses as “living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West.”

The protections worked—a little too well. When mustangs began overtaking public pastures where cattle graze, the Bureau of Land Management responded by capturing and removing wild horses. Today, more than 43,600 are penned in a federal holding system, according to BLM figures. So much for the pioneer spirit.

Meanwhile, the cost of rounding up the herds—by spooking them with low-flying helicopter passes until they run into pens—and then feeding and housing them has risen over the years: In fiscal year 2016, the BLM’s wild-horse program budget was \$80 million. Adding up the costs since 1971 is staggering: about a billion dollars since 1975, with another billion expected for caring for the horses now penned up. “How did we get to a place where we spend \$2 billion to gather and store animals that every-

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**Wild Horse Country**  
*The History, Myth, and Future of the Mustang*  
by David Philipps  
Norton, 316 pp., \$27.95

one agrees should be wild and free?” asks David Philipps in the introduction to his book *Wild Horse Country*.

Philipps—a *New York Times* reporter who was awarded a Pulitzer in 2014 for his work at the *Gazette* in Colorado Springs on the mistreatment of wounded veterans—admits he is “not a horse person.” He is, though, a wilderness person, and “mustangs embody the West that I love.” His quest to understand their predicament has resulted in a wide-ranging, scrupulously reported investigation into the iconic role of wild horses in our American self-understanding and the failures of government policy to ensure their protection.

The first half of Philipps’s book zips through equine history, as he lets his earnest fascination with the West come through. His reporting is threaded throughout with wild-horse symbolism. The mustang, Philipps writes, “is superior to its domestic brethren because it has the one thing Ameri-

cans say they yearn for most: freedom. It is the hoofed version of Jeffersonian democracy.” Poetic license, sure, but not simply wrong.

Philipps relishes the campfire legend of the White Stallion, which was said to evade man for decades and which inspired so many stories that Washington Irving noted them while embedded with an 1832 expedition troop. The White Stallion is a reminder that no matter what era, president, or policy, there is an American emotional link to horses. Even if you’re scared of them, loathe their smells, or resent Mine That Bird for spoiling your 2009 Kentucky Derby wager, it’s undeniable that we have a deep cultural affinity for horses.

Philipps’s investigation takes him far into prehistory. On a visit to Wyoming’s Bighorn Basin, he joins an expert from Johns Hopkins University in hunting for fossilized jaws of early horses. The question is: Can the horse be considered native to North America or is it an introduced species? The answer is complicated. Early horses did roam North America for about 55 million years, Philipps writes, but disappeared about 10,000 years ago. When Columbus arrived, there were no wild horses in North America.

The Spanish brought their horses—and also brought the word *mesteña*, which became “mustang” and is more a descriptor than a breed; Philipps uses the term to describe all wild-born horses. Native American tribes realized the animals’ use in warfare and hunting, giving rise to the Horse Nations

JOE AMON / DENVER POST / GETTY

era; the Comanche turned themselves into a cavalry powerhouse.

By the early 19th century, herds had multiplied so vastly that accounts suggest sights almost unimaginable today. In 1846, a young Ulysses S. Grant wrote: “There was no estimating the number of animals in it; I have no idea that they could all have been corralled in the State of Rhode Island, or Delaware at one time. If they had been, they would have been so thick that the pasturage would have given out the first day.” Historian J. Frank Dobie estimated that at their peak, there were up to a million mustangs in Texas and another million scattered in the West.

And then the horse became a pest. With few predators, the animals were eating the grass and drinking the water needed for cattle. The introduction of the automobile and the sudden drop in the need for horses for travel and burden exacerbated the problem.

Ranchers tried to control the situation by killing or taking horses for their own use. But that was chump change compared with the widespread slaughter as part of what historian Vernon Parrington called “the great barbecue,” a time of unscrupulous claiming or depleting natural resources of the West: Ranchers and cowboys began rounding up horses to sell in bulk. The buyers were newly established canneries, where horses were cheap raw material for dog food. Horsemeat for dogs was at the time a viable product, although even then it struck many Americans as morally wrong. Among them was Frank Litts, who in 1925 was arrested for trying to blow up the Chappel Brothers’ Illinois factory. He landed in an asylum—but escaped long enough to procure 150 pounds of dynamite for another pass at the factory.

The demise of these dog-food factories came soon anyway. By the 1930s, after decades of slaughter, overgrazing, and drought, the herds were dwindling. Slaughterhouses that had once prepared horsemeat often shifted over to beef. As of 2000, writes Philipps, there were still three horsemeat slaughterhouses in operation; even they shut down after Congress defunded horsemeat inspection programs in 2007.

Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in rising exports of horses to be slaughtered in other countries.

Although mustang populations had greatly declined by the early 20th century, a countertrend made them increasingly a part of popular culture—and even part of the American mythos that would come to enchant the world. Writers like Zane Grey shored up the romance of the West. The Western film genre took hold. An early ad for the Ford Mustang featured the White Stallion off in the distance.

Another trend was simmering, too: Concern for natural resources led to the environmental and conservation movements. A leading voice for horse protections was Velma Bronn Johnston, a colorful secretary from Nevada known as “Wild Horse Annie.” Her efforts across two decades resulted in the 1971 law, which protected horses on federal land. Capture or harassment of the horses could result in fines or jail.

The unintended consequence, though, was wild population growth. In 1970, a year before the law’s passage, the BLM estimated the wild-horse population at about 10,000. By 1978, the population had reached 62,000—far smaller than the 19th-century peak, but much higher than the figure of 27,000 that the BLM had determined was, and still is, the optimal number of horses (the “Appropriate Management Level”) to allow for an ecological balance of the land and animals, both wild and commercial.

As the mustang population grew, the BLM began its roundups. In 1981, 12,500 horses were gathered and stored in off-range areas—locations that are now running out of space. “It quickly became clear that the roundup policy had serious flaws and was so dysfunctional that no matter who ran it, and how much money they received, it was continually ending up in the ditch,” writes Philipps. “And yet it is still the approach used today.”

What about culling? Here our affinity for horses has become part of the problem. Our reverence for horses’ physical beauty and loyalty makes them off-limits in ways that many other animals

aren’t. Many Americans hunt deer and eat venison regularly, but unlike in some other countries, in the United States the idea of shooting a horse for meat is unacceptable. Americans today won’t even feed horsemeat to their dogs. It has so far been politically untouchable to slaughter animals under specific government protection, a point made by advocacy groups’ lawsuits. In 1982, the BLM placed a moratorium on euthanizing horses—originally intended for three months but still in place today. All this may be changing soon, however: President Trump’s 2018 budget proposal calls for the moratorium to be lifted and for funding cuts that would make the sale of horses for slaughter inevitable.

The BLM has an adoption program, though its lenient rules have allowed for bulk adoption, which at times has enabled individuals to buy and sell truckloads of horses for slaughter. A scandal in the early 1990s revealed BLM employees were cashing in on the system.

No side in this debate—from the horse advocates to the ranchers—is happy with the current state of affairs, and to fix it would require cutting across bureaucracies with bold leadership. Philipps’s preferred approach would replace the current roundup-based policy with a multifaceted strategy, one that would include birth control for mares and the reintroduction of the mountain lion, a natural predator.

Of course, mountain lions pose a threat to cattle. But Philipps is convincing on this point: He runs the numbers to show ranchers could receive credits—a system that has precedent in the reintroduction of wolves in recent decades. Besides, Philipps writes, there is something perverse about the costly horse roundups happening in the “same places where the federal government is spending piles of tax dollars to kill the lions that would likely eat them.”

The saddest part of it all lies in Philipps’s fear that the image of the wild horse will suffer most. “In many places in Nevada, they are no longer symbols of individual freedom,” he writes. Instead, they have become “symbols of federal mismanagement and waste.”

They’re on a long list. ♦

**“HuffPo embarked on a 23-city bus tour to get to know places like Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Odessa, Texas. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg undertook a series of carefully choreographed interactions with factory workers and people on tractors. The liberal pollster Stan Greenberg appeared at the National Press Club to discuss his findings from a series of focus groups with ‘Obama-Trump’ voters in Macomb County, Michigan. A new group of Democratic elected officials hosted a ‘Winning Back the Heartland’ strategy conference in Des Moines this month. The title of yet another research project, a bipartisan study underwritten by the eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, encapsulates the sentiment: ‘Stranger in My Own Country.’”**

**—The Atlantic, “On Safari in Trump’s America”**

# Stranger in a Dang Strange Land

BY LEMUEL SHIFFLETT

*Part One*

Folks here in Possum Holler been scratchin’ their dagbum heads tryna figger out what th’ hell’s wrong with them fancy-pants folks up in New York an’ points north. What the’ hell they want to vote fer Hillary fer, anyways? So yer humble correspondent—that’s me—decided it’d be best just t’ shimmy on up there an’ find out. Kind of a “anthropological expedition,” if ya know what I mean. (If ya don’t, look it up yer damn self, I ain’t got time to ’splain it.)

First stop I made was a clothin’ store called Odin, on account of how I spilled my spitcup on my britches gettin’ into a cab an’ needed a clean pair. Young feller was standin’ in there with a ponytail, so frail a strong wind coulda blowed him over. Looked at me like I was something stuck t’ th’ bottom of his shoe an’ asked if he could help me. I said I wanted a new pair o’ britches an’ I might as well get a shirt t’ match.

He shows me one he thinks I’ll like. “It’s cham-bray,” says he. Cham-BRAY. Like that.

“Hell it is,” I told him. “It’s denim, an’ I ain’t payin’ \$269 for no denim shirt I can get at the Walmart for seven bucks on clearance.” He looked like he ate a green persimmon, an’ I cleared outta there.

’Fore I could even get t’ my hotel, I seen a bunch a folks wavin’ signs an’ yellin’. Must be one a them protests we hear tell about, I think, so I go over there t’ see what they’s protestin’.

“WHITE PRIVILEGE IS A HATE CRIME” says one a th’ signs. “Excuse me, young lady,” I says. “Ain’t sure I git yer sign. Could you expl—”

Well, I didn’t git no further, on account of she didn’t like bein’ called ‘young lady.’ I coulda called

her ‘young hussy,’ way she was dressed, but Momma didn’t bring me up like that. So I asked a feller standin’ nearby.

“It refers to the racism inherent in the superstructures created by the corporate oligarchy to prevent us from liberating consciousness from bourgeois ideology,” he said—and I ain’t even kiddin’.

I asked for a f’rinstance.

“For instance,” he says. “If you cross the street against the light, are you afraid the police will shoot you?”

“Well, no—”

“Because you’re white, see,” he began. I started t’ explain that it was because I wouldn’t cross th’ street againt th’ light in th’ first place, ‘specially th’ way peo-

ple up there drive. Well, he wasn’t buyin’ it, an’ things went downhill.

I didn’t have no more luck talkin’ to this dried-up ol’ prune holdin’ a sign that said “MATH IS RACIST.” I never did like math much, it made my brain itch. But I couldn’t see how it was racist, an’ I told her so. “Mathematics operates as whiteness,” she says. “It occupies an institutional space that instantiates racist cultural norms about objectivity and other forms of false consciousness.”

I said I thought math let you make correct change at Minnie’s Diner, but she wasn’t buyin’ it. Told me I was racist, too. I figgered she was a lost cause, an’ I skedaddled.

By the time I got done checkin’ into my hotel I was so hungry I could eat a horse. But a lot of the menfolk up there don’t look like they take in enough meat an’ potatoes, so I asked the front desk clerk where a real man’s man could find what he was looking fer. ■



Mr. Shifflett

**COMING IN PART TWO:  
Be Careful Whatcha Ask Fer**