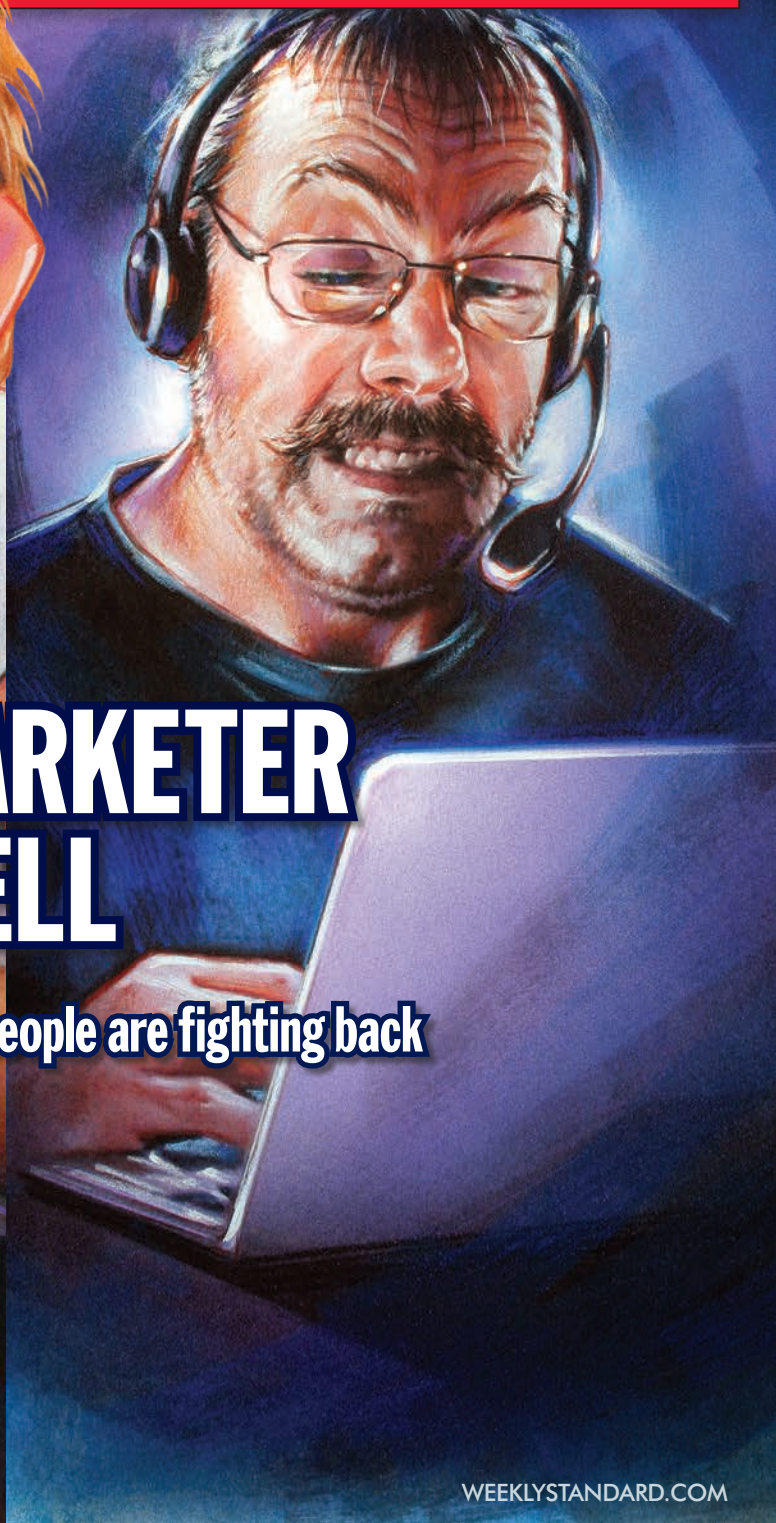


# the weekly Standard

JANUARY 1 / JANUARY 8, 2018 • \$5.99



## TELEMARKETER HELL

**TONY MECIA** on how people are fighting back

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# Bey Nice

We all know the phrase “killing them with kindness.” But is there now such a thing as “suing them with kindness”? Yes, if you happen to be the legal team of Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, arguably the most successful pop musician of the past two decades.

It seems that a “pop-up bar” recently popped up in Brooklyn to pay tribute to Queen Bey. It was called “Sleyenda,” after their hero, who “slays” frequently. Beyoncé’s lawyers quickly put the bar on notice. As the *New York Post* put it, “Grinchy Beyoncé sends cease and desist to NYC holiday pop-up.” Which is true, as far as it goes. But the *Post* missed what was remarkable about the lawyers’ missive—that it was decidedly un-Grinchy. The tone of the letter was downright un-lawyerly.

“It appears that you are a dedicated fan of Mrs. Carter, and for that support, Mrs. Carter thanks you,” the lawyers cooed. “There is a line, however, between fandom and infringe-

ment of intellectual property rights, and we are concerned that this pop-up bar will cross that line.” Could



*Don't make me be mean, now.*

they have been more pleasant with what is an unpleasant task? One is reminded of the wisdom head bouncer Patrick Swayze shares with his deputies in the movie *Road House*: “I want you to be nice. Until it’s time to not be nice.”

Of course, that time arrived a few paragraphs later: “Please know that

Mrs. Carter and BGK do not wish to initiate legal proceedings against you, but unless you comply with the foregoing demands, they will not be left with many options for protecting their rights.” In other words: Prepare to be slain by the Slayer.

We do wonder if taking such a congenial tone while *threatening a lawsuit* is an effective method to get people to comply. Perhaps our litigious commander in chief can give it a shot. ♦

## Regulator, Heal Thyself

When a fire at an electrical substation knocked out power for half a day at the Atlanta airport recently, airlines canceled more than 1,400 flights and thousands of passengers were stranded. Some sat in the airport terminal in the dark, while others waited on planes out on the tarmac for hours.

If only one of those passengers had had the ability to prevent such a calamity, he surely would have—right?

“Total and abject failure here at ATL Airport today,” tweeted former Obama transportation secretary Anthony Foxx. “I am stuck on a @delta flight, passengers and crew tolerating it. But there is no excuse for lack of workable redundant power source. NONE!”

If there is one group of people who know about “redundant power,” it is Washington bureaucrats. The Department of Transportation has an annual budget of about \$98 billion and some 58,000 employees. But none of them apparently thought to beef up power sources at major U.S. airports. The 2009 Obama stimulus “supported 800 projects improving our airports and air traffic control facilities,” the DoT says, but none prevented the “abject failure” at the world’s busiest airport.

Of course, it’s silly to expect that government, even one as large as

# What They Were Thinking

THIS GOP TAX SCAM IS SIMPLY THEFT—MONUMENTAL, BRAZEN THEFT FROM THE AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS! IT'S A VOTE TO INSTALL A PERMANENT PLUTOCRACY IN OUR NATION! IT BETRAYS OUR MILITARY, OUR CHILDREN, OUR...

zzzzzzzz...



PELOSI ET AL.: OLIVIER DOULIERY / GETTY

BEYONCÉ: ALI MIRAE



The angry Mr. Foxx

ours, can anticipate every emergency. Accidents happen. Then again, a lot of people look to government to solve problems significantly smaller than an 11-hour blackout at one of the country's major transportation hubs.

Before blaming others, Foxx might have followed a different course: He could have made it into the airplane's lavatory and taken a look in the mirror. But that move would have required unbuckling his seatbelt, which would surely have been against regulations. ♦

### Sins of the Scribblers

Pope Francis has told Catholic media that his annual World Communications Day speech, watched by tens of millions around the world, will be dedicated to addressing "fake news." Journalists are "fundamental" to democratic society, said the pope, and in doing their job "shouldn't fall into the 'sins of communication.'" THE SCRAPBOOK is flattered, humbled, really, that His Holiness should address our humble craft, but what was that last part?

Francis explains that these "sins of communication" include "disinformation, or giving just one side, calumny that is sensationalized"—does that mean calumny that hasn't been sensationalized is okay?—"or defamation, looking for things that are old news and have been dealt with and bringing them to light today." Such actions, he says, constitute "grave sin that hurts the heart of the journalist and hurts others."

No doubt, fake news is a problem for our times and perhaps even the work of the devil himself (Old Scratch never having been one much for compulsive truth-telling).



Fake news? Who, me?



It's also no surprise that the Holy Father—whose business, after all, is broadcasting the Good News—should have little patience with the scribblers who specialize in the bad variety. Last year he struck a similar chord, rebuking the "communications industry" for spreading "fear" and "pessimism."

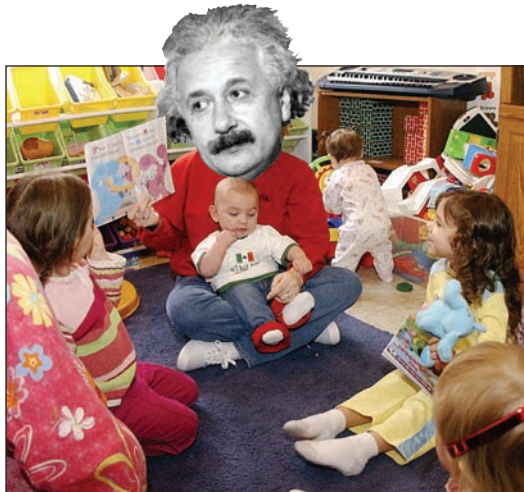
Still, THE SCRAPBOOK would like to see the pope recognize there is a distinction to be made between bearing false witness and being the bearer of bad news.

The Vatican has had to

battle fake news several times under this particular pope. Even when Francis is theologically conservative on an issue (not exactly a common occurrence) his rather more casual comments have often left bishops and cardinals nonplused. Earlier this year he joked that "inside the Holy Trinity they're all arguing behind closed doors, but on the outside they give the picture of unity." In November, a prominent American priest and theologian was asked to sign after sending a letter to Pope Francis that described his tenure as one of "chronic confusion" and "ambiguity."

But, sorry, sorry, that's old news and has been dealt with. ♦

TOP: TOM WILLIAMS / CO ROLL CALL / GETTY; BOTTOM: VATICAN POOL / GETTY



## What Next: A Master's in Meter-Maidology?

Sometimes THE SCRAPBOOK thinks that the D.C. city government exists solely so that Congress won't be the most incompetent political entity in Washington. We're no strangers to writing about the effects of terrible regulations, and we really have to give D.C. credit for cooking up this one: The city plans to require all daycare workers to have college degrees.

While we can think of a few basic legal safeguards and background checks that might reasonably be required to keep the kidlets safe, the idea that you need a college education to watch young children is preposterous. There are couple of blindingly obvious negative effects such a requirement would have. The first is that it would reduce the pool of jobs available to less-educated, lower-income workers. The second is that it would dramatically raise the cost of childcare in a city where it's already largely unaffordable.

Regulatory skeptics aren't exactly lining up to endorse this proposal. "The average D.C. family with a toddler and infant would have to spend up to 63.6 percent of their annual income to enroll their kids in childcare," says Shoshana Weissmann, a digital media specialist at the R Street Institute. "I appreciate D.C.'s efforts to limit the availability of childcare to the elite, and to keep peons away from children of the

few who will be able to afford it."

The really depressing thing is that this move by D.C. is just the latest in a long line of onerous regulations related to occupational licensing. States and localities have required such absurdities as 600 hours of training for those doing African hair-braiding or 1,825 days of experience and education to become a painting contractor. A 2011 study by University of Minnesota and Princeton economists concluded that occupational licensing excesses kill 2.8 million jobs and cost consumers \$203 billion annually.

In recent years, there's been widespread agreement among Republicans and Democrats on the need for occupational licensing reform. And yet new harmful and pointless regulations such as D.C.'s proposed daycare law keep cropping up. If we didn't know better, we'd say America's politicians aren't sincere about reducing the size of government, even when they publicly admit it must be done. ♦

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The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except the first week in January, third week in April, first week in July, and third week in August) at 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-274-7293. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-386-597-4378 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, \$5.99. Back issues, \$5.99 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit [www.weeklystandard.com](http://www.weeklystandard.com) or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Copyright 2017, Clarity Media Group. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a registered trademark of Clarity Media Group.

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## Hold the Memorial

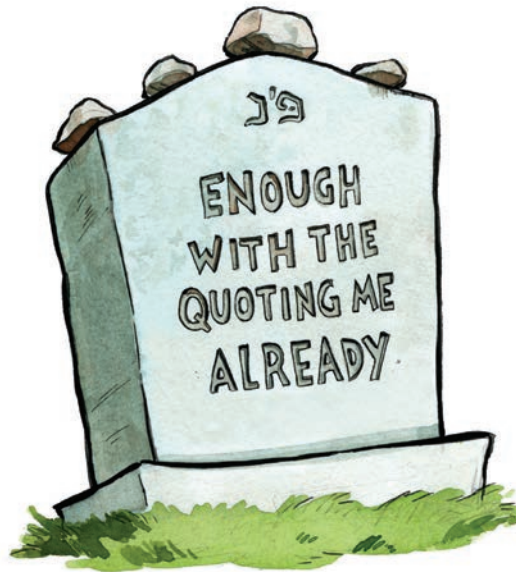
The other day a friend told me that my name came up at the funeral of someone I didn't remotely know. I told her, this friend, that I assumed that the person who brought it up was doubtless the minister, priest, or rabbi officiating at the funeral. She said it was the minister. I added that I knew exactly in what connection it came up and could tell her precisely what was said. The clergyman in charge, I knew, quoted the final paragraph from my book of 1980 called *Ambition*. Here is the paragraph:

We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical epoch, or the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose the time or conditions of our death. But within all this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we shall live: courageously or in cowardice, honorably or dishonorably, with purpose or in drift. We decide what is important and what is trivial in life. We decide that what makes us significant is either what we do or what we refuse to do. But no matter how indifferent the universe may be to our choices and decisions, these choices and decisions are ours to make. We decide. We choose. And as we decide and choose, so are our lives formed.

Over the years, at least a dozen people have told me that they have heard this paragraph quoted at funerals and memorials. I didn't realize it at the time, and it was scarcely my intention, but in ending my book I had written an all-purpose funeral peroration. My paragraph may well be in a collection of useful things to quote at funerals and memorials when the clergyman in charge didn't

really know the deceased. That it has been so often used reinforces me in my own resolve not to have a memorial after my own death.

So many of the memorials I have attended have been disappointing. Frequently the clergyman in charge was winging it on the thin documentation supplied by a brief interview with the dead person's family. "Jack loved golf and enjoyed reading biographies, chiefly of American political



figures." Not seldom, friends called upon to speak reveal they didn't really know the dead person at all well, or else badly misperceived him. A good rule at these memorials is never to let anyone speak who volunteers to do so. He is likely to want to talk chiefly about himself. "I'll never forget the night I won my Pulitzer Prize, Jack was the first person I called to tell the news."

Some years ago I attended the memorial for the literary critic Erich Heller, a man of great learning and no less great skeptical wit. Of the six people who spoke at his memo-

rial, at least three that I knew of he regarded as intellectually negligible, low academic politicians, clowns. What a shame, I remember thinking, Erich wasn't there to hear their vacuous comments, and how devastatingly amusing he would have been about them.

Not all memorials are failures. I attended one a month or so ago for a friend who by most measures had had a botched life. He had been alcoholic and had a gambling problem, and the two combined to cause him to lose a fairly prosperous business. His last years were spent on a walker, his eyesight fading, living in a hotel and then a nursing home, out of money and out of luck. What could one say in memoriam about so sad a life? My friend's son and daughter, both now in their 50s, spoke about their father's love of entertaining family and friends. (My happiest memory of him is as a young man at a party where he played ragtime piano to the delight of perhaps 70 people in the room.) They spoke so affectingly that they redeemed him, made his life seem not a failure at all but a gift—to them, to his friends—and infused it with meaning beyond that of mere success and failure. Their having done so suggested, too, that in his way my friend was a good father.

As for my eschewing a memorial of my own, I can see no point in having one, especially now that Samuel Johnson and Max Beerbohm are long gone and unable to speak on my behalf. A simple party, with family and friends, food and drink, will do nicely. Maybe someone there will recall an amusing thing or two I said or a kind or generous thing I did. But if anyone should quote the last paragraph of my *Ambition* book, let it be known now that I want him thrown out forthwith.

JOSEPH EPSTEIN



# There Is No Peace

*A cemetery damaged by shelling and machine gun fire in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine*

**T**he Obama administration will be remembered for a number of disgraces in foreign affairs, prominent among them its terrible deal with Iran and its dithering over the war in Syria. Deserving of a place on that list is America's acquiescence in Russia's attack on Ukraine, to which the Trump administration may finally be mounting a bit of resistance.

In the case of Ukraine, the United States sat by while the Russians carried out a de facto occupation of the country's eastern territory and simply annexed the Crimean peninsula to the south. Vladimir Putin didn't acquire these territories by conventional invasion. If he had mounted an open conquest, he might have provoked Western indignation and inspired more help for Kiev. That is not his way. In eastern Ukraine, Moscow trained and funded pro-Russian elements within the Donbas region, urged them to violence against Kiev's authority, and sent Russian soldiers in to control the unrest they had instigated.

It worked brilliantly—thanks first to Barack Obama's reluctance to risk any confrontation anywhere in the world, and second to Donald Trump's double-mindedness on the subject of Russia. The ceasefire ostensibly in place was negotiated in Minsk in 2015. But as the U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations, Kurt Volker, made clear this week, there has been no ceasefire.

"A lot of people think that this has somehow turned into a sleepy, frozen conflict, and it's stable, and now we have Minsk agreements and there's a ceasefire," Volker told the Atlantic Council on December 19. "That's completely wrong. It is a crisis." One that worsened this year: 2017, he

said, has been the most violent year since the conflict started in 2014. To date, more than 10,000 are dead as a consequence of a conflict many in the West have forgotten.

As in Syria, so in Ukraine: Russia is actively funding and inciting a proxy war on the soil of another country as Western democracies look the other way. The aim in Syria is to establish a client state; the aim in Ukraine is to grab land.

In September, Putin suggested sending U.N. peacekeepers into the region but deploying them only along the line of conflict between Russian and Ukrainian forces, 50 miles or more into Ukraine's territory—thus in effect acceding to Russia's occupation of the land east of that line. The Trump administration wisely didn't take the bait.

There are two possibilities for progress in eastern Ukraine. The first, favored by Volker and most other foreign policy leaders, is to deploy peacekeepers throughout the disputed territory and so create the stability necessary for free and fair elections to determine whether eastern Ukraine should become the pro-Russian republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. These separatist "republics" staged referendums in 2014 and proclaimed independence from Ukraine, but most serious observers regarded those votes as fraudulent. We doubt any deployment of U.N. peacekeepers can ensure a more legitimate outcome.

The other possibility is to face the reality that Ukraine is fighting a defensive war for its own territory. The United States and its allies can sell arms to Ukraine and give the struggling republic a fighting chance against Russian expansionism. If the conflict becomes sufficiently troublesome for Putin, he may back off. Of course, he may not. But

MARTIN TRABALIK / SOPA IMAGES / LIGHTROCKET / GETTY

he's certain to stay if Ukraine remains largely defenseless and the West remains silent.

For three years Ukraine has begged the United States for defensive weaponry, but the Obama and Trump administrations wavered. The reasons for their indecision escape us. Russian tanks and artillery are on Ukrainian soil. Russian proxies create mayhem. Ukraine long sought NATO membership with bipartisan U.S. support. What reason could justify our refusal to aid the victim, other than to make nice with the aggressor?

For months, the Pentagon and State Department have urged the White House to sign off on a plan to supply Ukraine with weaponry to stave off what is in fact an invasion of its territory. Congress has long backed either the sale or provision of such weaponry to Kiev. This week, at last, the Trump administration approved the sale of some lethal defensive weaponry to our Ukrainian allies—sniper rifles, parts, and ammunition. There are further administrative hurdles, but initial signs suggest that the president himself has been persuaded by his secretaries of Defense and State to back Ukraine. The new policy may have been influenced by Canada's decision, taken in November but not made public till mid-December, to approve arms sales to Ukraine. Others are likely to follow suit.

The first Cold War consisted of a great many hot wars and involved this nation in some terrible mistakes but also in some honorable victories. America won the Cold War by refusing to pretend that it wasn't a war. If we are now in a second Cold War with Vladimir Putin's Russia, we must again refuse to cry "peace, peace" when there is no peace. ♦

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## 2017's Person of the Year

For better or worse (mostly worse), Donald Trump was 2016's person of the year. For better or worse (almost entirely for the better), 2017's person of the year has to be Publius.

Not Publius Valerius Publicola, founder of the Roman republic (fine fellow though he undoubtedly was). Not Publius Decius Mus, devoted Roman warrior though he undoubtedly was. And not the author using the pseudonym Publius Decius Mus, who wrote in September 2016 what Tom Nichols called "the drama queen opus about the Flight 93 election" (rationalizer of demagoguery though he undoubtedly was).

No, we're thinking of the pseudonymous Publius who wrote the Federalist Papers in 1787-88—the trio of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. They had

a good year in 2017. They were needed. Our politics in 2017 strained the constitutional and institutional structure they and the other Founders designed. But the Founders prevailed. The Constitution and its institutions, and the norms and mores that have grown up around them, did their job.

It wasn't easy: 2017 was a year in which American politics vindicated Publius's prediction that "enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm." It was a year that demonstrated in spades Publius's judgment that "So numerous indeed and so powerful are the causes which serve to give a false bias to the judgment, that we, upon many occasions, see wise and good men on the wrong as well as on the right side of questions of the first magnitude to society." And it was a year in which Publius's prediction of what would happen in 1787 was repeated, 230 years later: "A torrent of angry and malignant passions will be let loose. To judge from the conduct of the opposite parties, we shall be led to conclude that they will mutually hope to evince the justness of their opinions, and to increase the number of their converts by the loudness of their declamations and the bitterness of their invectives."

But in the midst of these passions and declamations and invectives, one set of institutions has stood tall: those created by, derived from, and fostered by the Constitution of the United States. The separation of powers, the independence of the courts, the rule of law, federalism, limits on government power, an independent private sector and a vigorous civil society, basic freedoms of speech and assembly—these have survived the rocky seas of 2017, despite having at the helm of the American ship a captain who is careless of its well-being and reckless in its piloting.

The survival of that ship, the fact that it remains seaworthy and even in some instances is moving in the right direction, is a tribute to many individuals, but to Publius above all. He and his colleagues built well. They knew that "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary." And they knew that "A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."

Those precautions have proven their worth. Embodied in institutions, they have kept the ship of state afloat. Expressed as norms of behavior, they have suffered some erosion but remain living traditions to which we can appeal. At its very creation, Publius made the case for revering the Constitution, and he explained how the structure of government might make it possible that "the most rational government will not find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side." Some of those prejudices, what one might call the healthy prejudices of freedom that support civility and self-government, showed their vigor in 2017. We will continue to depend on them in 2018.

But obviously we can't merely depend on them. The

fate of America is in our hands. And so, as we move forward into 2018, the work of trying to save Republicanism from collapse into Trumpism (if possible) continues. The task of distinguishing a liberty-loving conservatism from an authoritarian populism remains urgent. The necessity of strengthening rather than damaging the guardrails of our constitutional democracy stands before us as much today as ever.

These questions need to be addressed directly and forcefully, but, one also hopes, as much as possible, in a spirit *sine ira et studio*. Still, there is no point pulling punches. On the fundamental question of Donald J. Trump's fitness for office, my judgment remains in 2018 what it has been from the beginning. And so some of us will continue to do our best, such as it is, in the spirit of Publius:

"I affect not reserves which I do not feel. I will not amuse you with an appearance of deliberation when I have decided. I frankly acknowledge to you my convictions, and I will freely lay before you the reasons on which they are founded. The consciousness of good intentions disdains ambiguity. . . . My arguments will be open to all and may be judged of by all. They shall at least be offered in a spirit which will not disgrace the cause of truth."

—William Kristol

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## 'We Will Remember'

*On December 21, Ambassador Nikki Haley delivered the remarks below to the United Nations General Assembly. The resolution then before the U.N. chastised the United States for its decision on December 6 to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and demanded the rescission of that policy. After Haley's speech, U.N. delegates voted 128 to 9 for the resolution. The New York Times called it a "stinging rebuke to the United States" and a "collective act of defiance toward Washington." We disagree: It was, rather, the U.N.'s shameful business-as-usual to which Haley delivered an overdue stinging rebuke.*

To its shame, the United Nations has long been a hostile place for the state of Israel. Both the current and the previous secretary generals have objected to the U.N.'s disproportionate focus on Israel. It's a wrong that undermines the credibility of this institution, and that in turn is harmful for the entire world.

I've often wondered why, in the face of such hostility, Israel has chosen to remain a member of this body. And then I remember that Israel has chosen to remain in this institution because it's important to stand up for yourself.

Israel must stand up for its own survival as a nation, but it also stands up for the ideals of freedom and human dignity that the United Nations is supposed to be about.

Standing here today, being forced to defend sovereignty and the integrity of my country—the United States of America—many of the same thoughts have come to mind. The United States is by far the single largest contributor to the United Nations and its agencies. . . . But we'll be honest with you. When we make generous contributions to the U.N., we also have a legitimate expectation that our good will is recognized and respected. When a nation is singled out for attack in this organization, that nation is disrespected. What's more, that nation is asked to pay for the "privilege" of being disrespected.

In the case of the United States, we are asked to pay more than anyone else for that dubious privilege. Unlike in some U.N. member countries, the United States government is answerable to its people. As such, we have an obligation to acknowledge when our political and financial capital is being poorly spent.

We have an obligation to demand more for our investment. And if our investment fails, we have an obligation to spend our resources in more productive ways. Those are the thoughts that come to mind when we consider the resolution before us today.

The arguments about the president's decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem have already been made. They are by now well known. The decision was in accordance [with] U.S. law dating back to 1995, and its position has been repeatedly endorsed by the American people ever since. The decision does not prejudice any final status issues, including Jerusalem's boundaries. The decision does not preclude a two-state solution, if the parties agree to that. The decision does nothing to harm peace efforts. Rather, the president's decision reflects the will of the American people and our right as a nation to choose the location of our embassy. There is no need to describe it further.

Instead, there is a larger point to make. The United States will remember this day in which it was singled out for attack in the General Assembly for the very act of exercising our right as a sovereign nation. We will remember it when we are called upon to once again make the world's largest contribution to the United Nations. And we will remember it when so many countries come calling on us, as they so often do, to pay even more and to use our influence for their benefit.

America will put our embassy in Jerusalem. That is what the American people want us to do, and it is the right thing to do. No vote in the United Nations will make any difference on that.

But this vote will make a difference on how Americans look at the U.N. and on how we look at countries who disrespect us in the U.N. And this vote will be remembered.

Thank you. ♦



Paul Ryan signs the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in a congressional ceremony, December 21.

# Finally, Something Goes Right

With tax reform crossed off, Paul Ryan has a to-do list for 2018. **BY STEPHEN F. HAYES**

For two hours on December 19, Paul Ryan loved his job.

Shortly after the House of Representatives passed wide-ranging tax legislation—including reforms that he had pushed for three decades on Capitol Hill as a staffer, back-bencher, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, and speaker of the House—Ryan leaned back in a brown-leather chair and exhaled.

Moments earlier, he had been standing before a throng of reporters, flanked

by colleagues, answering questions about the bill and what it means. He had been doing this for months when the provisions were just proposals, and Ryan, a preternaturally optimistic man, had strained in those appearances to seem upbeat, affecting a forced buoyancy that those close to him have come to recognize in the past two years.

Today, however, Ryan was happy.

Best day of this Congress? I ask him. “That’s a good question,” he says, pausing. “It probably is. . . . It probably is. I’ve been working on this since I was 22 years old. I’ve been working on this for a long time. This is the

biggest thing we can do to create a growth engine for our economy.”

The sweeping reforms are the most ambitious overhaul of the U.S. tax system since Ronald Reagan’s in 1986. Unlike that bill, this package was in no way bipartisan, passing on a party-line vote in both houses of Congress. But the changes are equally significant. The law lowers individual rates at all levels; slashes the corporate rate to 21 percent from 35 percent; eliminates many deductions; nearly doubles the standard deduction; and increases the child tax credit. The reforms don’t do enough to simplify the tax code, but congressional Republicans are right to be pleased with the result.

Ryan says tax reform passed for two main reasons: Republicans successfully muted objections from K Street, and Donald Trump was more disciplined than he had been with the Obamacare repeal.

Republicans on Capitol Hill were frustrated with Trump’s role in that earlier debacle. His public comments undermined their efforts, as when he

*Stephen F. Hayes is the editor in chief of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

AARON P. BERNSTEIN / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

threatened to abandon the GOP and work with Democrats who wanted to “fix” Obamacare by increasing the role of the state in the U.S. health care system. He was unhelpful in his private comments, too, as when he called the House bill “mean” during a meeting with Senate Republicans. He was incapable of holding even surface-level discussion about the actual policies being debated, a fact that frustrated conservatives, who were looking to include more market-friendly reforms. And he conducted separate negotiations with various factions of the GOP, publicly pitting one group against another with no apparent strategy or goal.

Trump was a help this time, Ryan says. “I think he learned from health care—let me back up. We applied the lessons from health care to this. Number one: get the conservative movement unified. Number two: get buy-in and agreement from the White House, the Senate, and the House.” Trump focused on the timeline, urging Congress to meet its self-imposed deadlines, and otherwise allowed lawmakers to hammer out the details by themselves.

“He learned, too, that it doesn’t help to have multiple conversations with conflicting views in Congress among Republicans, because you’re just playing people off of each other and we’re not coalescing,” Ryan says. “He realized: stick with the plan, execute the plan, and don’t allow fractures to occur. So I think he learned, too, from health care what works and what doesn’t work.”

It was important, equally, that Republicans laid the groundwork to squelch opposition from K Street. They knew that there would be objections from special interests that stood to lose preferences and advantages in the tax code. “We worked really hard on that,” Ryan says. “We spent a year of prep work on that—getting the big groups to overwhelm the small, narrow interests.”

GOP leaders moved early to win support from groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Farm Bureau, and the National Federation of Independent Business. “We

asked them to get their members to agree: ‘I’m not going to sweat the little details for my business or my industry in favor of comprehensive reform.’”

But even Ryan’s best day came with a hiccup. Shortly after our conversation, the Senate parliamentarian ruled that three provisions in the House-passed version of the reforms did not qualify under Senate rules for reconciliation—the mechanism for budget-related legislation that allowed Republicans in the upper chamber to pass the bill with a simple majority rather than the normal 60-vote threshold. The Senate passed the new version that evening and the House voted again the following day.

Ryan isn’t one to bask in the glow of past accomplishments, and I ask him about his priorities for 2018. He names three: entitlement reform, welfare reform, and, surprisingly, health care reform. “I don’t think the health care issue is done,” he says, indicating a willingness to revisit Obamacare as early as January. “At the end of the day, we’ve got to go after the root cause—health care inflation and entitlements. Welfare reform is going to be our next lift,” he says, noting that the president has expressed interest in his ideas for welfare programs and Medicaid. Ryan concedes that Trump is opposed to tackling the two entitlements that drive the national debt—Medicare and Social Security—but he’s determined to press his case. “We’re never going to give up on entitlement reform and the things we need to do to get the debt under control,” Ryan says. “With one more reconciliation, I think we have a pretty good shot at getting some of these things done.”

It’s not just Trump who isn’t interested in reforming Social Security and Medicare. Neither is Mitch McConnell.

Less than 48 hours after Ryan told me that welfare reform and entitlement reform topped his 2018 agenda, the Senate majority leader effectively ruled out any work on either one during an interview with Mike Allen of *Axios*. The headline over the story: “McConnell: Welfare and entitlement reform not on 2018 agenda.”

“I think Democrats are not going

to be interested in entitlement reform, so I would not expect to see that on the agenda,” McConnell said. Instead, he wants to work with Democrats to fashion a comprehensive infrastructure bill—a priority of Trump’s. Ryan is open to infrastructure spending, but he’s plainly wary of the Keynesian arguments for infrastructure that Trump favors.

I ask Ryan about Trump’s infrastructure-as-stimulus argument, noting the similarities between it and those made by Barack Obama. Ryan pauses before answering and then offers a knowing smile. “We like ideas that leverage private-sector dollars,” he says, laughing. In our brief discussion of infrastructure, Ryan mentions the private sector 10 times. The exchange shows just how adept Ryan has become at avoiding answering questions.

When I point out that Trump doesn’t talk about infrastructure the way he does, Ryan agrees. But when I point out that Trump seems to want the Treasury to cut a trillion-dollar check that can be distributed throughout the country, Ryan demurs. “That’s not, that’s not—” he laughs. “I’m not going to give you what you’re looking for.”

Even for someone as optimistic as Ryan, the outlook for 2018 has to be daunting. His counterpart in the Senate doesn’t share his top priorities, and the top priority for McConnell and the White House appears to be the kind of massive government spending bill that Ryan has spent years opposing.

There are the midterm elections, too. The president’s approval rating is stuck in the 30s. Congressional Republicans face a double-digit deficit on the generic ballot test. And tax reform, the biggest accomplishment of this congress, polls poorly.

It’s no wonder that there have been whispers in Washington that Ryan is considering retirement. He strongly disputes these stories. But sources familiar with Ryan’s thinking tell me that he has begun exploring his options.

With a June 1 filing deadline we may find out soon that Ryan’s interest in the private sector is not limited to infrastructure. ♦

# Feeble Resistance

Look at what the Democrats haven't accomplished.

BY FRED BARNES



*Gloom and doom: Congressional Democrats (from left) Ron Wyden, Charles Schumer, and Nancy Pelosi decry the ongoing GOP-orchestrated apocalypse, November 2.*

Shocked by Donald Trump's election, Democrats adopted a strategy of resistance that's simple and blunt: Anything Trump is for, they're against. It's turned out to be one of the least successful strategies a political party has ever pursued. Yet Democrats have stuck to it.

At least resistance does have one benefit. It assures Democrats they're operating on higher moral ground than Republicans. This may explain why their commitment to resist Trump didn't flag in 2017. They didn't bother with offering an alternative tax bill. Their job is to resist.

The result has been a string of failures. And passage of Trump's tax reform bill in the House and Senate last week is the worst. Every Democrat opposed it. The bill is filled with provisions Democrats hate and others long sought by Republicans. For Democrats, it was a loser across the board.

But it didn't have to be that way. Had Democrats negotiated with Republicans, they might have saved

the provision they most wanted to preserve—the full deductibility of state and local taxes. It's a crucial break in rich, high-tax states like New York, New Jersey, and California.

President Reagan tried to kill deductibility in the tax reform legislation of 1986. But that was a bipartisan effort, and Democrats insisted on keeping it. Now they're on the outside looking in.

Were they willing to compromise, they could have agreed to a deeper cut in the corporate rate than the original drafters of the Trump bill ever expected—and might have saved full deductibility. The *Wall Street Journal* suggested another deal. Democrats could have offered to eliminate the business tax entirely in exchange for a carbon tax. Republicans might have taken that deal.

In the end, the corporate rate wound up at 21 percent, down from 35 percent. And writing off state and local taxes was capped at \$10,000, a change likely to be especially costly to wealthy Democratic donors in high-tax states. Indeed, it was rich donors whose interests Democrats especially sought to protect. They'd

have been outraged if Republicans did the same for GOP donors.

To make matters worse for Democrats, Republicans recovered, at least partially, from their embarrassing failure to repeal Obamacare. The tax bill wipes out the individual mandate requiring everyone to buy health insurance or pay a fine. The bill also opens Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. Democrats had fought against that for decades.

Rep. Peter Roskam (R-Ill.) has a sensible theory about why Democrats thought they could defeat the tax bill. They sidetracked the repeal of Obamacare by intimidating GOP senators. They staged protests, harassed them at town-hall meetings, and held rallies denouncing them.

Based on that experience, Roskam says, Democrats figured they could use the same tactics to stop tax reform, only with more intensity and stronger language. They called it a "tax scam," which it isn't. "It does violence to the vision of our Founders," House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said. It doesn't do that either. It's "immoral," according to New York Democrats. Hardly.

The wild charges tended to unite Republicans. "There was near-unanimity on the Republican side in terms of the outside groups," Roskam says. That wasn't true on repealing Obamacare.

Roskam, who chairs the Ways and Means subcommittee on tax policy, had his own experience with Democrats. They offered a dozen or so "gotcha" amendments, nothing more, he says. Ways and Means chairman Kevin Brady devoted four days to amendments when the full committee met. Democrats ran out of them quickly.

Economist Steve Moore says Democrats are "trapped." They've declared the Trump bill will cause the taxes of middle-class Americans to increase, not fall as the president claims. We'll soon know who's right. The president has ordered that the rates in the new bill will apply to withholding from paychecks starting in February.

Odds are, the resistance will lose again. With the doubling of the standard deduction from \$12,000 to \$24,000

*Fred Barnes is an executive editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

for joint filers and the doubling of the tax credit for each child from \$1,000 to \$2,000, things look good for the middle class. Come February, a lot of paychecks will grow.

The resistance hasn't done much better in opposing confirmation of Trump's nominees to U.S. courts of appeals, one level below the Supreme Court. Senate Republicans are bent on creating a judicial revolution by confirming conservative judges. It's one of their most significant efforts. In 2017, they confirmed 12 appeals judges. The resistance has been feeble.

There's little drama at the Judiciary Committee at hearings for nominees. Democrats have been unprepared to question nominees in a rigorous manner. They are more interested in resurrecting the ancient practice of blue slips, a courtesy to senators from a nominee's home state. If one or both don't return their "slips," that dooms the nominee. In other words, a single senator decides.

No more. Judiciary chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) has decided senators shouldn't use blue slips to block a nominee purely for political or ideological reasons. If they do, he won't honor them. And when Senator Al Franken (D-Minn.) tried doing just that, Grassley didn't go along. Despite the resistance, the judicial revolution rolls along.

Nor have the resisters succeeded in slowing the pace of deregulation that Trump has insisted on. Congressional Republicans have helped by sending 14 bills to him to erase regulations issued late in President Obama's second term.

One more thing. The resistance hasn't been fighting a mighty foe. Trump is unpopular. Congressional Republicans trail Democrats in double digits in polls of voters' preference for the coming midterm election. The media dislike both the president and his party, and say so.

Still, we've learned a bit from the resistance. Their policy views haven't changed much. "Democrats are for jobs, but they're against business," Moore says. "They're no longer a growth party, they're a redistribution party." ♦

# The Media's Favorite 'Ethicist'

Need an anti-Trump line? Call Richard Painter.

BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

On December 18, a Twitter user with a large following tweeted out a conspiracy theory: The charges against Senator Al Franken, that he had groped numerous women over several years, were "likely a Roger Stone / FOX set up job." Three days later, the user added a sensational twist: "I didn't accuse the Russians of involvement in the Franken allegations but RT and Sputnik [Kremlin-owned news outlets] sure are defensive, and upset with what I said about FOX and Roger Stone. This is another reason we need an investigation, not a resignation." Of course, unhinged tweets are nothing new, emanating frequently from the likes of Nazis, bots, random idiots, Cher, and the president of the United States. But the source of this particular conspiracy theory about the Minnesota senator was an interesting one: Richard W. Painter, White House ethics lawyer during two years of the George W. Bush administration and, for the past year or so, bona fide political and cable news celebrity.

Indeed, Painter has become the go-to Republican for many mainstream outlets when they find it useful to have a "former Bush administration official" and "ethics lawyer" to light into the current GOP president in the most outlandish of ways.

In a March CNN appearance, he said he was "worried about KGB agents running around the West Wing." In an April hit on MSNBC, he accused the Trump administration of "treason" because Michael Flynn had a few conversations with Russia's then-ambassador to the United States last winter. He

was mildly more circumspect in July: A June 2016 meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and a Russian lawyer merely "bordered on treason," he said. In an October CNN appearance, Painter maintained that Trump has "no empathy" for fallen soldiers. He has "no understanding of the human emotions of what people go through because he never did it himself, he stayed home during Vietnam with his sore foot or whatever it was," he said. Last week, again on MSNBC, he declared, "The commander in chief is Donald Trump. There is a risk of him using that power to destroy our democracy, whether you call it a coup or anything else."

Now, extreme partisan statements like these are a dime a dozen on cable news shoutfests. But Painter's former job title and academic imprimatur (he's a law professor at the University of Minnesota) give them extra heft—they're not the usual turgid commentary coming from a generic "Democratic/Republican strategist." And indeed, whenever he makes an incendiary charge on television, Painter's remarks get thrown into the gaping maw of the Internet and end up widely dispersed. (Sample headline from the *Hill*: "Ex-Bush ethics lawyer on Trump Jr: 'This borders on treason.'" And how about this from *Newsweek*: "Trump Could Use Military to Launch His Own Coup, Warns Former White House Ethics Lawyer"?) A Google Trends graph demonstrates the 56-year-old's newfound celebrity: After toiling in relative Internet obscurity for years, Painter has enjoyed a massive boom in online mentions and searches since Trump's election.

But according to people familiar with how White Houses operate, Painter's high profile is based on a popular

*Ethan Epstein is associate editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

misconception about what, exactly, the White House ethics counsel does. The person in that position is not a moral arbiter or even someone with a large remit over the presidential administration's behavior. Rather, the job mostly consists of helping cabinet appointees and other administration officials "fill out disclosure forms and sort out conflicts of interest," says one former White House lawyer. The role is "important but quite limited in responsibilities," he says. An official might ask the counsel "Can I go to dinner with this lobbyist?" and other mundane questions—hardly the stuff of "treason."

In a phone interview, Painter confirms the rote nature of his role as White House ethics counsel, which he held from 2005 to 2007. Day to day, Painter says, he "helped people deal with financial conflicts of interest." He might, for example, "work with people selling real estate." By all accounts, he was stellar at this job, probably owing to his work in corporate ethics law prior to his appointment. That background, in addition to the fact that he was a registered Republican, led to his appointment, Painter says. But the recent "rise in my profile doesn't have to do with my legal expertise," he allows.

This has led to persistent complaints that in issuing such bold and brash statements, Painter is straying outside of his legal lane and, in so doing, hurting the academic legal profession. One prominent liberal law professor, New York University's Stephen Gillers, who has worked with and respects Painter, worries that he has "hurt his credibility" by simply "asserting that everything the White House does is wrong. He appears too partisan." Gillers continues, "We law professors carry a certain level of credibility by virtue of our titles," but by "going outside his expertise on social media, and especially television," Painter puts that at risk.

Crazed charges of "treason" are bad enough; they're reckless coming from a law professor and "former White House ethics lawyer." Painter's bio



**Richard W. Painter** @RWPUA · Dec 18

This was likely a Roger Stone / FOX set up job.

Minnesota voters are entitled to an investigation before a resignation. It's called due process.

Franken urged to reverse his resignation [politi.co/2Bt6b86](https://politi.co/2Bt6b86) via @politico



Franken urged to reverse his resignation

Painter, inset at left, and one of his recent tweets, above

obscures the reality that his pronouncements are often preposterous. Last year, he wrote a *New York Times* piece arguing that George W. Bush would have nominated liberal Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court. It was an absurd claim about a president who had appointed strict conservatives like Samuel Alito. But because it came from a legal academic who was "chief White House ethics lawyer from 2005 to 2007"—both titles were in the paper's bio—it was given some modicum of credibility. Painter actually began his piece, "As the chief ethics lawyer in the White House Counsel Office, I helped President George W. Bush with the nomination and confirmation of" Supreme Court justices, though the role he played in them was virtually nil. More recently, Painter called for John Dowd, President Trump's personal attorney, to be "disbarred" after it was revealed that Dowd wrote a tweet under the president's name. It was an insane demand: Lawyers frequently draft statements under their clients' names. But a prominent former Bush official had made it!

These days, Painter is vice chairman of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a liberal group once affiliated with attack dog David

Brock. Yet he retains his Republican party affiliation and thus his patina of objectivity. And, to be fair, in our chat, Painter points out the Democratic party's hypocrisy over ethics issues as well. In ousting Al Franken, they've "taken out one their best senators over sex," he tells me. But a "New Jersey senator who was indicted over bribery" was allowed to stay. (Robert Menendez's case ended in a mistrial.)

Painter is walking a well-trod path. Years after he had morphed into a standard-issue right-winger, Georgia senator Zell Miller remained a Democrat. That ensured just about everything he said was newsworthy: "Democratic senator endorses George W. Bush" is a much more interesting headline than "Republican supports Republican." Bruce Bartlett, a fierce and often profane critic of the GOP, is a "former Reagan official," and he's been dining out on that credential for decades. So there's nothing new about Painter: It's a lot less interesting when a former minor White House functionary turned liberal activist makes an incendiary charge about "treason" than when a "former Bush administration ethics chief" does it—even if the charges themselves are pretty crazy. As somebody else once said, when you're a star, they let you do it. ♦

# All Aboard!

Next stop: infrastructure.

BY MICHAEL WARREN



Rescue crews search under a collapsed bridge on Interstate 35 in Minneapolis, August 5, 2007.

The deadly derailment of an Amtrak train near Tacoma, Wash., last week prompted a tweet from Donald Trump. The accident, the president wrote, “shows more than ever why our soon to be submitted infrastructure plan must be approved quickly. Seven trillion dollars spent in the Middle East while our roads, bridges, tunnels, railways (and more) crumble! Not for long!”

Never mind that the high-speed train was traveling on brand-new tracks and appears to have been going too fast when it crashed down onto Interstate 5, this was too good an opportunity for the president to tout a marquee agenda item that had gained little traction. Neither the GOP leadership in Congress nor Trump’s own team in the White House had put much of a priority on infrastructure in 2017.

“If we thought it was the time to release an infrastructure bill, we

would release an infrastructure bill,” Gary Cohn, the director of the president’s National Economic Council, told the *New York Times* in June. “We just can’t keep throwing stuff on Congress. We actually need them to get legislation done. And as they start getting legislation done, we’ll come back with infrastructure.”

But with the Obamacare repeal (a failure) and tax reform (a success) done, the White House is planning to release an infrastructure proposal in the first few weeks of the new year. Trump has met several times in the last month with congressional leaders about finalizing a framework.

Trump has a personal interest in the issue. “He really understands building stuff,” says Pennsylvania’s Bill Shuster, the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, who met with Trump in the Oval Office on December 11. “The guy’s a builder, he knows how to build things on time and under budget.”

According to White House officials, the forthcoming plan will expand on Trump’s executive orders speeding up the permitting process for projects, and the president hopes for something on the order of \$1 trillion in total investment. This includes \$220 billion in federal spending for roads, bridges, and similar projects, with the balance coming from investment by state, local, and private interests.

The White House plans to introduce statutory changes to how states and local jurisdictions receive money for projects. A White House aide says the federal government should be “getting out of the business of picking and choosing projects.” Local governments will have to put up their own funds before Washington chips in. Projects will also be required to have maintenance schedules and cost guarantees. The president views this incentive system as a check on local politicians looking for federal dollars: If elected leaders are going to raise taxes or user fees for new projects on their own, they will be more discerning about what infrastructure projects they pursue.

What’s not clear is who is heading the administration’s effort on infrastructure. Elaine Chao, the secretary of transportation, has the regulatory aspects of such spending within her purview. A veteran of previous Republican administrations and wife of Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, Chao has made public appearances beside the president throughout the year to tout Trump’s infrastructure plans. Privately, though, she has expressed doubts that Congress will pass any major legislation.

“She isn’t driving the train, or the bus, or the car, or the truck,” says Peter DeFazio, Oregon Democrat and ranking member on the House Transportation Committee.

Within the West Wing, the lead is taken by D.J. Gribbin, a Department of Transportation alumnus who has also worked in the finance sector. Gribbin represents what DeFazio castigates as the “Heritage Foundation” outlook, which prizes private investment over government funding.

Michael Warren is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Yet Gribbin's view is in line with the conservative Republicans in Congress who blasted stimulus spending on infrastructure during the Obama administration and won't be enthusiastic about a Trump bill that goes heavy on federal outlays.

"We like ideas that leverage private-sector dollars," says House speaker Paul Ryan. "There's a lot of things you can do in the infrastructure space that we think we can leverage a big private-sector infrastructure [investment]."

Bill Shuster insists that any big infrastructure bill has to be bipartisan and that he told the president as much. But DeFazio says there's no appetite among Democrats for a market-oriented infrastructure bill, which is what he suspects Gribbin and the White House will release in January.

What many on Capitol Hill are frustrated about is the lack of specificity from the administration on its plans. Gary Cohn, for instance, told the bipartisan "Problem Solvers" caucus of moderate House members that a gas-tax increase could help pay for new federal infrastructure spending—something DeFazio would love to see but is anathema to most Republicans. The White House says the gas tax is on the table and won't elaborate on what other ideas the president is considering.

The ultimate goal, administration officials say, is to pass a big infrastructure bill by early summer. But Ryan poured cold water on the idea of a massive legislative package in 2018. "I think it's probably a series of bills that culminate in a comprehensive effort," said the Wisconsin Republican. "I'm agnostic on the packaging."

The White House insists everyone will be ready to hit the ground running when Congress returns in the new year—even though leaders on the Hill are unenthusiastic about infrastructure and say the president has been vague on what he wants. "We have done more advance work on this issue than anything we've done in this White House," says one administration official. "We don't want people to be surprised by this." ♦

# The Gap Between Tweet and Action

Parsing the Trump administration's National Security Strategy. BY TOD LINDBERG

For those willing to take it seriously, the question of Trumpian national security and foreign policy has always been the extent to which the disruptive if not incendiary rhetoric of Donald Trump, the man, would be matched by a Trump admin-

slogan as the pro-German isolationism of the 1930s—is more than enough to indicate a fundamental, disastrous change of course. By this light, Trump has been walking away from two generations of policy that served the United States very well.



Heckuva job, H. R.: Trump and McMaster

istration effort to remake U.S. policy in accordance with his Twitter account. Was "America First" a fundamental reconception of the U.S. role in the world with new policies to match? Or could we expect more policy continuity than actual disruption?

Of course, many remain entirely unwilling to get to this question. Trumpian rhetoric is too unsettling for them to countenance in any way. To deride the utility of U.S. alliance commitments, the value of global trade, the obligation of the United States to adhere to international humanitarian law and human rights treaties such as the Convention against Torture—and to do so, moreover, under the same

The first year of the administration has offered many presidential tweets and rhetorical flourishes to buttress that view. It has also offered evidence for a certain skepticism about the discontinuity Trump represented. Senior administration officials did indeed spend time abroad insisting that allies pay up—but they also made the case for the value of alliances. Trump did indeed strike a blow at the Obama administration's Iran agreement—but as part of a strategic reorientation of U.S. policy in the Middle East around Iran as the main threat to the region, in response to which the United States was promoting a de facto alliance of Israel and Saudi Arabia. Trump was extravagant in promising "fire and fury" to North Korea in case of an attack on the United States (or on our Asian allies, at least at times)—yet in the context of promoting deterrence in the problematic mind of Kim Jong-un and of persuading China the United States means business, such rhetoric was not beyond the pale.

Some have found it agreeable to portray the gap between tweet and action as the effect of experienced senior hands around the president, many of them former top military officers, in modulating his impulses. In this view, Trump is in constant need of being

Tod Lindberg is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

hauled back from the brink of disaster.

With the publication of the administration's new National Security Strategy (NSS), however, the picture has grown considerably more complex. The first thing that must be said of it is that Trump himself apparently likes it a great deal. He made a point of giving a speech to tout it, a departure from typical presidential practice for previous iterations of the document. The second is that it apparently reflects not only his views but those of senior officials in his administration, starting with national security adviser H.R. McMaster—indisputably one of the grown-ups in the room. This in turn raises the interesting possibility that there is less to the supposed gap between Trump and those around him than meets the eye. But that's neither because the tweets are carrying the day nor because actual policy is more continuous than disrupted but, for better or worse, because the administration from the president on down has got a firmer grip on a new(ish) strategic

framework than previously suspected.

In two words, that framework is “national interest,” which is what the United States will always pursue and the pursuit of which is “America First” in action. The new NSS rarely varies from the central subject of its consideration, namely, do international developments X and Y or possible U.S. policy choices A and B promote or hinder U.S. national interests? The document presents its conclusions as “principled realism,” where the “realism” is the pursuit of national interest. The “principle” comes from the exceptional American regard for “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” spelled out and acted upon since the Declaration of Independence.

A comparison of the 2017 NSS with the first National Security Strategies promulgated in the George W. Bush and Obama administrations quickly yields two major differences between Trump and his immediate predecessors. The first is that the Trump

document spurns the universal claims of classical liberalism as applied to international politics. For both Bush and Obama, the United States was part of a larger whole, one (admittedly very powerful) liberal state among a number of liberal states comprising a liberal international order that was in principle universal, although not yet in fact. For Bush, this phenomenon had a divine origin, God's gift to human beings of the desire for freedom. For Obama, it was secular—clever humans coming to their senses about their own best interests.

For Trump, to the contrary, the United States from its founding set an *American* standard for the defense of the “institutions, traditions, and principles that have allowed us to live in freedom, to build the nation that we love.” The United States has defended its standard successfully through considerable adversity, from the revolution and the Civil War through the defeat of fascism and communism. Rather than a part of a larger whole,

## Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce wishes you and your loved ones a joyful holiday season and abundant health and happiness in the year to come.



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the United States was the focal point around which liberalism writ large gathered. This gathering was owed to the improved understanding of the countries who came to appreciate the superior virtue embodied in the United States. That's what makes good allies. But without the United States in the first place, what passes for a liberal international order would be nowhere in the world to be found.

The second major difference is that the Trump NSS explicitly rejects his two predecessors' notion of an "arc of history"—which is to say, the idea that history is directional and moving towards universal liberalism. Again, Bush and Obama, so different in so many ways, shared a Whig view of history as progress: hence the project Bush spelled out in his second inaugural of "ending tyranny" (to be fair, he said it would take "generations," but end it we could); hence as well Obama's propensity to describe

the behavior of certain actors as on the "wrong side" of history. For Trump's NSS, on the contrary, the constant of history is international conflict. The way to deal with it is to be strong and self-confident in the way the United States exemplified until recently beginning "to drift" into "complacency."

Some of Trump's more ideological supporters (his ideological detractors as well) have detected a burgeoning Trump ideology here: anti-"globalist," anti-"entangling alliances," anti-interventionist, from his supporters' point of view; from his detractors', blood-and-soil ultranationalism and authoritarianism. The latter are unlikely to change their views no matter what happens; the former are likely to be disappointed by how little of their agenda even a self-consciously national-interest-based approach to foreign policy entails—as we have seen so far. ♦

sex is what you coerce from interns, secretaries, and people looking for a job. Perhaps the famous sleazes who fell like dominoes in the wake of the *Weinstein Affair* should be ranked in a *weasel tier*?

So no surprise that Merriam-Webster crowned *feminism* its Word of the Year. The year began with the Women's March and the *pussy hat*. It seems to have ended with lots of students looking up *feminism* as they worked on term papers. Given that Merriam-Webster's top lookup for 2016 was *fascism*—at least until the dictionary company campaigned asking its users to search for an alternative and *surreal* took the lead—we may infer that the sky did not fall in 2017, though the year closed with the increasingly surreal *Mueller inquiry* ongoing and nobody any clearer about allegations of *collusion* with Russia.

Merriam-Webster's result reflects only the number of searches in its online dictionary. Quantity matters, especially when it takes the form of an iceberg or, in the cases of Al Franken, Roy Moore, and John Conyers, plausible claims of *sexual harassment*. But the quantity of online searches does not necessarily reflect the quality of linguistic usage or curiosity.

When that old favorite the *casting couch* made an encore this year, people already knew what it meant. They had a general understanding of *feminism* too, but they had to look it up because the *intersectionality* of sex, gender, class, and race has complicated the term to Rubik's Cube-like complexity.

*Saturday Night Live* launched *Complicit*, a mock perfume from the Ivanka Trump brand, and the joke turned *complicit* into Dictionary.com's top search term of the year. We will never know if the searchers were saying *#MeToo* to Ivanka Trump's line "I don't know what it means to be complicit" or if they really didn't know what the word meant. *Xenophobia* was the website's 2016 winner, though who now remembers why that was?

How, then, to pluck the bedraggled survivors from the roiling sea of usage? One way would be to hire a polling firm, cross-reference its

# Are You Sufficiently Woke?

The political vocabulary of 2017.

BY DOMINIC GREEN

As 2017 goes the way of the *Titanic*, it's time to survey the lexical flotsam and jetsam bobbing in its wake. Which arcana drifted to the surface this year, much to our puzzlement? Which new coinages made it to the life rafts and can expect to keep afloat? Which flared brightly and then fizzled, like distress signals?

Linguaphiles, welcome aboard that lifeboat on the troubled waters of language, THE WEEKLY STANDARD'S Second Annual Word of the Year Awards.

*Dominic Green, a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, is a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

Last year's winner forced itself into the boat without being invited—but that was only appropriate. Nothing captured the alt-right mentality better than *cuckservative*, with its taunt that moderation is unmanly and certain conservative males are cuckolds.

How quickly a year passes. By the end of 2017, it was clear that *Homo politicus*, like his *allies* in Hollywood and the media, tends not towards cuckoldry but a 21st-century equivalent of the *droit du seigneur*. Our *élites* have *triggered* us. The workspace is no *safe space*.

This was a year of *sex* and of course *gender*, too, because *sex* is what you're born with and *gender* is what you make of it—except for the occasions when

results with a sociological databank, and assemble a national picture of linguistic innovation, weighted for age, income, and voting records. Another way would be to ask the editorial staff of THE WEEKLY STANDARD. That's what I did. *Sad!*

*appropriation*. That means *squad goals* and *clapback* are out unless you're on *Black Twitter*. (Didn't know that *squad goals*, popularized most by Taylor Swift, has its roots in black culture? You're probably a victim of *whitesplaining*.) Similarly, phrases beginning *Mother of*

It was a good year for compound nouns but a bad year for men who wear bathrobes to business meetings. Sports got political with *anthem kneeling*, the political got paranoid with *deep state*, and sportsmen, politicians, and *Shitty Media Men* worried about *inappropriate contact*. Meanwhile, the digital news *churn* whipped together triple-plays like *Trump Muslim Retweet*.

Word of the Year 2017, though, has to be *pervnado*. It's a new term for an old problem and perfect for the 12 months in which Google's top search term was *Hurricane Irma* and its top individual name search was *Matt Lauer*.

Will *pervnado* just blow through the American language or will it funnel its way into a permanent place in the lexicon? It is entirely possible that the next tsunami of smut will deposit a new term for the devastation and revulsion that it leaves in its wake. We do, however, now possess an umbrella term to describe the shift in accountability and morality that is taking place—and the alterations in public posture demanded from the contrite and those attempting preemptive contrition. That term appeared in the last weeks of the year, and it wins Phrase of the Year 2017: *the Great Awokening*.

This phrase seems to have originated on Twitter, then migrated into old media in November via NBC reporter Benjy Sarlin. The spirit of the Great Awokening survives in digital form, and the communities of the elect are revived in the factions of social media. Sanctity mingles with sanctimony, revelation and the call to redemption with score-settling and moral coercion.

Best of all, no one seems to know whence *pervnado* and *the Great Awokening* came. American English has endured a long dose of piety and euphemism, but users of the language have not succumbed to the cure. Instead, digital media have let loose a riot of impertinence. The people have spoken. They are disgusted, but they still have a sense of humor, and they know that that ridicule is nothing more than the *élites* deserve. It's enough to give you hope for democracy—almost.

Have a *lit* 2018, and *stay woke* on New Year's Eve if you can. ♦



Pervnado defined at the ever-current UrbanDictionary.com

The year 2017 saw *antifa* do their best to impose their *squad goals* so we would all become suitably *woke*. Anyone who queried the virtue of #BLM (*Black Lives Matter*) got a *clapback* and was disinvited from the #Resistance. A *clapback*, I discovered this week, is not a revenge gonorrhea infection but the delivery of repartee so scathing that the recipient is stunned into submission. (Merriam-Webster explained the word using lyrics from rappers' "diss tracks.")

This was also the year when we learnt that almost all human expression is wrong, because it is *cultural*

*All* may only be used by people of Iraqi descent, as that phrase entered English after Saddam Hussein entered Kuwait. The exception to this rule is *Mother of All Parliaments*. This may only be used by British people or, *in extremis*, Cary Grant impersonators.

On the bright side, non-Greeks may say *gyro*, as in the *hero sandwich*, not the *gyroscope*. After Jimmy Fallon and the country singer Luke Bryan performed a song on *The Tonight Show* called "I Don't Know How to Pronounce Gyro," the numbers of viewers who also didn't know sent *gyro* to number seven on the Dictionary.com charts.

Find out what all the kids are talking about. Visit [weeklystandard.com/podcasts](http://weeklystandard.com/podcasts)

The Weekly SUB Standard POP-CULTURE NERDCAST



Prince Philip and a pregnant Queen Elizabeth in 'The Crown'

# The Jewel of 'The Crown'

Queen Elizabeth has the last laugh.

BY RICHARD ALDOUS

Back in the 1990s, when I was a student at Cambridge, I met Queen Elizabeth's sister, Princess Margaret. A party had been arranged in her honor by the historian J.H. Plumb. There was jazz and dancing; the champagne flowed. Her Royal Highness drifted around, making excruciatingly banal conversation with everyone there. She seemed utterly bored. Certainly we were. One wondered why she bothered. The second season of Netflix's series *The Crown* provides a partial answer. Such parties were an escape from the even more excruciatingly banal duties of being a minor British royal.

A more recent "spare" to the British throne, Prince Harry, is soon to

*Richard Aldous is the Eugene Meyer professor of British history at Bard College. His books include The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs. Disraeli.*

be married to the American actress Meghan Markle. That's great news for whoever does the marketing for *The Crown*. The royal engagement was announced just before the second season of the show, which covers the years 1956 to 1963, launched, perfectly teeing up a major storyline about Princess Margaret's relationship with the photographer Antony Armstrong-Jones. "Tony" was similarly welcomed as an egalitarian breath of fresh air for the monarchy. Queen Elizabeth surely appreciates the irony of how the public and media adore Markle—that she has been married and divorced seeming to matter not at all. Had King Edward VIII been able to marry his American divorcée rather than abdicate in 1936, reluctant Elizabeth may never have become queen at all. And had Margaret been allowed to marry her father's divorced equerry Peter Townsend, she might have

found the happiness that eluded her.

Harry and Meghan's engagement is just one of the ways in which life is imitating art in *The Crown*. The mid-century fictional Elizabeth is pregnant with her third child. The Duchess of Cambridge, wife of Harry's older brother—the future King William V—is pregnant with her third child. Anglo-American tensions abound, with prime minister and president at loggerheads then and now. Even #MeToo finds its echo in strong storylines about sexual harassment and abusive behavior. Elizabeth's husband Philip invites a female journalist to his private quarters for an interview (the young woman outfoxes him), and John F. Kennedy is seen verbally and physically abusing Jackie. Taking one last curtain call is Christine Keeler—focal point of the infamous Profumo scandal when she shared her bed alternately with a British cabinet minister and the Soviet military attaché in London. Keeler died just a few days before the release of the new season, which has the scandal that rocked the British establishment to its core in 1963 in the background.

"What the hell is going on in this country?" asked the *Daily Mirror* at the height of Keeler's fame. And pre-Brexit Britain is a country every bit as anxious and divided as the one portrayed in the show. At the start of this new season, Elizabeth accuses the errant Philip of "being lost in your role and lost in yourself." It's a conscious echo of former secretary of state Dean Acheson's cutting 1962 observation that "Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role." Themes of inglorious decline and institutions in peril ebb and flow throughout the 10 episodes. The public attack on the crown from Lord Altrincham in 1957 made plain what should have been obvious: "republics, not monarchies, are now the rule, not the exception."

But what's striking about watching *The Crown* is how the sense of a monarchy in peril is one way in which this series does not echo contemporary events. While all around her political and cultural institutions are under assault, Queen Elizabeth II, 65 years into her reign, seems never to have

ALEX BAILEY / NETFLIX

been more popular and admired. The younger generation of William and Harry, with some added Markle Sparkle, are liked and respected. Even public reservations about Prince Charles, now 69, are tempered by a grudging acceptance that, after waiting so long, he'll deserve his short tenure in the top job when the time comes.

Quite how the royal family arrived at this unexpectedly strong position is the obsession at the heart of *The Crown*. Virtually every one of Peter Morgan's storylines this season brilliantly explores the tensions between traditionalists (Elizabeth herself, the Queen Mother, loyal courtier Tommy Lascelles) and modernists (Margaret, Prince Philip, the former Edward VIII) as they battle on how best to rescue a then-unpopular and unfashionable institution.

Characters caught in the middle usually get crushed. Poor young Charles is a case in point. The standard line on the heir-to-throne's childhood has always been that Philip inflicted his own alma mater, the Scottish boarding school Gordonstoun, on the boy because he cared little or nothing about his son's happiness. Morgan suggests another side of the story. The decision to send Charles to Gordonstoun was made out of a determination to break the mold—to get him “away from all this nonsense” and to stop him becoming just another upper-class twit. “This is not the real world,” Philip explains lovingly to him at Buckingham Palace in the ninth episode. “Who we are is not what glitters, it's the spirit that defines us.” But instead of making the boy, the school breaks him. The real Charles compared the school to a prisoner-of-war camp—“Colditz in kilts.”

Images that contrast different attitudes to what's fashionable occur time and again in the second season of *The Crown*, from a witty use of Handel's coronation anthem “Zadok the Priest,” as Elizabeth gets her trademark helmet hairstyle (complete with rollers), to the sinister moment when the always à la mode Margaret is chased by paparazzi in a scene evoking the death

of Princess Diana in 1997.

While the actress Claire Foy doesn't look like the queen, she perfectly captures her voice and her ruthless integrity. Her Elizabeth eviscerates Prime Minister Anthony Eden after the Suez Crisis, exposing his neuroses at being “in Winston's shadow.” Even though Eden will lie to the House of Commons over Suez, he cannot bring himself to lie to her. Philip, too, when the crucial moment comes, cannot lie to her. “There's ice in those veins if there needs to be,” he says, and we don't doubt it.

In the end, *The Crown* is a story

***The Crown is a story about the triumph of duty. The Queen Mother complains at one point, ‘the stings and bites we suffer as it all slips away, piece by piece; our authority, our divine right; from ruling to reigning to nothing at all—marionettes.’***

about the triumph of duty. The Queen Mother complains at one point, “the stings and bites we suffer as it all slips away, piece by piece; our authority, our divine right; from ruling to reigning to nothing at all—marionettes.” Her daughter understands that her job is to keep the show on the road, even if sometimes it means, says Elizabeth, “I feel like an actress, like a showgirl.”

All around is “progress,” even revolution. Fashions and attitudes change at a bewildering speed. Modernizers, whether egalitarian or from the beau monde, urge constant change and innovation on the monarchy. They have many good points. Philip is right to insist the 1953 coronation be televised. Margaret personifies a certain type of sexiness, at once audacious and vulnerable. We feel her exhilaration and freedom riding through London at night on a motorcycle.

But whatever utility the modernizers have, they lack Elizabeth's wider sense of duty and honor. Philip is irresponsible and self-indulgent—a “boy,”

she calls him. His friends in the infamous Thursday Club think they're fun-loving hedonists, but today we recognize them as predatory and misogynistic, badgering young waitresses and female journalists for sex. Margaret is heartbreaking. We sympathize with her yearning to break away, but the amoral world of Antony Armstrong-Jones is dissolute to the point of coldness and cruelty. Modernity, at least as represented here, seems to mean not loving anyone, not committing to anyone, not being loyal to anyone.

Today, we are struck by what is modern about the young royals, symbolized by Harry's marriage to a biracial American divorcée. But many presumably are also comforted by what is traditional about them. For while the Wills, Kates, Harrys, and Meghans of the world are socially progressive in ways that their grandparents could not imagine, they manage to be both Elizabeth and Margaret by remaining conservative in manners and mores.

Elizabeth, with her severe manner and dowdy fashions, may not provoke excitement or even tenderness, but she does inspire loyalty. She symbolizes a certain kind of unchanging integrity. In the end, that turns out to matter for an institution like the monarchy. It's an interesting thought, and one as unfashionable today as it was in the 1960s, that some traditions might be worth holding on to even when they appear anachronistic. In that regard the conservative Elizabeth has had the last laugh. For while the morals and ideas of the 1960s modernists look burnt out, she carries on, not fashionable, but always there—grandmother to the nation.

In times when nothing stood  
But worsened, or grew strange  
There was one constant good:  
She did not change.

Philip Larkin, the great poet of her reign, wrote affectionate beautiful lines for her silver jubilee in 1977. But he wasn't quite right. *The Crown* demonstrates that Elizabeth understood that she had to change just enough in order for things to stay the same. ♦

# The Narrowing of the Bench

Look what happens when you politicize the federal judiciary. BY PHILIP TERZIAN

Everyone had a good laugh last week at the expense of Matthew Petersen, chairman or commissioner at the Federal Election Commission since 2008, who had been nominated by President Trump to a seat on the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. In a televised hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. John Neely Kennedy (R-La.) asked a panel of federal judicial nominees if any of them had *not* “tried a case to verdict in a courtroom.” Alone among the candidates, Petersen raised his hand.

His candor should have answered the question sufficiently for the senator’s purpose: Petersen’s experience of the law has been civil and administrative—hence his eminence at the FEC—not as a litigator. But his candor also gave Kennedy an opportunity to illustrate what Dean Acheson once described as “senatorial humor,” which, in Acheson’s experience, “contains a sadistic element.” In slow, deliberately methodical cadence, Kennedy proceeded, one by one, through the various levels of trial practice—bench, civil, criminal, state, federal, and so on—to which Petersen was repeatedly obliged to answer, “No.”

Given the customarily toxic nature of politics in Washington, Petersen’s ordeal became an Internet sensation. The process was accelerated by Kennedy’s Senate colleague Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), who tore a page from President Trump’s book and tweeted to his followers (“MUST WATCH”) a truncated version of Petersen’s testimony: The nominee was asked “basic

questions of law”—which is not especially precise—“and [couldn’t] answer a single one,” Whitehouse exulted.

“Hoo-boy.”

Petersen, whose knowledge of capital folkways exceeds his courtroom experience, instantly recognized the writing on the wall and withdrew his nomination in a letter to Trump:

I had hoped that my nearly two decades of public service might carry more weight than my two worst minutes on television. However, I am no stranger to political realities, and I do not wish to be a continued distraction from the important work of your administration and the Senate.

For his part, Kennedy was, in senatorial fashion, magnanimous: Petersen, he allowed, is not “quite ready to be a federal judge.” Of course, the fact that Kennedy and his colleague Whitehouse are products of two of the more corrupt legal/political cultures in America—Louisiana and Rhode Island—somehow passed unnoticed in the press. Nevertheless, in some useful postmortem reporting, the *New York Times* did reveal that Kennedy’s motivation might have had simple, but telling, origins. Petersen was undoubtedly promoted within the White House by Donald McGahn, Trump’s judge-picker and Petersen’s former colleague on the FEC, and McGahn had recently defied Kennedy’s wishes on a Louisiana judicial appointment.

This was payback.

For the record, I have no idea what kind of federal district jurist Petersen

might have made—or, if he follows Kennedy’s advice and handles some arson and divorce cases, may yet make. But the underlying premise of the instant, and unanimous, media assault on Petersen is based on a fallacy. For in truth, the only thing that Kennedy managed to (intentionally) demonstrate is that Petersen, like many other people with diplomas from law school, has never been a litigator—and there is no reason, or requirement, that the federal bench must be filled exclusively with trial lawyers.

Indeed, surveying some of the better-known occupants of the federal bench in American history, one is struck by the fact that many of the most exalted reputations—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Learned Hand, Felix Frankfurter, for example—rest on a

lack of trial experience that would horrify Senator Kennedy. Holmes and Hand, for example, put the practice of law behind them as quickly as possible before ascending to administrative and faculty appointments and judgeships. To my knowledge, Frankfurter, who was more politician than attorney and spent the bulk of his pre-Supreme Court career teaching at

Harvard, seems never to have “tried a case to verdict in a courtroom.”

For that matter, the judicial candidate whose background most resembles the 47-year-old Petersen’s is William O. Douglas, the great liberal hero of the Warren Court, who practiced law for a couple of months before graduating to political/administrative posts and as the 41-year-old chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission was “quite ready” to be appointed to the Supreme Court by Franklin Roosevelt.

To be sure, the larger problem is that the process by which the federal judiciary is populated has grown increasingly—one might say poisonously—politicized in recent decades, and both parties are guilty of accelerating the trend.



William O. Douglas

Philip Terzian is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

In the 1970s, Richard Nixon began the practice of confining Supreme Court appointments to federal judges with a reliable judicial “track record,” and in the 1980s, Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) initiated the tradition of routinely scuttling nominees on a partisan basis. The result is that our current

Supreme Court consists of politically reliable appellate judges—and one failed appellate nominee (Elena Kagan)—while the lower courts appear to be off-limits to lawyers whose experience is in public service, not county courthouses.

Hoo-boy. ◆

# Unearned Diplomas

What we lie about when we lie about graduation rates. BY MAX EDEN & ALICE B. LLOYD

Earlier this month, the Department of Education released the latest figures on high school graduation: After rising every year for five years, the national rate hit an all-time high of 84 percent in 2016. Good news, surely.

At Ballou High School in southeast Washington, D.C., the news was even more promising: 100 percent of its senior class last June was accepted to college. NPR covered the story with gravitas and congratulations. Breathless celebration spanned the web, from *Mashable* to *Jezebel*, with feel-good headlines like “Every Single Senior at This Low Income D.C. School Earned Their Way into College.”

Just the year before, Ballou had passed only 57 percent of its seniors, a mere 3 percent of whom met reading standards on citywide exams (and almost none of whom were proficient in math). What a reversal of fortune!

But if Ballou’s seniors were suddenly all making it through, their teachers weren’t: More than a quarter of Ballou’s teachers quit before the end of the 2016-17 school year—citing students’ poor behavior and attendance, an unsupportive administration, and an unfair system of teacher evaluation.

So how, exactly, could students’ performance have improved so

drastically, even as their teachers were quitting in droves? To her great credit, Kate McGee, a reporter for NPR-affiliate WAMU in Washington, didn’t let the story end with graduation. She found an explanation for the miracle: systematic fraud.

The truancy policy in Washington, D.C., public schools (DCPS) holds that any student who misses class more than 30 times should fail the course in question. More than half of Ballou’s class of 2017 missed more than three weeks of school, and one in five missed more days than they’d attended. A system of remedial work covered their repeat absences. Teachers, under pressure from administrators, gave half-credit for missed work even when students had earned none. Those who objected, McGee reported, were given poor evaluations that could lead to dismissal. And seniors who weren’t on track to graduate with their class attended “credit recovery” crash courses, accelerated, watered-down versions of the classes they were already failing.

What did the higher-ups know, and when did they know it? At a November 29 press conference, Mayor Muriel Bowser said, “At this point, to be honest with you, I don’t know what mistakes were made at Ballou.” Antwan Wilson, the chancellor of D.C. public schools, also pleaded ignorance: “That’s what we need to understand. . . . What is the evidence of that?” He went on to say, “I

believe it’s important to work with the Ballou community and staff to ensure that what we’re being told by our school leaders is accurate.”

Which would be worse here, one has to wonder: deception or ignorance? In light of our soaring national graduation rate, probably the latter. A conspiracy is at least confined by its operators’ competence, while cluelessness knows no bounds.

The education reform establishment is never much bothered by the perennial problem of whether their policies are, in practice, counterproductive. Indeed, journalists are baffled that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos hasn’t cheered the nationally rising graduation rate with the complacent boosterism of her Obama-appointed predecessors. Perhaps she appreciates the potential gulf between promising metrics and the underlying progress they may or may not represent.

The nation’s capital, for better and sometimes worse, has also been the nation’s leading laboratory for technocratic reform in public education. The theory behind all sorts of reforms was sound enough: Traditional public schools are stifled by outdated rules and restrictive collective bargaining agreements, so all-star managers (such as Wilson) armed with expertly designed accountability systems will deliver higher test scores and graduation rates.

Teachers’ unions mostly railed against these reforms, arguing that they would squander meaningful improvements in favor of measurable ones and arm school administrators against dissenting teachers.

At Ballou, the unions’ worst nightmare was realized. The principal used D.C.’s evaluation system to punish teachers who wouldn’t follow her scheme of relaxed truancy rules and breezy remedial courses. DCPS announced on December 4 that Ballou’s principal had been removed and assigned to “another function in the district.” None of this, mind you, would have unraveled without NPR’s reporting. And this wasn’t even the first revelation of DCPS fraud this year.

After the Obama administration threatened schools with federal

*Max Eden is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Alice B. Lloyd is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

investigation if their discipline rates broke unevenly by race, districts across the country cut back suspensions. But in New York, Chicago, the Twin Cities, Virginia Beach, Syracuse, Baton Rouge, Philadelphia (the list goes on and is still unfolding as new data come forth), classroom conditions deteriorated, and students and teachers said they felt less safe. Washington was the one bright spot in that suspensions dramatically decreased, but school climate seemingly stayed stable.

Another miraculous victory here in the headquarters of technocratic education reform? Nope, more fraud.

In July, *Washington Post* reporters Alejandra Matos and Emma Brown exposed D.C. principals' use of informal "do not admit" lists to let individual schools keep out troublesome students without having to alert district-level tally-takers. One argument for fewer suspensions is that removing a disruptive student, an already vulnerable child, from school only disadvantages him or her further. But reformers dedicated to fighting the so-called "school-to-prison pipeline" willfully ignore evidence that keeping disruptive students in class hurts well-behaved students. And what message is conveyed when the rules are bent? A student on a do-not-admit list will probably guess he's being punished if he tries to go to school, while also realizing that the principal, the ultimate authority in a child's school-centered world, won't own up to it.

And if he can't trust his principal, why should we? More broadly, how much of what we read about "progress" in schools in the newspapers is actually a sign that things are simply being lied about?

One hopes DCPS's pattern of institutional dishonesty is isolated. But given that there are more per capita reporters in this town than any other, it's hard to imagine that some of the far-less-scrutinized school systems across the country aren't just as corrupt. DCPS is uniquely picked over by education reporters and reformers,

and it's also the administrative fountainhead for progressive ambition. The Obama administration cajoled and coerced states across the country to adopt the D.C. model. Have they also adopted the local means of meeting those ambitious goals?

A "100 percent success rate"—and the giddy headlines that accompany it—will always obscure the strenuous reality of what it takes to run a decent school system the honest way. Worse, students will come to understand they've been used and lied to. Public trust in institutions will erode accordingly.

Diminished confidence in our



Michelle Obama with Ballou High students, March 11, 2001

public school system, as political scientist Edward Banfield wrote in *The Unheavenly City Revisited* more than 40 years ago, contributes to societal decay in ways social scientists too often fail to grasp.

Banfield's proposal, already controversial in his day, would be verboten now: Kids who have stopped learning are better off gainfully employed than wastefully deskbound until age 18. For the common good, he argued, we should lower the graduation age rather than forcibly funnel these "nonlearners" toward graduation.

The frustration, anger, and contempt for authority engendered by the school may possibly enter into the personality of the individual, coloring his attitudes in adulthood and leading him to take a cynical and resentful view of the society and all its works.

Conceivably, the practice of forcing the incapable and unwilling to waste their adolescent years in school rooms further weakens the already tenuous attachment of the lower classes to social institutions. The discovery that the school consisted largely of cant and pretense may prepare the way for the discovery that the police and the courts, for example, do too.

Nowadays, Banfield would be booed on a college campus. But Ballou offers proof of concept.

NPR tells the story of a girl there who learned how to game truancy court. DCPS students who miss more than 15 days without an excuse are referred to truancy court—and while all but 11 students in the Ballou senior class of 190 qualified for court referral, only 25 were sent. By this student's telling, the court summons is the new tardy bell:

While she says she got calls and letters from the school about her absences, she wouldn't show up until they threatened to send her to court for truancy. "That's when I was like, 'Oh, let me go to school.' . . . Even then, you learn to work the system," the student says. When the school would threaten truancy court, she says she'd show up for a few

hours, do her classwork and leave. She believes it shouldn't matter if she showed up to class as long as she completed her work. Plus, she says, she knew no matter how much school she missed, she wouldn't fail. "The thing was, they couldn't do that to me, and they knew that I knew that."

For what sort of life has Ballou prepared her? How much worse off are she and her peers for their cynical service to the school district's desired metric? As Banfield would tell us, any student trained as she is to resent, distrust, and work around her school's requirements is also trained in contempt for all society's institutions.

We should be grateful when reporting calls into question the credibility of metrically miraculous transformations in public schooling—because underneath the bad accounting, there is a great deal more at stake. ♦

# Telemarketers, Ahoy

*Annoyed by those phone calls pitching solar panels, debt relief, and timeshares? Help is on the way.*

BY TONY MECIA

There are plenty of people working to make the world a better place. Doctors vaccinate children in Africa. Researchers hunt cures for cancer.

Then there's Roger Anderson.

He's harnessing technology to waste the time of telemarketers. Anderson's vision is to build a world free of those annoying phone calls pitching solar paneling, debt relief, and timeshares.

The 48-year-old telephone-systems engineer acknowledges that eradication of the entire telemarketing industry is a lofty goal. But he figures that the more time telemarketers spend talking to one of the 10 computer programs he's developed, the less time they will have to scam innocent people like you.

"If you want to pay it forward, you should waste as much time of that telemarketer as possible," he says. "There's a feeling of civic duty there to protect the next guy."

Over the years, the federal government has tried mightily to protect consumers from unwanted telephone sales calls. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted rules limiting the hours that telemarketers can call. It has outlawed the recorded messages known as "robocalls" and cracked down on telemarketers whose caller IDs lie about their phone numbers—what is known as "spoofing." The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) maintains a robust "Do Not Call" registry with 226 million numbers and regularly announces massive fines against companies that violate it. Yet none of these efforts has

stemmed the flood of infuriating and often fraudulent calls.

"The technology has now developed to the point where it is quite easy and cost-effective to unleash massive numbers of robocalls on consumers," says Ajit Pai, chairman of the FCC. "There is no question that, unfortunately, the innovative spirit runs strong in these scammers."

Pai says he receives between two and five robocalls a day on his government-issued cell phone, often from num-

bers that appear to come from the same area code and prefix as FCC headquarters. "If they are robocalling the FCC itself, there is something very wrong here," he says. Pai has made cracking down on illegal robocalls the agency's top consumer-protection priority.

Telemarketing is among the most despised of all professions. When Gallup asked about the public perception of telemarketers in December 2015, it found—unsurprisingly—that they were toward the very bottom of the list of professionals. A whopping 56 percent of those taking the survey said they considered telemarketers to have low or very low levels of honesty and ethical standards. The only groups that rated more loathsome were lobbyists (60 percent) and members of Congress (64 percent).

Telemarketing gathered steam in the late 1980s and early 1990s when advances in computing technology allowed businesses to inundate households with recorded messages. The disdain for the industry grew in parallel. In an episode of *Seinfeld*, Jerry takes a call from a telemarketer asking him to switch telephone companies. He says he's busy and asks for the

man's home phone number so he can call him back at a more convenient time, but the telemarketer says that's not allowed. "Oh, I guess you don't want people calling you at home? Well, now you know how I feel," Jerry says

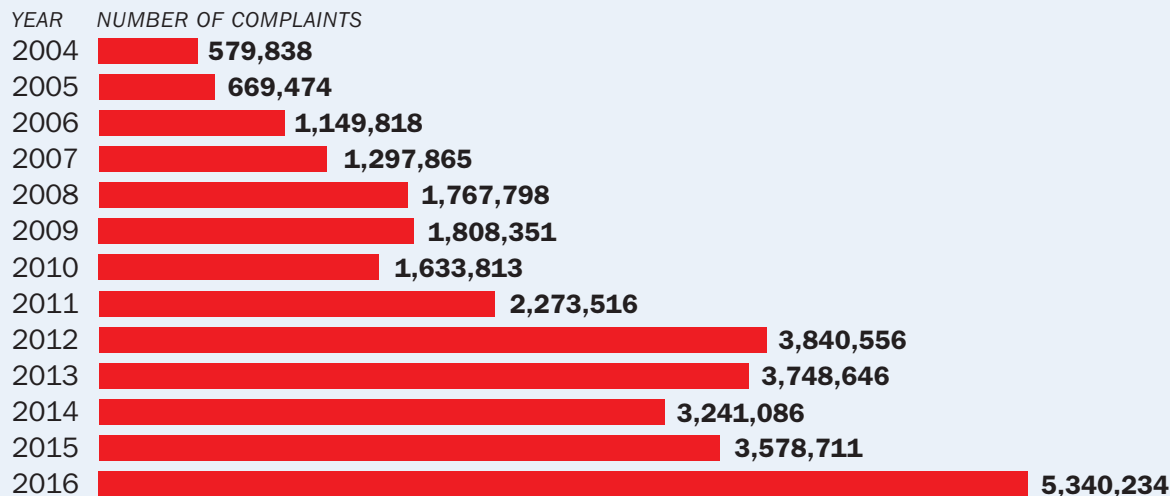


**FCC Chairman Ajit Pai says he receives between two and five robocalls a day on his government-issued cell phone—often from numbers that appear to come from the same area code and prefix as FCC headquarters.**

Tony Mecia is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

ALEX WONG / GETTY

## Consumer Complaints About Do Not Call Registry Violations, 2003-present



SOURCE: Federal Trade Commission, Do Not Call Registry Data Book

as the studio audience bursts into sustained applause.

In 1991, Congress passed the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, which gave the FCC the power to crack down on autodialed calls. “The dinner hour in America is about to get quieter,” read the opening of a *Washington Post* story the day after Congress approved the bill. But it didn’t, and in 1994, Congress tried again with the Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act, on which handed the FTC new powers to police unwanted telemarketing. The legislation led to the National Do Not Call Registry, on which consumers could place their phone numbers starting in 2003. It is illegal for a company to call one of these numbers unless it has a recent business relationship with the owner—or if one of a small number of other common-sense exceptions applies. (Numbers on the registry can still legally receive calls from political campaigns, debt collectors, charities, and polling companies.)

Nevertheless, the unwanted calls persist. Part of the blame falls on the telecommunications revolution, which has made long-distance and even international calls cheap. At the same time, the routing of calls is tougher to trace, especially if a telemarketing company has a complex legal structure, takes steps to mask its identity, or operates overseas. Placing robocalls may be illegal, but it’s easy to do and challenging for authorities to track.

In testimony before a Senate committee in October, an FTC official explained the economics: “Law-breaking telemarketers can place robocalls for a fraction of one cent per minute. . . . Because of the dramatic decrease in upfront capital investment and marginal cost, robocallers,

like email spammers, can make a profit even if their contact rate is very low.”

Telemarketers have also become more sophisticated. They have better call lists and more information on potential customers than in the past. They use sophisticated software that figures out the best time to call so somebody picks up, dials numbers from lists automatically, and determines how many live employees need to be standing by.

The foes of telemarketing, though, are using some of the same technologies to fight telemarketers—or at least aggravate them.

### THE JOLLY ROGER TELEPHONE CO.

Roger Anderson hit his breaking point a few years ago. The phone rang in his Southern California home, and it was a guy selling air-conditioning cleaning services. Annoyed, Anderson handed the phone to his 14-year-old son with instructions to waste the caller’s time. The telemarketer cursed at his son and hung up.

Springing into action, Anderson devised a home-brew answering system that required callers to press “1” on their phones for their calls to ring through to his landline. That halted all the telemarketing activity, but Anderson noticed that telemarketers continued to try his house thinking his system was just an answering machine. He wondered if there was more he could do to keep them from just moving on to the next victim.

“I stopped it at my house, but I realized I wasn’t inflicting any pain on the telemarketers,” he says. With calling

technology so cheap, he figured that the live agents were the most expensive parts of the operation. If he could keep them on the line and waste their time, he thought, he could disrupt the economics of telemarketing: “If I can grind that machine to a halt, then their entire business plan collapses.”

He recorded snippets of himself talking and programmed a series of chatbots to talk to telemarketers using basic artificial intelligence. His robots sense pauses in conversation or a questioning inflection in a caller’s voice and offer a response. They cannot improvise dialogue but play recorded snippets, which often sound nonsensical in a conversation with a real human.

In a clip with a solar-panel salesman posted on his website, you can hear Anderson’s voice answering “mmm-hmm” and “yeah” to a series of the telemarketer’s questions, even to questions that seem to require more than “yes” or “no.” When the caller asks about the size of Anderson’s electric bill, the robot Anderson says: “Oh, gee. Hang on. There’s a bee on me. There’s a bee on my arm. You know what? You keep talking. Say that part again, and I’m just going to stay quiet because of this bee.” The telemarketer keeps talking and tries to engage in conversation but is peppered with updates about the bee (“It’s totally crawling up my arm! It’s freaking me out!”) and is asked to repeat himself at least a half-dozen times. Six minutes into the call, the telemarketer is clearly frustrated and says, “What the f— is going on?” and hangs up.

Anderson launched his service, the Jolly Roger Telephone Company, in 2016 and keeps adding more chatbots. For \$6 a year, Jolly Roger will protect three of your phone numbers (landline or mobile).

His service screens out known telemarketers, connecting their calls to robots with names such as Crazy Mazy (“a nice old lady with a couple of screws loose”) and Whitey Whitebeard (“a senior citizen who likes to talk but gets a bit feisty if you waste his time”). After the call finishes, Jolly Roger emails you a digital-audio file of the conversation for your enjoyment. Anderson says Crazy Mazy holds the record; she once kept a cable salesman on the line for three-quarters of an hour. The company is growing and approaching 10,000 subscribers.

One of them is Heidi Blass, 46, who manages a massage business in St. Petersburg, Fla. In early 2017, she started receiving two or three unwanted calls a day and found that nothing she did would get them to stop—including blowing a whistle into the phone. She thinks the Do Not Call Registry is “almost a joke.” With Jolly Roger screening her calls, she finds that telemarketers now call her just a few times a week. She hasn’t had any laugh-out-loud funny recordings, but enjoys listening to Anderson’s robots waste telemarketers’ time. Her favorite is Salty Sally.

“She’s got this daughter that interrupts her, saying, ‘Mom, where are my leggings?’ It’s so subtle. At one point, the mom is like, ‘Did you check your brother’s room?’” Blass says. “There’s one guy who says, ‘Hold on, my dog just took a crap on the floor.’ It’s all done in a way that it sounds believable.”



**Gallup asked about the public perception of telemarketers in 2015 and found—unsurprisingly—that they were toward the very bottom of the list of professionals. The only groups that rated more loathsome were lobbyists (60 percent) and members of Congress (64 percent).**

## CALL BLOCKERS AND SMART APPS

Anderson wasn’t the first person to develop a chatbot to annoy telemarketers. One of the oldest and best-known such robots is Lenny, who has his own YouTube channel and a Reddit discussion group. His creator remains anonymous, and Lenny—a friendly but eccentric elderly man with an Australian accent—is more entertainment than business. There are more than 600 Lenny conversations posted online, some stretching up to an hour, with titles like “Kristi from Time Warner Cable REALLY wants to know how many TVs Lenny’s got in the house.”

Developers of smartphone apps are wading into the field of call-blocking. They don’t engage telemarketers in conversations the way Jolly Roger and Lenny do. Instead, they focus on developing lists of known telemarketing numbers, using data from third-party providers and reports from customers who download the apps. CTIA, a trade group of wireless companies, maintains a website list of robocall blockers that has reached 56 Android apps and 23 for the iPhone. Two of the best-regarded are Nomorobo (\$1.99 a month) and Privacy-Star (99 cents a month).

There are new entrants all the time. TelTech, a New

IMAGES: STEVEN CHORNEY

Jersey-based company, stumbled into the field because it already made apps that recorded calls and forwarded them. In late 2016, it launched RoboKiller, an iPhone app that blocks calls like most of the others but also answers them in order to analyze the telemarketer's voice. It adds that "audio fingerprint" to an algorithm that uses machine learning to help improve its list of suspicious phone numbers. It plays a recording to try to keep the telemarketer on the line. In one, the recording of a male voice tells an unsuspecting telemarketer of plans to audition for *America's Got Talent* and proceeds to belt out a shaky rendition of the chorus of Elton John's "Candle in the Wind." The singer then demands the telemarketer provide honest feedback.

RoboKiller costs \$2.99 a month and has nearly 100,000 subscribers. TelTech hopes to debut an Android version in 2018, says Ethan Garr, the company's vice president of product. He thinks using technology to analyze calls and collect suspicious numbers quickly is the most effective way to combat crafty and unscrupulous telemarketers. "They're always one step ahead, so the only way you're going to be able to beat them is to update the list in as close to real time as possible," Garr says. "The FCC and FTC are doing the best they can, but they can't find three guys in a hut in Asia."

The phone companies themselves have begun trying to combat unwanted telemarketing. They formed a "Robocall Strike Force" last year to hammer out technical standards that help show the true origin of a phone call. They have pooled resources to track the source of suspicious calls. Those efforts have made call-blocking technologies more effective and helped authorities trace violators and punish them. Some of the telecoms have begun offering call-blocking to customers directly. AT&T said in April that it had blocked its one billionth robocall.

Kevin Rupy, vice president of law and policy with USTelecom, a trade association, believes private industry and government need to work together to reduce robocalls. "There is no silver bullet to solving this problem," he says. "Everybody realizes that this is going to take a collective effort, a cooperative effort."

The FCC is certainly doing its share. In November, it passed a rule allowing carriers to block calls from numbers

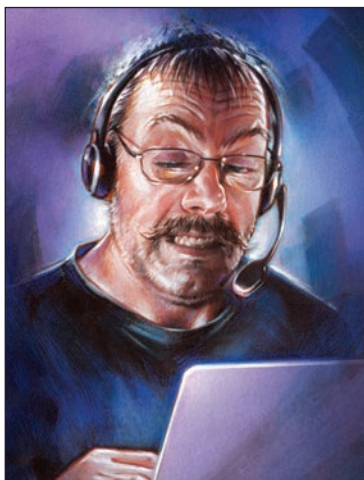
they know are invalid. Pai, the FCC chairman, says the agency has beefed up its enforcement efforts and brought three big cases in 2017. In the biggest one, the FCC levied a \$120 million fine against a Miami company accused of making 97 million calls in a three-month period in 2016—more than 1 million a day. FCC documents allege that the company would call with a recorded message claiming to offer discounted travel from Marriott, Expedia, or TripAdvisor, but if it happened to get a human on the line, it would route the call to a Mexican call center selling timeshares at resorts.

There were plenty of complaints about the scam. A Virginia medical-paging company said its network was being disrupted by the calls, potentially hampering its ability to page doctors and nurses in an emergency. TripAdvisor complained to the FCC, too, saying the calls were harming its image. The company passed along a voice message from a person who had received the robocall and wrongly believed it originated from TripAdvisor: "If I ever get a call like that again, I will contact the FCC and I will open the gates of hell on TripAdvisors. Never never never never call me like that again. Ever. Got it?"

The FTC has been busy, too. Since 2009, it has brought 33 cases against robocallers and levied \$287 million in fines. Both agencies are trying to educate consumers about avoiding unwanted calls. They recommend checking with your carrier to evaluate options, using a call-blocking app, and, if you should happen to answer a telemarketer's call, simply hanging up. Engaging with a telemarketer, they warn, only invites more calls.

Jolly Roger's Anderson doesn't necessarily agree with that last advice. He says he'd like nothing more than to spend his time building more and more robots to carry on long, rambling conversations with people trying to sell things over the phone. Maybe he's naïve. Maybe telemarketers will always be with us. Maybe this technological arms race has no winner.

If nothing else, though, he says his experience has brightened his outlook: Anderson no longer feels dread when the phone rings. "It completely changes your attitude," he says. "I never thought I would want telemarketers to call me." ♦



**Part of the blame for telemarketing falls on the telecommunications revolution, which has made long-distance and even international calls cheap and the routing of calls tougher to trace.**

# The Reorganization Man

*The State Department conquers Rex Tillerson*

BY PETER J. BOYER

**O**n the morning of December 12, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took the stage at the Dean Acheson Auditorium to conduct a year-end town-hall meeting with his anxious and largely skeptical State Department staff. The event was keenly anticipated and the venue packed. No one in attendance—not even Tillerson himself—could say with certainty that this would not be the secretary’s valedictory appearance.

Tillerson confidently performed what he called a “walk around the world,” a recital of American engagement points abroad, from China to Yemen. His Texas baritone filled the far spaces of the auditorium, and he followed up with a PowerPoint presentation of his plans to redesign the department and took a few questions from the audience. He carried on like a man whose first year as America’s top diplomat had set the stage for the successes of his second.

But Tillerson concluded the event on an unusually personal note, slipping into a reverie about the “Code of the West.” This unwritten set of cowboy virtues, such as trust, loyalty, and straight dealing, had “served me well for many, many years,” he said. That this was not an ethos normally associated with Washington, D.C., was the secretary’s unspoken point.

The common wisdom in Washington is that Rex Tillerson is a failed secretary of state—disliked by his department, disregarded by the president, and discounted by foreign leaders. There is broad expectation that he will be out of a job early in the new year. The current certainty of an imminent “Rexit” is partly owing to a White House leak to the *New York Times* in late November, which was itself a reflection of the sometimes bizarre management style of the Trump administration.

The *Times*’s front-page story reported that the White House had a detailed plan, developed by chief of staff John Kelly, to replace Tillerson with the current head of the CIA, Mike Pompeo, “perhaps within the next several weeks.” Pompeo, in turn, would be replaced at the CIA by Arkansas senator Tom Cotton. The story’s detail—and,

especially, the reference to the hand of Kelly, widely perceived as the “grown-up” in the White House—signaled to the cognoscenti that Rexit was real. The *Times* noted the plan had not been approved by the president, who subsequently denied that Tillerson would soon be leaving (“FAKE NEWS!”). But this denial only led to speculation that the ouster plan, while real, was meant to unsettle Tillerson enough to coax him toward resigning.

Few in Washington believe that Tillerson will be secretary of state when the warm weather returns. One Tillerson ally, who just a few months ago was confidently predicting that Tillerson would serve through Trump’s first term, now guesses the secretary may just last into a second year. “But if the president says, ‘I can’t stand this anymore, I want you to leave,’ he’ll leave,” the friend says.

Tillerson himself calls reports of his imminent departure “ridiculous,” but his wistful turn at the end of the town hall offered a hint as to where his heart is inclined—far from a mercurial president, the nattering press, and a restive, self-regarding bureaucracy. When asked his holiday plans, Tillerson said he was heading for his 83-acre ranch in Denton County, Texas, a place where the Code of the West obtains. “I look forward to being back in Texas to be with people who have that value shared with me,” he said. “And I’m going to saddle up my favorite pony, Blue, and I’m going to go out and check on some cows.”

**R**ex Tillerson is said to have been a casting-call hire as secretary of state, a man whose bearing and tone in a meeting with the president-elect convinced Trump that he’d found his man. He had no government experience, but that wasn’t a negative with Trump. And the people who’d recommended Tillerson to the Trump team, Robert Gates and Condoleezza Rice, had good reason to believe that the CEO of ExxonMobil would succeed.

As the head of the largest American-based oil company, Tillerson had effectively been in charge of his own foreign service, negotiating deals with some of the nastiest people of the world and in some of the most difficult reaches. ExxonMobil is said, for instance, to have won a far more advantageous deal from Russia than its competitors, and Tillerson emerged with the Russian Order of Friendship.

*Peter J. Boyer is national correspondent at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*



*Far, far from the ranch: Rex Tillerson emerges into the White House Rose Garden for a press conference, September 26.*

“In the conversations that I had with him, when I would mention a foreign leader, he knew almost all of them,” says Elliott Abrams, a diplomat and policy adviser who served Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. “There are a lot of Americans who would not be comfortable sitting down with the president of France or the king of Saudi Arabia. He’s very comfortable. And he knows what a meeting with the head of state is like. He’s had a million of those.”

The take on Tillerson was that he’d be a pragmatist in the James Baker mode. But any Trump secretary of state was going to face daunting challenges from within his own department. Tillerson took over an agency that had been among the most overt in its opposition to Trump during the presidential campaign and transition. The State Department, and its vast outer boroughs of former diplomats in the press corps, universities, and think tanks, was deeply suspicious of Trump, not only because his vow to “drain the swamp” held particular implications for an institution located in a place called Foggy Bottom but, especially, because of his America First posture.

Trump spent much of the campaign excoriating the deals America had made abroad in recent years, to which State had been central, and demeaning the officials

responsible for them as “very, very stupid people.” State Department employees donated to Hillary Clinton’s campaign over Donald Trump’s by a margin of 91-1. The diplomatic bureaucrats were the centurions of a global order that Donald Trump had promised to topple.

A State Department in the service of Trump’s agenda would be in no rush to appoint special envoys on climate change, the closure of the Guantánamo detention facility, or for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons (and indeed, many of the 60 or so special envoy slots at State inherited by Tillerson are targeted for elimination). For the permanent diplomatic bureaucracy, America First was a naked abandonment of its values, a surrender of the decades-old claim of the centrality of human rights and the spread of freedom in foreign-policy calculations.

Tillerson, though, had a nuanced interpretation of Trump’s America First imperative, which he hoped to sell as a harmonizing of American values and American interests. His background suggested he just might succeed in serving a president and a department so deeply at odds.

An Eagle Scout and a lifelong supporter of the scouting movement, Tillerson had been president of the Boy Scouts of America when the group admitted gay members

ZACH GIBSON / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

and had skillfully managed the organization through this momentous decision. His tenure at Exxon had also demonstrated a talent for image polishing through public diplomacy. His predecessor at ExxonMobil, Lee Raymond, was known as a two-fisted oil-patch guy, unapologetic about the profits-monster that emerged from the Exxon-Mobil merger (which he oversaw). He laughed in the face of what he saw as politically correct and scientifically unproved global warming, and financed contrarian research on the subject. When Tillerson assumed the helm, he set out to improve ExxonMobil's corporate reputation; the climate-change oppo-research spending stopped and the idea of a carbon tax was embraced.

In Washington, Tillerson told ExxonMobil's lobbying team to expand the company's presence in the capital—and worked to enhance his own. He joined the board of Ford's Theatre at a time when a capital campaign was underway to raise \$20 million for an expansion. "We ended up with \$50 million," says Paul Tetreault, the theater's director. "Rex had no interest in getting involved in the organization without getting engaged. He was connected in one way or another to 75-80 percent of that money."

Lee Raymond was a member of the board of the conservative American Enterprise Institute. Tillerson preferred the centrist Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), home to the great totems of American foreign policy, including Henry Kissinger. "He said he wanted to have a footprint in Washington that wasn't just the oil company," recalls John Hamre, president and CEO of CSIS. "I have some CEOs that have come to the first meeting and have never come back. But Rex Tillerson was the most faithful CEO we've ever had. He was actively involved."

Hamre was delighted by Trump's pick of Tillerson, and he expected it to be a great success. But before Tillerson had even taken up residence in the secretary's seventh-floor office, he was caught off guard by a surprise White House action and State's emphatic reaction.

Seven days into his presidency, Trump ordered a ban on citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries entering the United States. Within 48 hours, a dissent cable began to circulate within the State Department, including some of its most far-flung outposts, declaring the Trump move bad policy that would have the effect of making America less safe. Such cables on a contested topic usually attract a few dozen signatures; this one gathered 1,000. And dissent cables usually stay private. This one was quickly leaked to the *Lawfare* blog. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* followed with stories, and the dissent from State became an early Trump controversy. It was plainly meant to embarrass the president.

Instead, it angered him. "These career bureaucrats

have a problem with it?" Sean Spicer, then the White House press secretary, asked of the travel ban. "They should either get with the program or they can go."

Hamre believes that the controversy did lasting damage to Tillerson. "It had a much bigger impact than people realize," he says. "Rex, from the beginning, has had an insurgency going on within the White House that made it much harder for him. There are people who wanted to pull out of alliances, wanted to revert to an American nationalism agenda, et cetera, and all of a sudden, this story's out, and those people had this strong argument to use against State with the president."

Tillerson, who had no relationship with Trump, had to devote his energy to developing one—personal resources not spent stroking the rattled department he now ran. He then made things even harder on himself when he made reorganizing the State Department—a "redesign," he called it—a top priority and brought in two outside consulting companies to plan it. That effort dovetailed with an announced White House goal of a 37 percent budget cut for State. It all seemed like an assault on the State Department, and though Tillerson argued the cuts down to 30 percent (and Congress delayed them altogether), he was seen as the enemy inside the walls.

The open feud between Trump and the foreign-policy establishment never died down. There were showy resignations in the department's top tier and many retirements. Former diplomats took to the op-ed battlements, decrying the gutting of the State Department. The clamor reached a climax in November, when Barbara Stephenson, head of the American Foreign Service Association, issued a scorecard showing State's losses. In a letter to her members, she accused the Trump administration of "decapitating leadership" at State and choosing to "forfeit the game to our adversaries."

Her numbers were striking. The foreign service officer corps had lost 60 percent of its career ambassadors under Trump, career ministers were down by nearly a third, and the entry-level ranks were badly depleted. Young people, Stephenson said, were avoiding the foreign service in droves—fewer than half the number applied to take the Foreign Service Officer Test this year than last.

Tillerson admits that he knew no one at State when he became the boss and knew nothing of its culture. But he says he is puzzled by the perception that he has presided over a hollowing out of the State Department. "It's interesting to me that some people seem to want to observe that there's nothing happening at the State Department because I'm walking through this hollowed-out building and listening to the echoes of the heels of my shoes as I walk down the halls," he recently told a gathering at the Atlantic Council. "Yes, I have a lot of open positions. I

have nominees for them, I would love to get 'em in place. It makes a big difference. But I wanna tell you, the quality of the individuals in the career people at the State Department, the career foreign service officers, the people who are serving in ambassadorial roles, they're dedicated to the mission. And they're stepping up into these roles."

Tillerson might have benefited from a strong deputy with diplomatic experience and deep ties at State, and in the early weeks of his tenure, he thought he had found one. Trump had at first seemed inclined to approve Tillerson's choice of Elliott Abrams as deputy secretary of state, until someone in the White House pointed out that Abrams had written an article (in these pages) during the campaign that was headlined "When You Can't Stand Your Candidate." Abrams was nixed.

**A**fter the controversy of the dissent memo, Tillerson cultivated Trump and was soon getting as much face time with the president as any cabinet member. But the secretary of state never became a Trump guy in the way that Pompeo and Scott Pruitt, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, did. Pompeo and Pruitt had Trump's trust. They not only understood Trump's agenda, they agreed with it.

Tillerson's views diverged from Trump's on key policy matters, including the North Korean crisis, with the secretary insisting on the pursuit of every diplomatic option.

In October, Trump tweeted that Tillerson was "wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man," adding: "Save your energy Rex, we'll do what has to be done!"

On Iran, Trump had promised to pull out of the "very bad deal" reached by the Obama administration to curb Iran's nuclear weapons program. Tillerson's State Department, to Trump's annoyance, wanted to recertify Iranian compliance with the treaty. When Saudi Arabia led a trade and transport boycott of Qatar, citing the latter's financial accommodation of suspected terror networks and ties to Iran, Trump took the Saudi side. Tillerson objected, citing the vital American interests in Qatar, and successfully urged an American role in trying to broker a resolution.

The tensions between Trump and his secretary of state gradually edged toward the personal, with Trump cutting Tillerson out of key decisions and, reportedly, disparaging him to those in his inner circle. For his part, Tillerson did

little to defend Trump. When he was asked in August by Fox News's Chris Wallace whether Trump's comments on the violence in Charlottesville reflected American values, Tillerson responded: "The president speaks for himself."

The most famous breach in the Trump-Tillerson relationship came last summer, after the president told his national security team that he wanted a 10-fold increase in America's nuclear arsenal. At a meeting at the Pentagon, Tillerson reportedly declared Trump a "f—ing moron." The comment leaked to NBC News, and when the president was asked about it, he urged a Trump-Tillerson IQ contest. "And I can tell you who is going to win," he said.

The bitter irony for Tillerson is that inside State, he is considered Trump's guy.



**At a meeting at the Pentagon, Tillerson reportedly declared Trump a 'f—ing moron.' The bitter irony for Tillerson is that inside State, he is considered Trump's guy.**

**W**hen people familiar with the planning for a post-Tillerson State Department speak of the advantages of a Secretary Pompeo, it is not only because of Pompeo's closeness to Trump. What recommends him from an institutional view is his success in managing the CIA, where he has picked up on the cues from within, avoided imposing his own team at the top level, and—most of all—not tried to launch any sort of reorganization.

One former diplomat says that change, if it comes at State, will be a tonic no matter who Trump chooses. "It will be the end of a period of enormous unhappiness," the former official says, "and a sense of a secretary who has failed."

As for Tillerson, his friends uniformly say that he is no quitter. He didn't ask for the job and didn't really want it, but accepted Trump's offer out of a sense of duty. Tillerson himself has said that he serves at the pleasure of the president. Signs suggest that sufferance is nearing an end.

If so, Tillerson may bow out with a version of what he told his department as he prepared to return to Texas for the holidays. "I hope I'm going to see most of my cowboys on the ranch," he said. "Those are the guys I like to hang out with."

The vast realm of interested parties comprising the "diplomatic community" also know who they like to hang out with. When Rexit arrives, the next secretary of state will have no shortage of advice from them. Atop that list of recommendations will be: Ditch the Redesign. ♦

ANDREW HARRER / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

# Parenting with the Internet

*The unexpected risks of lives spent online.*

BY NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

‘S tart at the apocalypse and work back.’ That’s how Mary Aiken describes her approach to her role as a forensic cyberpsychologist—an expert in digital behavior and crime. “My job, as I see it, is to be fully armed with real insights and information, both open-eyed and imaginative, about potential risks so I can be prepared for the worst-case scenario.” And so that she can prepare us, as parents, for it. In her book *The Cyber Effect*, recently released in paperback, Aiken pulls no punches, explaining, “The variety of unsupervised and age-inappropriate content to explore online is almost limitless. And the number of children exposed to it grows every hour.”

*Naomi Schaefer Riley, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of Be the Parent, Please: Stop Banning Seesaws and Start Banning Snapchat.*

### The Cyber Effect

by Mary Aiken  
Spiegel & Grau, 387 pp., \$18

### iGen

by Jean M. Twenge  
Atria, 342 pp., \$27

If those sentences make your heart beat a little faster, that’s the point. As Aiken notes, when a risk is “unpleasant to consider,” there is “often a strong desire to overlook it.” Some readers may dismiss Aiken’s views as too alarmist, but there is good reason to believe that her pessimism—she often presents the worst-case scenarios for online decency, morality, and safety—is justified.

Technophiles often defend the Internet on the grounds that it’s just another in a long line of innovations that have elicited unwarranted fear.

Aiken argues that lives lived on screens are different:

Our instincts have evolved to handle face-to-face interactions, but once we go into cyberspace, these instincts fail us. We are impaired, as if we had been given keys to a car but not learned how to drive. We need more tools and more knowledge. Because if you spend time online, you are likely to encounter a far greater variety of human behavior than you have before—from the vulnerable to the criminal, from the gleeful and altruistic to the dark and murderous.

Indeed, Aiken notes that the places we tend to think of as physically and emotionally safest—our own bedrooms, our own homes, places where we are surrounded by our own families—are nowadays often the places where we err in letting down our guard. Two generations ago, even with televisions and landline telephones bringing the outside world

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into the home, it was still reasonable to feel relatively private and safe in the familiar, familial home environment. No more. Today's communication tools bring us into instant contact with human behavior we would rarely or never encounter in the physical world. At best, this easy interface with varieties of strangeness can transform our interests and alter our personalities. At worst, it can warp our longings and deprave our moral judgment.

Consider: Would Anthony Weiner have gotten in trouble without the Internet? There's no evidence he was flashing people on the subway before he started taking pictures of his private parts and sending them around from his phone. Maybe there really is, as Aiken argues, something about the way the Internet removes us from other people's reactions that makes us more likely to engage in certain behaviors.

Another example: interest in bondage or sadomasochism. Two or three decades ago, "a person with a fetish or guilty pleasure of his or her own had to dig around in the public library for a copy of the Marquis de Sade's writings, go to an art-house cinema," or otherwise make an effort to get hold of the desired pornographic content. (In the 1980s, even pornographic magazines devoted less than 17 percent of their content to such imagery, Aiken writes, offering a statistic that makes the reader wonder how it was obtained.) But now, two crucial barriers have been lowered: It takes much less work to find very specific smut, and the social shame that might once have inhibited the search has all but disappeared. Today "there are more than 3.5 million members of the Fetlife community [a social networking site for the BDSM lifestyle], and they've shared more than 19 million photos and 172,000 videos, participated in 4.7 million discussions, and created 1.7 million blog posts." Is there any doubt that modern technologies have not only sated people's appetite for such content but also, paradoxically, whetted it?

Following the lead of the late psychologist Al Cooper, Aiken says it is the "anonymity, accessibility, and

affordability" associated with the Internet that have been changing sexual interests and behaviors. Those three As also make it easier for people to engage in dangerous and illegal behavior. She describes places on the web that most of us are not willing to visit, let alone think about our kids visiting. Take the "dark web," for instance. It is estimated that in the two years following the arrest of Ross Ulbricht and the shutting down of Silk Road in 2013, "the number of products available on Darknets" doubled to 50,000—from

*Aiken argues that the Internet and today's tools for instant communication help to 'normalize' a lot of behavior that otherwise would not be remotely acceptable, making it easier to cross moral thresholds.*

illegal drugs to fake birth certificates to alcohol, art, and counterfeit currency.

In short, Aiken argues that the Internet and today's tools for instant, universal communication help to "normalize" a lot of behavior that otherwise would not be remotely acceptable. Whether it's cyberbullying—the recent case of the young woman whose text messages encouraged her boyfriend to commit suicide comes to mind—or online piracy or the purchase of illegal substances or the consumption of hardcore pornography, online interactions are qualitatively different from their analogues in the physical world. It is easier to cross moral thresholds. And the new technologies are well suited to bring together groups of likeminded people who in the pre-Internet days would be too few and too dispersed to find one another; this means that we and our children can step unwit-

tlingly into "communities" of people we might never otherwise come into contact with.

The word "cyberspace" may strike some readers as fusty and dated, but Aiken uses it liberally. Cyberspace is "an odd and yet familiar" place, she writes. "And like all places, it has distinct characteristics that have the ability to affect us profoundly, and we seem to become different people, feel new feelings, forge new ties, acquire new behaviors, and fight new or stronger impulses." We struggle to "keep pace with rapidly evolving behavior, new mores, new norms, new manners, and even new mating rituals."

Aiken rightly argues it's time that we slow things down—particularly we parents. Many parents act as though they are waiting for some conclusive proof that the time their kids spend on screens is harming them. If this were almost any other matter—from car seats to pajamas to breakfast cereal—parents would adopt a precautionary principle: Let's not use X product until we know that it's completely safe. But when it comes to computers, tablets, and smartphones, parents have taken the opposite view: *Let's keep using the tech until we have a 25-year, 1,000-person, peer-reviewed survey that tells us we are doing it wrong.* As Aiken writes, "We don't have time to wait for more new fields to arise and create their own longitudinal studies."

This is where Jean Twenge comes in. Her new book does not start with the apocalypse and work backward—but then her job is not to investigate crimes. It is to understand a whole generation.

Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, is most frequently cited for her work on millennials and particularly the high levels of "narcissism" she found in that generation. But her new book is about the generation born in 1995 and after—what she calls the "iGen." Its members "grew up with cell phones, had an Instagram page before they started high school, and do not remember a time before the Internet." The smartphone, Twenge says, has profoundly

shaped their childhoods. “The average teen checks her phone more than eighty times a day.”

If Aiken’s work is meant to scare parents straight, Twenge’s sounds a quieter alarm. While Aiken started by asking questions about technology and what it can do to us, Twenge started by asking questions about human beings and then wondering how they became like this. And while Aiken’s work is generally devoted more to the content of what we will find when we go online, Twenge takes a closer look at the medium than the message.

Not all the news about this generation is bad, Twenge reports. The iGen kids have lower levels of teen pregnancy, fewer sexual partners, and lower rates of drunk driving. Compared with previous generational cohorts of teens, they are less likely to get into physical fights at school, less likely to argue with their parents, and more likely to spend time with their families.

But if you dig a little deeper to find out why it is that today’s teens’ lives seem to involve fewer risks and less outwardly dangerous behavior, the answers will dishearten you. When Twenge asks 17-year-old Kevin about what kinds of parties he goes to, he tells her that he almost never attends one. “People party because they’re bored—they want something to do. Now we have Netflix—you can watch series nonstop. There’s so many things to do on the Web.”

Parents have been lulled into believing that because their children are not out drinking and driving or contracting STDs or getting pregnant too young they are therefore safe. Up to a point, this is a reasonable supposition. Indeed, some parents have steered their children toward more time at home and online because they think it is safer and easier to monitor.

But this time online brings dangers of its own. Twenge draws on the findings of large-scale, longitudinal studies, writing that “the data from these surveys are stark: teens’ depressive symptoms have skyrocketed in a very short period of time. The number of teens who agreed [with the statement] ‘I feel like I can’t do anything right’ reached

all-time highs in recent years, zooming upward after 2011.” Not only has there been a spike in the percentage who say “Many of my friends have a better life than me,” more teens simply agree with the statement “My life is not useful.”

Twenge goes to great lengths to isolate the causes of these trends. Indeed, by the time she is done trying to explain why it is that instances of all these mental health problems have shot up in the past decade, there can be little doubt as to their cause. She has looked at kids across racial, income, and geographic lines. Boys and girls from all kinds of families. If you want to know what has rocked their world, it is technology.

The use of social media is not only correlated with a high degree of depression, but it has also crowded out the activities that one might generally see as the antidotes. Teens are spending less time outside, less time in the company

of friends, less time on schoolwork, on after-school jobs, on reading for pleasure, on sleep, on volunteer work, on political activism, on religious activities, and even on romantic relationships. Meanwhile, these teens are subject to kinds of peer pressure that are novel and powerful.

If we want to understand the effects of so much screen time—not just the apocalyptic scenarios of self-cutting, suicide, revenge porn, and sex trafficking—we have to understand the normal and healthy parts of life our children are giving up. All of the things that make them well-rounded people, able to try new things, interact with other people, and gain some satisfaction from their accomplishments are being pushed aside. Twenge says these young people “are both the physically safest generation and the most mentally fragile.”

The only question now is what parents are going to do about it. ♦

BCA

# The Bore Is Strong with This One

*The Last Jedi and the state of movie criticism.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**E**nough with the whiny movie critics complaining about the new *Star Wars* movie. Like them, I was fully prepared to hate the thing when I arrived at the screening, but that prejudice was overcome by the movie’s wondrous look and by its fascinating, multilayered plot.

Yes! I hear you fans saying. Yes! He gets it! But a few of you (whichever ones of you follow me on Twitter) may be confused: Wait, wasn’t Podhoretz raging on *The Last Jedi* all weekend? Yes, I was. The fact is I didn’t write the sentences above just now. I wrote them

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

**Star Wars: The Last Jedi**

Directed by Rian Johnson



in the *New York Post* 18 years ago, in 1999, upon the release of *The Phantom Menace*, the first *Star Wars* movie made since the original trilogy.

Which is to say, I was once like you *Last Jedi* fans. I scoffed at criticism of *The Phantom Menace*. So be forewarned: That review has been thrown in my face for nearly two decades. Having praised *The Phantom Menace* is like having spoken favorably of Sarah Palin in 2008. It’s the sort of thing that

induces a defensive explanation: “Well, you have to understand, she seemed so fresh, so new . . .”

Five Star Wars movies have been made since *The Phantom Menace*, and every one of them has been hotly defended, to a greater or lesser degree, upon its first release. The difference between then and now is that the lion’s share of the nation’s film critics from 1999 have since been forcibly retired by their places of employ.

Many if not most of those arguably more pretentious and middlebrow critics were skeptical of science fiction pictures and their sequels and mass-marketed movies more generally. So if you have a bias toward the contrarian, as I do, saying something nice about a big-budget wannabe crowd-pleaser in 1999 had a dual purpose: You were showing off your populist instincts and thumbing your nose at conventional wisdom.

The opposite is true today. Those out-of-work critics have largely been supplanted by bloggers and fans, and their instincts and impulses are radically different. Fans are fans. They like most everything, especially if it’s “genre” and provides them with special “fan service” moments—scenes that delve into the arcana of “canon” and delight those who have spent an inordinate amount of their lives thinking about the comic books or movies they loved as children and teenagers. Some bloggers have a direct financial interest in keeping on the good side of their movie-obsessed readers (lest they lose clicks) and the publicity machines that offer them junkets and interview access—and awards-season advertising.

As a result, while earlier critics had a hoity-toity bias against sequels to popular science fiction fare of the past, newer voices have an emotional bias toward them enhanced by fear—fear of alienating social-media rageaholics who will denounce them in comments and on Twitter, and of the loss of their somewhat elevated status with the powers-that-be in filmdom. They want to love them. They need to love them. So there ain’t no way they ain’t gonna love them. Even when they don’t deserve the love.



Daisy Ridley returns as Jedi-wannabe Rey in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, the latest installment of the movie series likely to last the rest of our lives.

My problem with *The Last Jedi* is simple: Until the last 20 minutes, when it catches fire both visually and dramatically, I found it excruciatingly boring and startlingly devoid of any meaningful plot. This is a movie whose story literally centers on how much gas is in a spaceship’s tank. The daredevil pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) is working with Princess/General Leia (Carrie Fisher) to save the last remnant of “the Resistance” to the New Order fascists now running the galaxy before the needle points to E.

Meanwhile, Rey (Daisy Ridley) from *The Force Awakens* has been sent by Leia to learn Jedi secrets from her old and embittered brother, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill). While Rey does so, she’s being seduced telepathically from afar by the tempestuous Kylo Ren (Adam Driver), who killed his father Han Solo in the last picture.

These two storylines come together in the end. But there’s a third. Finn (John Boyega) from *The Force Awakens* goes off to try to find a way to disable a piece of technology on the big New Order spaceship. He finds himself on a planet that’s a big casino. He locates a guy who can help him. They are chased. They get off the planet. They go to the bad spaceship. They’re caught. They fail. That’s it. The entire

plotline takes half an hour of screen time and adds up to nothing.

Half an hour of pointlessness is a lot. So, too, are the endless minutes during which Rey must plead with a recalcitrant Luke to show her his Jedi tricks. She says please. He says no. She says please. He storms off. She’s like a stalker. She’s creating a hostile Jedi environment. Finally he says yes. When Luke and Yoda played this game in *The Empire Strikes Back* it was over very quickly. This one takes forever.

Like I say, very boring, but at least *The Last Jedi* ends with a bang—not a logical bang, but a bang nonetheless. Still, that bang comes at the cost of betraying all kinds of *Star Wars* mythology. Primarily, it seems, the Force is no longer just the energy that flows through the universe. It’s more like Samantha Stephens’s powers on *Bewitched*—these characters can do anything with it as long as the plot needs them to. Now that the Force is just sitcom magic, you can bet that Episode IX will feature time travel, the deadly scourge of all that is good in science fiction. No matter. People will love it. And then, two years later, they will say it was a disappointment. Just like the people who love *The Last Jedi* will call it a disappointment two years from now. ♦

# Wintry Chills

*Heart-stopping tales of specters and spooks.*

BY MICHAEL DIRDA

Is it perverse to find ghost stories relaxing, even restful? Compared with the grim realities of the news and the appalling horrors of the last hundred years, even such outstanding classics as M.R. James's "Count Magnus," Sheridan Le Fanu's "The Familiar," and Algernon Blackwood's "The Listener" come across as comparatively mild, almost cozy. Haunted houses and ancient family curses, as well as demons, revenants, and "dwellers on the threshold," now seem like so much narrative furniture—and solid, Victorian furniture at that, guaranteeing comfort and security. In truth, older ghost stories remain so enjoyable at least partly because they are, quite simply, well-made stories, strong on plot and atmosphere. As adults, we read them as we once listened, enthralled, while our mother or father told us about Snow White and the Evil Queen or Odysseus in the cave of the cyclops.

Last winter in these pages I surveyed many of the genre's women authors. This time I concentrate on two dozen of the most famous ghost stories by men, restricting myself to work published in England between the mid-19th century and roughly 1930. Because I've already written about them elsewhere, I leave out the three just-mentioned giants of the field, James, Le Fanu, and Blackwood. In general, my spoiler-free comments try to describe each story in such a way that you'll actually want to read it. Most of my chosen titles, which appear in roughly chronological order, show up regularly in standard anthologies—and links to free versions of many of

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

them can be found in the web version of this article, at [weeklystandard.com](http://weeklystandard.com).

## Edward Bulwer-Lytton, "The Haunted and the Haunters"

Today Bulwer-Lytton is remembered mainly for the opening phrase of his novel *Paul Clifford*: "It was a dark and stormy night." Yet this versatile author produced significant fiction of all kinds, including occult thrillers (*Zanoni* and *A Strange Story*) and a pioneering scientific romance (*The Coming Race*). "The Haunted and the Haunters" is probably the most celebrated haunted-house story of the 19th century.

The unnamed narrator, of an adventurous temperament, discovers a house in London, the owner of which tells him, "I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days." Naturally, our hero sets up camp in one of its rooms and is duly assailed by various phantasmagoric entities:

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvae grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

Having survived till morning, this confirmed rationalist reasons that the night's horrors were "conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another." Tearing apart an inner room of the house, he soon discovers alchemical instruments and writings, as well as a miniature portrait of an Elizabethan grandee, who strikingly resembles a mysterious Mr. Rich-

ards, known to be living in India. Soon thereafter, Mr. Richards comes to visit London—and I'll say no more about this excellent story.

## Charles Dickens, "No. 1 Branch Line: The Signal-Man"

We don't usually think of Dickens as a writer of ghost stories—other than *A Christmas Carol*. Yet the great novelist possessed a strongly Gothic imagination, and nearly all his plots contain elements that verge on, or even cross into, the supernatural.

In this famous story, the narrator—apparently Dickens himself—is enjoying an evening walk along some train tracks when he spots a railroad signalman. Clearly jittery about something, the signalman eventually explains that he has repeatedly glimpsed a figure near the railway tunnel making frantic gestures, then vanishing when approached. Soon afterwards, he adds, a locomotive crashed; following the figure's second appearance, a train passenger died suddenly. Is this a bogey heralding imminent disaster and death on the rail lines? And why does it only appear to the signalman?

## Arthur Quiller-Couch, "The Roll-Call of the Reef"

Arthur Quiller-Couch—commonly referred to as "Q"—is probably best known today as the editor of the first *Oxford Book of English Verse*. He is also the true source of some notable artistic advice: "Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it—whole-heartedly—and delete it before sending your manuscript to press. *Murder your darlings.*"

While Q turned out several memorable tales, "The Roll-Call of the Reef" is his masterpiece. It begins with discussion of an old trumpet and drum, which have been coupled together using a lock that can only be opened by setting the tumblers to a particular, and now unknown, six-letter word. Many years earlier, it seems, two separate shipwrecks occurred on the same day off the Cornish coast. After being nearly drowned, the trumpeter for a ship bearing a squad of horse soldiers and the drummer boy for the other

vessel's infantrymen discover that their horrific experience has created a bond between them. Before long, the two are regularly rowing themselves out into the bay so that they can play their instruments over the watery graves of their lost comrades.

I shall say no more, except to add that "The Roll-Call of the Reef" isn't just a wonderful ghost story, it is among the most beautiful and moving stories I've ever read.

### R. Murray Gilchrist, "The Basilisk"

Gilchrist's ghost stories reflect the *fin-de-siècle* penchant for highly decorated, slightly archaic prose. His byzantine diction and syntax easily transport the reader into the hallucinatory, though Gilchrist can also be deliciously world-weary, as when Marina, in "The Basilisk," puts off her over-inquisitive lover by saying, "Ask me nothing. . . . Life itself is too joyless to be more embittered by explanations."

Marina, we learn, "dwelt with a retinue of aged servants, fantastic women and men half imbecile, who salaamed before her with eastern humility. . . . Had she given them life they could not have obeyed with more reverence." Following a strange and sleepless night, the alluring young woman informs the besotted narrator that she has decided to "lie in your arms and pant against you before another midnight." ("Pant" is sheer genius.) But before this hour of bliss, the two must first perform some dangerous rite: "I have come to bid you fare with me to the place where the spell may be loosed, and happiness bought." The journey takes the couple to a temple beside a loathsome marsh, where the lover is left blindfolded until . . . If you didn't know otherwise, you might guess "The Basilisk" to be an erotic allegory written by Poe at his most feverish.

### Robert Hichens, "How Love Came to Professor Guildea"

Ask any aficionado to list the 10 greatest masterpieces of the classic ghost story genre and you can be sure that this story will be on the list.

The narrator, Father Murchison, grows friendly with the distinguished Professor Guildea, who normally doesn't give or want any kind of affection; in fact, he hates it. One autumn evening this distinguished scholar glimpses somebody or something in the park across the street from his house. Leaving his front door open, he investigates but finds nothing. Nonetheless, from then on Guildea grows convinced that his house has been invaded by an unseen presence.

story a misogynistic allegory of married life? Read it and see what you think.

### Oscar Wilde, "The Canterville Ghost" and Richard Middleton, "The Ghost Ship"

Can ghost stories be comic? M.R. James thought they shouldn't be, insisting on "a pleasing terror." Still, there are a handful of very funny ghost stories, headed by this pair from Oscar Wilde and his contemporary Richard Middleton.



One night the professor and the priest secretly watch, incredulously, as a pet parrot begins to coo and respond to invisible fondling. Soon the truth emerges: Whether male or female, an unseen entity has grown infatuated with Guildea. The lovesick Thing follows the scholar wherever he goes, never wants to be apart from him, actually starts to rub up against his body. "This gentleness, this abominable solicitude, this brainless worship of an idiot, persistent, sickly, horribly physical, I cannot endure," cries Guildea. "It nestles to me. It leans against me. I feel its touch, like the touch of a feather, trembling about my heart, as if it sought to number my pulsations, to find out the inmost secrets of my impulses and desires. No privacy is left to me."

Is Guildea's tormentor real or a product of his imagination? Is Hichens's

In "The Canterville Ghost," Wilde satirizes most of the conventions of the 19th-century Gothic tale. An American family named Otis arrives at a supposedly haunted English manor:

As they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase, . . . the sky became suddenly overcast with clouds, a curious stillness seemed to hold the atmosphere, a great flight of rooks passed silently over their heads, and, before they reached the house, some big drops of rain had fallen.

Utterly fearless, the Otis family simply ignores the manor's ghost and its attempts to frighten them. They apply "Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent" to clean up the recurrent bloodstains on the rug. The spectral Sir Simon, increasingly frustrated by these unimaginative Americans, disdainfully concludes that they "were evidently people on a low,

material plane of existence, and quite incapable of appreciating the symbolic value of sensuous phenomena.”

In the course of the story, Wilde mentions various Gothic melodramas and shilling shockers. All these are made-up—I think—but they now sound like lost works by Edward Gorey: “Red Reuben, or the Strangled Babe,” “Gaunt Gibeon, the Blood-sucker of Bexley Moor,” “Reckless Rupert, or the Headless Earl,” “Jonas the Graveless, or the Corpse-Snatcher of Chertsey Barn.”

A friend of Richard Middleton described him as a “shaggy Peter Pan with a briar pipe.” Sadly, the writer’s suicide note—he poisoned himself at age 29—actually echoes that eternal boy’s view of dying: “Good-bye! Harry,” it begins, “I’m going adventuring again.”

Before his death, Middleton—who belonged to a literary club called the New Bohemians and championed the work of Émile Zola, George Gissing, and Kenneth Grahame—produced several fine stories, among them “On the Brighton Road,” in which a tramp meets a young man who isn’t quite what he seems, and this comic gem, “The Ghost Ship.”

In the little village of Fairfield the residents enjoy regular, friendly intercourse with the town’s large population of spirits. One night a spectral pirate ship is blown inland and crash-lands in a nearby turnip field. Soon all of Fairfield’s young male ghosts, to the despair of the town’s ghostly lasses, are spending every night in wild carousal with Captain Roberts. The narrator and the town’s parson decide to visit Roberts in his cabin:

It was the most wonderful place you ever saw in your life, all full of gold and silver plate, swords with jewelled scabbards, carved oak chairs, and great chests that looked as though they were bursting with guineas. Even parson was surprised, and he did not shake his head very hard when the Captain took down some silver cups and poured us out a drink of rum. I tasted mine, and I don’t mind saying that it changed my view of things entirely. There was nothing betwixt and between about that rum, and I felt that it was ridiculous to

blame the lads for drinking too much of stuff like that. It seemed to fill my veins with honey and fire.

The next night a gale strikes the village. As the narrator makes his way to the local pub, he notes—in a wonderful simile—that “the wind was so strong that I danced along on tip-toe like a girl at the fair.” After the tempest clears, life with the dead isn’t quite the same in Fairfield.

### **F.G. Loring, “The Tomb of Sarah”**

The term “ghost story” can be loosely applied to all sorts of older supernatural fiction. While M.R. James’s “ghost stories of an antiquary” sometimes present sheeted horrors, they more often feature demons, necromancers, and various unseemly creatures.

Still, “The Tomb of Sarah” might well be the simplest and best short vampire story of Victorian Britain—the longer masterpieces being, of course, Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). When an old church is being renovated, the engineer in charge realizes that one sarcophagus needs to be moved. But he hesitates because of its curious inscription: “Sarah. 1630. For the sake of the dead and the welfare of the living, let this sepulture remain untouched and its occupant undisturbed.” Now what could that mean?

### **W.W. Jacobs, “Jerry Bundler,” “The Monkey’s Paw,” “The Toll-House,” and “The Well”**

In the two decades before the First World War, W.W. Jacobs was England’s most popular humorist. His style, when not overdoing the dialect, is still charming, his dialogue being particularly excellent. You really do feel in the hands of a master storyteller.

Many of Jacobs’s comic stories are tall tales, and it’s but a short step from the tall tale to the ghost story. “Jerry Bundler,” in fact, virtually combines the two. As for “The Monkey’s Paw,” even if you’ve never read it, you already know its plot: There isn’t a more famous or more terrifying short story in English than this one about a talisman that grants three wishes.

Still, Jacobs wrote several other ghost stories well worth reading. “The Toll-House”—in which four friends pass the night in a haunted house—conveys with almost Dostoyevskian power both psychological disorientation and mounting terror. In “The Well,” Jacobs presents his version of “the biter bit.” When a sternly ethical young woman accidentally drops a family heirloom down an old well, her fiancé must descend into its brackish depths to retrieve it. There is, of course, something else in the water besides a diamond bracelet.

### **Oliver Onions, “The Beckoning Fair One”**

Does any ghost story carry a more evocative title than “The Beckoning Fair One”? Written in a leisurely, almost Henry Jamesian style, this psychological *conte cruel* brilliantly depicts its narrator’s growing physical lassitude and mental confusion. You could almost think of it as an Edwardian version of Stephen King’s *The Shining*.

The writer Paul Oleron, at work on what promises to be his magnum opus, decides to move into a new house. His friend Elsie—obviously in love with Oleron—nonetheless complains that the place seems to sap the energy out of him. Moreover, on each of her own visits, something dire happens: She tears her hand on a nail, she falls on the stairs when one of the steps suddenly gives way. Gradually Oleron himself recognizes that, yes, “something did persist in the house; it had a tenant other than himself.”

Oleron never quite sees that tenant but he does hear “the sound of a woman brushing her hair.” More and more, the writer finds himself enthralled by this invisible presence, so much so that he grows loath to go outside even to buy food. At the same time, he decides that he now hates his novel’s heroine, clearly based on Elsie, whom he has, what’s more, begun to find coarse, fat, and interfering. What is real? What is delusion? Because “mists and confusions had begun to enwrap him,” Oleron can no longer tell the difference. The story’s climax is shocking.

### Perceval Landon, “Thurnley Abbey”

We usually think of graphic horror—gross, splattery, physical horror—as particularly modern and cinematic. But the Victorians on occasion could pull out all the stops, as in this startling tale by Perceval Landon, virtually the only thing he is remembered for. In it Mr. Colvin awakes on his first night at Thurnley Abbey:

The face was not entirely that of a skull, though the eyes and the flesh of the face were totally gone. There was a thin, dry skin drawn tightly over the features, and there was some skin left on the hand. One wisp of hair crossed the forehead.

Rather than say anything more about the plot, let me add just one further, chilling detail: The thing is, or at least was, a woman.

### E. F. Benson’s “Spook Stories”

Today the prolific E. F. Benson is best known for his comic fiction, especially his novels about that imperious social arbiter Emmeline Lucas, better known as Lucia. As fine as these are, Benson may be even better as a writer of what he called “spook stories.”

These vary enormously in their subject matter and themes. In “The Bus Conductor,” the protagonist experiences a vivid nightmare in which a black hearse waits outside his door and its “conductor” murmurs the all-too-suggestive phrase “Just room for one inside, sir.” “Caterpillars” is a nightmarish allegorization of cancer. In “The Horror Horn” a mountaineer encounters an abominable snow-woman. The painter of “At the Farmhouse” decides to free himself from his alcoholic and slatternly wife, only to be haunted by a vision of the young beauty she had once been. Something almost Lovecraftian comes out of the sea in “Negotium Perambulans.”

Still, my own favorite of Benson’s many ghost stories is his first, “The Room in the Tower.” The unnamed narrator for years suffers a recurring nightmare in which he visits a country house where a garden party is taking place. He observes a graveyard next door and his hostess, a distinctly unsettling Mrs. Stone, invariably says, “Jack will show you your room:

I have given you the room in the tower.” Eventually, of course, a day arrives when the dream starts to come true. The narrator finds himself at the familiar garden party, the fateful words are pronounced, and he finally discovers exactly what awaits him up in the room in the tower.

### The James Gang

So admired were M. R. James’s ghost stories that other dons and clerics sometimes tried to emulate them. For instance, Arthur Gray—the master

*The woman seems not to want the young clergyman to leave—and when he finally does depart, he glances back at his strangely jumpy hostess in her doorway and ‘for one instant the play of shadow made it look as if there were another, taller, figure behind her.’*

of Cambridge’s Jesus College—began publishing stories under the pen name “Ingulphus.” These were collected under the title *Tedious Brief Tales of Granta and Gramarye*. The book opens with “The Everlasting Club,” whose members include not just the living but the dead. The stories, needless to say, aren’t tedious at all.

Other members of the so-called James Gang include E. G. Swain (*The Stoneground Ghost Tales*), Amyas Northcote (*In Ghostly Company*), and A. N. L. Munby (*The Alabaster Hand*).

In his introduction to *Nine Ghosts*, R. H. Malden—dean of Wells Cathedral—notes that “it was my good fortune to know Dr. James for more than thirty years.” Unsurprisingly then, Malden’s stories aim to send shivers

up your spine, not turn your stomach. In “Between Sunset and Moonrise” a young clergyman visits the peculiar Mrs. Vries who lives alone in a rural Fenland district. He discovers her reading the biblical account of the demon Asmodeus. She seems not to want him to leave—and when he finally does depart, he glances back at his strangely jumpy hostess in her doorway and “for one instant the play of shadow made it look as if there were another, taller, figure behind her.”

On his way home, the young vicar follows a “drove”—a primitive road—and as night falls, he begins to grow anxious. Fog uncannily masses itself on either side of the drove, leaving a straight tunnel into the distance, at the end of which he sees figures hurrying toward him:

The advancing figures seemed to be melting into one another, something after the fashion of dissolving views. Their speed and stature increased as their numbers diminished, suggesting that the survivors had, in some horrible fashion, absorbed the personality of their companions. Now there appeared to be only three, then one solitary figure of gigantic stature rushing down the drove towards me at a fearful pace, without a sound. As he came the mist closed behind him, so that his dark figure was thrown up against a solid background of white: much as mountain climbers are said sometimes to see their own shadows upon a bank of cloud. On and on he came, until at last he towered above me and I saw his face.

I should say nothing about the fate of Mrs. Vries.

### Walter de la Mare, “Seaton’s Aunt”

Like so many of Walter de la Mare’s strange stories, “Seaton’s Aunt” never quite tells you what is really going on.

The narrator, Withers, recounts three visits to the home of his classmate Arthur Seaton, first when they are boys, subsequently to celebrate Seaton’s engagement, and then a final time a few months later. On each of these visits Withers meets Seaton’s aunt, who strikes him as both exceedingly solicitous and curiously unsettling. Her nephew claims she’s in league with the devil, insisting that

she hates youth and vitality, that the house is full of spirits, and that she never sleeps. Is Seaton's aunt, then, some kind of vampire—or just an aging woman envious of the bloom and energy she has lost or never had? It's even possible that Seaton could be wrongly vilifying and tormenting a kind, well-meaning relative.

Nonetheless, de la Mare repeatedly suggests something witchy about the old woman: "There was a silvery star pattern sprinkled on her black silk dress, and even from the ground I could see the immense coils of her hair and the rings on her left hand which was held fingering the small jet buttons of her bodice." She devours her food with a gargantuan appetite. Her nephew insists that she's a spider, that she "sucks you dry." True or false? And what really happens at the story's end?

**A.M. Burrage, H. Russell Wakefield, and L.P. Hartley**

Walter de la Mare would go on to write many eerie tales, but in the later 1920s and early 1930s at least three other British writers would emerge as comparable masters of the ghost story: A.M. Burrage, H. Russell Wakefield, and L.P. Hartley. Along with de la Mare, they would dominate the genre until the 1950s.

Burrage is my favorite. There's a distinct gentleness, even a Hallmark card-like sentimentality, to several of his wonderfully told and paced stories. In "Playmates," a little girl, neglected all her life, makes friends with seven shy, spectral children. In "The Sweeper," an old lady invariably gives money to tramps—why? In "Smee" the players of a hide-and-seek game always seem to number one person too many.

Wakefield wrote every kind of supernatural tale. In "He Cometh and He Passeth By!" a necromancer based on Aleister Crowley uses magic to destroy his enemies. In "The Red Lodge" a riverside villa tempts its residents into death by drowning. "The Seventeenth Hole at Duncaster" reveals the consequences of building on the site of ancient Druidic mysteries. In "Professor Pownall's Oversight" the greatest chess player in the

world faces an otherworldly opponent.

Finally, we come to L.P. Hartley, widely known for a single, now proverbial sentence: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." That comes from *The Go-Between*, which is, in its way, a novel about a haunted life. Hartley's best-known supernatural collection, *The Travelling Grave and Other Stories*, largely draws on work from the 1920s and includes his punningly titled "A Visitor from Down Under" and the ominous "Three, or Four, for Dinner." Some of his most macabre stories approach black humor. At the beginning of "Feet Foremost," we learn that the spectral Lady Elinor must actually be carried into the house where, centuries earlier, she had

been murdered. The vengeful revenant will only leave after causing the death of someone in the house—"According to one story, she doesn't go out *with* the corpse, she goes out in it."

Although I'm sorry to have left out more than a half-dozen other writers, this list should be long enough to help readers to discover, or rediscover, the shivery pleasures of the classic English ghost story. After all, this is the right time of year for it: These dark, chilly evenings practically call for tales of phantoms and things that go bump in the night, which is why "tales of the unseen" regularly featured in the Christmas and winter issues of Victorian magazines. Happy hauntings! ♦

BCA

## Pulling Together

*An exceptional American on what makes America exceptional.* BY BARTLE BULL

I met Chris Gibson early in his first congressional race, at a campaign breakfast my family hosted at our house in upstate New York in April 2010. The sun was out that morning but winter was still in the air, as it often is there at that time of year. The fields and orchards of the Hudson River valley all around us had been the greatest food basket of the American Revolution. Now here was a man who stood before a little gathering of local farmers and small-business owners, perhaps 50 people in total, speaking to us of the founding.

Gibson grew up in Kinderhook, New York, the son of an oft-unemployed Irish Catholic union mechanic. As a teenager Gibson mopped floors in a diner and did odd jobs. The day after his 17th birthday, he joined the Army National Guard, and after college and ROTC, he took his officer's commis-

*Bartle Bull writes about culture and current affairs in numerous publications.*

### Rally Point

*Five Tasks to Unite the Country and Revitalize the American Dream*

by Chris Gibson  
Twelve, 246 pp., \$26

sion at 22. He was deployed in the Gulf war and Kosovo, earned a Ph.D. in government from Cornell, taught at West Point, and found time to start a family. He served several combat tours in Iraq with the 82nd Airborne and by 2009 was a decorated brigade commander on a clear path to the stars and pension of a general officer. Instead, he retired from the Army and plunged himself and his family into the risk and tawdriness of electoral politics, to run as a Republican in a longshot campaign for a House seat.

In his breakfast remarks to our group, Gibson spoke movingly of two of his paratroopers, Zachary Wobler and Chris Pusateri, who had died in Mosul in 2005—discussing what they

had died for and why we were all there that morning. America, Gibson said, “was an exceptional nation at birth.” Our country had created immeasurably more freedom, happiness, and prosperity than any other on earth. And so it should be, he said, since our republican system of government reflects the reason and liberty with which we have been endowed by our Creator.

At the time he met with us, Gibson was struggling against the heavy-weight funding and organization of a deep-pocketed Democratic incumbent. Gibson was about 20 points behind in the polls, having started campaigning late in the season, soon after leaving the Army. He had no organization, no campaign money, and insignificant personal funds to draw from. Eschewing the “dialing for dollars” that can chain candidates to the telephone for several hours a day, Gibson hit the road, driving all over the nearly 300-mile north-south stretch of what was then New York’s 20th Congressional District.

By September 2010, Gibson was still 17 points behind his opponent, Rep. Scott Murphy. But Gibson’s grassroots fundraising and fervent volunteers were catching the eye of the NRCC. Then came one of the more dramatic late-round knockout blows in recent political history. Murphy had been running attack ads for weeks, something Gibson never did. The Harvard-educated venture-capitalist millionaire accused Gibson of embracing big-business-driven policies that would ship American jobs overseas. In a debate a month before the election, Gibson was ready for that line of attack: “Scott,” he said, turning to face Murphy, “for the record, the only thing I’ve shipped overseas in the last decade was me and my paratroopers, to fight for *your* freedom!”

The crowd loved it and so did local media; this was a clincher. (The best part: It was Gibson’s 11-year-old daughter who came up with the line, after hearing one of the attack ads on the radio while the family was driving to a cookout.) A month later, Gibson won the election by 10 points, recording a 26-point swing in the final weeks.

It was not his last impressive political victory. Thanks to redistricting, Gibson had to run in 2012 in a constituency that was about 60 percent new to him. He managed to win by six points in the same election that saw his district vote for President Obama’s reelection by six points. And in November 2014, even though his Democratic opponent outspent him 2-1, Gibson won 63-35—a margin of victory that would be the envy of any inner-city Democrat or Bible Belt

conservatism that, at least for him, worked at the ballot box.

About a fifth of the book discusses specific policy proposals that will make sense to any voter in the electoral sweet spot between JFK Democrat and Reagan Republican: Congress needs to rein in the regulators, we need another aircraft carrier, the business tax should not be the highest on earth, and so on. This is all reasonable stuff.

But one day these policy-focused passages in *Rally Point* will be dated.

This will be a pity, because the rest of the book deserves to live in the public eye for years to come—for two reasons.

First, it provides a touching and historically valuable sketch of a certain kind of contemporary American life.

In tears, his ear cupped to the inside of his bedroom door, a 9-year old boy—Gibson—listens to the last inning of the 1973 World Series, featuring his beloved Mets in their “Ya Gotta Believe” season; his father, seemingly embittered after years of unemployment, had sent him to his room for whining about the game.

Fourteen years later, as a young infantry captain, Gibson stands 50 feet from Ronald Reagan in Berlin as the president calls on the Soviet leader to “tear down this wall!”

Together with this officer, older now and commanding thousands, we walk the streets of Mosul, a little safer after a wounded insurgent—surprised that his American captors had patched him up rather than abused him—helped the paratroopers eliminate a vicious al Qaeda cell. And we join the officer at the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, N.C., his “formation of hardened paratroopers standing at rigid attention” before him as they honor one of their dead from Iraq—and as a boy of 7, a relative of the fallen man, stands there crying with them.

Back home a few years later, cleaning out the stalls of a friend’s dairy cattle, Gibson realizes that the work is perfect training for Congress.

For all the policy and politics in this book, the Plato and Franklin and



Chris Gibson in his congressional office in 2014

Republican. As the *New York Times* wrote a few days before the 2014 election, Gibson offered a “case study of how a Republican can cultivate, win over and retain an unusually high level of support from Democrats in a swing district, while adhering to Republican positions.”

Having limited himself in advance to no more than four terms, Gibson served out that third term and then left Congress a year ago.

The title of Gibson’s new book *Rally Point* is taken from a military term for “an easily identifiable point on the ground at which units can reassemble and reorganize if they become dispersed.” The idea is clear: We may feel that our society is fracturing, but Gibson wants to suggest there are ideas, old and new, that should pull us together. The book is partly a personal and political memoir and partly an argument for the kind of big-tent, founding-based

Mencken, there are times in it when the deceptively simple storytelling makes you laugh and times when it might make you cry. Gibson has a real gift for this kind of writing and should do more of it.

The second reason *Rally Point* deserves to be widely and enduringly read is its examination of America's "exceptional" nature. The book offers as elegant a summary of the legacy and political philosophy of the founding as you will find anywhere. Any responsible citizen knows all about the Connecticut Compromise, naturally. Gibson has that rare gift of illuminating more obscure episodes, like the Newburgh conspiracy of 1783 or the *Schechter* decision of 1935, with insights that make us actually want to read about them.

Much of the value in these passages comes from Gibson's elaboration on ideas and stories that might at first seem familiar. Martin Luther King Jr. comes up in the context of Gibson's recollecting his own father's disappointments at a life all too often jobless. It is always worth remembering King's belief in work's essential dignity, but how many of us remember his conviction that the man called to be a street sweeper "should sweep streets so well that all the host of Heaven and earth" will pause to praise him?

How about our market-driven political economy? We should understand it as combining Enlightenment thinking with early-Romantic ideas—not pure capitalism, but a capitalism that understands a role for community, family, and church in providing for our welfare. We are, Gibson says, Locke "by day" and Rousseau "by night."

I will never forget Gibson standing on my lawn in early 2010, reminding us that of course the American dream lives on—that he knew this because he had lived it, embodied it. When Gibson talks in this book about Cincinnatus, he incidentally reminds us that the Roman farmer-general is said to have enacted his famous retirement drama twice, years apart. Let us hope Gibson has remembered this bit of history as well as the many others in this excellent book. ♦

BCA

# Love in Hiding

*What the wartime diaries of Hans Keilson reveal about his life and fiction.* BY ARNON GRUNBERG

Hans Keilson was not quite 23 years old when, in December 1932, he came home from his hospital job to news from his mother. "Someone named Loerke called," she said. "He called to congratulate us. He's going to recommend your novel for publication." The call had been from the poet Oskar Loerke, on whose recommendation Keilson's debut, *Life Goes On*, was published in 1933 by the S. Fischer publishing house in Berlin.

Keilson's novel was the last by a Jewish author that Fischer published before the Nazis rose to power. A year later, the book was banned in Germany. On the occasion of a reissue of the novel a half-century later—it took Fischer that long to publish a second edition—Keilson wrote in the afterword that the publication of the book "was my entrance into German 'literature' and my exit from it too."

Keilson's career—psychiatrist, author in exile, German Jew—epitomizes 20th-century European history. He was born in 1909 in Bad Freienwalde, a small spa town east of Berlin. In the early 1930s, he was studying medicine and playing trumpet and fiddle. Suffering psychological "troubles," he applied for treatment at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, but the analyst he saw there didn't believe he was in urgent need of psychotherapy and turned him away. Keilson writes: "I went back home, furious, and sat down to write the opening sentences" of what would become *Life Goes On*.

It's a cliché, though not necessarily untrue, that rejection creates fer-

*Arnon Grunberg is the author of numerous novels, including Tirza and The Jewish Messiah.*

**1944 Diary**  
by Hans Keilson  
translated by Damion Searls  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 227 pp., \$25

tile ground for a creative mind. But to be rejected from psychoanalysis is a highly unusual rejection. In Keilson's essays, he writes extensively about Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis, and one of his virtues as an author of fiction is his ability to analyze emotions in a cool and slightly detached way; he is not interested in merely describing or evoking emotions.

*Life Goes On* is the story of a family in a small German town during the economic catastrophe that followed the First World War. The most remarkable aspect of the novel is its portrait of the father, a struggling shopkeeper. He is a powerless, occasionally pathetic creature who nevertheless evokes empathy in the reader precisely because the reader is aware of the son's uncomfortable and slightly camouflaged disdain for the father. The father embodies submissiveness and shame.

Keilson specializes in a specific type of male character: well behaved and always civilized, a bit comical but also powerless, a puppet of history. To appreciate and understand Keilson's obsession with male weakness, it is important to remember that the history of Jews in Europe, especially in Central Europe, is largely the story of the impossible task of protecting their families. Keilson's own parents were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. After the war his sister, who had immigrated to Palestine, said to her brother: "I would have been able to save them."

In 1936, Keilson's future wife Gertrud Manz, a Catholic, graphologist, and divorcée, convinced him to flee Germany for the Netherlands. Here he hid and survived the war, Gertrud giving birth to their daughter Barbara in 1941. (Gertrud and Barbara were not in hiding: They were registered as Aryan and mostly living apart from Keilson, with Barbara listed on official papers as the daughter of a German soldier.) During this time, Keilson wrote the novella *Comedy in a Minor Key*, which was published after the war by the exile publishing house Querido. The story starts with the body of a Jewish refugee who died of natural causes while hiding in the Dutch city of Delft. His protectors, a young but rather dull couple, make a fatal mistake when they try to rid themselves of the corpse: They put it in a pair of their own pajamas that, because of a tag sewn in by the cleaner, can be traced back to them, and they are forced to go into hiding themselves. Whether this novella is a true comedy is unclear; Keilson would seem to lack the necessary malice and is not interested in social satire. The story is subtle, perhaps a bit too subtle. Above all, it is a portrait of the lack of professionalism that characterized at least some of the organized resistance in the Netherlands: well-intended but ill-prepared. Bravery is often a result of coincidence, and Keilson's humanism takes the form of anti-heroism.

After the war and out of hiding, Keilson married Gertrud and started working as a psychoanalyst in the Netherlands. His second novel, *The Death of the Adversary*, was published in 1959; it's a meditation on what it means to be someone's enemy and the mistaken belief that people always need an enemy. Hitler and the Nazis are never mentioned explicitly but it is clear whom Keilson has in mind. After the book appeared in English, *Time* magazine put it on its list of the 10 best novels of 1962—in the company of Vladimir Nabokov, William Faulkner, Shirley Jackson, Philip Roth, and Jorge Luis Borges. Yet even with that boost from *Time*, Keilson's literary career did not take off.

His professional life as a psychoana-

lyst continued, though, and he worked with more than 200 of the only 2,000 surviving Dutch Jewish war orphans. They were the subject of his dissertation, for which he was finally awarded his doctorate in 1979. The dissertation, which was translated into English in 1992, starts with the epigraph "In place of Kaddish."

Keilson never returned to live in Germany, instead becoming a Dutch citizen. Almost half a century after the war he wrote an essay entitled "Rather Holland than Homesick" (an inversion of the Dutch poet Leo Vroman's famous postwar quip after he moved to the United States, "Rather homesick than Holland"). However, Keilson never adopted the Dutch language in his writing, and even after decades in the Netherlands, his essay on his adopted country is both awkwardly touristy and extremely German. Elsewhere, in one of his poems, he characterizes the Netherlands as the place where he pays taxes. He remained, in short, very much an emigré author—connected to the German language and people, but unable to live in his native land.

However, he outlived all other German exile authors, surviving long enough to see a surprising turn in his literary reputation. In August 2010, Francine Prose reviewed for the *New York Times Book Review* reissues of *The Death of the Adversary* and *Comedy in a Minor Key*. The books are "masterpieces, and Hans Keilson is a genius," Prose wrote. "Read these books and join me in adding him to the list, which each of us must compose on our own, of the world's very greatest writers." Overnight, Keilson became a literary celebrity—in the United States but also in the Netherlands. He appeared on Dutch television and was photographed at literary parties while his books appeared on bestseller lists. He appeared to enjoy this belated recognition. But as he told a *New York Times* interviewer, "My work as a psychoanalyst is more important than my writing, and I mean this honestly."

Less than a year later Keilson passed away at the age of 101.

In 2010, Keilson's second wife, Marita Keilson-Lauritz, found a diary that Keilson had kept in 1944 while in hiding in Delft apart from his first wife and daughter. In this diary, Keilson wrote among other things about his love for a young Jewish woman who was also in hiding and whom he visited regularly. (Unlike the vast majority of Jews in hiding, Keilson had forged papers and so was able to go out.) The woman, 12 years younger than Keilson, was named Hanna Sanders. Keilson's diary mentions sonnets he wrote for Hanna, which an editor discovered after his death. The diary and sonnets have now been published in an excellent English translation by Damion Searls; they shed new light on Keilson's literary work.



Hans Keilson

Love had been conspicuously absent from his writing, except for the titillating play of a child with other children and the arousing image of the mother of the main character in her underwear in his debut novel. And in *The Death of the Adversary*, love is associated with hate, reminding the reader of Primo Levi's maxim that indifference, not hatred, is the opposite of love. Keilson writes: "But it must be a desperate love that demands or permits the desecration of corpses and the devastation of cemeteries at the dead of night." Fascism as desperate love or as the result of desperate love—this is where Keilson the author cannot really be separated from Keilson the psychoanalyst. But love for another person, the love that gets along so well with lust, a higher desire mixed with carnal impulses, was not associated with Keilson until the discovery of the diary and the sonnets.

The diary is as much about the war and the gas chambers—Keilson knew what was happening in eastern Germany and Poland—as it is about his favorite authors, writing poetry, and his simultaneous love for Hanna and his wife Gertrud. Over the course of

the war his affection for Gertrud grows. On December 12, 1944, he wrote: “And then I think about Gertrud and I’m scared. My love for her is just fear.” The reader is immediately reminded of the father in *Life Goes On*, a man for whom the love that remains is fear.

The great mystery of Keilson’s literary work is why he kept Hanna and his love a secret. A psychoanalyst colleague of Keilson’s who knew him well, Iki Halberstadt-Freud, is quoted in the Dutch edition of the diary: “He has never loved a woman more than Hanna.” So why did he keep her apart from his work? It seems that Hanna was not only Keilson’s greatest love but also his wound, and writing about Hanna or about love would be poking the wound.

Even after Gertrud passed away in 1969, Keilson chose to remain silent about Hanna. After the war Hanna tried to commit suicide, but it is unclear if her desperation originated in the loss of her love. From a poem that was written by Hanna, and from Keilson’s descriptions of her, we may infer that he was as important to her as she was to him. She later settled in Israel, where she married an electrical engineer. In 1970 she wrote a letter to Keilson in which she expressed the hope that they would meet again; this rendezvous may have taken place in the Netherlands in the early 1980s, but not much is known about it. Hanna passed away in Israel in 2008.

In Hans Keilson’s sonnets and in his diary, love and horror are closely connected. He knew that as soon as the war was over he would return to his wife and child. His great love affair with Hanna could only last for the war’s duration.

Keilson was probably too much of a *mensch*, too civilized, to poke his wound for the benefit of literature. And perhaps he was right to avoid doing so; after all, he was first and foremost a psychoanalyst. Being too civilized is not always good for literature and not always good for survival. Nevertheless, with the publication of this diary, readers have access to some of Keilson’s finest writings. ♦

BCA

# O Holy Night!

*The surprising story of the cantique de Noël.*

BY PRISCILLA M. JENSEN

From time to time I’m forced to confront the ugly little corollary to my heart-leaping, car-singing, year-round love of Christmas music. Forced usually by Muzak, and more times than ought to be strictly necessary by enthusiastic choirs at midnight mass, I admit that there are Christmas songs that I really do not like. You know what I mean; you must harbor at least one visceral reaction to a chestnut or a red nose or a star or that little percussionist from Hell.

Over the years, I’ve indulged unkind scorn for unfavorites, including, till just lately, “O Holy Night.” Those vacuous words! Those insipid arpeggi! The lady who’s sure she can hit that high note!

But several Decembers ago, in stop-and-go traffic, I pushed a yard-sale cassette into the dash and heard something I’d unaccountably missed—the original “Minuit, Chrétiens,” sung in French.

“*Minuit, Chrétiens!*” it begins, “*c’est l’heure solennelle, où l’Homme Dieu descendit jusqu’à nous!*” “Midnight, Christians! It is the solemn hour when the Man-God came down to us!” That’s the ticket. Announce the good news right out of the gate! And on I listened, and became more and more fascinated. “*Le monde entier tressaille d’esperance*”—“the whole world trembles with hope,” a beautiful image of that shivering and astonished night.

But it was at the next verse that my ears really perked up. “*Le Rédempteur a brisé toute entrave / La terre est libre et le ciel est ouvert / Il voit un frère où n’était qu’un esclave / L’amour unit ceux qu’enchaînait le fer.*” The forceful image of a Redeemer as chain-breaker and brother of slaves

*Priscilla M. Jensen is assistant editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

had me madly guessing about the song’s history. It must be some time after the revolution because it’s genuinely Christian, but not terribly long afterwards, with its language of brotherhood unchained, its rather irregular theology, and the notable absence of a certain bourgeois namby-pamblitude that comes to mind when one thinks of later-19th-century France. The 1830s, or maybe the ’40s, I guessed, and once we’d extricated ourselves from the commute, I went to check it out.

And found a most astonishing story, with laurels, brickbats, calumny, anti-Semitism, cameo appearances by Brook Farm and *Action française*—in fact, enough nuts for the finest array of the 13 desserts traditional at Christmas feasts in the Languedoc, where “*Minuit, Chrétiens,*” an example of a *cantique de Noël*, was first performed in December 1847.

The little town of Roquemaure had recently fixed up the 17th-century organ in the parish church, according to most accounts, and M. l’abbé Petitjean requested, for a Christmas debut, a song from the local poet, lawyer, and wine merchant Placide Cappeau. At the time there was residing in the town a soprano, Mme. Emily Laurey, a friend of the renowned composer Adolphe Adam, who agreed to write music expressly for her to perform this new canticle of Christmas, and she did, in the church of St. Jean-Baptiste et Jean l’Évangéliste at the Christmas midnight mass 1847. And along with the Christ child, that night, was born an immortal song, as necessary to a French Christmas as “Silent Night” has become elsewhere.

Lots of the locals seem to have taken the composition to their hearts. There’s at least one report soon afterwards of *cantique fatigue*: Every bourgeois piano

along the main street of one provincial town was tinkling out the strains of Monsieur Adam's composition within weeks. But as it circulated more widely, it began to run into trouble—theological trouble, which has followed it almost to this day, and critical trouble, which is of course eternal.

First of all, you see, the poet Cappeau was a Voltairean free-thinker who made his Redeemer a sort of energetic redresser of inequities, including the burden of original sin. He was, says Gérard Cholvy, the late French historian to whom nearly all of this essay is indebted, “a republican, a democrat, and a socialist, in the sense that was understood in 1848.” From the start, Cappeau's theology was recognized as unconventional, indeed dubious. In the earliest version of “Minuit” the “Man-God” Christ descends to “stop the rage” of His Father, when orthodox theology says that Christ came from love, his and his Father's, for eternity, not for a drop-by to calm down the Old Man.

The first version also says that Christ came to erase the “original stain” of Adam's fall, but it was Cappeau who heretically wiped it out 30 years later, striking the line from his poem because he didn't believe in the “absurd doctrine” and emphasizing Christ as the redresser of inequality and injustice. By then as well, the pantheist writer Alphonse de Lamartine had called the “Minuit” “the *Marseillaise* of religion,” a judgment with which French churchmen were inclined to concur, though they didn't at all take it as praise.

Instead it neatly encapsulated, for many, the political as well as the theological problems of the “Minuit.” The “echoes of '48,” as a critical priest called them, the breezes that blew republicanism and socialism, nationalism and a sort of liberation theology, rustled the olive leaves of Roquemaure briskly on their way toward rattling the church's rose windows, yet another threatened storm after decades of peril and upheavals.

Since 1789, the French church had been outlawed, pillaged, given a modicum of legal rights, told it couldn't listen to the pope, told maybe it could, been given back some of its rights but

not others, had those too occasionally snatched away. Cappeau's heterodoxy came along at a time when the ecclesiastical establishment was very much out of patience with being insulted, and it was not kindly received.

Many were inclined to reject it on aesthetic grounds, too, as “the last word in useless bad taste.” The movement to revive Gregorian chant had started in France only a few years before; its proponents saw it not only as a beautiful and exalted way to approach God but as part of restoring the life of the church itself. Why would anyone prefer to “dress a clown up in a monk's hood” by shoehorning in “the product of the momentary conjunction of an Israélite and a Pelagian”—that is, of the Jewish composer Adam and the heretical lyricist Cappeau?

This harsh characterization was a later one, though it would have made sense to the contemporary critics of the “Minuit.” But I've discovered as I worked on this essay that while Pelagian do-goodery might be implied in Cappeau's words, the supposed Jewishness of Adolphe Adam is far from a demonstrated fact.

From curiosity I looked into Adam's biography. His father, also a musician, came to Paris from Alsace, where Adam has long been a surname—an Alsatian source says that first names, in their German forms, are commonly so used, and the first name in the list of examples is . . . Adam. His funeral was at his parish church in Montmartre, and I haven't found anything to suggest that his family were converts, which is usually in sentence two of any biography of Mendelssohn or Disraeli.

Of course, accuracy wouldn't much have concerned the song's critics, who thought calling something Jewish was the ultimate insult; the accusation above was launched in 1923 in a Catholic journal. Unsurprisingly their fascist contemporaries were even more unpleasant—*Action française* sneeringly called the composition “Jewish music” in the same year.

In North America the “Minuit”

seems to have quickly become indispensable to a Quebec Christmas service, imported in the 1850s by a Canadian who had studied music in France. The theological controversy wasn't unknown there, but the *cantique* became synonymous with Noël, and it was long an honor to be chosen soloist on Christmas Eve. Cholvy suggests jokingly at one point that everyone knows, presumably in Quebec as well as in France, that Protestants go to midnight mass on Christmas, too, just to hear the “Minuit, Chrétiens”!

The story is different in the United States. The slight air of elevated abstraction in the English version of 1855 with which we are all familiar,

“O Holy Night,” with its saccharine glaze of sweetly gleaming stars and angel voices and chocolate box Magi, seems quite a distance from the original. Where Cappeau tells the proud and haughty to regard their crèche and bow their high heads, John Sullivan Dwight's travelers are led by a “serenely beaming” light to stand in



Adolphe Adam

the stable with “glowing hearts.” This discrepancy is not so perplexing when one learns that Dwight was not only a Unitarian minister but a leading light in later transcendentalist circles, even unto being the director of the school at Bronson Alcott's Brook Farm.

“Minuit, Chrétiens” has remained sufficiently controversial in France that as late as 1990 the famous soprano Jessye Norman was forbidden to sing it in Notre-Dame de Paris. At the same time it's widely regarded as the sine qua non of a *joyeux Noël*. Perhaps first lady Melania Trump, who recently told some children that it's her favorite Christmas song, is of a mind with a group of French university students several decades ago. Cholvy had been lecturing about the history of this *cantique*, sung, he said, in “the old days” at Christmas. Oh, no, not the old days, said the students, producing battered lyric handouts from their parishes. “*Mais monsieur, on le chant chez nous.*” “We always sing it back home.” ♦

**“Say goodbye to Coach; Company rebrands itself as Tapestry”**

**—Toronto Sun**

**PARODY**

**“As Mugabe’s party rebrands itself, it is using a simplistic narrative that absolves both Mugabe and Zanu-PF of their political blunders. . .”**

**—Washington Post**

**“Grand Forks must brand itself as a Global Hawk base, commander says”**

**—Grand Forks Herald**

TO: SANTA CLAUS, OTHER DEPARTMENT HEADS  
FROM: TINSEL BUTTERBOUGH, DEPUTY ELF, MARKETING  
SUBJECT: Rebranding

Santa et al.,

The need to revolutionize our public-facing strategy has never been more important. Customer research shows the words most identified with our current brand are “Christmas,” “traditional,” and “legend” (or “myth”). While these have positive associations, they also are severely mono-channel, limiting both potential customer base and total market share. Additionally, the brand personality—a jolly but reclusive elderly male of apparently Northern European extraction who relies on a single, antiquated, and chronologically rigid distribution channel—is out of step with an integrated, ’net-centric, and fully customizable User Experience.

Consumers today are used to getting what they want, when they want it, and to be able to communicate directly to company representatives about issues they might have. It goes without saying that any brand that does not interface directly with its customer base through all available social media, from Facebook and Twitter to Instagram and Google Hangouts, is cutting itself off not only from prospective customers but from future brand ambassadors.

For illustration purposes, consider Nikki Wilson of 8344 Maple Avenue, Columbus, Ohio. Last year at Christmas, Nikki asked for an Easy-Bake Ultimate Oven, a Barbie Dreamhouse, and a pony. She received a matching pen-and-pencil set, a financial-planning-for-kids board game, and a wool sweater that makes her itchy. This year Nikki dropped Santa and created a wish list on Amazon.

TBH, the idea that someone should have to write an actual letter, put it in an envelope, put a stamp on it, and take it to the post office to be mailed and delivered days (or even weeks) later is completely foreign to our target demo and, increasingly, even their parents.

Market analytics also show that a straight, white, cisgender male no longer resonates across all demographics, especially those in our most loyal 18-and-under customer base. The ambiguity of “Santa Claus”—aka “Saint Nicholas,” aka “Kris Kringle”—creates confusion as to our unique selling proposition. And none of the identities delivers a clear sense of our mission, vision, values, or long-term view.

In short: In a rapidly evolving marketplace, we must reposition ourselves for impactful disruption to obtain maximum buy-in from all stakeholders. I suggest our chief action item for the new year should be to architect a top-to-bottom rebranding campaign, beginning with aspirational statements—What is Santa’s main passion? What story does he want to tell about himself?—followed by adoption of best-of-breed practices that build on our legacy business while incorporating machine learning and AI to accelerate our transformation into a bleeding-edge, 21st-century global operation.

And needless to say, we need a new mascot. The old white guy isn’t cutting it any more. Feedback welcome.

SY,  
T. Butterbough