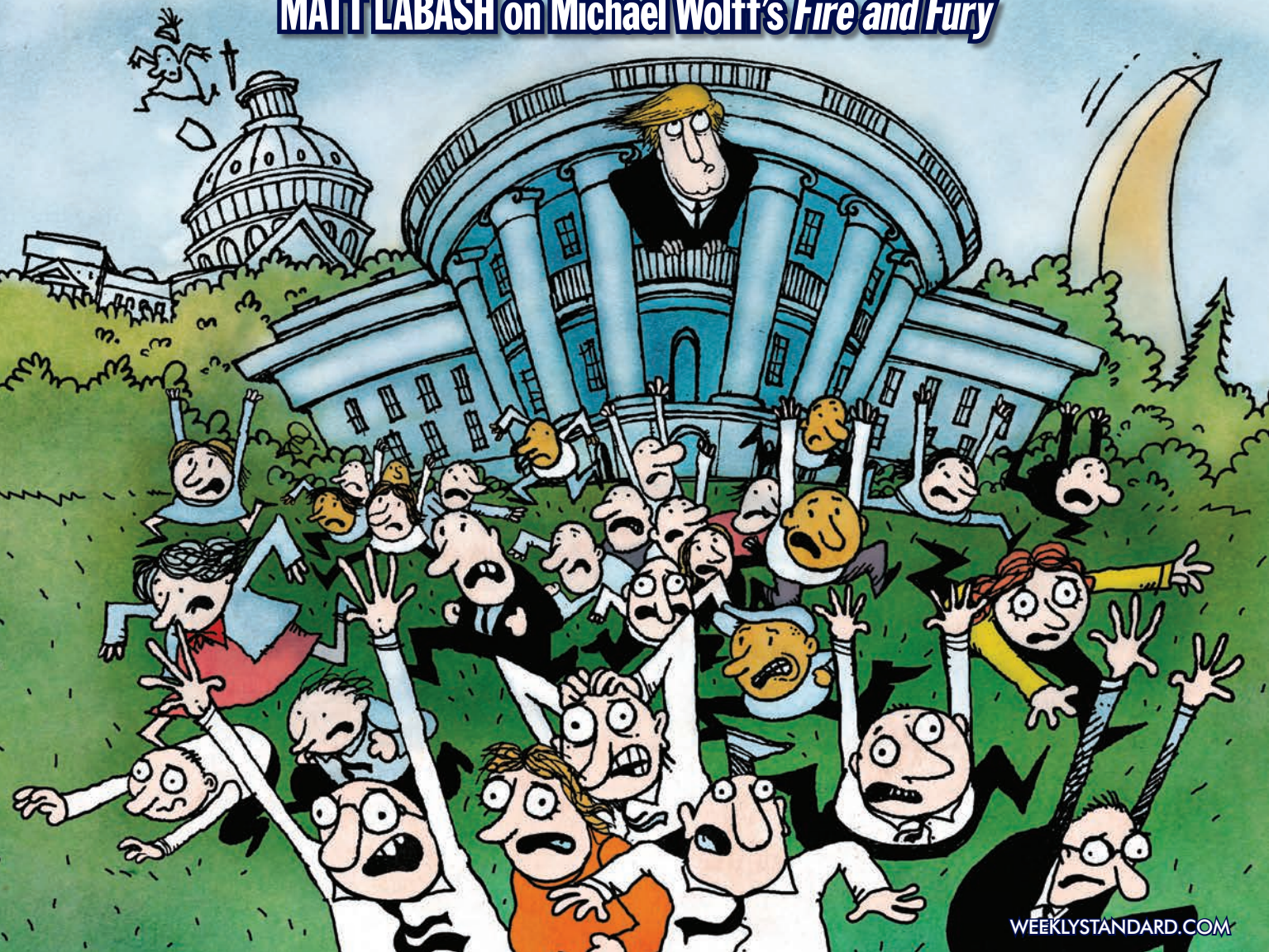


# the weekly Standard

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## THE BOOK THAT ATE WASHINGTON

MATT LABASH on Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury*



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# Bruce Cole, 1938-2018

It was one of the ironies of the George W. Bush presidency that a supposedly unlettered president should appoint to the federal government's cultural endowments two chairmen who were the most accomplished men ever to hold their respective positions. To the National Endowment for the Arts, Bush appointed the gifted poet and essayist Dana Gioia. To oversee the National Endowment for the Humanities, he appointed Bruce Cole, an equally distinguished scholar of Renaissance art and comparative literature. Bruce, who was a good friend to this magazine and many of its writers



Bruce Cole

and editors, died unexpectedly last week at the age of 79.

The NEH is constantly imperiled by the remorseless pull of O'Sullivan's law, first articulated by the great journalist John O'Sullivan: Any institution that is not explicitly right-wing will become left-wing over time. Bruce knew what he was getting into. He knew, too, the conservative case against federal funding of cultural projects; he might have even agreed with it. But he reasoned that if the endowments are to exist—and after more than 50 years and five Republican administrations, they show no sign of

going away—they should be subject to countervailing pressure against O'Sullivan's law, away from scholarly and political enthusiasms and toward an appreciation for the great patrimony of Western art and literature. And if that pressure can come from the top, all the better. He did a lot of good at NEH, with programs that were notable for their straightforward, non-ideological evangelization of American history and art.

No one questioned his bona fides. His magnum opus, *The Renaissance Artist at Work*, was comprehensive of its subject, ranging from the brush techniques of the period to the kind of political intrigues an artist might encounter in a world of warring city-states. It went through multiple editions and became indispensable to students and scholars alike. *Art of the Western World*, cowritten with Adelheid Gealt in 1989, was the basis for a nine-part series on PBS. He was fettered with awards and fellowships and honorary doctorates from institutions around the world.

Tussles with layers of civil servants—some well-meaning, others not so much—never wore him down or dampened his good cheer. After Bush's two terms Bruce stayed in harness as a freelance scourge, pointing out the absurdities of our great museums and art galleries and lamenting their failures of nerve. His writing appeared frequently in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New Criterion*, and, we note proudly, THE WEEKLY STANDARD. Late in life he even took to activism. He served on the board of the Civic Arts Society and accepted an appointment by President Obama to the board of the Eisenhower Memorial Commission. There he served as the voice of reason and taste against Frank Gehry's silly design.

In person, Bruce dressed—always elegantly—in the tweedy manner of the bygone professoriate. He was courtly, soft-spoken, and quietly witty. His laugh rumbled from great well-springs of merriment that allowed

## What They Were Saying

**'The two sides sit within shouting distance, but when North and South Korea this week arranged the first official talks in more than two years, liaison officials spoke using desktop telephone consoles each the size of a small refrigerator.'**

—Reuters, January 5, 2018

NO, THAT'S WHAT I AM SAYING. JON SNOW IS NOT DEAD. HE CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD. YES, I'M BEING SERIOUS. AND THE DRAGONS? WELL, THEY GET BIGGER. BUT ONE OF THEM DIES AND TURNS INTO AN UNDEAD DRAGON. NO, I'M NOT KIDDING. IT'S BAD. BUT YOU KNOW DAENERYS AND JON ARE RELATED, RIGHT? OH, YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT? WELL, YEAH, IT GETS PRETTY AWKWARD. NO, THE LAST SEASON ISN'T UNTIL 2019. OR IN YOUR CASE, 2027.



him to look into the yawning abyss of modern American culture and not lose heart. We can think of no better exemplar in scholarship, government, or friendship. ♦

## Oprah in the Oval?

We will admit to still sometimes shaking our head at the realization that Donald Trump is the president of the United States, though apparently not just his ardent fans but liberal America, too, is now ready to embrace the idea that billionaire TV stars are a good recruiting pool for the Oval Office. After host Seth Meyers joked about Oprah Winfrey running for president and she gave a fiery speech at the Golden Globes, the speculation in the political press was instantaneous and effusive.

NBC's official Twitter account published a picture of Winfrey, saying, "Nothing but respect for OUR future president." NBC later retracted the tweet, blaming it on a third party. (Which raises the question why a major TV network needs to outsource its Twittering.)

Anyway, we understand why Oprah's name is being bandied about. She's certainly beloved, though how long she'd remain so in a political campaign is open to question. And she can certainly deliver a speech, though we were a little troubled by everyone's favorite line from her Golden Globes remarks: "What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have." This admonition to speak "your truth" is being received as some sort of pointed challenge to Trump. But isn't one of the lessons of the last few years that everyone insisting on *their* version of the truth is a recipe for political dysfunction?

THE SCRAPBOOK is so old we remember a time when a politician's explicitly invoking the notion that truth is subjective marked the end rather than the beginning of his career. In 2004, New Jersey governor Jim McGreevey resigned, saying, "My truth is that I am a gay American." Well, this



LISA MAREE WILLIAMS / GETTY

## PyeongChang 2018



RANBYZ

declaration was a polite way of glossing over the real truth: that McGreevey had cheated on his wife with a man he had corruptly put on the state payroll, thus necessitating a hasty exit from the governor's mansion.

Of course, TV fame, a substantial fortune, and a sketchy relationship with the truth aren't the only things Oprah has in common with Trump. For decades, she's been America's premier peddler of snake-oil—promoting everything from anti-vaccination pseudoscience to new age religions repackaging the false prosperity gospel. (Remember when she

promoted *The Secret*? Just "ask, believe, and receive" and all your dreams come true!) When you think about it, Oprah makes scams such as Trump University look insufficiently ambitious.

And what of their shared narcissism? Remember how everyone guffawed that Trump had a fake *Time* magazine with him Photoshopped on the cover at one of his golf clubs? He's got nothing on Oprah, who started her own magazine and has been on the cover of every issue for its 17 years of existence.

All of which is to say, the similarities are discomfiting enough that if she runs for president, don't count her out. ♦

## The Other Iran

You've probably read recently about the wave of unrest in Iran that has led to at least 24 deaths and 8,000 arrests. Many of the protesters have chanted for the "death" of Iran's leaders, President Hassan Rouhani and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.



But not everybody inside Iran is dissatisfied. Some are quite comfortable under the theocratic regime—and routinely document their exploits on the Internet. Western media have discovered an Instagram account called @TheRichKidsofTehran. The photos it posts (see left) look a lot like what you'd see from youngsters in the United States, with an occasional headscarf or Iranian flag thrown in.

There are subjects in sunglasses making pouty faces at mirrors while holding iPhones, young women in bikinis unwinding at pool parties and on luxury yachts, and plenty of Western-style conspicuous consumption. The account is where "attractive 20-somethings flaunt \$1,000 Hermès sandals and frolic poolside at lavish mansions in a capital where, perhaps in another part of town, the desperate hawk their own kidneys to feed their families," the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

It seems that the Iranian nuclear deal that unfroze at least \$100 billion in assets—including \$400 million in cash that the Obama administration dropped off in an unmarked cargo plane—didn't all go toward bankrolling Hezbollah, destabilizing the Middle East, and developing nuclear weapons. Reviewing the Instagram photos, *Yahoo! News* says "that money seems to have found its way into the pockets of the wealthy elite rather than for the benefit of a society in dire need of jobs, credit, and infrastructure."

Iranian police routinely crack down on ordinary citizens for failing to wear proper hijabs and for drinking alcohol. But the regime also limits Internet access, so few Iranians are likely to be among the 133,000 followers of @TheRichKidsofTehran and can't see the wealthy so brazenly flouting the rules (assuming the whole thing isn't some sort of CIA disinformation campaign).

The account reveals that regardless of religion, geography, and ethnicity, humans share a thirst for liberty—including the liberty to be Instagram narcissists. ♦

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## Artisanal Sex?

Recently I visited a small university town. A friend recommended I visit a certain downtown coffee shop known for its exquisite espressos and Americanos. “It’s pretty hipster,” my friend warned, and it was. Everyone present was between the ages of, I guessed, 17 and 35. The men wore clothes that could generously be called fitted. The women’s outfits seemed, to my admittedly traditional sensibilities, calculated to offend: not because they were revealing or immodest but because their patterns and colors seemed haphazard, aggressively unbecoming. The music was strange to my ear but not unpleasant; some kind of brass band, accompanied by a vocalist singing in a foreign language I could not place.

While I was waiting for a friendly tattooed and tobogganed barista to assemble my Americano, something caught my attention. The brassy music I heard came from an LP turntable. It was a fine-looking silvery machine dating from maybe the 1980s, with a tinted cover. A long row of LPs extended along the wall.

I don’t know what hipsterism means, exactly, and I doubt anybody does; Googling the term, I find, doesn’t help. But it seems to me that that turntable was revelatory. Hipsters are known for craft beer and 19th-century facial hair and vintage typewriters and wildly complicated methods for making coffee. The word “artisanal” is always near at hand in discussions of hipsterism. It is a backward-looking phenomenon.

Hipsters like things to be labor-intensive. Why wouldn’t those nice young people who ran the coffee shop simply pipe in music from a satellite radio channel or from Spotify? Or even from compact discs, which are far

easier to buy and play than LPs? One of them, at least, felt there was something to be gained by finding and purchasing a functioning LP turntable and records to play on it. Is there a discernible superiority in the sound produced by a needle and record? I don’t know, but somehow, notwithstanding my navy blazer and white button-down shirt and absence of facial hair, I feel



I can work with a guy who assumes things are probably more worthwhile if they cause a bit of trouble.

Here’s a question, though. Will hipsters come to apply that principle, or that attitude, to sex? The “hook-up culture,” in other words, or the culture of instant gratification, to use a phrase that took off in the 1980s, seems inimical to hipsterism in this sense. If you’re invested in making a BLT with sautéed kale or watching movies on reel-to-reel projectors, are you the sort of person who’ll have sex with mere acquaintances and even strangers merely because urge and opportunity happen to meet? Humans are complicated and inconsistent things, but the answer would seem to be “maybe not.”

The older ethic, if it’s fair to sum-

marize a vast array of religious and cultural practices over many centuries, held that sexual intercourse is only permitted once the male pursuer overcomes a series of arbitrary but agreed-upon barriers between him and the pursued female—familial oversight, financial viability, her own interest, religious sanction. Only after investing a great deal of time and attention to the desired end would the object yield. Those of a more liberal persuasion will have a thousand hot objections to this paradigm, but it was the ordinary way of living for many centuries, and it seems unwise to dismiss it with fancy “-ist” epithets: sexist, patriarchalist.

The LP turntable makes me wonder if sexual mores in North America may move in a surprising direction. I note for instance the 2014 reissue of Wendy Shalit’s book *A Return to Modesty*. In 1999 Shalit, then a recent graduate of Williams College, made the case for the older sexual ethic, especially for females. She was attacked relentlessly by social libertarians, but in the book’s new foreword she could write hopefully that “teen pregnancy is at an all-time low” and that “the latest national study of sex on campus suggests that contemporary college students

are actually having sex less frequently than their predecessors, and widespread discontent with the hook-up scene is no longer a theory, but a fact.” The recent succession of firings and resignations over accusations of sexual harassment (and worse) would seem to reveal a deep impatience with the libertinism bequeathed to us by our baby-boom elders. Maybe the generation that gave up instant coffee will also give up instant gratification.

Whoever hipsters are, whatever it is they want, maybe their aesthetic and attitudinal weirdness signifies an urge among the young to take time and trouble with whatever one wishes to consume. There is hope in that.

BARTON SWAIM

# A Pakistan Crackdown

On New Year's Day, Donald Trump fulminated on Twitter that the United States had “foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!” Three days later, his administration announced it would suspend military aid to Pakistan on the grounds that the country's government shelters and funds the very terrorist organizations that the aid money was designed to help Pakistan fight.

Previous administrations have delayed or reduced these funds for the same reason—this year they could amount to more than \$1 billion—but the Trump administration says it's cutting the money off completely unless Pakistan takes “decisive action.”

It's a bold move. And the right one.

Unlike many other bold moves of the Trump administration, this one received only muted criticism. A *New York Times* op-ed titled “How Not to Engage with Pakistan,” for instance, didn't dispute the essence of Trump's allegation. Its author, Richard Olson, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan under President Obama, censured the administration mainly for making policy so openly. “Pakistan, like most countries,” Olson wrote, “reacts very badly to public attempts to force its hand.” That's true, and Pakistan reacted very badly. The country's foreign minister, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, said the two countries no longer have any alliance.

U.S. news coverage of the dispute employed bland, generalized language to describe Islamabad's offenses. Pakistan's government isn't “cracking down on terrorist networks” and has failed to “rein in militants.” State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert spoke of Pakistan's need to “deny safe haven to or lawfully detain those terrorists and militants who threaten U.S. interests.”

All true, but it doesn't convey the essence of what Pakistan has done for years—what Trump tweeted so succinctly if undiplomatically. The country doesn't simply tolerate terrorist organizations or go after them with insufficient fervor; it actively funds and abets these groups for both nationalist and ideological reasons. As Tom Joscelyn and

Bill Roggio of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies have tirelessly documented, Pakistan zealously backs our enemies even as it takes our money.

Pakistan's gravest concern is its far larger and wealthier rival, India. Since Partition established their borders in 1947, the two countries have gone to war four times, and each time Pakistan has suffered defeat. Pakistani leaders believe that in order to counter Indian influence, they must maintain alliances with radical Islamic terrorist groups that fear and loathe the Hindu nation as much as Pakistan does. By allying with such groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan not only keeps out Indian influence but also creates an anti-Indian “fallback” territory in the event of a fifth war.

This is the dominant strategic paradigm inside Pakistan's military and its intelligence services. But it's not their only reason for backing jihadist groups; there's

also the ideology itself. Many Pakistani national security officials, from low-ranking soldiers to senior leaders, share the Islamist ideology and actively encourage the country to support it.

Pakistan supplies the Taliban with arms and with territory for training camps. We know this because Taliban commanders have freely said so. Pakistan arms the al Qaeda-affiliated Haqqani network, responsible for many deadly attacks in Afghanistan. Although the Haqqani headquarters in Waziristan (on the Afghan border) is well known, and although the Pakistani military has conducted antiterrorist operations there many times, the group remains unmolested.

The Taliban's central leadership committee—the Quetta Shura Council—is based in Quetta, Pakistan. Taliban leaders are essentially free to operate out of many urban centers in Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Taiba, responsible for appalling terrorist attacks in both India and Afghanistan, openly operates recruitment centers throughout Pakistan. It was Lashkar-e-Taiba that carried out the 2008 suicide attacks in Mumbai that killed 166 people over the course of three days. As for al Qaeda itself, it's no coincidence that Osama bin Laden's compound was in Abbottabad—the home of Pakistan's military academy.



Residents of Lahore weigh in on the new policy.

The Trump administration's policy change on military aid is intended to pressure Pakistan into confronting these and allied organizations. But withholding money, however sensible, isn't enough. We will have to impose other and more severe penalties. This begins with naming and sanctioning Pakistani government officials and entities who support jihadist groups. Depending on the behavior of the Pakistani government, it might include a more fundamental change: formally designating Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism. There are four countries on the State Department's list: Iran, Syria, Sudan, and North Korea. Those regimes have "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism," to use the State Department's official language. Pakistan indisputably qualifies for inclusion.

Such a heavy step might lead Pakistan to deny the United States use of its territory for Afghan operations, which will require our forces to use the Russian-influenced territories to the north as bases of operation. But the region will not cease to be the globe's jihadism nerve center until Pakistan ceases to see it as a tool of the state. A progressively tougher stance towards Pakistan's terrorism backers will produce geopolitical benefits elsewhere, just as our weakness and naïveté encouraged the country flagrantly to disregard American interests in the first place. We may not be able to pry Pakistan from its paranoid dependency on jihadism, but we don't have to fund it either. ♦

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## Getting Smart

It should have been a simple vote to reauthorize an important law, but ideologues allied with exhibitionists to turn it into a circus. Throw in a badly informed Trump tweet, and we had a carnival of folly—which is to say, an ordinary day on Capitol Hill.

We're describing the House debate on the reauthorization of Section 702 of the FISA Amendments Act, a law that allows the U.S. government to monitor foreigners talking to foreigners on foreign soil. You wouldn't think such a thing could be controversial, but you'd be wrong: Privacy activists persist against all evidence in believing that Section 702 allows the government to "spy on Americans."

It does no such thing. The law is the result of a hard-won compromise in 2008 between the Bush administration and its critics—before Democrats and most progressives took an eight-year hiatus from caring about civil liberties. The law as currently written allows the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on the communications of foreigners outside our country, as long as that monitoring doesn't target Americans (citizen or resident alien) or anyone physically inside this country. There are many checks on abuse: The government

may not target foreigners simply to gather information on Americans ("reverse-targeting") and all 702-authorized spying must be approved by both the attorney general and the director of national intelligence.

Nothing about Section 702 poses a genuine privacy threat to Americans.

There may be reasonable points of disagreement on the law, but reasonableness wasn't much in evidence during the House debate on reauthorization, with multiple bills restricting data collection vying for consideration and only a few members seeming to know what the debate was about. Meanwhile in the Senate, Kentucky's Rand Paul—as usual unwilling to offer any reasonable compromise and preferring press conferences instead—began loudly and ignorantly threatening to filibuster the bill when it came to the Senate.

House leaders hadn't expected much of a debate on

702 reauthorization and so hadn't done much in the way of whipping votes, with the result that Section 702 itself—an essential tool in the fight against international terrorism—appeared to be in jeopardy.

Into the turmoil rode Donald Trump with a characteristically mad-cap tweet: "House

votes on controversial FISA ACT today.' This is the act that may have been used, with the help of the discredited and phony Dossier, to so badly surveil and abuse the Trump Campaign by the previous administration and others?" He was referring to Obama administration officials wantonly "unmasking" the identities of Trump campaign officials in intelligence reports, which had nothing to do with 702 surveillance.

As the whole spectacle descended into chaos, House Republicans and the president's own national security staff prevailed on him to clean up the mess. Hence a follow-up tweet an hour later: "With that being said, I have personally directed the fix to the unmasking process since taking office and today's vote is about foreign surveillance of foreign bad guys on foreign land. We need it! Get smart!"

In the end, the House voted 256 to 164 to reauthorize Section 702. We're glad of the result—though saddened to know so many members of the U.S. House want to deprive our national security officials of one of their most important tools. Now the bill goes to the Senate, where it will again meet with Rand Paul's penchant for all-or-nothing grandstanding. We'll be watching. Let's hope the president won't be. ♦



WILLIAM KRISTOL

# Of Storms and Whirlwinds

**F**ederalist 68, by Alexander Hamilton, is not much read today. It consists of a defense of the original Electoral College in which the electors, chosen by the people, would assemble in each state and deliberate on their choice for president. This version of the Electoral College never really took hold and has faded into the mists of history. So this essay might seem irrelevant.

But *Federalist 68* is if anything more relevant than ever today. That's because it also makes an argument about the importance of the character of the person who will be president.

Here's Hamilton:

The process of election affords a moral certainty, that the office of President will never fall to the lot of any man who is not in an eminent degree endowed with the requisite qualifications. Talents for low intrigue, and the little arts of popularity, may alone suffice to elevate a man to the first honors in a single State; but it will require other talents, and a different kind of merit, to establish him in the esteem and confidence of the whole Union, or of so considerable a portion of it as would be necessary to make him a successful candidate for [President]. It will not be too strong to say, that there will be a constant probability of seeing the station filled by characters pre-eminent for ability and virtue. And this will be thought no inconsiderable recommendation of the Constitution, by those who are able to estimate the share which the executive in every government must necessarily have in its good or ill administration.

We were reminded again and again in the first year of the presidency of Donald Trump of “the share which the executive in every government must necessarily have in its good or ill

administration.” We will be reminded again and again of this in 2018.

This past week, the Trump administration, guided by its senior national security officials and consistent with the judgment of virtually every senior official in the Bush and Obama administrations, strongly supported the reauthorization of section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. The surveillance authority in question, though crucial to our national security and safeguarded from abuse, has been under attack from demagogues on the left and right. The administration reiterated its support for reauthorization Wednesday night as the House of Representatives readied for a vote on Thursday.

Then the president unleashed a tweet Thursday morning that endangered the very legislation his own administration had endorsed:

“House votes on controversial FISA ACT today.” This is the act that may have been used, with the help of the discredited and phony Dossier, to so badly surveil and abuse the Trump Campaign by the previous administration and others?

The president's aides prevailed upon him to “clarify” his position an hour later:

With that being said, I have personally directed the fix to the unmasking process since taking office and today's vote is about foreign surveillance of foreign bad guys on foreign land. We need it! Get smart!

And the House, to its credit, shrugged off the president's ill-timed mixed messages and approved the surveillance program.

But the dueling tweets were a

reminder of the risk of having a president who “is not in an eminent degree endowed with the requisite qualifications.” Even if the ship of state maneuvered past presidential irresponsibility in this case, can it do so successfully time and again?

Meanwhile, one of today's leaders of the decayed husk of the religious right, Jerry Falwell Jr. has tweeted: “Complaining about the temperament of the @POTUS or saying his behavior is not presidential is no longer relevant. @realDonaldTrump has single-handedly changed the definition of what behavior is ‘presidential’ from phony, failed & rehearsed to authentic, successful & down to earth.”

Falwell is wrong. No one can change the definition of what behavior is presidential because that definition fundamentally depends on what our form of government requires, not on what one individual prefers.

As Hamilton put it a few years after *Federalist 68*, when serving in the Washington administration:

The truth unquestionably is, that the only path to a subversion of the republican system of the Country is, by flattering the prejudices of the people, and exciting their jealousies and apprehensions, to throw affairs into confusion, and bring on civil commotion. . . . When a man unprincipled in private life desperate in his fortune, bold in his temper, possessed of considerable talents, having the advantage of military habits—despotic in his ordinary demeanour—known to have scoffed in private at the principles of liberty—when such a man is seen to mount the hobby horse of popularity—to join in the cry of danger to liberty—to take every opportunity of embarrassing the General Government & bringing it under suspicion—to flatter and fall in with all the nonsense of the zealots of the day—It may justly be suspected that his object is to throw things into confusion that



he may “ride the storm and direct the whirlwind.”

Trump lacks “the advantage of military habits.” He lacks the discipline to truly “ride the storm and direct the whirlwind.” But he does seem more than able to create a storm and incite a whirlwind that can do considerable damage. Disorder is its own threat, even if it is not in this case laying the

precondition for despotism. Enough civil commotion, as Hamilton foresaw, can threaten our form of government—the great achievement for which the Founders labored, which subsequent generations fought to defend and improve, and of which citizens of the United States have always been proud.

Self-government is an experiment. It could still fail. ◆

COMMENT ◆ STEPHEN F. HAYES

## The Year Trump Turns Left

One fact of the first year of Donald Trump’s presidency is that the policy results have been pretty conservative. For some conservatives, this is enough to sustain a great enthusiasm for Trump and his presidency. For others, like me, the concerns about Trump’s erratic behavior, his casual dishonesty, and his potential for catastrophic decision-making remain paramount. Few in either camp would mistake this moment for the dawning of a new era of conservatism. But with narrow Republican majorities in Congress and a president utterly unfamiliar with the principles that shape modern American conservatism, it’s not nothing either.

The sources of that success date back to May 12, 2016, when Trump met with House speaker Paul Ryan at the headquarters of the Republican National Committee. Trump was the presumptive GOP nominee and Ryan a Trump skeptic. They met twice that day. During the second meeting, which included several advisers from Trump’s retinue and a few of Ryan’s colleagues and congressional aides, the Wisconsin Republican attempted to give Trump an adumbrated version of the 25-minute PowerPoint presentation on debt and entitlements that he’s been giving for years. Ryan was just a couple of minutes into the presentation



when Trump, not terribly interested in the details of Medicare premium-support proposals, cut him off. Trump told Ryan that he was happy he was so passionate about policy and that, if elected, he’d let the speaker drive it from the Hill.

And so it came to pass. Ryan managed to wrangle the House into passing something that loosely resembled

Obamacare reform before it died in the Senate, and he then drove Trump’s tax reform success. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell failed to deliver on health care, but forced tax reform through his chamber. Thanks to them, Trump’s largest legislative accomplishment was there for the signing.

Conventional wisdom holds that Trump and Trumpism have dramatically reshaped the Republican party and even movement conservatism. That’s true, if regrettable. But it’s equally true that conservatives and Republicans have used Trump to achieve conservative ends in his first year.

Yet on January 10, *Politico* published a report that suggests Trump is headed in a dramatically different direction in his second year: “Republican leaders are considering skipping passage of a GOP budget this year—a blow to the party’s weakened fiscal hawks that would squash all 2018 efforts to revamp

entitlements or repeal Obamacare. . . . Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has argued that he cannot pass controversial deficit-reduction legislation using powerful budget procedures with his new 51-vote majority.”

The news wasn’t entirely surprising. In late December, McConnell sketched out a 2018 agenda light on attempts to limit government and heavy on bipartisanship. Ryan, by contrast, told *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* that he hoped to persuade his congressional colleagues and the president to be ambitious—eyeing health care and welfare reform, as well as the entitlement reforms that have been his focus for the past decade.

McConnell is cautious and focuses on obtaining and holding power. In December 2014, after Republicans had taken back the Senate in the second conservative wave of the Obama presidency, McConnell shared with the *Washington Post* his modest goal: Don’t mess up.

It’s political prevent defense. It’s uninspiring and ineffective. And there are massive problems facing the country, debt among the most urgent, that require something more than muddling through. But the momentum and the president are clearly with McConnell’s modest agenda and against Ryan’s bolder plans.

Budget negotiations to get the Pentagon out from under spending caps that have hurt readiness will likely lead to the lifting of similar caps on domestic spending. Some congressional Republicans are pushing to bring back earmarks, the mechanism for pork-barrel spending, and Trump supports their Swampy call. The president is encouraging an infrastructure plan—maybe as large as \$1 trillion—that he sells in Keynesian language similar to that used by Barack Obama about the 2009 stimulus.

When we look back in January 2019, we should expect that the results of Trump’s second year will more closely resemble those we might expect of a centrist Democrat than a Republican. Conservatives liked 2017. They could be pretty disappointed in 2018. To say nothing of a Democratic House in 2019. ◆

# The GOP Triumphs of 2017

For 37 years, efforts to open the remote Alaskan tundra known as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling for oil and natural gas got nowhere. It's a barren, uninhabitable area that looks like the surface of an asteroid. But environmental groups and their Democratic allies treated it like a rare tourist attraction and insisted its pristine ugliness must be preserved.

Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) badgered his colleagues for years to allow the energy riches of ANWR's "non-wilderness 1002 Area" to be exploited. But it was the senator's pals, House Republicans, who kept this from happening in 2005. And when Stevens died in a plane crash in 2010, ANWR looked to be forbidden to energy companies forever.

No more. ANWR was opened for development as part of the Republican tax reform enacted last month. The tax bill became law through a legislative process called "reconciliation" that made profit-making assets attractive to lawmakers. Opening ANWR meant tax cuts could be bigger.

This was a relatively small Republican victory, but just one of many that made 2017 the "most consequential year from a right-of-center point of view," Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell says, since he was elected in 1984.

Another conservative surprise in tax reform was the elimination of the individual mandate requiring everyone to buy health insurance or pay a fine. It was the idea of Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas). Since more people will be opting out of Obamacare, less money will be needed to fund subsidies and thus available for tax cuts. The ANWR opening, by

the way, was pushed by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska).

There were much bigger victories than these. The corporate tax rate was slashed like never before—to 21 percent from 35 percent. The top rate on personal income dropped to 37 percent from 39 percent. And of special interest to middle-income taxpayers, the standard deduction was doubled from \$12,000 to \$24,000 for joint filers.

When McConnell talks about the triumphs of 2017, he starts with the confirmation of a conservative Supreme Court justice, Neil Gorsuch. McConnell made that possible after Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016 by refusing to let President Obama

fill the vacancy. It was filled by President Trump.

Two more victories. The federal appeals courts, one rung below the Supreme Court, were created in 1891. And no president since 1891 has seen more appeals judges confirmed in his first year than Trump did in 2017. Also, Congress wiped out 15 Obama regulations by invoking the Congressional Review Act.

How did all this happen with a new president who lacks an ideology and stressed trade and immigration as a candidate? Both those issues divide Republicans. But that's about all he came with, while Republicans were loaded for bear with proposals that simmered during the Obama years.

Especially worrisome to conservatives was Trump's chumminess with Democrats. As recently as three or four years ago, he donated to Senator Chuck Schumer's campaign and to other Democrats besides.

Tax reform? He had thoughts on the narrower matter of corporate tax

cuts. Repeal and replace Obamacare? He appeared to pick that up during the campaign because so many Republican voters responded to it. Abortion? Pro-abortion as a Democrat, he became pro-life as a Republican.

Fears that Trump would try to impose a populist agenda on Republicans have not panned out. There just wasn't enough of one to fill his needs as president. Instead, he's attached himself to the conservative agenda of Senate and House Republicans as if he invented it. And he's held on to his loathing of the left and political correctness, which appealed to conservatives even when they were leery of Trump's character traits.

A key to GOP victories in 2017 was that Trump and Republicans came together. It wasn't a political love story, but without acknowledging it, Trump had to give up the most to make the relationship work. He became a conservative, a skin-deep one anyway. They inured themselves to his tweets, bravado, and ADD.

In 2017, Trump focused on trade and immigration less than expected. That's likely to change in 2018. But maybe not. If the defenestration of Steve Bannon is felt, we'll see the result in White House positions on these issues that provoke the former adviser's disapproval.

McConnell was a backbencher when tax reform was enacted in 1986. He thinks the GOP-only 2017 version is better. Back then, it was a bipartisan effort. Republicans had to give up things they wanted to hold the parties together.

When Republicans initially talked to Democrats about a tax compromise in 2017, they quickly realized a deal was impossible. Republicans would have had to give up too much. The bill would have reflected class envy and wealth transfer and the views of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren.

"We would never have gotten business rates down as we did," McConnell says. The Trump administration wouldn't be "a pro-growth administration." And for Republicans, 2017 wouldn't have been quite so consequential. ♦



# Rise of the Gerontocracy

In 1898, when the 42-year-old George Bernard Shaw stepped down as drama critic of London's *Saturday Review*, he introduced his successor, Max Beerbohm, 26, with these words: "The younger generation is knocking at the door, and as I open it there steps sprightly in the incomparable Max."

I was reminded of this famous line when, earlier this month, 83-year-old Sen. Orrin Hatch, Republican of Utah, ended speculation by announcing that he would not seek an eighth term. Hatch, who was once an amateur boxer, explained that "every good fighter knows when to hang up the gloves." But he might also have been thinking of the future: first, that at the end of his next term, Senator Hatch would be 90 years old; and second, that in opening this particular door, a rising generation of Utah Republicans could squeeze through for a shot at the title.

As if on cue, there stepped sprightly in the incomparable Mitt Romney, whose candidacy for Hatch's seat now seems inevitable. But the fact that this generational changing of the guard would involve a man in his eighties making room for a 70-year-old went largely unremarked. And why not? Romney was the Republican presidential nominee six years ago, and his age at that time was never an issue. Nor is it now.

This is an extraordinary development in American politics. Not so many decades ago, Romney's age would have discouraged his candidacy and certainly scuttled his chances for success. Now it is neither whispered nor mentioned out loud, but wholly irrelevant. And yet as recently as 1952, when 62-year-old Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected to the White House, he became the old-

est person in almost a century to be elected president.

By the time, eight years later, 70-year-old Ike laid down the burdens of office, he had fully earned his status, in the public's mind, as elder statesman, a distinction magnified by the relative youth (43) of his successor, John F. Kennedy. Indeed, in that same year (1960), so geriatric was Western



**Depending on your viewpoint, the tendency of lawmakers to hang on either thwarts rising aspirants or allows the wise and experienced to flourish.**

democratic leadership that influential journalists, such as the *New York Times's* James Reston, routinely complained about the antiquated quartet of elderly gentlemen—Eisenhower, Britain's Harold Macmillan (66), Konrad Adenauer of West Germany (84), France's Charles de Gaulle (70)—charged with fighting the Cold War.

In retrospect, of course, led by the likes of these giants, the Western world enjoyed an embarrassment of riches, especially in comparison to the genuinely sclerotic leadership of the Soviet Union. But retrospection is not one of journalism's habits, any more than youth is a virtue in itself. It is worth noting that both major-party nominees for president last year—Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump—were approximately the same age as old Ike when he retired. So, for that matter, was Ronald Reagan when he was sworn into office (1981).

Of course, the obvious explanation for all this is that, thanks to advance-

ments in medicine and pharmacology, people are living much longer than they used to. And that, combined with the natural inclination of politicians to hog the limelight, has led to a governing class largely dominated by senior citizens. The chief of the executive branch, Donald Trump, will be 72 years old this year. Two of the nine justices of the Supreme Court are in their eighties. In Orrin Hatch's Senate, fully one-quarter of members are above the age of 70, and of those, eight senators are in their eighties—including 84-year-old Dianne Feinstein, who has yet to decide whether or not she will seek reelection this year. The great left hopes of last year were 69-year-old Hillary Clinton and 75-year-old Bernie Sanders; the great left hope of 2020 will be 71-year-old Elizabeth Warren.

To be sure, and apart from the extension of human longevity, this is not necessarily a bad thing. In the mid-20th century, when the Progressive-era reform of seniority ruled Capitol Hill, the liberal complaint about Congress was that power rested disproportionately in the hands of conservative southern Democrats, who tended to keep their House and Senate seats for decades and (by the standards of the day) lived to advanced age.

Depending on your viewpoint, however, the tendency to hang on either thwarts rising aspirants or allows the wise and experienced to flourish. In any case, the length of political careers is permanently altered: Robert Taft, Ohio's "Mr. Republican," aspired to the presidency three times in midcentury while serving a total of 14 years in the Senate. When Robert Dole won the GOP nomination in 1996, he had been a senator for just under 30 years.

In my youth, I used to catch an occasional glimpse of the skeletal, eightysomething Sen. Carl Hayden (D-Ariz.), who remained in office until he was 91—and had represented Arizona in Congress *since it had gained statehood*. At the time, from my perspective, that seemed an impossibly lengthy tenure, hard to grasp. Now, not so much. ♦

# The Sage of Burkittsville

Charles Murray's human accomplishment.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

For the packed house at the American Enterprise Institute on the evening of January 8, Charles Murray needed no introduction. We were there to celebrate the 75th birthday of the author of *Losing Ground*, *The Bell Curve*, and *Coming Apart* and to mark his transition to emeritus status at the center-right think tank where he has spent the last 27 years. But this party also had a twist. It was Murray, the guest of honor, who had brought a gift: a spellbinding address reflecting on his career, work, thought, and grim view of the American future.

"My whole career has been one wrong answer after another as far as the left is concerned," Murray joked. He described growing up in Newton, Iowa, and his roots in Middle America. When he arrived as a freshman at Harvard in September 1961, he said, he was somewhat estranged from the manners and norms of East Coast university life. "A part of me always felt like an outsider and still does." Four years later, he left Massachusetts for Thailand. He spent some six years there, first as a Peace Corps volunteer and later as a social scientist. "I basically missed the '60s," he said.

It was while working in Thailand that Murray had what he called "epiphanies." The first came early, as he sat in an office watching paper-pushers. The high rhetoric of progress used by development officers and bureaucrats, he realized, did not translate into concrete reality. Government activity was entirely superfluous to the lives of everyday Thai people.

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The second epiphany came later. In interviews with villagers, Murray learned that the only things they expected from magistrates was for them to catch water buffalo thieves and ignore illegal distilleries. "What mattered in good government was intensely local." The priorities of the functionary in Bangkok were removed from, indeed at odds with, the priorities of the farmer in the provinces.

These two lessons informed Murray's studies at the American Institutes of Research, which he joined after receiving his doctorate in political science from MIT. A lifelong Democrat, his politics slowly began to change. "What was building up over those years was that I was getting very knowledgeable about social programs in the United States," he said. The political right was alien to him nonetheless. Impressed by William F. Buckley Jr., he remembers thinking, "That poor guy—he has to hang out with conservatives."

Murray's early work caught the eye of Irving Kristol, "the Godfather," who invited him to contribute to the *Public Interest* and connected him with benefactors who could help fund his research. By 1984, Murray had become a fellow at the Manhattan Institute in New York, where he published his first major study, *Losing Ground*, a relentless and devastating empirical critique of American social policy. The book caused an uproar that helped launch the movement for welfare reform. "By the end of writing *Losing Ground*, I realized I was a libertarian."

*Losing Ground* also marked the beginning of a pattern in his work. Every decade or so thereafter, as regular as the tides, Murray innocently

would lob an intellectual grenade into the public square, sending the *bien pensant* left into hysterics and shifting the ground of debate.

By the late '80s, Murray and his wife had moved to rural Burkittsville, Maryland, where he was deep into research for a book on the social consequences of IQ coauthored with Richard Herrnstein of Harvard. The then-president of the Manhattan Institute, Bill Hammett, was reluctant to be associated with what was sure to be an explosive and polarizing work. "I had essentially been fired," Murray told me in a recent interview.

He landed at AEI in July 1990. His new colleagues included his sometime editor Kristol, Robert Bork, James Q. Wilson, and Jeane Kirkpatrick, among others. "It was a really interesting dining room to be in for luncheon conversations," Murray told me. He recalled listening as Bork and Kristol discussed President George H. W. Bush's attitude toward intellectuals. They agreed that Bush was defensive around scholars, whereas President Reagan hadn't been. Intellectuals amused Reagan. Or so they thought.

In his 2014 book *The Curmudgeon's Guide to Getting Ahead*, Murray told another story of those early years. One day he made a quick run to the office to pick something up. "I wasn't going to be in the building more than 10 minutes, so I arrived wearing a flannel shirt and jeans," he wrote.

As I was standing in front of the tenth floor elevators waiting to leave, one of those elevators opened and out stepped Irving Kristol, AEI's most revered scholar. Irving was a warm and unpretentious person and a good friend. But there was no warmth in his eyes as he deliberately looked me up and down; said, "Well, what have we here?"; and walked away without another word. From that day until his death [in 2009], long after it had become customary for AEI scholars to work in shirtsleeves, I never arrived at AEI in anything except a coat and tie.

As it turned out, Murray would spend much of his time working from home. His initial plan had been to spend a full day per week in the office.

But soon he discovered that the collegial atmosphere of the building cut into his work. “The day I spent at AEI was the least productive day of my week,” he told me. Trips into D.C. became less frequent. Eventually, he didn’t require an office at AEI at all.

The fallout from the publication of *The Bell Curve* in 1994 strengthened Murray’s regard for his employer. He previewed the book’s contents for AEI scholars and brass. At the end of the presentation, Murray recalled, Kristol leaned back in his chair and said, “Well, Charles, we’ll defend you—up to a point.”

“We knew there would be a reaction because IQ raises so many hackles,” Murray told me. “But I thought we had handled it so well that we’d be praised for taking these difficult topics and making it possible for people to talk about them.” Suffice it to say, that didn’t happen.

Intelligence is a combustible subject on its own. Discussing it in relation to race—even if done briefly in a classically liberal, pithy, open-minded, inconclusive, understated manner—is like lighting a match inside an Iraqi ammunition depot. Making matters worse was Herrnstein’s death from lung cancer right before publication. Murray would have to defend their work on his own against caricature and calumny. “I had thought I was familiar with being vilified,” Murray said.

Boy, was he wrong. Murray was tarred as a racist, a eugenicist, and a quack. The insults and accusations varied. What remained constant was AEI’s support. “Chris DeMuth,” president of AEI until 2008, “never batted an eye.” Over time, the furor over *The Bell Curve* calmed down. By the beginning of George W. Bush’s presidency, Murray had begun receiving invitations to speak on college campuses once again. His books on libertarianism and on human accomplishment in the arts and sciences were well received. And when *Coming Apart* was published in 2012, Murray found that his reputation had been largely rehabilitated. “I was no longer a villain on

the left,” he told me. It wouldn’t last.

If there is a theme to his work, Murray said, it is to be found in “the intersection of happiness classically defined and public policy.” Human beings, his data show, find meaning in family, community, vocation, and faith. In his early work, Murray also believed in the power of incentives. If the intrusive, centralizing, bureaucratic structures that crowd out civil associations were reduced or abolished, he argued, human beings would flourish. “When I wrote *Losing Ground*,” he said in his speech at AEI,



Murray in 2012

“I was still optimistic about the malleability of human beings.”

That optimism has faded in recent years. Murray’s research into IQ and the heritability of traits lessened his faith in economic carrots and sticks. “I was depressed by the evidence that a lot of bad things are hardwired by adolescence and maybe even before that.” *Coming Apart* depicted white America irreparably divided by education and class, and America’s common culture replaced by antagonistic bubbles of rich elites and aggrieved workingmen. This was four years before the 2016 election.

Murray’s *By the People* (2015) went further. It told the story of how New Deal Supreme Court decisions systematically replaced the Constitution of the Founders with an administrative state that is undemocratic, unaccountable, invasive, expansive, and for all practical purposes lawless. The

intellectual climate also had changed, Murray said, and this time for the worse. Recently Murray has been ostentatiously disinvented from speaking engagements on college campuses and, when allowed to speak, become the subject of violent protests.

“Essentially, it’s over,” he told me. He wasn’t referring to his time at AEI. He was referring to the American experiment in self-government.

“This is what old guys do,” he said. “They get dark and pessimistic.” He told the audience at AEI, “You are, I fear, akin to a remnant,” sheltering the idea of human freedom in an ignorant and authoritarian epoch. One reason for his retirement, Murray went on, is that it is better to shine a light than to curse the darkness, and he spends much of his time these days cursing the darkness.

What does retirement mean for Murray? “More time to play poker.” Time to study religion alongside his wife, a serious Quaker. And time to write. “I’m working as intensively on the current book as I have on any,” he told me. A look at the calendar suggests Murray is due to shake up the policy world for a fourth time.

“People on the left have to realize that when you take someone and say all the nastiest things about them, there’s no downside to what they write next.”

As I left AEI, I couldn’t help thinking that Murray’s pessimism was somewhat at odds with other remarks he had made during his valedictory address. He admitted he was “strategically optimistic” because he found it unthinkable that young people used to the freedom of the digital age would submit to government control and standardization. “Sooner or later, the wheel is going to come around.” The social sciences, he went on, are about to be revolutionized by findings in neuroscience and genetics. It will be a thrilling moment.

What he is far too modest to observe is that this youthful remnant of social scientists toiling away in the dark will have something Charles Murray did not: the power of his example. ♦

# Reading the Milo Manuscript

How unpublishable was it?

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



Why my publisher hates me: Yiannopoulos announcing his lawsuit in New York last July

Imagine being repudiated by Stephen Bannon, the most repudiated man since Rasputin. Any ordinary person would feel obliged to slink off to the remotest mountains of Madagascar, never to be heard from again. But Milo Yiannopoulos, the *Breitbart News* blogger whom Bannon disowned as a colleague 15 months ago, continues to thrust himself into the public eye. The man is unreputable.

Here he is again, begging for our attention (granted!) as he pursues a lawsuit against Simon & Schuster and its imprint Threshold Editions. Threshold is dedicated to publishing conservative polemics by media demicelebrities like Jerome Corsi and Mark

Levin. When Yiannopoulos achieved some notoriety in 2016—Twitter shut down his account for verbally abusing fellow Twitterers, and his speeches drew well-publicized protests on several college campuses—Threshold was more than happy to sign him to a quickie deal to write a book called *Dangerous*, with an advance against royalties of \$250,000.

“I met with top execs at Simon & Schuster earlier in the year and spent half an hour trying to shock them with lewd jokes and outrageous opinions,” Yiannopoulos told the *Hollywood Reporter*. “I thought they were going to have me escorted from the building—but instead they offered me a wheelbarrow full of money.”

The decision by Threshold and its editorial director, Mitchell Ivers, to sign Yiannopoulos did not please the book-publishing industry, which

like every other cultural gatekeeper is dominated by people with political views roughly equivalent to Milo’s, though on the other side. Authors and editors from all over signed petitions demanding that Threshold renege on the contract. The *Chicago Review of Books* called the deal a “disgusting validation of hate” and announced it would refuse to cover any books published by Threshold’s parent company, Simon & Schuster—a move applauded by both of the *Review’s* readers. The comedian Sarah Silverman took to her own Twitter account in outrage: “YUCK AND BOO AND GROSS,” she argued.

Yiannopoulos generates controversy and outrage the way a blowtorch throws sparks. His persona relies heavily on his sexual identity, which in a more innocent age we would have called “flamboyant” and left it at that. We are to suppose that his energetic gayness clashes with his right-wing politics, making for an exciting and unexpected combination, although it’s not clear, *prima facie*, why right-wingery and homosexuality should be irreconcilable. With his trademark mix of High Camp and Falangism, Yiannopoulos is a kind of alt-right Liberace, lacking only the candelabra and musical talent. Controversy is his daily meat. Even as his manuscript was being edited, many observers knew it was only a matter of time before Yiannopoulos gave Ivers and Threshold a reason to abandon the book, and him, thus getting the literary community off their backs.

And sure enough, in February of last year, with the book’s publication date just a month away, some industrious Milophobe discovered an old podcast that had somehow escaped everyone’s attention. In it Yiannopoulos made light of pedophilia and endorsed its salubrious, life-affirming effects on his own upbringing. (He says he had his first sexual encounter with an older man when he was 13.) The podcast lit up the Internet, and Yiannopoulos acknowledged that he had misspoken. He condemned pedophilia in the strongest possible terms. What he had been endorsing,

DREW ANGERER / GETTY

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he explained, was not pedophilia—the abuse of pre-pubescent children and a horror to every decent person. No, what he’d been endorsing was *hebephilia*, which he defined as sex between adolescents and adults. From now on, he promised to be more careful with his words.

This is when Bannon repudiated him and *Breitbart News* fired him.

As night follows day, Threshold terminated the book contract. The quality of Yiannopoulos’s manuscript, the publisher announced, made it “unacceptable for publication.” There was no mention of the pressure brought to bear on Threshold to drop the book nor a peep about its author’s “controversial” views on man-boy sex. Yiannopoulos understandably thought this explanation disingenuous. Indeed, not long before dropping the book, Ivers, his editor at Threshold, had congratulated the author on his good work with the manuscript. So last summer, several months after Threshold reneged, Yiannopoulos sued the publisher for \$10 million. The filing said the cancellation had done “irreparable harm to the commercial value of Yiannopoulos’s public persona, including long-lasting harm to the development and exploitation of his stature as an important, sought-after media figure and free-speech celebrity.”

Notwithstanding such delusional legalese, Yiannopoulos’s case looked pretty tight. Ivers and Threshold had signed up for controversy and got it; surely they knew what they were getting when they hired a man who is famous for calling himself a “dangerous faggot” and boasting of his fellating skills. Ivers’s flattering interactions with Yiannopoulos (a text message reading “you done good,” for example), cringe-making as they are, don’t suggest an editor on the verge of firing an author. All the evidence suggested that Ivers and his imprint terminated the book because of social and political pressure and nothing more.

Or so it seemed until the end of last month. Threshold’s lawyers had a brainstorm: If people don’t believe

the publisher rejected the manuscript because of its low quality, let ’em decide for themselves! They entered Yiannopoulos’s original manuscript as evidence in a court filing, putting all 264 pages in the public domain, along with Ivers’s proposed edits. The thing is now available for anyone to read, as far as they can.

Yiannopoulos has used a ghost writer for his blogging, and he may have hired one for this book. If the old saying is true and good writing is like a window pane, allowing you to see straight through to the mean-

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ing behind it, then whoever wrote the unedited manuscript of *Dangerous* is an excellent writer indeed. Every page lays bare the author with pristine insouciance. From the opening paragraph, the text is as repellent as the man himself. The year 2016, the first sentence tells us, was “the year of the troll,” and hence 2016 “was the year of me.” All but two chapters are titled “Why [someone] Hates Me”: “Why the Progressive Left Hates Me,” “Why the Media Hates Me,” and so on.

After a few pages a reader will wonder if there’s anyone who doesn’t hate him, and why. As an author Milo is relentlessly self-referential. He

inserts himself in the oddest places, parenthetically. When he talks about competition among “victim groups,” for example, he calls it “a tragicomic battle for the bottom.” Then he adds: “also the name given to my warring ex-boy friends.” Is he a racist? Impossible, “given my penchant for black men, denizens of the dark continent.” A mention of the Clintons inspires an aside: “You have to feel for poor Bill. Every time he hears ‘gender’ and ‘gap’ in the same sentence he gets hard, then he sees Hillary’s crossed eyes and evil smile and he’s booking another flight on the Lolita Express.”

In the end, he says, the book has an overarching purpose: “Keep reading and you’ll find out how you can become as terrifying to the forces of political correctness and social justice as me—and you won’t even have to suck a dick to do it!” Ivers suggested deleting this last phrase.

Several months after Ivers terminated the contract, Yiannopoulos published *Dangerous* himself. The phrase has been struck in the self-published version and replaced by a lamer wording: “And you won’t even have to turn gay.” Indeed, from a quick comparison between the manuscript and self-published book, it appears that Yiannopoulos accepted many if not most of Ivers’s proposed edits and deletions. The warring boyfriends are gone. Clinton’s Lolita Express has disappeared. The denizens of the dark continent have been banished. The best he can do is a unconvincing retelling of the old “some of my best friends” argument. “Many of the most cherished people in my life are black men. Because I love and respect them, I believe they deserve truth, not lies.” Suddenly the “dangerous faggot” sounds like Oprah.

The result is milk-and-water Milo. But it’s probably the only Milo that’s publishable, as even Milo understood.

From the start I’ve wondered how an editor who had published the lunatic speculations of Jerome Corsi or the crazed, self-infatuated musings of Mark Levin could find a book beneath his dignity. But Ivers found one. Case closed. ♦

# Just in Case of an Impeachment

The O.J. defense.

BY ERIC FELTEN

Robert Mueller was supposed to be fired by now. That was, at the end of 2017, the fervent hope of both Democrats eager for a Saturday Night Massacre rerun and of some burn-it-all-down fans of the president. They saw the document demands by GOP lawmakers and their challenges to the impartiality of FBI and Department of Justice officials as the precursor to a Nixonian strategy of cutting the head off the investigation. Given cover by the suggestion that various Mueller underlings and FBI investigators have conflicts of interest, went the theory, President Donald Trump was preparing to remove the special counsel.

And if not that, then the president might at least try to discredit the investigation, as Harvard law professor Jack Goldsmith suggested in a recent *Lawfare* article, “The President Can’t Kill the Mueller Investigation.” It’s a strategy we’ve seen before: “The goal,” Goldsmith writes, “is to delegitimize Mueller for the same reasons that Bill Clinton’s proxies tried to discredit Ken Starr: To shape the politics of impeachment.”

Perhaps. But if the strategy is to throw up a firewall against impeachment and removal, there may be a better parallel than the anti-Ken Starr offensive of the Clintons: namely, the successful defense of O.J. Simpson in his trial for the 1994 murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman.

There is no shortage of odd similarities: Jeffrey Toobin, author of *The Run of His Life: The People v. O.J. Simpson*,

has already signed a book contract to chronicle the Mueller proceedings; there have been constitutional law cameos by Alan Dershowitz. More significantly there is this parallel: Simpson’s legal team went hammer



and tongs, not at L.A. County district attorney Gil Garcetti or lead prosecutor Marcia Clark, but at the journeyman investigators whose mistakes (and worse) allowed the foundation of the prosecution to be denounced and ridiculed. Could Capitol Hill Republicans be preparing to take the same tack?

The main target for Team Clinton in 1998 was Ken Starr himself. (When Clinton loyalist James Carville wrote his critique of the inquiry, he titled it . . . *And the Horse He Rode In On: The People v. Kenneth Starr*.) It was an effective attack in no small part because Starr was the face of the probe and the

driving force of the case against Clinton. Michael Gerhardt, professor of constitutional law at the University of North Carolina and author of *The Federal Impeachment Process*, has argued that “the failure of the House to undertake its own fact-finding, and its reliance instead on Starr’s findings, made it easier for Clinton and his defenders to attack the impeachment.” Starr had become so central to the affair that impeaching his motives was the likeliest and most efficient way to rally support for President Clinton.

But there are challenges in trying to repeat the Clinton crew’s takedown of Starr. Bill Clinton had plenty of media allies willing to help vilify Starr in a way that Trump cannot expect with Mueller. And Clinton’s success turned in part on his extraordinary wiles in confounding his questioners when interviewed—subtle skills that Donald Trump doesn’t possess.

Which may explain why committees in both the House and Senate are focusing their defensive Russia probes not on Mueller himself, but on the rank and file investigators. Did Justice Department lawyers use dubious information from a partisan oppo document—the Steele “dossier”—to request warrants from the Federal Intelligence Surveillance Court to snoop on team Trump? Was the FBI shot through with anti-Trump animus, as evidenced by sneering text messages between counterintelligence agent Peter Strzok and FBI lawyer Lisa Page?

If it seems a bit premature for GOP lawmakers to be laying down markers for how to turn some future impeachment trial of Trump into an inquisition judging federal investigators, remember that the Simpson team’s conspiracy theory that L.A. police planted evidence was hatched long before the O.J. trial began. Toobin reported in the middle of July 1994 that the Simpson defense was already angling to paint detective Mark Fuhrman “as a rogue cop who, rather than solving the crime, framed an innocent man.” Toobin would later note, “It is important to remember just how early in the case this was: Nicole and Goldman

GARY LOCKE

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had been dead for just about a month.”

Mistakes made by investigators in the first hours of the case would prove pivotal—mistakes such as those of the newbie criminalist who showed up on the scene and failed to follow proper procedures. Trainee Andrea Mazzola was on video handling different pieces of evidence without taking the time to put on new, sterile gloves for each specimen. Criminalist Dennis Fung had tried to cover for his errant and inexperienced assistant by telling the grand jury that he, not Mazzola, had handled and bagged blood evidence such as the killer’s glove. That fib was duly found out and would be played by Simpson’s lawyers for all it was worth.

“That testimony wasn’t accurate, was it?” demanded Barry Scheck, cross-examining Fung.

“That I personally did that stuff? No,” was Fung’s sheepish reply.

“And that testimony you gave the grand jury was under oath?”

“Yes.”

You don’t have to buy into an

**If it seems premature for GOP lawmakers to start turning some future impeachment trial of Trump into an inquisition judging federal investigators, remember that the Simpson team’s conspiracy theory that L.A. police planted evidence was hatched long before the O.J. trial began.**

elaborate conspiracy theory to recognize the Fung testimony as hugely damaging to the case against Simpson. The conspiracy theory suggested that LAPD cops planted blood evidence to frame Simpson; but far more plausible, Occam’s razor-wise, is the simpler scenario of investigators’ habitual sloppiness. The criminalist who’s used to being cross-examined by overworked and underprepared third-string

public defenders isn’t used to having his custody of evidence aggressively challenged. Go long enough without having to prove you followed correct procedures and you get lazy about the Ps and Qs.

In the same way, you don’t have to buy into an elaborate conspiracy theory to see FBI agents and Justice Department officials getting similarly sloppy. Casually overblown political opining is the most common of Washington pastimes. It requires real discipline for supposedly apolitical actors to avoid partisan chat when no one is checking that those fundamental norms are being enforced. Or take the possibility that unverified allegations from a shady opposition-research dossier were used to request a warrant from the FISA court to surveil the Trump team. We may find that such shortcuts have been commonplace. Given that FISA requests are denied next to never, the Justice Department may not exactly be in the habit of having to make punctilious justifications to get what it wants

## How Does 2018 Look for American Business?

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

With a new year under way, it’s a good idea to pause and take stock of where things stand for the American business community—and to set meaningful goals for the year ahead. Last year saw encouraging boosts in economic growth and business optimism. Now, our challenge is to strengthen and sustain that progress while ensuring it’s broadly shared by all Americans. We can do exactly that with the right policies and leadership in Washington.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently laid out its agenda for 2018 at our annual State of American Business event. At the top of the Chamber’s list this year is passing a bipartisan infrastructure modernization bill. We simply cannot build a 21st century economy on 20th century infrastructure.

Another priority is to continue

removing or revising job-killing regulations through administrative, legislative, and legal action. Next, to strengthen and sustain growth, we must defend NAFTA and reaffirm American leadership on trade. American workers and companies have nothing to fear and everything to gain from open trade.

Further, as we head into an election year, it is important that we elect members of Congress who are serious about economic growth, believe in free enterprise, and want to govern.

While focusing on these immediate priorities, the Chamber will also lead on the broader challenges facing our country and society.

We’ll ask tough questions: How do we help workers and communities that have been left out of the new economy while helping businesses that can’t find workers? How do we embrace the extraordinary opportunities of new technology while managing the disruptions that come with it? How do we encourage

more entrepreneurship and create an environment where capital is accessible, frivolous lawsuits are stopped, and the freedom to speak, innovate, and take risks is always preserved and protected?

Finally, how do we persuade citizens and policymakers that we must restore fiscal responsibility in our country, beginning with carefully measured entitlement reforms? We owe our children and grandchildren nothing less.

These are not simple questions with easy answers. But they are some of the most important ones facing our society, and the Chamber is prepared to tackle them. The good news is that the economic winds are at our backs. There is so much we can accomplish this year and beyond to make America more prosperous and hopeful for everyone. So let’s get going.



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

from the secret court. That may facilitate the speedy tracking of terrorists, but it may also produce habits with a Fung-al lack of fastidiousness.

O.J. defense lawyer Johnnie Cochran would later say of the trial, “The primary advantage that I had with this jury was that they were familiar with the history of the Los Angeles Police Department. They’d lived it. Several of these jurors knew from personal experience that police officers do not hesitate to lie—even under oath.” Will there be a similar pool of Senate jurors in any future impeachment case who will feel they are familiar with the bias of bureaucrats, even law-enforcement bureaucrats?

What Cochran might have added was that he had this other significant advantage: The jury, for the most part and from the get-go, was disinclined to do what the prosecutors asked. The defense team recognized that their job wasn’t to persuade jurors of their case: They just needed to give the jury a respectable reason to bring in—with a straight face—a verdict of not guilty.

So too with a hypothetical Trump impeachment trial. If there is a post-2018 Democratic House majority and if such an anti-Trump body were presented with a Mueller report that could be used to justify articles of impeachment, the president’s defense would be in much the same position with regard to the jury it will face as the Cochran crew was with theirs. Chances are, unless Mueller’s brief proved to be devastating, there would be at least 34 Senate Republicans who would be, like the majority of O.J. jurors, disinclined to convict. They would just need something to hang their hats on.

In *People of the State of California v. Orenthal James Simpson* the jury hung its hat on the sloppy work and casual prejudices of some of the policemen who happened to respond to the murder in Brentwood. Will sloppy work before the FISA court and casual political prejudices of the sort texted between FBI agent Peter Strzok and FBI lawyer Lisa Page provide the same sort of justification for senators who choose not to convict an impeached president of their party? ♦

# A Game of Constitutions

Role-playing the Founders.

BY JAY COST

‘D o you know,” Thomas Jefferson wrote tantalizingly to John Adams in the summer of 1815, “that there exists in manuscript the ablest work of this kind ever yet executed, of the debates of the constitutional convention of Philadelphia?” Unfortunately for him, Adams never had occasion to read these notes, for they were taken by James Madison, who kept them from public view for the whole of his life. Jefferson, as Madison’s political confidant, got to sneak a peek, but otherwise the “labor and exactness beyond comprehension” that Madison dedicated to recording “the whole of everything said and done” at that momentous 1787 conclave was not publicly available until after he died in 1836.

Pity for Adams, but bully for us—because while Jefferson was often prone to rhetorical flights of fancy, he was not exaggerating in this instance. When Madison’s notes are combined with the other, partial accounts of the Constitutional Convention, what emerges is a complete picture of a profound moment in human history.

One reason Madison made such a diligent recording of the events was his conviction that future generations of citizens would benefit from a written record. This is, after all, a republic in which the people are supposed to rule, and if the people are to rule well, they have to know a thing or two about the origins of and intentions behind their institutions of government.

The Constitutional Convention is thus not simply a historical curiosity, the domain of ruffled academics

combing through dusty university stacks, but an opportunity for civic engagement and education, especially among young adults.

Yet the surfeit of primary information creates a pedagogical problem. What is the best way to introduce these profound documents to students? For generations, educators have simply been putting Madison’s *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* on their syllabi. That is all well and good; those notes, like the *Federalist Papers*, are still quite readable, despite the peculiarities of the 18th-century vernacular. Still, something important is lost in the translation of deed into word—the dynamism of the convention and the ratification debates, the high drama, the pathos, the contingency of the whole thing are often lost. It is easy to think that the whole debate was as dry as an ancient book and the conclusions a matter of inevitability.

Fortunately, Patrick Coby of Smith College has afforded us a new way to engage the founding in a much more immediate manner—through an immersive role-playing game, almost like Model United Nations. Coby’s Constitutional Convention of 1787 is part of a series of role-playing games for students entitled *Reacting to the Past*, developed under the auspices of Barnard College and published by W.W. Norton. Previous entries include games on the trial of Anne Hutchinson, the debate over secession in Kentucky in 1861, and the English Reformation.

What makes the Constitutional Convention so amenable to this kind of setup is that it *really was* like a multidimensional game. Coby likens it to a Rubik’s Cube, in which each

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shift in the puzzle creates a new puzzle to work out. This is an apt description.

From the looks of the finished product, the Constitution could seem like it was delivered from some unitary lawgiver, like Solon or Romulus. But that was not at all the case. The dozens of delegates to the Constitutional Convention arrived at Philadelphia with a number of different, often competing interests. There were ideological considerations, like the proper role of the people and the prudence of centralizing power. There were economic concerns, like the role of wealth in apportioning representation. There were small-state and large-state divides, free-state and slave-state divides. There were moments of high drama—like when Benjamin Franklin encouraged delegates to pray as a last recourse for breaking a deadlock and when the peg-legged Gouverneur Morris denounced slavery. There were even moments of comedy, of a sort, such as Luther Martin’s harangues against centralized power and Alexander Hamilton’s maladroit suggestion of an elective kingship.

Impressively, Coby has taken these many aspects of the Convention and refined them into a fun, educational challenge for students. Ideologically, he divides the delegates into “nationalists” (like Madison and Hamilton) who advocate a stronger central authority and “confederalists” (like Robert Patterson and John Lansing) who oppose it. Delegates are similarly apportioned based on their views of major issues like slavery and the large-state/small-state cleavage. There is, obviously, a lot of simplification in these categories, but the essence of the convention is no doubt distilled.

Students are then assigned a delegate (the game is played with as few as 12 but as many as 22 delegates) and provided a detailed background, offering cues for how he should generally behave at the convention. These include plenty of historical color that offers students an opportunity to breathe life into long-dead historical personages. For instance, Coby writes of Martin that “no delegate can rival [his] collective of personal

oddities. . . . Delegates cringe when he stands to speak, since there is every chance that he will never sit down again.” Coby also provides a digest of important documents, ranging from selections of Aristotle’s *Politics* to Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* to help students understand the bigger issues at stake.

With this basic information, and a relatively light structure of gameplay, it is up to the students to hammer out

Morris being summoned to court to answer a paternity suit.

The potential for individual initiative here is amazing. Students who take their roles seriously, who immerse themselves in the recommended readings and their character biographies, can really shape a governing document in the interests of their delegate. Bargaining and speechifying are at the center of gameplay, and the instructor’s job is simply to sit



Students at California State University, East Bay, point out ‘George Washington’ as they participate in a reenactment of the Constitutional Convention.

a Constitution of their own. They are to bargain, to argue, and ultimately to compromise—or perhaps not! Just as the Constitution need not have been adopted in Philadelphia, so too is there no guarantee that the game will yield a final result.

There are also a number of interesting twists and turns, such as the potential for “walkouts” from the convention, as student delegates abandon the project based on a belief that the end result will be inconsistent with their characters’ interests. Students also have a chance to leak information about the proceedings to the broader public, which thankfully did not occur in 1787 for it would have made the project all the more difficult. There are also side games that can become available, like Hamilton challenging Abraham Pierce Blunwin—a composite character—to a duel or

back and let events run their course. The final product need not be at all similar to the actual Constitution.

In his later years, Madison dismissed the notion that he was “the writer of the Constitution.” Instead, he averred that the Constitution was not “like the fabled Goddess of Wisdom, the offspring of a single brain. It ought to be regarded as the work of many heads and many hands.” Indeed, his notes—published a few years later—would attest to that. The Constitution was the product of compromise among competing interests, factions, and ideologies, one that could have gone in many different directions or not have happened at all. This is part of what makes our founding such a special event, and through his innovative, immersive role-playing game, Coby has captured this crucial aspect of the Constitution, which is so often overlooked. ♦

# The Book That Ate Washington

*Here's what happens when you let a Wolff loose in the West Wing*

BY MATT LABASH

Like any dutiful Washington swamp creature, I've spent the last few days holed up with *Fire and Fury*. Which is not, if you've been in news-cycle hibernation, the new fragrance from Ivanka. Rather, it is a book by Michael Wolff about life inside Mar-a-Lago North, aka the Trump White House.

Or scratch that—it is not *a* book. It is *the* book. If there is only one book Washington political reporters will read

many of the accounts in *Fire and Fury* are in conflict with one another and many, “in Trumpian fashion, are baldly untrue . . . and that looseness with the truth, if not with reality itself” is “an elemental thread of this book.” Or put another way: Despite him weighing the evidence and settling “on a version of events I believe to be true,” everything that follows might be a lie. Which makes Wolff, who has been criticized by the punditry for everything from violating off-the-record agreements to being a slop artist (more on that later), that rarest of creatures in Washington: a crude approximation of an honest man.

Wolff, a Manhattanite who holds court at Michael's and who has for decades made his bones writing about media and moguls and preferably media moguls (he wrote a biography of Rupert Murdoch), is a wicked stylist and keen observer, with a justly earned reputation for approaching his subjects with fangs bared and talons sharpened. He can come off as meekly obsequious and sinister simultaneously—on television, the effect is Fred Armisen meets Nosferatu. So it came as some surprise when word got out last fall that Wolff had effectively turned himself into a potted plant in the West Wing, spending the better part of Trump's first year in office absorbing

all the palace intrigue. Why on earth did they let him in? Everyone knows the White House has Twitter. Don't they have Google?

It helps, of course, to have a rabbi, and Wolff clearly did in the person of “The Great Manipulator” (as *Time* dubbed Steve Bannon when they slapped Trump's then-chief strategist on their cover, much to Trump's chagrin, since he doesn't like competing for attention with the hired help). Wolff says he did 200 interviews, and I wouldn't be surprised if around 180 of them were with Bannon. If the book came with sound effects, the loudest would be that of Bannon grinding his battle-axe.



Michael Wolff makes an appearance on 'Meet the Press' in Washington, January 7.

this year—and for many, one book a year is their outer limit, as reading gets in the way of more vital swamp-creature pursuits like pretending expertise, being gossipy hens, and tweeting—then this is it.

As with most chattering-class blockbusters that catch on with the general public (number one on Amazon, a million copies and counting sold in less than a week), one needn't go through the trouble of actually *reading* the book to have authoritative opinions on it. But read it I did anyway, right down to the author's note where Wolff states that

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NEWS.COM

Bannon will now have much more time to spend with his weaponry after sounding off about Trump and family in Wolff's book. (Trump's lawyers took time out of their busy schedules dodging multiple Russian-collusion investigations in order to threaten to sue both him and Wolff, while Trump christened Bannon "Sloppy Steve.") As a result of crossing Trump, Sloppy's financial backers have dumped him, he's lost his Sirius/XM radio show, and he's been ousted from his perch as bomb-thrower-in-chief at *Breitbart*. To add insult, on the very day Bannon's *Breitbart* exit was announced, Trump indicated that he might cut an immigration deal with Democrats, and the White House advertised he would be visiting that globalist playpen Davos. No word yet whether anti-immigration, nationalist scourge Bannon will now commit seppuku just so he can roll over in his grave.

But what comes through loud and clear in Wolff's telling is that no matter how bad you thought it was in Trump's White House, it was actually much worse. From the end of what Bannon called, with characteristic gentility, Trump's "broke-dick campaign," through the transition, and all the way through Bannon's ouster last August, Team Trump didn't resemble a team so much as a collection of competing brand managers fighting in a loser-leaves-town cage match. For an administration that pretends to hate the "fake news" media, members leaked so much and so often that some even hired dedicated press staffs and leaked about each other leaking. Each faction (Bannon representing the populists, then-chief-of-staff Reince Priebus representing establishment Republicans, and "Jarvanka"—Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump—representing themselves) was trying to capture Trump's ever-diminishing attention. None of them was as interesting to the president as watching his own cable-news coverage, DVRing talking-head slights to replay and obsess over while he ate cheeseburgers in bed, barking on the phone to his one-percenter pals, soliciting advice on important matters of state such as who he should fire next. "We serve at the president's displeasure," says one staffer to Wolff.

Characterizing Trump's vinegar sessions to friends, Wolff writes that he'd mull over the flaws of each member of his staff: "Bannon was disloyal (not to mention he always looked like shit). Priebus was weak (not to mention he was short—a midget). Kushner was a suck-up. [Sean] Spicer

was stupid (and looks terrible too). [Kellyanne] Conway was a crybaby. Jared and Ivanka should never have come to Washington." While an unflattering depiction of Trump, it does bolster his credentials as a shrewd judge of character.

All the assembled characters, though, are present due to Trump's suspect judgment in the first place. Forget the fact that Bannon—someone who thinks it's acceptable to prop up an accused child molester (Roy Moore) running for Senate—effectively serves as the "conscience" of the administration in Wolff's narration, the one true ideologue keeping Trump faithful to his base. There was a hint much earlier on that the White House might be in over their heads, when it fell to Ann Coulter to clock in as the moderating voice of reason, taking the president-elect aside to say, "Nobody is apparently telling you this. . . . You just can't hire your children."

There's very little policy discussed in *Fire and Fury*. Wolff, like Trump, isn't much interested in it. But to compensate, there's plenty of derisive name-calling and vicious put-downs. (All cheeseburger, no vegetables.) With mostly thin-to-invisible sourcing on Wolff's part, Trump assesses the room like Rickles in the Catskills, often working blue. To Bannon, whom Trump says "everybody hates," he offers, "Guy looks homeless. Take a shower, Steve. You've worn those pants for six days."

Bannon's deep-pocketed backers, the Mercer family, are "wackos." His trusted press aide, Hope Hicks,

Trump says somewhat jokingly, is "the world's worst PR person." Though Trump puts some balm on that wound, allegedly telling her she's "the best piece of tail [Corey] will ever have." (Wolff thereby suggests she and Trump's married former campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, had a fling.)

Sally Yates, briefly acting attorney general until Trump fired her, is "such a c—." Gary Cohn, Trump's National Economic Council director, is "a complete idiot, dumber than dumb." Jarvanka "should take the hint and go home," while H.R. McMaster, his global-strategy-lecturing national security adviser, "bores the shit out of me." Besides, when he's out of uniform in his baggy suit, "he looks like a beer salesman."

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Following their Dear Leader's lead, everyone in Trump's orbit seemed to return the favor, both to him and each other. Kushner calls then-deputy chief of staff Katie Walsh "demanding and petulant." While Bannon variously calls Kushner "my intern," Jarvanka collectively "the geniuses," and Don Jr. "Fredo," after the dimwitted son in *The Godfather*, saying his dalliances with Russians would result in investigators cracking "Don Jr. like an egg on national TV." Likewise, Bannon tells Hicks she is as "dumb as a stone" and informs Ivanka, who he thought was "dumb as a brick," that she's a "f—ing liar." He says that last bit in the Oval Office, in front of her dad. ("I told you this is a tough town, baby," Trump offers his daughter, by way of consolation.)

More generously, Bannon calls himself "President Bannon."

But we're not done yet. According to Wolff, Priebus and Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin think Trump's an "idiot," McMaster thinks he's a "dope," and Cohn thinks he's "dumb as shit." After the book's publication, when a White House official told a CNBC reporter that Cohn "denies that ridiculous quote," Cohn must have forgotten to walk back a widely circulated email attributed to him, which described working for this White House:

It's worse than you can imagine. An idiot surrounded by clowns. Trump won't read anything—not one-page memos, not the brief policy papers; nothing. He gets up halfway through meetings with world leaders because he is bored. And his staff is no better. Kushner is an entitled baby who knows nothing. Bannon is an arrogant prick who thinks he's smarter than he is. Trump is less a person than a collection of terrible traits. No one will survive the first year but his family. I hate the work, but feel I need to stay because I'm the only person there with a clue what he's doing. ... I am in a constant state of shock and horror.

Bannon, elsewhere in *Fire and Fury*, likens Trump to a 9-year-old child, says he has "lost his stuff," and informs Wolff that there's a 33.3 percent chance the Mueller investigation will lead to his impeachment, a 33.3 percent chance that Trump will resign if, say, the cabinet attempts to have him removed under the 25th Amendment, and a 33.3 percent chance he will "limp to the end of his term." But in a sunnier assessment, he does allow that Trump is "a big warm-hearted monkey."



Jared Kushner



Ivanka Trump



Steve Bannon



Hope Hicks



Kellyanne Conway

With this kind of rancor and ineptitude, it's small wonder that Trump's only major legislative accomplishment in his first year was passage of a tax bill (if we can count cutting corporate America's tax rate by 40 percent a legislative achievement for a purportedly populist president whose chief aim was to look out for the little guy). Perhaps there wasn't time to do much else, what with all the insults that needed tending to.

Most White Houses are what the late David Carr liked to call ego gymnasiums, full of climbers trying to guard or expand their influence. If Trump's seems more cutthroat than most, it's not by accident. It's part of his top-down ethos, from interactions with aides to antagonizing the media and investigators. As Wolff notes:

He lived in a mano a mano world, one in which if your own respectability and sense of personal dignity were not a paramount issue—if you weren't weak in the sense of needing to seem like a reasonable and respectable person—you had a terrific advantage. And if you made it personal, if you believed that when the fight really mattered that it was kill or be killed, you were unlikely to meet someone willing to make it as personal as you were. This was Bannon's fundamental insight about Trump: he made *everything* personal, and he was helpless not to.

Wolff's book, as you might have heard, launched into the exosphere several days before its originally scheduled publication date after excerpts were leaked and then helped along by Trump threatening to block publication while tweeting his thumbs off denouncing it: "Michael Wolff is a total loser who made up stories in order to sell this really boring and untruthful book." Wolff, who doubts whether Trump reads books, even the ones Trump "writes," wondered to Savannah Guthrie on *The Today Show*: "Where do I send the box of chocolates?"

As Wolff was now getting stalked by paparazzi (hard to imagine that happening to, say, Doris Kearns Goodwin) and making the TV rounds (MSNBC in particular rode him like a rented mule), in print outlets, and all over social media, one mouth-watering morsel after another dribbled out. Any of which could've served as the cherry on top of the sundae, or maybe the entire sundae, in a more conventional political book. A (very) incomplete sampling:

IMAGES VIA GETTY, FROM TOP: THOMAS PETER; CHIP SOMODEVILLA; DREW ANGERER; MANDEL NGAN / AFP; DANIEL ACKER / BLOOMBERG

■ Ivanka and deputy national security adviser Dina Powell creating a photographic presentation of Syrian kids foaming at the mouth after a chemical weapons attack to prompt Trump to action (Trump abhors PowerPoint or spreadsheet jockeys and “liked literal big pictures,” writes Wolff.)

■ Campaign aide Sam Nunberg being sent to explain the Constitution to Trump, getting as far as the Fourth Amendment “before his finger is pulling down on his lip and his eyes are rolling to the back of his head.”

■ In pre-presidential days, Trump moving in on a friend’s wife by having the friend sit in his office at Trump Tower and asking him explicit sexual questions (“You must have had a better f— than your wife”) while the wife listens in on speakerphone.

■ Trump complaining to a friend that everyone exaggerates his exaggerations.

■ Joe Scarborough frantically asking Trump if there’s anyone he talks things through with before he decides to act, and Trump saying, “you won’t like the answer, but the answer is me. Me. I talk to myself.”

I could go on. And on and on. But why? We’ll both just get more demoralized.

**Y**et after Wolff’s book release, there was another steady drip—that of Wolff’s credibility being called into question. Some of it came from predictable quarters: conservative media and the Trump White House. Alex Jones’s conspiracy-theory hub, *Infowars*, ran a whole piece detailing how a YouTube body language expert determined that Wolff was lying. Trump surrogates hit the editorial pages and airwaves. Stephen Miller, a one-time Bannon loyalist and Trump’s senior adviser for policy (a 32-year-old who seems to be one of the few senior advisers Trump has left when not consulting himself), practically yelled at CNN’s Jake Tapper, calling Wolff’s book “garbage” and a “grotesque work of fiction.”

Plenty of others who made cameos in the book also denounced their portrayals. A spokesperson for *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour said it was “laughably preposterous” that she’d approached president-elect Trump suggesting that she become his ambassador to the Court of St. James’s. While a representative of former British prime minister Tony Blair said Wolff’s claim that he paid a visit to Kushner at the White House to chummily inform him of a juicy rumor

that the Brits had Trump campaign staff under surveillance and were monitoring their calls was “categorically absurd.”

Likewise, mainstream and even liberal press outfits (*Vox*, *Slate*, the *New Republic*) all ran pieces picking apart factual inconsistencies in Wolff’s narrative. Most errors were of an embarrassing but fairly minor variety—confusing the identities of people at a restaurant, getting ages or spellings wrong—not enough to blow a hole in Wolff’s hull. But some mistakes were real howlers.

In one of the worst instances, Wolff quotes the late Roger Ailes as telling Trump shortly after the election: “You need a son of a bitch as your chief of staff. And you need a son of a bitch who knows Washington.” Ailes suggested former House speaker John Boehner. To which Trump asked, “Who’s that?”

The problem, as reporters discovered, is that Trump had tweeted about Boehner numerous times before the election and had even played golf with him. Oops.

There is a noticeable glee emanating from diligent, mainstream, fact-checking reporters trying to take Wolff down a peg, even as they spend most of their days inclined to disbelieve everything Donald Trump says otherwise. The reason for this could be attributable to several factors:

They might be jealous of Wolff making the big score on their home turf. Or there could be resentment of Wolff doing the talk-show

rounds, making delusional pronouncements that his book could be the end of the Trump presidency (about as likely as Wolff becoming president) while declaring that he has shown that the emperor has no clothes. Any reporter with a room-temperature IQ and working pairs of eyes and ears had a hunch that if not buck naked, Trump was down to a loincloth and golf cleats even before he took the boss’s chair.

Or maybe Wolff’s factual lapses just offend their sense of propriety: While doing the unglamorous daily drudge-work, they have to be scrupulous and exacting; why shouldn’t he? Wolff has a long history of not only gnawing on his media competition’s skulls for column fodder and his own amusement but also playing fast and loose with facts.

Twenty years ago, the now-defunct *Brill’s Content* took a hard look at Wolff’s book *Burn Rate*, a memoir of his time as a dot-com hustler, and charged that one of his characters

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**Fire and Fury offers lots of derisive name-calling and vicious put-downs. Kushner calls then-deputy chief of staff Katie Walsh ‘demanding and petulant.’ While Bannon variously calls Kushner ‘my intern,’ Jarvanka collectively ‘the geniuses,’ and Don Jr. ‘Fredo,’ the dimwitted son in *The Godfather*, saying his dalliances with Russians would result in investigators cracking ‘Don Jr. like an egg on national TV.’**

was actually a composite of three people. Likewise, seven of Wolff's main characters and six others who were either portrayed in or familiar with events in his book claimed he "invented or changed quotes," and none remembered him taking notes on or taping their discussions.

Wolff, for his part, told *Brill's* that he had notes and email to back him up but refused to release them. (He says he's recorded many of his *Fire and Fury* subjects, as well, but has similarly declined to release those.) Then, with a Trumpian flourish, he told *Brill's*: "I'm sure people are very surprised to see these meetings come back to life. But that's good writing. That may be great writing."

So it's perhaps understandable that some rivals and marquee journalists have, over the years, called Wolff everything from one of "the most hated figures in New York media" (Michelle Cottle) to a "despicable . . . hyena" (Jack Shafer) to "someone who is rarely impressed with anyone other than himself" (Howard Kurtz) to "fearless in a way that people attribute to sociopathology but that I always thought was a business strategy" (David Carr). Back in 2004, Cottle, in a Wolff profile for the *New Republic*, reported that a friend of Wolff's heard a senior official at the *New York Times* "snipe that 'if Wolff were any further up his own ass, he'd be a colonoscopy.'" This go-round, *GQ*'s Drew Magary proclaimed that Wolff is a "fart-sniffer whose credibility is often suspect . . . who represents the absolute worst of New York media-cocktail-circuit inbreeding" and who is "one of our least reliable journalists." And Magary is one of Wolff's defenders.

Personally, I've enjoyed reading Wolff over the years. You can call him many things (see the preceding paragraph), but never dull. I do not know Wolff nor can I vouch for his credibility. Though I should add that a mutual acquaintance of ours, after spotting an anecdote he'd casually tossed off to Wolff turn up in *Fire and Fury*, reported this to me of Wolff's seemingly slack methodology: "[He got it] from me, which I got from a woman on the beach in Florida, who heard it in a carpool line. Literally. I had no idea he was including it. That guy is a serious bullshit artist. Wow."

Whether Wolff is or isn't a bullshit artist, one can argue that the most pressing concern surrounding *Fire and Fury* isn't that we don't know for certain what we should or shouldn't believe. Rather, it's that so much of it is *believable*. Whether Trump did or didn't do these things, they're completely within the realm of possibility. This is the same president, after all, who just one day before the *Fire and Fury* hubbub broke compared—on Twitter—

the size of his nuclear "button" to that of Kim Jong-un. (Spoiler alert: Trump's is "a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!")

What is also indisputable is that Trump might be the most prevaricative president of the last half-century—no easy feat, considering Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton belong to the club. Last year, the *New York Times* kept a running tally of all the lies Trump told, with supporting links, in a feature simply titled "Trump's Lies." From the time they started counting, the day after his inauguration, until they let the feature lapse on November 11 (perhaps because it was no longer sporting), they counted no fewer than 179 lies. Including an impressive streak in which Trump "said something untrue, in public, every day for the first 40 days of his presidency."

At that clip, he likely would've scored higher were it not for days

in which he was "absent from Twitter, vacationing at Mar-a-Lago, or busy golfing." The last of which, according to those who've played with him, sees him cheating more than lying.

On *The Today Show*, Wolff, upon being asked about Trump calling into question his credibility, responded that he was being assailed by "a man who has less credibility than perhaps anyone who has walked the earth." This is a fair point. By the same token, a new Morning Consult/*Politico* poll shows only 32 percent of registered voters find *Fire and Fury* to be "very" or "somewhat" credible. (Twenty-five percent found it "not too" or "not at all" credible, and an enviable 42 percent hadn't heard of it or had no opinion.)

Michael Wolff might not be the Platonic ideal of Trump's Boswell, crossing all his "t"s, meticulously logging footnotes. He may very well represent something much more cosmically valuable to Trump, though: a perfect karmic delivery system.

**It's perhaps understandable that some rivals and marquee journalists have, over the years, called Wolff everything from one of 'the most hated figures in New York media' (Michelle Cottle) to a 'despicable . . . hyena' (Jack Shafer).**



Copies on sale in Washington, D.C.

# Mr. Maximum Pressure

*Cory Gardner has the president's ear on North Korea—and the Hermit Kingdom doesn't like what he's hearing*

BY JENNA LIFHITS

‘M’y neighbors probably think I’m nuts,” says Cory Gardner. The fresh-faced senator is from tiny Yuma in northeastern Colorado, a 3,500-person town with “horrible cell service” to the point where he doesn’t get reception inside his house. So when the secretary of state calls, Gardner does what the rest of us would: He goes outside into the cold.

“I was on the phone for half an hour with Secretary Tillerson, wandering around my backyard talking about North Korea,” he says with his habitual smile, “and the neighbors probably thought I was crazy.” He pauses a second before adding, “But I didn’t get tackled,” and bursts into laughter.

Gardner is unshakably upbeat for someone focused on one of the most stressful subjects imaginable: North Korea. He is the point man for Asia policy in the Senate as the chairman of the East Asia and Pacific subcommittee, and he is leading a revival of Republican leadership on the region. That this is occurring as Kim Jong-un rushes to expand his nuclear capabilities is no coincidence. The Man from Yuma believes in tackling tough problems head-on.

For Gardner, the key to stability on the Korean peninsula lies in isolating and economically crippling Pyongyang until Kim is forced to change his behavior. The North Korean regime, in turn, describes the Colorado senator as a “man mixed in with human dirt” who has “lost basic judgment and body hair.”

“When I first started holding hearings on North Korea, Ben Cardin and I were the only people who would show up,” says Gardner of the Maryland Democrat and ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee. “Now I have so many people showing up that I don’t get to ask all the questions I want to.”

Successive administrations have tried all sorts of negotiation and agreement with Pyongyang, only to fail to deter its nuclear program. The Obama administration was slow to implement sanctions and hesitated to crack down on Chinese companies that helped Pyongyang evade

sanctions. Gardner’s North Korea playbook begins by rejecting such timid efforts.

He applauds the Trump administration for ramping up pressure on both the North and its main trading partner, China, and for pushing for new sanctions at the U.N. “Trump has done more than President Obama ever did,” he says. But Gardner wants the president’s “maximum pressure” strategy to include even more high-level sanctions on Pyongyang’s enablers.

“The administration can do more. I’m not satisfied with where they’re at right now,” he says. “We could be carrying out tougher sanctions. We could be carrying out tougher enforcement. We could be forcing China, with every tool and power that we have, to toe the line when it comes to global sanctions.”

Diplomatic and economic pressure on North Korea, he says, has to match the pace of the country’s nuclear progress. Pyongyang has accelerated its weapons testing in the last year, inching closer to developing a nuclear-equipped missile that can reach the U.S. mainland with every launch. Of the potential for war with the Hermit Kingdom, national security adviser H.R. McMaster noted in December, “it’s increasing every day.” “We’re in a race,” he said, “to be able to solve this problem.”

Gardner has domestic responsibilities, too: serving on the committees on commerce, energy, and small business and entrepreneurship. It’s a full slate for the 43-year-old lawmaker. His record is 37 meetings in a single day. “You just move from North Korea to corn to transportation to space shuttles to what’s happening to the water in the Colorado River in the span of an hour,” he says. “You don’t just need to know the width of it, you need to know the depth of it.”

He’s also chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which oversees election strategy. It’s been a particularly eventful year with Roy Moore gaining the nomination in Alabama and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon promising primary challenges to nearly every establishment GOP candidate in 2018. Gardner is wary of talking about Bannon.

“Dean Heller is a great representative of Nevada, and he wins,” he says when I ask him about Danny Tarkanian,

*Jenna Lifhitis is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*



THE WEEKLY STANDARD / HANNAH YOEST

**Cory Gardner in his Senate office  
in Washington, January 8**

the Bannon-backed candidate mounting a challenge to Nevada's senior senator.

Is too much attention being paid to this wave of alt-right candidates? "It's newsy, it's attention-drawing, but is it reality? No," Gardner says.

"Where we've seen defeats in the past, it has come at the expense of candidates who didn't run a good campaign, who didn't do their job getting back home, maybe not even lived back home," he says with a chuckle. "But if you do what you need to do, the right candidate is going to win."



*Gardner on the campaign trail in November 2014*

Gardner practices what he preaches. His run for the Senate in 2014 was widely seen as the sharpest campaign of that season. It had to be, as he was facing a well-funded sitting senator. Mark Udall's campaign focused on abortion politics and how the conservative Gardner would be an unwavering vote in the Republican "war on women." Gardner countered by tying Udall to Obama's health-care policies and showing how the senator had voted in lockstep with the unpopular president. He was relentless in promising Colorado voters that he would be an independent *and* conservative voice for the state. Gardner won by fewer than 40,000 votes.

All roads lead back to tiny Yuma for Gardner—though it's a hike from the nation's capital. There's the four-hour flight to Denver and then a 150-mile drive. That drive, which features just two stoplights, is the first thing that comes to mind when I ask the senator how he unwinds. "It's a great opportunity to decompress," he says, "to think, to get back to Colorado."

He describes himself as a fifth-generation Coloradan. His family runs a farm-tools business in Yuma. "They never doubted me," he says of the people of his hometown, who supported him through all his campaigns. "No one ever said, 'Well, you're from Yuma, what are you doing?'"

Gardner attended Colorado State and interned at the statehouse in the summers. After getting a law degree, he went to work as legislative director for Senator Wayne

Allard in 2002. Gardner won a seat in the Colorado house of representatives in 2005, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010, and then the Senate in 2014.

He joined the Foreign Relations Committee and trained his eye on North Korea, "knowing that it would be a flashpoint," as Kim worked to develop weapons that could grant him legitimacy and his regime longevity. "This is an area of the world that has got 50 percent of global GDP, 50 percent of the global population; two-thirds of our trade is going to travel through there," Gardner notes of the Asia-Pacific region.

The first-term senator was quick to use his legislative power to pressure the executive branch. Gardner's 2016 North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act didn't merely recommend that the Obama administration sanction those found to have contributed to North Korea's weapon programs, human-rights abuses, and cyberattacks. It required it.

Victor Cha, a professor of government at Georgetown University who served on George W. Bush's national security council, says the legislation gave the administration tools for isolating North Korea, while directing the executive branch to squeeze Pyongyang harder. "It basically empowered and facilitated the executive to really go full bore on sanctions," says Cha, who was recently nominated to serve as U.S. ambassador to South Korea. "For the longest period of time, everybody thought North Korea was sanctioned heavily, but it wasn't sanctioned nearly as heavily as Iran."

The legislation paved the way for North Korea to become the fourth-most-sanctioned nation on earth (after Russia, Syria, and Iran). It also led to the sanctioning of Kim as a human-rights violator and the designation of North Korea as a jurisdiction of primary money-laundering concern.

But Gardner isn't satisfied. He wants the Trump administration to push harder against countries that trade with the North. In July, he introduced the North Korean Enablers Accountability Act, which would require the president to block any entity or financial institution that engages in significant trade with North Korea from the U.S. financial system.

"The doctrine is maximum *pressure*, not maximum *cajoling*," he says. "If there are 5,000 businesses in China doing business with North Korea, we need to block them. We don't have time to say, 'Hey, let's pick one or two today, and maybe next month one or two, and next month one or two.' We need to do this now."

In September, Trump signed an executive order expanding the Treasury Department's authority to go after companies, banks, and individuals who conduct, finance, or facilitate trade with Kim's regime—including Chinese banks engaged in transactions benefitting North Korea. Treasury officials say the ability to impose new sanctions

MARC PISCOTTY / GETTY

will force those entities to choose between Pyongyang and using the U.S. financial system.

But the administration remains hesitant to act against Chinese businesses violating U.S. laws, says Bruce Klingner, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation and former CIA deputy division chief for Korea. “So far, there have been no entities sanctioned under that new executive order, and we still haven’t seen Chinese banks added to the list beyond the one,” he says, referring to the Bank of Dandong. The Treasury Department unilaterally blocked the small Chinese institution from the U.S. financial system in November—the first such action by a U.S. administration in years.

Sanctions against North Korea should be constantly “rolling in” to make the Kim regime choose among its military, its elites, and its weapons program, says former State and Treasury Department official Anthony Ruggiero. “There’s a feeling inside the administration that there might be a line that if the United States crosses, that China will not be as cooperative on North Korea sanctions anymore,” says Ruggiero, now a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. “We’re nowhere near that line. We’re talking about Chinese companies and individuals and banks that are violating U.S. law.”

In a New Year’s Day speech, Kim signaled his openness to talks with the South about sending North Korean athletes to the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang next month. Seoul followed up on that suggestion, and the countries sat down for their first formal meeting in two years on January 9—where it was agreed the North would send representatives to the games and that the two countries would also hold further talks. North Korean negotiators rejected any possibility of talks on de-nuclearizing the peninsula, saying, “All our weapons, including atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs, and ballistic missiles are only aimed at the United States, not our brethren.” Gardner believes meetings between North and South could help eventually eliminate the nuclear threat.

“At some point, somebody has to move to break this stalemate, and I hope that it’s because we’ve seen effect in our sanctions starting to take hold,” he says. But he knows that the North has on many occasions engaged in talks and made promises, only to go back on its word as soon as the pressure relented. And, Gardner reiterates, he supports the Trump administration’s insistence that high-level negotiations about North Korea’s future cannot occur without a denuclearization commitment from Pyongyang.

The Colorado senator is less happy with the president’s bombastic taunting of Kim Jong-un. In September, Trump called the North Korean dictator “Rocket Man” in an address to the U.N. General Assembly, and he took to Twitter on January 2 after Kim warned that he had a nuclear button on his desk and the entire United States in range of his nuclear weapons. “Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him,” the president wrote, “that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!”

“I wouldn’t have said it that way,” Gardner admits when I ask him about the tweet. But, he goes on, “I’m not worried about trying to figure out the relationship between the president and Twitter, I am worried about what Kim Jong-un is trying to do to the world.”

Gardner has the administration’s ear on Korea policy and criticizing the president isn’t the best way to keep it. But he has been willing to stand up to Trump if important issues are at stake.

When Trump did not denounce the far-right groups behind a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville in August, Gardner called him out. “Mr. President—we must call evil by its name. These were white supremacists and this was domestic terrorism,” he wrote in a tweet. And Gardner firmly rejected Roy Moore, the Trump-backed candidate for Alabama’s open Senate seat who was credibly accused of sexual misconduct with teenage girls. “Roy Moore will never have the support of the senatorial committee,” he told me on December 7.

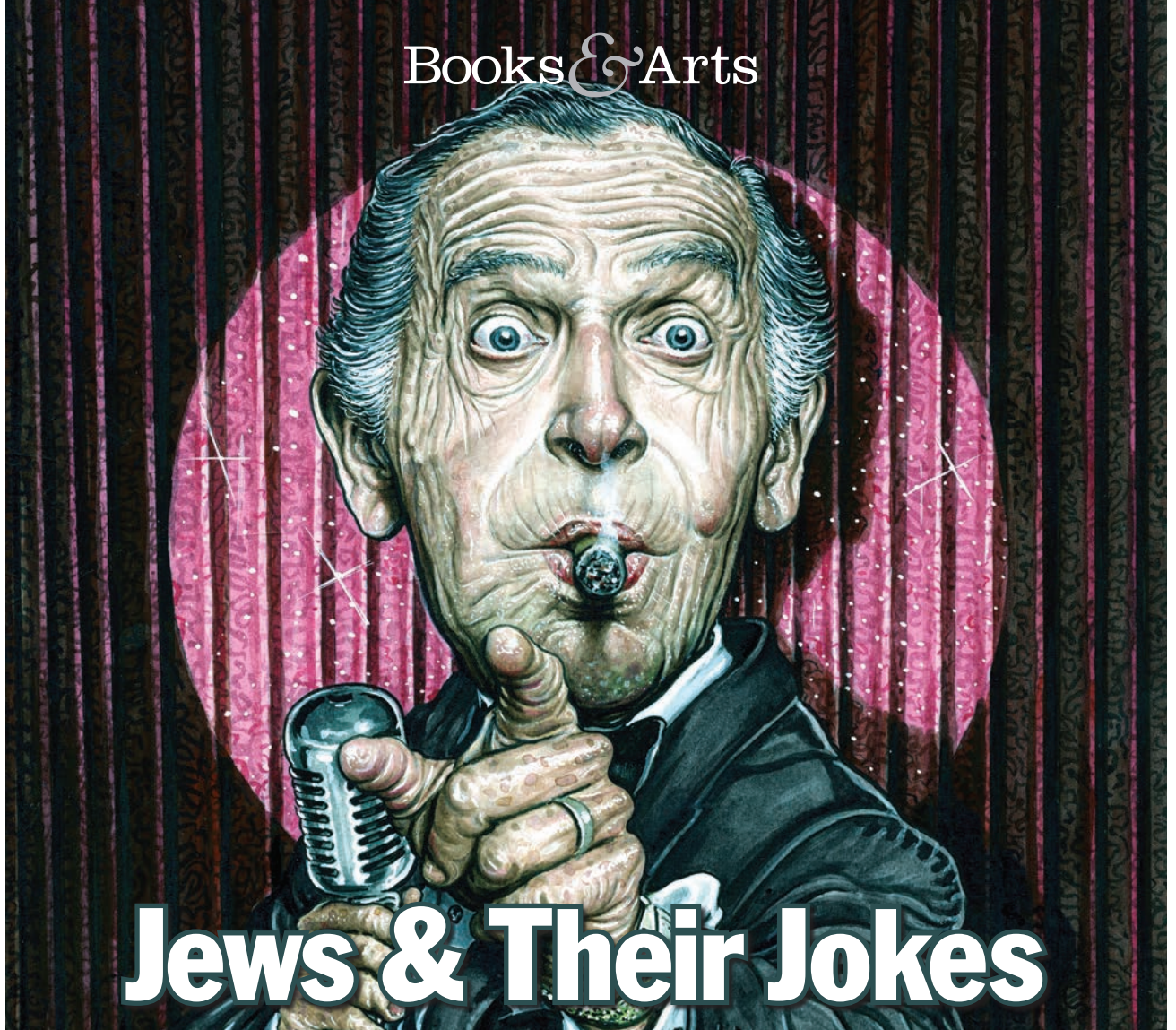
Character matters to Gardner.

On a snowy Thursday in January, he asked me back to his office. He wanted to tell me about Ralph Carr, the governor of Colorado whose opposition to the internment of U.S. citizens of Japanese descent after the attack on Pearl Harbor cost him his political career. “He stood up because he believed what was happening was unconstitutional. He believed that if we’re not standing up for their rights, who will?” Gardner says. “People thought he’d go on to become president. He ended up losing his next election and died about ten years after that.”

Gardner keeps a picture of Carr on his office wall. “It’s to remind me of the job that we have in this country—to stand up for everyone, regardless of how popular it is,” he says, looking up at the framed photograph. “Our liberty isn’t based on a popularity poll. It’s based on the Constitution. Our rights given from God. And we can never let that change.” ♦

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**‘I’m not worried about trying to figure out the relationship between the president and Twitter, I am worried about what Kim Jong-un is trying to do to the world.’**



# Jews & Their Jokes

*The sources and substance of Jewish humor, from King David to Larry David.* BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

**H**ow odd of God / To choose the Jews,” a scrap of verse by the English journalist William Norman Ewer, has over the years had many answering refrains. “Not odd, you Sod / The Jews chose God” is one; “What’s so Odd / His son was one” is another; and a third goes “This surely was no mere whim, / Given that the *goyim* annoy ’im.” But the central mystery remains: God chose the Jews for what, exactly? After reading Jeremy Dauber’s *Jewish*

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**Jewish Comedy**  
*A Serious History*  
by Jeremy Dauber  
Norton, 364 pp., \$28.95

*Comedy: A Serious History*, an excellent new survey of Jewish humor from the Old Testament through Adam Sandler, some might say that God chose the Jews to convey jokes, write sitcoms and comic movies, and publish novels peopled chiefly by clownish antiheroes.

Citing a Pew Research Center study titled “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” Dauber reports that “42 percent of respondents felt that ‘having a good sense of humor’ was part of ‘being Jew-

ish in America today,’ 14 percent more than being ‘part of a Jewish community’ and 23 percent more than ‘observing Jewish law.’” In other words, at the heart of being Jewish, in the minds of a preponderant number of American Jews, is comedy. How did this minority people produce so much humor, so many jokey jokes?

The Old Testament, to put it gently, is not notable for humor. As Dauber notes, the first of its paucity of laughs is given to Sarah, wife of the 100-year-old Abraham, who informs her she is to have his child. Dauber early considers, and frequently harkens back to, the book of Esther, which he cites as “the first work to feature the joyful celebration and

IMAGES: DREW FRIEDMAN

comic pleasure that comes with an anti-Semite's downfall and the frustration of that form of persecutory intent." After a recent rereading, I must report that the book of Esther is less than uproarious. But the book does record a resounding Jewish victory, and such victories, until the advent of the Israel Defense Forces, were only slightly less rare for the Jews than Super Bowl appearances for the Cleveland Browns.

Humor has not been without its dreary analysts and theorists. Along with so much else, Freud got the impulse behind comedy wrong, arguing that a joke is chiefly an act of aggression. He did, though, as was his wont, make a number of useful observations while coming to his false conclusion. "I do not know," he wrote apropos of the Jews, "whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of their own character."

Their often ambiguous place in the world has given Jews a great deal to think about and, having taken thought, subsequently to joke about. Jeremy Dauber divides this body of humor into seven categories, devoting a chapter to each. His categories are:

1. Jewish comedy is a response to persecution and anti-Semitism.
2. Jewish comedy is a satirical gaze at Jewish social and communal norms.
3. Jewish comedy is bookish, witty, intellectual allusive play.
4. Jewish comedy is vulgar, raunchy, and body-obsessed.
5. Jewish comedy is mordant, ironic, and metaphysically oriented.
6. Jewish comedy is focused on the folksy, everyday, quotidian Jew.
7. Jewish comedy is about the blurred and ambiguous nature of Jewishness itself.

Every decent book on comedy should at a minimum include several good jokes, a criterion by which both Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* and Henri Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* notably fail. So does Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation*. Even a bad book on comedy, one with the most improbable theories, is partially saved by a few

good jokes, so that it "shouldn't," as the punchline from an old Jewish joke has it, "be a total loss." Jeremy Dauber, recognizing that analyzing comedy is a mug's game, along with being one of the quickest known paths to boredom, lards—or should I say "schmaltzes"—his text with several splendid jokes within his seven categories.

Of Dauber's categories, anti-Semitic jokes have never been in short supply ("What is the ultimate Jewish dilemma: Ham—on sale!"). Jokes about anti-Semites, though, tend to be



Opposite, Milton Berle; above, Don Rickles

richer, like the one about the drunk at the bar who three times offers to buy drinks for the house, each time excluding from his generosity "my Israelite pal at the end of the bar." When the Jew asks the drunk what he has against him, the drunk answers, "You sank the *Titanic*." The Jew replies, "I didn't sink the *Titanic*, an iceberg sank the *Titanic*." After belching daintily, the drunk responds: "Iceberg, Greenberg, Goldberg—you're all no damn good."

I used to fancy a definition of the Jews as "just like everyone else, only more so." But more needs to be said if one is to understand Jewish humor—not the jokes but the impetus driving the humor. I should say this derives from the split social personality of Jews, their simultaneous feeling of resentment at not being entirely in the main-

stream of ordinary life joined to their disdain for the vapidness of that life, thus linking a sense of inferiority to one of superiority. Jeremy Dauber notes that there are essentially three kinds of Jewish jokes: "jokes that showcase particular Jewish conditions or circumstances, jokes that highlight particular Jewish sensibilities, and jokes that feature particular Jewish archetypes."

Dauber sets out the various theories of humor. These include the incongruity theory, the relief (of tension) theory, and the congruity theory. There is also the Jewish superiority theory and, thrown in at no extra charge, the lachrymose theory of Jewish history (the joke here is that the theme of every Jewish holiday is "We suffered, we survived—let's eat!"). Dauber also considers the comedy of Jewish novelists and storytellers—S. Y. Abramovitch, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz; Bellow, Malamud, and Roth (the Hart, Shaffner & Marx of American literature, as Bellow derisively called them); Bruce Jay Friedman, and others. Dauber's comments on these writers are necessarily scant, but then to have given this aspect of his subject full attention would have swollen his book and diverted him from his main task.

More interesting are Dauber's pages on Jews and the movies. Two of the best comic directors—Ernst Lubitsch and Billy Wilder—were Jewish. Perhaps the most amusing comment in *Jewish Comedy* is about the movie *Gentleman's Agreement*, a movie that attacks anti-Semitism, a comment made not by a Jew but by Ring Lardner Jr., who said the moral of the film was that "you should never be mean to a Jew because he might turn out to be a Gentile." Dauber brings up earlier movies that were "de-Semitized," or made less Jewish, by Hollywood studio moguls—the Jewish Sam Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, and others—lest they not find ready recognition and acceptance with non-Jewish audiences. No movie, though, could be more Jewish than Mel Brooks's *The Producers* (1967). That it could be made at all, let alone come to

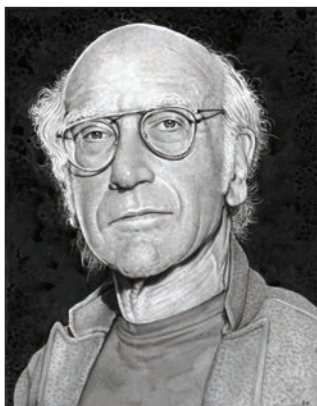
be considered a classic, is a sign of how deeply Jewish humor has permeated American culture.

The liveliest pages in *Jewish Comedy* are those on which Dauber takes up Jewish jokes within his categories. These include rabbi jokes, *schnorrer* (or beggar) jokes, *schlemiel* and *schlimazel* jokes, *shadkhn* (or matchmaker) jokes, Jewish American Princess jokes, Nazi jokes, even Holocaust jokes. A nice selection of Jewish curses—"May your bones be broken as often as the Ten Commandments"—is also provided. The most politically incorrect of such jokes are Jewish women jokes, which play on the stereotypes of the nagging, over-caring, overbearing disapproving Jewish mother (portrayed brilliantly years ago by Elaine May in one of the Nichols and May skits); the Jewish American Princess ("What does a JAP make for dinner?" "Reservations, of course."); Jews and cosmetic surgery (Dorothy Parker said that Fanny Brice's rhinoplasty was a case of "cutting off her nose to spite her race"); the domineering wife (when a boy returns home from school to announce that he is to play a Jewish husband in the school play, his mother sends him back to tell the teacher he wants a speaking part); and the extravagant wife ("A thief stole my wife's purse with all her credit cards. I'm not going after him. He's spending less than she does.")

Perhaps the *summa* of Jewish women jokes has Goldberg, walking along the beach, who picks up a bottle out of which emerges a genie, offering him one wish. Goldberg wishes for world peace. The genie tells him that he gets that wish a lot and hasn't had much success in fulfilling it. Perhaps he'd like to try another wish. Very well, Goldberg says, then he would like more respect from his wife, for her to provide the occasional home-cooked meal, perhaps allow him sex every

other fiscal quarter. The genie pauses, then says, "Tell me, Goldberg, what precisely do you mean by peace?"

Several pages in Jeremy Dauber's book are given over to Jewish stand-up comics, a group in the modern era never in short supply. (The title of the world's shortest book, no one will be surprised to learn, is *Famous German Stand-Up Comics*.) The roster of notable Jewish comedians includes Mickey Katz, Belle Barth, Jack Benny, George Burns, Henny Youngman, Joe E. Lewis, Oscar Levant, Phil Silvers, Jack E. Leonard, Myron Cohen, the Marx Brothers, the Three Stooges, Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, Buddy Hackett, Don Rickles, Shecky Greene, Jerry Lewis,



Larry David; Joan Rivers

Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, Sam Levenson, Allan Sherman, Mel Brooks, Joan Rivers, Jackie Mason, Woody Allen, Larry David, Jerry Seinfeld, Albert Brooks, Sarah Silverman, and more. The minor league for many of these older comedians, the place where they honed their skills, was the Borscht Belt in the Catskills, whose resort audiences of mostly New York Jews provided one of the most knowing and toughest of all audiences going, so tough that Joey Adams, quoted by Dauber, remarked that "when you bomb in the mountains, it's like a concentration camp with sour cream."

Some of these comedians worked Jewish—told Jewish jokes, did green-

horn accents, used Yiddishisms—others not. Another division among Jewish comedians is between the safe and edgy, a few of the latter going over the edge itself into dangerous political or sexual territory (Mort Sahl, Lenny Bruce) or into simple bad taste. Larry David's specialty on his own show *Curb Your Enthusiasm* is to walk right up to the line of bad taste and then cross it, not to everyone's amusement. Mel Brooks worked the line of bad taste and got away with it; recall *Blazing Saddles* with its flatulence campfire scene and Yiddish-speaking American Indians. Interviewed in 2001 by Mike Wallace for *60 Minutes* when *The Producers* was reincarnated as a Broadway show, Brooks ignored Wallace's first question to ask him what he paid for his wristwatch; instead of answering Wallace's second question, Brooks rubbed Wallace's lapel between his thumb and forefinger and asked what the jacket he was wearing set him back. Playing on the stereotype of the vulgar, money-crazed Jew, Brooks, somehow, came off as lovable.

Lenny Bruce spoke of putting "the jargon of the hipster, the argot of the underworld, and Yiddish" together in his act. I saw him one evening in an east side New York movie theater—he had not long before lost his cabaret license owing to his generous use of obscenity—doing a bit in which a Jewish nightclub owner is attempting to persuade a Puerto Rican busboy to service sexually Sophie Tucker, the grand old lady of show business, who is appearing at the club and who is presumed to be an insatiable nymphomaniac. They go back and forth, the Puerto Rican busboy and the Jewish owner, the latter arguing and pleading, the former stalwart in his refusals, until finally the busboy exclaims, "She is an old woman, Mr. Rosenberg, I don't care how much you pay me, I won't [a slight pause here] *schutup* [word drawn out] her." The joke, of course, is not only in the premise of Sophie Tucker's low needs, but also in the young Puerto Rican's reverting to Yiddish to close the argument.

Perhaps the edgiest of contemporary Jewish comedians is Sarah Silverman, who in one of her bits, quoted by Dauber, claimed it was neither the Romans nor the Jews who killed Christ but the blacks. In another, not in *Jewish History* but in some of her shows, Silverman plays a faux-naïve Jewish American Princess, whose niece tells her that she learned in school that Hitler killed 60 million Jews during the Holocaust. Silverman corrects her niece: “I think he’s responsible for killing 6 million Jews.” And she said, ‘Oh yeah, 6 million, I knew that. But seriously, I mean, what’s the difference?’ ‘Uh, the difference is 60 million is unforgivable.’” In another bit Silverman plays a ditzzy woman in her early 30s, childless, her biological clock running, who recounts how inconvenient at various earlier stages in her life it would have been to have had a child, and concludes, “The best time to have a baby is when you’re a black teenager.” How Silverman has been able to tell such politically incorrect jokes and not been stoned to death is an interesting question.

*Jewish Comedy* seeks to be comprehensive, to touch all aspects of its subject, from the Old Testament through the Talmudic canon through the past century and up-to-the-moment comedy, and all in under 300 pages (not counting endnotes). Dauber does an impressive and fairly complete job of it. Some things, inevitably, are more lightly touched than others. Talmudic humor is among them. The humor of Jewish intramural rivalry—the snobbery obtaining among Eastern, German, and Sephardic Jews—is another. All I remember from a novel read decades ago, whose title and author’s name are lost to me, is that what separates Sephardic Jews from all others, apart from their extravagant genealogical pretensions, is that no Sephardic Jew can stand gefilte fish. German Jews were known by Eastern Jews as *yekkes*, meaning jackets, or suit jackets, which German Jews in their formality were said never to remove. The stereotype made possible the joke that holds the difference between a *yekke* and a virgin is that a *yekke* remains a *yekke*.

Of television comedy, Dauber takes up, among others, Norman Lear, Larry David, and Jerry Seinfeld. Lear’s most memorable show, *All in the Family*, featured the rebarbative Archie Bunker, who tossed off anti-Semitic, racial, and reactionary remarks and could only have been created by a Jewish liberal, which Lear, still working at 95, remains. Larry David was of course one of the principal writers for *Seinfeld*, a show whose Jewish content I think Jeremy Dauber may overemphasize. He calls the character Elaine Benes,



*The Marx Brothers*

played by Julia Louis-Dreyfus, “a classic example of the Jewish American princess,” which she is not, and he suggests that Jewishness was central to the show in a way that doesn’t ring true, even though Jerry’s parents are stereotypically Jewish and so is the character George Costanza and his family. (Jerry Stiller, who plays Frank Costanza, remarked that the Costanzas were “a Jewish family living under the witness protection program under the name Costanza.”) Yet not Jewishness but heightened selfishness and a refusal to accept adulthood seem to me the twin comic engines which kept the show humming along for nearly a decade.

A category that Dauber might have added to his other seven is that of jokes about Jewish assimilation and Jews sliding away from Judaism and their Jewishness generally. This would include all those jokes about nose jobs and name-changing. Perhaps the subtlest of these jokes is the one about the three rabbis who over lunch discover that all of them have a problem with mice in their synagogues. The first rabbi recounts that he called in an exterminator, but without great success. The second rabbi tells that he set tens of mouse-traps around his synagogue, but when one of the traps went off it greatly disturbed the service and he had to remove them all. The third rabbi, however, announces that he found a solution by buying a 25-pound wheel of Stilton cheese that he set on the *byma*, or altar, whereupon 68 mice suddenly appeared. When asked how that got rid of the problem, the rabbi replies, “I *bar mitzvahed* all 68. They never returned.”

At the close of his book, Dauber mentions the possibility that the end of the era of Jewish comedy may be near. Political correctness figures eventually to take its toll on Jewish comedy, as it does on all humor. The greenhorn accent, often central to the telling of Jewish jokes, is unknown to (because unheard by) generations of younger Jews. The art of joke-telling itself, a form of oral short story, seems everywhere in decline.

My own view is that Jewish humor will continue as long as the reigning note behind Jewish jokes continues to be the belief, everywhere confirmed, that out of the crooked timber of humanity nothing entirely straight can be made, that human nature in all its nuttiness does not change, and that the greatest fool of all—he could be mayor of Chelm, that legendary Jewish town of fools—is he who thinks it can. ♦

*Illustrator Drew Friedman is the author of Old Jewish Comedians, More Old Jewish Comedians, Even More Old Jewish Comedians, and his latest book, Drew Friedman’s Chosen People, all available from Fantagraphics Books.*

# Prodigies and Parenting

*Extraordinary kids need more than just education.*

BY NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY



*A children's IQ test produced by Houghton Mifflin in the 1930s*

In a recent conversation with an administrator who spent years at one of Manhattan's most prestigious prep schools, I brought up the subject of gifted education. "I don't know what you mean," she responded without a trace of irony. "Every child is gifted in his or her own way." In a culture where every parent thinks he is raising a genius, teachers and principals (particularly those whose salaries depend on tuition dollars) have been taught never to say otherwise.

But for parents who really are raising geniuses, there seems to be little in the way of support or guidance. In their 2012 book on gifted education Chester Finn and Jessica Hockett argue that we have spent so much energy trying to get lower-performing students to catch up that we have neglected those

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**Off the Charts**  
*The Hidden Lives and Lessons of American Child Prodigies*  
by Ann Hulbert  
Knopf, 372 pp., \$27.95

in the upper tiers. Fortunately, for kids at the very top, like those profiled in Ann Hulbert's new book, *Off the Charts*, schooling may be largely irrelevant.

The children Hulbert describes—from the famous ones like Shirley Temple and Bobby Fischer to the lesser known Billy Sidis and Norbert Wiener—demonstrated extraordinary talents at young ages and it was their parents, not their schools, that were tasked with determining how best to let these capacities flourish. Hulbert approaches her subject historically, beginning with "the wonder boys of Harvard," Wiener and Sidis. As she writes,

The milestones began with mastery of the alphabet before two and full literacy by three or four. ... Avid

reading ensued, mostly of nonfiction. The boys then speedily amassed languages (Latin, Greek, German, French, and Russian for both, and some Hebrew, Turkish, and Armenian for Billy). Their intense scientific interests (anatomy and astronomy for Billy, chemistry and naturalist zeal for Norbert) inspired unusual strides before school age as well.

Their parents, though, took distinctly different approaches to the boys. Norbert went to high school at 9 and then college three years later. But rather than send him to Harvard right away, which was the obvious choice, his parents moved to be near Tufts and sent him there to keep him out of the spotlight for a bit longer. Billy, by contrast, "was on his own as he entered adolescence, and more of an outsider than ever on campus. Under suspicion ... of being mentally unbalanced, he was prey to continued press hounding."

And rather than protect him from such exposure, his relationship with his parents only made things worse. As a cousin observed, Billy's parents were "not cruel" but they "had no truly paternal or maternal feeling: they could educate a child but not rear him, which is a different thing."

This distinction between education and rearing is useful for all parents, not just those of prodigies. But for children who are particularly high achievers, it seems easy for parents to forget that their charges are still children and that their psychological development cannot be ignored in favor of the development of their talents. So many of the men and women profiled by Hulbert entered a period of major crisis in adolescence, and a surprising number seemed never to find their way out.

Billy Sidis became an eccentric, his life story shrouded in mysteries and lies. Norbert Wiener became a mathematician at MIT and the founder of the briefly influential field of cybernetics.

Henry Cowell's parents seemed somewhat more attuned to the question of their son's overall development and actually apologized for his early reading: "Both his father and I disapprove of beginning formal education when a child is very young, but when a baby points to a letter or word and

fairly demands to be told the name of it, what's to be done?"

For the most part, Henry, who was born in 1897 to parents of very modest means in Menlo Park, California, was given free range to pursue the subjects that he enjoyed. As his mother, who kept detailed notes on her son's development—particularly his musical talents—wrote, "The child must be delighted with his work. ... He must study the thing he wants while he wants to know it. ... It is not the way of wisdom to hold Geometry before the face of a dreamer while he is at his dreams. First let him wake to the presence, if not the beauty, of angles in the world."

Cowell, who went on to become a prominent modernist composer, was discovered at the age of 12 or so by Lewis Terman, a psychologist interested in the study of prodigies. He included Cowell in his *Genetic Studies of Genius*, a major longitudinal study that Hulbert dubs "the first youthful-talent search."

With an IQ of 131, Cowell was not on the highest end of Terman's group. But as Hulbert notes, "precocity, especially as measured on a scale like Terman's, doesn't turn out to be a very reliable precursor of outstanding mature performance ... particularly of a mold-breaking variety." Throughout *Off the Charts* Hulbert returns to the difficult transition from childhood prodigy to adult genius. Cowell's life was hardly simple or neat, but Hulbert argues that, because of his upbringing, he was one of the few who made it.

Hulbert summarizes in her own words some of the findings from the Terman study's 25-year follow-up: Within the study's sample, "extra [IQ] points did not account for more accomplishment. What made the clearest difference [among the study's subjects] was, not surprisingly, family background." Cowell's mother had helped him develop the kind of calm and self-assurance that served him well as he grew older. Cowell described how a theme might present "itself to me in a flash. ... But it must be given in material form, and I may work long hours to get the scheme down in a form which adequately represents it."

Indeed it is these long hours of work

that seem to make difference between the child prodigy and the adult genius. As Hulbert notes, "Parents and mentors presumed that momentum would propel a young marvel onward through adolescence. They tended to gloss over the fact that immature absorption in a pursuit has to give way to newly committed, self-aware exploration."

And this is one of the parts of Hulbert's work that seems very much applicable to parents of average children, not just prodigies. Finding a way to move them from something with which they are briefly obsessed to having them push through some difficulties to achieve something larger is a deep challenge of modern parenting. How do you get a child who likes playing the piano when it's easy to play to working through difficult passages for long periods of time? Whether it's reading or math or constructing complex Lego structures, it

is tempting to let children slide when things become difficult. (This is a challenge Amy Chua famously addresses in *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*.) As Hulbert summarizes the tenets: "Start the talent-building process very early; assume the child is sturdy and full of energy; expect feats of mastery; value family loyalty above youthful autonomy or popularity with peers."

In a world filled with parents who hover over their children and protect them from any bad grade, poor performance, or other disappointment, there is no doubt that a dose of grit will probably help strengthen young people for their journeys to adulthood. But there is a difference between providing them with regular challenges and treating them as shorter versions of adults. As Hulbert concludes: "The last thing prodigies, or any other children, need is to feel that the clock is ticking on their talents." ♦

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## Justice and Sorrow

*The will of the gods and the bloody lessons of Herodotus' Histories.* BY ALGIS VALIUNAS

Writing history, and especially the history of the ancient world, is an uncertain business, in which the truth is as elusive as in metaphysics. Modern historians of the classical world necessarily rely heavily on the works of the ancients. And the supreme historians among the ancient Greeks had to rely on their own observations, the oral tradition, and the tales of any eyewitnesses they could find. The saying goes that journalism is the first draft of history; however, it was not mere journalists but the Greek master historians—Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon—who were the original men of the first draft. As the scholarly eminence Arnaldo Momigliano wrote tell-

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ingly, "There was no Herodotus before Herodotus." When Herodotus (ca. 483-424 B.C.) was relating some 200 years of history that no previous historian had written, getting the story straight posed herculean challenges: He had to confront the Hydra of numerous irrefutable reports and rumors over and over again, and inevitably he gave up trying to kill the many-headed monster and instead recorded every factoid, preposterous assertion, and bit of scuttlebutt that came his way. Sometimes he made clear what he found believable and what he did not; sometimes he left the reader to figure it out for himself.

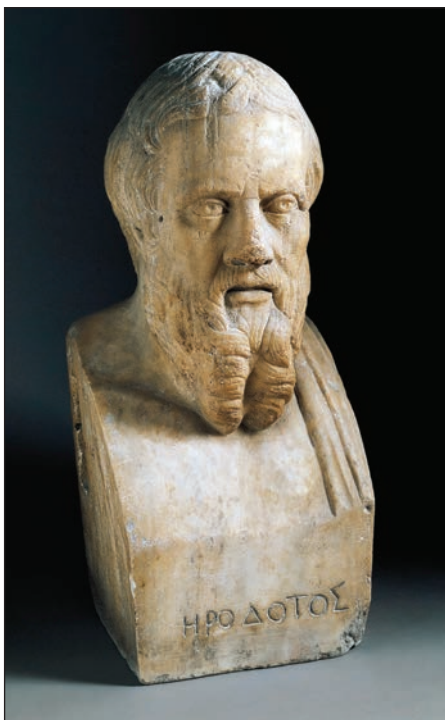
The result is a work that has a privileged relationship with the truth similar to that of an epic poem—that is, Herodotus retails everlasting truths about baneful and glorious war, the several breeds of political men,

the difference between regimes founded on love of freedom and those in which one man commands and the rest are his slaves, the varying proportions of reason and unreason in human affairs, and the immemorial conflict between East and West, in an omnium gatherum that incorporates propulsive narrative of momentous events, divagations into deep background and historical side-shows, divagations from the divagations, ethnographic investigations, and descriptions of marvels that the author has seen or heard tell of. If you want to know of the phoenix and the flying serpents of Egypt, the land where people do everything opposite to what they do elsewhere, so that men urinate squatting and women standing up, Herodotus will satisfy your curiosity. Little wonder that the man celebrated as the Father of History—the title first bestowed by Cicero—has also been known as the Father of Lies.

Getting the story straight is still hard. Even to call Herodotus' masterpiece *The Histories* (or *The History*, in the translation by David Grene that I will refer to throughout) is not historically correct: *Istorie* simply meant *inquiries*, and by creating the historical genre Herodotus inaugurated the tradition that would rename his book for posterity.

The book opens with the declaration that the actions to be related are remarkable and worthy of being memorialized in a form that will preserve their living essence: "I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history, that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with all this, the reason why they fought one another." The reasons given by the Persians, who will become the Greeks' principal enemy in the wars, extend far back into the haze of myth. The names are all familiar, but from the poets, and it is startling to see them in a work of history. In the Persian version, after the Phoenicians had abducted the daughter of the king of Argos, Io, and the Greeks in retaliation abducted not only the daughter of the king of Tyre,

Europa, but also the daughter of the king of Colchis, Medea, and then Alexander, son of the Trojan king, Priam, carried off Helen, the Greeks seriously upped the ante by destroying Troy. This Greek conquest in Asia Minor was the unforgivable primal offense in Persian eyes, for "the Persians claim, as their own, Asia and all the barbarian people who live in it, but Europe and the Greek people they regard as entirely



separate." Herodotus forbears from weighing in on the truth of these tales but proceeds to tell of "that man that I myself know began unjust acts against the Greeks": Croesus, the Lydian king who conquered Greek colonies in Asia Minor and forced them to pay tribute. "But before Croesus' rule all the Greeks were free." The Oriental lust for dominion and the Greek passion for freedom will constitute the moral polarities of the account. Yet Herodotus recognizes that this neat antithesis does not quite cover the vagaries of history: He writes that cities once great have now become small and cities once small have become great, so he knows that "man's good fortune never abides in the same place." A lesson that the victors in any war, and especially those with imperial aspirations, would do well to heed.

What is true of cities also holds for individual men, in particular those who have the fate of cities or empires in their hands, or believe they do. The story of Croesus points the moral. His far-reaching conquests made him immensely rich, and he considered himself the happiest of men. When he asked the Athenian visitor Solon, the writer of that city's laws, who was "the most blessed," Croesus fully expected the distinguished sage to say, "You are." Instead Solon extolled some obscure Greeks, private men who had lived virtuously and died nobly in battle or peacefully in their sleep. Croesus fumed and demanded an explanation. Solon replied that no man can be called blessed until he is dead, and he has lived and died well. Croesus dismissed Solon as a useless dullard.

"After Solon was gone, a great visitation of evil from the god laid hold of Croesus, and one may guess that it was because he thought he was of all mankind the most blessed." A dream foretold the death of his favorite son, and the prophecy proved true in spite of Croesus' misdirected efforts to thwart it. Another prophecy, from the oracle at Delphi, the holiest in the known world, so overwhelmed him with its clairvoyance that he sacrificed thousands of animals and piles of gold to secure the favor of Apollo, the Delphic god. When fear of the growing Persian power and ambition made Croesus think of preemptive war, he naturally consulted two oracles, both of which told him that if he attacked Persia he would destroy a mighty empire.

Spurred on by the oracles, he went to war, and the empire he destroyed was his own. Oracles are famously ambiguous, and Croesus overlooked the darker interpretive possibilities. Were, say, Thucydides telling the story, he would have made clear that if Croesus had possessed as much prudence as he did magnificence and piety he might have avoided the hard fall. It would have seemed to Thucydides that belief in the uncanny and the supernatural serves one's purpose only so long as one is equipped with sufficient reason—that is, so long as one has the intelligence to discount the supernatural and rely on one's

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virtue. But what Herodotus teaches is that Croesus' imprudence was in fact an insufficiency of piety: He might have preserved his empire had he further consulted the oracle for elucidation.

Reason and unreason are fatefully conjoined, and one can only hope to prevail for a time, in Herodotus' world, or even merely to survive there, if one acknowledges the supernatural forces that overdetermine all human action. Herodotus inhabits a moral universe in which there is an abundance of strife and suffering but there are evidently no accidents. The gods see all and decide all: The fate of men and empires is ultimately not under human control. From fearsome human passions for power and wealth and empire—the irrational desires that reason serves and cannot master—the rule of the gods is conceived: The cruelties and terrors men inflict on one another are too frightful to attribute purely to human agency. Herodotus writes that people everywhere have the same knowledge of the gods, and he shows that what they all know is the helplessness of human nature, which cannot govern its most ferocious impulses by reason, and must look to divinity for whatever justice can be found in this dark and tragic place. Operating on the familiar principle that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must, men in Herodotus' world are no better or worse than they have ever been. However, Herodotus' human beings cannot bear the responsibility for their own worst deeds; they need divine overseers to mete out appropriate punishments.

Yet men act, apparently with wills of their own. And this is the paradox of the tragic sense of life that Herodotus shares with the poets: Tragic heroes choose freely, or seem to, even while realizing an inescapable destiny. A man's character is his fate, said the philosopher Heraclitus, but philosopher's wisdom goes only so far for Herodotus; signs, portents, oracles, and prophetic dreams all testify to the inexorable authority of the invisible world, so that at most one might say that character colludes with the unseen powers, and one could even be tempted to concede

that a man's fate is his fate is his fate.

The tragic figures in Herodotus tend to be Persian rulers rich in hubris. King Cyrus, greatest of the barbarian despots, displayed the tempestuous arrogance that will not tolerate any superior power, even if it is a force of nature. When one of his sacred white horses was drowned in the turbulent waters of the Gyndes River, "Cyrus was furious with the river for its insolence and threatened it: 'I will make you so feeble that, for the rest of time, even women will easily cross you without wetting their knees.'" He interrupted his mili-

*Herodotus inhabits a moral universe in which there is an abundance of strife and suffering but there are evidently no accidents. The gods see all and decide all: The fate of men and empires is ultimately not under human control.*

tary campaign against Babylon so that his troops could spend the entire summer on an engineering project to divide the offending river into 360 ankle-deep rivulets. One sees here the stupendous grandiosity that is the motive force behind Persian overreaching to the point of catastrophe.

After conquering the Babylonians, Cyrus set his sights on the Massagetae; ignoring the circumspect advice of his war council, he listened instead to Croesus, who in captivity had become Cyrus's most trusted confidant and who pressed the king to advance into hostile territory, admonishing him of the unbearable shame he would incur by yielding ground to a woman, the Massagetaean queen, Tomyris. Having made his move Cyrus dreamt that

night of Darius, the son of a loyal subordinate, with wings on his shoulders that overshadowed Asia and Europe. Cyrus interpreted the dream to mean that Darius was plotting against him. "But to him the god was giving signs that he himself should die, right there where he was, and that his kingship should pass to Darius." When Tomyris offered Cyrus the chance to return her captured son and to withdraw in peace from her land, he refused and rushed into battle, which Herodotus says was the most devastating ever fought between barbarians; Cyrus was killed and his army defeated.

Barbarians will be barbarians, and "Tomyris sought out his corpse among the Persian dead, and when she found it, she filled a skin with human blood and fixed his head in the skin." Thus the bloodthirsty Cyrus would drink his fill in brutal poetic justice. Sometimes a man, or a woman, will add an emphatic fillip to the will of the gods. And the arabesques that barbarians give to physical and psychic monstrosity are endlessly inventive.

Against barbarian despotism and savagery, Herodotus pits Greek love of freedom and nobility in war. He has a particular brief for Athenian democracy, which enhanced immensely the city's greatness: "It is not only in respect of one thing but of everything that equality and free speech are clearly a good; take the case of Athens, which under the rule of princes proved no better in war than any of her neighbors but, once rid of those princes, was far the first of all."

Yet the gullibility of the Athenian *demos* embroiled the city in a war with Persia that ought to have been avoided. Aristagoras, prince of Miletus, an Athenian colony taken over by the Persians, had gone to Sparta to supplicate the king, Cleomenes, for support of the Ionian revolt against Persian subjugation; Cleomenes, paragon of rectitude, with only his city's good in mind, sent him packing. Turning to the Athenians, Aristagoras "promised them anything and everything," and won them to his cause. "It seems that it is easier to fool many men than one." The Athenian popular assembly voted to send 20 ships

in support of the Ionian effort. “These were the ships that were the beginning of evils for both Greeks and barbarians.” After the expedition had captured and burned the city of Sardis, the Athenians, exasperated by their allies’ fecklessness, withdrew their aid. But upon hearing of the Sardis disaster, Darius, now the Persian king, first asked who the Athenians even were, then launched an arrow into the air and prayed for vengeance against them; he ordered a servant to tell him three times at every meal, “Master, remember the Athenians.” The upshot was a Persian expedition against Athens and its Greek allies, which repulsed the barbarian forces at Marathon in 490 B.C. Darius did not lead that failed venture, and he died before he could mount his own intended punitive mission.

His hotheaded son Xerxes succeeded him and inherited his hatred of Athens. Vast power believes it deserves vast dominion, over the richest lands in the world, and Xerxes conceived the project of universal empire in colossal self-regard and desire for vengeance: “For the sun will look down upon no country that has a border with ours, but I shall make them all one country, once I have passed in my progress through all Europe.” Cautious voices tried to dissuade Xerxes, and he was inclined to heed them—until a terrifying figure appeared in his dreams to insist on the war plan, and the very same vision appeared to his uncle Artabanus, who had prudently counseled against the war and against putting too much stock in dreams. Prophetic enchantment overrode mere reason and the war was on.

Over the course of five years Xerxes gathered an army of 2,641,610 fighting men, with millions more in the service train, Herodotus writes, by far the largest army the world had seen. (Modern estimates put the figure at 75,000 to 100,000.) The lash drove the barbarian soldiers on; Xerxes even ordered his men to inflict 300 lashes on the waters of the Hellespont, after a storm had smashed the bridge he had built to span the strait.

Free men do not require the bite of the whip on their backs to defend their freedom. Old enmities forgotten for the

time, Greece stood united against the Persian onslaught. The experience of freedom steeled the Spartans to fight to the death against insurmountable odds. The 300 Spartans who defended the mountain pass of Thermopylae against a Persian horde and died fighting became the symbol of Greek valor. Disaster threatened. Xerxes took Athens. Only divine intervention saved the Greeks, in the form of a storm that sank most of the Persian fleet. “All this was done by the god, that the Persian armament might be made equal with that of the Greeks and not much greater.” The Greek navy routed the Persians in the sea battle of Salamis in 480, the Greek army routed the enemy at Plataea in 479, and Xerxes fled.

The Greek triumph and the Persian defeat represented the contrast between two human types. When after Thermopylae Arcadian deserters told Xerxes and his generals that the Greeks were holding the Olympic games, in which athletes competed for an olive crown, a Persian grandee exclaimed, “What sort of men have you led us to fight against, who contend, not for money, but purely for the sake of excellence?” The war was won on the playing fields of Olympia and lost in the sybaritic Persian court where immeasurable luxury was the ultimate good.

Yet Herodotus knew that this sterling Greek virtue and unity in the name of freedom were not made to last. In the days of Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes (who ruled from 465 to 424), “more ills befell Greece than in all twenty generations before Darius. Some of these came about through the Persians, and some by the acts of the chief peoples of Greece warring against one another.”

This last reference was to the Peloponnesian War, which pitted Athens against Sparta, drew in a host of other Greek cities and colonies, and lasted far longer and was far more destructive to Greece than the Persian Wars. Some 15 years perhaps after Herodotus’ death, Persia actually became a Spartan ally for a time, and Persian treasure combined with Spartan courage to force the oppressive oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants on Athens. So

Herodotus honors the Greek defense of its freedom against overwhelming Persian might, but he also alludes to the Greek implosion that followed the heroic moment. Great cities fail, the best passes away, and this elegiac note dominates *The Histories*. Xerxes wept when he looked upon the masses of men under his command and observed that not one of them would be alive in 100 years; Artabanus redoubled the sorrow when he said in response that every man who has ever lived or will ever live will wish many times during his life that he were dead.

Herodotus unforgettably amplifies Artabanus’ point with a sidelight to the main event: the story of Hermotimus, “a man who, being wronged, achieved, of all the people I have known, the greatest vengeance.” Captured by enemies, Hermotimus had been sold to one Panionius of Chios, who made his living castrating comely youths and selling the geldings, highly prized by the barbarians for their unimpeachable trustworthiness. Hermotimus became the most honored eunuch in Xerxes’ court. Traveling with Xerxes’ expedition, he happened upon Panionius, greeted him as a long-lost friend, thanked him for the great benefits he had enjoyed, and promised to return the favor if Panionius and his family would accept his hospitality. When Hermotimus had secured his prey, in exultation he told Panionius that the gods in their justice had delivered the evildoer into his hands. Hermotimus thereupon compelled Panionius to castrate his four sons, then forced the sons to castrate their father. Here was perfect justice, after a barbaric fashion, which Herodotus records as a fitting lesson for the ages.

Last year or perhaps the year before marked the 2,500th anniversary of Herodotus’ birth. We can be grateful still to have his work after all these years, but his bleak teaching does not suit our time and place, which is averse to the tragic sense of life. Trigger warning: Human sorrow comes in infinite variety, and you can be sure that the gods spare no one; nothing human endures, and life is far from sweet even while it lasts. The Father of History did not lie about that. ♦



# She's a Stand-Up Gal

*The nostalgic marvels of Amazon's Mrs. Maisel.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**T**he most potent form of nostalgia is for a time you never knew in a place you do and imagine was at its peak before you came along. For me, that would be the 1950s in New York City, set to the cool, light strain of the Dave Brubeck Quartet playing Paul Desmond's "Take Five." I can never get enough of the cultural examples of the day—made-on-location pot-boiler movies about career girls, dated bestselling novels about the advertising business that once occupied paperback racks next to the giant phone booths in every drugstore, the original cast albums of the great Broadway musicals.

It has ever been thus. I was born in 1961 in Manhattan, and my early memories are of the divine remnants of the 1950s being washed away as I grew—second-rate restaurants that required formal dress for children, men in hats smoking cigarettes in movie-palace lobbies, my older sisters attending charm school and walking around our apartment with books balanced on their noggins, plump Checker cabs that could fit six in the back whose middle-aged Jewish drivers would tell your parents about their Catskills bungalow and their daughter at Cornell.

So when I say that the new Amazon show *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*—the first eight-episode season of which is set in a fairyland 1958 Manhattan in which all the colors are bright, the weather is good, and even Lenny Bruce is a nice guy exuberantly delighted just to be there to drink it all in—is the most wonderful thing to have happened in my life since the birth of my third

child, you should know the background and judge my opinion accordingly.

If I go too far, and I do, maybe you can believe me when I say *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* is an unabashedly delightful and entirely original confection. The show, just awarded a Golden Globe



Rachel Brosnahan in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*

for comedy, tells the story of Miriam, a happily married 26-year-old mother of two with a young executive husband who dabbles in stand-up comedy. She is a beautiful and funny dynamo of a Jewish girl living in a lovely Upper West Side apartment three floors down from her loving and acerbic parents. She inadvertently discovers that her husband has been cribbing his act from Bob Newhart and challenges him to do his own stuff. Whereupon he bombs on stage at the comedy club in Greenwich Village—and then announces he's leaving her for his secretary. Shattered and drunk, she wanders back into the club and onto the stage and begins to rant hilariously about him and his life. She tears the roof off the place, and suddenly Mrs. Maisel—raised only to be a wife and mother—has a show-business calling to pursue.

All this happens in the first episode. The rest of the series charts the evolution both of her odd career (which no one in her regular life knows about) and her tentative steps into a post-married life she never sought. Everything is changing subtly around her. She finds herself in Washington Square Park listening to a local activist named Jane Jacobs protesting a Robert Moses plan to build an expressway in lower Manhattan. Her academic mathematician father is hired by Bell Labs to do what we understand to be the originating work of the digital age. And Miriam finds herself amongst the beatnik poets and folk musicians who are the augurs of the 1960s to come.

None of that is heavy-handed or portentous. It's all atmospheric—the invocation of a glamorized, idealized past. Creator-writer-director Amy Sherman-Palladino, whose most notable prior credit was *The Gilmore Girls*, fills the proceedings with cracklingly witty (although over-profane) dialogue and gloriously swirling camerawork reminiscent of the 1950s musicals of Vincente Minnelli. This is not a show about cultural revolution. It's more like a really, really smart Doris Day/Rock Hudson movie set among the Semites.

On religiously Jewish matters, Sherman-Palladino makes dozens of stupid errors large and small, which usually ruins things like this for me. But on culturally Jewish matters, she's letter perfect.

And the show is anchored by one of the best small-screen comic female performances I've ever seen. How Rachel Brosnahan, a 26-year-old Gentile from the Chicago suburbs best known for playing a hooker on *House of Cards*, came to embody an educated, mid-century Upper West Sider in voice, accent, word, and gait with such eerie perfection—I've known Miriam Maisels all my life, and she's all of them rolled into one—is a thrilling mystery. Amy Sherman-Palladino wrote Rachel Brosnahan the part of a lifetime, and Brosnahan returned the favor by making *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* an unending delight. I want to live inside the show. I suspect you will too. ♦

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

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## Teary Kim Jong-un hugs, makes nuclear concessions

**‘TRUE EMOTIONAL BREAKTHROUGH’**

*Diplomatic history made in heartwarming prime-time talks*

BY NEVILLE WOODWARD

In a stunning foreign policy victory for the United States last night, President Oprah Winfrey convinced North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong-un to abandon his nuclear program in favor of a new regimen of self-care and talk therapy, all during an unprecedented three-hour prime-time diplomatic special broadcast on NBC.

“I will never give in!” the recalcitrant Kim said when the president asked at the top of the show why the dictator “had so much hurt.” The talks were tense at first, but the president’s probing personal questions, and a surprise appearance by Dennis Rodman, eventually got Kim to let his guard down and deal with his low self-image. “You all have called me a monster,” bellowed Kim during one memorable exchange. “Well, look at me! I am a monster!”



RODMAN AND KIM: NEWSCOM

Kim Jong-un gives a grateful hug to fellow Winfrey White House visitor Dennis Rodman after agreeing to halt nuclear weapons work.

“I don’t see a monster,” the tearful president replied. “I don’t see a monster. I see my friend.”

Abandoning traditional diplomatic norms, President Winfrey pressed Kim to acknowledge his pain and speak his truth, which served to open the door to a genuine breakthrough.

“I did it all for Daddy!” a surprised Kim exclaimed halfway through the special, arriving at the epiphany while talking about his fractured relationship with his late father, Kim Jong-il. “He’s the

one who hated America!” a sobbing Kim continued. “I only ever hated myself!”

The show concluded with Kim promising to completely shut down his nuclear program and to take a few months off from government to backpack through Thailand and get to know himself. “All this time, I thought I was starving my people,” a smiling Kim said while embracing President Winfrey. “But I was really just starving my soul

**KIM CONTINUED ON A6**

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